Connecticut Student Writers

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In recent months, both *Smithsonian* magazine and *Slate* magazine ran articles about creativity. But these articles aren’t likely what you might expect. Both articles point out that, as a culture, we give a lot of lip service to creativity and creative individuals, but, as Jessica Olien points out, “It’s all a lie.” In fact, in a study cited in both articles, many people, in interview after interview, describe creativity as something messy, frightening, and even dangerous.

Schools and businesses like it when a creative endeavor pans out, but in general they don’t like it when their students or employees take creative risks to get there. Talking about schools, Olien goes so far as to say that students who take the risk of being creative are actually “heroic.”

Part of this phenomenon is caused by the fact that humans, in general, are a pretty risk-averse species. And the profession that rates highest for risk aversion is, unfortunately, teaching. Is it any surprise, then, that we have so much standardized testing and teaching to the test, despite the fact that all the research in our field suggests that it is of questionable worth?

To paraphrase my colleague Lynn Bloom, what we end up with is a lot of “good enough” teaching and “good enough” learning, but not a lot of creativity or originality among teachers or our students.

This year, we had almost 1,100 submissions to *Connecticut Student Writers* magazine—so many from the middle school grades, in particular, that we chose to give out more honorable mentions than we have in any previous year. And with consideration of how risk-averse teachers tend to be, we also made the decision this year to honor some of the many teachers who have taken the risk of having their students write and submit poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, and drama. We are honoring 20 such teachers this year, each of whom had multiple students selected for awards in this year’s contest.

To quote Jessica Olien again, “to live creatively is a choice.” We offer our praise, our encouragement, and our thanks to those teachers and students who have chosen creativity.

*Jason Courtmanche*

*Connecticut Writing Project Director*
Star Visit Me

By Amelia Ditzel
Woodstock Elementary School, Grade K

Star, Star, please come out in the morning.
Star, Star, please come to me.
Star, Star, please play with me.
Star, Star, please eat breakfast with me.
Star, Star, please build a snowman with me.
Star, Star, please go on the swings with me.
Star, Star, please fly back home.

When I Met the Unicorn

By Ruthie Feltenberger
Annie E. Vinton Elementary School, Grade K

A rainbow shot up in the air.
I saw a unicorn. She was galloping on the rainbow. Her wings were carrying a butterfly. The butterfly's wings fluttered up. She flew off and made it rain. The unicorn's glittery horn washed away the rain. She got rainbow hair. She flew faster and faster into the night. The stars carried her back down. I was waiting for her. She turned my eyes blue!

Race Planes

By Gus Leffers
Kendall Elementary School, Grade K

Jack races planes today. His car is going to the airport. He goes inside his plane. The boss says, "Start your engines!" "Go!" yells the boss. The jets zoom! Here they come down the runway. The jets start firing. Then they take off. Zoom! The jets flip over! The jets are going as fast as they can go. Zoom goes the jets. Zoom goes one jet. Zoom goes the other jet. It's going to be close and the winners are Jack and Gus! They are landing and in second place is Max. And in third place is Sam. Jack and Gus get the trophies with the stars on them. Here comes the race planes, race planes, race planes, down the runway, runway, runway, on race day, race day. Race day. Zoom, zoom, zoom! Here come the race planes on race day. Zoom! Zoom! Zoom! On race day.
Nana, Me, and My Yellow Duck

By Daniel Cummiskey
Squadron Elementary School, Grade K

It was winter in my Nana and Gido's backyard. I was digging in the snow and I found a rubber duck. I went in my Nana and Gido's house and my Nana washed it off. Then I put it on the windowsill to watch for summer. Every time I go to Nana's house, we check on my duck to see if he sees summer. Nana says, "Daniel, check on your duck!"

Then the day finally came. I took him out of the windowsill and I put him in the pool. I pushed him to go to the deep end. Then my sisters pushed him back. In the fall, I put him back in Nana's window to watch for summer again.

My Dog

By Alexander Adorno
North Street School, Grade K

My dog plays with a ball. My dog gets a ball. My dog got a stick. I tickle my dog's belly. I make my dog happy.

When I Decorated my Christmas Tree

By Aryana Patel
Tootin' Hills Elementary School, Grade K

I decorated my Christmas tree with my brother and one ornament fell down. I was mad at my brother. I told my mom to clean the glass up. Then my mom helped us put the ornaments on the Christmas tree. Then, my dad helped us put the lights on the Christmas tree. We had to connect the lights. Then, I connected the lights to the power strip. Then, I cleaned the boxes up. I put them in the big cardboard box and I had to put the tissue paper in the big cardboard box. We were all done decorating the Christmas tree. It was fun.
Sky

By Grace Wollenberg
Latimer Lane Elementary School, Grade 1

A plain old sky
With dabs of white
That drinks water then spits it out
When it's blue, it's happy
When it's gray, it's sad
Everyone thinks that the water that falls is plain
But it's spit or tears
You'll never know, just look hard
You might see faces
You might see animals
You might see your loved ones
Oh, how I love the sky.

Ice Cold Bunny

By Abby Ditzel
Woodstock Elementary School, Grade 1

In the north there was a mean fox, a good baby bunny, and two sister penguins. They live near the ocean. The two sister penguins and the bunny share an igloo. The sister penguins take care of the baby bunny. The mean old fox lives in a nearby dirty cave. Fox plays sneaky tricks. Sometimes Bunny likes to go into Fox's garden. This is actually a snow garden. It has snow flowers and snow carrots. Fox watches Bunny from his house. He can see Bunny hopping around eating the snow carrots. This makes him very mad. It took him more than ten weeks to grow those snow carrots. He growls.

One day Fox asks Bunny if he wants to go to the beach and play Frisbee.

Bunny says, "Sure."

Fox throws the Frisbee and it lands in the water. It was ice-cold water. Bunny did not know that.

Fox says, "Oh no it landed into the water! Do you mind getting it for me, Bunny?"

"Ok," says Bunny.

It is deep water. Once he is swimming, he is getting so cold. Then he turns into a block of ice. He floats in a block of ice out to sea.

The sister penguins are swimming in the sea looking for fish. They see Bunny. They grab a block of ice with their wings. They try to warm bunny up in the sun. It doesn't work. They are worried. Fox is on the shore laughing.

He teases, "You are in a block of ice."

The sister penguins wobble back to the igloo. The block of ice is getting a little too cold for their wings to carry so they carry the block of ice with their beaks.

In the igloo there is a fire. The put the block of ice near the fire and they wait a little while. They are sad. While they wait they go over to talk to Fox. They ask him why he played a sneaky trick.

Fox tells them, "Because Bunny has been picking in my garden."

One of the penguin sisters says, "He is a young bunny and he doesn't know a lot of things. He did not know it was your garden. Why didn't you just ask him not to pick in your garden?"
While the penguins were talking to Fox, the ice cube melts all the way. Bunny looked around. He looks at Fox’s house and hops over there. The sister penguins start dancing with joy. Fox apologizes. He has learned a big lesson...

The moral of this story is use your words when someone is doing something you do not like instead of playing a prank.

The Scariest Pumpkin Ever!

By Angela Krantz
CREC Montessori Magnet School, Grade 1

Albert the Pumpkin was the scariest pumpkin in town. He had a very scary face. His teeth were sharp and his eyes were very large and scary. He never smiled because he was carved to be the scariest pumpkin in town.

He did not ask to be a scary pumpkin, but whoever carved him made him look scary. He wanted to be happy, but he wasn't, he was scary.

He scared everyone in town. He liked to scare everybody at first. He was not even afraid of monsters, but monsters were afraid of Albert!

All the monsters and ghosts were scaring the children and making them run away. So Albert scared the kids too.

Albert especially loved Halloween because he got treats when he scared the children. They would cry and scream and drop their candy and Albert would eat all their candy up. Albert loved candy.

All the other ghosts and monsters also scared the children like Albert, but they didn’t want to eat the candy, they just liked to scare children!

When Albert thought about scaring people, at first he had been happy to see them running away and leaving him all their candy, but after a while, he was sad. He was sad that he had to scare people because he really just wanted a friend.

One Halloween Albert saw a little boy with candy in his hand. He went to scare him and get his candy.

He said, “BOOOOO.”

The boy said, “That’s not scary enough. This is scary!”

Then the boy showed all his teeth filled with metal braces with little black-eyed skeletons on them and loudly said “ARGHHHH!”

Albert started screaming, “No, do not scare me please! I will stop scaring people. I just want a friend and some candy.”

“Oh,” said the boy, “OK, my name is John. Want to share my candy?”

They decided they would always be best friends.

Chipotle

By Samuel Minor
Latimer Lane Elementary School, Grade 1

Yum! The taste of Chipotle!

Chipotle is really, really tasty. If you’re going to get the quesadilla and you’re not that hungry, then get the kids’ quesadilla, but if you’re really hungry, then get the adult quesadilla. One time I got the adult quesadilla and it was...gooey and hot. When I took my first bite, the cheese started to melt in my mouth. When I tasted the flavor, I ate more and more. Then, soon it was all gone. It filled me and made me full.

You can call from your house. Then they will make it, and you go pick it up, and you don’t have to wait in line. The service is fast/slow. Sometimes, they mess up the order a little, but still it’s good. They mess up the order because they have so many customers. I recommend you go on a Wednesday night at about 7:30.
Some of their seats are high.

I give Chipotle 4 ½ stars. Chipotle’s food is good. Another reason is the décor is great, too. Also, they serve stone-carved pitchers. It is in Canton next to a bunch of other stores. If you want to go for a family diner, then it is not too much money. Chipotle gets crowded, so I recommend you call from your house. Then go pick it up. If you don’t call from your home, then you have to go and wait in the long line, and waiting is not too fun. If you have a little baby, then I recommend you get for the little baby a kids’ quesadilla. Also, if you have a little kid, they have the same high chairs. I love their food because it is good. So, if you’re looking for a good restaurant, then to go Chipotle.

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**American Girl Restaurant**

*By Caroline Brenia*
*Latimer Lane Elementary School, Grade 1*

Do you like American Girl? If you do, then American Girl Restaurant is the place for you! American Girl Restaurant has awesome food. I like it because if you forget your doll, you can borrow one there, with the doll chair and cup and saucer! The ice cream there is delectable. I recommend that you get the hot dog and hamburger with a side of fruit, and for your dessert you should make sure to try the strawberry sorbet with real strawberries in it. It is awesome! You can go there for your birthday, too!

American Girl Restaurant is actually in any American Girl store. You should go any time you would like to go. Once I went for my birthday, and the waiters sang Happy Birthday to me! The service there is fast, and the price is reasonable too! Some people might think it is too expensive, but I think it is worth it. I didn’t want the rest of my hamburger because I was full, so I let my father eat the rest of it for me, and he said he liked it. For example, it had tomatoes and lettuce and the hot dog was small so that I wouldn’t get a stomachache.

I think American Girl Restaurant is awesome because: 1. It’s not too expensive, 2. The food is awesome, and 3. The service is fast. So go to American Girl Restaurant today!

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**The Beach in Maine**

*By Katie Ford*
*Daisy Ingraham Elementary School, Grade 1*

Once there was a beach in Maine. It was very pretty. The water was cold. When someone goes into the water, they giggle because it is cold. They want to swim, but it’s so cold they can’t. They loved that beach so much that everyday it was filled with people. That beach is a happy friendly place for anyone. I hope the next time I go to that beach it will be like my story.

This is a real story.

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**My Cuddliumptious Blanket**

*By Sophia Caneira*
*Annie E. Vinton Elementary School, Grade 2*
Second Grade

If I Were

By Emma Frost
Annie E. Vinton Elementary School, Grade 2

If I were a tiny butterfly, I would be acrobatic.
If I were a bee, I would be queen bee.
If I were a flower, I would be a poppy.
But if I were a chicken bone, at least I would be clean.

Magic

By Sophia Caneira
Vinton Elementary School, Grade 2

Magic is around you everywhere.
Through trees, and bees, and even seas.
For magic is always around.
It's been found and around and sound.
It's been cooked and looked and even booked.
It's been raked and caked and even baked at every starry night.
It's in the wind. It's in the air.
And nothing quite compares to Magic.

Fenec's Ears

By Abigail Wilson
Latimer Lane Elementary School, Grade 2

There was once a young African fox named Fenec. She loved her family and friends. Fenec liked to lie in the hot sun and eat insects. Fenec was proud of herself except for her ears. She wishes her ears could be smaller. She thought her ears were too BIG! One day when Fenec was supposed to go play with her friends, she went to the God of all Africa. There she asked the God of all Africa if he could make her ears smaller. But the God of all Africa said, “Your ears are special, Fenec. They are a part of who you are. For example, the hyena has a special laugh and the elephant has a special trunk. You have special ears because your ears can keep you cool in the sun. Not all animals can be as lucky as you.”

So Fenec went home, but she didn't tell her Mom or Dad what she did. But Fenec had learned something. She learned to be proud of her ears because her ears help her survive in the hot sun of the desert. The end.

The lesson: love yourself for who you are -- big, short, long, small, or tall.

10 Rules You Need to Know if You Want to Survive the Cafeteria

By Dylan Brown
Kearns Primary School, Grade 2

On the first day of school my brother Max brought me to the bus stop. Then I asked him, “What if something goes wrong in the cafeteria?” “Oh, I almost forgot. Here’s a notebook to help you in the cafeteria,” he said, handing me a notebook. It was “10 rules.”
The bus came. I didn't sit in the front row even though it was empty. I sat in the 4th row and flipped the pages. When I arrived at school, we had morning meeting, reading, science, math and then lunch.

I didn't try to sit at the left hand far side table because...

**RULE ONE**

Never sit at left far side table; someone there pukes every day.

But it was the last table I could sit at! I sat down one seat from everybody. I was thirsty. I didn't buy milk because...

**RULE TWO**

Never buy milk at school; it tastes like dirt!

I checked my lunch bag. No juice! So I got some milk for 25 cents. I tried to drink it fast because...

**RULE THREE**

Drink drinks fast; they will melt because the cafeteria is so hot.

I couldn't resist my chocolate bar. Then I had the rest of my milk. It was cold!

I had my sandwich then it was time to clean up. I talked to my friend Sean. I forgot it was a mistake because...

**RULE FOUR**

Never talk at cleanup time; you'll go the principal's office.

Then I had the rest of class. Then I went on the bus and sat in the 2nd row. When I got home Max asked, “Did you follow the lunch rules?” “Nope. Nothing happened.” “Well you'll probably want to follow the next six.”

The next day Max took me to the bus stop. “Remember to follow the 10 lunch rules,” he told me. I sat in the 5th row. I got to school, had meeting, math, and reading, then lunch. I sat at the middle close side table. I talked to a BIG kid. So I broke...

**RULE FIVE**

Never talk big kids; they'll give you nightmares.

“What!” he said to me. “Huh?” I said back. “You said, ‘what did you play at recess?’ Twerp!”

“Did not!” “Did too!” “Did not!” “Did too!” “Did not!” “DID TOO!” he screamed. I just broke...

**RULE SIX**

Never mess with the bully; or you'll be sorry.

I just realized the person on the other side of me was saying, "bwab gool flec stokt" so I punched him lightly. I just broke...

**RULE SEVEN**

Never punch; you'll have detention for a week.

He had water in his eyes as he was about to cry, but didn't.

I cleaned up then went home because it was early release.

“Did you follow the rules?” Max asked. “Not a single one, nothing went wrong.” “Better follow the next three,” he said.

The next morning because it was Saturday, I watched Saturday morning cartoons. I went to a birthday party and then ate dinner. On Sunday, I went to my grandma's. On Monday, I got on the bus and sat in the 2nd seat. We had gym, writing, then lunch. At lunch I sat at the far end table in the between left and middle then went to the bathroom. I just completely broke...

**RULE EIGHT**

Never go to the bathroom before lunch; you'll puke.

I didn't puke at all! I said to my friend, “49 + 27 = 76.” I broke...

**RULE NINE**

Never do math at lunch; you'll lose 0.2% of your brain.

I wasn't any dumber!

I bought a hot dog for lunch and put the ketchup vertically. That broke...
RULE TEN

Never put ketchup vertically; it will taste like wood!
That didn’t stop me! I had already broken rules 1-9, so I tried it. It was good!
Then later I went home and I told Max, “You don’t need to follow these rules. There’s only one rule
you need to follow that’s not in the book yet.”

RULE ELEVEN

“Never follow rules 1-10 in this book!!!”

The End

Let’s Party

By Joyce Zhou
Annie E. Vinton Elementary School, Grade 2

It was September 6th. It was my birthday party!!! When my friends arrived, I kept running to the
door. When the party started, we all got to paint the box we had chosen. We had regular paint and sparkly
paint. We also had jewels and glitter glue. We all worked hard, quietly, and quickly. We all finished in ten
minutes!

Then it was time to take out the double-decker ice cream cake!!!!
One deck was vanilla and the other deck was chocolate. We had bought it
from the UConn Dairy Bar. That’s my favorite store! We all got to eat the
vanilla and chocolate cake. It looked delicious with frosting as blue as the
sky. The cake had ice cream in it. So it tasted like ice cream, but was
shaped like a cake. It was like having the best of both worlds!
The cake also had fancy frosting. The fancy frosting was braided
like Rapunzel’s hair. I wondered how the baker was able to do that?!?!?!
It also had a kind of frozen frosting shaped like mushroom tops. They kind of
looked like toadstools, but thank goodness they were sweet and creamy.

I wanted to eat cake first because I thought it would put me in a good mood. Luckily there was more
than enough for everyone at my birthday. We could each eat more than one piece! Most of us wanted vanilla,
so all of the vanilla was almost gone. I got a big piece and finished it in one minute. I was as hungry as a whole
pack of wolves.

My cake said, “Happy Birthday Joyce!” written with purple icing. I was very content with how my
cake looked, but I wasn’t surprised with how wonderful my cake came out because we had gotten it from the
UConn Dairy Bar!

After we had finished enjoying my cake, we opened gifts. I got a new fluffy backpack with googly eyes,
some wooden butterflies, hair chalk, and my party from my mom! It was a wonderful birthday and my cake
made it even more special!

Getting a New Dog

By Jamison Hallam
Tootin’ Hills Elementary School, Grade K
Summer at Nana and Gido’s

By Lila Cummiskey
Squadron Line Elementary School, Grade 2

“Cannonball!” I scream as I jump into the crystal blue water at my Nana and Gido’s pool. It was a hot summer day. My nana was bringing snacks out. Juicy, red watermelon. Mmmmm, my favorite. Chips and dip, carrots and hummus, the usual pool snacks. Gido sends us to his garden to pick mint so Nana can crush it up and put it in jars for safekeeping. We love to nibble on green pieces of mint. It tastes sweet and of course minty. As we are out on our mission to get mint, we pick some red juicy tomatoes so Nana can make her tomato salad for dinner.

After a day of long swimming Gido calls us out of the pool so he can wrap us in our towels. Nana washes our towels every night. She loves to wash towels. Before dinner we have to have a lemon cookie. We never tell my mom because it is our secret with Gido. And Mom will get mad because you are never supposed to have lemon cookies before dinner. Nana makes the hamburgers and hot dogs and her tomato salad. Gido fills the chip bowl.

After dinner we eat dessert. We have fudge pops and even more lemon cookies. And Nana makes vanilla ice cream with her blueberry sauce. Then we take one more nighttime swim. We jump into the blue water. Then we help Gido with his tasks for the pool like putting the pool cleaners in and putting away the pool toys for the night.

We get in our PJs, brush our teeth, and get under the covers with a flashlight so Gido can tell us stories about when my mom was little. We say goodnight to everything. We say goodnight shirt, goodnight pants, goodnight pool, goodnight mint garden. And then we go to sleep knowing that we can do it all again the next day! I love my Nana and Gido.

A Cup of Hot Chocolate

By Hebah Habib
Anna Reynolds Elementary School, Grade 3

Mom

By Adelane Urriola
Annie E. Vinton Elementary School, Grade K
The Rise of A New Day

By Katrina Boshovic
Southeast Elementary School, Grade 3

Small and sweet bumble bee,
buzzing as loud as can be.

Messy pigs,
squealing joyfully.

Dark green-shelled tortoise,
crawling ever so slowly.

Beautiful monarch,
sipping sweet nectar.

Beady eyed owl,
swooping down for food.

Dull moth,
chasing beloved light.

Miniscule coqui,
chirping at midnight.

Slippery dolphin,
leaping in a spectacular sunrise.

Helping Others

By Myra Green
Annie E. Vinton Elementary School,
Grade K

My Heart Sings in the Moonlight

By Tova Lowry
Squadron Line Elementary School, Grade 3

Songs in my heart dance to the light of the shimmering stars.
The music hits me and the diamonds twinkle bright with light in the dark sky.
The water dances to the sparkle of the moonlight, shimmer, shimmer.

Sherlock Hound and the 24 Carrot Gold

By Makena Culligan
Ledyard Center School, Grade 4
“Alexander, it was so much more fun being a kid when I was young,” my dad said. “How so?” I asked. We were eating my dad’s “famous” pizza, as I like to call it. My dad said, “Well, things were just better. When I was growing up I had a Mickey Mantle card that would be worth thousands of dollars and I bought it for 10 cents. The back of a baseball card showed games played, at bats, runs, hits, home runs, RBI’s, etc. It also gave the player’s weight, height, and where they grew up.” "When did you get your Mickey Mantle card?" I asked. "1956, I was six years old,” my dad replied. "In 1956 Mickey Mantle won the Triple Crown," my dad answered. "What’s the Triple Crown?" I asked. "You can win the Triple Crown if you have the most home runs, RBI’s, and the best batting average in the whole league. Mickey had 52 HR, 130 RBI’s, and a .353 batting average. The Yankees also won the World Series in 1956. Don Larsen pitched the only perfect game in World Series history. It was game 5, Monday, October 8th, at Yankee Stadium. Larsen won the Babe Ruth award and the World Series MVP award.” "Wow," I said, letting my dad's words sink in.

"What else was different besides baseball?" I asked. "We didn’t have computers," my dad answered. "Then how did people communicate with each other?" I asked. "Phone or mail," my dad said.

That night as I crawled into bed I was still thinking about everything my dad had told me. After several minutes pondering what it was like to be a kid in the 1950’s compared to how it is now, I drifted into a deep sleep.

***

October 8, 1956 was a warm and cloudy day. The trees had started to turn bright colors. I looked out my bedroom window at our peaceful street. I slowly climbed out of bed and got dressed. When I got downstairs, my father, Ben, had a huge smile on his face. "Guess what I got?" he said. "What?" I asked. "I got last minute tickets to Game 5 of the World Series today!" he exclaimed. "Really?" I asked. "Yes," he replied. "Who is pitching?" I asked. "Don Larsen," Ben said. I almost exploded with excitement.

Later that morning Ben asked, "Do you want to stop at McDonald's before the game?" "Yes!" I said excitedly. We got into Ben's old Desoto and drove to McDonald's. When it was our turn to order the worker asked me what I would like. I replied, "Can I have a Happy Meal please?" "A what?" the worker asked. Then I realized I was in 1956 and the Happy Meal probably hadn't been invented yet. "Um, can I have a hamburger with nothing on it?" I asked. "Sure," the worker replied. Then he asked Ben what he wanted. "I'll have the same and two orders of French fries," Ben replied. Then the worker said, "Your total is 50 cents please." We finished our meals quickly and headed for Yankee Stadium. When we arrived we could barely see each other because of the huge crowd. I had seen pictures of Yankee Stadium, but up close it was about a billion times cooler.

Our seats were behind the outfield, very close to the back of the stadium. Ben told me that there were over 64,000 fans watching the game. As the Yankees took their positions in the field, there was an extremely loud mixture of boos and cheers. Don Larsen stepped onto the mound and Yogi Berra crouched behind the plate. Larsen went back into his windup and threw the pitch. The ball was a blur as it crossed the plate. After a second, the ump said, "Steeerrrrrike!" With the next pitch Larsen caught the batter looking for another strike. The third pitch was a perfect curveball that dropped below that batter's bat before he made contact. Larsen finished the inning with two more strikeouts. When the Yankees came up to bat, Ben told me who the pitcher was for the Dodgers. His name was Sal Maglie and his nickname was "the Barber" because he threw lots of pitches at people's heads. In 1956, barbers shaved people's faces and cut their hair. Sal would "shave" the batter's face with the ball.

Don Larsen had a perfect game going to start the fourth inning. The score was still 0-0. Larsen struck out the first two batters and the third with a 1-2 count, hit a deep bomb toward center field. Mickey Mantle ran back to the wall and at the last second jumped and made the catch! I cheered as loud as I could.

With two outs in the bottom of the fourth, Mantle stepped to the plate. Ben reached into the bag he had brought and pulled out two baseball gloves. "Be ready for a ball coming our way," Ben yelled over the screaming fans as we put on our gloves. Sure enough on the next pitch, Mantle hit a deep line drive toward
center field! You could tell it was gone from the sound the bat made when it made contact with the ball. We stood up. At the last second, Ben leaped up and caught the ball! The fans around us cheered, even the Dodgers fans. Ben and I sat down marveling at the ball. Now the score was 1-0 Yankees. In the sixth the Yankees added another run.

When Larsen stepped onto the mound in the top of the ninth, all the fans were screaming. He got the first batter to ground out and the second batter struck out swinging. Now with two outs Larsen had a chance to become the first pitcher ever to throw a perfect game in the World Series. With the count at 2-2, Larsen threw the pitch...the batter swung...and hit air!!!!!!!!! Larsen had done it! He had thrown the first perfect game in World Series history! Yogi Berra ran up to Larsen and wrapped him in a bear hug. Soon, all the people were hugging Larsen. Fans started piling onto the field and Ben and I did the same, screaming joyfully.

***

December 23, 1956 was a cold snowy day. This was the last school day before holiday break. I was having lunch with Ezra Hester who had moved to Cranford, New Jersey from Alabama. I had heard a few kids make fun of him, and saw that he wasn’t happy. When I sat down, I asked him, “What was it like in the South?” He replied, “It was terrible, getting made fun of and laughed at walking down the street. Every day a black person could get killed by the Ku Klux Klan.” “What is the Ku Klux Klan?” I asked. “It is a group of people that hate black and Jewish people.” “Oh,” I replied softly. We were both silent for the rest of lunch.

When I got home, I asked my father to tell me more about how black people were treated in the South. He replied, “First, let me tell you about the Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court decision. It started when a black girl named Linda Brown was forced to walk 20 blocks to a school for black children with poor facilities when there was a school right down the street for white children with great teachers and good resources. Oliver Brown, her father, was so upset he brought the Board of Education to court, but lost his battle. With the assistance of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the case was brought to the Supreme Court. On May 17th, 1954 Chief Justice Earl Warren declared that the Board of Education must end segregation of schools.” “Wow,” I said, playing over all the information in my head.

“How else were black people treated differently than white people?” I asked. Ben answered, “Black people had to sit at the back of the bus and all the white people sat in the front. There were separate water fountains for black and white people. There were restaurants marked WHITE ONLY or BLACK ONLY.

That night when I got into bed, I thought about everything I had learned about life in 1956. How things were so much different. In middle of a thought, my eyes closed and I drifted off into a deep sleep.

***

I heard somebody calling my name. “Alexander, Alexander!” I opened my eyes. I was in my bedroom in West Hartford, CT in 2015! My dad was sitting on my bed. He said, “It is already 8:00am! I have been trying to wake you up. You must have been dreaming a really deep dream.” I replied, “You would never believe me if I told you what I was dreaming about!”

Snow Day

By Brianna Jackson
Tashua Elementary School, Grade 3

I peered outside my window and saw those beautiful white things falling down so fast I could barely see them. There were millions of them flying in all different directions. The sky was a light gray and it looked like the floor tiles in my kitchen. A white blanket covered the ground. All the trees were bare except for the evergreens. The spectacle painted a picture in my head and I kept it in there.

I hopped into the kitchen and started to beg and plead to go outside. My mom smiled, looked at the temperature and mumbled “30 degrees” to herself. I put on a goody-two-shoes face and my mom replied nicely “okay.” But then she turned her voice into a stern one, “watch out for frostbite.” I got a weird feeling after that and a chill down my spine. I ran to get my coat, mittens, hat, scarf, snow pants, and snow boots.
Excitedly, I pulled on my snow clothes and got ready to go out and play. I smiled and took a big breath, pranced out into my garage, and burst out the garage door. As I stuck out my tongue, little snow flurries fell in my mouth. I slowly walked in wonder into my front yard and laid down and felt the cold, soothing, icy snow. I moved my arms and legs rapidly, and made a perfect snow angel. There was a big gust of wind, so I sat up straight. The snow glistened like iridescent sparkles. I made a snowball, but it was hard work because the snow was powdery and soft. I threw the snowball at one of the trees and it splattered like a mini white firework.

I decided to make a snowman, so I put some snow together forming a sphere-like shape. I then rolled the little ball until it grew large, and I did the same thing two more times, but the snowballs were smaller each time I did it. Next, I piled all the balls on top of each other. I rushed inside and grabbed a long straight carrot, then rushed right back outside and stuck it in the middle of the snowman's face. Then, I grabbed buttons from my art room and poked them on to make eyes and a mouth. Using three more buttons, I arranged them vertically down the middle snowball. Searching the ground, I found two sticks that I poked into each side of the middle snowball. I took off my scarf and wrapped it around him. Finally, I placed my pretend magic hat on his head. He was great, stood there like a statue. I decided to name him Frosty. “Frosty,” I repeated in a proud voice as I watched him for a second, and then ran off.

Now, I was getting a bit lonely so I thought I'd invite my neighbors sledding. I ran into my garage and took my sleds off the hook. The sleds were heavy so I walked a couple of steps and onto their porch. I tapped on the door “knock, knock.” I waited and suddenly they opened the door. I asked them, “do you want to play?” “Sure” they answered. So in a couple of minutes they came stampeding out their garage door with their sleds in their hands. “Let’s get the other neighbors!” I exclaimed. They nodded in agreement as we dashed to the other neighbor's house. We knocked, and he came right out in a flash. We scrambled into the neighbor's backyard and immediately started sledding down the big hill. “Wwwwwweeeeee!” I screamed as I slid down. We played as our hearts desired, making mini snowmen. At least we tired. We flung across the slippery zip line, had snowball fights, built snow forts, and even played on the snowy swing set until we all grew tired, and sadly that time came. We said our goodbyes, and I left with all my stuff.

When I got home I took my snow clothes off and took a hot shower. It was soothing and relaxing. I got out of the shower, ate dinner, watched a show, played a family game, and got ready for bed. Getting snuggled into my bed, I fell asleep and dreamed of another magical and amazing snow day tomorrow!
I am a wretched soldier coming home from war,
My brother had died on the other side.
He still lay there on the battleground and in my eyes.
He died right as the dew left the ground, turning into mist, and fogging the old distant mountains.
The air is filled with sorrow, but that will soon change.
But for now...
A raven sits on the branch, eyeing everything with a suspicious look of hunger...
There is despair, a despair I can’t describe;
it dances around the military train.
Then it stops...
The train stops...
This was the remains of my old town, after eight years of a dreadful war.
The sky is gray and damp except for one twinkling star.
The flowers are forgotten in the gray sky,
except for the long shadowy trees craning their necks over the cold shingles of the houses.
I walk towards the calm and familiar direction of my childhood home.
As I’m about to walk on my front step, I pause.
I wait so long in silence, and I don’t know why.
But not as long as those eight years on the battle grounds.
I can still picture the vivid, bloody grounds,
The moaning,
The screaming,
of wounded people and quick deaths.
I recall the numb feeling of when a golden bullet whizzed past my ear skyward; you think that would be a victory, dodging a bullet. But instead of victory, sadness.
The bullet had shot my brother’s plane sending him down,
down,
down,
to the darkness of death.
And now I’m home, an American – home, and still standing.
Surprisingly...
Because there were so many which were burned down in the battle.
And there is a new feeling inside me when I open the door,
escaping the dreadful thoughts of the war.
I see my family with open arms enthusiastically sprinting across the floor,
for I avoided my early grave, and kept my head up.
And now there is finally peace on Earth because we won the war.
The Leap  
By Kaleb Cohen  
Kathleen H. Ryerson School, Grade 4

We sit on the ground leaning against the wall of the public library, watching people walk by us without noticing a thing. We hear people talking about their fun-filled day, while my family and I can't relate to any of it. My whole life we've been struggling, and have lived on the street off of raggedy blankets. People drop coins in a small, black top hat my Grandpa has from when he was a kid.

I've dreamed of a house with a pool and a fridge packed with food. I've imagined a red convertible and the breeze whipping through my hair as we drive, even though any house or car would do. Then, I open my eyes and I remember that we're still on St. Charles Street.

My Mom and Dad both got infections in their legs from years of no socks and shoes in below-zero winters. Mom doesn't walk well, but Dad does although he has a bad limp. My Dad tries to help our family, especially my Grandma, who rests uncomfortably on a park bench most of the time. She is getting old, and it's even harder to survive living on the streets. Dad does some odd jobs like gardening and cleaning cars. He sometimes gathers bottles and brings them to Jack, the owner of the meat shop, to get money. I believe in my Father, it's just, I don't think we can make a living this way, so I do what I can to help my family.

I help Jack at the meat shop. I unpack and sort the canned food in the back of the store, and then I sweep and mop the floor. In exchange, Jack gives me food and some money. I sometimes go into the library and help shelve books. In return, the librarians have been teaching me words and sentences. They also let me borrow books to practice reading on my own. I'd love to go to college so that I can get a good job someday.

When I'm not working, I walk to the movie theater on the next block and see if there are any clothes from lost and found that haven't been claimed. The people who work at the movie theater let me take the clothes and I bring them back to my family.

One day as I jam my fingers into sidewalk cracks, searching for spare coins, I notice a squirrel. He is on his hind legs staring longingly up at a large oak tree, which has a small nut dangling on one of its branches. The squirrel leaps in the air and misses the branch. He tries again and again and the same thing happens. It keeps missing the branch. After a few minutes the squirrel jumps with all of its might. The squirrel barely lands on the branch with its back legs dangling off the edge. It pulls itself up with its front legs and stands sturdily on the branch. Then, it plucks the nut off the stem of the branch and hops off the tree with the acorn clenched in its mouth. The creature scurries away with its nut.

The image of that squirrel stays in my head. The squirrel kept trying to get the acorn. It first stood on its "tip toes", staring at the nut. Then it jumped for the branch many times, but each time it didn't reach it. The squirrel finally gathered all of its strength and jumped again. It got the nut. "That's like my family," I think. Like the squirrel, I will jump and jump until I reach that branch. I may fall but I will not give up.

I start walking back to the corner where I live, when I see something shiny in the sunlight, catching my attention and I walk over to it. It's a silver coin! I pick it up, and while a smile spreads across my face, I continue on my way.

The Nazis and their March to Evil  
By Johanna Brown  
CREC Montessori Magnet School, Grade 4

Chapter 1
Before the war I was like any child in Germany. I was in the 4th grade and I had plenty of friends. Some of my friend's parents were NSB members [they are Nazi supporters]. Even though some of the boys in my school said things about Jews being bad people, it didn't bother me too much. I knew Jewish people were not bad, you see, Yankek, am Jewish.

I wasn't really proud of my religion; it was just something I'd always been. The Jewish people I had grown up knowing were mostly nice people, no different really from other people I know, other than going to
different religious services on a different day.

At the beginning of World War II, I started to lose my Nazi friends one by one. One of them said, “go rot in hell” to me. That day I ran home and cried. My mother told me “Yankek, no matter what people say, you are amazing.” Later that week my mom told me a person named Adolf Hitler was starting to blame bad stuff on Jewish people. I asked her why. She said it was really complicated. I guess it must be, because I don’t understand it at all.

Chapter 2

Then, one night, the Nazis rounded up a lot of Jewish men and boys. They also damaged Jewish-owned shops. It was called Kristallnacht [the night of broken glass]. Then, everything happened so fast.

I was taken out of school and put in a Jewish secondary school with all grades jumbled up into one small classroom. And, since I was nine, I had to wear a star that was called the Star of David on my clothes. My dad and mom told me Jewish people were prohibited from driving cars, riding bikes, taking the tram, going to some stores, and even had to be in their houses by 9:00 pm every night or they were shot on the spot.

Many of my parents’ friends’ family’s started going into hiding and finally, one day my, parents told me, “have you heard about other families taken away or gone missing”. To which I replied, “yes” and to that my parents said, “well that might happen to us if we don’t go into hiding soon.” We needed to be ready. It wasn’t safe to stay where we were. Then I said, “well, at least we will all be together” and my parents said they couldn’t be with us, at least not for awhile.

Chapter 3

Sadly, Ani, my sister, and I were separated from our parents. My dad still had some Nazi friends who didn’t mind we were Jewish, so he arranged for us to go in with them.

So the day finally came when Ani and I were to leave. We said our goodbyes and left. My parents gave my sister and I several pieces of stale bread and some cheese, but I knew it would not be enough to last us the whole way. That was all they had left, but I did not know it then. Two days after we left and a day after our parents left, a bomb was dropped on our house; our family was very lucky.

After traveling for three days we made it to my dad’s friend’s house. My dad’s Nazi friends were not what I was expecting at all. They had six other Jewish children in the house and were very strict. We could not go outside, we were not to speak unless spoken to, we couldn’t speak Hebrew, and we had to hide when anyone came to the house. It seemed I was scolded every day. Ani, on the other hand, was always spoiled by them. All the girls were spoiled, but it seemed as though us boys were treated harshly.

Ani and I had to sleep in separate rooms, since she was a girl and I was a boy. But Ani and I had our own hiding spot together in the basement. It was inside a wall with an air mattress in case of the soldiers came to search the house. And one night it came in handy.

Chapter 4

Turns out, I had to report to Westerbork concentration camp and my family was nowhere to be found. A whole team of Nazi guards would be searching for me. My sister Ani had tears pouring out of her eyes when she heard the news.

“Don’t go,” she said.

I then replied, “I will never leave you.”

Well, one night, sadly, that nightmare came true. About five Nazi men knocked on the door. It was opened right away. The Nazi’s pushed right past Mrs. Tippner and started searching the house, top to bottom for me. Eventually they came down to the basement, but I was as quiet as a mouse. One of them almost found us, but he didn’t. Soon they left, I was relived.

Chapter 5

When my parents got the news they must have been jumping for joy. But as one nightmare ended, another started unfolding. I got a letter from my mother saying my dad had been taken to Westerbork concentration camp. My mother was lucky enough to escape. Then, I began to think “should hand I myself in or should I stay with Ani?” Finally I said to myself “Yankek, you will stay with Ani no matter what happens.” The next day two Nazi men kicked down the door and arrested all the people downstairs. Luckily, Ani and I were upstairs, so we hid in one of the hiding spots that were under the floorboards in Mr. and Mrs. Tippners bedroom.
Suddenly, men came upstairs and found us. Ani and I were immediately sent to Westerbork. But then I got lucky. It turns out my dad was my kapo [a prisoner that is the leader of a quarter usually assigned by the SS guard]. That kind of cheered me up. I say kind of, because Ani and I were split up. Because, Ani is a girl and I am a boy so we couldn’t be together. Who knows what is going to happen to her. Finally on April 12th, 1945, all of us Jewish survivors find out we are free. It turns out Hooghalen [were Westerbork is] has been liberated.

After that everything started falling into place. Ani, my father and I were all reunited with my mother, and then we moved to America to start a new life. I will never forget the time spent worried whether I’d ever see my family again. I’ll always be thankful for the people who took us in and risked their lives for us. [I will try to do the same for others if something like this happens in the future].

Das Ende
[The END]

Rise and Shine

By Molly Pane
Latimer Lane Elementary School, Grade 4

Crash! “Oops!” said my brother, Max. And that’s how my perfect morning began.

My name is Amanda; I’m in fifth grade. I have a record for being late to school. My teacher said that if I’m late one more time, its detention for a week! I can’t let that happen because other than always being late, I’m a total teacher’s pet and I don’t want that to stop. Teachers give me less homework and better grades. Once, I got an easier test just because I’m the teacher’s pet. Plus, since I don’t tattle on everyone like some people do, I still have a lot of friends, but detention would change all that.

I wish that crash wasn’t so loud, because if it wasn’t I would have never woken up. But I did, and saw the time on the clock as soon as I opened my eyes. It read 7:30; I overslept. I jumped out of bed in a blur. Great, I thought, of all the days I could have overslept, it happened today. I ran to my dresser and pulled the drawer open, it was completely bare. Starting to get worried, I opened the second drawer, same as the first. I started to think of excuses for being late: aliens, global warming, a family emergency. I was on about my fifth excuse when I remembered it was Friday, laundry day, so with a little hope restored, I hurried downstairs to the laundry room. On the way to the laundry room, I found my mom scolding my brother, while cleaning up broken glass - probably something Max broke. I also got a glimpse of the clock - 7:40.

I think I lost hope right when I saw the washing machine. At first, I tried to get myself to believe the tiny clothes in the dryer were Max’s, but they were too girly for him and I saw my, “Little Brother For Sale,” shirt in the mix. I ran to stop the dryer before it did any more damage. All my shirts were too small, but after looking carefully through all of my clothes, I found the outfit that my cousin gave me. The outfit was about three sizes too big for me, but at that moment, it looked just right. I grabbed the outfit and ran up the stairs. Once I got to my room it was 7:50. I still needed to eat breakfast, brush my hair, brush my teeth, walk to school, and get to school by 8:15. I was (as my mom called it) as busy as a bee. I got the outfit on as quickly as I could, five minutes to be exact. But then I made the mistake of jinxing myself by thinking I might actually be able to get to school on time. On cue, right as I thought it, I found my toothpaste bottle empty. I knew I couldn’t use Max’s, don’t ask me why, just trust me, and I knew my mom ran out of toothpaste last night. I did what anyone in my situation would do, I ate a piece of gum and thought of a way to write my teacher a note saying I lost my voice so I wouldn’t have to talk to anyone. It was 8:00 then, and my hair wasn’t that messed up, so I didn’t brush my hair. I glided down the stairs, out of breath, and snatched the box of cereal. Max was reading and I poured the cereal into a bowl and ended up spilling most of it on the floor.

“Clean that up!” Mom bellowed.
“But Mom,” I whined, “I’m going to be late.”
“No exceptions,” said Mom. “Now clean up.”

So I cleaned up the mess and when I finished, it was 8:05. I skipped breakfast and rushed out of the door. I ran like I was in the Olympics, but it still took me ten minutes to get to the school. When I passed through the gates, joy took over my body until I saw it: the worst thing ever. Clear words in red saying, “No school.”
Amazing Penguins in the Arctic

By Macy McPhee
Braburn Elementary School, Grade 4

Penguins are birds, but they cannot fly. They have white feathers on their stomachs and black feathers on their backs, like little men in tuxedos. Male and female penguins normally look alike. Penguins are shaped like torpedoes, which is good for swimming. They also have webbed feet to keep their balance, and they use their flippers on the surface of the water like oars.

The biggest penguins are the Emperor penguins. They are about as tall as a human. King penguins are the second largest. Other types of penguins are the Adelie, Chinstrap, Macaroni, and White-flippered. There are also the Gentoo, African, Rockhopper, and Yellow-eyed penguins.

Penguins eat krill and squid, but their main diet is fish. They hunt for all of their food in the ocean. Penguins also have a hook on the end of their beak. That helps them catch their food. Also, penguins drink salt water. Amazingly, they have special features in their body that push away the salt from the water out of their bill!

Penguins spend 75% of their time underwater. They can't breathe underwater, but they can hold their breath for a long time. Also, a penguin's average speed in water is 15 miles per hour. It's a remarkable sight to see penguins swimming in the ocean.

In mating season, penguins go to special nesting areas to mate and to raise chicks. When a male penguin is ready to mate, it struts and calls loudly to try to attract a female penguin. Mates stay together for years.

Penguins lay 1 to 2 eggs at a time. When an egg is laid, the female goes out into the ocean to get food, and leaves the male to watch the egg. In about 2 weeks, the female comes back and the hungry male goes to get food. Chicks are covered in fluffy feathers. When chicks sit on their parents' feet, it's called brooding. Also, when chicks are strong enough, the parents leave and the chicks are left in a group. In a few days, the parents come back, and they recognize their chicks by voice.

If you ever happen to see a penguin, take a moment to look at it. What does it look like? What is it doing? How is it moving? Is it swimming? Consider the fact that penguins are amazing, non-flying birds.

My Special Place

By Celia Abbott
St. John School, Grade 4

I have a special place that is hidden and quiet. I have a special place where pirates and fairies come to life. My special place is called the secret beach. It is not easy to find, this secret beach. First, you have to listen really hard and see if you can hear little bells. I'm sure it's not crickets. Next, watch for the big bears, which I doubt are big rocks. When you see the sparkles in the leaves those are fairies, not dewdrops. Then, last of all, you must walk over the wobbly bridge, that is definitely not a board, which goes across a little stream. Then that's when you get to the scary, beautiful, secret beach.

My Family

By Josie Lopez
Annie E. Vinton Elementary School, Grade K
Sword Fighting

By Aaron Harris
Central Elementary School, Grade 4

It was a warm summer day, though not the sweaty kind. The sun was high in the sky and it was around 3:00. Crack! A whip snapped. Then, "Pirate show in ten minutes!" a voice cried out. My Gramma, my sister Soren, my brother Evan, and I were at a Pirate Fair! It was summer 2014, and we were on a large field surrounded by tents and booths selling everything from steel cutlasses to chain-mail scarves. I even saw a suit of chain-mail armor! The sweet aroma of friend dough, hamburgers, and hot dogs drifted into my nose. Evan and I had acquired a pair of foam swords and were using them to guard our sister who had located the face painting booth and had received a mask of Hello Kitty face paint. "Hey, Evan," I said, "you wanna sword fight?" "Sure," Evan answered, so we started dueling while Gramma watched the two of us and Soren. Smack! Whack! Thud! Oof! We went, dealing blows, executing sharp slices, and trying not to get hit. Just then, the pirate code guy turned a corner and headed straight for us. He was a large man, maybe six feet tall. He had a long blue coat, a bottle on a long strap over his shoulder, an old fashioned blue captain's hat with a red feather in it, and clomping black boots. Evan and I were so busy dueling we didn't even notice him until he called out, "you there!" We jumped, then we noticed who he was, we hid our swords behind our backs. We had seen this guy before. He had given us a harsh telling off for "dueling" on the "fairgrounds". He pulled out a scroll from one of his many shoulder pouches and launched into a speech about the pirate code. When he was done he said we would have to walk the plank as our punishment...or sing I'm a Little Teacup. I groaned. Why did this guy have to walk around, bossing people around like he was a king? Guess which one we chose? Yup, I'm a little teacup. Evan and I started singing, then after "here is my handle, here is my spout!" We suddenly stopped. We couldn't remember the words. Then Gramma joined in with, "when I get all steamed up, here me shout, tip me over and pour me out!" We joined in after she started. "Close enough," said the pirate code guy when we were done. "Don't let me catch you two dueling again!" "OK," Evan and I chorused. Then we started walking away. I sighed inwardly, "what will we do now?" I thought. It was too bad we couldn't sword fight, it was fun. And that was how it was as we slouched away.

Soccer

By Charlotte Brenner
Latimer Lane Elementary School, Grade 4

Have you ever had a sport that was so important to you? Well, soccer is the most important sport in my whole life. Soccer is a big part of my life because I have supportive teammates, helpful coaches, and supportive parents on the sidelines.

Soccer is a big part of my life. I have supportive teammates that are the best. For example, one time our soccer team lost a soccer game to Farmington 3-2, and I was in goal. I started crying after the game was over because I thought I was the worst goalie ever. Right after I came off the soccer field crying, my teammates gave me the biggest hug ever and right when they hugged me, I felt like we won the game. I felt like I could do anything. If you have ever had that feeling you would know it feels, like a wind of power just bursting through your body. Just, "babam!" You feel 100 percent better. That is why I think my teammates are supportive and the best teammates ever. This makes me think I should be thankful for my teammates because no other teammates could replace the ones I have on my soccer team.

Soccer is a big part of my life. My coaches let us play games after practice. I can remember a time when absolutely no parents showed up after soccer practice so we got to play three rounds of the game Lightning, and then when the last round of Lightning ended, a bunch of parents showed up. We had to go home, but this makes me realize that my coaches are so nice for letting us play games and not telling us to sit on the bench waiting. Another reason my coaches are nice for letting us play games is because they actually play Lightning with us and they always lose, but I think that they let the kids win or they are just too tired to run back and forth kicking soccer balls in the net. I'm thankful for our coaches for letting us play games after soccer practice.
Soccer is a big part of my life. Parents always cheer us on. The parents always cheer my team on during every soccer game. The parents on the sidelines go crazy because I think they want us to score. If the other team gets the soccer ball, the parents will pretend that nothing happened and they do not scream loudly or anything. That just cracks me up on the field and if you heard the parents and saw the parents you would be on the ground laughing too, trust me. One specific parent is always cheering my team on and by cheering I mean standing up, screaming his loudest. That's why I like when the parents cheer us on. Another great thing about having parents on the sidelines is that when our team loses a game, they are always in a happy mood. For example, when we lost a game against Enfield 6-0, and our team was supper bummed, our parents were not. They said to us, “The world isn't over!” So of course that cheered us up.

This makes me realize that I'm thankful for this whole soccer season and I'm blessed that I have all these amazing people in my life. If I did not have all of these people in my life, I would still think I'm the worst goalie ever, be bad at soccer, and be sad when we lose a soccer game. I'm so thankful for these people in my life.

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**Cardinal**

*By Rabia Chaudhary*

*Washington Elementary School*

*Grade 3*
Fifth Grade

Adventure

By Alexa Selter
Burr Elementary School, Grade 5

As the clean, fresh air blew against
My face.
I began to pace and pace.
Should I go-
Or should I stay?
Never look back!

They will be fine without me there...
One step is enough.
Never look back!

The breeze blew-
Making it tough,
Two steps-
Far too rough.
But my friends push through-
Friends are always there for you.
I still never look back!

As we went on our amazing, yet scary, adventure
My heart was pounding
Like thunder and lightning.
Never look back!

Some might have guessed...
Those friends are the best.
Friends push you to go where you want to go.
They push you to appreciate what you want to see.
Friends push you to do things they know you love.
Never look back!

Do the things you love!
Even if it's tough inside, let the nervousness
Groove through you!
Let your imagination go free!
Do what YOU want to do.
Never looked back-
Never will look back.
The Bully

By Anni Jonker
Burr Elementary School, Grade 5

The sound of you locking yourself in a bathroom stall and crying, was as loud as a lion roaring.
You want someone to wipe the painful, discouraged look right off your face.
The door is locked, you are all alone, you are there, just staring into the blank, white space of your mind, filled
with sorrow.
Nobody knows what is happening until,
“BAMM!”
He kicks down the stall door; and the hinges of the door snap, and the bully stands in front of the light making a
swarm of darkness rise over your head, slowly increasing over your body.
He looks like a pure evil super villain ready to attack, with that mean, devious look on his face,
Your body slowly rises up from the disoriented floor from the entire plumbing underneath. You are trying to
stand up to the bully.
But with a big shove, he pushes you right back

D O W N

To the ground, right back where you started.
“Bullying is not cool, so stop it now or I will tell.” You say with a serious look on your face as brave as a soldier in
war.
But inside you are bouncing around like gelatin on a plate, jiggling around fiercely like it is telling you to eat it.
He rises up a fist, “Sure you will...”
As your first reaction, you duck right under his legs and you slide out,
You push open the bathroom door and run though the halls.
A teacher comes up to you and says,
“What's wrong” and then,
SAVED.

The Big Day

By Karina McMahon
Burr Elementary School, Grade 5

Sophia bust out of the red velvet curtain in a graceful leap. She could feel the audience’s eyes burning
through her skin. The spotlight was on her, and this was her one and only chance to make the professional
dance team. Sophia's toes ached from practicing so hard, but she didn't care. Sophia went onto pointe (on her
toes), and lifted her leg high above her. The judges peered over their glasses and gave Sophia a deathly stare
that made her tremble with fear. All Sophia could think was constantly, "Am I good enough? Will I make the
dance team?" Sophia's life was dancing. She couldn't live without it. In the day she would dance, and in her
dreams she would dance too. Sophia's flowy pink and marigold yellow skirt spun out as she rapidly did 7 twirls
in a row. Without wobbling, Sophia landed her many spins perfectly without getting too dizzy. “So far, so
good,” she thought. But Sophia knew the hardest part hadn’t even come yet.

Sophia was still dancing and was getting more nervous by the minute. She didn’t want to make a fool of
herself. Sophia's ballet shoe clenched her ankles tightly. She felt like a butterfly swirling through the air. The
crowd was hushed in pure silence. Every eye was focused on her. Nobody dared to make a peep. Sophia had
worked hard for this for two years. The national dance team was a BIG deal. Most dancers didn't get this far.
Sophia's fingers felt clammy and cold. Her nervous smile that was spread across her face started to wear off.
Sophia's cheeks ached and her smile faded. But she pasted her grin back on as she continued to dance. The
judges stared at every move she made. Every time the judges scribbled a note on the papers sprawled out in front of them, Sophia’s heart would skip a beat. All of a sudden Sophia heard Mia babbling behind the curtain trying to distract Sophia. Mia had always been mean to Sophia. Ever since Sophia had started to dance when she was three, Mia had only been negative. “Your twirl was crooked,” or “I don’t think your dance is good enough quality to make the national team.” Sophia bit her lip as her shoulder brushed the side of the curtain.

Sophia could see the dim light casting a grim shadow across Mia’s face behind the curtain. Mia made lots of noise behind stage. When she walked away she would stomp. Instead of keeping quiet she would cough and mumble and push against other hopeful dancers who wanted to make the national team. Sophia gulped. The music sped up faster and faster making Sophia speed up her dancing. She tried to keep the beat, but it was too obvious. Anyone could tell she was trying to speed up with her twirls and leaps. Mia smirked. Sophia’s eyes welled up with tears. This was not going well.

Sophia took a breath as the music slowed down again. But she knew it was going to speed up once again. The world was blocked out of Sophia’s mind. Her legs stiffened. She had practiced this part over and over again. Sophia didn’t know if she would nail it or not. Sophia looked at the stage ahead of her. Okay, she thought. Let’s go! Sophia tried to dance like nobody was watching. She twirled on her toes, and broke out into a neat line of scissor kicks. Everyone and everything was silent like they all knew the big part had come. Sophia grinned as the ending came. She had done it.

“ACHOO!” Someone sneezed and possibly ruined Sophia’s whole performance. Right away Sophia knew that it was Mia. She tried to stay graceful but she couldn’t help it. Mia froze up so instead of looking like a ballerina she looked like a windup toy. Her feet slipped out from under her and she started to slide. This was not what Sophia had always dreamed of.

Sophia fell onto the hard stage with a thump. Mia snickered. Oh no! Sophia thought. Her act was ruined! Sophia’s excitement vanished into thin air. She wanted to disappear. Sophia gawked at the judges and the huge crowd. Blushing, Sophia laid helplessly on the black stage. Every part of her body ached with pain and embarrassment. The audience nervously sat in their seats. People looked over others heads. Sophia started to sob. Tears rolled off her flushed cheeks and onto her spread out skirt. Sophia was struck with fear. She felt small and crumpled. Nothing could make her feel better.

“Sophia,” a voice whispered from the front row of the audience. It was her mom. After Sophia had fallen, she didn’t realize that she had been laying on the stage for a while. People might’ve thought that she was really hurt. Sophia’s mom stumbled down the aisle and onto the stage. Tears filled her eyes as she leaned over Sophia.

“Are, are you all-alright?” Her mom stammered. Sophia’s eyes grew huge with fear. What could the judges think about her act? But that wasn’t what Sophia’s mom was thinking. All her mom could think was, “I hope Sophia is all right.”

“What hurts? Sophia! Are you okay?” Sophia slowly nodded. She trembled all over. All of a sudden she started to weep. Sophia couldn’t even contain herself.

“I-I wanted. But didn’t make,” Sophia stuttered and tried to explain everything that happened, but her words came out in a big jumbled mess. Tears flooded her cheeks and dried on her chin.

“Are you okay? Come on, get up. Get up.” Her mom’s voice faded, and her eyes popped open. Sophia rubbed her eyes groggily. “Get up! Today’s the big day!”
The Sewing Competition

By Alyssa Caneira
Mansfield Middle School, Grade 5

Lauren ran down the sidewalk with her friend, Marianne, to the Mansfield Community Center. It was a warm, sunny summer day—a nice day to take a walk. The girls were taking a walk to the MCC to check out their bulletin board—the MCC had just put up the new events of the week. As they walked in, something on the board caught Lauren’s eye.

“Marianne, come over here! I mean it—look at this! There are sign-ups over here, and one is a pillow-making contest! Want to join with me?”

Lauren had an eye for sewing—she loved it a lot. Marianne... well, sewing wasn’t her greatest strength, but she liked it. She mostly preferred dancing and music.

Marianne was hesitant about the contest. “I haven’t been sewing much,” she admitted. “And I’m not as good as you, but I’ll try.”

So, together, the two friends signed up for the contest. It had a really cool prize, too.

“Oh, Marianne! Wouldn’t you be so happy if you won a sewing machine like that?” Lauren sighed, pointing at the photo of the winner’s prize. The high tech embroidery and sewing machine included a $50 gift card to any sewing store.

Marianne smiled. “Wow, you’d do anything in the whole world to get that prize,” she remarked. “I’d like it, too, Lauren!” she agreed.

Lauren could tell that Marianne was trying to make her happy, but she didn’t want her to know that she could tell.

At home, Lauren plopped down in her fuzzy, aqua recliner chair and started to sew her contest pillow. It felt so good to sew—her fingers tingling and burning with excitement. Her pillow was probably the best one she had ever made. She had hand-sewn the whole pillow! Lauren admired the pretty flowers that she had just embroidered. The mix of button centers and embroidery floss petals felt smooth and delicate. The pillow was complete with lace around the edges. The total pillow was 16x16 inches. But there seemed to be some blank spaces in her pillow, something missing.

Suddenly, “RING-RING! RING-RING!” Lauren’s iPhone rang. She jumped up from her recliner and picked up the phone.

“Hello!”

“Oh, Lauren! My pillow’s ruined! Oh, I knew this would happen. I cut the pillow by accident while trying to cut something else on it instead,” Marianne wailed. Lauren could hear her sobbing on the other end of the phone.

Lauren had no idea what to say to Marianne.

“Marianne, don’t feel bad! I—I’ll try to think of something to help you. I’m very sorry about your pillow, Marianne. Marianne?”

Marianne had hung up.

“Marianne must be very disappointed,” Lauren thought. “I really need to think of something to help her. But, it is a competition, after all.” Lauren wasn’t sure what to do.

Lauren tried to think of a way to help Marianne. She also knew that she might have a better chance of winning if she went to the contest without her. But, Marianne had signed up to make Lauren happy, so she couldn’t let her friend down.

Suddenly, Lauren had a great idea—a way to help Marianne. But still, a little annoying voice in her head said, “Why not just go without her, and have a better chance of winning?”

But Lauren ignored that voice, and dialed Marianne’s phone number.

“Hello?” said Marianne. “Lauren?”

“Hi, Marianne. I have an idea. Should I come over to your house?”

“Thank you, Lauren, but please hurry! The contest is starting soon!” Marianne replied.

Lauren ran to Marianne’s house. When she got there, Marianne looked at her anxiously. “Are you really sure that you can fix this?”
"Trust me, Marianne. I think we can sew the fabric scraps from your pillow onto my pillow, and enter the contest together. Is that okay with you?"

"Sure, Lauren. Let's do it."

Lauren grabbed a needle and white, glossy thread. "This is going to be perfect," she thought. "I hope Marianne likes it."

Lauren picked colorful, soft fabric scraps left over from Marianne's pillow and started to fill in the "blank spots" on her pillow that she was thinking of earlier. She tried making a "collage" with the scraps overlapping each other. It seemed wild, free, and beautiful at the same time. It made Lauren sew faster.

When Lauren was done, she glanced up at Marianne, who was looking at the finished pillow in awe.

"Wow," Marianne breathed. "That is just so beautiful, with all the colors! It worked! It really worked!"

"I knew it would," Lauren exclaimed. "I just knew it!"

The two best friends laughed, and Marianne hugged Lauren in relief.

Lauren and Marianne walked over to the Mansfield Community Center with their pillow. They sat down in the MCC's auditorium.

Two people from the MCC walked onstage and called each person's name who had entered the contest.

Then, each person walked up onstage, held up their pillow, and gave a small speech about it. The 4th person's pillow was so perfect that everyone in the audience clapped and cheered when she finished.

Marianne and Lauren looked at each other in horror.

"Oh..." Marianne said nervously. "She did... really good."

Before she could say more, the MCC managers called their names. Silently, the friends stood up and walked to the podium.

As Marianne held the pillow, Lauren gave a speech to the crowd about making her pillow and then adjoining it with Marianne's.

"When I was sewing my own pillow, I wasn't sure how to fill some of the blank spots that seemed to be on it. When Marianne called about her pillow being ruined, I knew I had to help her. Looking at her ruined pillow, I knew exactly what to put in those blank spots. Not just with fabric, but with friendship, too," Lauren said finishing her speech. When she was done, the audience clapped and cheered very loudly.

After the presentation of pillows, the judges looked at them all more closely. Marianne and Lauren held their breath.

Finally, the judges finished and walked back up to the microphone. "The winner is..." one judge announced, "The two young ladies, Lauren and Marianne!"

The two friends screamed, ran up to the podium, and received their prize of a high tech sewing machine plus a $50 gift card to any sewing store.

"I knew we could do it," Marianne whispered. "The best friends hugged each other.

"It was really fun to win," Marianne said. "Thank you for being my friend, Lauren."

"You're welcome," Lauren replied. "I'm glad we're friends, too."

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**The Dangerous Encounter**

*By Kylie Downs*

*Wells Road Intermediate School, Grade 5*

I blinked my eyes to clear the snow and looked at Dad, who just seemed like a blurry blob in this blizzard. I moaned as a frosted fern smacked my face, leaving a tiny red gash on my forehead.

"When will we get home?" I asked Dad in my best complaining voice.

The sun was disappearing into the pine trees, and my hat was getting icy. The world seemed to spin with the force of the snowstorm and each step in the two-foot-deep snow felt like I was moving a mountain.

Dad answered with a shiver, "Once we get out of this forest, we'll be in the field. So I'd say five minutes. Oh, and watch out for that barbed wire by your feet."

I jumped over the barbed wire that I nearly stepped on, almost collapsing to the ground. The forest was fading behind us, and now we had to face the blizzard in the wide-open plains. Snap! I quickly turned back to the woods.
“Did you hear that?” I asked, shocked by how quiet I sounded.
“I’m sure it was just a branch or something,” Dad replied calmly.
Yeah, it’s or something, I thought with a spark of fear.
As I turned back, I stumbled and fell right into the snow. I instantly got up and brushed off my snow pants in embarrassment.
Dad chuckled and cried, “What? Did you lose your footing?”
I nodded, and then stopped in my tracks.
“What is it?” Dad asked, creeping up to me.
He froze as well as we stared forward. Eight eyes stared back. The snow appeared to freeze in the air as I caught the creature’s sight. Air blew from their nostrils when they snorted. Standing right in front of me were four deer, and one was a buck. Its antlers were longer than some doors!
“Step back,” Dad warned, a wary look in his eyes.
The three female deer stepped forward.
“Is that one a baby?” I asked Dad, staring in surprise at what might be a baby deer, or fawn.
“Yup,” Dad replied. “In fact, I think that other one is a fawn too.”
My legs started to ache, and my face was frostbitten. I slowly bent my knees, keeping them from falling to the grassless ground. Too late. The buck swung his head up, stepped back, and vanished into the woods, flicking his white tail to summon the other deer to follow. The three females hesitated, then they too blended in with the misty forest. As we began to walk down the hill to my house, Dad turned and looked at me.
“That was cool, Ky, wasn’t it?” He smiled and wiped his snow pants, which were soaked with melted snow.
“Yeah. That was awesome!” I exclaimed, closing the fence gate behind me. The backyard awaited us.
“Let’s go inside and get some hot chocolate, and maybe a cookie,” Dad muttered wearily.
My stomach growled at the thought of such food, but that didn’t mean I didn’t love my adventure. As I walked inside our warm house, I thought about all that had just happened. I had basically walked through a snowstorm and faced four deer, but it felt more than that. I sat down waiting for my hot chocolate and cookie, thinking hard. Why did it feel more than that? Why? Hmm, that doesn’t matter right now because no matter what, I will never forget this dangerous encounter.

Treasured Memories

By Maria Proulx
Juliet Long School, Grade 5

The bow of my kayak cuts through the water like a torpedo heading to a doomed ship. As I rest I hear crickets chirping and an owl hoot in the distance. This is Lake Monomonac. On the mountain nearby hundreds, maybe thousands of hawks circle up like a tornado. They are the most amazing, mouth-dropping creatures and are ready to migrate. This is Lake Mononomac. Lake Mononomac with its crystal clear waters is one of my favorite places on earth.

On early summer mornings my dad and I creep out to the lake to fish for bass. The mist covers the lake like a cloud coming straight down from the heavens. I love peaceful moments like this. It is so quiet that a small fish jumping out of the water to catch a buzzing fly sounds like a boulder falling from the sky.

On afternoons my dad and I sail and admire the puffy clouds that dot the light blue sky. The warm breeze fills the plain white sail. Dragonflies buzz and the bald eagle that often soars around our lake disappears into the horizon. As we sail back to our cottage, paddle boarders are just passing the dock. We don’t mind, I think, as we wave. The whole lake shares. The whole lake is a family.

I rush out of the boiling sun into the cool shade and I collapse into a chair. I ponder, thinking of the calm moments like this where the breeze takes wisps of my hair and sends them flying behind me. I smile looking at the lake I know so well. As I gaze into the astonishing sky I realize- “Family is Forever” and traditions live on. Lake Mononomac is where all my treasured memories meet.
The Peacock

By Fiona Rusch
Greenwich Academy, Grade 6

Two hundred eyes preparing to see,
Hera would have been pleased.
A perfect blue and green tornado,
Grace in every perplexing tremble.
A portrait of something proud
But more than that,
A warning of beauty in a powder-soft arc
A flash of truth too bold for most
But the wisdom of nature lies in its design
Which folds down on itself like a gentlewoman's fan,
Before others can catch and harm can be done.
In the end, maybe too glorious for some.

A Quiet Winter Wish

By Caroline Fallon
Salisbury Central School, Grade 6

The winter sun peaks over the frosty hill,
And my beating, drumming heart stops still.
The frigid beauty swirls around me,
Dancing in the winter wind I cannot see.

No more crispy leaves
Play around the trees,
Except the few pine needles that remain,
Amongst the forest bare and plain.

A frozen stream twists and turns,
As it silently yearns
For the day it will be set free
And new waters it will someday see.

The winter wind flies so high,
Dancing, spinning, sighing across the frostbitten sky
As it pushes flurries on their way,
In and out of every day.

Cold fingers, a numb nose
And icy toes
Are all part of the winter fun
As we await the warmth of the summer sun.
No birds sing in the forest,
They all went south with winter wind’s first gust.
As I walk along winter’s path there’s not a sound for my ears to meet,
But the crunch of crispy mud beneath my shivering feet.
Blake Outman, Boy Wonder

By Abigail Sprinsky
Tootin Hills Elementary School, Grade 6

Part One - Fairy

The sky was darkening as I flew out to find one of the most important people in the world, in my world at least. The buildings became larger as I approached the city. I was in search of a boy to make into the Great Fairy.

The journey may seem hard in the big city of New York, but don't worry. I already knew who he was and where he lived. So I flew to him. His name is Blake Outman, a troublesome boy who doesn't like to do much, except play video games and annoy people he doesn't care for. My friends say that he isn't the right person, but I know that he is the one. I thought about this as I flew over the skyscrapers, trying to find the small brick apartment building Blake lived in.

When I got there, I saw colorful lights coming from the living room TV. Blake was holding a controller that his thumbs danced on. "I knew he would be doing something like that," I said to myself.

I called up to my friends on my phone to show them the boy. It's fifty miles from the meadow to the city, but fairies fly like lightning.

While I was watching Fairy Idol on my phone, the whole city suddenly went black. I put my phone away because my friends had arrived and I couldn't let any human, especially Blake, see the faint light.

"You do still realize this boy will never be good enough," the first one said.
"Just wait," I said. "He'll prove himself."

I was right, as usual. He felt around blindly for his special blue flashlight and flipped it on. I saw him shaking. He was still looking at the TV, hoping that this would just be for a few seconds. But it wasn't.

He dragged himself over to the electrical panel in the extra storage room and fiddled with the buttons and knobs to turn on the kitchen and living room lights. The apartment lit up.

Blake went to see his parents to ask them if they were okay. That's one good thing about him. He's always nice to them, other close relatives, and the very few friends he has.

"Ha! That was nice." I said.
"True," said another one. "But we still need more."

Part Two - Blake Outman

"Ugh," I said. "Not another one." I hate blackouts. I never told anyone his, but I'm really scared of the dark. Not even my parents know, so don't tell other people.

I opened the electrical panel. I flipped the living room light on and off, and it sparked to life. I did the same with the kitchen. I went to see my parents. I didn't know if they were scared of the dark too so I wanted to make sure they were okay. I love my parents; they're my closest family and friends. I wouldn't let anything happen to them.

Next, I heard a scream from next door. The piercing noise was four-year-old Bailey and her baby brother, Mark, screaming because they're terrified of the dark too. The problem is everyone knows it, and nobody likes it. Another thing is that their parents are very far from being technicians. So they would stop screaming, I went over to their noisy apartment to turn on the lights. When the first light sputtered to life, Bailey got up, ran over to me, and gave me a big hug. Mark started to drift back to sleep.

This had never happened to me before, and I loved the feeling the hug gave me. "Gee, I wish the lights would go out more often!" I thought smiling.

"What do you call that?" Said a voice from nowhere. I spun around, just to find two bright dots in front of me. I blinked, and they were gone.

I shrugged. "Must have been my imagination," I thought, still confused about what I saw.

Suddenly I heard a crash from across the hall. "Oh right," I remembered. "I forgot Old Man Jones." Old Man Jones is a ninety-year-old man who will not go to a retirement home. But I like him, he's funny and gives me candy to do his chores. Which, of course, I never do, but he's going blind so I get the candy for telling him I did them. Plus, the old guy is like a grandfather to me.

I shuffled over there. I was getting really tired, but if I didn't do this I would never get candy again, or
get to visit Old Man Jones. My parents also don’t like racket he creates.

When I got in there, I found his cable box, (using my awesome blue flashlight of course) and switched on all his lights. I found Old Man Jones in his bedroom, with an unused plastic hairbrush lying next to his dresser and an inside-out sweater on his torso. He thanked me with a pat on the back and a king size Snickers bar. I dug into the candy, and replied, with a full mouth, saying it was no trouble.

Then I went home, happy in my head and stomach. I sank into bed, too tired to put my pajamas on. I felt happy that my friends and family were safe, and that their homes were well lit. The smile I still had on proved it.

"You did a good thing tonight, Blake," the same weird voice that came out of nowhere said.

Part Three - Fairy

"Did you see that? Did you? Wasn’t that so kind and amazing?" I asked my friends. They had to agree, his sudden kindness was amazing. "He could help us with our blackouts too!" I explained, pleading them to believe me.

"You’re right, about what he did tonight and what he could do for us in the future." One of them agreed. "His technical work is amazing."

"So," I asked. "Is he the one?" "Yes, I believe he is."

Purrfect Love

By Mackenzie Louison
Metropolitan School, Grade 6

Ellie has her routine. 6:00AM wake up human, chow, jump on bathroom sink (ugh there is water in the sink), and finally find her place on the kitchen table. She pretends to give herself a bath, ignoring the watchers. But outside, he is waiting. His tail is crazy, swishing back and forth with excitement. He pounces from the tree he had been waiting on for her. When he saw her he soared to another branch. They had been dating for almost a year. The only problem was he was dedicated to the outside and she was an indoor cat. It would be impossible to see each other in person. He lived in the trees in the wooded backyard and she was inside her cozy warm house. Ellie had loved his name from the moment she heard it. It was almost as pretty as her name, it was... Spencer. It was as if there had been an angel saying it every time she heard it, or like they do in one of those TV body spray commercials, "Spencer."

Ellie is spoiled, like a princess in a tower. Only, she lives in a big home and sleeps in a queen-sized bed with her human, Mack. Ellie rules her home. She decides when it’s time to eat. If the humans are asleep, she will wake them. She starts by sitting on their chest and licking them with her sand paper tongue. If that doesn’t work, she climbs on the furniture and knocks things off with her paw until they pay attention to her. During the day, she grooms and takes numerous catnaps. Ellie is friendly but will give a firm bite when she wants to say, "back off." She is a large cat with a low hanging belly. About the only time she goes a little crazy is when her human gives her catnip.

Spencer is a free spirited squirrel. He does anything he wants, but actually will do anything for Ellie because she is the love of his life. He rules the backyard and loves the tall trees that are his home. As he springs from tree to tree, he always has one eye on the window, constantly looking for her to reappear.

One night, Ellie had been sleeping in her usual spot, curled up on Mack’s bed. After a long rest, Ellie rolled over onto her stomach and stretched out. All of a sudden the automatic lights went on outside of Mack’s Window. Ellie’s curiosity caused her to inspect what was outside. So she snuck past Mack, who was sleeping on his side, and approached her perch that was attached to the window. She shuttered! There was a big, black, bear eating trash outside the window to the patio. Ellie had never seen a bear before. Her eyes lit up like floodlights as she noticed that Spencer was in the tree above the bear. Spencer had been eating a nut but it slipped out of his paws and hit the bear on the head. "Plunk!" The Mama bear turned her head up toward the branch and noticed the squirrel sitting there. Maybe it was her appetite, but she immediately started to climb the tree toward Spencer. He jumped out of the tree trying to get away when the bear swung at him with a sharp paw. Spencer’s hair went flying and Ellie sprung forward trying to help, but instead banged her head
against the window. Spencer dashed away making Ellie wait in fear the rest of the long night.

In the morning after the sun came up, Ellie went to see Spencer at their usual place. When he finally showed up, Ellie noticed the amount of fur the bear sliced off of Spencer’s tail. Ellie was so upset and felt like it was all her fault, but Spencer seemed fine other than the chunk of hair missing from his bushy tail.

After a long day of worry, Ellie jumped onto the table and watched as the Mom made several trips back and forth to the car carrying in the groceries. Suddenly something caught Ellie’s eye. Spencer appeared inside! Ellie dove onto the floor and whispered in Spencer’s ear, “What are you doing here?” He replied, “I came to see you, what else?” She purred a bit and said, “That’s sweet but you can’t stay here, you live outside and I live in. You have to go before it’s too late.” His smile faded, “You are right, how could I not have thought this through. Goodbye my love. Oh, I almost forgot... I brought you a nut.” He pushed the perfectly round acorn toward her. “Thank you, but hurry before...” The door shut and in walked Lisa, the Mom, with the last bag of groceries. Spencer was now trapped in the house.

Ellie knew that eventually one of the three annoying dogs she tolerated in the house would have to go to the bathroom and the door would open again. For now, Spencer was trapped. Ellie looked at Spencer and said, “Follow me!” She dashed into the hallway and up the stairs.

Once they were safe, she told him he needed to hide until the dogs went out and then he must run. But it would be hours before the door opened again. And Spencer and Ellie would have time together, hidden under Mack’s bed. They shared the snack he brought her, though he ate most of it. The rest of their time was spent sharing stories, laughing, and cuddling.

At 3:30 pm, the door swung open and Spencer dashed out. Ellie was devastated that he was now gone, but she knew it was for the best. They could still have a relationship even if it was through the glass window. He would be waiting for her to appear. She would curl up in her favorite spot and watch him perform. No one knew that the squirrel outside was doing more than collecting acorns. He was dancing in the trees for his true love.

Why Not?

By Natalie Williams

Colebrook Consolidated School, Grade 6

When I was in preschool, my teachers were really strict. I only ever liked one or two of them. I had quite a few not-so-good days, like when I gave myself a haircut, or the time I didn’t WANT to go to sleep during nap time on St. Patrick’s day because I wanted to see a leprechaun, and the day I got hit in the face with a plastic pineapple...

Most kids got to choose whether they slept during naptime or not. Me? Nope. In my preschool, it was an hour of lying on a hard cot, listening to “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star” over and over and over and over and...well, you get the point.

The one thing I HATED was recess. Most kids: Recess? YAY! Me: Recess? Ugh. I was too small to reach ANYTHING, so I usually had to find the farthest corner where the teachers couldn’t see me and use a stick to draw in the dirt, although I could manage to climb up this tower playscape and sit on the top platform, then go down the slide, and climb up again. It wasn’t until about my last year there that I was able to climb on buildings like the big slide and the tall monkey bars and do more than just sit in the giant monster truck tires. I also had this habit of doing things that I sort of knew I wasn’t supposed to do...

One day, I wanted to bring my favorite toy, a blue baby doll, out to recess. The teacher called everyone to line up, so I grabbed the doll and got in line. We walked out the door and onto this “road” (a fifteen-foot-long and three-foot-wide strip of blacktop), then onto the playground. I was just stepping off the road when a particularly mean teacher named Miss Nancy called.

“Natalie? Why do you have that doll? You know you’re not supposed to bring toys outside.” She said it sharply, and disapprovingly, like she was getting mad at someone who didn’t deserve her attention.

I stopped and turned around. “Why not? It’s my favorite and I want it,” I told her, even though it wasn’t why I wanted my doll, because I wasn’t about to pour my heart out into this teacher who I really didn’t
like. I turned back around and continued walking toward my drawing corner. Inside my head I was thinking, *It's my favorite doll and my mom is away and I miss her and YOU don’t even know she's away right now, and I just. Don't. Get. WHY. This is a big deal.*

Suddenly, hands were grabbing my shoulders and whipping me around, shaking me like a ragdoll. I struggled to try to get away from her but her grip was like iron. Then Miss Nancy's face was inches away from mine, so close that I could smell her black bean soup breath. She was yelling that children always listened to teachers and didn't ignore them and followed all the directions they were given. She was bent down in that way that grown ups do when they are talking to a kid smaller than them. I think they think it's supposed to make them less intimidating and more likely to get listened to. Except, it does the opposite. They still tower over the kid and still get WAY too close.

Tears started pouring out of my eyes, because I didn't understand why she was yelling at me. I had told her why I had my doll, because she had asked me. I knew I wasn't SUPPOSED to bring my doll outside, but my mom was in Costa Rica, so I had been feeling down lately, and I had wanted some comfort. I hadn't ignored her. I had answered her. She hadn't even TOLD me to do anything, so technically it had been impossible for me to disobey directions, because there hadn't been any.

I was screaming and crying and clinging to my doll like it was a lifejacket and I was stranded in the ocean as Miss Nancy tried to tug it away. When kids are young, I think they get ideas and then just have to do it. That was how it was with me right then. The only thought going through my head was *Hold on. Hold on. Hold on.* Nothing else had mattered. *Hold on. Hold on. Hold on.*

Later, when my dad came to pick me up, the teacher told him that I had brought my doll out to recess, even though I knew I wasn't supposed to. He had said, "Okay, I'll talk to her, it won't happen again, blah blah blah," but I knew he didn't really care. He grabbed my lunchbox and the blanket I used for naptime in one hand and scooped me up in the other, then walked out to his blue pick up truck. When I was all buckled up in my car seat, he asked me why I had brought my doll, which was sitting in my lap, out to recess.

"Because I miss Mommy," I told him, and he nodded, smiled at me, and kissed my forehead. I knew he understood.

Then he got in the truck and drove us home.

But not before we stopped at Stop and Shop and got mangoes, my favorite.

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**Alcatraz**

*By Clair Michalik*

*Greenwich Academy, Grade 6*

I rushed to the window of the boat and I began to shiver as the outline of Alcatraz became clear through the San Francisco fog. I couldn't imagine what it would be like to be a prisoner there, especially at night. I started to run to the front of the boat for a better view, and as I stepped outside the wind almost knocked me off my feet. Regaining my balance, I stared in awe as we slowly approached the island. The wind was blowing through my sweatshirt and every so often the water would crash against the side of the boat and spray would come over the edge, pelting the deck like tiny bullets. Soon I was back inside.

As I stepped off the boat and onto the island I was blasted with harsh salty winds. Tall empty buildings with shattered windows and chipped paint loomed everywhere making me feel small. Although they looked desolate in the meager light, I couldn't help thinking that the buildings must have been really nice for a jail.

When I walked inside the main building I noticed that the giant lights overhead cast a strange orangy glow. Even though it was eerie, it was warm, so I was happy. It seemed that the building was endless, three tiers of cells on each wall again and again and again. My feet thudded on the concrete floor as I was walking down Broadway (the main hallway) and peering into cells.

"Dad," I asked, "Why did Alcatraz close?"

"Because the island has no natural resources so it cost too much," he said casually as we continued down the hall.

"Oh," I replied. I felt bad for the officers and their families because some of them lived on the island and
they had a nice community. There was a bowling alley and a ferry that would take their kids to school in the morning. It would have been tough to be told to leave the place you call home.

After Broadway, I headed into the D block. This was where the worst of the worst went. I walked inside one of the cells and it was awful. Instead of just having metal bars in the front, there was a solid concrete door as well. Without any openings, no light could penetrate the room. I was standing inside the cell when I felt a tap on my shoulder.

“Ahh!” I cried, startled, as I spun around on my heels. To my relief, it was only Kelci, our tour guide.

“Sorry to scare you,” she said, “but I would like to know if you want to come on an unofficial tour upstairs.”

“Sure, that sounds like fun,” I replied, still breathing a little harder than usual. My family and I were led to a staircase closed with a giant lock. I got to use a key equally as large to open it. As my family and I started up the worn stairwell, Kelci locked the door behind us.

I was really excited, but at this point it was dark. I will admit I was a little freaked out. We were in a maximum-security prison and about to explore the unknown. I was Indiana Jones discovering the lost world of Alcatraz. We began to ascend the stairwell to the unknown levels. Everything was shadowy and dusty. Our path was only illuminated by a single flashlight. We moved on to the billiards room. In the middle lay a pool table in perfect condition. There was a beautiful view of San Francisco out of a cracked window and you could feel a faint breeze on that side of the room.

Finally we make our way up to the gunnery through a small set of stairs. The gunnery was a thin hallway covered by a metal cage that ran the length of the building. As a guard, you were safe here, but danger lurked in every corner. You could see the whole prison, but the whole prison could see you too. In the gunnery I got to take a picture with Kelci while holding the enormous keys to Alcatraz.

It was getting late and it was time to go see the demonstration “The Closing of the Doors” by none other than Kelci. She showed us the mechanics of opening and closing the cell doors and we got to see it happen (which is a lot cooler than it sounds). Kelci’s final words of wisdom were, “The prisoners heard this sound seven times a day. It was the last thing that they heard when they left Alcatraz for the very last time. Now the bang of the doors is the last thing that you will hear before leaving Alcatraz.” GGGRRRREEEEE BLAM!

Wearing My New Shoes to School

By Kylie Ritchie

Tootin’ Hills Elementary School, Grade K
Storm

By Abigail Lateer
Tolland Middle School, Grade 6

I don't understand why
people associate rain
with dreariness and coldness
and grayness and dark.
My storms are alive
with electricity threading together
the churning black sky
and thunder ricocheting
off the angry boiling clouds
and wind roaring and rushing and raring
with shiny wet leaves throwing off bits
of scattered dead slate light
because that's what happened today:

RainSlashedAtTheSky

The Universe Was A Cacophonous Crashing

and I could hear

 a hole being ripped in the
_S_H_A_T_T_E_R_E_D_

void

as war waged between the sky and the earth and the wind
While a girl
(who seemed so very small in comparison)
watched at her window.

My Life in Super Mario Bros. Wii

By Shreyus Saxena
Southeast Elementary, Grade 4
Trees

By Charles Effman
Coleytown Middle School, Grade 6

The age old giant
stands proudly,
watching over his green kingdom.
   His legs may be prisoners,
   trapped beneath the ground,
   but his arms reach for the sky.
   As the wind blows
   the giant catches it
   with those many arms.
   Each arm extends a hand
   of a different shade of green.
   His body is cloaked
   in clothes of bark,
   to keep him warm
   as he stands proudly,
   watching over his green kingdom.

Windy Hook

By Hailey Russell
City Hill Middle, Grade 7

I thought December 15th was going to be an ordinary day. Well, I was wrong, extremely wrong. I attend Windy Hook Elementary School, it's not a huge school, made from red bricks and has three floors, but I love it. Anyways, that day I went to school as usual. I was super excited because it was Friday and tomorrow I had a soccer tournament. I said "hi" to my teacher Mrs. Smith and put my stuff in my locker. I went inside the classroom and sat right next to my best friend Amelia. A half an hour went by and then it happened.

Boom! Boom! Boom!
Oh my gosh! So many things were going through my mind. I started getting really nervous. Everyone started talking uncontrollably until my teacher said, "Quiet down class. Everything's going to be alright." I could tell things were going to get scary, even Mrs. Smith was shaking.

Boom! Boom! Boom!
There it was again. Soon there was an announcement on the intercom, "Attention, attention, everyone we are moving into code black. Everyone lock your doors and move to the back of the classroom. Also there is no talking whatsoever. Thank you." My whole class did what they were told without any feedback. We were in code black for probably 20 minutes. Soon the intercom went on again. "Attention everyone please evacuate the school immediately." Now I was scared. My instinct was there was a shooter. How would we get out of the building if there was a shooter?

Boom! Boom! Boom!
My heart was beating faster by the minute, I had butterflies in my stomach, and my throat was getting all swollen to the point where I couldn't breathe but was just huffing and puffing. After a minute or two, Mrs. Smith told us all to get into one line and hold hands. The last thing she told us was, "Kids, before we go out there, I want you all to know that you are loved. Every single one of you is loved, no matter what." I couldn't help it. I started to cry, so did half of the other kids.

Boom!
Quietly and carefully, we went out the door and started to walk. I looked at the ground the whole entire time. On a scale from 1-10 for horrified I was, it was definitely a 10. I did not want to die nor did I want to
witness anyone dying. Soon we got out of the building and were moving onto the blacktop. I started looking at all the other classes and then it hit me! I just remembered I had a big brother Jeff and a little sister Madison who also go to this school. Immediately I started looking for them. It didn't take me very long to find Mrs. Johnson's class and see Jeff in line. Then I started looking for Mrs. Jordan's class. After about 2 minutes I found the class and started looking down the line. I probably did that 10 times and saw every person except Madison. I started becoming very afraid. I had all kinds of mixed emotions going through my body. I was worried, nervous, and completely freaking out. Not the good kind like when you meet One Direction, but instead the kind that makes you sit at the edge of your seat during the scariest part of the movie.

Soon, my class was starting to walk to the other side of the building. I couldn't leave; my sister was missing and could be in great danger if there really was a shooter in Windy Hook. Suddenly I got an idea. I quietly tiptoed to the tree nearest to the school. When the coast was clear I ran as fast as a cheetah into Windy Hook.

The first place I checked was the office. I basically tore the place apart. While I was looking, I started to cry. The possibility that a shooter was in my school, I was breaking all the rules and would probably get an ISS, OSS, or even a detention every week until the end of the school year. Madison was nowhere to be found, so the next place I checked was the nurse's office. She wasn't there either. "Where else could she be?" I wondered. I felt like I was running out of oxygen, it was getting harder to breathe and my mind was racing in a thousand different directions. I even checked the boy's bathroom, hoping beyond hope she might be hiding there. Girls would never use the boy's room but in this case it would have been a great hiding place. No such luck. My next move was to check every single classroom. Madison might have left her line and hid under a desk or in the closet. It seemed highly unlikely for Madison not to follow the rules the principal has said over the intercom but I had to keep looking. It seemed like hours had passed since I started looking for my sister when in fact it was only a few minutes.

I checked every classroom, stairwell, even the boy's locker room. I just wanted to give up and go be with my teacher outside on the blacktop. "Maybe Madison went with another class or with the principal," I thought. I really didn't know what to do at this point. "I give up!" I screamed. But I couldn't just leave; I decided to check one more place, the place I should have checked right from the beginning of the search, the girl's bathroom.

I ran to the girl's bathroom, closed the door quietly, and went over to the stalls. As I was walking towards the last stall, I heard a soft sob coming from behind the stall door. I slowly opened the door, my sad and scared face turned happy and joyful. "Madison," I shouted. I had found my sister. I reached in and pulled her up and we gave each other the tightest hug we could possibly give each other. We were hugging for a while until I realized what was happening. "Why are you here and not outside with the rest of your class? I have been looking frantically everywhere in the school for you. There is a shooter in the school. Do you know how much danger you are in? I have broken so many rules to find you!" Madison looked at me very confused. "I'm really sorry Hailey but I needed to find out what was going on with these three boys. There is no shooter in the school. When I was going to the girl's room, I heard three boys giggling. So my instinct was to go and investigate. The boys were in the 6th grade hallway setting off firecrackers. They hated school and wanted to get out of class for the day."

I was so relieved to hear that there was no shooter in our school. We both looked at each other and started to sprint towards the door that lead to the blacktop where we would find our teachers and principal. We told the principal the entire story. Her expression changed from concern to relief and, with permission from the police, issued a code green.

As I walked back inside with my class, I was grateful that everything turned out the way it did. The three boys were expelled. Madison and Jeff were safe. Our principal said I showed great courage but should have told a grownup that Madison was missing. I didn't get in trouble as I thought, but I will definitely from now on tell a grownup when something is not right.

That night before bed, I told Madison that today was definitely an interesting day. She agreed. I am glad everyone is safe. Hopefully I will never experience anything like this again at Windy Hook.
Highway Lullaby

By Kara Mahoney
Tolland Middle School, Grade 7

The highway’s about to put me to sleep.
Driving into this suffocating darkness, this never-ending cold. The sonorous roar of tires on pavement combines with the faint outlines of music whispering from the radio to create a lullaby of the sweetest drowsiness.

Plus the love of my life is curled up, fast asleep, in the passenger seat.
Her golden hair is washed in monochromatic silver by the full moon interrupting through the window. Her stomach rises with every breath, her every inhale, exhale so even that it drags me into its gauzy, warm embrace, threatening to sink me into a sea of silver dreams.

But I must focus. I must keep driving, chasing scarlet taillights and running from the inevitable dawn. So I keep driving, I keep chasing those ghostly taillights as sunrise creeps ever closer.
Eventually the sky is stained a color that doesn’t yet have a name, perhaps because it is so hard to capture in our pitiful words, and dawn stands proud on the horizon, holding up the beginnings of a golden sun.

And then Claire wakes up.
She stretches her arms up to the low ceiling of my sedan. Claire rolls her head, as if it was brand new on her body and she had to adjust to the weight. I glance over at her, a small smile playing on my lips.
"Good day, Sunshine," she greets me, as always, with a quote from her favorite Beatles song. That stupid tradition originated when I first met her, and every time she says it, I’m taken back to that playground and I’m eight years old again and Claire’s calling me Sunshine for the first time, grinning with a gap toothed, candy-sweet smile about how my name is Rae.

Honestly, what loving parents name their daughter Rae Kelley?
"Morning, Amazing Grace," I return as I pull the car to the side of the road. See, Claire's last name is Grace, and I, desperate to give her a nickname as well, started calling her Amazing Grace. It stuck.
Claire unbuckles her seatbelt and gets out of the car, and I follow her. We lean back against the trunk of that old grey sedan, the clouds like perfectly painted cotton candy and the velvet morning draping down around us.

And for some reason, I feel lighter; like with Claire standing next to me I’m not just chasing taillights anymore. Like she’s both lifting me up and tying me down, like she’s that little candy-smiled girl holding on to a red balloon. She takes my hand, and we watch dawn lift the sun into the flawlessly crafted sky, and I can’t help thinking that the sunrise I was dreading isn’t quite as bad as it seemed when Claire was asleep.

You know, I wish I could just leave the story there, with the candy sky and our hands entwined and the chilly breeze sweeping Claire’s hair away from her face. I wish I could just leave you with a three-word love story: Strangers, friends, lovers. But alas, there’s one more word. Strangers. Our love story is a sad one; strangers, friends, lovers, strangers.
Our love story doesn’t end in frills and roses and a sweet little ‘Happily Ever After’. It ends in tears and that horrible argument and an old vinyl record being thrown out of an apartment window.
I won’t leave you with the gory details of the argument. I’ll leave you with the aftermath: Claire knocking on my door with black eyeliner smears down her tanned face, me handing her a box of her belongings, and her dropping it on the floor and enfolding me in her arms. "I’m sorry," she murmured into my shoulder. "I’m sorry I’m sorry I’m so so sorry."

And I stepped out of her arms and looked away. "Claire, I can’t do this anymore."
Claire nodded, took the box, and left. I leaned against the door that she closed, tears of regret rolling down my face as I slid to the floor, already knowing that I never should have let her go.
That was the last time I saw her.
Thus concludes the tale of Rae and Claire. I may have ruined that relationship, but Claire did teach me a lesson. She left a permanent scar on my heart that never quite faded, and I feel kind of thankful for the reminder that life isn’t a fairytale. Sometimes the frills and roses fade after a while. Sometimes the little girl lets go of the balloon. And sometimes the highway puts you to sleep, and when you wake up, your life has changed and the girl you love is gone. But that doesn’t mean that everything good left with her. Maybe that cut on your heart is exactly what you need to get you to truly stop chasing taillights.

The Unexpected Visitor

By Dorothy Zhang
Coleytown Middle School, Grade 7

A vicious swirl of wind, a big bully roaming through an innocent neighborhood, destroying everything in its path. A blur of gray and white. The sound of an eerie siren, threatening to burst eardrums with every shriek. All this, caused by one little visit from a very “special” visitor! Not the typical school day!

May 25, 2011. The day that was supposed to be remembered as the day my second-grade class had a pizza party. However, Mother Nature apparently had different ideas. The rickety yellow bus containing my class and I bumped along the cracking, concrete road, and was already halfway to Shakespeare’s Pizza before the call came. Beep! Beep! A teacher on a walkie-talkie suddenly scampered up to the front of the bus! So much for staying seated… She told the bus driver to stop, immediately. Then she stood in front of the bus and announced, “Severe weather alert! Keep calm, everybody! We’re turning this thing around!” Naturally, being energetic little second-graders, my whole class rushed to the nearest window, pressed their faces on the glass, and stared outside. To their disappointment (and my relief), it didn’t look so bad, except for a few measly clouds lazily drifting through the air. They didn’t look frightening enough to scare an ant! The bus driver though, was trained to follow directions without question. He ignored the grumbles and complaints of twenty-four pizza-hungry second-graders and we were back at school before you could say “PIZZA!” Luckily, a few parents waiting for us at the pizza place delivered it to us, and everything seemed to be fine for a while.

We were all munching heartily on pizza when someone noticed the clouds! Now, there are three types of clouds: normal, dark, and insanely, unrealistically, BLACK! Unfortunately for us, the type we saw outside was the third one. I never, in all my years of imagining, would have pictured clouds like these. They looked so filthy and grotesque they could have made Godzilla whimper. And then, my heart skipped a beat. I couldn’t believe I didn’t notice it sooner: the sirens. Tornado sirens were blaring, left and right! The sound somehow carried perfectly across town, even in this weather.

Panic struck me and started eating me up, from the inside out! “Quickly, everyone! Out of the room, single file! NO TALKING!” The teacher obviously was just as scared as we were. My whole class jumped up in perfect unison. We had NEVER been more eager to go….into the boys’ bathroom.

The building groaned as five hundred students made a mad run, stumbling and tripping over each other to get to their severe weather spots! All those drills, and all the things we practiced had completely been forgotten. My class had the BEST spot! NOT! The boys’ room stunk so much, but I decided to just tough it out. After all, this is pretty much a paradise compared to being outside, in the path of that ruthless swirl of wind! My insides twisted and turned, and tied themselves into knots. I had never even been a fan of thunderstorms, and there I was, possibly in the path of a tornado! My whole body shook, even though it wasn’t the least bit cold. Breath! I had to keep telling myself, over, and over, until I completely lost the will. It was no use. The thunder rumbled like a mighty roar! A flash of lightning had me curled up against the wall as close to it as possible, without passing through it!

My mind turned to my family. I wished I was more like them. None of them would be freaking out as much as I was! They would be calm and collected, the total opposite of me. Suddenly, the building shook, and interrupted my train of thought! Kids wailed, screaming and holding onto each other for dear life! For a second, I thought it might’ve been the end! I stiffened, preparing for the worst, but still desperately hoping for the tornado to pass and leave me ALONE!
More thunder, more wails. The sirens droned on and on, monotonously. I hugged my knees and buried my head in my arms. My heart thumped inside my chest as if to pop out any second! The pounding inside my head, like my brain was doing all it could, trying to process what was happening. The biggest rumble of thunder yet caused even the calmest of the teachers to wince! I had forgotten about the teachers. They were sitting against the wall, just like we were, only they weren’t crying or screaming, but it sure looked like they wanted to! And I definitely didn’t blame them!

Whoosh! A gush of wind threatened to blow down the school! I realized I was still tense, awaiting my doom. The worst hadn’t come. It sparked a bit of hope inside me! Maybe the worst was gone! Maybe it left me, and my school and went somewhere else entirely! One more rumble of thunder, the biggest one, and then, it was calm. The tornado had passed, and I was still breathing. My heartbeat started calming down. Alive. I’m alive! I thought as gratitude and glee overwhelmed me. All the chaos ceased, and I could hear a big huff as every person in the room let out a sigh of well-delayed relief!

Standing, I wobbled over to the door of the bathroom. In all the confusion, my legs had turned into jelly! I opened the door and stepped out into the deserted hallway. Teachers and students trudged out of their tornado places like bears coming out of hibernation. At that moment, I realized that there was no way this experience would ever slip out of my mind! And it hasn’t yet. It’s been more than three years now, but the memory is still fresh in my brain. And now, I almost go a little overboard, taking safety precautions when there are any signs of a tornado!

What the American Flag Means to Me

By Princess Frimpong
East Hartford Middle School, Grade 7

What does the American flag mean to you? To me- it means a lot. It means Freedom, Chance, and Hope.

In the 1600s, English settlers brought Africans to America, sadly, against their will. The blacks were soon called slaves. Thousands of people owned slaves in America until 1865. Not everyone thought it was right to own them though, but they did anyway. Many black slaves were treated terribly by their masters. Wretchedly, their pride and dignity was stripped away from them. However, after much struggle, blacks got their pride back and said NO! They fought and fought for years until they acquired their Freedom. This fight involved people like Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, Nelson Mandela and many more to stand up for what was right, to attain freedom for their countries.

The American flag, to me, symbolizes Chance. Even today, many people from all over the world come to America because of that chance. They know they can have that chance here; my family came to America because they wanted that same thing. Some people migrate here because they needed to escape their poor, dangerous, or run down homes and villages. Many American children don’t know that they have an amazing opportunity in this country, to go school and become educated. I used to take school for granted, but now I’ve changed. In fact, I love school and I know I have chance at success. I have a chance to make a real difference in the world one day.

The last thing that makes the American flag so special to me is the fact that there is always Hope! The flag gives me hope whenever I see it...whenever I pledge allegiance to it, I always see hope as symbolism in the flag. When I gaze at the 50 white stars, I think of how the states have put in such an effort to help each other, by helping each state grow into a happy and wonderful place to live. The 13 red and white stripes are beautiful colors and remind me again of hope and of love.
This Girl

By Grace Perreira Lopes
Mansfield Middle School, Grade 8

This girl, who stood at the door of her beloved art room, was in a mood. An angry mood.
This girl carried all of the anger, hate, disappointment and fear of every generation that came before her.
Her family, half Portuguese, half Black had generations of oppression.
She carried the anger and cried the tears, that her great and grand parents weren't allowed to.
Racial injustice was hot on her mind, she shivered every time in school when they learned about little girls, and little boys, and innocent people of all ages being beaten and killed by the KKK.
Her grandmother’s generation marched, alongside Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. so that this girl’s generation didn’t have to.
Little did they know, killer cops murdering innocent black boys and innocent black men, would ignite marches of peace, and riots, once again.
This girl of fair skin, owned and flaunted every part of her heritage. Because she was allowed to.
She wasn’t forced into hiding like her ancestors.
This girl, a product of love, looked over the table at her ninety-four year old great grandfather, whom she calls “Granddaddy” and revels in the fact that he was born in 1923, before sliced bread was invented, and lived through numerous, huge, internationally involved wars.
As he tells her story after story,
about what oppression was going on in America,
in the 1920s, 30s, and 40s.
She shivers at the thought of such a segregated and torn America.
This girl, eyes of hazel,
gets reminded often,
how much she really looks like her great-grandmothers.
Beatrice, Margret, Maria, and Delfinha,
from Cromwell, New Bedford, and Portugal.
They say she's spitting image
of all these lovely ladies,
like all of their faces swirled into one.
This girl, avid feminist,
could dispute anyone who thought feminism was un-needed
all while swinging around her weapon-
her Nikon D3200,
which stored picture after picture of her family,
friends,
and secret loves.
This girl has one weakness.
Her only cousin, her "baby" cousin.
A little bobbling ball of joy
whose existence on this planet
although only five years,
was the greatest existence to ever cross this girl's life.
When he held her camera,
and took careless-but-somehow-amazing pictures,
her whole world,
her whole existence,
the reason she lives on,
sits in front of her,
and says, "I love you!"
This girl,
sitting on the kitchen floor,
snaps a quick picture
of the roly-poly ball of five-year-old fun,
who sits in front of her,
pushing a yellow car along, and laughing.

I am Going to the Circus
By Sienna Rivera
Charles H. Barrows STEM Academy,
Grade K
Silence

By Ian Kamperschroer
Ledyard Middle School, Grade 8

In the breathless revolution dawn,
with whispers of war hanging over the sleeping city,
the innocent angel danced among the lonely streetlamps and Victorian buildings
singing a child's hymn of simplicity
In the gray industrialist morning
it woke
stretching its black tentacles into the sunless sky
above the cobblestone rebel streets
where fire and hatred in the name of freedom had burned bright the night before
where the steel-booted fascist police scoured the broken pavement for any sign of uprising
and the hidden refugees fearfully peeked from basement windows

In the blazing desperate night
with the prez dead and shattered glass scattered across Main
he sat cross-legged in his smelly shanty
wearing a crooked grin as he observed the pitiful irony of Man's eternal ignorance
the blood of the poor mixing with the vomit of the wealthy

Now the bearded Buddha of insanity sang his old angel hymn
over the bleak rooftops and into the starless sky
he sang of lost liberty and stolen dreams
of torches long gone out
as the black tentacles of some new creature reached into the oblivion
he sang in twisted melody
of the broken promise held in a pointless revolution
the new millennium's army marching forth to the beat
silhouetted by the hopeless glow of a lost dawn.

Where Pinballs Go

By Kelley Glifford
Mansfield Middle School, Grade 8

K.C. and Strongman called my name while I was walking to my science class. I was talking to Laurie Smithson, who made a face as I excused myself and started over towards them. "Why do you hang out with them, anyways? They'll never go anywhere." I scowled at her. She shrugged. "Well, there's always a job flipping burgers at McDonald's, maybe that's what they'll do." I got out of there fast.

K.C.'s real name is Kevin Christopher, but if you call him that, he'll slug you. Everyone knows it, even the teachers. They say K.C. even when calling role. He looks like a cheerful, chubby guy, but that doesn't fool anybody. Whenever a new kid comes around, he's quick to beat him up, just to show who's boss.

Strongman Thompson was tiny. He'd have been beaten up loads of times if it wasn't for us. K.C. came up with the name Strongman to get a laugh about his size. I say that's stupid, that poor Strongman doesn't need any reminding about being small, but by the time I got to the scene, the whole world was calling him Strongman.

They're the kind of guys people avoid looking at, as though making eye contact would earn you a one-way ticket to the devil or something. It annoys the heck out of me. I've grown up with them and it never even crossed my mind that they were less than average until Laurie said something. I don't want to believe it, though.
People are always surprised when I hang out with them because they say I'm good looking. I've got a long mop of blond hair and some muscle tone going for me. But I've also got these huge blue eyes that I think make me look like a wuss. My sister got the nice, brown eyes. It drives K.C. nuts when I complain about it, though. Whenever I do, he hits me one across the face saying, "There ya go. Now ya've got black eyes instead of blue ones."

"Hey, Lucas," K.C. banged me on the shoulder as I arrived. "Me and Strongman here were think' of tacklin' ole Heavy Hitter tonight. Wanna come?"

The Heavy Hitter was the pinball game at the bowling alley, the only one in town. It's pretty old, especially for a town as young as ours, but it's still popular. It's inspired a bunch of tournaments. Kids go Fridays, adults, Saturdays. I didn't much like to go to the alley on Fridays. There's a bunch of high schoolers who wanna play, and if they think you make them look bad, watch out. Even I don't get out of there without a cut lip or something.

But I decided to. K.C. looked like he would punch my lights out if I said no, anyways.

"Knew ya would," K.C. slapped me and Strongman again and left, sending Strongman sprawling into a pack of girls who looked at him like he was something slimy. They shoved him back, and I caught him. His face was red and he looked close to tears. Strongman's kind of sensitive. He can't live up to his name and that really bugs him.

"Why me, Lucas?" He asked suddenly, glaring at K.C.'s back. "He had to bully me into going, you know. I don't like it there." He rubbed a bruise on his cheek.

"I dunno. You goin' too?" I knew he was, he'd just told me, but I wasn't listening.

I was thinking back to the days when the three of us were like brothers, thick as Laurie's hair. I was always the leader since I kept my head best, but K.C. would be if I wasn't there since he was the strongest. He didn't used to mind, but he's got a bunch of older siblings so I think he wants to be in charge of something. He doesn't come right out and say it, but he's taking charge more to show he can handle it. He's got no idea. You gain someone's trust and they'll follow you forever, but if you're rough, they'll desert you at the first chance.

That was why I'm number one at the bowling alley and he's not. He's tearing us apart.

I wasn't looking forward to going to the bowling alley that night any more than Strongman had been at school, but my sister Marta was raring to go. Like most things I do, K.C. doesn't like how I bring my kid sister along to things, but Marta's like Mighty Mouse. She's small, but tough.

So seven thirty found her skipping down Roland Avenue, smiling to reveal a mouthful of braces. Her tortoiseshell glasses flashed in the moonlight. I trudged behind her. I remembered being excited every time I got to go to the bowling alley, just like Marta. It just isn't the same now.

The place was packed. Mr. Billings, who owned the bowling alley, had disappeared, like he does on every Friday. I think he's scared of us. I wondered if something bad had happened to him before I started coming. Pretty likely.

The Heavy Hitter was surrounded by people. Tall, speckly high schoolers, a couple girls who wore too much makeup and not enough clothing, and a few who looked like dropouts hunting some action. The sight of them brought back the feeling that the people with whom I'd hung out for years weren't the best people to be around. For the first time, the scene didn't look right.

It was then that I thought of something I could do for them, those people who weren't going anywhere, the only thing keeping me from grabbing Marta and running out of there.

I was going to take them with me.

I approached the cluster of people, avoiding their eyes, the very thing that had annoyed me just hours before. I was going to tell them. Tell them they didn't have to be like this the way I saw them, the way the rest of the world saw them. I was going to take them with me. I coughed on cigarette smoke. I raised my hand.

"Aaaaaand we have a taker!" K.C.'s radio announcer's voice rang out above the crowd. "Lucas Harper has volunteered to take on Corey Mickelson, our current Pinball Wizard!" Loud cheers erupted and I heard Marta shriek, "Crush 'im!"

I looked at her. She was squeezed between two high schoolers who looked as if they could crush her like a bug. She tugged on the larger one's sleeve and yelled "That's my brother!" like he didn't know. Golly, she's got courage, I thought miserably. I couldn't do that. She could go somewhere with that courage. She
could go somewhere if she wasn't here.

There was Strongman, shying away from a girl whose eyes resembled an owl because of all the line smeared around 'em. He's got good judgment. He could go somewhere. If he wasn't here.

K.C.'d gotten distracted form his announcer duties and was tackling a guy twice his size, but he didn't care. At first, I classified this as courage, but it was too big to fit. Courage was accepting who you are without argument. Stupidity was trying to change it. K.C. wasn't all that tough, but he liked you to think it, with all his slapping and nicknames. Kevin Christopher wasn't that tough of a name, but K.C. was. He was trying to change who he was. He wasn't going anywhere.

K.C., now sporting a black eye, spit out the score Mickelson had set. A shark grin slithered across the dropout's wide face.

I turned and stared at the machine. The silver ball had once gleamed, but was now scratched. We've been scratched, I thought. Some of us are trying to go somewhere and we can't accept that. We're scratching those who are trying to go.

I flicked the wooden lever and the ball flew. Swung the bat, and missed. Twice. Mickelson hadn't missed once. Money changed hands.

"You know," said a voice behind me. "That'd go a whole lot better if you moved the ball with your hand." The voice sounded like Strongman's. There was no glass protecting the ball.

I picked it up. The scratches had turned into canyons. Bees invaded my ears. My numb arm moved all the way to the end, where the home run hole sat. My fingers opened.

My ears stopped buzzing, but something else had started. The whole alley was ringing with murmurs. Mickelson advanced. Cheater…cheater…he took a swing.

He was the toughest guy around, now. I sort of felt bad for K.C. He didn't have the respect he'd wanted, and I didn't think he'd ever get it. I grabbed Marta and Strongman—they were the only two I could save—and ran outside.

We were gone for good. No way were we coming back to the bowling alley, the pinball wizard's cauldron.

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**The Butler's Party Act**

*By Rosemary Watson*

*Mansfield Middle School, Grade 8*

December the 24th, 1898

William fastened the last of his vest buttons, a rather merry and seasonable red and gold garment, and admired himself in the mirror. If one had been unaware of his financial situation, one might speculate as to why he was not yet married, being a handsome young man of a jovial sort, but any young lady he had ever called on knew better than to place herself in a situation as uncomfortable as his.

"Laurelle? Are you finished yet?" He called up to the attic, where the maid had her chamber.

"Almost!" she responded.

Laurelle was the only servant William had, and he couldn't really afford her. She had been his little sister's handmaiden, but she had since married and left. William had kept Laurelle on to do some basic cooking and cleaning, though he needed it not. Besides, she was awfully pretty, and a great help with his act.

William was just starting to get impatient when Laurelle tiptoed down the stairs from her lofty bedroom. She spun at the bottom of the narrow steps, and he was momentarily mesmerized by the way her sequins caught the dying lamplight, throwing weak rainbows all about the moldy parlor.

She wore a dress of artfully decorated silk in fringe and sequins, with a daringly open back and high heels, both of which were rather eye catching for the time. 'Twas a festive scarlet for Christmas, with lipstick to match. Her ebony hair was curled, and pinned up in an elegant fashion, with snow colored pearls scattered in.

"You will be the belle of the ball," he told her.

"Oh, stop it," she mumbled, her face turning quite almost as red as her dress. William snatched up a
leather medicine bag and opened the front door.

The well-dressed pair turned their collars up against the cold, and set out into the blizzard night, off to the party of the year.

They entered the manor through the back, God forbid they enter like guests. This was a job, not fun. It was almost time to enter the ballroom when a young housemaid, no older than 11 years, stopped them in their tracks.

"Don't look for ghosts," she urged them. "The butler will find you, and he won't be happy. You might get hurt!" But they brushed her off as merely a frightened child, and sent her off.

From behind the ballroom doors, Laurelle and William heard the jazz band's playful tune slow to a halt, followed by a drumroll. Laurelle took William's arm, and they paraded through the double doors together, as the wealthy crowd applauded in delight and anticipation.

William raised an arm and waved it for silence.

"Gentlemen and ladies, young and old, I bid you good evening." He added a wink and giggles erupted from the newly presented girls of the group. William was a proper Set of Ancient Egypt. Charming young chap one second, and scaring you half to death the next. "Now," he challenged, "are you all ready for a fright?"

"YES!" the crowd chanted.

"Very well," Laurelle laughed, "but you musn't blame us for whatever happens!"

The group fell silent as William opened his medicine bag, and removed a little device that looked rather like a copper plated candle. 'Ghost hunting' had been a grand old tradition in his family. Generations of his ancestors had charmed the gullible upper class with fog, lights, and the strange metal contraption. Spirits indeed!

"This little thing will help us track down anyone who had been passing through this house unseen," William explained. "Now follow me!" He waved the object all about the grand hall as if he was being pulled by a powerful magnet in every direction at once, and the eager group trailed behind him.

Laurelle silently slipped away, preparing for a "spirit" to appear. She placed her little boiling kettle under a mesh cloth, and surrounded it with candles. Silently, she returned to William's side. Now, time for a diversion.

Laurelle dramatically tripped on the waxed floor, pulling as many people down with her as she could. She rolled about the ground, moaning in pain, screeching that she was possessed. It had a stunning effect on the guests. Their faces went pale and they backed away in terror.

Back at the kettle Laurelle had prepared, the steam was seeping through the mesh, and fire from the candles had caught on the base of the cloth. Flames rose up brilliantly, and combined with the vapor in a most amazing spectacle.

"There's the blasted spirit!" William shouted, leaping towards it and motioning the party guests closer.

"A named thing is a tamed thing, evil specter!" William chanted at the burning pile, disgusted by the foolishness of his own work. "And I name thee Flame, destroyable by water!" and with a great theatrical flourish, he extinguished the "ghost" with the contents of the nearest punch bowl.

The crowd cheered gratefully, and Laurelle stood again, free of that ghostly grip. William smiled and winked. The act was over, and all was well, time to depart.

But it was not to be so for poor William, Laurelle, and the frightened party guests. For as they began to rise, a filmy grey figure floated through the far wall, and made its way to where the ghost hunters stood, easily parting the crowd. It turned and faced the wide-eyed pair frustration clear on his winkled but composed face. He was clothed in a cheap tuxedo, like a butler might have, with wisps of pearly hair sticking about his balding head.

"I say, good sir and miss, what is all this ruckus about?! Here you are, all winks and waves setting fire to the ballroom! And ruining all the punch while you're at it, why don't you? Young sir and madam, what have you to say for yourselves?"

Neither Laurelle nor William had a great deal to say, after all, one cannot really speak after fainting.
Silver Tears

By Kelly Doyle
Joseph A Depado Middle School, Grade 8

My sweaty, trembling hands clutched onto my worn sleeves and gripped on tightly. I tried darting my nervous eyes across the room to distract from my quivering lip and glassy blue eyes. I shut my eyes tightly and inhaled slowly.

"Breathe, just breathe, I reminded myself."

I exhaled slowly. My head was circling like the famous tilt-a-whirl rides, and in both cases I felt nauseous. In addition to my spinning head, a continuous thumping sound started to pound in my head and my tapping feet didn't help either. My heart boomed and clashed faster and faster, and before I could control myself I broke down. Cascading tears rolled down my pitiful face like a heavy downpour.

"Breathe! I spat in my head."

I couldn't breathe. All I could do is cry and cry until the crying hurt and the hurting went numb. Each silver tear burned its own permanent mark into my cheeks. Silver tears ran down my face as if it were a race: a race to see what tear hurt the most. I slumped to the floor and I hugged myself into a little ball. I shut my eyes tightly and let the darkness and overwhelming thoughts swivel through my mind.

"She's dying of leukemia," my mother whimpered, her voice shaking.

My mother said that seven somber months ago. When I heard the news I just nodded my head and walked away, as if I heard what we were eating for dinner. I simply walked away as if the world wasn't burning down. And now? I finally heard the news of her death. She was gone and this time I didn't walk away, I just cried.

The next day I dressed in black attire. I stuffed a few crumple tissues in my fists and dragged my feet all the way to the funeral home. My body was shaking, my head was spinning, and my eyes were tearing. I sat down with the rest of the heart broken victims and wept. My tears were swept away gently from the tissue, but my face was still streaky from silver tears. My feet tapped the ground fiercely, and I wanted to leave immediately. I wanted to say Good Riddance! to all of the sadness and despair. I wanted the hurting to go away, but it was clingy and persistent. The depression was like a thick black cloud of smoke. You couldn't see where you were going, and you were lost. I was about to storm out of the room when a short film came on about my cousin just before she died.

"I-I just want to say I love all of you. You all mean the world to me," my cousin stammered through tears.

She spoke so relaxed and glimmered. Her face was sullen and her head was shaved, but a certain beauty still radiated around her. My cousin began to speak and this time I sat more thoughtfully. My eyes weren't darting, and my feet weren't tapping. My ears, however, were listening, and I listened to every word she said. The more my cousin talked, the more I came to the realization that dying wasn't just the pure act of life abruptly coming to an end and floating into a dismal, dark afterlife. I couldn't take the matter of dying lightly anymore and view it as only a sad occurrence in time. Dying needs to be viewed as a graceful transition from one majestic life to another. Life is so limited and if we take it for granted, we'll never truly enjoy it. The significance of dying couldn't be put into a word, a phrase, or sentence, because it holds to much power. Dying wasn't a word you could look up in the 378th page of the dictionary, and dying wasn't the word you use to describe yourself after a pathetic jog. Dying was more than that. Dying was a life act that occurs, and when it does so happen to occur it breaks everyone's hearts to small fragments and leaves them in a weary presence.

My cousin went on and talked more about her experiences with cancer. I laughed at the small jokes she made, and I cried at the parts when she couldn't talk. I nodded my head in agreement when she said she loves us, and I frowned when she said her last and final goodbye. Meanwhile, I listened with my heart and I learned what it's like to lose someone. The TV screen went blank, and everyone dabbed their eyes. A final few words were then said, and everyone left to go to the reception. I got up my steps staggering, and I walked with limp feet out the door and a hazy mind filled with anxious thoughts. The setting sun was blurry from the tears and was settling behind the disoriented clouds. I looked down to see everyone piling into their insignificant cars to drive away.
"Are you okay?'' my mother questioned.

I stood there in the car parking lot trying to pull the question apart. Was I okay? How did I feel? Shouldn't I be happy that my cousin isn't suffering? I honestly didn't know how I felt because emotions and feelings were everywhere trying to jam into my confused head. My eyes began to tear up again due to my frustrated thoughts and unanswered questions. Breathe! Just Breathe! I recited in my head. My mother stood there with me waiting for a response. My head was shaking and I kept my eyes forward into the setting sun. I didn't know what to say to my mother at that exact time, so I didn't say anything at all. I sighed with relief for my cousin and swooned into my mother with a tight hug. And in that moment I felt safe and reassured. I felt as if my cousin was standing there with us, smiling and crying. All the little emotions poured out of us, accompanied by silver, grasping tears that stung our cheeks in the brisk wind. I left the funeral home shaken and awed with silver tears streaking down my face and my mind finally cleared from the bitter havoc. I left the heartbroken day with my eyes a little less blurry, my steps a little more straight, and a heart that wasn’t completely torn to shreds.

Great Expectations: A Message of Social Reform

By Zachary Waskowicz
Talcott Mountain Academy, Grade 8

Forced to quit school at the age of ten and work amid slum conditions in a blacking factory, Charles Dickens experienced what it meant to be a member of the lower class in Victorian England. Separated from his family, who were later sent to debtor's prison, he grew up a victim of his circumstances. Dickens started a career as an author, and soon became well known for his sympathy for the poor and advocacy for social reform through his works. In his novel Great Expectations, the main character Pip is treated as if he is worthless when his only prospect is being a blacksmith's apprentice. Pip gains a fortune from an unknown benefactor and his experiences as a higher class "gentleman" lead him to a new understanding of class status. Through his rejection by the wealthy Estella, Pip realizes the Victorian society's perception that individuals with money are superior. He initially accepts this judgment, and he associates contentment with social status. His self-transformation and the loyalty and integrity of his brother-in-law Joe lead Pip to realize that his views of the lower class as common and inferior are wrong. He regrets that he missed the greater opportunity to have lived a contented life learning the blacksmith trade from Joe, who he shunned in the pursuit of his "great expectations." Through Pip's enlightenment about the relationship between social class and contentment, Dickens delivers a powerful social reform message that society needs to change its perception that the lower class is inferior to the upper class.

Using the privileged and haughty character of Estella, Dickens exposes the societal perception that the individuals of the upper class are superior to those of the lower class. Early on in the story, Pip is given the opportunity to visit the wealthy Miss Havisham's estate where he experiences the snobbery of her daughter, Estella, who refuses to play with him. When Pip first meets Estella, she treats him harshly and judges his worth based on his poor, working-class appearance. "Why, he is a common labouring boy...And what course hands he has! And what thick boots" (57-58). Estella's rejection of Pip is based solely on his class status. Estella furthers the impression of the upper class' superiority over the lower class when she counsels Pip after his increase in prospects. She asks him if he has "changed [his] companions," and in a "haughty tone," she advises him that "What was fit company for you once, would be quite unfit company now" (228). Pip learns that not only is he inferior in the eyes of the upper class without a fortune, but in order to be "fit" for the upper class, he must change more than his income. Dickens makes it clear that societal norms establish the upper class as superior and the perception of an individual's worth is based on social status.

Once Estella judges him, Pip not only accepts her perception that the lower class is inferior, but he associates contentment with social status. Prior to his change of perception, he had not considered his life to be inferior. He had been content with Joe's love and support and his prospect of learning the blacksmith trade from him. "I had never thought of being ashamed of my hands before...her contempt for me was so strong, that it became infectious, and I caught it" (58). Once he accepts society's judgment, he becomes dissatisfied with his
station in life. "I was common, and I knew I was common, and I wished I was not common" (66). Before acquiring his wealth, Pip desires to be a part of the upper class so he may become an impressive man in the eyes of Estella and rise above others of a lesser privilege. Pip recognizes that his new concerns about social status "made great changes in [him]" (69). He dissociates himself from his family, friends, and values so that he will be "fit" for the upper class. He is now embarrassed to be seen in the company of the people he once loved because they are deemed lesser by society. "I thought...how common Estella would consider Joe, a mere blacksmith: how thick his boots, and how coarse his hands...how Miss Havisham and Estella never sat in a kitchen, but were far above the level of such common doings..." (69). Through Pip's discontentment, Dickens shows how one's values and self-worth can be wrongly influenced by society's perceptions.

Through the loyalty and integrity of Joe, who is content with his station in life, Pip ultimately learns that his "great expectations" are his downfall. When Joe visits, Pip realizes the mistakes he made in regard to his dissociation with Joe. He feels uncomfortable being treated as a "gentleman" by Joe because it is based on a false perception. "I felt my face fire up as I looked at Joe. I hoped one remote cause of its firing, may have been my consciousness..." (215). Pip appreciates that Joe is comfortable and proud of being a "lowly" blacksmith versus a high society "gentleman." Joe feels uneasy with Pip's new lifestyle, yet he disregards the change and continues to look after him. Throughout Pip's transformation, Joe remains loyal to Pip. Joe comes to Pip's aid after he squanders his wealth, is threatened with debtors' prison, and contracts an illness. Pip reminisces about his life with Joe when he was a "...small helpless creature to whom [Joe] had so abundantly given of the wealth of his good nature" (450). He remembers how "...happy they had been when [they] once had looked forward to the day of [Pip's] apprenticeship..." (450). In addition to caring for him, Joe pays off Pip's debt from the small amount of money he has managed to save from working in the forge. Pip sees how Joe's worth is not determined by his riches, but by the wealth of his kindness and integrity. This experience makes Pip realize that he never had to gain wealth in order to be respected and loved. He understands how his perceptions were wrong, "...I should have been happier and better if I had never seen Miss Havisham's face, and had risen to manhood content to be partners with Joe in the honest forge" (263). Pip learns the consequences of judging someone's contentment and worth by their wealth versus their character and actions.

Dickens portrays a significant social reform message in his book *Great Expectations* by using the character development of Pip and the influences that affect him. He exposes the societal perception that the upper class is above those of the lower class through the attitude of Estella. Her standpoint affects Pip's views of social classes, and his change in values acts as an avenue for mirroring how society behaves in order to be upper class. It is through Pip's decline in fortune and the loyalty of Joe that Dickens shows the reader that one does not need great fortune to be respected or loved. Pip's enlightenment shows a powerful message of social reform that society needs to change their perception of the upper class being superior to the lower class.

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**Our Evergreen Tree**

*By Angela Pan*

*Annie E. Vinton Elementary School, Grade K*
Parenthood

*By Katherine Mettler*
*New Canaan High School, Grade 9*

I recognize the organized stone tiles
of our front patio, and the frail plastic blue
lawn chair that my mother is sitting in,
making the bottom sink down to the ground
with her weight.

They say pregnant women have a glow,
but in this image, there is
not a soft lining of warmth
like lamplight around her uncovered
belly, but ecstatic crystal rays
sweeping across the familiar greenery
of Connecticut summer,
blessing and drawing in everything at once.
There is no ambiguity,
no fog on the horizon, or uncertainty
in her face; she embodies the simplistic
but tremendous understanding of life
in a way that only a mother can.

And in this way she sees, she knows,
the way he will kick
and cry
and carve circles under her eyes for months.
But she has felt the warm glow within her.
She has known all along
with conviction
the magnitude of his sun rays
will forever be enough to light
the ever-looming shadow
over the beautiful certainty
of parenthood.

Fat, Ugly Secret

*By Anna Korpanty*
*Bristol Eastern High School, Grade 9*

Summer is a beautiful time, especially the beach, filled with sunshine and sand that sticks between your toes once they’re soaked in crystal turquoise waters. All the girls love slipping into their neon bikinis and tanning across shore. Yet for me, the beach was a terrifying experience.

"Anna, did you at least wear a swimsuit?" The question was asked over and over again, and the answer was always the same, no. I believed my body was something no one wanted to see, something no one could ever see. While everyone had slipped on loose shorts and a tank top, a dark hoodie swung over my torso, since I had heard that black was slimming.

"What, are you going to just sit there the whole time?" My sister, Natalia, had a usual sarcastic tone,
but she seemed extremely frustrated with me today. It was the last day before she went off to college, and she wanted it to be thrilling. Me sitting down on a chair under an umbrella was not her idea of a good time.

“I just feel really bloated today.” It wasn't just today, though, it was every day. I hated my body; I couldn't even stand to look at myself. I always managed to make an excuse when it came to swimming in public, but she seemed to not be giving up.

“There are a bunch of stores on the street, and we're not going to let you get heat stroke.” The only other person with us was my other sister, Joanna, who seemed to stay oddly silent during this conversation, nodding in the background.

“We don't have to go out, mine's in the car.” The Volvo was a far walk from the beach, so I would get more time to think about my next move. Maybe the walk could end up burning the cereal that I ate this morning. 112 calories per serving? That's evil.

“It's too far, let's just hang at the water later. Fries?” Those potato sticks were famous for being buried in salt. My stomach could not afford any more sodium intake for another week. I would be able to at least pick at the food, and neither of them would notice since they were always occupied with slurping on pink lemonade.

The cup was on fire, the fries still sizzling from the bright golden oil it had previously been saturated in. The smell was intoxicating, but I knew I would transform into a pumpkin if I inhaled them like my sisters did.

I didn't understand how both Joanna and Natalia could eat practically whatever they wanted, yet remain stunningly thin. Neither of them was very athletic, so to the two of them, television was more exciting than a long day at the gym. I, on the other hand, zoomed around my neighborhood almost every day in an attempt to have their figures.

I twirled a fry around my index finger, staring it down at every possible angle. Why did it have to taunt me? It begged me to swallow it up before drying up, but my head ignored the yelps. I needed to shave off my thick stomach, I needed to be pretty.

“You full?” Joanna’s words were mostly incoherent due to food stuck on her tongue, but I nodded at the two words I could understand. Their straws made a soft noise to show there was no more liquid left inside, and cups were then tossed into the gum-covered trashcan.

“Clothes?” Natalia suggested, motioning to the beach-type stores near us. I just wanted to stick to my sweatshirt, not have to try on shirts that weren't big enough for my overly round self, or pants that were too tight on my jiggly thighs.

“Everything here's too pricey, let's go explore.” I took a silent breath of relief, ecstatic that someone brought up physical activity.

“We could eat somewhere, but there's nothing here for her.” By “her,” she was referring to me, since I had chosen the vegan lifestyle as another tactic to eat less and lose more.

“I just want to go home.” I muttered, feeling ill from the smell of sea salt and juicy hamburgers surrounding me. Natalia rolled her eyes, obviously exhausted from me today.

“I mean, we could eat dinner home with everyone.” It was humorous to think that my brother would actually go out with us, since he never comes out of his room to do anything besides switch the video game disc he has in some crazy named console, but a goodbye dinner was the most appropriate choice. Natalia dragged her feet over to the car, not wanting the scenery to go away, because she knew that once we left, it was straight to her backing up her whole life and heading to her university.

“I could change and we could go for a swim before leaving.” Her face lit up like a glittery night star, jumping around with glee and laughter. They raced into the water as I stayed behind to get my two-piece, looking at myself multiple times to see if there was a way I could shield my body. After tugging on my bikini top, I realized this mission would be unsuccessful, and I would be forced to reveal my body to the world.

I awkwardly stumbled into the ocean, attempting to reach where my sisters were. They swam in my direction, swinging their hair in my face and hopping over the cool waves. I began to actually forget about how I looked and join the fun, giggling as Joanna rushed under water to avoid the waves, being the scaredy-cat that she'd always been.

I felt like a fish, moving with the rhythm of the ocean exactly how you should in order to fight off the
strong current. My weight didn't matter, my legs didn't matter, nothing mattered except for me and the water. I was free from the burden of insecurities just for a moment.

Unfortunately, the fun has to always come to a stop, the current always has to slow down, and the person you are before is the same person you are after. The moment I stepped from the water, I became that insecure individual again. I am still that insecure individual, but I have become sneakier. I am more able to hide those feelings from myself. I can convince the others around me that I feel good about who I am. My insecurity is my secret, but it's not one of those secrets that you only tell one of your friends and then you tell one or two more. It's the type of secret that no one knows except for you, because it's too ugly to share. My ugly, fat secret.

Learning from Loss

By Isabella Cassone
Fairfield Ludlowe High School, Grade 9

I lost it. What I've cared for, even the slightest bit, has disappeared into the infinite abyss of catastrophe. I never thought it would irk me, or spawn any emotion. It's intriguing how all you know can spiral downhill in only days. Or hours. Or minutes. Or seconds. We're all bombs about to detonate; it's only a matter of time.

I used to think bullying was a long lecture. That no one really provoked each other, and no one was a victim. Bullying was always foreign to me, something that no one experiences. I was gravely wrong.

The thick summer air was sliced by a sharp breeze as my family and I approached my church, casually tardy. The massive doors, arranged with pastel glass, creaked as we nimbly entered the church. I swiftly walked to a splintery pew, the smell of stale, musty air penetrating my nostrils. As I kneeled down to pray my eyes were captured by a new parish member, a young boy amidst elders in the squalid air. His face was one of a 15-year-old, and he was amongst another family I knew. Church stagnated and my mind was in an alternate dimension, though my hands were still interlocked. By the time the final hymn was concluded, people bustled out of the building as if they were breaking free from captivity. After greeting the priest, I went to approach the family I knew, and the new boy. He looked unhappy, frantic even.

"Hi, I'm Bart. I'm friends with them," he said, pointing to the family with barren, unoccupied eyes.

I observed Bart. His face, his body structure. He was lanky, with curved posture, and a growth of acne on his face. He wasn't the most attractive, and my mind flashed to school—the judgmental teenagers, the insecure antagonizers that wreak havoc on their peers.

"Nice to meet you," my mother piped in. "You slept over?" He slowly nodded his head with a forced smile.

"So, you excited for the first day of school this Tuesday?" my mom again inquired. This evoked an eerie silence between them. My mother anticipated a response as the sun beat on her slick, black hair. Bart's vacated eyes wandered as a trance was placed upon him, his feet shuffling.

I was assured that a word wouldn't escape his lips, but he managed to croak, "Somewhat."

After the talk subsided, we bid our adieu and parted, but as the car rumbled up the hill and rattled from the bumps, that look of desperateness and sorrow couldn't escape me.

Freedom and summer escaped from my grasp as Tuesday approached, forcing me into a lifeless, mundane school day. Forcefully pushing the door, I entered my house, where my weighted backpack swung from my shoulder on the wooden floor with a hollow thud. A sweet aroma of cinnamon wafted into my nose as I explored my scattered homework on top of a round table. My binder overflowed with syllabi and guidelines. My ears became acute to the silence in my home where I became attuned to nonexistent sounds, but this symphony of silence abruptly ended with I heard someone fumble for keys and click open the door. My mom staggered into the house, tripping on bags with her hair wisped about her face. "Hi Bella," she said, her voice strained and exasperated. Dragging her items with her, she trailed into the dining room to complete her work.

I began to focus back on my work, trying to regroup, but then the phone sounded. I heaved myself off of the chair to search for the phone, and I was somewhat stunned to see it was my grandmother calling.

I grabbed the phone and anxiously stabbed the button before putting the device to my ear. "Hi," I greeted, my voice raspy.
“Hi, can I talk to your mom, Bella?” she questioned. It seemed serious, as her voice as monotone and un lively. I passed the phone to my mom and mouthed ‘grandma.’

Muffled voices and weeping plagued me as I heard my mother whisper, “That’s terrible.” Deciphering what they were saying became my new task instead of schoolwork. The phone beeped, and the conversation closed. The ringing silence infiltrated my ears again, and the only thing coursing through my mind was terrible. I pretended to be staring at my homework, the lines of my papers blurring as my mother approached me, her eyes red and face shiny. Her lip quivered, but only the slightest bit. She placed the phone back on the receiver and walked to me, sliding out a chair and taking a seat at the table. I looked up and our eyes interlocked, a serious feeling looming over our heads. “Bella,” she began, hands clenched. A pause lingered in the air. “Something has happened, but it is a private matter.”

I nodded my head in anxious worry. What is happening? What is wrong? Why is it so secretive? What requirements allow me to be entitled to know this? “Okay,” I replied, my mind settling, but my heart thudding and my temples pulsing. “Tell me.”

She stared deep into my eyes woefully. “Remember Bart, the boy we met a few days ago at church?” she breathed, choking down tears. “Well, he committed suicide today, after school.”

I suddenly felt miniscule to the human eye, as if I was being viewed through a microscope. I was exposed; I was paralyzed by fear. I was in utter disbelief as questions swarmed through my head like insects. What? Why? Huh? How is everything happening so suddenly? I barely met Bart—we only exchanged eye contact and hints of raw emotion with our eyes. I just witnessed him alive. Breathing. A beautiful boy loved by a beautiful family. This does not compute. I refuse to accept this and deem it as possible. “No,” I sighed in a soft voice, “No.” My heart rate rose and I could feel my heart beating in my throat as my eyes began to burn. My instincts made me feel naked. I wanted to cover my eyes and prove myself an emotionally sound girl, but the tears uncontrollably streamed down my face. The only thing to ease the pain was holding my mother, as I had done so long ago as a child. My hands reached for fabric as I looked for consolation. I had to lead my mind away from the suffering. “But,” I sniffled, my voice mumbled by my mother’s shirt, “he was so young.” My face was chapped, dried, and stung from all the crying. The tears slid down the slopes of my cheeks and sneakily entered my mouth with a salty taste. My tears were filled with all of my fear and anguish. My vision blurred until my uncontrollable blinking flushed out the tears in my eyes. My mother’s sweet perfume trailed into my nose until I tasted it. My head pounded from dehydration; my throat hurt from the strain. My mind trailed off into the vast universe of infinite dimensions as I sat and started into space. I didn’t dare look at my mother. Her pain is my trigger. She pulled me in for another hug, but I rejected it to finish my homework in the tranquility of my shocked thoughts.

A few days after, newspaper articles were exposing Bart’s suicide. I couldn’t even look at them in fear that I would relive the sadness I had experienced. Turning on the news was torturous. Everything became bleak. I was so weak and it was so easy to succumb to tears.

When I mustered up the courage to bear the news after the tragedy, I was overjoyed to see that a webpage was created to commemorate Bart’s passing. Then my stomach churned as the news claimed that another bully had hacked in and dishonored Bart. My heart palpitated, skipping a beat or so. My fists clenched until my knuckles were pale. I wanted to scream. I wanted to cry. I was shocked out of my mind.

The next Sunday, I returned to church, haunted by negative memories. My family appeared content as we floated on the sidewalk, but rocks in the asphalt and my hair covering my face were the only two things in my vicinity. A breeze of mothballs and aged air entered my airways as we opened the doors and took a seat at a pew. I kneeled down and closed my eyes. My hands were clasped together and covering my face. I prayed like the world was ending—like I was going to die any minute and my only repentance was eager prayer. It must have been for an hour. I prayed for Bart. I prayed for all victims, bullies, and bystanders. I prayed for my luckiness, my sanity, and I especially prayed for the families. I prayed for Bart’s family, and the family whom Bart stayed with. After I closed my prayer with a whole-hearted amen, I leaned against the bench and sobbed. It was quiet and subtle.

As everyone left the church, I made an effort to talk to the family that had Bart over the Sunday prior. I expressed my condolences and gave meaningful hugs. We conversed and talked about our stages of loss; I was happy to know I wasn’t the only one suffering. Then we parted, and my family entered into the car.
leaned my elbow against the windowsill of the leathery door and observed the trees. They all melted together like pastels, too busy and unfocused. Then the car halted at a red light, and everything was clear and crisp. Life is like that. When you are oblivious to everything around you and don't pay attention, life is blurred like the trees as the car moved. Life is unsettling and forgetful. But then, when something changes, you tend to look around and think more. Everything becomes unmistakable and you realize that you are so lucky to have the life that you do.

Bullying is not a lecture. It is not something to brush off of your shoulders. Don't be a bystander and don't be a bully. Be an ally and support what is right.

The Tangible Fox

By Sinead Klik
Fairfield Ludlowe High School, Grade 9

A fox is an animal known for its clever, cunning, and strategic characteristics. On O'Hara Farm in Munster, Ireland, a fox was using its keen abilities to wreak havoc. The lifestyle of a farmer is dependent on the idea of supply and demand. As the demand increases, the supply will either weaken or flourish. Pete O'Hara was having a pest problem: a fox had been stealing the hens from the chicken coop. For every hen taken, the egg production decreases, causing profit loss. Fortunately, Pete was not overly concerned considering his son was extremely helpful. He also had a trustworthy farmhand, Joel, who had taken an interest in the chicken coop and vowed to watch for any suspicious activities.

Tommy O'Hara was Pete's son. Tommy was a hard worker and understood the importance of stability on the farm. On a warm afternoon Pete requested that all the animal snares be set up around the farm. Every night he would walk around the farm and check each individual snare. He had heard stories of his father using snares to make a living in the past. Pete would snare animals and sell their furs for a hefty profit. That was before skinning animals was frowned upon. Now Pete only uses snares when necessary to relieve the farm of vermin. Pete had never exposed his son to snaring an animal until now. Tommy took the snare patrol upon himself because he wanted to live up to his father's past. At the same time, he also didn't want his father to be disappointed if his reaction to seeing a wounded animal didn't meet his expectations.

Two weeks had passed, but no animal was caught. Hens were still being stolen from the coop. This caused Pete's frustration to intensify. Joel had claimed he saw a fox at the edge of the property, standing amongst the trees waiting for an opportunity. Convinced this fox was the thief, Pete ordered that the snares be coated in pigskin to draw the fox close. With the slightest movement the gin snare would snap shut, sinking its teeth into the unlucky leg or snout of its victim. Tommy understood that catching this robber was necessary. Without the hens to produce eggs, the farm would lose a substantial amount of money. The farm was located outside of a small town. This town was reliant on the goods from the farm. Joel was also dependent on the profit earned. Joel was a good worker, but a horrible drunk. He would spend his weekly commission on spirits at the local pub. The recollection of the damage this fox was causing ignited a fury in Tommy. The farm was reliant on him to trap and rid the farm of this fox.

On the third week of having the snares set, Tommy grew worried that the fox was smart and knew not to approach the traps. On a brisk night, he set out to do his rounds of the snares. He viewed almost every snare and nothing was caught. He began to feel heaviness in his chest and he knew he would cause disappointment. He walked hurriedly through the brush towards the last snare. He stopped short when he heard a rustling behind a log a few feet away. As he walked closer, three fox kits came into view, alone without a mother. This was a rare sight; a mother fox is protective of her kits and usually becomes aggressive towards an unwanted presence. Coincidently, the mother fox was not far. Tommy turned to look at what he was expecting to be an empty snare. Instead, he was looking at a fox. Tommy felt an urgency to get his father and present the cause of the farm's problems. Yet, something inside of him changed his anger and frustration towards the fox into sympathy. He felt responsible that the fox kits would become orphans and grow up in the woods without the guidance of their mother. He bent down to inspect the damage the snare caused. Fortunately, the fox's tail was caught, not a leg. It is possible for a fox to live without a tail. He then took in the
beauty of the creature; her fur was a brilliant orange. The fox looked at her kits with distraught anguish in her eyes. He suddenly felt guilty and sorry that he had caused the fox pain. In one swift movement he unhooked the locked snare and slowly opened the snare jaw, relieving the fox’s tail of the teeth. The fox scampered away from him. She wrapped herself around her babies; they embraced her and snuggled in her warmth. Her tail was covered in blood, but it looked as though it stopped bleeding. As he rose to leave, he took one last look at the family he could have ruined, the fox looked at him deeply with her piercing green eyes. In that moment, the two knew they had a debt to each other.

He walked back to the farm the way he came, collecting each snare. He decided to put the horrible contraptions back into the shed away from hurting anything. He made a promise to dispose of the snares while his father was at the farmer’s market the upcoming weekend. When he hung the last snare, he left the shed and didn’t regret letting her go. Before he closed the shed doors, he looked in at the contents and felt shame.

Tommy locked the shed doors and was approaching his house, he knew his father was preparing dinner and would need help. When he was near the house, he noticed Joel walking towards the chicken coop. He had a basket covered by a blanket in his hand. This struck Tommy with curiosity as no one was allowed into the chicken coop after dark. It’s important not to disturb the sleeping hens. Joel reemerged from the coop with the basket and something moved under the blanket. Joel proceeded down the gravel driveway and turned left, which led to town. Tommy’s confusion led him to follow Joel. A black car was parked on the side of the road and Joel approached the driver. He tapped on the window and pulled up the blanket, showing a hen angrily pecking at the inside of the basket. The driver rolled down the window and inspected the chicken. He then gave Joel a wad of cash. The hen was then put inside the car, her future unknown. Joel hastily shoved the cash into his pocket and continued on his way to town. Recollection washed over Tommy as he watched Joel hurry excitedly through the entrance of the pub.

Joel was not welcomed back to the farm. He blamed an animal that was innocent of the allegations. The fox was hurt due to the deceit and ignorance of a greedy man. Humans allow their greed to override the choice between right and wrong. Or are we all living the life of a fox, sharing their characteristics?

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2015 New Year’s Resolutions

_By Amir Suhail_

_Farmington High School, Grade 9_

1) Every year, fourteen billion pounds of trash get thrown into my waters. Every year, 50 million acres of rainforest are destroyed. Every year, I lose thousands of feet of glacial ice due to my rapidly increasing temperature. This year, these numbers will reduce. There will be a change. My inhabitants will use fewer chemicals, handle toxic waste properly, and will conserve my water.

2) I am quietly forced to kill twenty-two thousand children every day. Their inferiority, their malnourishment, and their poverty-stricken lives lead to their ultimate demise. They don’t live, they slowly die. They reside in the corners of me, forgotten and unconscious to the outside world. I will try to stop the infectious diseases that spread around me. I will try to provide every family fair provision. I will not be choosy to whom I give my resources to.

3) Thirty-one million refugees roam around me. In a year, my people spend one point four trillion dollars on military expenditure. This is enough to remove third-world debt completely. This is enough to provide clean drinking water for nine thousand, six hundred fifty families. This is also enough to save millions of women and children from oppression. But lastly, cutting these costs would provide a place of tranquility. No longer will my surface face the blows of war, the blasts of bombs, or be the grave of thousands and thousands of bodies.

I’ve been through two world wars, multiple genocides, and millions of children’s deaths, hunger, and poverty. This has been going on for too long. But not long enough for it to become out of my hands. This year, I believe that the people that I help live, by providing oxygen, plants, and shelter, will in turn help themselves by saving me. This is 2015.
A (Kind of) Heroic Journey

By Xavier Rouleau

William Hall High School, Grade 9

Disclaimer: I am a madman on a Hero’s Journey.

The story starts in a time of confusion. It comes from an age of mysticism and innocence; in other words, I was eleven years old. And I hated everyone. I’m still that way today - if you take me to a house party, I’ll probably start talking to the family cat until we leave. This is why when I heard that I was going to have a sibling, I was devastated. My mother and father separated when I was about five years old, and although I maintained a healthy relationship with both of them, I would constantly worry about them having more children. (Worrying is my talent.) The reason why is pretty average: I thought they wouldn’t love me as much. In the aftermath of the not-so-wreckage my dad got into a relationship, and not too long after this I could only imagine my new brother being a demon child who was going to do some rather murderous things to me. I am sad to say that this isn’t an exaggeration; I still have three crucifixes around my door handle. Going back to the sudden realization of a sibling of mine being born, there was a lot of crying involved, even though my dad repeatedly tried to cheer me up with offers of playing Super Mario Baseball on the Wii. This was the start of a new phase of my life, where the me I am now would finally reveal itself.

When the main worry of my life came into viewing distance, there was a lot going on. At the time of my brother’s birth I attended a private Catholic school and was bullied often, but that space was my comfort zone. My home and school were these two untouchable places where nothing could get me, so when Parker (my brother) was born, I wasn’t the center of attention anymore on my dad’s side. Keep in mind I was born a good 10 years before any of my cousins and Parker. Just an update - I now have 10 cousins. All are either about five years old or just midgets in disguise, I can’t decide.) To hear all this news about “Did you hear she’s in labor?” and “She didn’t use any anesthetics, God bless her,” made me feel out of place in my own family. In fact, the day my brother was born, I was hiding in a pillow fort at my grandma’s house while my aunts talked about their newborns in the room next door. As everyone else in my family slowly eased into a new age of children with their hot chocolate and bathrobes, I stood in the snow, even though the door was unlocked.

People shouldn’t be comparing their body parts to others’ in fourth grade. In fact, I probably shouldn’t have had my first kiss in fourth grade. With a boy. In the private school I went to, there weren’t many people. As such, there wasn’t much to do but start silly fights over nothing and cry about how “Jason stole my trading cards.” (I’m still waiting, Jason.) There was such an abundant amount of drama that I started to carry some over into regular life. This is why everything Parker did I despised, and to be honest, I despised him as a whole. From breastfeeding to constant crying to making New Year’s Eve a nightmare, he seemed to do it all. I disliked him even when I wasn’t around him and he made me miserable wherever I was. Of course now I can understand and actually recollect, “Oh right, he’s a baby,” but back then all I could imagine was negatives. Being surrounded by whining and fights and trading cards, Jason, didn’t leave me feeling well at home. I’d say and do things that were mean, then question myself later, and it made me feel bad about myself even more. Also, let’s face it, being called ‘four eyes’ and other names in school didn’t make me happy. Except for the times in which they were joking, in which case I would do one of those little fake laughs. You know the ones.

My life has been a mess. I’m a mess - but that doesn’t stop me from moving with change. In my younger ages, I didn’t know how to do so, but I’ve had a lot of guidance and change since then. Parker gave me a sense of purpose in school, and shortly after he was born I became serious about my education. I moved to a new school, and met new friends, where I finally lost the old me and became more outgoing towards others. I now know I’m more of an extrovert, partially thanks to him, but Parker isn’t a baby anymore. He’s four years old now and I love him dearly, even if he is only a half brother. Although, like all children, he can be aggravating, I get by that. In the end, he’s still a child, and I should enjoy these moments while he is. His presence has helped me recognize change in life and adapt to it. Dare I say, I may be communicating with others in a better and more productive manner since he’s been alive. In the long run, I’m happier with him here. I have someone to grow old with that I’m not married to. I have someone to reminisce with, and right now I have someone who looks up to me as a person, which no one can replace. I’m happy to have him here, and like most brothers I’m lucky.
Fall Lines

By Victoria Sun
Arts at the Capitol Theater, Grade 10

Send me a letter by midnight.
Have your words swirl around my feet
as we dance across the moonlit lake.
Watch as ink cascades off the rocks
so when I leave,
black footprints are all that remains.

Do it on a chilly night,
so I'll wrap nothing but your pages
around me.

Wander on broken stanzas
through sunrise and sunsets
hit question marks
and trail off to ellipses
until stars rain down like exclamation marks.

When the tide pulls in,
a trail of quotation marks is revealed,
they lead in spirals around the wayward side
of grammar mistakes
that suddenly stop in the midst of a
Sentence.

When they finally come to their epilogue,
I come across an enchantress,
who calls herself a poet,
looking to strike a bargain.
Her golden flowing locks remind me
of your own waves;
how they rise and fall.

I don't need to speak;
words slip through my teeth
like the stream through my fingertips.
To hear your gracious roars
or see how the light reflects off you so
majestically,
the tides crash into each other
like applause.
Your harp plays with the hopes
of enchanting the moon,
sending me in your direction.

You are the fall line.
Streams flow through your veins.
Dripping from one edge to the other.

As I get closer, I see the sharp curves
that ward others off.
I swim towards the current,
free my limbs
and dive under.
Blue

By Jo DeWaal

Greenwich Academy, Grade 10

A teakettle cloud presses the horizon, smudging a charcoal stripe, wobbly as a Sharpie line, loose to the ground.

An agrarian quilt stretches from the sagging front porch to the road, not another red roof farmhouse in sight.

I remain alone, only potato plants, malachite leaves touched with feldspar bending ’neath corn stalks, giving shivering whisper.

A rush of wind lifts sticky curls from my neck, my eyelashes lifted, as house painter brushstrokes open up the western front.

Alone with the storm, clouds carve carousel mounts, whipped castles sour.
Frost topples granite, agate spills into tourmaline torrents.

Coursing clouds sweep ashen stains leaving blue, ushering my chance to wipe away tears, and dream unobserved.

Dearth and Devotion

By Alicia Chang

Tolland High School, Grade 10

My "grandfather" was a thin man, as wise as he was weathered. He was not much of a talker—I never even found out his favorite color, or his favorite food. But we did know each other well. We worked together every day, unfailingly, under flickering fluorescent lights, until afternoons melted into evenings; he would streak black ink on light paper, graying brush hairs sweeping over newsprint, and I would follow suit. At times the only sound would be that unmistakable scratchy swoosh of a drying brush. Even now, when my bed sheets rustle just the right way, I'll reminisce about what happened so many decades ago, and that night my dreams will be infiltrated by stark images of home and family. I'll be reminded of the pain that loss brings.

When I was ten years old, I met him. I think about that fateful autumn day often; I awe over how something as minor as the weather that one time has inspired my identity.

It had started raining as I walked back from school that afternoon. Desperately wanting to avoid the dank discomfort of wearing wet clothing, I ducked meekly into the next store I reached. I tried to browse inconspicuously, but winced at each squeak of my soaked shoes against the floor. A movement from within the shadows caught my eye and I strode almost involuntarily toward it. There he was: graying hair, grave face. He was writing - or rather, performing, calligraphy. I was mesmerized. Giant characters were being created on the daily newspaper; I envied their elegantly tapered ends, strong joints, majestically arcing limbs; I stared longingly at their complex strokes. Long after the rain stopped, I remained there, just watching.

And that night, I returned to the orphanage late, my eyes still starry with what I had seen as I shifted in
my cot.

I returned the next day. He did not so much as look up. Neither of us spoke a word those first two
days. As I started to leave the third day, though, he stopped me, and handed me a large brush. It had a smooth
bamboo handle, a loop of brown string at the end, and pristine white hairs. It was the most beautiful thing I
had ever seen. I accepted the gift wordlessly.

"Come back tomorrow," he said, and for the first time, I saw him smile. I only nodded, unable to thank
him—my soul ached too much for words.

When I turned up the fourth day, there were two stacks of newspaper and another rusting rickety
stool. He gestured for me to sit; I sat. Not much had changed. His eyes refastened on his art, and no words
were exchanged. But after every stroke, he would pause and I would copy his every mark. When the weekend
came, I stayed home practicing on old school papers with water and the brush he had given me. With this
system, we worked on through winter and spring.

I arrived early the first day summer vacation from school began. He did not seem surprised. Instead,
he slipped a flyer to me. I scanned it quickly. There was an art and calligraphy competition for young adults
being held in a couple of weeks. It was annual; I had heard of it before. The prize money for first place was a
number I could have only dreamed of, and my heart clenched at the sight of it. Though deep down I knew I
could not win, I agreed to enter, so he asked me to choose a phrase to write out of all the ones we had
practiced.

My choice was clear. "龍飛," I declared without hesitation. Dragon flying. With that, he taught on,
leaving me to mull over how the words had simply rolled off my tongue, smoother than river stones, faster than
river water. Dragons were everywhere: land, sea, sky; they were everything: power, magic, fortune, royalty,
mystery; but most of all, they were everything to me: the bedtime stories I was never told, the luck I never had,
the strength I could never summon.

The day of the competition arrived. We walked together to the site of the competition. Competitors
were to create their art live in front of the judges to as prove that all work was original. We had practiced those
two characters over and over, but I was still restless. I took my designated post and begged him to sit with me.
He complied.

When it came time for me to start, I couldn't. I realized with despair that I had only written calligraphy
alone, or in his presence. I found myself unable to do it in public. All the judge's eyes were on me, waiting, yet
my hand could only shake in suspension over the special rice paper he had purchased for the occasion. An
insatiable anxiety gnawed through my mind, coursing like adrenaline to reach my fingertips, locking muscles
with fear. My face flustered in shame as water droplets scattered and soaked into the fine paper. Was I to be
disqualified for holding up the judges? I considered withdrawing from the competition. Minutes had passed
and I still had not made a single stroke.

His hand on mine startled me out of my indecisive misery. In silence, he guided my brush to the
inkpot, dipped it skillfully, and placed the brush tip on the paper. As if by reflex, my hand regained ability,
beginning to form the powerful phrase. Black against white. Breathing. The scratchy swish sound as my brush
dried after each line. Finally, I finished and submitted. The judges walked away, and for the next few hours we
were to wait in nerve-wracking anticipation for the results.

As we lingered in the sitting area, he broke the silence with the beginning of a story: abrupt, then
slowly, sorrowfully eloquent. He told me of his time as a Kuomingtang, and how he had come to Taiwan from
his home in China during the war. He lamented losing his loved ones to the heavens in his absence, and how
he often wished he still had a family. It was as if the floodgates had broken: out spilled his life story. It was only
fair, I thought, to reciprocate. So I told him what I had never told anyone else, how I, too, had lost my family.
How I wished I still had a home. And after our confessions? We returned to our usual silences.

In the evening, they announced the winners. I had come in second place in calligraphy for my age
group. I looked at him.

"If I had won," I began quietly, "I would have used the money to give you a trip home." Then, carefully,
I added, "I am sorry you lost your family."

"No," he shook his head. "I am home. You are my family."
That winter, after countless lonely mornings in the draft-welcome, dingy store, he contracted pneumonia. The inevitable occurred.

The next winter, I entered the competition again, and won—with the same phrase, 龍飛, of course, as a tribute to my grandfather.

Though I have lost him, he is not forgotten.

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**The Lonely iPhone**

*By Kate Luongo*

*Newtown High School, Grade 10*

A sudden jolting vibration overtook me, abruptly. When it faded away, I relaxed for a moment before I saw her hand hovering above me. She laughed and typed the letters “LOL”. Really? Three letters were worth the trauma I was living through? She pressed “send” and I anticipated the reply.

She turned my volume up high and began blasting music. Not that I don’t love living and breathing One Direction, but I have ears, too.

She danced and sang along in her closet, searching for something to wear. For a moment, I could breathe, until I beeped. I was a little embarrassed until I remembered that that wasn’t my fault. That was the sound a “tweet” made.

She picked me up and laughed hysterically. Personally, I didn’t understand what was so funny about “Bacon for breakfast today. The best way to start the day #bacon” but I didn’t understand a lot of things. Especially the famous #. Honestly, what did bacon do to deserve it? I was starting to realize that just about anything could be given the trendy sign.

Suddenly, I heard the familiar drone voice of her workaholic mother, “Savannah, you’re going to miss the bus.”

My friend Mac, seemed to know this drone pretty well. She spent most of her time under his illuminated screen both at home and at the office.

She stuffed me into her jean pockets and ran downstairs. I couldn’t see anything in the darkness, but I could smell a banana and could hear her chewing briefly.

Then her backpack banged against me as she slung it over one shoulder.

This didn’t mean I was done for the moment. The second cool air flooded the pocket her hand appeared again to retrieve me.

It was nice to get a little fresh air, but I couldn’t enjoy it. She tapped at me obnoxiously, at the same time as walking down the sidewalk. My nerves grew, as I watched her stumble over a root. I had seen my relatives smashed, by this art of “multitasking” and I did not want to join them.

The bus honked, forcing her to peel her eyes off of me, for just a moment, to climb the tall steps and sink into one of the green vinyl seats.

In the dim bus, I could only make out glowing faces hovering over brightly lit screens. I tried to get the attention of the one in the navy blue case. He had been a good friend of mine, but he didn’t notice. He was too busy tweeting.

School, the big brick building that looked much more intimidating than it actually was, came into view. At first, I had thought that this would be a place where I would be put away for a good long rest. School was a place for learning, right? I had been wrong. Very wrong.

She found a way to keep me on her desk, in plain view, checking me every so often without getting in trouble. In fact, everyone did.

The teachers sometimes even enforced it. “Take out your iPhone to look this up,” they would say. The tie or the thin-rimmed glasses didn’t deceive me. We were doing all of the teaching. Sometimes I noticed the thick books called dictionaries sitting in the back of the classroom. They looked lonely and sad. I couldn’t help feeling that I was responsible for that.

School or no school, my general routine was this: Texting, more texting, tweeting, an occasional selfie (if she was having a good hair day), maybe looking one thing up and then some Instagraming or Snapchatting.
A special day arrived. Instead of relaxing on the couch like she usually does on a day when the bus wasn’t coming to pick her up, the doorbell rang, bringing friends, a few at a time, all holding boxes wrapped in shiny paper or colorful bags.

I was beginning to recognize this as a “party.” I had arrived tightly packed in a small square box, at one of these. It was since then, that I have been glued to her hand.

I had read about parties (I had vast information on many topics thanks to Google). They used to include games like “Pin the Tail on the Donkey”, or “Bingo”. At some parties, there was even a piñata that would burst open when whacked, causing a rainbow of candy to stream out. To me, this sounded like a magical dream (if you weren’t the piñata). At this party, the first activity was social networking and gossiping about the latest posts.

Cake time smelled good, sweet like chocolate. I watched as small mouthfuls speared with forks were eaten, but not one of the guests finished their slice.

The mother drone appeared, holding a small wrapped box, and declared that it was present time. I eyed the box suspiciously. It seemed familiar.

“Oh,” she awed opening a new sweater, headphones (thank goodness), iTunes gift card (ugh), and a new purse.

Her mother handed her the small box. “Happy birthday,” she said.

I fell and bounced on the couch before lying face down.

“OMG!” she cried, squealing. In fact, everyone was squealing, even the guests. What was going on?

Then it came to me. I didn’t need to see it. I knew. I heard Siri, the familiar beeping, the obnoxious vibrating and I knew.

Within seconds, I became worthless. I knew the drill. She would spend hours checking out all the new features like “voice commands”, “iMovie,” and the funny camera settings. Then days would pass and she would only use it for the two T’s, texting and tweeting.

Wasn’t that what I had already been doing? In fact, wasn’t that what one had always been doing, from the beginning of time? People didn’t need an expensive hunk of metal to communicate. In fact, there was a time when parents had the feature of “voice commands,” and by telling their children what to do, they obeyed. Social networking was always popular, although I will say it used to be called talking, not tweeting (unless you were a bird). Words were cherished, thought about, and preserved. Music, one of the earth’s finest gifts, was free. You didn’t need to pay to sing a song.

As I sat there, my mind clouded with the sounds of the phones, I realized that I was now one of the dictionaries sitting in the back of the classroom.

Now, I was the lonely iPhone.

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**Upon Looking Back**

*By Anna Watson  
Manchester High School, Grade 10*

My past lives in a little blue house with a big maple in the front, the big oak in the back, a porch overloaded with bikes, and the baby apple trees with memories dug into their cores. Under the protective limbs of the big oak magic was alive, alive in the ‘digging area’.

“Here’s some more rocks.”

“Good, go get more.”

“Where from?”

“Liz, there’s a lot by the apple tree.”

We five Watson girls, and the one Watson boy were building a kingdom. Michaela dug the castle’s moat around the island, Rachel and Jael built the castle, Lea, Jonah and I gathered rocks to hold the water in the moat. This is how we spent most of our days as homeschoolers. Outside and free. We constantly had dirt under our nails and bare feet.

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“Odyssey’ is on,” Rachel called. We loved Focus on the Family Radio Station. We managed to bottle our energy just long enough to have lunch, prepared by our mother, and participate in a Christian ‘time of wonder and adventure’. These were the times I liked to copy my older sisters, and everything was perfect, as far as I could see.

***

“Peanut butter doesn’t make you drunk,” Angie, our best friend, snickered.

“Yes it does,” Jonah and I proclaimed. We had set aside our breakfast to prove peanut butter can make you drunk. Jonah was holding the jar and eating out of it with a spoon. My younger brother staggered around falling into things. He changed his innocent voice to a slur. I was laughing so hard I couldn’t speak.

A dark cloud passed. It woke from another nap, stomped down the stairs, snapped the laughter, and ripped the jar from Jonah’s arms.

“What are you doing? Clean up this mess! Angie, get outside!” she screamed as she dragged Angie to the door. Jonah was next. She grabbed his hair, spanked him and finally sent him to his room crying. I didn’t know what to do. I stood there. “Maybe if I start being the perfect daughter and clean up, she’ll leave me alone.” My hopes were crushed. She screamed at me too.

I thought she was allowed to yell at me. She’s my mother, right? She could treat us the way she wants. My Dad never seemed to acknowledge the stories we told him when he got home. We all learned to shrug it off, pretend it didn’t happen. For 10 years I shrugged off the abuse.

***

She pulled the minivan to the side of the road.

“We’re not moving until you apologize.” Everyone was silent. Then Jonah made the terrible decision to speak. Her hand came whipping around the front seat slapping Jonah on the thigh. He slapped her back. Back and forth they went until her face got in the way and Jonah slapped off those glasses I hate. She sat in her seat stunned.

I wished I could be in the cars flying freely by. They probably had the proper family I dreamed about. Caring mom, protective father. A stable secure, properly functioning, Christian family.

I thought she was going to continue driving when instead the woman went back to hitting Jonah.

“I am your mother. I will have the last slap.”

From then on I hated everything that reminded me of her. Her graying hair, the blue van, the way she walked, talked, laughed, and the clothes she wore, her glasses.

I know she isn’t justified. No parent has a right to yell at their child. Especially out of anger. Discipline is good when given for the right reason: out of love, not anger, and not undeserved or unexplained.

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I am not a rebellious teen. I am a growing young lady who has finally opened her eyes to see what life is really like. This is the period in life where I am supposed to have the most growth, and I want that growth to be strong and true. I don’t want to have a closed mind. I won’t live in ignorance.

Sadly, I had to learn the hard way. I want to be able to help the people who have problems like mine, problems they’re ashamed to admit. I want to help them before they learn there is a hard way.

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“Sit down.” I stood my ground. “Sit down or I’ll take something special from you.” I immediately thought of my little sister. Why did she have to witness this? Why does she have to grow up with an excuse for a mother? I wanted to sit, let my legs shake freely, but I was determined not to let her have power over me again. She has had power for way too long. I saw Lea mouth ‘sit down’ from the doorway behind the woman’s shoulder. I sat.

“God, please let this be over. Get Dad here soon, please,” I silently prayed.

She sat silent for a long while.

“Well first, are you okay?” my mom finally sighed. That sigh drove me crazy. It sounded as if she was making a great sacrifice. I breathed out a laugh.

“Why are you laughing?”

“Really. You really don’t know why I’m laughing?” I was so surprised I breathed another chuckle.

“No. Tell me.”
"You yell at me, shove me into the bookshelf, tell me to sit down or you'll take something special from me, and you ask if I'm okay," My voice cracked. Another long silence.

"I'm not the bad guy."

My stomach clenched. I stifled a furious outburst. "I'm not the bad guy. If you had just listened to me this wouldn't have happened." I hadn't obeyed her because I was frightened to think of what she would do to me if I was alone in the office with her. Now she was going to explain how she had every right to do what she did because she is my 'mother,' an unearned title. A tear escaped despite my efforts to hold it back.

This woman's job was to raise me to be a proper woman, faithful to God and family. Was this her lesson plan?

She so often quoted the Bible to reinstate her power and show the proper way to act. Then she hid the Bible and backstabbed. I labeled her a hypocrite. I decided I would never trust her again. I have tried to sympathize with her. Given her one more chance too many times. She was not my mother.

She always said kids grow up to be like their parents. She told her parents she would never be like them, yet she had grown to be exactly like them. I will never be like her. I will never treat anyone the way she treats her family.

I took in the scene while she held another silence. Lea had left the doorway, hopefully to call Dad. I glanced out the window. The weather was pretty nice, contrasting the atmosphere in here.

My cuts burned and thumb throbbed as I supported it tenderly. I was shaking with fear but tried to conceal it. I will not show I'm afraid of her. She began to talk again. I stared at her, my face wet, but blank. She finally left to the basement to cry or punch something.

What should I have done now? Dad wasn't home yet. I had homework due tomorrow; I did that.

I have learned to shove off the abuse, but this pain wasn't going away so easily. My thumb was either broken or severely sprained. Every time I tried to write I had a flashback.

I scripted what I would yell at Dad if he supported the woman he had once married. As soon as he got home I ran to him. He hugged me back.

We went to the hospital. My thumb was broken.

She never apologized for that night. She never showed she was sorry my thumb was now tender, easily hurt. Now I have a constant reminder of what kind of mother I have. Every time my thumb throbs I have to close my eyes, tight.

I have gone through physical, mental, emotional abuse, and neglect. Because of my past I experience anxiety that hinders my everyday life. I have scars visible and invisible that remind me of everything I want to forget. People have told me I am wrong to not have a relationship with my mom. They have said it is my fault she reacted the way she did. I have also been told the damage she has done to me is not damage. "It is the right of a mother."

Because of my past I have grown to hate ignorance. I try to keep myself from going into a blind view of the world. Despite the events in my life I will be faithful to God and my family. I will be a proper woman, and I will never be like my mother.

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**Two Words: One Truth**

*By Nora O'Brien*

*Édwin O. Smith High School, Grade 10*

"I'm gay."

These are the two words that no Catholic parent is prepared to hear. The two words that create awkward silences in groups of friends, their eyes shifting as they try to find the right thing to say. These are the two words that make me feel alone as I kneel beneath the crucifix every Sunday, praying to God to forgive my sins. The two words that I've never been able to find the courage to say. I am sharing them with you because these two words are my truth, the truth of millions of others, and a truth that deserves to be told.

"If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads." - Leviticus 20:13
Ever since I was in elementary school, I’ve been brainwashed into believing hateful verses like this to be the truth.

Recently, I’ve learned that they are false.

But sometimes, like in my case, when you were taken right out of the delivery room and carried straight to church, the line between truth and falsity starts to blur.

The words of Leviticus start to take on a familiar voice, and the thought of anything other than "normal" becomes an "abomination."

This being said, I never understood the controversy over this topic. How come little boys couldn’t like other little boys instead of girls? Why was it such a big deal for two women to get married to each other if they were truly in love? I had always spoken my mind about equality, even as a child. Love was always love to me; I saw homosexuality to be just as valid as the love that my parents, or any couple, shared.

However, it’s harder to be so optimistic about these views once you realize that you’re the one who’s the abomination. It’s harder to advocate when the words "God hates fags" slide off of someone’s tongue as easily as their own name. In fact, you start to wonder if they’re right. Would this supposedly loving God abandon me now that I wasn’t following the path carved out for me in his image?

I’m not going to pretend I always knew I was gay. I liked boys just like my friends all throughout elementary and middle school. I had crushes, felt butterflies in my stomach, and discussed with my friends whether it was okay or not to ask "that guy" to the upcoming dance.

But in high school, things started to change, and the differences between me and my straight friends became clearer every day. While they were busy complaining about not having a boyfriend, I was happy being single. While they were talking about how nervous they got in front of their crushes, I was starting to get anxious and tongue-tied when talking to girls. When I figured out that I wasn’t just an independent girl with some social anxiety, it was like getting my head dunked into a tub of ice water. Awakening, yet frigid. Eye-opening, but harsh. I had never been one to be ashamed or keep secrets, but knowing that I was going to go through life constantly being told that what I felt was wrong was enough to keep me quiet.

One thing I’m going to tell you about the closet is that you never want someone to try to force you out of it.

Well, in the midst of the confusion that was September of freshman year, this is exactly what happened. A girl who I had recently met started a rumor about me and one of my best friends, and soon enough, I feared going to school at the cost of being pushed out of the closet by her.

"How does it feel to be gay?" she would hiss in my ear in a voice dripping with fake-sympathy, as I tried my best to ignore her and concentrate on my work. "It must be so hard for you."

Her comments grew worse, and I couldn’t even walk down the hallway with my friend anymore without being harassed by this girl. Some of my friends even started to believe her lies.

I denied my sexuality to everyone who asked, and my shame grew larger day after day, consuming me to the point that I was praying to God to just please, please make me normal. I continued to step deeper and deeper into the closet, immersing myself in the state of sadness and constant fear that often accompanies it.

The second thing I’ll tell you about the closet is that it’s vitally important to bring someone in there with you.

The moment I decided to text my best friend about my sexuality, my life changed forever. "I don’t like boys, like, at all," I remember telling her. "I don’t feel attracted to you or anything, but I really, really just don’t like boys."

Hands shaking and heart racing, I sat in my bed, wondering what I had just done.

"I’m so proud of you," she replied, and my anxiety started to melt away. "You know that I’ll always love you no matter what, and this doesn’t really change the way I see you."

In that moment, I started to feel like everything was going to be okay. One simple text message made me realize that my true friends would always support me no matter what I am or who I love. I will always be thankful to her. She accepted me with open arms and understood that the butterflies I sometimes feel around girls are the same ones that she feels around guys. I gained the confidence to come out to my friends, siblings, and even my parents, who have also taken it in the best way I could’ve hoped for.
Starting now, I’d like to live my life openly and honestly. I’d like for my family and peers to accept me for who I am. And most importantly, I’d like to fall in love someday. I’d like to be able to walk down the street holding my girlfriend’s hand with full confidence in who I am. And if I’m lucky, I’d like to even marry her someday.

But in order for these things to happen, I first must learn to fully accept my own truth: I’m not an abomination. I’m not going to Hell. Love is love and I deserve to feel it just as much as anyone else. I’m gay, and these two words are my truth.

Truth

By Jesse Ludington
East Haven High School, Grade 10

Scene 2
A hospital room. NOAH lies in the hospital bed, appearing unconscious. MEREDITH and PAUL enter, followed by a DOCTOR. MEREDITH appears concerned, while PAUL is calmer.

MEREDITH: Noah!

SHE rushes to NOAH’s bedside. PAUL follows, but remains at a distance. The DOCTOR runs over to MEREDITH and puts his arm in front of her before SHE can hug NOAH.

DOCTOR: I have to warn you, ma’am. Your son isn’t in the best of conditions. I’m going to have to ask you to refrain from touching him.

He lowers his arm and steps back.

MEREDITH: What do you mean? What’s wrong with him?

DOCTOR: He’s exhausted, clearly, and in quite a bit of pain.

MEREDITH: Is he going to be okay? Paul, you said he was going to be okay! Isn’t he?

PAUL: Of course. Of course he’ll be fine.

DOCTOR: We’re going to do our best, and hopefully he’ll pull through.

MEREDITH: Hopefully? He might not?

DOCTOR: I’m sorry, ma’am. We can’t give you any guarantees right now. But I can promise you that we’ll do everything we can to help your son.

PAUL: Are we at least allowed to talk to him?

DOCTOR: Yes, of course. He’ll certainly hear you, though he may or may not answer. I’ll give you some time with your son.

The DOCTOR exits. PAUL approaches the hospital bed, MEREDITH clinging to his arm.

PAUL: Are we all just going to ignore what happened here?

NOAH stirs and looks up at PAUL, confused.

NOAH: What?

PAUL: How you got shot, the whole thing!

NOAH: What about it?

MEREDITH: Paul, stop it!

PAUL: Why? We’re just having a conversation, he’s fine!

PAUL turns to NOAH. PAUL’s voice should now get louder and more aggressive with each question.

PAUL: You obviously haven’t told the full story. So what really happened?

NOAH: L...what?

PAUL: Dammit, Noah! Don’t you remember anything?

MEREDITH: Stop it! Stop it! It’s too much for the boy! Can’t you see?

NOAH (faintly): Dad, I’m so tired. Can’t I just go to sleep?

PAUL: Stop avoiding my questions, Noah!

MEREDITH: Paul, please! He’s in no condition to answer questions!

PAUL: And how would you know that?
MEREDITH: He's obviously exhausted. Just leave him alone!
PAUL (with his voice at its loudest): We need to know what really happened!
MEREDITH (tears up): Just give him a break! Please, Paul!

PAUL opens his mouth as if he is about to say something, but decides against it. He is silent for a moment, collecting his thoughts. PAUL turns away from MEREDITH and then back to her.
PAUL: Meredith, honey, I think you're getting a bit overwhelmed.
MEREDITH: N-no, I'm not...I'm fine!
PAUL: I think you need some air, dear.
MEREDITH: I'm staying with our son, Paul.
PAUL: What's the point of that? The damn kid won't answer a single question!
NOAH (distressed): Dad, stop yelling, please.
PAUL: I'll do whatever I want, Noah!
MEREDITH: Stop, Paul! You're scaring him! You're hurting him!
PAUL: I wouldn't have to yell if he would just answer my questions!
MEREDITH: But yelling at him won't make him answer!
PAUL: It's not like you'd know that! You won't even raise your voice at the boy!
MEREDITH (beginning to cry): Just...Just leave him alone!
PAUL (softly, persuasively): Meredith, honey, I think you need some time to think. You don't know what you're saying, dear.
MEREDITH: I-I think you might be right.
PAUL: Come on.

PAUL leads MEREDITH off stage. HE reenters, alone.
PAUL: Alright, Noah, no more interruptions. Tell me what happened.
NOAH: Mom's right. Leave me alone.
PAUL: I need answers!
NOAH: Why?
PAUL: Just tell me what happened!
NOAH is silent.
PAUL: Answer me!

The DOCTOR enters.
DOCTOR: Sir, I'm going to have to ask you to stop raising your voice. You're disturbing the other patients.
PAUL: Oh...yes, I apologize.

The DOCTOR nods and then exits.
PAUL: You know that I'm going to find out the truth, son.

PAUL exits. NOAH rolls over in the hospital bed. End scene.
Eleventh Grade

All About Colts

By Evan Saunders

Arts at the Capitol Theater, Grade 11

So I asked him about his addiction,
I asked why cigarettes liked him so
and he’d light right in front of me,
blowing smoke that screamed
something of a different nature,
of an idle drifter.

But you, a passerby would know what I mean,
flood waters going up by the day,
houses are sinking right down the road from here,
while that same kid sits in the park
his addiction sizzling out right in his mouth
as he drowned thinking cigarettes
evaporate the world’s problems.

Now don’t get me wrong
cigarettes do melt flood s,
as does beer or wine or any other addiction,
or like mine,
Colts.

Handheld dragons are beautiful things,
snug in your hand cold to bony fingers
especially if it isn’t yours.
But for many years,
after I spent 6 hours in a brawl house called school and 30
minutes
on the yellow bus back up to some place with a little less fire,
a little less pain.
My dad would leave his dragon on the table next to
bitter scotch and an empty wallet.
I’d go down stairs with that dragon,
cradle him like my dad never would.

One day I came home not the same
the blood on my face wished it belonged to someone else,
Dad stumbling over drunk in the corner,
blowing the last of an empty wallet on watermelons
I took the dragon downstairs, lining scared melons
against a wall that had nothing for them
and imagined faces,
faces of fist’s breaking my nose over and over.
Children in collared shirts,
tearing apart the dragon tamer.

It spit fire in my hands
metal smoke that sprayed out its mouth,
turning watermelon to brain
bang
bone fragments of my nose hanging in the air bang
like ash that fluttered from the ember tip
bang!
And I cried for them,
I cried as I smoked my cigarette.
carrying a dragon with mouth open hollering
“More Please?”
and I threw it across the room,
a smoking gun at my father that didn’t care
to go to prison and rot somewhere else
Find another addiction
And forget a whole other life.
I walked out of the house on that night
Didn’t look back, hearing the hungry dragon moan
As I walked 20 years to be here now,
Maybe that kid will learn to breathe water and
swim
And my father, will tear metal bars and regrow a
soul
Or all the houses that sank will turn to yachts and
glide off somewhere
Where there aren’t any cigarettes.
Chop Suey

By Heaven Stone
Arts at the Capitol Theater, Grade 11

I
you were not
made for this light
you used to
blot at the corners
of your lips
tissue scraps
turned rose petals
before my eyes
you felt messy
leaving red rims on
dishes you didn't own
messier leaving home
without drowning yourself
in bottled beauty

II
your hair
has gotten
so long

hats were once
for rainy days alone
you were so afraid
they'd think
you were bald

III
the woman
at my table
keeps adjusting her
hairpins
she gave up
on me
an hour ago
i only
spoke to her
because she wears
the same lipstick
i avoid her
eyes
she knows

IV
the place reeks
your jasmine
her mint
i wonder
if the man
you're here with
helps you
with your coat
before you leave
if he holds the door
just to inhale
you walking
by

V
sometimes
i think you sit
by the sign
because it has
the same bulbs
as your mother's vanity
all stage light
blinding to
someone like me

VI
you told me
i brought shadows to
your life
i wonder if
you've found
the light you looked
so much for
if you stooped
to using public
lights
i don't think
you ever will

VII
he stares
in brooding silence
at the teapot
doesn't hold
your hand
across the table
i trace crimson
crescents
on her teacup
ruby pout
feathered
at the edges
the messy
you just couldn't be
with me
No Swearing

By Annalee Mears

Lyman Memorial High School, Grade 11

On the night of the new moon, a demon met a man, and a man met a demon.
It was just another night, albeit a darker one. The man knew that the fear pervading these nights was irrational. He was still jumpy, though. In the dark woods, surrounded by shifting shadows, who wouldn't be? The woods were a quick route between houses in this town, and the man had many friends to visit tonight.

It was just another night.
A branch snapped somewhere in the underbrush. He was used to hearing things and seeing shadows; he barely flinched anymore. Then, he fell, with force.

“Ah shi−” his words were cut off as his mouth clamped shut. He tried to move, but his body would not obey.

“Ah, ah, ah~” said a voice. “No swearing!” The man looked over, and saw a canine-like creature sitting in the shadows. It was staring at him, its head cocked, oversized ears flopping to the side. A rattlesnake tail gently swept the ground. A snake tongue flicked out of its mouth. It suddenly sneered, muzzle crinkling.

On a moonless night, the demon met the man, and the man met the demon.

“I'm curious,” it spat. “Why are you walking alone on the night of the new moon?”

“It's just another night,” the man sneered back. “You don’t scare me, monster!” The man had expected a growl, or a shocked expression, or – if he dared to hope – an admission of defeat after that. The monster wanted to scare him, right?

Instead, it barked with laughter.

“Hah! Just any night, huh? And monster?” It grimaced before continuing. “You haven’t heard the tales of demons? Monsters, are not, demons. A monster can surface on any night. Ghouls, for example, appear when there are trespassers. Zombies, when they smell flesh. Vampires, when the night is dark. Werewolves, when the moon is full. But demons, demons are not slaves to the moon or those primal desires. We appear in the shadow of the moon, in the places the moonlight shuns. And on the night of the new moon, in the absence of moonlight, we can go wherever we please.”

It sneered again. The man sneered back, trying to keep up his bravado.

“Not slaves to primal desires, huh?” he said. “Then why am I stuck? And the whole moonlight thing? I think you’re just scared of it.” A feral growl ripped itself from the demon’s throat. The demon rose, its maw snapping open as secondary fangs shot forward, dripping with venom.

“The moonlight does not cage me!” it said. The demon calmed down slightly and sat on its haunches. “Moonlight is a medicine only. To abuse it is to fall victim to its powers.”

“Oh, fu−” the man’s mouth clamped shut.

“I said no swearing,” the demon said. It chuckled.

“Oh, so you have morals now? ‘Cause I’m pretty sure kidnapping is a no-no.”

“Hah! Morals are set by beings; they are as tenuous as a newborn rabbit.” It took a step out of the deeper shadows. It bared its fangs and drew back its black lips into an insane smile.

“I make my own morals. I don’t listen to God’s or Satan’s rules.” It laughed at this. “They set morals arbitrarily. One time, when they reincarnated, they switched domiciles! That raised some hell!” It took on a shocked expression, then laughed madly.

“Oops, was that a pun?!” The man looked up at the demon’s face, closer now, and found himself staring into one red eye, a black rim enclosing the crimson. The other had been gouged out.

“Well,” it said, returning to its original demeanor. “That’s that.” The fit of madness seemed to have worn off. “I’ve grown tired of you.” It stepped closer to the man.

“Hey, hey! Wait!” he cried. The demon stopped, a wicked smile on its face.

“Yes?” it drawled.

“Wh-what are your other morals?”

“Hah! What’s to say I have more than one?” It laughed, its shoulders shaking. “I do have one more: I
don't kill kids. If you think that's gonna save you, you're wrong. You're not a kid." Drool slipped off of the forked tongue.

"Well, I have a kid! And a wife! If you kill me, you'll leave my kid without a father! And they'll come looking!"

"Pathetic," it growled. It looked at him with disdain. "You have no wife. You don't have a kid, either. I can't smell a kid on you. I do smell various perfumes, though." It grinned. "Someone gets around."

"Well, they'll - they'll all come looking! They'll find you, and they'll kill you!"

"I can't be found, I can't be killed," the demon said calmly. It walked towards him, slowly placing its paws.

As it drew near, the man tried one last attempt.

"So, I'm just another nameless victim, then?! Is that it? Too much of a coward to know who you're killing?!"

"Heh. No." Its voice was soft, menacing, nostalgic. "Every victim has a name. Every victim has a story. That's what makes the hunt so fun." The demon came to a halt a few paces away. It whispered into the night.

"You're Jeff Hinser. You're a typical, womanizing male. Your family alienated you at 17. You failed school, but didn't care. You have no job; you mooch off others. The most notable thing about you is that you like to write poetry about flowers and metaphorical silver linings."

Jeff was shocked. No one knew that. This demon could not have known that.

"You're an open book, Jeff!" It laughed maniacally.

"No!" He struggled against the magic bindings.

The demon drew closer. "I should tell you my name, since I know yours." It chuckled darkly. "And everything about you. I'm Zerick, genderless."

Zerick opened its mouth, drawing closer with each languid step.

"No!"

The teeth showed to the gums as the lips drew back. The teeth were dagger-like, made for tearing and slashing and suffering.

"Help!"

A hiss was heard as venom-filled fangs came down behind the canines.

"Oh my GOD! Help! HELP! FU="

The jaws snapped shut.

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Clean Streets

*By Jordan Lagan*

*The Master's School, Grade 11*

Chip grunted as he elbowed his way through the crowd. His young muscles tensed from exertion as the cart he was yoked to rolled into the mud and he tried unsuccessfully to pull it out. The more he strained it seemed, the more the wheels became entrenched.

As he struggled, two guardsmen with feathers in their hats and swords strapped to their belts approached to see what was upsetting the flow of human traffic. One of the men was a squat fellow and the other quite tall, the former having a bulbous nose that protruded from his flat round face, the second sporting an unkempt grey beard. Upon finding Chip, the round-faced guard raised an eyebrow. "What's the trouble lad?" He ventured with a smile.

Chip didn't turn around. "Donkey take sick?"

The bearded guard seemed to think the joke terribly funny. He cracked a smile to reveal a face full of half-rotten teeth and yellow gums. "My name's Tom," the large-nosed guard said. "You need a hand?"

Chip's face flushed from exertion and fear. If they look inside the cart... his mind filled in the blank with a number of unpleasant results.
"What've you got in here boy?" Tom took a step forward to inspect the contents of Chip's cart. There seemed to be nothing inside but a single object covered by a grimy white sheet.

He lifted the sheet and his eyes widened in horror. His lips peeled back in a wordless scream and he stumbled back.

"Holy ancestors!" he grooped at the air with his stubby hands.

Chip turned around, a pleading look in his eye. "Please ... help me."

The other guardsman's wrinkly face turned a pallid color as he went to look at the covered object for himself, ignoring Chip entirely. He placed one hand on the corner of the sheet.

"Mots!" His companion screamed his name. "Don't!"

"What in heaven's nam— " Mots yelped and pulled back with such speed that he tripped in the mud and fell on his backside. "Disease!" he cried, the terror plainly written on his face. "Plague! Stand back!"

Mots scrambled to his partner and they took several steps back together. "Disease! Plague!" They shouted in unison. "Stand back!"

People began to distance themselves from Chip almost immediately, a pocket of emptiness forming around him and his cart. "Please," he begged. "It's my little brother, I— " he stopped as the crowd took up the chant, interrupting him.

"Disease! Plague!"

Chip's parents had named him because of the way he was often chipping in with something witty or clever. He had no witty reply however when a bald-headed citizen screamed through his gap teeth, «Burn the sickness! Burn the plague!»

*****

Nobody knew what started the Disease and nobody knew where it came from. Some said it was punishment from the gods or something spread by the Ghyrians who lived packed together like rats in the sewers, but nobody knew for sure.

Chip's father had been one of the Disease's original victims, an honest fisherman who'd worked everyday on Gilwar Lake from sunup to sundown; or at least, that had been the case before he'd come home complaining about a headache and muttering about something in the mist. What happened in the next six hours had confounded Chip and left him both speechless and terrified.

What started off as a series of grumbles and a simple bad mood turned into an inflamed rage as Chip's father ransacked what little furniture his family possessed and turned their two-room shanty essentially to rubble. The carnage was so violent that Chip fled. When he returned, he found the barely recognizable shape of his father, naked, sweating and devoid of any hair whatsoever lying on the floor and fighting for raspy breathes. The worst symptoms of all were the massive tumors that covered the man's head and hands. In just two more hours he was dead; a perfectly healthy man reduced to ashes in half a day.

Chip's younger brother had been found in much the same condition, lying on the side of the road by a neighbor, his listless eyes blankly regarding the clouds. Chip didn't waste any time. He knew of a healer who practiced in Southern medicines; the magical kind. The price was certain to be outrageous but Chip would find a way to steal or work for whatever the man charged. Chip piled the boy into a stolen cart and covered his ugliness with a sheet.

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A piece of wood smacked into Chip as he opened his mouth to protest. The crowd began looking for burnable objects with a religious fervor, their fear of sickness and disease outweighing their common sense. He looked with longing towards where the crowd was thinnest; escape was his only option now. The thought of abandoning his brother did not enter his mind.

He bent down and put his hands on the ground, feeling for a handhold. All matter of twigs and thatch rained down upon Chip, some landing inside of the cart and piling around Chip's brother. Some of the crowd seemed to have abandoned their fear of catching a disease, stepping closer to Chip to get a better aim with whatever flammable object they could throw.

Suddenly Chip found purchase on the dusty road as with both hands he gripped a cobblestone tightly.
He pulled, summoning all of his strength, his shoulders and thighs bulging. Behind him, Chip heard a loud squeak and amazingly, the cart jumped out of the mud and onto dry ground again.

The smell of burning tar suddenly caught in Chip's nose and he snapped his head around. Mots and Tom had left and were just now returning with torches. In the hands of the bearded guard was a bucket, the contents of which sloshed around, the pungent odor of raw siege oil hanging over all.

Chip cursed and sprang forward, the wheels of the cart turning tediously slow. As he moved, the crowd moved with him, keeping him away from any sort of escape.

Chip didn't want to die. "Damn it!" he screamed and threw off the straps that yoked him to the cart. It didn't make sense for him to die when he was perfectly healthy and perfectly able to run away. Why didn't the crowd see that? Why didn't they give him a chance?

He sprinted for the edge of the crowd but a burly man with a staff blocked his way. Chip didn't stop; he jumped as high as he could. The staff came down with a brutal thwack and Chip screamed as it collided with his face. His elbow shattered when he hit the road and the back of his head exploded in pain. Mots and Tom grabbed the boy by his shoulders and pulled him back into the circle, silencing him with ruinous punches.

"Please," Chip croaked, but nobody heard him. They tossed him into the cart and Mots began drizzling his bucket of oil over Chip's body. The mixture soaked into Chip's hair and his clothes, drenching the sheet below him and body of his little brother.

Tom hesitated with his torch, as if suddenly touched with mercy, as if suddenly coming to his senses. Was he really about to murder two people, little more than boys just because one of them was carrying an illness? Wasn't the inescapable fate of the plague punishment enough?

"Burn the plague!" came the faceless shouts, the will of the fear-drunk mob. "Purify the streets!"

The humanity left the guard's eyes and he lowered the torch. Chip felt pain, white-hot pain. The smell of charred flesh lingered in the streets thereafter for weeks. None dared to move the corpses or the collapsed cart after they saw the ravaging effects of the Disease.

Those Darn Airlines!

By Ian Enders
William Hall High School, Grade 11

Isn't airline travel a drag? Darn TSA makes getting into airports uncomfortable, countless hours spent in layovers, expensive, often terrible food in airports, and worst of all, the airlines themselves. At one time, Pan Am and their competitors made airline travel glamorous and everyone wanted to fly. But over time, as tickets became cheaper, more people flew and soon it became overcrowded and uncomfortable. However, recently, a new topic has become controversial in the market: Mega-Merging. Mergers have taken place in the industry since commercial service began; however, it has become more intense since the Delta-Northwest merger in 2007. In 2013, when US Airways and American Airlines proposed (now is) merging with each other, it led the FAA to block the merger, which would lead to the creation of the world's largest airline (Hasley). These mega mergers are hurting the U.S. Aviation Industry. If we let mega-mergers continue, we will most likely see higher airfares with less onboard services, possibility of hostile takeovers, and the reduction of services to cities that could ruin our nation's extensive aviation industry.

Because of the increase of mergers in the U.S., former hubs are no longer capable of making an airline profitable. This means that many cities that once flourished have been hurt by the elimination of their service. "After the Delta-Northwest merger, Cincinnati Airport went from about 600 flights to about 190 flights (daily). They lost a major employer, Chiquita, to Charlotte, N.C.," said Diane Rehm on her show (WAMU). This was a major loss for the city of Cincinnati, similar to cities like St. Louis, Pittsburg, Memphis, and Cleveland, who lost their hub status due to merging. However, more critical is the loss of smaller cities. "The Southwest AirTran city (cities affected by merger) was probably the biggest damager to service of small cities of any of these mergers. I think we're, what, two dozen cities that lost service on one or both of the carrier -- or AirTran service...cities like Harrisburg, Allentown, Asheville, just the types of cities that we're arguing need protecting in this current merger," said Ben Mutzabaugh (WAMU). Southwest was one airline that has
affected many small cities during their mergers, and ripples across these regions. Airline service supports local
growth of cities, so products and people can travel throughout the country, as well as regionally easily and
quickly. Without this service, products and people have to travel on congested Interstates, or use other slower
means of transportation hurting enterprise expansion.

A big concern for the industry is the ill effects of a merger to head in the wrong direction, as was the
case for the United-Continental merger. There have been problems with the reservation system, the company’s
rapid rewards program, and poor customer service since the merger (WAMU). Comparing the modern day
American Airlines merger with US Airways, the merger could pose new problems. A reason for this merger is
to get the bankrupt American Airlines (one of the airlines involved on 9/11) out of bankruptcy with the thriving
US Airways. There is one problem with this plan: the merger might not successfully take place. If that is the
case, a much larger airline serving a much larger range of people and airports could create a ripple effect all
over the world. The big question is how do we fix that airline? Most likely the airline would want to merge
with another airline, not only creating a larger monopoly in the industry, but also passing the risk of a bad
merger onto another airline.

Rosemary, a frequent flyer, stated, “As a recent resident of Houston (then a hub for Continental), I was
immediately affected by the United-Continental Takeover, I mean merger. I saw our transportation costs
pretty much double from when we first moved here...our prices have gone from about $300 a ticket from
Houston to Boston to - I'm lucky if I can get $500 from Houston to Southern California” (WAMU). Over the
years, airline tickets have gone up exponentially in prices, and many customers can no longer afford to fly as
often to see family, or for vacations, and there is a reason for this. Charles Leocha was once quoted as saying
about his experience on an airline, “I go back and forth to New Hampshire a lot. My tickets cost me about $180
round trip. And I might as well just throw the ticket away once they brought it up to $200 change fee because
that's more than what I paid for the ticket. It's like putting their thumb in eye of the regulators. They said we're
going to raise our prices for no reason for no reason only because we can” (WAMU). That is true, for there is
much less competition than there was before the mega mergers began. In the case of Houston, both United
and Continental competed at certain airports that they both served, but when United took over, certain routes
became monopolized, equaling higher priced tickets. To pay the highest officials of the company higher
salaries they charge for baggage, meals, and other services that at one time was very different: they were
complimentary. This appears to have made mergers less desirable for the consumers. Top level executives will
do whatever it takes to make money, thus eliminate services that made flying somewhat enjoyable into a
nightmare for people onboard.

Some people will say that mergers are good for the industry. For one reason, it gets airlines to a new
marketplace via certain cities and regions. To compete with Delta, the merger with AirTran helped Southwest
Airlines compete in the southern states, particularly Atlanta (WAMU). A merger can be successful, as was the
case with Delta, a once struggling airline prior to merging with Northwest. Post-merger Delta became a
profitable airline with great service offered, expansion of hubs all over the U.S., and both customers and
stockholders alike are satisfied (WAMU). We cannot say that mergers are to blame for the increase in ticket
prices - increased fuel prices, inflation, and government fees like the 9/11 fee, which causes air transportation to
become more expensive to the consumer.

Stockholders say mergers have been good for airlines, but what about the customers? For many
airlines, it appears their primary concern is profitability, not customer satisfaction, on time performance, or
crowded environments. As well, the Southwest-AirTran merger hurt business. Mentioned previously in this
essay by Ben Mutzabaugh, “two dozen or 18 cities that lost service on one or both of the carriers” (WAMU).
That's a lot of cities that lost service from the merger. Even though one airline has gained, many cities lost
service in the selfishness in the CEO and Board of Directors of the airline. Finally, the airlines did play a
massive role in the price of tickets increasing, because they monopolize routes, and can charge whatever creates
profits.

Going back to Rosemarie's comment, she felt that an airline merger was a takeover. Many Americans
felt like airlines are taking over the skies. In 2000, there were 10 major U.S. airlines that were in service, along
with the creation of many low cost carriers. Soon, there will be 4 major airlines that were in service, along with
the creation of many low cost carriers. Soon, there will be 4 major airlines in the U.S. (Hasley)**, 12 airlines in
the U.S. with commercial service, and no creation of new airlines (Wikipedia). Names that once ruled the skies, like TWA, America West, and Northwest, are names in history destroyed by mergers. The United States can no longer handle mega mergers. Two or three future mergers would likely create a monopoly of domestic airlines, and who knows what airfare rates would be like as a result or what cities would go into bankruptcy due to hubs that have been moved to competing cities. We need to change this to get America back on track. The consumers need to challenge these corporations by creating new, successful airlines to rival them. This might lead to competition, which means lower airfare, possibly better services onboard, and increasing small city services, and opening new hubs. This is a nation that lets everyone have opportunities, and by doing this, we can help America thrive, so everyone shares the skies, not just one person owning them.

Works Cited

Where the Forgotten Goes

By Katherine Sargent
Hopkins School, Grade 11

Quite often, it was the “2a” part of the quadratic formula, or that word for the little plastic on the end of your shoelaces, or the name of the person you were meeting for the third time. Sometimes it was the rest of the poem from which you remembered three lines after reciting it in the second grade for a school-wide competition. A good amount of the time, it was the dates of the Boer War or a whole slew of birthdays.

More and more often, it was the look of the ravaged sea after a storm, or the touch of snow on reddened fingers in early December, or the title of the song that was the soundtrack of your freshman year. Or the soft pinch of sand between your toes, or the book you had read so many times as a teenager that its pages were worn as wrinkled skin, or the smell of the pillows at your grandmother’s house – a house that no longer stands.

It was easy to catalogue math formulas and history facts and even names, all alphabetically and numerically and very logically, within the filing cabinets.

But the less reasonable, the less tangible, the less real things became, the harder it became to store them away neatly and definitively. How, really, could one file the exact color of your lover’s sun-soaked hair when she was seventeen into the same cabinet as the color “auburn”? An aspiring writer’s frustration at losing this helpful word for reddish-brown in a character’s description would never equal the old man’s desperation to remember how his wife had seemed to absorb all the warmth of the sun into her red hair, when now it lay flat and white over her decaying brain.

Nor could the same exact lines memorized from a Shakespearean sonnet mean the same thing to a sixth grader hoping for an “A” on his oral recitation than to a twenty-something year old looking back fondly on his first girlfriend, feeling vaguely irritated that he can’t remember the poem he recited to her.

It’s even harder when the feeling is so unique that an entirely new cabinet must be constructed. The feelings of sunshine and rain, for example. The thousands of strains those feelings could take accounted for almost half the budget of the cabinet funds. One could be a sickly child who had been in bed for so long that the warmth of a sun was so far removed from his brain that it perhaps wasn’t even there anymore. There might be a man wandering a desert island who had so lost himself from the world that even rain was a foreign idea to him. A personal favorite is the businesswoman, trapped at her desk from before the first rays of the sun appeared until the yolky ball had slipped below the horizon, who, until she held her first child in her arms, misremembered the warmth and security that a greater power provides.
There is, of course, a section of cabinets devoted to what people wish would remain here. Those cabinets are filled with Facebook pictures from 2008, walking in on your significant other cheating on you, the chorus from that cursed Top 50 pop song, the cologne your ex always wore, the mortifying pictures of your uncle at the Christmas party, that feeling you got when someone now long-gone smiled at you.

It’s all here.

When people think their thoughts are grabbed out right from under their noses, when the word you need for this sentence seems to simply disappear, when the equation for the molar mass of a compound is nowhere to be found, it is indeed to be found right here.

When it’s time for it to come back to you – and only you have that power – you must understand we rejoice. It is a true pleasure to be able to hurry to that cabinet, snatch that unfinished sentence or half of a formula or color of the storm-torn sky, and relinquish it. It is always our hope, even as hundreds of millions of things pour into our headquarters every second, that we will be able to send back just one of them to its owner.

It is not our place to hold your thoughts. We remember where each and every one of your ideas goes. We give it the utmost care and attention in the hopes that maybe if we can catalogue it just a little bit more clearly, order things a bit better – for we are constantly reordering – or create a new cabinet just for you, that it will return to you all the sooner. After all, these are your most valuable possessions. These are some of the very few things that wholly and irrevocably belong to you.

To wish for something to be sent here takes a very strong mind indeed. I cannot comprehend fearing or hating something so much that I would wish it removed from my own mind. Losing the power of your mind, which comes only from losing the power of the things within it, is the thing I fear most.

Only once have I ever considered cataloguing away one of my own thoughts. Within our headquarters, it is, of course, entirely unethical; most frowned upon indeed. I have known some workers to do so, and they were immediately let go. But I also know that these people had weighed the consequences of living with that thought forever with the inevitability of losing their livelihood. And for them, and quite possibly for me, they chose the latter.

I’m sure, at this point, that you can guess what I most wish gone.

I wish to forget how to forget. I wish that none of my thoughts would ever be placed in those forsaken cabinets without my say in it. I wish the powers of my mind will not be picked over and scrutinized to discern just where they should be tucked away, as if they were just another bit of work for one of my coworkers. I know, of course, that forgetting is unavoidable; we get older, we make new thoughts, we lose room for old ones. They might come back, and they might not. I know I cannot ever forget to forget.

But perhaps the next best would be being able to forget that I will forget. If I never have to know that my mind will lose its powers someday; if I never have to fear that debilitation, I could live a happy life. Watching all these poor people forget has taken a toll on me. If I don’t have to realize that the same will happen to me, what a carefree life I would lead!

Of course I will then never know the disappointment when one thought leaves my mind. I will also never know that delight when it returns to me. Better still would be if I could forget the difference between the two.
Ancient Histrionics

By Caroline Jeffers
Rockville High School, Grade 11

Nathaniel: Senior who plays Octavius Caesar. The ex-boyfriend of Nichole, he is very smug, laid back, and enjoys messing with others for the sake of anarchy.

Dylan: Senior who plays Sextus Pompey. Nathaniel's partner in crime, Dylan has severe senior-itus, and wants to end his final year of High School with a bang.

Nichole: Junior who plays Cleopatra. A high-maintenance control freak, she strives to re-earn Nathaniel's love, and has to get everything done her way.

Sterling: Junior who plays Mark Antony. Works with tech crew, he gets violent mood swings from being stressed all the time, and doesn't care how stuff gets done so long as it gets done.

Lisa: Sophomore who plays Octavia. Humble and shy, her main role lies backstage where she works as a background and make-up artist, along with a costume designer.

Ezekiel: Sophomore who plays the Soothsayer. A logical thinker and a great problem solver, he works backstage where he assists Sterling with tech and Lisa (his crush)

Vincent: Freshman who plays Lepidus. Excited to be in high school, Vincent is well intentioned (if a little naïve) and wants to please everyone.

Seamus: Freshman who plays Enobarbus. Got roped into doing the play by Vincent, and considers himself too cool for drama or Shakespeare.

Setting: (The curtain opens to reveal LISA quietly listening to music while she paints one of the backgrounds. Two tables littered with props and a clothing rack draped with bed-sheets stands off to the side. EZEKIEL sits in a corner texting and STERLING sits in front of the stage making sure all the sound equipment is working.)

STERLING: All right guys, the sound's all set. (to LISA) How are the backgrounds coming?

LISA: I'm on the last one right now. I accidentally got paint on one of the sheets though, so whoever uses it for their toga better make sure the spot is on the inside.

STERLING: That can be Seamus's toga then, because he never shows up for rehearsal.

EZEKIEL: Speaking of not coming to rehearsal, I got a text from Dylan saying that he's not coming.

STERLING: Please tell me you're joking; this is our final rehearsal!

EZEKIEL: Sadly, no. According to Nathaniel, it has something to do with the senior prank they played getting him into trouble. (His phone vibrates) We have an update from the office! And (He squints at his phone) Nathaniel's trying to get him out of suspension.

LISA: That's just great. Now we've got one of our main characters in I.S.S.

EZEKIEL: Actually, it's O.S.S. He just texted me they're trying to get out of it.

STERLING: I thought they wouldn't give O.S.S for something like a senior prank.

EZEKIEL: Does it matter if he got I.S.S. or O.S.S? Either way, Dylan's A-S-S is in trouble.

STERLING: So our seniors are in the office, and our freshmeat—I mean men—aren’t here. Where's Nichole?

EZEKIEL: She just texted me she's on her way—

(The auditorium doors open. NATHANIEL comes sprinting in and jumps on the stage panting. DYLAN comes staggering in after him holding up a coconut bra and grass skirt.)

DYLAN: Ha ha! You'll never take us alive coppers! (jumps onto the stage and sighs) That was fun.

NATHANIEL: Not the best prank, but definitely entertaining.

STERLING: (Sniffs the air) You guys smell fruity. Do I want to know what you guys did for your prank?

NATHANIEL: We made a slip n' slide beach day in the hallway.

LISA: How'd you manage that one?

DYLAN: Easy, we just put plastic wrap on the floor and brought in beach balls and stuff.

NATHANIEL: We placed 'wet floor' signs by the stairs and in the hallways so people would know, and we cleaned up after ourselves, so I don't know why they yelled at us.
LISA: Wait, where'd the slip n' slide come from?
DYLAN: Oh, we just poured a bit of water on the plastic wrap, covered ourselves with lotion, and voila! Indoor fun in the sun.
NATHANIEL: ‘The hallway’s never smelled cleaner, although we were apparently ‘disruptive.’ I told them we were originally all going to bring in alarm clocks, hide them around the school and set them off for different times which would have been even more disruptive.
DYLAN: And since we didn’t hurt ourselves or anyone or cause any damage, and since it’s the end of the year and no one cares, they just let us go. (Looks around) Are we missing people?
LISA: Vincent and Seamus aren’t here yet, and neither is Nichole, but she said that she’s on her way. Hopefully she finds our freshmen while she’s at it.
NATHANIEL: Freshmen. They think they know everything. I don’t mind going without Nichole and her antics on how I (scrunches up face and speaks in high pitched voice) “ruined her life and all the greatness of high school!”
LISA: She’s so dramatic. For someone who’s doing so well in science, you’d think she’d figure out by now that the world doesn’t revolve around her.
DYLAN: I thought she broke up with you.
NATHANIEL: She did, but somehow, it’s my fault, and the entire male race is to blame. First she cries over the break up, and then says: Who needs men? (Nichole enters) Well look who’s here.
LISA: I don’t want to see where this goes. Well, I need to go finish the settings. Call me if you need me.
(nshe exits)
NICHOLE: You should all be in costume. Go get changed, while I go to the bathroom—
NATHANIEL: We’re not doing costumes until later. We’re starting right now—
NICHOLE: Well I have to go, and you’re not going to rehearse without me.
STERLING: You were just in the bathroom doing your make-up, why didn’t you go then?
EZEKIEL: Hmm . . . to pee, or not to pee . . .
NATHANIEL: I hear that’s the question.
NICHOLE: Knock it off Ezekiel. Respect your upper-classmen.
EZEKIEL: (To himself) Why, Cleopatra doth be stride the narrow world like a Colossus, and we petty sophomores peep around her huge ego to find ourselves as her dishonorable slaves.
NICHOLE: Don’t start without me.
(she exits)
NATHANIEL: Great rehearsing with you sweetheart!
DYLAN: She seems to be in a pissy mood today. What scene do you want to do before our overlord returns?
STERLING: We could do the party at the end of the second act; she’s not in that scene.
EZEKIEL: But Lepidus and Enobarbus are, and Vincent and Seamus aren’t here.
DYLAN: We don’t need them—Lepidus gets so drunk he passes out and gets carried off stage anyway, and we can just wing it without Enobarbus. We just need to practice being drunk.
STERLING: Just laugh and giggle a lot and pretend like you know what’s going on.
DYLAN: We’re seniors, we do that anyway.
NATHANIEL: (Drags table to center of the stage) Friends, Romans, Countrymen—I Octavius Caesar formally invite you all to a feast I like to call: Act 2 scene 7.
EZEKIEL: You guys don’t need me for this right? (no one responds to him) Okay . . . I guess I’ll go backstage and see if Lisa needs help.
(he exits)
NATHANIEL: We don’t have to do this line for line yet since it’s just the three of us right now. Just practice doing this in your best drunk man voice. (Pours grape juice into small cups on the table) Cheers my good Romans!
(They all take a drink)
DYLAN: I bet I can drink more than you Octavius!
NATHANIEL: I highly doubt it Pompey, but I’ll take a ‘shof’ at your drinking game.
DYLAN: It’s so nice for us noble Romans to be able to settle this through a truce.
NATHANIEL: That's because we're Romans and we're the best.
STERLING: Of course we are! Screw the Egyptians!
DYLAL: Pardon me for asking—Has that not been your battle strategy all along Antony? *(STERLING narrows his eyes while NATHANIEL chokes on his drink and falls out of his chair laughing and coughing)*
Dear me, it appears Caesar is dying under the influence. *(NICHOLE enters, with VINCENT and SEAMUS behind her)* Don't break character—let's convince her we're all really drunk!
NICHOLE: Nathaniel! Are you okay? Did Dylan push you?
DYLAL: *(drunken giggling)* They think he's fine. Why, the drinks wine!
NICHOLE: What's that supposed to mean?
SEAMUS: Who cares what it means?
NICHOLE: Don't even make a comment Seamus. You don't have any of your lines memorized, so I don't want to even hear you talk unless you're working on your lines.
STERLING: *(staggers over to NICHOLE and throws an arm across her shoulder)* Don't worry about the little freshie.
*(offers Vincent a drink and winks)* Shots Lepidus!
VINCENT: *(Instantly gets into character)* Sure thing Antony! *(takes one sip and passes out, accidentally breaking a chair. STERLING immediately stops laughing; EZEKIEL enters)*
STERLING: Oh my God, what did you just do?
NATHANIEL: He's just trying to be funny. Hey, maybe we should do a theatrics performance on puns!
DYLAL: *(more giggling)* Don't 'ya mean a play on words?
STERLING: Vincent, you just broke the chair! What are we going to do? What if we don't have another?
NICHOLE: First you show up late to practice, and then you smash the sets!
VINCENT: I'm sorry guys, I didn't mean to—
EZEKIEL: Don't worry, we've got more chairs in the back—
STERLING: What are we going to do now? What if we don't have any extra seats?
EZEKIEL: I just said there are more in the back. Nichole, why did you rush to see if Nathaniel was okay after he fell, but you yell at Vincent for falling?
NICHOLE: *(blushes)* Because Vincent looked like he was okay.
VINCENT: Don't worry about it guys. I just got a few scrapes.
NATHANIEL: Vincent, your nose is bleeding.
SEAMUS: If it's bad, I can take him down to the nurse or something—
NICHOLE: Oh no you don't Seamus. You're staying right here until you learn your lines. Vincent, go take care of your nose.
VINCENT: Okay guys, I'll be right back. *(He exits)*
SEAMUS: I do have some of my lines memorized.
NICHOLE: Oh really? Like which ones?
SEAMUS: *(smirks)* Under a compelling occasion, let women die. I've seen Cleopatra claim to be dying twenty times before, and for far less reason. I think there must be something invigorating about death, since she dies with such enthusiasm.
NICHOLE: *(unimpressed)* Wow, you've memorized one whole monologue.
SEAMUS: Oh, I also memorized Enobarbus saying: When a man's wife dies, he can be comforted by the knowledge that there are replacements to be found.
DYLAL: Amen to that. Shots!
*(offers a cup to SEAMUS, but NICHOLE smacks it out of his hand)*
NICHOLE: Enough of your stupid grape juice—
DYLAL: It's not stupid grape juice: It's a heavenly and sacred drink poured into golden goblets from blessed Bacehus himself who decided to let us humble men get drunk.
NATHANIEL: The great and mighty gods knew even then the only way to cope with women was through blacking out and hangovers.
STERLING: *(laughs)* I'm going to be so sad when you guys leave here after graduation.
NICHOLE: Stop with the sexist remarks. There's a reason why male and mule differ by only one letter: They're both a half-ass of a creation.
NATHANIEL: Yeah, because that wasn’t a sexist comment at all.
STERLING: You’re the only jerk around here. Just because you’re playing Shakespeare’s most over-the-top female character doesn’t mean you get to boss everyone around.
DYLAN: I guess you could say Cleopatra is . . . a drama queen!
NICHOLE: Enough of the puns and cracks! And you’re just as self-centered as me.
NATHANIEL: Really? Well if you want to hear something self-centered and cold-hearted, why don’t you share with us the nice break up texts you sent me, and then the ones you sent after those when I refused to reply.
NICHOLE: Well maybe if you didn’t ignore me—
NATHANIEL: Well maybe if somebody actually had the guts to talk to me rather than pretend everything was fine and then flip out on me the second I couldn’t read your mind—
EZKIEL: Why don’t we all just calm down? Nichole, why don’t we just let Seamus use cue cards to read off his lines? If he has parts of them memorized, it’s better than nothing, and he can just read off of them when he needs to.
NICHOLE: But that’s not professional—
STERLING: Who cares if it looks professional? So long as we can perform this play.
NICHOLE: Fine, but it’ll look terrible. Seamus, go write your lines down.

(Seamus exits. VINCENT comes on stage)
VINCENT: Do you guys need me for anything?
EZKIEL: Not right now. All right then. We should rehearse the first naval battle since we’re actually going to stage the battle unlike in the play where they just talk about it. I’m going to go set up the fog machine while you guys get into costume. Make sure to turn your microphones on. (he exits)
VINCENT: You guys found a way to do it?
STERLING: Yes, and it’s going to be unbelievable. Nichole, you can sit out the first round and watch from the audience with Vincent and Dylan. Tell us if everything looks okay.

(NICHOLE, DYLAN, and VINCENT move to the floor in front of the stage. STERLING and NATHANIEL get changed into costume. The lights dim, and fog drifts onto the stage. STERLING and NATHANIEL begin to pace the stage in a circle)
NATHANIEL: (Speaking in a deep dramatic voice) I should have known you would abandon Rome for something as low as a woman Antony.
STERLING: You kicked Lepidus out of the triumvirate, and you have the nerve to talk to me about a move that is low?
NATHANIEL: You like to gamble Antony. Let us see if fate sees things the way you do.
STERLING: Then let this naval battle commence! Prepare your fleet!

(They exit to opposite sides of the stage)
DYLAN: (Whispers excitedly to NICHOLE) Just wait, this is going to be fantastic.

(NATHANIEL and STERLING approach each other from opposite sides of the stage in cardboard boxes)
STERLING: Come Cleopatra! Toga-ther, we can rule the world!
NATHANIEL: (Pulls out a light-saber and points it at STERLING) Nobody can defeat me!
STERLING: (Pulls out his own light-saber) COME AT ME CAESAR SALAD!
NICHOLE: I’m going to stop you guys right there. (She jumps onto the stage.)
STERLING: So you’re joining us? Great! There’s an extra box for you backstage—
NICHOLE: No, I am not joining you. (She starts coughing) Alright, first of all, you guys need to chill with the fog. Second, what kind of a battle is this?

(LISA, VINCENT, and EZKIEL enter)
STERLING: It’s a low budget production. What were you expecting us to do, flood the stage?
NICHOLE: These boxes are just pathetic as boats.
LISA: I was planning on painting them.
NICHOLE: And what would that do? Absolutely nothing. And you guys can’t fight with light-sabers.
VINCENT: If that’s what you want, I can try and find something else for us to use—
EZKIEL: No you won’t Vincent. Nichole, you do nothing but boss everyone around. I get that you’re a junior, I get that you’re stressed out, but all you’re doing is getting yourself worked up over nothing. It shouldn’t matter
if Seamus has his lines memorized—he’s only doing this play for the sake of Vincent. If he can put passion to his words, I don’t care if they’re memorized or not, so long as the audience gets his emotion. And the play itself can be performed as either tragic or comedic. So why not be tragic when we need to be tragic, and have some fun with the play when we can have fun with it? The audience will remember it more, and we can enjoy ourselves more. Everyone here is giving their all into putting this performance on, especially Lisa who paints like Monet—I guess she’s working on her best “impression” of him. The least you could do is show some respect. If you don’t like what we’re doing, then just go home. Be a sour sport and pout all you want, but we’re going to enjoy our high school experience.

NICHOLE: Fine, I will go home. Good luck finding someone to play your lead character.

(She starts to leave, but pauses for someone to object)

NATHANIEL: If you think I’m going to chase you down honey bunches, you’d be gravely mistaken.

NICHOLE: All I wanted was for this to be the perfect high school romance—

STERLING: Oh bite me. The course of true love never did run smooth.

(EZEKIEL and LISA grin. NICHOLE exits angrily)

NATHANIEL: Spoken just like Cleopatra herself. She’s like the devil; I don’t know why Antony stuck with her.

EZEKIAL: Well, the devil hath power to assume a pleasing shape.

VINCENT: What are we going to do now? We still need someone to play Cleopatra.

LISA: Why not let Ezekiel do it? He knows every Shakespearean play inside and out.

NATHANIEL: Works for me. We can have one of the extras play the soothsayer.

EZEKIEL: I’ll do it if Sterling’s comfortable with it.

STERLING: If it means the show goes on, I’m fine with it. Let’s hear your best Cleopatra voice.

EZEKIEL: (speaks high pitched) Hotheaded comedians will stage impromptu impersonations of us and depict the celebrations we had in Alexandria. Antony will be portrayed as a drunk, and I’ll see some boy with a squeaking voice portray me.

STERLING: (wipes away fake tear) I’m proud to call you my serpent of the Nile.

EZEKIEL: More like your serpent heart hid with a flowering face. Now Antony, (he lays across the stage on his side) I want you to draw me like one of your Roman girls.

STERLING: Only if we can do one thing after this play.

EZEKIEL: What’s that?

DYLAN & NATHANIEL: Toga party!

ALL: Toga! Toga! Toga!

(They exit)

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My Journey

By Lola Rittlinger

Braeburn Elementary School, Grade 4
When It’s Too Cold for Flowers

By Banicole Wilson
Arts at the Capitol Theater, Grade 12

ten thousand birds release screams over our heads.
my father, whose permanent residence is the hospital
as of last April,
tells me that all that has ever mattered will soon vanish
into the bed sheets of yesterday.
yesterday’s bed sheets are red as peppers.
he had an accident;
“but don’t tell your mother,” he says. “it will worry her
sick.”
the doctor told her anyway. the doctor is a bastard with
a PHD.
in my opinion. he’s a Grade A grad school farce with bad
facial hair. when he told us about the tumor, he asked
how my day was going with a big damn grin.
my mother did worry.
sometimes I tuck myself behind the curtains in my father’s
room,
windowpanes pressing against my back, a dare to God,
let me fall. go ahead.
bees never fall. they bumble their fat, full-bellied selves
along,
air currents crossing them. they have no right to fly.
autumn sings; soon it will be too cold for flowers.
he talks in his sleep.
philosophical folks never seem scared, it seems,
even as nurses rush into the piercing sound of beeps.
how many are left?
they are chimes that seethe my ears. out from behind
curtains,
I am running. sometimes I sit in bathroom stalls,
my hands over my head, cursing to the sick’s graffiti
one note reads: I miss him.
I want a pen, a knife. anything. I need to scratch
a reply into the door, sign my death warrant.
because. because I can’t; and
the coldest cranny in hell is reserved for daughters like
me.
returning, I take a seat beside his bed, my smile ironed
flat.
he takes my hand so close they’ll bury him with it.

“do you hear them?”
the birds, he’s asking. I glance out the window.
dozens of identical black shapes flash past.
“migrating month, my dear.”
I grimace, unsettled by the overhead shrieking.
they remind me more of the shadows than dancers,
more of a reaper shredded into fragments than
a flock in flight.
he explains their inborn ability to detect magnetic
fields,
croaking words I don’t know. a bird skitters across the
glass.
the doctor gave him four months.
somehow, he’s stretched his tired lifeline taut over half
a year,
an impressive feat for a guy whose only claim to fame
is the children he’s raised, the wisdom he’s relayed.
the factory laid him off when he got sick.
the funeral is already planned, a small procession,
hold the flowers, closed-casket, a few friends.
he said so.
my mother will remarry when he’s gone, he knows.
the house is already sold, his socks and bills burned.
I would cry, but bees still fight the frailty of gossamer
wings.
I will, too.
how many are left? like thunder, beeping shivers itself
into my brain, between curtains, bed sheets,
inescapable.
each month—a heartbeat,
and each heartbeat convinced that this is the last.
hiding does no good. the birds still shriek goodbyes:
do birds really shriek goodbyes? it is migrating month.
soon I will move on.
soon toe-tags will be bought and bed sheets will be
burned.
doctors forgiven, understood, forgotten.
autumn signs;
soon it will be too cold for flowers,
his voice too weak for tidy tirades.
the bathroom stalls will receive fresh paint,
and I will pretend not to miss him,
although I will. although I do.
Pledge of Allegiance

By Cassandra Schambach
Rockville High School, Grade 12

Every morning at school
Students rise, hand over heart,
And recite the Pledge of Allegiance

But I sit.
I sit respectfully and wait for them to be done
My voice has not joined their sea of monotony since I was in grade nine
And only recently have I received any questioning as to why

I’ve overheard assumptions being made
I must be “too tired,” “too lazy,” “too apathetic to care.”
When it’s quite the contrary, and more than a matter of wasting my air

I believe words hold a power that we cannot even begin to comprehend
They affect the people who hear them and the surrounding universe
From which each sound wave resonates
Words roll off the tongue with such buoyancy but are received with great burden
And like a river slithering down a hillside, with time and repetition
Words will change the landscape

I refuse to regurgitate words that were spoon fed to me
Before I could pronounce all of them
Let alone understand what they mean

I refuse to stand up day after day
And utter words with which I only halfheartedly agree
And let the power of these carefully strewn syllables taint my lips

Don’t get me wrong, I am proud to be an American
I was born in this country and I’ll likely be buried in its soil
But I am a child of the world
Who desires to play hide and seek in the Sahara
And sled down snowy slopes in Russia
Sip coffee in a Venetian café like I’m at my own kitchen table
And doze off under the galaxies as if the grass beneath me is the bed I have known for years

I do not dislike America; I do not disown these states as my home
But I will not dedicate myself to this nation, nor any other
I only dedicate myself to this planet and the beauty and good that I know is still present

I pledge allegiance
To myself and all that I believe in, and
To the Flag
I say fly freely and happily over the land
Of the United States of America
I must give thanks to this country
And to the Republic
Because here being different is okay and that is
For which it stands
But I cannot dedicate myself to just
One Nation
Or place myself
Under God
When that’s not my belief, I stand concrete in my thoughts,
Indivisible
In my actions
With Liberty
Permeating my existence
And Justice
Guiding my decisions, giving me strength to stand up
For all
That I believe in
And when they all settle back into their seats
I wonder
How many of them only do it because it’s a routine part of their day
Because we were taught this way
How many of them genuinely have found a space for themselves within the essence of that oath
How many take it seriously versus how many just want to hear their own voices
I wonder if there are any others who feel the way I do but don’t object
And stand up to say it anyway because they’re afraid of the after effect
I can just hope that there’s enough youth today not afraid to stray from the norm
To kick up a storm and challenge the ideas of others
To take their own path, think for themselves
Find their own voices and learn how to use them
Learn that words don’t just go away
The universe remembers what you say

Deadline

By Deanna Pellegrino
Rockville High School, Grade 12

The typewriter clicked beneath his fingertips, and the chair scraped the floorboards. The desk lamp cast a yellow glow over the shadows that lined the walls. He reminded himself that he had a deadline to meet, and hurriedly re-read what he had written.

Edward Francis Hale, 42, died on October 12, 1987, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Born May 11, 1946, Hale was orphaned at the young age of 7, after a house fire, which killed all of Hale’s immediate family.

His eyes glanced up and surveyed the disheveled room. Stacks upon stacks of papers covered every surface.

Hale grew up in his birth town of Cincinnati where he lived with his great-aunt Ellen Hale—now deceased—and delivered papers until he was fourteen.

The floor was an ocean of disorganization. The unmade bed floated upon the clutter like a lifeboat lost at sea. The small clock ticked quietly on the bedside table. Its thin hands read 10:16. His eyes lingered on its glass face.

Along with improper schooling, he read the papers he delivered and educated himself. Hale graduated at the top of his class and received the prestigious Ohio Outstanding Young Writer Award.

He removed his glasses, held them up to the light, wiped them clean. Top of the class—not bad, he thought. He checked the time. 10:19. Focus, he thought to himself.

At 20, Edward Hale began writing freelance journalist columns for The Daily News. By the time he was 24 he married Kathleen Alfano-Hale (23) and had a daughter, Marie Abigail Hale (i). After a tragic car accident in 1971 in which Edward’s wife and daughter were both killed, Edward moved to Pennsylvania.
“A year old. What a damn shame,” he said aloud. His voice sounded distant in the empty room.

_Hale then went on to write obituaries for The Pittsburgh Inquirer. He worked in his department for 16 years until the event of his untimely death._

That was all he'd written so far. 10:20. He was running out of time. He rubbed his tired eyes, hunched over his typewriter, and began typing once again.

_Edward Francis Hale was found dead in his apartment on the evening of October 12, 1987. Estimated time of death- 10:27 p.m._

His eyes darted to the clock. 10:25, it mocked.

_Hale was not a pleasant person, nor was he a good friend or neighbor—_

He thought for a moment, trying to find words that fit.

_ but Edward was, indeed, punctual. Hale is survived by no one. Funeral services will not be held._

With a click and a ding, he removed the sheet of paper from his typewriter, and laid it on his desk. 10:26. He breathed a sigh of relief, and his shoulders lost their tension. He made his deadline. He waited for the second hand to tick 30 seconds more before pulling the revolver out of his desk drawer, and turning off the light.

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_Enlisted_

_By Reanna Tumel_

_Stafford High School, Grade 12_

He enlisted. The words sounded hollow, lacking any substance. They echoed through his mind, empty all but for the salty sea he found himself drowning in. Whenever he stuck his head out of the water, took a deep breath of painfully sharp air, he was forced back under. By the waves, by his unshed tears. He was the one to drive himself there, to that office building, to that ugly brick place, and sign his name on the dotted line. No one forced him. It was his choice, and only his.

He enlisted.

The blood on his hands had dried. His own blood, he reminded himself. A tear finally trailed down his face, marking a path in the grime. It dripped down, off his chin, into his open hands. The stench of blood renewed itself. It was a smell he had become far too accustomed to. It made him uncomfortable, as if his skin was too tight.

His leg throbbed. He ignored it. That pain did not compare, barely noticeable, to the clawing from within his chest. He was being torn apart from the inside out, ragged and rusted nails laying waste to everything he had ever called his own. He felt like a slate wiped clean. All words scrawled on himself that he thought were permanent were really just...just chalk. A single bullet erased him, wholly and completely.

He deserved this, he muttered to an uncaring world. It was what he asked for.

The nights were never silent, not here, but the sounds of the forest were dulled, as if out of breath and as if it mourned with him. It didn't, but he could pretend. _His_ blood was no different to the thousands of others who had met their fate and watered the soil with red. _He_ was just another casualty, just another tally to add to the body count. The body count that just kept growing, growing, until everyone was lost.

He bit his cheeks to keep from screaming.

A shape crept towards him, blurred and monochromatic in the darkness. There were no stars tonight, not a one and he doubted he would see one shining ever again. A man—a boy, God, they were all boys—emerged. Willard, he thought, was his name.

He raised his eyes towards the newcomer, the rest of his body motionless. Willard's brow was furrowed, his hair matted over his forehead from the humidity. Not blood. There was no blood on him. Just dirt and sweat. The expression changed as he tilted his head. His mouth dropped open, a gaping emptiness.

"Is that... is that blood on your face?"

He nodded. There was, he knew. He could taste it.

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Willard moved forward, a morbid curiosity pulling him closer. Willard looked him in the face. He looked back. Willard's eyes went to the trembling leg, down to the body laying quiet, speechless. Back to the dead eyes of the breathing man. Willard—no, Wilson—stumbled back. His ashen grey face shaking. "Ah sh—," Willkerson said, loud enough to be heard by the men in a close enough range. "Smith, we got a bleeder and a stiff over here."

He laughed humorously. A bleeder and a stiff. That's what they had been reduced to, that's what this war had turned them into. A bleeder and a stiff.

He closed his eyes. The blackness provided no sanctuary. Even behind closed shutters he wasn't safe from the beast. It could sense him, sense the fear crawling on his skin. How would he survive this? How?

The blood would stain, he thought. If not on his skin, his soul.

The sun filtered down through the canopy of leaves, dancing on his skin as the branches swayed in the wind. He fought a smile. It wasn't appropriate to smile, today, not when they had lost five men. Five dead, not breathing, men. But he was smiling, his face burnt and dirty, as Silas sat sprawled on the forest floor, his lips twitching to hide his own levity. Max could see the light in the other's eyes despite the deadpanned face. Silas always had telling, truthful eyes.

A sob erupted from across the camp. Someone hushed him. Max bit down on his lip, his teeth leaving rugged imprints in the soft skin. He lowered his eyes, focusing on his feet. This was war. This was a place of blood and death and sorrow and do or die. It was hard to remember when he had brought such a big piece of home with him to this foreign land, this beautiful, ugly land.

There was relative silence. Silas raised an eyebrow, a cigarette at his lips. He waited a moment before leaning forward, his lips curled mischievously, "Now, Max, as I was saying—"

Max would later forget what Silas had said to elicit a laugh that bubbled up from his chest. It earned him a glare from the one with a missing finger and a missing friend. He would forget the color of the sky, the name of the new recruit weeping for forgiveness, the news on the radio behind him. He forgot it all, but he would never forget the last smile he saw on Silas's face, a face covered in scars only he could see.

His first thought that popped up in his mind, in his sleep hazed consciousness, was that the ground smelled like his Aunt Margaret's garden, of rich soil and chives. The next was that he was being shaken awake with rough hands, hands that encircled his arms entirely.

Max jolted up. Ambush? Attack? Morning? He opened his eyes to nothing. All was quiet. All was calm. His eyes focused on a face lit by the embers of a dying smoke.

"Silas?" His voice cracked in his attempt to whisper. He was confused, so confused. It was the dead of night and all he could think of was summer squash and legs lying missing from their owners. "Why—why are we awake?"

"I wanted to talk to you about something, is all." Max felt his stomach drop. Something was wrong. There was something off about the air, about the shape in front of him. He could see it in the glistening eyes. Silas had been crying.

"Yah, and why the hell couldn't it wait til morning?" He tried to stay calm, but his voice had an edge of frantic desperation. He felt the sudden urge to run, run away from Silas, from camp, from everything until he collapsed.

"Just couldn't."

There was a long silence. Max refused to break it. This was Silas' doing, this was his to finish. They stared at each other for long minutes. It was hard to breath. He blamed it on the air.

"Maxy, I wouldn't be doing this if it weren't important. I know you need your beauty sleep to keep up that clear complexion of yours, but..." He trailed off. There was no humor in his voice. His smile made him look even more broken than Max knew he already was.

Cold fingers gripped his wrist. He attempted to flee, but the hands were iron. "Look, I just wanna get my affairs in order, in case something was to happen to me, is all." There was a pause. Max held his breath. "If I die and you don't, you gotta promise me, you gotta, that you'll tell my family I love 'em. Tell Annie I lover her. But this ring in my pocket?" He pulled out a piece of metal unceremoniously, held it by his fingertips. "Don't
give it to her. If she's gonna miss me for what we had, I don't want her to miss me for what we could have been."

Max's lip trembled. Silas continued on, his voice ragged, unholy. "If I don't make it...I want you to keep it. Give it to a girl. Put it in a goddamn drawer. I don't care, see, I just don't. But I want you to have it. I want to spare Annie the pain, and I want you to know that you're always going to be my brother."

His mind raced back to the third grade, back to childish proclamations and bleeding thumbs.

"You promise me that, Max?"

Max nodded. He felt the sudden urge to throw up.

"Right. One more thing, okay? Just one more thing and you better listen close. If I die, don't survive."

He breathed out, his chest shaking. "Live."

When he woke up the next morning to a laughing face it was easy to convince himself that it had been a twisted dream, and nothing more.

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Max held the bloodied metal in his palm. He wanted to burn it, the wretched thing. He wanted to burn himself. But he couldn't because he enlisted. He signed himself up. He received everything that he asked for and more.

The voice whispered softly.

His best friend was drafted, and he enlisted.

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A Dog, a Sweater, and my Fundamental Understanding of the Universe

By Cameron Hines
Notre Dame High School, Grade 12

Fear stretched its way across my mother's face. Nothing in the six parenting self-help books provided any solution to the wails of agony coming from her son in the living room. Her cry of, "I don't know what to do with him, Mum!" flashed through the telephone wires to my equally confused grandparents in Massachusetts, all the while my trembling toddler form was beating helplessly on the dilapidated furniture. Nothing my mother could do would soothe my devastated psyche. My world had ended. The apocalypse had come. Steve was leaving Blue's Clues.

Prior to the cataclysmic events of 2002, Blue's Clues has been to me what football still is to Texas: an obsession, a religion, a way of life. It was part of my daily routine: Breakfast, Blue's Clues, preschool, Blue's Clues, lunch, chores, dinner, Blue's Clues. I watched each episode with the same focus detectives have at a crime scene, memorizing and mastering every puzzle to the delight of the show's producers. My mother's sole instruction to babysitters was simple: "Put on Blue's Clues and do NOT change the channel." Failure to obey her warning brought upon the harshest hell a five-year-old could muster.

The show began to seep into my character. The first few habits were innocent enough for the family photo book: albums upon albums of me, sitting in the family armchair with a paw-print notebook, pretending to be Steve. However, the most disturbing, if ironic, effect was that my worldview at five years was shaped by the show. Blue's Clues, like most children's shows, was formulaic, and I relished the predictability. There were always three clues, always a thinking chair, and always Steve in the same, green-striped sweater. A pattern. Unending. Unbreaking.

So, as logic would dictate, I began to assume the world also followed a similar pattern. To my innocent self, this seemed like an accurate assumption. Each day followed a pattern: home, preschool, and home again, punctuated briefly by half-hours of smiling Steve and his dog, Blue. In my mind, there was no world—only three or four abstract points liked by the interior of a Dodge Caravan. Satisfied with myself, this primitive worldview lasted for the first two years of my conscious life.

Steve's fateful departure tore my caricature of life to shreds. After my seemingly endless tantrum, my mother was forced to explain why on Earth Steve would leave the comfort of his fictional house for some far-flung mystery called a "college." Finally, after a great deal of crying, "I'm never going to college!" I begrudgingly accepted that I, too, would one day leave my cherished armchair and handle the world without scripted prompts.
In that moment, my mind expanded and never returned to its original dimensions. The vague shapes beyond the windows of my mother's minivan became concrete, and soon I began to see the world for what it truly was: shifting, dynamic, exciting. Instead of preparing for another slog through my repetitive cycle, I began searching for new and interesting things to experience: food, people, games—all the things that marvel the youngest of minds. Life wasn’t a television show to be repeated five times a week; it was a blank canvas for me to paint as I pleased.

Eventually, my newfound appreciation for the unknown carried me through kindergarten; my endless chimes of “What's that?” a constant strain on my teacher's mental health. Although my favorite subjects have become slightly more complex (albeit not nearly as difficult as Kindergarten art class), I still carry the same juvenile sense of curiosity I discovered twelve years ago. While Blue’s Clues ended roughly eight years ago, it is safe to say I will still be singing its praises, academically or otherwise, for the foreseeable future. My mother, as you can presume, is undoubtedly thrilled by hearing more of “that stupid blue dog and the idiot in the green sweater.”

Livsnjutare

By Delaney Rhoades
RHAM High School, Grade 12

Livsnjutare "enjoyer of life"

What does a plane ticket mean to you? What does it make you think of?

Where would you go?

Not only what do you think of and where, but why?

Have you been there before or have only dreamed of it to explore?

Or to find a new life?

I presume you are waiting for me to tell you about an encounter with a plane ticket, or multiple ones, but this is merely a story that begins with a flight. It is my experience. My bittersweet experience that gave me the eyes to a new world. A story of the love that I acquired for Spain and everyone in it; a love story, perhaps.

I can’t remember how I came to sign up for the trip, but I wanted a change. I didn’t realize the change it would cause in me either. The mere thought of being across the world for a fresh moment; meeting a new family, learning about a different culture, and experiencing an unknown place made me crave a touch of time away from home. Thus, every chance I got, I said yes to Córdoba, Spain. Little did I know I would go back a few months later.

There were skyscrapers touching into the clouds, cobblestone under my feet, friendly people and beautiful trees to fill the clean air. We toured Madrid for two days. Our large group explored in awe, shopping and eating in lively Spain. Then came the time to take the train and reunite with our hosts. I met Celia back in November when she came to stay with me and explore my little town; three months later, I got to meet her family and experience her world. Even though we had met only briefly, she had quickly become a sister to me. I could not contain my yearning to be with her again, because with her, I am content.

The train was only an hour trip, but the nerves and excited talk made the journey drag. Then it was over after a slow stop that a rush of people spilled out of the train, hurried with motion. Our mob of friends walked cautiously through the doors into this unfamiliar world, hearts in our hands, to be greeted by the faces that we were longing for...

A crowd of people standing and jumping, ready to overflow.

Of course, I could only focus on my chosen sister, Celia. I will never forget her high-pitched squeal of joy when she spotted me.

Hugs, kisses, and “holas” embraced me as we finally reconnected. Meeting Celia’s mother and sister, I
could feel the love emanating off their bodies toward me. It felt amazing to be somewhere across the world and having a new family who generously welcomed me into their life.

My routine started the same everyday: get to school at seven in the morning with eyes half open and then climb onto the buses with our sister or brother to drive to the destination of the day. We shopped in the cities of Granada, Segovia, Córdoba, and my personal favorite, Seville. Also we ate. A lot. Eating in Spain is an exceptional experience and it made me feel like royalty: chocolate and churros, a snack the size of lunch complete with a complimentary chocolate mystery dessert, followed by a sumptuous lunch and delicious late night dinner.

The food was rich and filled with love, and always had a side of bread. I grew accustomed to the necessary coffee breaks once a day, which served to warm our bodies and as an escape from the busy busy activities every hour. To end the day, there were many celebrations, dinners, and exciting events. I was also fortunate to attend a costume party for Valentine’s Day. Dancing dinner parties and farewell presentations filled our evenings. Of course, these events meant there was more marvelous food.

Each day was beautiful, even if the sun was not out. Even the hidden beams of sun could not have embellished more the pure beauty of Spain. The fogged light still brightened the buildings that opened up to the sky with their architecture. In each city the flowers guided us with their color and smell. I tried to soak up every place I went so I could try to explain these places to my family in the States but I knew I could not come close, because it was beautiful beyond words.

Thankful for my camera, and its amazing amount of storage, I took pictures of anything and everything I saw: colors, shiny, bright, red, yellow, blue, and white. Flowers, trees, gardens, rivers, picturesque landscapes and the people walking.

The people.

They say “a house isn’t a house until the people inside make it a home,” and Sr. Oliver Wendell Holmes said, “where we love is home—home that our feet may leave, but not our hearts.”

Celia is someone whom I shared a beautiful bond and her sister is the cutest, most caring creature. Her mother acts as if she is my own and although the communication between she and I was slim, love and appreciation made words unnecessary in our relationship. This family is what led to my return six months later. It was as if my invasion of their home was a gift to them that they had been waning. They loved me as if I were their own child.

So I went back.

I earned enough money for my ticket and ran off with a good friend. We said our nervous goodbyes and “adios” to our families in the Boston airport. Happy tears flooded the airport as we reunited with our Spain families. Finally my heart was at rest.

We played with splashing water and laughed under the scorching summer sun. Spending each day happy and at ease. I saw my dearest friends from February and the same ones I met in November; and fell in love with them all over again.

Names of Celia, Maria, Sergio, Marta, two more Celia’s, Adri, and those two uncles, an aunt, three cute little cousins, a grandfather, a wonderful dad, Vicky, another Ismael, Shahi.

Names now danced in my head.

It was not like it was in February, it was better.

For those three weeks my heart was full and delighted in Spain. Time was precious with this family. They taught me not only a new language and culture, but they gave me new love I could not have experienced any other way. They gave me love for life and family.
Livsnjutare is Swedish for someone who loves life deeply and lives it to the extreme. It's an "enjoyer of life." This is what I have become from my adventures because of a couple of tickets to Spain.

One ticket brought me across the North Atlantic to a warm flat in the outskirts of Córdoba, Spain, into the arms of many people I came to know and love, with all my heart.

One ticket.

And now, until I am able to run off again with a new ticket to reunite with my second family and a new adventure, I will wait and hold tight to the memories made.

---

Two Halves Make a Soul

By Trevor Seiders
Rockville High School, Grade 12

FADE IN: EXT. FARMHOUSE - MIDDAY
CUT TO: INT. BEDROOM - MIDDAY
Establishing shot: A man sitting at a desk, back to the camera. You can see the man in the chair and most of the desk. There is a framed picture on the desk.
Close on: The man's aged hand while he writes with a pen.
MAN (V.O.): When I was young, I bought land. It took some time to save enough money, but it was well worth the wait.
Wide shot: Bedroom, with desk next to window. The man is still writing.
MAN (CONT'D): Every year I watched the fields grow, brought in the harvest. It was one of the great joys of my life, along with my wonderful family.
Close on: Picture. It is a portrait of the man's wife and his two sons.
CUT TO: Establishing shot: The family taking the picture. The wife is smiling the two boys are jostling in front of her. One of the boys looks to the camera, and speaks warmly. The man is not in frame.
SON: Come on, Dad. Take the picture!

2.
MAN (O.S.): (chuckling) Alright, alright, here we go. Say 'cheese' everyone!
WIFE + SONS: Cheese!
CUT TO: Close on: The picture on the desk again.
MAN (V.O.): But I am old now. My beard is grey and my bones are brittle. My sons do almost everything now, while I lie in bed disheveled and dispirited.
CUT TO: Close on: The window. Outside, two young boys are awkwardly harvesting wheat, using scythes. It is clear that the scythes are too big for them to use.
FADE TO: Same shot, only the two boys are now young men. They handle the scythes with ease, harvesting quickly. One young man shouts something to the other. His brother laughs then continues working.
MAN (CONT'D): I once feared they would leave me for the war, but... (chuckles) I need not have worried. And I don't much, anymore—worry, that is.
Close on: Man's hand. He pauses for a moment, coughs heavily then resumes writing.

3.
MAN (CONT'D): I have lived a good life. A full life. I know it will be the end soon, so I write here to remember the choices I've made, the things I've done...
Wide shot: Same as before
MAN (CONT'D): I suppose it is best to start from the beginning, for memory's sake. I remember the least from then, of course. (Man sits up straight, seemingly in thought, then hunches over the desk once more)
MAN (CONT'D): There are, however, a few things I remember quite clearly...
Dissolve To: EXT. TENT - MIDDLE OF NIGHT Establishing shot: Man's shadow is visible against the outside of the tent behind him, with a fire burning in front of him. The man's face is shadowed.
(The man sits and listens to the crackle of the fire for a few moments, then speaks.)
MAN TWO (V.O.): My age is... a high number. A higher number, I believe, than most would expect. I am still sharp, quick. (beat) But not as much as I used to be. That is why I have chosen to write this document. I hope that if I should fall on this battlefield, this testament might be of some further use.

Close on: The fire, still burning strong.

4.
MAN TWO (CONT'D): Many, many years ago I joined this war...
FADE TO: Close on: Soldier's helmet in the dirt. It doesn't look like it has been there for a long time.
MAN TWO (CONT'D): I was but a boy. I was weak. I felt sick at the sight of blood. It was absurd of me to be here. But the enemy pushed forward too quickly, and it became for us not a forward march but a hasty defense. I was forced into a life or death situation. Kill or be killed. Fight and survive, or be erased.
(The helmet is kicked by someone sprinting by. At the moment of contact, all the sounds of war become audible.)
CUT TO: Close on: A young soldier's face. He looks nervous. War sounds fade to background while MAN resumes talking. At "sit still..." the soldier mouths the words.
MAN TWO (CONT'D): The first man I killed was young. Probably younger than I was. He sure as hell shouldn't have been in the front lines. He was scared; I could see it in his eyes. He had a knife pressed against my neck, was screaming at me to "Sit still or I'll slice you open."
CUT TO: Wide shot: The young soldier is holding a knife to our young MAN's throat. Soldier is standing. MAN is on his knees, head down. Time slows to a halt.

5.
MAN TWO (CONT'D): He should have killed me then. War demands things like that, instantaneous action. But he didn't. Maybe he saw a little bit of himself in me, I don't know. I do know he knew he couldn't kill me, and I think I knew it too. (Time slowly resumes. Action unfolds as MAN describes.)
MAN TWO (CONT'D): I ducked, brought my head up into his stomach. He dropped the knife - fight and survive, or be erased. His eyes widened as I came at him.
CUT TO: View over MAN's shoulder as he charges towards the young enemy.
MAN TWO (CONT'D): Fear, maybe. Surprise. Disbelief. He begged for his life, pleaded with me.
SOLDIER: Please man, I'm sorry, please-
MAN TWO (V.O.): War demands sacrifice.
CUT TO: Wide shot, as the scene has progressed. Our MAN brings the knife up and slits his enemy's throat. MAN pauses then seems angry. He hacks away at the young soldier's corpse.
MAN TWO (CONT'D): I became very angry. Angry at the boy, for making me kill him. The pool of red deepened and I carved that anger into him, cut after cut.
Close on: MAN's hands, covered in blood. He has stopped cutting.

6.
MAN TWO (CONT'D): When it was over, I had changed as much as he had. (MAN's hands clench into fists.)
MAN TWO (CONT'D): Killing became easier after that.
CUT TO: Warscape. A scythe covered in blood is in focus in the foreground. The tips of a man's fingers can be seen in the corner of the shot. In the background, the farmhouse from the first scene is burning. The camera slowly pans up the dead soldier's arm to reveal a pile of bodies as the MAN narrates.
MAN TWO (CONT'D): War demands sacrifice, and I sacrificed my humanity in order to stay alive. The strong fight and survive, and the weak are erased. My only purpose was my own survival. It was their fault that I had to kill them. It was all their fault, and they needed to pay. (beat) After a while I began to enjoy the bloodshed.
(The camera follows a stream of blood from the pile as it flows across the hill.)
MAN TWO (CONT'D): The rivers of red meant that I was alive and they were not. They were weak and I was strong.
(The war sounds build in volume, continuing to crescendo until--)
CUT TO: Close on: MAN’s eyes shooting open. There is no noise but the crickets and the crackling fire. FADE TO BLACK

7.
MAN (V.O.): I remember very little of my childhood. Most of what I do remember comes in waves, small segments of time that rarely connect. It is in this way that I recall one of my earliest memories—the second time I saw death. I do not remember the first, but the second is clear in my mind. It went something like this.

FADE IN: Establishing shot: A boy stands in the aisle between pews in a church. Around him people are mourning, and at the far end of the church there is a casket.
MAN (CONT’D): I stood in the aisle of a church, looking down the carpeted walkway at a coffin. All around me were people mourning, and there was an overwhelming sense of loss. Everything seemed to have a slight blur to it, perhaps because there were tears in my eyes too.

Close on: Uncle’s face in the coffin.
MAN (CONT’D): The coffin was unremarkable. Inside lay my uncle, or what seemed like a wax figure that looked just like him. I didn’t touch him, but I could tell his skin was cold and lifeless.

Close on: Rain beating against a stained glass window.
MAN (CONT’D): The rain drummed against the windows. I remember looking at one image in particular, of Jesus on the cross. For a moment a drop traveled down his cheek, and it looked like he was crying—a solitary tear for the dead. Quickly it was washed away by the storm.

Back to the establishing shot. As MAN narrates, TIA appears next to the casket.

8.
MAN (CONT’D): Despite the rain, I could have sworn there was a beam of light filtering down through the rafters. Behind the coffin, I saw a beautiful angel. She was clad in the purest white, and though I could not see her face I was sure she was mourning my uncle’s passing. A name came to me then: Tia...

Close on: Boy’s face as he mouths the name, then closes his eyes.
MAN (CONT’D): I mouthed the word, and felt overcome with a sense of peace. I closed my eyes for a brief time and when I opened them again she was gone.

Establishing shot as before, without TIA.
MAN (CONT’D): But I was never in doubt that the goddess had been there, ensuring that every part of my uncle’s death had been truly and utterly peaceful.

CUT TO: Close on: MAN’s eyes, surrounded by wrinkles. He coughs heavily then continues.
MAN (CONT’D): I hope Tia will come for me, too.
DISSOLVE TO: Close on: MAN’s eyes as the old soldier staring into the fire.
MAN TWO (V.O.): I sit here, waiting for the order to march into what could be my last battle, and I am taken by the current of memory all the way back to long before I was a soldier. Before I ever knew what war was, I knew death.

9.
CUT TO: Close on: The fire, still burning brightly.
MAN TWO (CONT’D): I saw it wrap its skeletal arms around people, tear them off the face of the Earth. I understood that at some point everyone would die—my parents, my friends, even me. Even then I think a small part of me knew the basic inevitable truth: no one can live forever. You can only fight and struggle to stay afloat for as long as possible, watching people drown all around you, until the waves take you down as well.
(There is a pause as he throws some more wood on the fire.)
MAN TWO (CONT’D): There is a particularly strong memory that comes to mind in the dark at night. Sitting here, staring into this fire, I can almost see the image in the ashes. I hear the gasping on the breeze...

Close on: The man’s eye. The camera zooms until the blue of the iris becomes the sky of his memory.
FADE IN: Establishing shot: A boy walks down the street slowly. He is looking around constantly, and it is clear he is in no hurry to get to where he’s going.
MAN TWO (CONT’D): I was a child. I didn’t have a care in the world. I was walking somewhere, I can’t recall exactly where—though I know I wasn’t in a hurry to reach my destination. If I had been, I probably
wouldn't have ever seen the alleyway. But I took my time. I walked slowly. And when I walked past the small pathway between buildings, I looked inside.

10. The boy glances down an alleyway as he passes. He sees something, and stops to stare at it. He is visibly startled.

CUT TO: View of the alley. In the shadows, a man lies bleeding from a stab wound to the chest. He is gasping for breath as the pool of blood beneath him spreads.

MAN TWO (CONT'D): I could hear this strange sound. After a minute I realized that it was the man gasping for each breath. It was a rhythmic gulping as the light slowly faded from his eyes.

Close On: The dying man's face. He is clearly in pain, and a line of blood runs out of his mouth and across his chin.

MAN TWO (CONT'D): Behind him a hooded figure was floating.

Return to the view of the alley, only now you can see farther into the darkness. This reveals Ta'xet, as MAN TWO describes.

MAN TWO (CONT'D): It wore robes the color the man's blood was going to turn, and where there should have been a face there was only a shadow that seemed to engulf the light around it. It did not move. It made no sound. But it did not disappear when I blinked or looked away.

Close on: Ta'xet, floating behind the body.

MAN TWO (CONT'D): I was filled with an overwhelming sense of dread, and though I did not know that man in the alley, I felt absolutely sure of two things: that his death was exceptionally painful, and that he deserved it.

11. Close on: Stabbed man's face, now blank in death.

MAN TWO (CONT'D): I remained for a few moments more, then turned and walked away. The image did not leave me though. It haunted me. It still haunts me.

CUT TO: MAN TWO throwing another piece of wood on the fire.

MAN TWO (CONT'D): I heard a name whispered to me on the wind in that alley. Ta'xet. I can only pray that she is not the one that comes to claim my soul.

CUT TO: Close on: Teenager's face. As the narration proceeds, the camera steadily zooms more of him. The voices also begin to blend together to form one clear voice.

MAN (V.O): Sometimes there is a decision so monumental that it fundamentally changes you. You would never know it, but there will always be an unanswerable question that tugs at your subconscious.

MAN TWO (V.O.): What if I had done it differently? What if I had taken the other road? Who might I be? You might hardly recognize yourself. You see one choice leads to another, and another. Life is lines of dominoes, all travelling in different directions...

MAN (V.O.): But all starting from the same place. No matter how far away you get from all the other paths, you can always trace the line back to the point where you pushed the first domino over. It is not something I suggest I could do - my life is the only one I will ever know.

12. MAN + MAN TWO (V.O): But I do not despair at this.

MAN TWO (V.O): I think it is better that I do not know. I have done what I have done, and knowing what could have been will not change that.

MAN (V.O): There is an uncertainty inside me that I might not like what I would find. Perhaps it is better that what could have been, wasn't.

CUT TO: Camera over the boy's shoulder, so you can see what he was staring at – a recruitment poster for the war.

MAN + MAN TWO (V.O): I am happy with the life I lived. And now it is time to say goodbye.

MAN (V.O): Tia.

MAN TWO (V.O): Ta'xet.
MAN + MAN TWO (V.O.): (Deep breath)
CUT TO BLACK
MAN + MAN TWO (CONT’D): I am ready.
FIN.

Hands
By Kristin Johnson
Washington Elementary School,
Grade 3
Honorable Mentions

Elementary School, Grade K
Evelyn Cohen      Tootin’ Hills Elementary School
Owen Day      Annie E. Vinton Elementary School
Amelia Ditzel      Woodstock Elementary
Myra Green      Annie E. Vinton Elementary School
Kai Quintana-Wright     North Street School
Kylie Ritchie       Tootin’ Hills Elementary School
Lillian Robitaille     North Street School
Indigo Travis      Colebrook Consolidated School
Adelane Urriola      Annie E. Vinton Elementary School

Elementary School, Grade 1
Caroline Brenia       Latimer Lane Elementary School
Abby Ditzel

Elementary School, Grade 2
Caroline Blazer       Squadron Line Elementary School
Sophia Caneira       Annie E. Vinton Elementary School
Lucy Provost      Charles H. Barrows STEM Academy
Katherine Simone      Anna Reynolds Elementary School
Charlye Sutton      Squadron Line Elementary School

Elementary School, Grade 3
Arlo Bachelor      East Haddam Elementary School
Paige Clarke      Latimer Lane Elementary School
Hebah Habib      Anna Reynolds Elementary School
Stella Mahlke      John Pettibone School
Mattie McCann      Latimer Lane Elementary School
Jayla Walker      Montessori Magnet School

Elementary School, Grade 4
Athavan Balakumar      Southeast Elementary School
Henry Christenson      Southeast Elementary School
Makena Culligan      Ledyard Center School
Rebecca Diaz-Matos      Latimer Lane Elementary
Delaney Grimaldi      Kelly Lane Intermediate School
Hazel Hendler      Burr Elementary School
Jake Isakoff      Central Elementary School
Anthony Lessor      Metacomet School
Gabrielle Longman      Braeburn Elementary School
Giovanni Marchetti      Central Elementary School
Lola Rittlinger      Braeburn Elementary School
Naisola Sarfo-Mensah      The Master’s School
Jenna Staples      Annie E. Vinton Elementary School
Ava Westergren      Buttonball Lane School
### Elementary School, Grade 5

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<td>Megan Baron</td>
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### Middle School, Grade 6

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<td>Sarah Blackburn</td>
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<td>Bharat Krishnan</td>
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Taraneh Abolfath
Samantha Gefen
Brant Hadzima
Luke Macy
Julie Orenstein
Jeff Schebell
Abigail Slanski
Sophie Spaner
Ella Stanley

Middle School, Grade 8
Miles Anderson
Joelle Anselmo
Mahnoor Bilgrami
Nana Boatema Hansen
Kalina Bonofgio
Olivia Bourgoin
Shell Chen
Connor Chin-Hing
Michaela Coderre
Sage DeAngelis
Bryan Elliot
Sara Farnoli
Abigail Howard
Megan Johnson
Iris Jordan
Julia Levine
Robert May
Madelon Morin-Viall
Amy Osella
Benjamin Poulis
Emily Robinson
Eve Woods
Kate Yuan

Secondary School, Grade 9
Olivia D’eramo
Madison Fahle
Kelly Fallon
Michael Flaherty
Amelia Schrager

Secondary School, Grade 10
Jenna Bator
Maddy Brooks
Sophia diTommaso
Katherine Du
Juliet Duchesne
Joyce Hida
Heather Soucier
Kaitlyn Tonkin
### Secondary School, Grade 11

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# Teachers of Contributing Students Writers

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2016 Connecticut Student Writers Magazine Submission Form

An electronic version of this form is available at [http://cwp.uconn.edu/ct-student-writers-magazine](http://cwp.uconn.edu/ct-student-writers-magazine/)

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Certificates of achievement will be awarded to published authors and to those receiving Honorable Mention. Submissions should not exceed 1,500 words.

**Category (circle one):**
- poetry
- non-fiction
- fiction
- art

**Title of Piece:**

________________________________________________________

**Student:**

First Name: __________________________________________

Last Name: __________________________________________

Grade and Age: ________________________

**Home Address:**

Number and Street: __________________________________

City, State, Zip Code: _____________________________

Phone: ________________________________________

Email: ________________________________________

**School (Full Name):**

________________________________________________________

**School Address:**

Number and Street: __________________________________

City, State, Zip Code: _____________________________

Phone: ________________________________________

**Teacher (Full Name):**

________________________________________________________

Email: ________________________________________

**Principal (Full Name):**

________________________________________________________

Email: ________________________________________

☐ I understand that plagiarism is punishable by law and I certify that this entry is my own original idea and work.

**Student’s Signature/Date:** ______________________________________________________

☐ I am familiar with this student’s writing. I have read this entry. I am satisfied that it is his/her own idea and work and represents his/her best effort.

**Teacher’s Signature/Date:** ______________________________________________________

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For more information, contact: Marcy Rudoff: rudges01@mansfieldct.org or Ethan Warner: ethan.warnen@meridenk12.org

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):

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Department of English, University of Connecticut
215 Glenbrook Road, Unit 4025
Storrs, CT 06269-4025

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