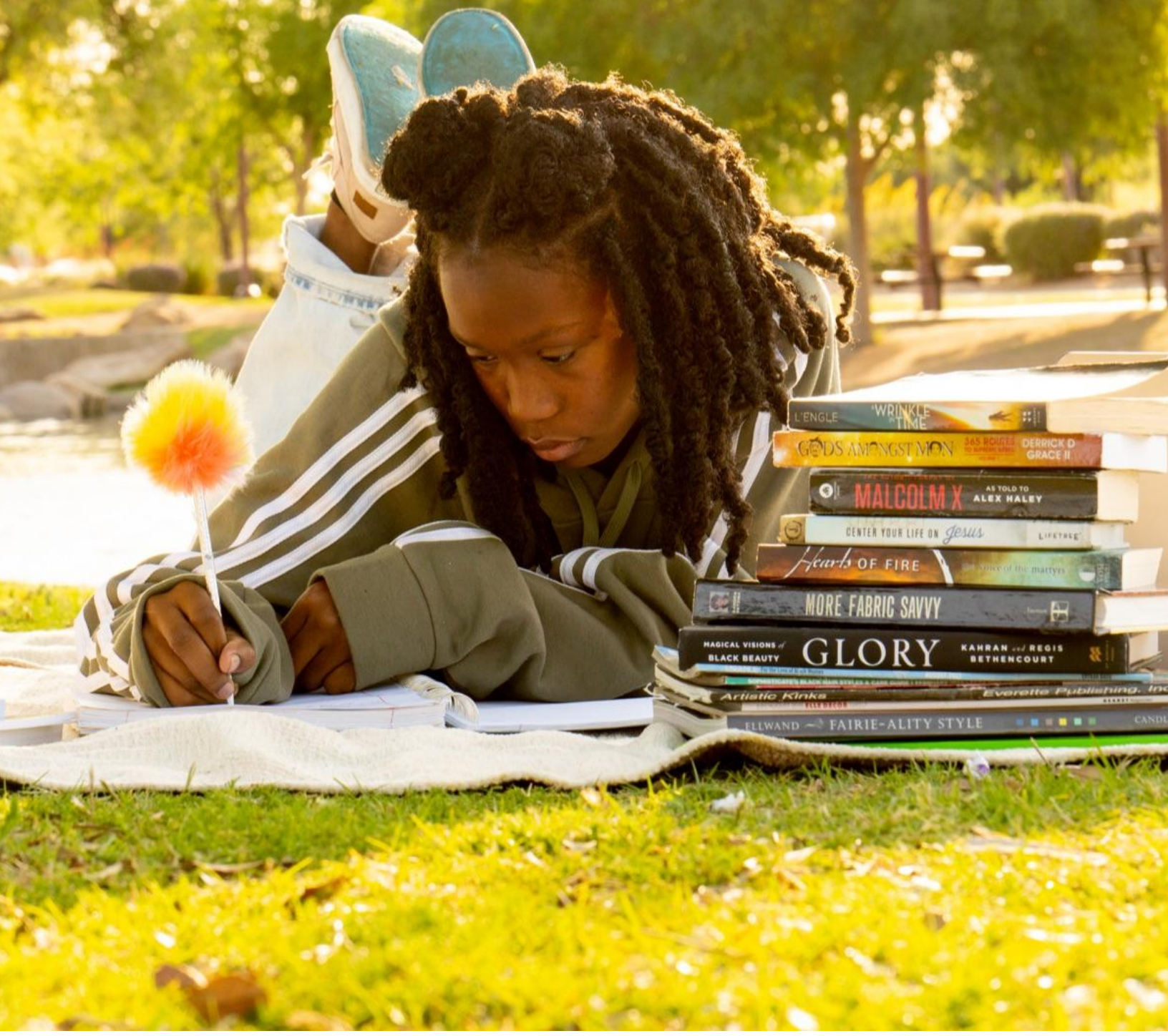


# Write On, Black Girl!

Edition 1, Spring 2022



# Acknowledgments

Welcome to the inaugural edition of *Write On, Black Girl!* Our team has been working hard to compile this publication, and we could not have done it without all of your wonderful contributions. We would like to take this opportunity to thank our sponsors, contributors and supporters for trusting us to create this incredible compilation of artwork, writing, poetry, short stories, memoir, photography and art by and for Black girls.

We are beyond grateful for the overwhelming amount of submissions received for this first edition. There is so much power in sharing your story, and we hope that this publication will serve as an archive of the Black experiences and worldviews of Black girls created by transgender, cisgender, and nonbinary folx who identify as Black girls. So, thank you to everyone who submitted to the publication, we could not have done this without you.

We would also like to say a huge thank you to our sponsors who have supported us throughout the making of this publication. Building something from the ground up is not an easy task, but with the help of The Connecticut Writing Project, The Africana Studies Institute and The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences we have built a solid foundation for the future of *Write On, Black Girl!*

To our wonderful team that has helped put this publication together, thank you! Thank you to our founder and editor Kiedra Taylor as well as our co-editors Pascale Joachim and Christina Young. We would also like to thank Danielle Pieratti and Jason Courtmanche for their support and contributions. We would also like to thank the Connecticut Writing Project interns: Francesca Montano, Ethan Stone and Liahna Strout. Each of you have supported us in different ways and we are incredibly grateful for your help.

Lastly, we would like to thank you, our readers! It means so much to us that you have picked up this publication in whatever form, and have taken the time to learn about the experiences and worldviews of Black girls. It means so much to us and to our participants, so thank you for supporting us.

We hope you enjoy the publication.

With Warm Regards,  
The *Write On, Black Girl!* Team



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The front and back cover of this magazine along with other select photos, like the one above, were donated to *Write On, Black Girl!* So, a very special thank you to the collaborative efforts of Martin Lowenthal of M1 Visions (<https://www.mlvisionsphoto.com>), Vela Davis of Vdavisculture (@vdavisculture), and Amelia Faces by Amelia ([amelia.squarespace.com](https://amelia.squarespace.com)). And of course, thank you to the beautiful models.

# Mission Statement

*Write On, Black Girl!* is a magazine that serves as archive of original poetry, short stories, memoir, photography, and art created by transgender, cisgender, and nonbinary folx who identify as Black girls in grades K-12 and undergraduate studies. This magazine is meant to be a collection of scholarly works that comes from within the Black community and will be used for Black feminist and Black girlhood studies. We aim to build a network of professionals, community organizers, and artistic creators who are dedicated to using their own resources, expertise, and institutional powers to support those who have been historically silenced and marginalized. Our ultimate goal is to bring their voices into print culture to redefine hurtful stereotypes that have been imposed on us.

We hope that *Write On, Black Girl!*

1. **affirms** validation of authorship for transgender, cisgender, and nonbinary folx who identify as Black girls
2. **recognizes** the political significance of the intersections of transgender, cisgender, and nonbinary gender identities
3. **creates** space for selected participants to present their work before a live audience
4. **acknowledges** the power and importance of writing and art created by all participants





# About Us



## **Kiedra Taylor, Founder and Editor**

Kiedra B. Taylor, MA is a PhD student at the University of Connecticut. She specializes in African American Literature. Particularly, she focuses on Black girlhood and the ways in which racialized gender expectations affect Black girls and adolescents. Kiedra believes *Write On, Black Girl!* is a creative and safe space for Black girls' voices to shout with confidence, "Black Lives Matter!" Her work has been published in *Challenging Misrepresentations of Black Womanhood* (Anthem Press).

## **Pascale Joachim, Co-Editor**

Pascale is pursuing a degree in English and Film Studies at the University of Connecticut. A long-time lover of literature and creative writing, once Pascale caught wind of *Write On, Black Girl!*, she knew she had to be involved in any way she could. She believes there are far too few spaces for Black girls to express themselves in an authentic, unfiltered way, and feels that *Write On, Black Girl!* will showcase all the beautiful and valid ways Black girls choose to exist. Pascale hopes this literary magazine encourages Black female creatives everywhere to continue to pursue whatever medium speaks to them.



## **Christina Young, Co-Editor**

Born and raised in Brooklyn, New York Christina is a rising junior at the University of Connecticut. Majoring in Political Science with a minor in Women's Gender and Sexuality Studies, Christina is incredibly passionate about social justice issues and the arts. She is dedicated to ensuring that students and faculty of color feel welcomed and that she uses her energy and effort to advocate for others. This is why Christina was thrilled to join *Write On, Black Girl!* Christina believes that *Write On, Black Girl!* will uplift the voices and experiences of Black female writers, artists, photographers, and creatives in Connecticut and beyond. Christina is looking forward to embarking on this journey and hopes that *Write On, Black Girl!* inspires people everywhere.

## Editor's note

*Write On, Black Girl!* responds to questions that I began to ask at the beginning of my studies in children's and young adult literature: where are the Black girl voices in discussions *about* Black girls; where do Black girls tell us about who they are and where they believe they fit in the context of American idealism; what do the constructions of Black girlhood in literature, especially the literature most often used in classrooms, tell us about the way American culture understand and value Black girls? In the introduction to Aria S. Halliday's edited collection, *The Black Girlhood Studies Collection*, the editor notes, "Black women, including Harriet Jacobs, Phillis Wheatley, Nannie Helen Burroughs, Zora Neale Hurston, Maya Angelou, Lorraine Hansberry, June Jordan, Jamaica Kincaid, Staceyann Chin, bell hooks, and many others have reflected on Black girlhood and the ways that the world fights against Black girls for existing" (1). Halliday's collection centers the experiences of Black girls not only in the US but in the Caribbean, Canada, and the African continent, and is therefore a valuable resource for studying constructions of Black girlhood. Add to this discussion explorations of Black girlhood in children's and young adult literature and we see that for more than one-hundred years Black girlhood in literature has been essentialized or ignored in the publishing industry. But because of movements like #WeNeedDiverseBooks and #OwnVoices, there has been an increase in the number of Black authored books and Black female protagonists. To be sure, there existed representations of Black girlhood written by Black authors before these movements, but the recent conversations discloses a desperate need not only for representations of Black girlhood, but also for Black girl voices.

This collection of writings, art, and photography in *Write On, Black Girl!* is written by folx who identify as Black girls, Black trans girls, and/or Black non-binary folx. They are K-12 and undergraduate students in the state of Connecticut. While the work of some of the contributors challenges stereotypes about who they are and how they exist in the world, others speak out against injustices and mischaracterizations of their identity and craft fiction and art for art's sake. I'm moved by this work. I'm moved by the loving affirmations. Iris Jordan tells us to "Never be ashamed/ of your true complexion/ The universe built you/ To its utmost perfection/" (74). These words along with the expressions of nearly seventy participants celebrate Blackness. *Write On, Black Girl!* is a celebration of us! And I'm grateful to be a part of it.

Because we wanted to accept as many submissions as we possibly could in this first edition, we had to rethink the themes of this collection. The call for submissions asked for work that "illustrates [their] understanding of [themselves] as an outspoken Black girl." We are pleased with the creative ways that participants interpreted this call and therefore arranged the submissions into the following categories based on our understanding of their work: Dear Black Girl, Girlhood/Motherhood, Essays From Her/Their Perspective, Black Innocence, Entries From Her/Their Memoir, Resilience, Melanated Confidence, and Short Fictions. To maximize space and reduce white space, we used the art and photography submitted to us to accent the pages and section headings. Christina and Pascale's work is phenomenal and their dedication to this project shows in the beauty of this final project. The collective effort of the interns, Jason Courtmanche, Kate Capshaw, and Anna Mae Duane made this, my dream, come true. A special thank you to Stephanie Toliver for seeing the value in this project and for her words of encouragement. I'm grateful for everyone who had a hand in making this project a reality. And most importantly, I'm grateful for the contributors who trusted us enough to be vulnerable in this space. I'm overwhelmed with joy for the connection that we now share. And to you all I say, *Write On, Black Girl!*



# Letter of Encouragement

I wrote my first story when I was six years old. It was a mystery about a girl named Stacy and her missing clothing. Her quest to find the socks, shoes, and headbands disappeared from her bedroom chest of drawers took her to lands unimaginable and gave her the opportunity to speak to myriad people and creatures she never would have communicated with had her apparel stayed put. It wasn't a masterpiece by any means, but it was mine. It was a story I found, rooted somewhere in the depths of my childhood imagination. It was a story I was proud of because no one told me to write it. Stacy wasn't born of a directive from an elementary teacher, nor was she birthed from an assignment given by my parents to mitigate 6-year-old boredom. No, Stacy came from me. Stacy was me, an adventurous little girl who loved stories and solving puzzles, a precocious child who believed that her journeys would take her to new futures and other worlds.

Today, I can't tell you much about the intricacies of Stacy's adventures because I've lost the specific details over the decades, but there's one detail that I've never forgotten. Stacy was white. She had blond hair and blue eyes – think old school Alice from the 1951 *Alice in Wonderland* movie, Bubbles from the *Power Puff Girls*, Sailor Moon from the beloved anime series, Elsa from *Frozen*. . . you get my drift. Stacy was me, but not. She had my traits, my characteristics, my essence, but not my skin, my family, my culture. She mirrored me on the inside, but the outside was as different as night and day.

I've often tried to figure out why I chose to design Stacy's character in that way, and after years of thinking about it, I realized that I wrote her to be a white version of myself. It was a way to remove myself without erasing all of me. You see, I never saw Black girls in the stories I independently read as a child. I grew up reading series like *The Hardy Boys*, *The Boxcar Children*, and *Left Behind: The Kids*. Black girls weren't main characters in these books. In fact, Black girls hardly ever made an appearance, even as sidekicks. I don't know what my 6-year-old mind was thinking at the time, but as I look back, I wonder if I couldn't put myself in the shoes of the main character because I didn't think it was possible to focus on me. I didn't think that my identity as Black and girl could be positioned at center stage, even in my own work. I wish I could say that I overcame this inner challenge as a teenager or even as a young adult, but I didn't. Every story I had written included a white main character. Every paper I submitted to teachers based on assignments for independent reading books focused on novels whose main characters were white. I never wrote Black-centric stories, and I never submitted papers on Black-focused texts unless deliberately assigned. I wrote and wrote and wrote, and with each stroke of the pen or click of the computer keys, I consistently erased myself. I scrubbed the edges of my narratives to remove any Black spots that would dirty the goodness of the story I tried to create. I polished the words of my essays to smooth the rough edges of Black language and remove any Black cultural markers that could make the view of my pristine compositions opaque. I attempted to be what Stacy had always been, me, but not.

Then, when I was about 20 years old, I found a book that changed my life, *Parable of the Sower* by Octavia Butler. It was the first time I had seen a young Black girl who was smart, adventurous, bold, and cunning. Lauren Olamina traveled to destinations unimaginable and spoke to myriad people she never would have communicated with had her life remained untouched by outside forces. Instead of looking for missing clothing, she was searching for home, for a safe place for her and her chosen family to exist. When I saw Lauren on the pages, I remembered Stacy. I remembered the ways I tried to erase Black people, Black language, and Black stories from my own work. I remembered the little girl who couldn't write herself into her own imagination for fear that others would see Black futuristic and fantastic girlhood as an incomprehensible lie. I remembered the 6-year-old who believed that the only people who get to solve mysteries, explore other worlds, and exist in the future were white, blonde, and blue eyed. I feel for that little girl, and I cry for her. I cry for me. If I had the chance, I would tell her this truth:

*You deserve to be the center.*

*You deserve to see yourself whole – the inside, the outside, the spiritual.*

*You deserve to see the world, to go on adventures, to solve mysteries.*

*You deserve to revel in the dark, to embrace Black culture, language, and story.*

*You deserve to write the stories you didn't know existed.*

*You deserve to write.*

*You deserve.*

These words that I say to my younger self are the same words that I say to you, as young Black girls existing in a world that wishes to make you small, that dreams of your erasure, that hopes for the smoothing of Black identities into white characteristics. You have the power to write your stories, to create characters who are like you, skin and all. You have the authority to write what's in your heart and compose stories and essays that speak to you, that center you. You are in command of your truth and your stories. You are powerful, knowledgeable, and innovative writers whose stories will one day influence young girls like I was, like you were. Write on, Black girl. The future awaits.



**Stephanie R. Toliver** is an assistant professor of Literacy and Secondary Humanities at the University of Colorado, Boulder. She earned her PhD in Language and Literacy Education from the University of Georgia and was a 2019 NAEd/Spencer Dissertation Fellow. Informed by her love of science fiction and fantasy texts as well as her experience as a 9th and 10th grade English teacher, Toliver's scholarship centers the freedom dreams of Black youth and honors the historical legacy that Black imaginations have had and will have on activism and social change. Specifically, she focuses on representations of and responses to Black youth in speculative fiction texts to discuss the implications of erasing Black children from futuristic and imaginative contexts and to assist teachers in imagining how classrooms can use speculative fiction as a means to center Black joy and Black dreams. She is the author of *Recovering Black Storytelling in Qualitative Research: Endarkened Storywork*, and her academic work has been published in several journals, including *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, *Journal of Literacy Research*, and *Research in the Teaching of English*. Her public scholarship has been featured on LitHub, Huffpost, and the Horn Book. Follow her @SR\_Toliver.

# Dear Black Girl,

## **Black Women, The Blue Print**

by Lizamishel Boateng, Undergraduate

Model: Tae’Niajha Pullen, Undergraduate



Dear, Black Child  
By: Marleigh Newell

Dear, Black Child  
If there is anything you have taught me  
it is to be my own girl,  
to **walk** my walk to  
**talk** my talk  
Be in my own skin...  
my melanin.

Dear, Black Child  
I am strong  
There are so many people  
who look just like me  
who have changed the world.

Dear, Black Child  
You've taught Us that we are  
strong and independent

You've Taught Us that we can all  
walk our walk  
talk our talk.

We can fly higher than any bird or  
any plane ever flew  
We know we can be in our own skin...  
our **Melanin**.





## Dear Black Girl

by Alanah Robinson, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade

Photography by Lizamishel Boateng, Undergraduate; Model: Tae’Niajha Pullen



I know you are traumatized by the hate and hatred that's happening in the world. Dear Black Girl, your curly hair and brown chocolate skin shining in the sun makes some people feel warm and loved, but some don't. You fill your head with thoughts, saying how can I be loved just like they do? Dear Black Girl, your beautiful hazelnut eyes, and shining black eyebrows glitter in the sun. But Black Girl, do you feel loved? Do you even know what love feels like? Your big fluffy hair reflecting on the ground, you look down, feeling gloomy. But the warm and comforting hand on your shoulder from your mom makes you feel loved. Dear Black Girl, did you just figure out what love meant or is this just a natural feeling?

Dear Black Girl, when you were younger you always wanted to try new hairstyles like dying or straightening your hair, but mom was always protective over your hair. She said it made you unique and different from others. She always would put these products in your hair and brush all day. You would cry, and hated it, but when you were done you looked gorgeous and all those tears would all go away. It was strange but you ignored it. I guess that was when you felt loved and someone actually cared about you and wanted to make sure you were okay.

Dear Black Girl, after your mom did your hair you would look in the mirror and say to yourself, you are beautiful, and you meant it too. But having hair is not just about beauty, it's not about how you look. It's about self-love and being confident in yourself and loving yourself because without self-love, you can be stuck inside a bad stage where you can't find yourself. Having hair or not having hair is beautiful.

Dear Girls, hair, eyebrows, eyelashes, all these things don't define who you are. What defines who you are is you. So no matter where you're from or what race you are, you need to learn to be brave. A wonderful woman once told me self-love is the best love, meaning you don't need a soulmate to feel loved, it's you who needs to love yourself.

## **Dear Beautiful Black Girl**

by Jade Beaulieu, 11<sup>th</sup> Grade

Love your skin

The skin that connects you to a root of graciousness

The skin that glows in the sunlight

The skin that has covered you and kept you safe

Love your hair

The hair that is kinky and coily

The hair that is bunched, braided, twisted

The hair that's been battered and burdened

Love your intelligence

The intelligence that was denied

The intelligence that will show you, you can, and you will

The intelligence that will defy the odds and ridicule the foolish

Love your people

The people who span from colors of shiny gold to smokey colors of cedar

The people who smile together in the face of evil

The people who hold each other tight and understand your pain

Love your history

The history that has shown you how bold you can be

The history that has forced you to cry and scream and ponder

The history that guided you to to fight for what you know is fair

Love yourself, you are worthy

Love yourself, you are beautiful

Love Yourself, you will change history

Love yourself

## Dear Black Girl,

by Lizamishel Boateng, Undergraduate

Model: Tae’Niajha Pullen, Undergraduate



## Dear Black Girl,

by Anaya Tolton, 11<sup>th</sup> Grade

Dear Black Girl,

Or Latina

Or Asian

Or Afghan

Dear any minority girl

We have come to the conclusion that you are not fit for us.

You have too much melanin

You have an accent that's too thick

You have hair that isn't blonde and

You have hair that isn't straight

You have eyes that aren't blue

You have an attitude

You have a voice that is too loud

You have food that tastes weird and

You have food that is too spicy

You have a different religion from others

You have too many flaws

And for these reasons we have decided to decline your request for respect

Good luck with your search.

Sincerely,

The World

Dear World,

I have read your letter

And with careful consideration

I have decided to reject your declination

I have an accent that is a melody, a tune my ancestors carried years ago

I have melanin in my skin, it's radiant in the light where I belong

I have personality, not an attitude, and I will express passion the way I want

I have food that is unique to me, each burst of flavor telling a story

I have curly hair that bounces with each step I take to a world where girls like me are in power

I have eyes that aren't blue but in the sunlight they're like honey

I have different qualities, not flaws

I don't need to look like everyone else to matter

I am the difference in the world

I am beautiful and essential

I did not request your respect

I demand it

Regards,

Minority girls everywhere



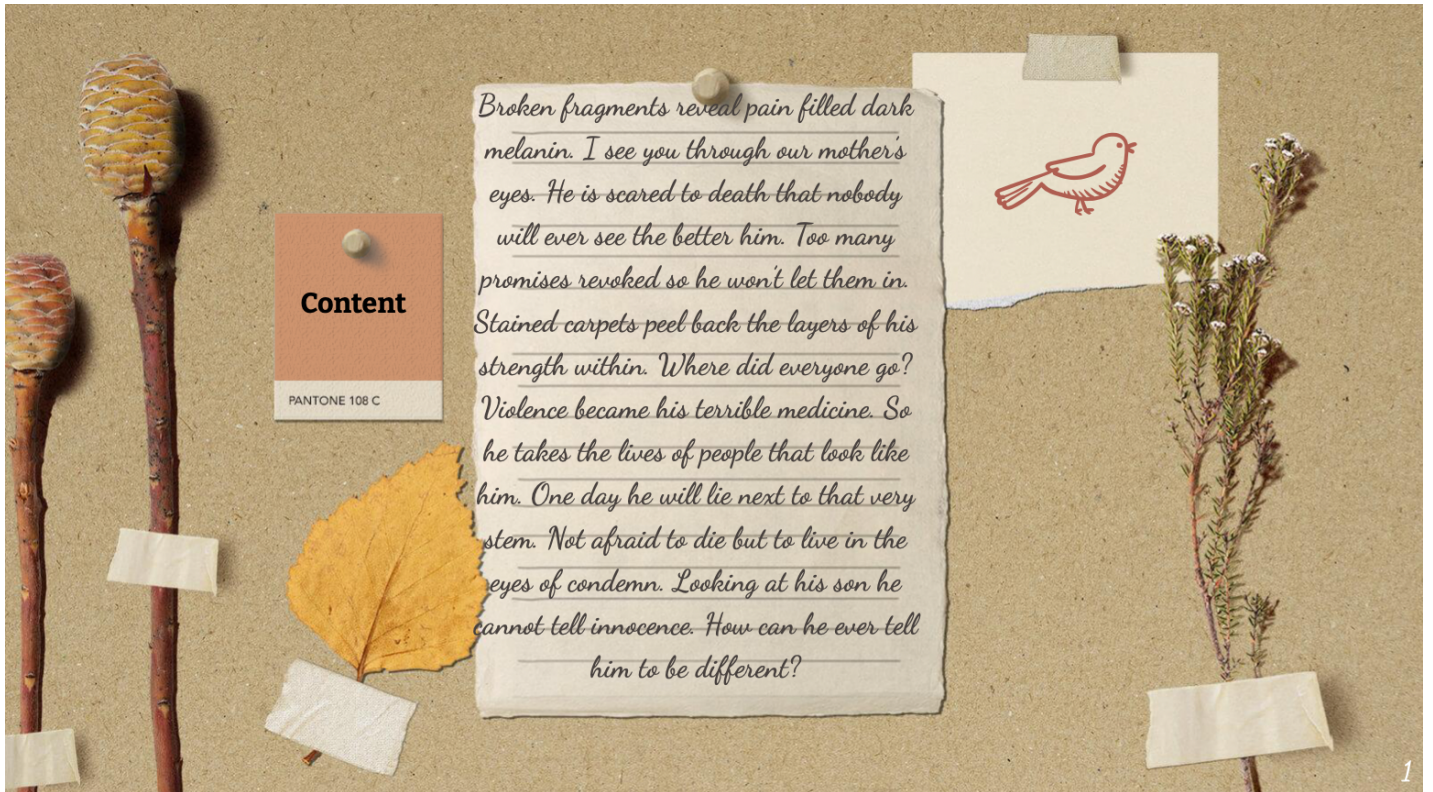


by Lee Ernset  
12th Grade

# Girlhood/Motherhood

## Content

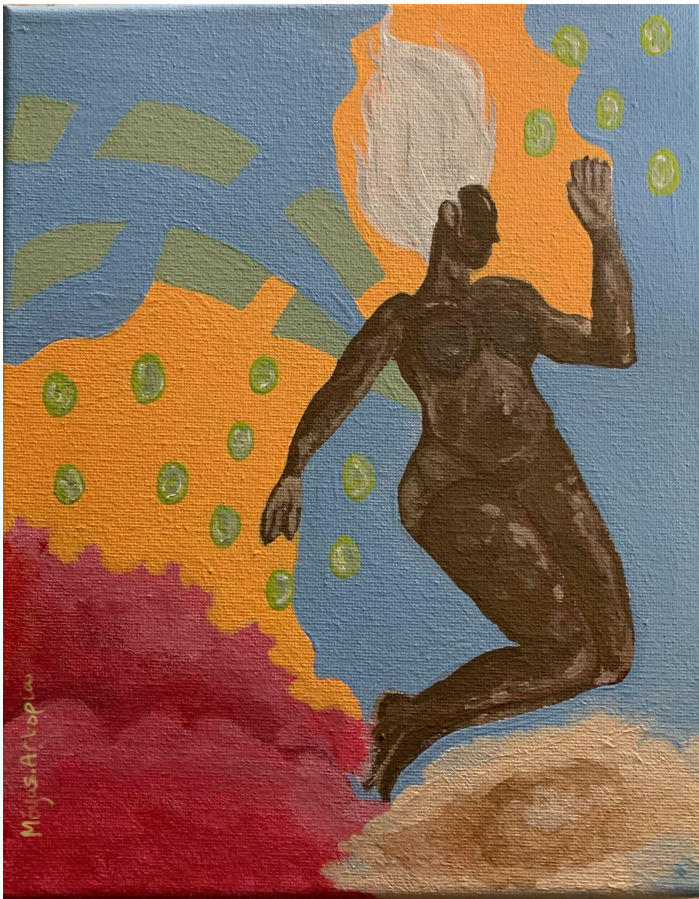
by Kaylynn A. Gooding, 12<sup>th</sup> Grade





## **A Migrant's Womanhood**

by Jermoya Tracey, Undergraduate



## **A Reckoning**

by Danicia Brown, Undergraduate

As a child, she had no fear.

Her perception of reality was not changed by the possibility of pain in the future.

The excitement in her body overrode any hesitation. She jumped, skipped, played.

She spoke loudly and with confidence to the people who would listen. Her smile would brighten any room.

Fear is learned through trauma. Nothing else.

At 20 years old she is now afraid to speak.

Her smile speaks for the person she wants to be.

To be that fearless child again would be a gift from God.

## **Mother Dearest**

by Danicia Brown, Undergraduate

Is your love as unconditional as you tell me?  
How about your heart. Will you give it to me if I  
ask for it?  
Your hands strong and scarred from years of  
cooking with hot oil  
I know you are tired.

The straining of your soul to protect your children  
Stretches you thin over the years.  
Yet your eyes fill with determination  
At 6:30 every cold morning as you walk out the  
door.

Your smile drops when you are alone  
The veil must come off at some point.

Too exhausted to interact with the man upstairs you  
Hide under your three blankets and disappear  
into your shows.  
Repeat.

Effort. A tiring practice. One that you  
Ignored.  
Self-preservation for your peace. Or maybe ours.  
It comes off as half hearted.

The late ride to school, you wanted us to sleep in  
The words  
“Don’t tell them what happened last night”  
Were said with quiet authority.

Your mind still works this way but is easing into  
A more relaxed state. Still takes  
Time for you to think outside of yourself.  
It is getting better with your limit being reached.

The mistakes you made  
In the past and future, I want to tell you that  
You are forgiven.

## **Before My Birth**

by Danicia Brown, Undergraduate

I am not a woman.  
At times, I am the color pink.  
I am the slice of grass you step on.  
My home is inside the sun. It burns at times but it is  
quite comfortable once you get used to  
it.  
I am her. But I am also they.  
I am the cloud that you see once but quickly slips  
away into the atmosphere.  
I am a small green crab.  
I am a mirror.  
I am frigid. I hate being frigid.  
I am 97 degrees Fahrenheit.  
I am ready to return to nothingness. To comfort.



# I Love You

by Gabrielle McKayle, 10<sup>th</sup> Grade

I love you is the worst thing I've ever heard. Three words that can easily sting if said in the wrong tone. She knew how badly I wanted to hear those words when we first met.

"Soph? Are you listening to me?" she tapped my shoulder across the table.

Shaking my head I snap out of my daydream, "Yeah," The table goes quiet.

"Sorry I just needed a minute to process everything." Her eyes soften, and she looks down at the menu.

"Here maybe some food will make this easier," she slid the menu my way. I think I'll throw up if anything comes near my mouth. Except her lips. If she kissed me right now it could ease the pain in my chest.

"Did you do this on purpose?" She looked at me like I had two heads. My heart started to take over my head. Anger rose in me and I asked again, "Did you pick here on purpose Mia?" She took me here for birthdays. I took her here after a long day. This was where we said "I love you" for the first time. Benny's was our spot.

\*\*\*

*"Sophia" I looked up at her, I can't believe I'm on a real date right now.*

*"Yeah, What's up?" She takes a deep breath and I feel my stomach tighten. Please don't ghost me, please don't ghost me, Please don't-*

*"I love you." Woah. Not what I was expecting but my God I'll take it. I lick my lips, trying to keep my composure.*

*"I mean who wouldn't" I raise an eyebrow and smirk like a stuck up jock.*

*"See this is exactly why I love you," she laughs and punches my shoulder. "Never stop being you okay?" Our first I love you and now our first promise, so much is happening.*

*"I won't. I love you too by the way. Wasn't sure how clear I made it, I can be pretty-" She kisses me.*

*"Stop talking, I get it." I nod, our faces closer than ever. I take a breath and kiss her back, with all the love in my body.*

\*\*\*

"I thought we could have a final meal, you know...before it's all gone." She laughed lightly, trying to lighten the mood, but deep down I could

see this was tearing her apart too. I always hated to see her cry, she would become red like Rudolph, and her cheeks puffier than a marshmallow. My heart starts to ache more, knowing how bad this pains her to do.

"So that's it then huh?" my voice cracks, it takes everything in me to hold back the tears. "Four years and we're done because you can't decide what you want?" I hear her sniffle. I broke her. I wish I could take it back, make her believe I don't blame this on her.

"You-" she stuttered, wiping her eyes she started again. "You don't know what you want either."

"I know I want you. Isn't that enough?" The waitress comes then, all smiles ready to take our order.

"A Bud Light please, and a basket of fries." I know Mia doesn't like beer but the fries will help. Her head is still down when I turn back to her. She mumbled something but I couldn't decipher it.

"What?"

"Thank you for ordering the fries. I need something in my stomach if we're gonna discuss this." I feel appreciated. "Could've gotten me a margarita though." I chuckle and grab her hand, this will probably be the last time I hold it like this.

"Could a margarita fix this?" I ask, being somewhat serious, "Because I'll wave her back." Mia holds my hand tighter then, like something shifted within her. I miss when she was easier to read.

"Soph, you know there's no fixing this." There's that nickname again. I had never really liked the name Sophia, it felt rich and stuck up. Everybody called me Sophia, except for her. She would only call me Sophia if we were watching Mamma Mia or if we were in Greece. She said it was authentic and I usually found it cute. We would dance around the living room and sing ABBA songs like no one else was watching. I'm gonna miss those moments the most, where we were happy and free.

\*\*\*

*I laugh as she dances, she definitely isn't on beat but we're both too happy to care. As the song ends I*

*clap and cheer for her, "I think you could've been Donna."*

*"Gross then you'd be my daughter." I grab her waist and pull her into me, smothering her in kisses. Wrestling for space on the couch she finally gives in and gets on top of me.*

*"Fine I'm Sophie and you're Sky."*

*She shakes her head again, "You aren't a Sophia or a Sophie. You're a Soph." I smile a little, acting like I was thinking about it.*

*"I like it. Has a nice ring to it."*

*She bends down and kisses me, "Alright it's settled then." She turns her head back to the TV and continues watching the movie.*

*I fake a cough, "Excuse me Miss McCoy, this position is a little compromising don't you think?"*

*"Oh please." she says, rolling her eyes.*

\*\*\*

The waitress came back with my fries and beer, I thanked her and asked her to make Mia a margarita.

"Just trying to make you happy, one last time." I grinned, although tears were forming in my eyes.

"You are quite the charmer Soph."

I shrugged nonchalantly, "What can I say, I always had a way with the ladies." Her grin was cheek to cheek, teeth whiter than winter snow. God I love her smile. I stare at her, watching how the light reflects on her. I know how hopeless I look right now but I can't help myself. I just want to soak up our last moments together.

"You look like a lost puppy, it's making me feel bad," If only she knew how lost I'm gonna be without her. "I haven't even said the words yet."

"Don't." A knot forms in my stomach, "Don't say them...please" You can hear the desperation in my voice. She opens her mouth but I interrupt her, rambling. "P-Please don't do this to us Mia." Now I'm frantic, my clothes feel tight and my throat is closing. She grabs my hand, I can't breathe.

"Soph, you're having a panic attack." Her voice is merely an echo in my head, I can't focus on anything.

"Soph c'mon, five things you can see." My mouth opens and nothing comes out. I have to try, for her. "You, the table, our drinks, the ketchup, and the tv over there." My breathing slows a bit, yet it's still faster than normal.

"Good, now 4 things you can touch."

"You, the table, my drink, the napkins." My throat opens up, I take a deep breath.

"Almost there Soph, 3 things you can hear."

"You-" She smacks my shoulder, it makes me snap my head towards her.

"Stop naming me for every one, it's not helping."

"The tv, the kitchen, the bar." I stick my tongue out at her, I start to feel better. "You don't have to continue, I'm okay now." I know I'm not okay but I can't bear her trying to comfort me like she isn't here to break my heart.

"Are you sure? I don't mind."

I smirk, "What do you want me to say I can taste you?" She loses her grip on my hand, her face looks shocked. Oh please I've said way worse things.

"Let's not be vulgar at the table Sophia Grace"

I visibly cringe at the name, scrunching my face up like I just ate a lemon.

"Gross, you sound like my mom."

She laughs at me, "You're such a drama queen," I play offended, making her laugh even more.

\*\*\*

*"I assume Grace is your middle name?" She closes the door behind her.*

*I look up from the floor, "Yep. I hate when she uses it. Makes me feel like a child." I lay down on the bed, my legs hanging on the side. I stare at the ceiling, sighing. I feel the mattress sink, her warmth comes shortly after.*

*"Are we just gonna lay here and stare at the ceiling?" I turn to her, she turns to me.*

*"Well I don't want to go back out there, so yes we are." I cross my arms and pout as I turn back to the ceiling.*

*Chuckling, she turns back to the ceiling too, "You really are a child sometimes."*

*"That's because my mother freaks out when I try to act my age. The only way to please her is to act how she wants me to." She reaches over and uncrosses my arms, holding my hands firmly.*

*"She loves you a lot, you're just a little stubborn that's all."*

*I kiss her hand and smile at her, "Thank you for sticking with my stubborn ass."*

*She laughs and replies, "Anytime Sophia Grace" I push her off the bed, "Not funny."*

\*\*\*

"I'm getting hungry, wanna call the waitress over?"

"Woah woah woah, let me look at the menu for a second geez."

"You need to look just to get the same thing you always do?" I've been getting the same meal since we came here for the first time. No need to fix something if it isn't broken, you know.

Cheeseburger with fries, the classic meal for an American. Yes I find it funny because I am greek.

"Alright I've made up my mind, cheeseburger with fries." I close the menu and slap it on the table, a cheeky grin plastered on my face. She laughs and shakes her head, I don't ever want this moment to end. I called the waitress over and ordered our food, handing her the menus. For a minute the world moved slowly, the lights reflecting off her like an aura. I take a swig of my beer, finishing it off.

I sat the bottle down, "How did you know you wanted to end this?" She starts playing with her hair, avoiding my eyes. She's uncomfortable, I can tell. I wish I could word it differently but I can't beat around the bush.

She mumbled, still fidgeting with her hair, "A couple months...after the night in the park."

\*\*\*

*"Do you want to get married?" I had been thinking about asking her for a while. The ring was even in my bag, I could do it now. All she had to do was say the word.*

*"I don't know, eventually I do," My heart starts hurting, that's not what I expected her to say at all. I try to keep my cool, hoping she doesn't notice my shift in behavior. "I'm young, lots to see, lots to do."*

*"We're out of college pretty soon, don't you ever think about the future?" I pause, I don't want to push her away.*

*"Soph, right now I know you love me, and I love you," She smiles at me, "That's all that matters." No. So much more matters.*

*"So you don't ever think about buying a house? Settling down?"*

*"We have an apartment."*

*I raise my voice, "That's not the same thing!" I look at her, she seems frightened. I watch as her hands run through her hair. "I'm sorry I did mean to raise my voice," I sigh, "I just feel like I'm not being heard.*

*She lets out a sarcastic laugh, "I think it's the other way around."*

*"What do you mean by that?"*

*"What I mean is I'm telling you I don't want to think about the future and you're shoving it down my throat."*

*Just like that the conversation is over. "Okay, we'll just sit here and look at the stars" It was quiet for a few minutes.*

*"I think we should be apart for a little." Oh. I should've seen this coming. "Not a breakup, I just think I'm gonna stay at home and you can stay at the apartment," I sit quietly, trying to make sense of it all. I watch as she gets up and heads to her car, "I'll call you when I'm ready." I nod, not trusting my voice. I wait until she's halfway out of the parking lot. The tears come streaming quickly after.*

\*\*\*

Our waitress places the food on the table, my appetite is gone. I take a bite of my burger, trying to ease the feelings in my stomach. We eat silently, like we are strangers. The check comes quickly after, I pull out my wallet and pay for us both.

"You didn't have to..." I can't even look at her without feeling sick.

"I'll earn it back eventually," I get up and put my coat on, sitting back down. "So I assume you're moving back with your parents?" She nods. "Okay, just pack up when I'm not there. Take what you please, I'll just deal with the rest." She grabs my face, I flinch. Her hands feel cold and foreign on my skin.

"Can you at least act like you care?"

I scoff, "Like I care?" I feel every emotion I've ever felt rise up within me at once. "I've always cared, Mia! I was ready to propose that night, to get us a house, to-" My voice is shaking now, I can't control anything I am saying. "To have a kid. To have the cheesy white picket fence life with you, because I love you!" I slam my hands on the table, she freezes. I can't take much more of this. I refuse to cry in front of her like a baby. I get up and turn to leave.

"I love you."

Sniffling, I reply, "That's the worst thing I've ever heard."

# America Is A Dream

by Miniya Ture, 11<sup>th</sup> Grade

## I Must Be Dreaming

America is a dream  
Unless you're not white  
Or unless you're a woman

It's a dream until you have to live off of minimum wage  
Or stay home when you're sick because you can't afford a trip to the hospital

America is a dream  
Until you can't tell a kid from a criminal  
And you pull the trigger at the threat of a hood

America is a dream  
Where protests are seen as riots  
And riots are seen as a revolution

America is a dream  
A dream where men have a say in what women do with their bodies  
And don't take no for an answer

America is a dream  
For the colorists and racists  
Blinded by the societal standard of beauty  
And the falsities of supremacy

America is a dream  
Until your taxes are spent on warfare  
Instead of housing  
Or education

America is a dream  
Until you're terrorized  
For an act of terrorism you never committed

America is a dream  
Until they blame you for the pandemic  
And attempt to claim your culture as their own

America is a dream  
Unless you were here first  
Yet reduced to a percentage on a map

America is a dream  
Where they keep kids in cages  
Even though all they wanted was a safe haven



America is a dream  
Until you can be killed for the clothes you wear  
Or for whatever may be under them

America is a dream  
For the little white men in suits  
Who fly into space  
Because they have nothing better to do with their  
money

And the little white women  
Who point fingers at us  
With their crocodile tears

And as we struggle through our nightmare  
We look up at those that are dreaming  
And envy at their disregard

To dream to be so high in life  
You couldn't care less about those below.

America is a dream  
Like a painted picture  
With a false wall

And as you wake up  
And peer through the cracks,  
You can see how faulty  
This dream really is.

## **Hiraeth**

by Jhonni Dixon, 11<sup>th</sup> Grade

When the owl hoots, I surmise,  
which do I pick up:  
the alchemy of my dreams,  
or what builds them.

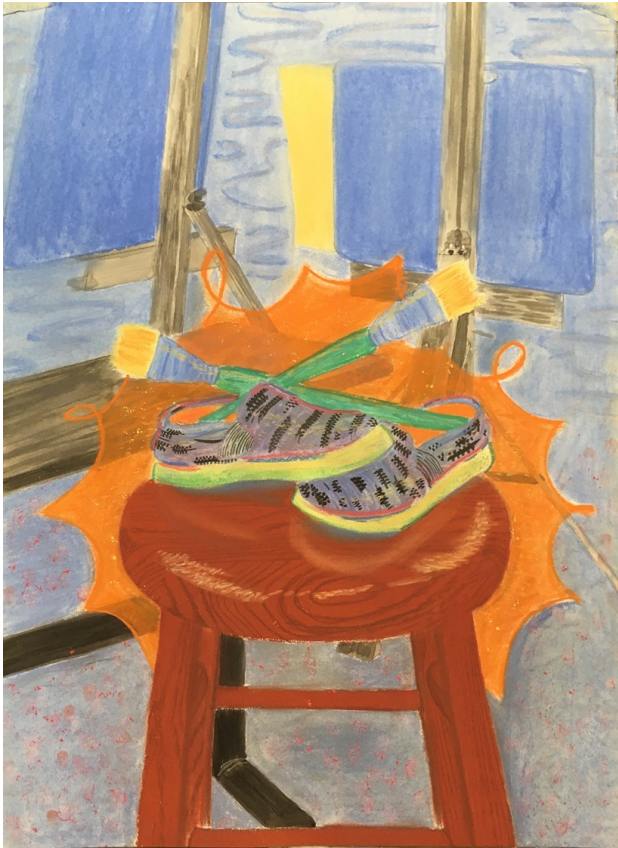
The one where my friends await my arrival,  
seated on the page, searching for revival,  
a moment of sondering as I put it down.  
Or the one I use to sew myself a life,  
that needs not a reverie of written words,  
one needless of escape.

The diaphanous life I so desire—  
cinema of my heart—  
or the pages that tweak my existence.  
“How to live a happy life”—  
how can I,  
the solivagant she,  
when the lives never lived,  
ethereal voices under the veil of reality,  
the home that never was,

for which I still long.

Riverine life surges, courses;  
my docile self always seeking escape.  
But do I take the short cruise, the interim ruse,  
or the shipbuilding class, the lesson to defy?

Which will it be, escapism or real?  
The alchemy of my dreams,  
or what builds them.  
The stories that are full of life,  
but fall short of truth.  
The fountain doesn't give you back your  
youth...



by Lee Ernset  
12th Grade

# **I've come to the conclusion that I hate being a teenager**

by Anaya Tolton, 11<sup>th</sup> Grade

I've come to the conclusion that I hate being a teenager

Because what are you really? Are you a kid? A young adult? You're definitely not happy so what are you? You're given expectations set unrealistically high and you need to figure out how to make it work.

So... here are my top ten reasons in no particular order:

1. You have to get to school on time. But you need to get a full night's rest. But you need to be a part of a club or a sport to be well rounded. And you need good grades. You're college bound and all colleges care about are your grades.
2. And you can't go to the bathroom in the first 15 minutes. And you must ask to go to the bathroom. No, Bethany, I don't care if it's an emergency, sit down and stop being a distraction. Fine you can go now, leave the bag. Don't talk back to me young lady. That's it you're not allowed to go now, I don't care.
3. Oh and ladies, if we see that stomach, you're covering up or getting sent home. This is school, we don't need to see that much skin. Boys will be boys and they won't be able to control themselves so you better accommodate them. This is a man's world.
4. The mitochondria is the powerhouse of the cell. The slope formula is  $y = mx + b$  and if the degree in the numerator is greater than the degree in the denominator, there is no horizontal asymptote. Learn how to do taxes? Nah, but you need to memorize the name of every Roman leader if you plan on passing this class.
5. You should wear makeup so you look pretty and attract the boys. But not too much. Wear cute clothes too, and wear them for you. Dress code? Hell no, break the rules! But if you're too cute you'll be an attention whore.
6. If you're not toothpick thin, heads up, you'll be fat shamed. You could honestly afford to lose a few pounds. Just work out and diet and don't eat a few meals for a few weeks and You'll be perfect. But Body Positivity. All bodies are beautiful. Where are all my plus size queens?
7. Clothes again. Wear comfortable clothes. Don't try too hard. When you try to dress cute it's obviously for someone else. Who gives a crap about what other people think about you?
8. Everyone's opinion matters. The teacher's, your crush's, your enemy's, your neighbor's. Oh honey, it all matters. You must be liked at all costs. Those are the rules. Without being liked you are nothing, you are no one, you are weird. You don't want to be weird do you?
9. Nothing is weirder than band. I don't care if you have always wanted to learn how to play the trumpet, the second you become a band kid you become a social reject, a weird kid. Reread rule # 8 if you're still considering an instrument.
10. You're only cool if you're in a relationship. You see Tyler over there? Isn't he just dreamy? You should go talk to him. You don't want to talk to him? What a loser. Everyone knows that to have any amount of social status, you should have a guy or girl to your hip. And if you don't have one, you should be working double time to get one. Love life or no life people.

I've been told that Diamonds form under pressure and heat. But being a teenager is a different kind of pressure. When you add too much heat to a diamond It simply vanishes--And sometimes I wish I could just vanish. It would be easier than trying to fit in a box. With ten sides

And no wiggle room for error.

## **When We Were Young**

by Piper Jones, 9<sup>th</sup> Grade

Do you remember the days when we were young  
The days where we could laugh without a care in the world

Do you remember when we were young and we could go to school  
Without the fear of judgment

I miss those days  
The ones where you and your friends are inseparable  
Those days when we were young

Do you remember when we were young?  
So innocent  
So naive

But then we grew up  
We were no longer naive  
The fear of judgment overthrew us

Friends drifted away  
The ones you used to hug now only wave  
I miss the days when we were young

Those were the days  
Free of judgment and pain  
The days when all I had to be was me



## Pretty

by Anaya Tolton, 11<sup>th</sup> Grade

If I had to describe myself  
without looking in the mirror,  
I'd say my hair stops shy of my shoulders  
and is a little frizzy,  
my eyes are a deep brown,  
and my glasses are probably dirty.  
I stand as tall as I can,  
though my shoulders lean slightly forward  
and I fiddle with my fingers because I'm stressed.  
My clothes look good,  
and give my body the appearance that I am fit and  
in shape.  
This is how I like to imagine myself.  
I go through my day thinking each curl is behaving  
and that my mascara looks good.  
I go through my day thinking I look normal.  
Like every other teenager does  
Every other teenager looks great  
I've been raised to think everyone is beautiful  
But then the end of the day comes,  
and I force myself to look in the mirror  
I look tired  
My hair is really frizzy  
And flat on the top  
My mascara is smudged  
It looks like the work of a toddler  
It looks like I've been crying  
My head looks disproportionate to my body  
My shoulders are too wide

My arms are too skinny  
My torso is too thick  
I weigh too much  
How many meals should I skip so I can have nice  
waist  
I have too many acne scars  
And acne in general  
My nails are too short and stubby  
My posture is horrible  
My ears are too small  
My nose is too big  
How much does plastic surgery cost  
My eyes look weird with glasses  
My face looks weird without glasses  
Maybe a smile will fix it  
A smile made it worse  
My teeth aren't white enough  
Straight enough  
Good enough  
I am not good enough  
How am I supposed to go through my day  
Believing I look good  
When I see myself in the mirror  
And can only see what's wrong  
How come everyone else can look perfect to me  
But to myself I will never be  
Can never be  
pretty





## **The Black Women's History Overlooked**

by H'elena St. Arromand, 11<sup>th</sup> Grade

I am the product of stolen goods...  
the passed down generations of the jitterbug, the cakewalk, and the twist  
the hairstyles with thousands of years of meaning behind them  
I am a strong independent Black girl, (but watch out.. not too strong or I am dangerous)  
I am years of generational trauma, false allegations, and negative stereotypes  
My uncle Tom, Aunt Jezebel, and cousin Sapphire's legacy realized  
I am hundreds of years of being told I can't  
I am the intelligence that it took to be free from slave masters, to break the laws of segregation, and slowly, but surely to remind society  
that we built this land, we discovered groundbreaking ideas, we were tested on, poked and prodded at and only to get no recognition for what we uncovered  
My history is the one that has been stamped out  
the one that we are trying so very hard to get back  
It is the one that should be lectured on the most  
Zora Neale Hurston, Claudette Colvin, Maya Angelou  
Beautiful Black female leaders  
instead I am being told that my leaders are not valid enough  
instead I am being teased and ridiculed because of the way that I speak  
instead we are told to leave the past in the past, and that, "slavery isn't happening now so it's not a big deal"  
instead I have to prove my intelligence as a Black girl  
instead I am mocked as a Black girl  
instead I am questioned about my abilities as a Black girl  
instead I am asked, "why would you embrace being a Black girl?"  
to stand up for my brothers and sisters, to stand behind the choices my ancestors made, and make deliberate choices for the future  
I am the Black girl that my past, present and future picked to be their voice, grasping my heritage, and to help educate  
Educate the young and validate the old  
Educate the majority and discredit the history books  
I am what was once involuntary silence  
Flipped and turned, into books, movies, marches, poems, art, dance and even more  
I am creative expression and understanding  
I am the shackles of my ancestors finally being released  
Fulfilling the long lasting dream to speak up and be heard  
I am the legacy.

## **Best Friends Forever**

by Chisom Onoh, 12<sup>th</sup> Grade

It had been the two of us. It had always been the two of us. From swinging on the monkey bars to swinging on bullies, we've been together. Aimee had been so normal, but that kind of made her extraordinary. It was in the way she talked and smiled that just drew people in, but she never left me, even when her new friends didn't like me. We had planned out our whole lives together, the problem was we didn't account for any bumps in the road.

We were waiting for the late bus. Or rather I was waiting for Aimee to take the late bus. Aimee hated being alone, so everyday I'd stay with her until her bus showed up. We were sitting on the steps, I plopped down on the top step and Aimee sat in the middle of the staircase with her legs stretched out, looking up at the clouds. It had been sunny, but the clouds were creeping over us.

"Do you think it's gonna rain, Faith?" She looked up at me.

"I hope it doesn't," I reply.

"I hate staying after school," She muttered.

"It's not that bad," I retort. A silent anger festered in me, ready to poke and prod.

"What's wrong?" She asked.

"I just feel like-" I take a deep breath. "I think I hate you,"

"Why?" She exclaims.

"It's just that everyone likes you-"

"Not everyone likes me," She said, fidgeting with her necklace.

"But all our friends love you-"

"And they love you too!" She reached out her hand to mine and I took it reluctantly.

"But they don't know what you did," My voice cracked.

She stayed seated, her hard eyes staring me down. "We said we'd never tell," Her grip on my hand tightened.

"I know, but they deserve to know," I forced the words out.

"Did you tell them?" She spoke through bared teeth.

"I didn't say what you did,"

"You mean what we did. You were there too ya know," She smirked.

"But I-"

"But you what? You didn't call for help. You let him die," She slowly inched forward.

"You hit him! You caused this and I tried to call for help, but you didn't let me," I cried out.

We stood face to face now, any distance between us gone. "Who's gonna believe that? I mean it could have been you that was driving," Her demeanor changed "It was dark out and Faith had insisted that we go out for a drive. I told her that it was too dangerous, but she didn't listen and that's when s-she-"

"Stop it!" I slammed her into the door. She smiled at me, that perfect, normal smile. "There you are, the real Faith," She laughed. "Enough with this goodie two shoes act. Accept it, you didn't help him, so if I go down," She brought her lips close to my ear. "You're going down with me," She whispered.

"I just wanted a friend, I didn't ask for this" I pleaded.

"You wanted to f\*ck with the eagles, so you should've learned how to fly" She smirked.

The bus creaked around the corner coming to a halt in front of us. I let go of her. Self satisfied, she walked to the bus door and turned her head. She smiled at me, that perfect, normal, smile.

"See you tomorrow!" She waved goodbye.

Stunned, I waved back. She disappeared onto the bus as it groaned away. At that second I knew it, we were different sides of the same coin. We'd been together too long, our whole lives intertwined so much that I can't help but see her in everything I am. So I know what I have to do.

I'll see her in the hall and walk beside her, hand in hand, we'll go to the movies and laugh, we'll even pose together at prom. Our friendship will be a habit I just can't shake. But when I look over at her as she laughs, I'll forget what she did, what she is, and maybe in that moment I'll remember the girl smiling on the monkey bars.

**Me**  
by Mackenzie Grant, 5<sup>th</sup> Grade



## **Safe Haven**

by Piper Jones, 9<sup>th</sup> Grade

We would talk everyday for hours on end  
Until one day, the phone didn't ring  
She was my safe haven

Now I sit alone and confused,  
With nothing but pictures from my camera  
Cause she was my muse

A necklace carved with her initials  
And a bracelet that's the color of rainbows  
Those are my safe haven

Some days I hear a whistle blow'  
And I know my mind is playing a trick  
But I wish you really did show

A key chain from the good old days  
Our last vacation  
I can still hear the waves  
That is my safe haven

Sports were my thing you knew that  
But now that you're gone it feels wrong to go back  
All I have left is a medal and a plague

My love of sports came from you  
After you pushed me to try something new  
I still have the shirt  
Cause that is my safe haven

The gifts you gave will never leave me  
The action figures with wobbly legs  
Or the parrot I got as a baby

Now there's my cat that helps me sleep  
Some days I swear I hear him say just breath  
That is my safe haven

Lastly there's that little box  
With that poem you wrote attached to the top  
If only you could read it to me  
Cause there's no other place I would rather be

I'll never forget the days we had,  
When you made me feel as safe and as loved as  
bacon  
Cause you were my safe haven

## **Was It Ever Real?**

by Piper Jones, 9<sup>th</sup> Grade

Do you ever miss me?  
I always thought we had fun  
Was it all out of pity?  
I remember building forts cooler than your house  
Did you really forget me?  
Third wheeling became my favorite hobby  
Did I matter to you?  
I remember our post game ice cream parties  
What happened?  
I Remember pranking our dads and laughing so  
hard we couldn't breath  
Did you mean anything you said?  
Remember making those friendship bracelets  
I still have mine  
Did you ever really care?  
I never thought those late nights watching movies  
could've just been a dare  
Did I do something?  
I know we said we would always play together  
But come on I can't pass this up  
Why?  
I remember making our secret handshake  
Do you remember how it goes?  
Cause I do  
Was any of this ever real?

## Little Brown Baby Sister

by Natalie Eva Naa Ayele Armah, 5<sup>th</sup> Grade

When you were born  
a light like  
the burning sun  
was lit  
inside my heart

I held you  
in my arms  
for the first time  
and all I could feel  
was joy

Your little  
chubby hands  
reached out

You grabbed  
my nose

I laughed

It tickled

Mom tried  
to pry my nose free  
but until you let go  
you were stuck  
to me

And I clung to you  
We were joined  
together

As will always be





# Essays From Her/Their Perspective

## **Black Girl Inside and Out**

by Rianne Mustafa, Undergraduate



## **Together**

By Gabrielle McKayle, 10<sup>th</sup> Grade

Her hands soft and comforting, nails bitten off  
My girlfriend flips through the dvds, picking the  
perfect movie  
Her twin sized bed feels like an island, just the two  
of us, surrounded by water  
“We’ll always be together right?” I asked scared for  
the answer  
Confused, she turned around, “No, my mom will be  
here soon.”

## **Black Broken Beauty**

By Veronica Copeland, 12<sup>th</sup> Grade

When you look at me, what do you see?  
Do you see the embodiment of pride after fighting  
for a place to belong  
Or do you see a scared little girl, hiding behind a  
plaque of armor?

A scared little girl who was warned  
That this world does nothing but take.  
Take from our culture,  
Take from our homes,  
Taking away the very parts of our being  
That makes us whole.

Who are you to tell me I’m not who I am?  
I’ve been in this body for 17 years, you’ve only  
known me for 17 seconds  
You don’t get to tell me if my identity is valid.

You don’t get to tell me if I’m “really black”  
Or if this is just a wicked game of pretend  
You do not have the luxury  
To question  
How I perceive myself.

I’ve worked too hard to build myself up  
After it’s been broken down by the looks and slurs  
For someone like you  
To come around  
And ruin what needed fixing.

And if I could go back in time  
I would give myself the power  
That no one was able to give me when I needed it  
most.

Because she felt like she didn’t belong.  
She was told,  
Not “white” enough for your white friends  
Not “black” enough for your black friends  
Sometimes it made her wonder  
If she was even enough.

And if I could talk to her  
I would let her know  
That people like to say the harshest things that give  
them the most power

So I am here to tell you  
You are not a mutt  
You are not a dog  
You are not a word the insecure like to say so they  
can feel bigger than a stage

I would say  
You are beautiful  
You are stunning  
You are everything you need to be  
Everything you want to be  
And no one can tell you otherwise.  
No amount of empty words can change the beauty  
of your character

## Portland

By Elyse Willis-Card, 12<sup>th</sup> Grade

Where are you from?  
they say  
I am  
from food bank lines beginning at 3 am  
ending with sad families leaving after  
hours of standing

Where are you from?  
They say  
Depending on who's asking  
I might say  
the city of roses  
Or  
I might mention how my family fled  
Like Lot, Pdx my Sodom  
Or  
How Out of all the kids I went  
Into Kindergarten with  
Only a handful of us are still breathing  
Roaming the earth, less than that of us graduating

Where are you from?  
They say  
I am from New Jerusalem  
And summer days at peninsula  
Kicking my little legs back and forth,  
Feeling as though I can fly, up and out my  
City

Where are you from  
they say?  
I from rainy days spent at papa's pizza  
And winter days spent alone  
My four walls; a prison, not a home  
Be back before the street lights come on  
I am from the city where some Youngins  
Rep colors before they learn to read  
The city of protest and gentrification  
The city where weird white hipsters go to vacation  
Where are you from?

They say  
I am from Wednesdays being spent at Nadaka,  
The trees my fortress, here is where I exhale  
Where the young boys and girls commit to being parents before receiving their  
diploma

The city of hustlers, trappers, dreamers  
Black excellence on the rise  
I am a pearl, my city the oyster  
Portlandia  
I say  
When the question is where

## **They Didn't Tell Me**

By Sasha Appiah, 12<sup>th</sup> Grade

They didn't tell me I was stolen from my motherland: Taken from the Most High's hand to some strange land, to be packaged like meat and completely reprogrammed.

They didn't tell I was slapped with the labels "black", "nigger" and "African American", though I come from the twelve tribes of Israel: Asher, Dan, Ephraim, Gad, Issachar, Manasseh, Naphtali, Reuben, Simeon, Zebulun, Judah and Benjamin.

They didn't tell me that our oppression was prophesied, that when He was risen on the stake and resurrected it was to save our lives.

They didn't tell me my mulatto skin was heavenly designed. That my Kinky coily curls were woolly blessing from on high. That my big lips and almond eyes were just fine. That I was bought with a price, the precious blood of the Son, a Hebrew Israelite.

They didn't tell me I was special, that my ancestors were Kings and Queens, a royal seed.

They didn't tell me the Messiah's name is Yahusha Hamashiach, why is His hair blonde, if His feet are like burnished bronze?

They didn't tell me I was a product of this crooked society, that the character I was labeled with was not the character I was created with.

They didn't tell me I had it all already, that I didn't need to waste my life chasing after drugs and money.

They didn't tell me I was not destined to be a hoodrat, or a thief, but that I had a future, and that the people of the all time best selling book looked like me.

They didn't tell me slavery never ended in 1865, but that they tried to put a bandaid on the wound and appease us after taking our lives. That they still managed to master our minds and keep us chained in silence like mimes. Still shackled around the neck and told what is next, master said I have to work 12 hours a day for minimum wage, master said my name is Tyrone James, master said to keep my head low, master said I can't know. They didn't tell me the 13th amendment does not apply because we are still being shot up and spoon fed lies.

Lies, O, the lies, it doesn't only apply to one group of people, it applies to all of mankind. We are all walking proteges of a created being, instead of who the Creator called us to be. Can't you see? Depression, anxiety, aids, STDs, but we won't humble ourselves and get on our knees.

No one told me the solution is in the One who sees all things.

They didn't tell me the things they needed to tell me.

# Black Innocence

## **Liopleurodon**

by Addie Grant, 7<sup>th</sup> Grade





## Pretty Girl

by Lauryn Thomas, Undergraduate

She doesn't remember my name or who I am other than "Pretty Girl," her supplier of joy every day, at 6 am, with disposable bags, scented wipes for sensitive skin, and medicated calamine lotion in hand. Me, a genuine Santa Claus.

Every morning without fail: phone alarm sounds, moans and groans, followed by a poignant "kill me now" and a deep, five-minute stare at the ceiling (once you start every morning this way, it's hard to stop). Heavy steps down the dark hallway to the bathroom to collect my sack of goodies: a variety of strongly scented soaps and lotions for sensitivity, sanitation, calmness, clear thought, and whatever eucalyptus helps with.

"Top Mixes" begins:

*It could all be so simple  
But you rather make it hard  
Loving you is like a battle  
And we both end up with scars*

*Tell me who I have to be  
To get some reciprocity  
See, no one loves you more than me  
And no one ever will*

The creak of the door (the only door in the house that actually creaks, as if it knows the age of the relic inside), opening it just enough to peek my head through to see if she's still sleeping.

"Pretty Girl."

Barely audible, even in the stillness of the early morning. Floaty, with a slight crackle, like the way the needle of a record player skips over small specs of dust as it moves along vinyl. Beautiful, classic, and timeless.

"Pretty, Pretty, Pretty Girl," sitting up in her bed now, causing a slight pop in the springs of the mattress, "mmm, good morning sweetheart."

Her voice is melodic, soulful. The sun rising up through the trees, Ms. Lauryn Hill gliding in the background; the aesthetic reminiscent of Stevie's "Ribbons in the Sky."

Almost comically, like in cartoons when the disembodied voice over the screen reads "five minutes later," the sun has fully risen, and with it hostility and stubbornness.

"No, No, NO!" I try to stand her up, put on her pants, button her shirt, but every attempt at helping is met with resistance. I grow more and more frustrated.

"Una gwan throw me down!" My jaw clenched, temperature rising, and "Ex Factor" continuing in my ear, timely in its escalation;

*No matter how I think we grow  
You always seem to let me know*

*It ain't working, It ain't working*

*And when I try to walk away  
you hurt yourself to make me stay  
This is crazy  
This is crazy*

I quickly lotion her hands and feet, and move her to her brown, leather recliner as she cries out in dismay. I flick on her television to *Colombo*, and march out the room in a huff.

Exasperated and tired, I drone down the steps to prepare her breakfast: Two hard boiled eggs, turkey sausage links, an english muffin lightly toasted, and a small cup of honey flavored greek yogurt to conceal her medication — the same every morning.

The house is small; hiccups in breath and sniffing can be heard from the kitchen.

“She doesn’t understand; she doesn’t get it,” I have to keep reminding myself, attempting to keep my head level.

I sit at the counter, allowing her time to calm down, and the music to level my own teetering sanity ...

*I keep letting you back in  
How can I explain myself  
As painful as this thing has been  
I just can't be with no one else*

Mentally prepared for round two, I begin to scale each matted, carpet step, tray in hand, ready for whatever lies ahead ...

“Yes Jesus, oh lord, oh Jesus, hmmm.”

Floaty, slightly cracked, and beautiful. Some of the lyrics are lost, but no less spirited. Familiar, timeless, and warm.

I tentatively proceed into the room, feeling things out to ensure my entrance will not cause more hysteria.

“Hello my Pretty, Pretty Girl!”

“Uh, hi Grandma”

“Pretty Girl,” she calls me, attacking each forkful, famished from a fight not twenty minutes before. “Pretty, Pretty, Pretty Girl.”

We cycled back to the beginning; I am “Pretty Girl,” her supplier of joy, every day, with two hard boiled eggs, turkey sausage links, and an English muffin lightly toasted in hand.

*Care for me, care for me  
I know you care for me*

*There for me there for me  
Said you'd be there for me  
Cry for me cry for me  
You said you'd die for me  
Give to me give to me  
Why won't you live for me*

\*\*\*

If people are inherently nothing, then at this point her slate is almost as it was when she was first born, completely clear. Names, people, and places are fuzzy. Her vocabulary has degraded almost to that of a toddler. Her world is myself, my parents, sister, and brother, and her bedroom with the creaky door and the leather brown chair. To her, my name is actually Pretty Girl.

But when she says it, I assume the role. I know who I am in her world; walk with an air of confidence because of it. My sister is “my darling,” my brother is “sir,” my mother “love” and the occasional “ma’am.” But I am “Pretty Girl.” In her simple, faded, practically translucent world, I am “Pretty Girl,” And for a girl who has struggled with self-hatred to the point of mania and dysmorphia, it means more than she will ever know or comprehend—being someone’s Pretty Girl.

Because of this I wish to keep her world small and cyclical; Her “Pretty Girl,” her supplier of joy, the thief of her exaggerated cheekbones and habitually glossy brown eyes, the hand holding hers, every day, at 6 am.

## **The Big Chop**

Cecilia Echevarria, Undergraduate

It was always a constant battle in my head, whether I wanted to do it or not. And what may that be you ask? I’m talking about the “big chop.”

As my parents tell the story, I was born with a head full of hair, and it quickly grew as I went through my childhood, and by the time I was 7 my hair reached my lower back. But what really surprised, and truly intrigued other people, was how curly and thick my hair was.

Right about that time was when I began to learn how to take care of this curly mane. From learning how to braid, to learning which brushes to use, to which products to use, I found myself taking up to an hour in the shower tending to my hair, making sure I did not damage any of my precious curls. So in the 8th grade, when I decided to cut my hair to my shoulders, I was faced with so many opinions, people telling me I’d regret it, or that I wouldn’t look good. They told me I wasn’t meant to have short hair.

Here’s what people didn’t understand: I needed the big chop. Although my hair was long and curly, my hair at the ends was dead and had lost all its natural texture. Society has instilled in the heads of black and hispanic women that straight hair is the best and that is what is acceptable. So as I was growing up, my mom and I would relax each other’s hair. Dosing our hair in chemicals, in the hopes that our curls would loosen, and they definitely did, I realized after some time that I had lost the hair I was born with.

Despite all the laws that are in place, many workplaces deny eligible people employment in their companies solely because of their natural hair, being seen as unprofessional and messy. In Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah* the main character, Ifemelu, who immigrated to the United States from Nigeria, begins to look for jobs after attending college. Her African American friend’s tell her that in order to get a job she must straighten her hair till she ends up having to do the big chop. In doing this Ifemelu loses a lot of her confidence, which is something women face day to day right now.

Thankfully in the past few years, views on natural hair have changed and there are now many brands and products and companies promoting positivity on the subject. I recently discovered the brand NaturAll, which is a hair care product brand geared toward serving black women and men. These products use all natural ingredients and all the recipes are vegan. This is an example of a brand that recognizes the importance of someone's hair and the statement your hair can make. The company's website is filled with testimonials by real customers and many describe how the products not only keeps their hair healthy but it makes them feel more confident in their bodies.

It is important to remember and recognize that someone's hair is a part of who they are and it can affect more than just their appearance. There's almost always a story behind the big chop and it can be different for everyone. As I now begin my second big chop journey, I hope that I can show my friends and family that my hair is a part of me that makes me who I am. And that I am happy and confident in the decision I've made. I love my hair and every woman should be able to have the freedom to love theirs too. Every woman should be able to wake up in the morning, look at themselves in the mirror, and smile.

## **Fire**

by Anaya Tolton, 11<sup>th</sup> Grade

I was just a boy once  
All I (fire!) wanted to be when  
I grew up was a chef  
(fire!) I played with trucks  
And fighter jets but my dream  
Was to (fire!) create masterpieces with  
Spices

At 18 I was (fire!) drafted  
I didn't have a lot of meat on  
My bones (fire!) or much skill  
I thought of running away and  
Cooking (fire!) elsewhere but if I was  
Caught I might as well dig my own grave  
And running would (fire!) break my mother's  
Heart

When I (fire!) held my first gun  
It was heavy. I knew that it would be  
I knew that something (fire!) small  
Could be so deadly. I knew with it  
I (fire!) was deadly. Captain said that  
On his command, we will shoot  
I decided I would (fire!) never  
Kill

Captain and I never got along  
I would be punished (fire!) for  
Never wanting to shoot. I just  
Wanted to season, (fire!) saute, and serve  
Not in the army, in the kitchen  
Captain said he would (fire!) break me  
Eventually. I would like to see him  
Try

Fire! I finally snapped out of my haze  
I couldn't remember how I'd gotten here  
How long had I been crouched in this spot?  
I looked around and to my horror  
Bodies littered the ground, blood mixed with dirt  
Creating patterns around the corpses  
What had I done? Who have I become?  
I never wanted to kill and yet before me  
Mowed down men, men like me  
Captain walked over to me, red faced and breathless  
'Congratulations Soldier, you finally listened.'  
What? 'You finally listened to  
Fire!

## **Writing Is Like A Crime Scene**

by Gabrielle McKayle, 10<sup>th</sup> Grade

Writing is like a crime scene,  
A tragedy someone has to deal with.  
A mess handed to workers wishing they called out  
sick.  
Blood splattered around in a puddle like words,  
Caution tape forbidding others to see the disaster.  
FBI walk in and out like editors,  
Making tiny revisions to get the story right.  
Pieces of plot left around like DNA,  
Pointing you in twenty different directions.  
Puzzled with the M.O's not matching,  
Making it seem like a different person entirely.  
Photographs taken of the victim at every angle,  
Like new eyes reading the page can help.  
Cleaning crews come like a backspace button,  
Deleting anything not worth mentioning.  
A case file inches thick,  
Collecting dust like that first draft in your drawer.  
Guess that's another story unsolved.



# The Missing Girl

by Ariana Watkis, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade

*Bringggggg!* Finally 2:30. School's over. I slip on my coat, and rush to the auditorium where I sit with my best friend Mya.

"Hey Mya!" I smile and sit down in the chair right next to her.

"Hey Chloe!" she says.

Mya wears a black hoodie and blue jeans. She has white chocolate skin and has chestnut brown hair.

"I heard there's a snowball dance! We should totally go," I cheer. We just got to sixth grade in the fall and this is the first dance of the year. We have to go.

"I'll ask, my parents," Mya mumbles.

"Ok" I say as I turn around to see Sarah and Jake walking down the aisle toward us.

"Hey," Sarah says in a white shirt with a yellow smiley face, blue jeans, a flower headband and white sneakers.

"Hey," I say as the two sit down, Sarah next to me and Jake next to her.

"Hey Jake, look at this cat!" Sarah laughs and shows Jake her phone.

Jake and Sarah share a laugh.

"Hey Jake, hey Sarah, are you going to the dance tomorrow?" I ask.

"Yeah, Me and Noah are going together, you?" Sarah looks down at her phone still looking at the same cat video.

"I'm going and I have the perfect dress," I smile.

We all get on the bus to go home and that night I think about the dance and how fun it'll be. The next day at school, I can't even focus. I'm so ready for the dance and to see my friends. I rush to the auditorium and sit next to Sarah, Mya and Jake.

"I have the cutest maroon dress for the dance with my white heels," Sarah says as I sit.

"I'm wearing a solid peach shirt and black jeans." Mya says, not too excitedly.

That night I rush back and forth from the bathroom to my bedroom. I put on my midnight blue dress that goes to my knee and head to the bathroom to put on some lip gloss. I fly down the stairs and slide on my black heeled boots and my white cream sweater. My mom drives me to the school where Mya, Sarah, Noah and Jake wait outside. "Call me if you need anything," my mom waves goodbye.

"Ok bye mom!" The window rolls up and the car speeds off.

"Hey! Glad you came." Sarah hugs me. We go inside and the music plays.

Everyone is dancing. We go over to the snack table where there's hot chocolate, soda, brownies and cookies. We grab plates and get brownies and hot chocolate.

"These brownies are delicious," Sarah says as she takes her last bite.

As we finish our snacks to the newest song made by Alissa Crystal. We dance, having the best time ever.

"I'll be back," Mya says and walks off.

"Ok," we all say and continue to dance.

The rest of the night we just dance, have fun and have lots of soda and hot chocolate. We don't see Mya again, but maybe she just went home so I don't think much of it. I go home and go to bed thinking of how fun my first dance was.

The next morning I get to school but no Mya. The day after, no Mya. A week later, no mya. Where could she be? I'm at my locker and I get out my phone. There are no texts or calls from Mya so I send a quick text myself.

**Hey Mya. Are you ok?**

I get off the bus and inside. I check for a text or anything from Mya but nothing. It's been a week since the dance and we haven't seen her since. I call her but it goes straight to voicemail. The next day I rush to my locker where I see Sarah and Jake.

"Have you heard from Mya?" I ask.

“No, I haven't seen her since last Friday at the dance,” says Jake.

“Me neither, I'll go next door to her house and see if she's there,” Sarah says.

After school Sarah and I go to Mya's house. We ring the doorbell but no answer. We ring it again, still no answer. We head to our houses and I think about Mya. I hope she's ok.

Two days later and Mya still hasn't been at school. I try calling again but still no answer when I get home. I checked if she sent any message or called, but still nothing.

A car speeds into Mya's driveway. It isn't her car because her car is a white Jeep and this one is a black Jeep. Just as the car stops in front of the garage, a lady with a green shirt and brown skirt walks up to the house with a girl in a gray hoodie and gray sweats. They both go inside. Oh my gosh. Did someone just break into their house? Who would do that? I don't know what to do. Just then they walk back outside with Mya's dog on a leash. They bring the dog into the car and the lady drives off. But the kid in the hoodie walks towards MY HOUSE! Oh no, oh no. I walk away from the window and close the door.

“Ringggg” The doorbell rings and my heart pounds.

“Who could that be?” I hear my mom say as I hear the door fling open.

“Chloe! Come down here, someones at the door for you,” my mom calls.

They're here to see me? Oh no! I slowly walk down the stairs but then I see...

“MYA!” I yell so happily.

“Hey Chloe!” We give each other a big hug.

“Where were you?” I ask.

“So, at the dance I went to go get a drink but then my mom texted me that she was picking me up early. I told you guys I was leaving, but you were busy dancing and didn't notice. I didn't want to keep my mom waiting so I left. In the car my mom announced that we were going to Pennsylvania to visit my grandma since she was sick. We came back today,” Mya explains.

“Ohhhh.” That explains it. I give her another hug.

That next day we go to school.

“Mya!” Sarah runs over and gives her a hug.

“Where were you?” Jake asks.

“Well..” Mya explains the whole thing. We laugh then get to our next classes.

## **Scarlet Turned Crimson**

by Kara Khan, 8<sup>th</sup> Grade

I had the window open so I could hear and see the kids clearly since the window was severely fogged up. They were playing tag, yelling playfully, and laughing. I heard the breeze tickle the green leaves of the tall trees and the freshly cut, green grass. The atmosphere of this place I called home was nothing like those walking things outside of the walls. They were people that ate people to multiply. Well, I wouldn't call them people. More so monsters. There were so many gardens behind the walls of Diona that it didn't feel as if the whole world was two years into the apocalypse. Everything felt so surreal, like that one painting with a fish having multiple legs. Or the one with the man walking his four pet fish. Today gave me fish vibes. Today felt quite fishy. I looked down to take a bite of my corn and the kids' giggles were silenced by low, eerie moans.

I took a peek outside and saw a herd of the deceased dragging their feet toward anyone they saw. The kids began to scream as they ran to the front door. I dashed out of my room and down the stairs. I was about to reach for the knob of the front entrance when Kate, Ben, and Greg came bursting through the door. The six-year-old, Ben, had tears streaming down his plump, red cheeks. I felt so bad for the poor thing. Kate was shaken up as much as Ben. But the oldest, Greg, was calm. Well, calm enough. I led everyone upstairs and comforted them. I assured everyone that nothing was going to happen to them.

“What are the scary guys doing here?” shouted Ben in between sobs. “The walls are supposed to be like Superman!”

Greg took on the older brother role and soothed him by talking Ben into a warm embrace. Kate didn't hesitate to join in with her brothers. I took the chance to peek out the window. Olivia's men were already off fighting the deceased. This was my chance to finally prove my strength to Olivia.

"Okay, I'm going outside to..." I paused to think of a kid-friendly way to tell them I was going outside that wouldn't freak them out. "...get some cookies from Mrs. Helen. Don't move."

I couldn't spare the time waiting for the kid's comments so I left immediately, dashing down the stairs and grabbing the first weapon I saw. It was one of those tools you used for the fireplace. I snatched it from its rack and swung open the door. Their rotten flesh filled the air with a sickening stench. Screams were heard from all over going from low to high pitched. I was mortified by how weird everything looked. Diona's fresh and colorful atmosphere was being drowned out by the pale green beings and crimson splatter. I looked to my right and saw my neighbor screeching for help and the deceased towed over and piled on top of her. All I was able to do was watch. I was completely stunned with tears filled to the brim of my eyes. I looked ahead and laid my eyes upon the sight of one dragging its feet toward me. I was so filled with fright that I couldn't even grip the fireplace poker correctly. I began to shake as I dropped my only sense of protection. The being only got closer each time I trembled. It was huge, large, enormous, massive. My entire life flashed before my eyes--times before the outbreak, times when things were sweet behind the walls of Diona--as the dead one yawed its mouth to take a vast chunk out of me. I closed my eyes, waiting and accepting my fate. I took a deep breath in and held it tight in my cheeks as a loud blast was heard. I tensed while splatter shot all over my freshly washed clothes.

I opened my eyes to see the deceased finally dead and many more laying on the grass of Diona. The ear-deafening noise of gunshots filled the air. The deceased were being knocked down left and right. The clamor of everything woke me to reality and I ran for cover. There were numerous houses, so I chose one with pillars and hit my back against it. I took a deep breath and slowly turned my head around the corner. Not only were the dead getting shot, but our people were getting shot as well. Everybody in sight was hitting the ground: kids, adults, elderly, men, women. What would stop whoever was shooting from shooting me? I wiped my wet cheeks and sucked it up. I was going to book it once it got quiet. I took slow, profound breaths and kept my ear open for any chime. After a few minutes, the firing stopped.

## One More Look

by Piper Jones, 9<sup>th</sup> Grade

"You can't go back, I promise you it's not worth it. It's better if you don't know what happened." she seemed concerned.

"Did you do it?" I questioned as the smell of peppermints filled the air.

She paused and looked away and stared at the endless fields in front of us as if she was hiding something. She wanted me to stop asking, I could tell, but if there was any way of doing this I wanted to know.

"Did you or not?" I asked again but this time I stood up blocking her view.

"Yes okay, I was in a car accident and I wasn't sure if my little sister had made it. I felt responsible so I just had to know I didn't kill her too." she said somberly as she stood up from the log we were sitting on.

"Did it work?" I was still standing.

"Yea but what I saw, how it felt to be there and not do or touch anything, it was hell on Earth Literally." she replied.

"Are you an angel?" our eyes met.

"Yea, what of it?" she just stared at me as she responded.

"Angels can go to the ground! You can help me!" I tried to hide my excitement. But I started bouncing from the thrill.

"I've been back to Earth already and I'm NEVER doing it again!" she screamed and turned away.

"Fine, I'm sorry," the embarrassment was overwhelming. I looked to the floor.

"We're in heaven, just try to enjoy it!" she continued as she walked away.

She let out a half smile, but her eyes said it all. She's been through a lot and clearly going back to Earth didn't help her, but I have to try. *If this is heaven I can imagine myself wherever I want right?* I let out a sly smile and the field from before was gone and I appeared at a beach in Hawaii. I had always wanted to come here but after Ollie was born I couldn't it was just too much work. I sink down into my beach chair and take a sip of my drink and close my eyes. It was just moments of peace before...

"Jennifer get off your ass I got news!" It was her again the angel from before, her long blond hair

blew in the wind and her blue eyes sparkled. She reminded me of Oliver. She was standing right in front of my chair just inches from my feet. I didn't think she would have helped me considering her past reaction. But there she was.

"Really? What is it?" I was clearly confused as to why she was here, but I just barely sat up in my seat.

"Since you're still new here and you don't have your wings yet, this is really dangerous, but I can give you some of my angel power to get you down to Earth but only for 24 hours." she responded.

"Ok let's do it!!" I was so excited I was already out of my seat.

"Wait but why..." I was back on Earth before I could finish.

Earth was everything I remembered, it was beautiful on the outside, and dying on the inside. But anyway, I landed in some park, I didn't recognize it. *I thought I was supposed to land in my hometown, where I grew up and where I still lived when I died, this looks nothing like it,* I thought.

"HONK HONK," that sound shouldn't have been as soothing as it was, heaven was too quiet. But Earth reeked of oil, it wasn't a pleasant welcome. I somehow ended up in the middle of the street and I thought I was gonna get hit by the car, but then I remembered I'm a ghost. *Dumbass!*

I make my way to one side of the street and try to make sense of where I am, then something catches my eye. *Omg is that what I think it is? That's Oliver's school! I think they are just leaving.*

The race was on, I had to get over there before all the students left. I flew across the street just as the last bell rang. I reached the school as the last bunch of kids were leaving, but no Oliver. I stood there defeated. The leaves were blowing right through me, the kids were laughing as they reached their cars. *Where could he be?*

I decided to just take the path back to my old home. I doubt that's where he is but it's worth a shot, so I head that way.

Everyday I would pick up Oliver from school, so I knew the way back home by heart but it had a lot more twists and turns then I remembered. *Shit I thought the turn was on Elm street not*

*Duncaster, or was it the other way around?* I decided to take Duncaster, turns out I should have stuck with my gut and gone down Elm street instead.

*"20 hours remaining Jennifer! Find him fast!" a voice beckoned*

I finally reached my house, and I was left speechless. It looked abandoned and old and was covered in rust. I didn't even recognize it, but I had to go inside.

It smelled of rotten food and death. I saw flashes of light coming from where the TV once was as if I was seeing memories. There he was, Oliver sitting there watching Spongebob, playing with his trucks. He was happy. But then I heard screams, my screams and I snapped back to reality.

There were still dried blood stains on the walls, all of the furniture was still there and a few pictures were scattered around. One of which caught my eyes.

"Oh my gosh..." I gently placed my hands on the photo.

"...This, this is from the day Ollie was born," I shed a tear and I stared at the ground.

But then I yanked my hands off the photo. *No! No! What if I can't find him? What if he's dead?* At this point I was crying, and I left the house as soon as I could.

"Jennifer! Only 17 hours remaining," it was the same voice from before.

I was shocked that time had passed so quickly, it felt much shorter than 3 hours.

I let out a sigh of relief then went next door to Mrs. Patty's house wondering if that was where Oliver was. I doubted they would keep him that close to it all but I was hoping I was wrong.

When I arrived at Mrs. Patty's house, I was starstruck. Her grass was overgrown and her gutters were full of gunk, the air was stale and her house didn't have the sparkle it used to. I hesitated before I walked in the door. *Please be okay! Please be okay!* I couldn't help but pray for her and me.

"Jennifer...I don't know if you can hear me or if you even care...but I just wanted to say, thank you for bringing the joy back into my life, both you and Oliver." I heard her mumble with her tear soaked face as she sank deeper into her favorite rocking chair.

I told myself I wasn't gonna get too emotional when I came down here, I just needed to know Ollie was okay. But when the tears started coming I couldn't stop them. Even though she didn't know I was there and couldn't see me, I sat there on the floor beside her chair crying right along with her.

But then she continued,

"I'm...I'm sorry Jen they took him." there was a pause.

"DCFS said I was too old to be his guardian and I haven't heard from him since." tears were streaming down her face faster than before and I just wish I could have hugged her.

It was hard to see her like that so I left and continued my search for Oliver.

"Reaching the halfway point now Jennifer, 13 hours to go."

That's when I recognized the voice, it was the angel I met in heaven. The one who got me down here in the first place.

I floated past my old home once again but I overheard the conversations of a group of guys standing in front of my house. I didn't recognize any of them at first, but maybe they were just paying their respects.

"Poor Kid, losing his mother at that age, and no info on the father," one of them states in a deep voice.

"Yea I've known Jen for as long as I can remember and she raised that kid right, I was gonna head over and check on him since I'm almost done here." It was Roni. I hadn't even recognized his curly brown hair.

"You're a good man Roni, let me know how he is!" the third one says.

The other two men turned and walked away from the house, but Roni stayed. He knelt down in the long grass as if he was praying, or apologizing. Not long after he stood up and walked inside. I followed him in, curious of his plans, but he just sat there in my favorite comfy chair. Clearly Roni does not understand, "Almost done!" since he sat there in silence for another 2 hours.

"The clock is ticking, 11 hours to go," I appreciated the reminders, but they just got me worried.

As I followed Roni home I recognized the area. It was filled with dozens of trees lining the street with few houses, and yet it always smelled like someone was barbequing. *Really Roni? If you*



*wanted to go home before going to see Oliver you should have been more specific, undead spirit here with limited time and I would like to see my son.* I thought to myself wishing I could say it to his face, he probably would have just laughed it off anyway.

For some reason he had to shower, brush his teeth and even grab a snack.

“Tick Tock 7 hours Jennifer” the angel continued.

“How can someone take 4 hours to do all that? I have 7 hours left because of you!” I was glad he couldn’t hear me, I don’t think I was ever this mad when I was alive.

*Why the hell did time seem to fly faster when you were dead? This would feel so much longer if I was alive.* I would never forgive myself if I don’t reach Oliver in time, then he finally gets up and heads out the door.

He opened his windows and blasted his music, songs I’ve never heard before. *At least if I lost sight of him, I could still hear him.* I let out a chuckle. That’s the Roni I remembered.

He drove so slow, he always had. It could take him ten minutes to drive from one end of his street to the other. He also liked to take the “scenic route” everywhere he went. So when he took every possible turn I was not surprised.

I’m not sure how far from Roni’s house Oliver’s new home is but I think it took us at least an hour until we reached the house.

“5 hours remaining Jenn.” She picked the worst times to remind me.

“Hey, is anyone home?” He knocked on the door.

“It’s Roni, I just wanted to check up on Oliver again, see how he’s doing.”

There was no response so we both assumed nobody was home. But he didn’t leave, he just pulled his car out to the street and waited. I let out a smile, I wondered when he would realize he looked like a stalker.

*Ollie come on! I know you can’t drive but I’m running out of time and I need to see you.* I thought to myself. We had been waiting for what seemed like forever and I knew I was running out of time.

“You better hurry up Jenn, only 2 hours left!” all I could think about was how on Earth time went so fast.

As the clock ticked down my patience got less and less. *Where the hell could they be at this hour, with that aged kid?*

But then all of the sudden a car pulled into the driveway in the pitch black and I saw Roni get out and run over.

“Oliver hey buddy I missed you!” he yelled.

The lights must have been motion censored since they turned on when the two left their cars.

“Roni guess what? Oliver asked as Roni lifted him into his arms.

“What’s up bud?”

“Look what I got!” he responds and holds up a paper.

Oliver shows him a picture that he drew of him and Roni...and me. I could see Roni’s eyes welled up.

“That’s beautiful buddy! I love it! Is it for me?” he asks.

“YEA!” Ollie shouts.

“Thank you!” He kisses him on the cheek.

“Let’s go inside now” he gestures.

I followed them in but as we approached the door, I slowed down and hesitated just as we reached the steps. *What am I doing? How can I go in and say goodbye to my son when he won’t even hear me or know that I’m there?* I thought to myself as the tears started coming. But once again I heard a very familiar voice.

“Jennifer, I just realized I never told you my name. I’m Maggie. I know exactly what you are going through, and I get that it’s tough,” her words were soothing.

“How? How am I supposed to say goodbye to my son?” I asked as I turned to face her.

“You were warned that it would take a toll, but you went anyway, you came this far, so finish what you started.” it sounded less like sympathy and more like a demand.

“But Maggie...”

“You know, when I went to see my sister after I died...” she interrupts before I can say anything.

“She was unconscious and barely alive in the hospital, and she wasn’t much older than Oliver. I had overheard the doctors talking and she was paralyzed because of me” her voice cracked as the moon rose and the outdoor lights shut off.

“I wasn’t lucky enough to find my sister safe and sound like you are with Oliver, but it gave me the closure I needed. This chance comes once, you

have 30 minutes, so hurry up and don't waste it." Her voice faded as I was left with nothing but the glow of the moon.

I take a deep breath...Let's do it!

So I walk in to find Oliver, Roni, and his new family all gathered together. They were watching Spongebob, Oliver's favorite show. He was watching it the day I died

"Just don't let him forget his mother, Jennifer, but I'm sure she would be glad Ollie has such great people in his life now." I heard Roni announce and I let out a smile.

"He'll know the person his mother was, I promise you that!" the woman replied.

"15 minutes Jennifer, get your closure!" she muttered with urgency.

I head over to Ollie and sit down next to him even though I can't actually sit. Shortly after they send him up to bed and I follow.

"Hey baby, it's mommy. I really missed you." I said as he dozed off in his dinosaur blanket.

"I'm sorry! You shouldn't have to deal with all of this, you should have a normal childhood," I continued and bent down to his level lying in bed.

"Jennifer, you have five minutes lets go! I will drag your ass back up here if I have to!" she threatened.

"But this is my son! Meet Oliver!" my face was soaked with tears and I tried to grab his hand, to hold it one last time.

"I really wish we could stay, believe me but we have to go please!" she begged, but my grip on the bed was strong.

"Just look at him, I can't leave!"

"I'm sorry, okay but let's go!" She grabbed me and started dragging me .

"No, please stop!" I begged her to let me go, then tried to loosen her grip.

Just before she dragged me back to heaven Oliver opened his eyes and I got to see the beautiful blue sparkle one last time.

"I love you Oliver! Don't ever forget that! I blew him a kiss and he fell back asleep.



## Special Surprise

by Piper Jones, 9<sup>th</sup> Grade

"Baily, Come down here now please?" my dad called sharply from downstairs.

"Hold on alright I'm coming!" I yelled as I jumped out of bed.

My sixteenth birthday was today and I wasn't expecting much.

When I reached the bottom of the stairs, both of my parents were sitting at the kitchen table. My mom had tears in her eyes--as usual. *So much for a special surprise.* I thought to myself.

"Hey Mom! Dad. What's up?" I tried not to sound too enthusiastic, maybe it was all just part of a game.

"Since today is your sixteenth birthday and your party is not until tomorrow..." I started to zone out as I thought of all the possible things they might let me do today.

I heard her continue, "we thought you might like to join your father out on his boats, learn about deep sea fishing."

"WHAT?" I quickly and angrily stood up from the kitchen table but mom grabbed my hand.

"What's wrong sweetie?" I can't deny her beautiful eyes, she deserves better than him.

"Why would I want to go sit on a boat for hours in the middle of nowhere with him?" she sensed my anger and stood up.

"Just give it a chance. Your father's not that bad." she tried to smile as she walked over to the sink. I noticed the new bruises on arms as she washed the dishes from breakfast. *What does she see in him? I wish I had the guts to tell her the truth.*

I rolled my eyes, "So what should I bring?" I looked at dad and his face lit up, but the smile was obviously fake, it always was.

"Whatever you want!" His eyes were large with surprise.

I gave them a thumbs up and my own fake smile and headed up the stairs to my room. I grabbed my favorite beanie hat, my phone, a book and went back downstairs.

"Ok ready," I resisted the urge to roll my eyes.

"Alright then, let's go." His smile was so big, I thought he was glowing. *Would you stop pretending? She'll know the truth eventually.* I thought to myself.

He got up with a pep in his step and headed out the door, but I didn't follow. *Maybe if I just stand really still, he'll forget I'm here.* A girl can dream, he made it out the door, his words now muffled so I couldn't understand him. Then he walked back in the door.

"Whatcha waiting for?" he smirked and grabbed my hand and dragged me out.

I've been out on the boat with dad before, but I was a lot younger. Before I realized what kind of man he really was. When we finally reached the docks, I'd forgotten how big the boat was.

"Here she is!" he announced it as if the boat was his child.

"Sounds like you care more about this boat than your own family," I mumbled under my breath. He turned and looked my way.

"I work hard to provide for you and your mother every damn day a little appreciation would be nice," his anger was evident, with his fists clenched at his sides.

"I'm sure you do." We just stared at each other for a few seconds.

"GET IN THE BOAT! I don't know what your mother was thinking with this bonding time."

We climbed aboard and it was actually really cool. The sail was huge and it reflected off the sun in the prettiest way. He took me up to the captain's room with the steering wheel and some comfy seats. He glanced at the window.

"I have to handle a few things before we can leave port so just sit tight in here okay?" He looked nervous, but I nodded and he turned and walked out the door behind him.

It had been at least five minutes since he left and I was already bored, but then I noticed something shiny on the floor almost hidden by the chairs. I bent over and picked it up, it was his wedding ring. *Why am I not surprised? Of course he "lost" his wedding ring.* He told me to stay put, but after finding the ring I couldn't wait to confront him once more.

When I got out of the room we were off port and floating out to sea.

"What?!" I yelled.

"How did I not notice this?" my voice cracked as I stared at the open seas we were floating out towards.

"Dad?" I called out but no response

"DAD?" I called again with more urgency than before.

"Where are we going? I thought you said you had to take care of something first." I scoured the boat.

A sigh of unexpected relief washed over me when I found him, I was panicked and breathing heavily. He was just there smiling, gutting fish like nothing ever happened.

"I thought I told you to stay in the room?" He took a swig of the bottle beside him, I knew exactly what it was.

"I found your wedding ring on the floor in the room..." I paused as I caught my breath.

"...Now why don't you save us all the trouble and just tell her what you did!" I continued.

"Why don't you be a good little girl and stay out of adult business." He faked a smile.

"Now head back upstairs, and stay out of my way." he continued and gestured towards the stairs. I hesitated, I wanted to punch him right then and there.

When I got back up to his room I couldn't sit down. *I shouldn't have come! This was stupid! Why would mom do this to me?* I questioned myself as I paced back and forth.

"Dad, can we just go home?" a moment of silence followed before...

"BANG," it was loud and made me jump.

"Dad? What the hell?" I called but no response, and I got out of my seat and went down the stairs.

He was nowhere to be found, but I searched the boat. I was running around the boat not really paying attention to where I was going.

"OW! What was that?" I was confused and a bit disoriented, I looked around but there was nothing in front of me, just the edge of the boat. But then I heard splashes of water, I stood up quickly and cautiously approached the edge.

"Dad? Is that you?" I questioned, but the splashing continued. *Crap! I hate him but I didn't want this.* I looked over the edge and I froze. The splashing had stopped and there he was, my dad over the edge in the water, lifeless because of me.

"Oh my gosh." I was shaking, I didn't know what to do.

"Dad, can you hear me?" he didn't answer.

*What should I do? I can't climb down there. I need to go get help.*

I tried to throw down a floaty, pull him up with that, but it didn't work. My breathing got heavy

and I got dizzy. *No! This can't be happening! This is my fault I killed him.* I threw down a rope and was able to loosely tie him on it, but I didn't care, it was something. I ran back up to the captain's room and took the wheel.

*Baily, if you can't do this, your dad dies.* I took a deep breath and steered the ship in the right direction. I turned on the motor and pressed the pedal as far down as it would go and we were flying.

It took about thirty minutes to reach the dock, after I tied us on I ran to check the side of the boat where I left him.

"NO!" I yelped as my eyes welled up with tears.

"He was right here..." my voice trailed off and I sank down to the floor.

I don't know how long I sat there for, until I heard a familiar voice.

"Bailey? Are you here? I have lunch for you two?" It was mom. *What do I tell her? That I killed my own father, her husband who she's been married to for twenty years? Or that her blind faith was just a joke?* I stood up slowly, my face was soaked in tears, and I turned towards her. I reached into my pocket and realized I still had his wedding ring, I never gave it back.

She ran over to the boat as I made my way to the exit.

"What's wrong? Where's your father?" she questioned, her hands on my shoulders

"He...he left," I couldn't even look her in the eyes. She yanked her hands away.

"WHAT?" She just stared at me, waiting for something, anything but I just stood there.

"He left us, we got in the boat, he showed me how to drive and at the next port...he left." tears were streaming down my face as she pulled me in tight.

"I'm sorry, Mom!" I mumbled as I placed my head on her shoulder.

"It's okay, it's not your fault." Her words soothed me and I began to calm down.

"Did he say why?" she asked as calmly as possible.

"No," I muttered as I tried to hide my smile.

# Entries From Her/Their Memoir

## **Black Women, The Blueprint**

Photography by Lizamishel Boateng, Undergraduate

Model: Tae’Niajha Pullen





## Black Woman in America

Laylah Pitt, 11<sup>th</sup> Grade

Laws are made to eliminate slavery, allow people of color to vote, etc. Yes, we are nursing our political wounds, but what about our societal wounds? There are still countless affairs within our society's ability to accept outside cultures and values. Versatile dialects, physical orientation, and self acceptance are yet to be healed and saluted within our population.

Language. An entity so sacred that beholds infinite and complex value. Language is an unevolved society. There's the oppressors, and the oppressed. The oppressing language colonizes and disregards the oppressed language and disguises it as upskilling. On the opposing hand, the oppressed language remains unheard and coerced into silence. In this case, "proper" English is the dominant language, and any kind of vernacular dialect is the oppressed.

Why should people of color, the oppressed population, take the time to learn the dominant language if society refuses to appreciate vernacular? The dominant population is essentially cutting the tongue off of the oppressed by silencing their language with another one. What many people don't understand is that disadvantaged groups use this vernacular language to connect with others on a cultural level. Dialect like AAVE/ebonics is not just slang or a "broken language", but it carries cultural value and history. Black individuals use this language with fellow members of the black community to express a sense of understanding and comfort. Black individuals use this language to honor their history. Black individuals use this language to proclaim their identity. Not only does oppressing the language of the disadvantaged affect their culture, but it affects the way that they think about themselves. People of color begin to think that their way of exhibiting their culture is essentially less or wrong. Suppressing this language with "articulateness" only exemplifies society's lack of appreciation for these versatile dialects. Suppressing this language with "articulateness" will only set society back to a time where people were even more oppressive towards racial and linguistic differences. Society should be encouraging people to speak and write with their vernacular, instead of influencing the idea that students need to speak and write with proper and precise english.

In the educational system, schools teach students that they have to be "articulate" and "thorough" in order to be successful in life. Students constantly learn English grammar and spelling, and are being coerced into dominant culture. Schools are essentially inferring that vernacular  $\neq$  success. For example, if I were to use AAVE in my college essay n write wit out usin' sophisticated words n such, da essay would be "informal" or "unacceptable". People within the higher status of society gaslight people of color by arguing that we, the oppressed, set ourselves up for vernacular discrimination. How does one simply speaking their natural and cultural language make themselves targets of racism? How do folks who fail to accept various cultural dialects get away with it? Why does the presiding culture care how people of color express themselves so much?

As a black individual, I found myself under the spell of believing that AAVE is "ghetto" and unprofessional by the influence of members of the dominant culture. I would get satirized for saying things like, "it be", and "they be", and "ain't" and "gotta", etc. Repeatedly getting taunted for speaking the way I was raised made me embarrassed of my OWN people and culture. I would get embarrassed hearing members of the Black community speak ebonically and silently pray that white folks wouldn't associate me with them. I would even add in my own discriminatory remarks. As I commenced to speak with less vernacular, the dominative culture began to accept me more. Unfortunately, that caused dissociation between the Black community and I. To them, I was someone "who wanted to be or thought I was white". This was not only a problem with students or teachers at school, but with family. Family members questioned why I spoke with such formality. They never understood the impact of dominative culture on people of color in predominantly white schools, because they attended predominantly black schools. Criticism from both communities triggered me to develop a huge identity crisis. I didn't know which way was the "correct way" to speak. The criticism not only applied to the way I spoke, but my appearance. I straightened and damaged my hair to look like my white peers. I spent hundreds of

dollars on expensive attire just to feel that “I’m fitting in”. When asked my ethnicity, I would list anything and everything besides African American. But of course there was something that I could not change or hide. My skin color. With that, I learned to accept that and move forward. As I got older, I started to question myself. Why do I care what these people think? Why don’t I appreciate my culture? If my younger self could look me in the eyes today, I don’t think she’d recognize me. Locs down to my lower back, streetwear inspired clothing, Air Jordan’s, AAVE, long eyelashes. If I could say anything to my younger self, it would be, “99% of the people you surround yourself with now, will not be in your future. Disregard what they think, and embrace your culture. The real *you*”.

## **The Value of Math in Diversifying Educational Institutions**

Gabrielle Wheeler, 11<sup>th</sup> Grade

Educators need to take steps to bridge the racial achievement gap in mathematics. Diversifying math is not a change to the discipline itself, but a necessary advancement to its instruction. Although many view math as a subject that some students can understand and others cannot, it is teachable if the approach is personalized to the audience.

Dr. Bryan Brown’s *Science in the City: Culturally Relevant STEM Education* (2019) discusses the need to examine science through a cultural lens. When teaching the biological concept of osmosis, Dr. Brown uses the example of a student who learned to marinate carne asada, a traditional Mexican dish, from their grandmother. Explaining osmosis through something familiar to students helps them better understand the concept and maintain an interest in the subject. These connections also bring the student’s culture into the classroom and make them feel valued.

Dr. Brown emphasizes the application of culture in teaching. He asserts that just as science must be culturally relevant to students, the same goes for math. As a whole, the United States (US) is a nation that dislikes math, according to *The New York Times*. This distaste for math is the same as a dislike for reading among students. When they do not see characters who mirror their family, culture, language, and lifestyle, they lose interest in the subject. Math projects can serve as a connection to the real world in which students uncover mathematical applications to sports, music, rockets, clothes, stained glass, and more. Just as it is essential for students to see themselves in math problems, it is pertinent that they see themselves in mathematical history. Math classes should share stories of relevant mathematicians across genders, cultures, and languages.

The California Department of Education wrote a framework for reforming math curricula in schools. The proposal explores the idea of social justice in the classroom. Recommendations include the application of math concepts to immigration and inequality and the upheaval of gender stereotypes. This draft generated controversy and officials plan to revise the outline before presenting it to the public for a second time, according to *The New York Times*. Educators and parents criticize the plan for disrupting traditional curricula. Even parents who dislike math as a school subject prefer the current math system in which students learn the rules and formulas without additional lessons about social justice.

School boards and departments of education across the US have already made changes to other subjects, incorporating social justice into English, history, and foreign language classes. Some hope to retain a sort of “normalcy” in math. Although it is beneficial to incorporate social justice into the aforementioned disciplines, educators need to examine all aspects of school curricula for bias to make a lasting change. Math is meant to be clear-cut, according to *The New York Times*. Due to its structure and rules, many view math as impossible to change. Some Californians regard the proposed framework for math as a complete upheaval of academic standards, according to *The New York Times*.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) administers mathematics assessments in fourth, eighth, and twelfth grade. In 2017, white students scored 25 points higher than Black students and 19 points higher than Hispanic students in fourth grade, according to [nces.ed.gov](https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/data/naep/). Asian students scored 37 points higher than Black students and 31 points higher than Hispanic students. These statistics call attention to the need for increased cultural diversity in mathematical instruction. In a changing world, math class cannot be the

constant. For a student to have overall academic success, all subjects must be accessible to them. Diversifying mathematics is essential to making the subject understandable.

Accessibility is not simply offering a math class to every student. Accessibility is centered around representation and whether students see themselves in their schoolwork. Without adequate representation, students begin to lose hope for a future that includes them. Some students will decide to be the first in their desired career fields, the one that others will look up to, while many will regard the path ahead as futile and isolating. They need to see themselves to believe. Half-attempted diversification is no better than leaving the pre-existing curriculum. Without change, students will continue to view themselves as absent from certain fields.

Fixing a single aspect of the curriculum will not bridge the racial divide and will only serve to isolate minorities from certain careers. Predominantly white math teachers, generic English names in math problems, and generic foods used in examples, create an ideal mathematician that children subconsciously compare to themselves. Students need diverse teachers and content throughout their educational journeys.

## **Where I'm From**

by Kaye'jah Reid, 5<sup>th</sup> Grade

I am from foamy soap,  
Ramen noodles and Wrigley's gum.

I am from a scary cemetery  
outside my window, sounds of my sister crying.

I am from all kinds of smells  
in the hallways, hearing the elevator  
Go up and down through the walls.

I am from the sunflowers blooming  
In the garden, the beautiful blue sky.

I am from rice and peas sunday,  
And laughing most of the day.

I am from Charades and park playin.  
Lego building and sketching.

From "Mind your manners"  
and "'stop pointing"!

From Kaye and Kevin,  
From Africa,  
From Hartford.

I am from pea soup  
And curry shrimp and rice  
From My Home. :)

## **Control**

by Kimberly Yankson, 10<sup>th</sup> Grade

You fit into me  
Into my thoughts, choices, decisions,  
You fit into me,  
Shaping me into the person I am now.  
The perfect person you want me to be.  
Force a smile.  
You fit into me.  
You fill the emptiness so well,  
Perhaps because you created it yourself.  
You fit into me  
And I try to push you out,  
I try to resist,  
I try to run away.  
But you get things your way all the time.  
And I fit into your needs,  
Fill the shape of your desires  
And you fit into my fears.

## Dear Diary...

by Sabrina Brown, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade

2/22/2022

why do these things always happen to me?

Mom...

She's always out and never spends any time with me. She never gives me any attention. I hate how little she's home. It's like she doesn't live here anymore, or even the fact that she doesn't care to say hi!! why can't she just spend some time with me? I'm her only daughter. Yes I know she has three kids, but all I want is some more time with her.

She comes home with all these men I don't even know and just sits there with them for hours talking and drinking. What do they even talk about for what feels like 10 hours straight without getting up, turning on the television, or even stopping to get food? After they're done talking, mom and the men always go out and she says something like "oh...sweetie we'll be back before 2:00 am. Just take care of Johnny and the others, will ya?" why do I always get stuck taking care of them! It's so annoying when I get stuck taking care of them. I'm not even the eldest! I'm a middle child, why can't someone else take care of everyone? How bout Steph, huh? He can do it, he's the real oldest child, not me.

Some days I just want to yell at her and say something along the lines of "Forget it mom, I'm tired of running around doing your job being the actual mom because ever since dad died you started acting all crazy like you have no sense! Maybe you should stop drinking so much, maybe that would help out and fix your grieving problems. You don't grieve by grabbing any guy off the street and making him think you're the one, only to break everyone's heart in 24 hours!" I really want to say it to her or one day maybe she'll find my diary and go through it and find this page. Maybe just maybe, so she knows how I feel because for now it's trapped in here by a lock and a shoebox.

I have school again tomorrow and I really don't wanna go but what can be so bad about going, only the millions of people staring at you and laughing? When you come home to cry about it, there's nobody there, no shoulder to cry or lean on when you need it the most. This is why I hate school and why I hate being in this stupid family. Some days I wish I was never born into this family but it was fate... Right? or maybe I'm overthinking this too much and I just need to sleep. Good night, diary.

What should I do now?

7:09 am

3/14/2022

Good morning, diary! I know I haven't written here for a while. I've just joined so many after school programs with my friend and we've been having the best time! I joined a cooking club and met my new best friend! His name is Kai, he's so kind and caring. I really am glad to have made my first real friend! Well at least I hope, but my birthday is today so it's gonna be awesome!

3:03 pm

I thought today was gonna be great but instead it ended up being the worst day of my life! After writing, I went down for breakfast hoping my mom would have made me a great breakfast, but she sat there and just ate her great breakfast in front of me and I ended up eating a nasty red velvet cupcake pop tart! The worst flavor ever! Then I got to school and everyone was making fun of my outfit! My classic sea blue hoodie with my blue and white bleached jeans! I wanted to fall on my knees and cry but I went on with my day and let it be. Eventually it came to the last part of my day, The after school programs. Today I had my cooking club with Kai. When I got there everyone was staring at me like something was wrong! Turns out I had a stain on my shirt, but I cooked with Kai. I went to the bathroom and when I got back everyone had eaten our food! I was so mad I started to tear up and ran out! I hated today. It was gonna be the best day of my life, finally turning 14. I came home and I went to my diary. I hate my life! I hate my family! I hate everyone and everything! It's been like this for years and I've had to bottle up my anger and tears. I want people to know how I feel but they just don't! I'm tired of this being my life so I'm leaving for good!

Goodbye diary and I hope someone finds you and takes good care of my writing!

## **Black Women, The Blueprint**

by Lizamishel Boateng, Undergraduate

Model: Tae'Niajha Pullen





## Ring

by Gabrielle McKayle, 10<sup>th</sup> Grade

### I

The black phone buzzes in the cup holder,  
The screen reads "Mom"  
Thankful for the call she picks up,  
Grinning ear to ear.

### II

She talks blissfully about her weekend,  
Unaware how zoned out her daughter is.  
"Are you even listening!?"  
"To you? Always."

### III

"I'm so glad I got to see you!" she says,  
As her mother fights an internal battle.  
"I know me too!" is the reply chosen before  
hanging up,  
Wondering why she didn't tell her daughter the  
whole truth.

### IV

"I'm driving in a bad spot,  
I might lose you."  
"Mom?"  
"Hello-"  
"Yes I'm still here"

### V

She holds the phone close,  
Listening to the silence on the other end.  
A soft smile overshadowed by tears.  
I'm still here, mom.  
Always.

## I've Loved and I've Lost

by Gabrielle McKayle, 10<sup>th</sup> Grade

I've Loved & I've Lost (5 times)

### *Sixth grade*

His Justin Bieber hair was enough to win me over.  
But the blue eyes definitely helped seal the deal.  
The photobooth enclosed us  
like a bunker of light.  
Making silly faces at the camera,  
We were happy for those few moments.

### *Seventh grade*

I always thought the Big E was tacky,  
But with him it was amazing.  
The way he held every door for me,  
The smell of his hoodie,  
His arm around mine as we walked.

### *Eighth grade*

My body heated up like an oven.  
I wouldn't want to be held by anyone else.  
I didn't imagine meeting her dad while in her lap,  
But love's unpredictable like that.  
He didn't pay us much attention anyway,  
Or he definitely would've seen us kiss by the  
mistletoe.

### *Ninth grade*

Her warmth is still here.  
Faint but here.  
I should be lucky I even get a text.  
Still, I miss when we were more.

### *Tenth grade*

Alone.  
No warmth or radiance left for me to hold onto.  
No late night conversations that led to hushed  
laughter.  
No fights on what movie to watch that night.  
No her.

# Resilience

## Suffocation

by Jermoya Tracey, Undergraduate



## Scars Never Forget

by Faiza Inusah, 8<sup>th</sup> Grade

When we're young our parents don't teach us about the real world  
They hide us and shield us as best they can  
from the horrors  
but they always acknowledge that they're there  
That there are things lurking in the shadow  
The monsters under our beds  
the boogie man  
But they never prepare us for what comes next  
Not "the real world" of 9-5s and bills but the moment  
your adolescence is ripped away and you're forced into the real world  
This doesn't happen when your age gets the word teen at the end  
but when all those monsters lurking in the dark come into the light to show their true faces  
They could be the ones you hold dearest or the ones you barely know  
The man hiding in the alley waiting or the store clerk watching  
but one thing even if they tried they couldn't prepare you for  
is the scars those monsters leave behind  
Wounds may heal but scars never forget

## Dance

by Kimberly Yankson, 10<sup>th</sup> Grade

We dance

as she points over to the empty space by the desks at the corner.  
Just so we can continue before class starts.  
as we sing our choir song, "The Lion Sleeps Tonight."  
*She's really good at this.*

We dance and talk

about our scars.  
I show her mine. The one on my arm, the one on my knee--  
Scratches of frustration and anxiety.  
I'm afraid she'll question. But she smiles warmly at me.  
That's when she shows me the giant one on her neck.  
I didn't know if I should ask where it was from.  
She beat me to it though--  
Heart issues she's had since she was a baby.  
It's the same condition as my older half-sister.

How did I not know about my best friend's heart?  
How did I never notice the scar?  
She knows exactly what I'm about to say.  
"Don't apologize, I've just never brought it up."  
There is a change in the air,  
but we just keep dancing.

We dance around each other

*I don't want to be friends with her anymore, she's annoying.*  
The words dig into my skin like my nails did the night prior.  
*Why would you say that?*  
*You don't really feel that way.*  
*I'm sure this feeling will blow over soon.*

We dance  
                                apart for a week until we realize  
7th grade just wasn't the same without each other.

*I'm sorry.*  
*I forgive you.*  
*I forgive you.*  
*I forgive you...*

I dance alone  
It's Saturday morning at drama practice.  
But soon enough she'll be here, watching me dance.

I dance  
as they walk in crying.  
I wonder what's wrong.  
They don't want to tell me.  
Someone finally breaks the silence.  
*Ellie passed away Friday night.*

I freeze--  
not knowing how to react.  
I don't think it's true.  
Don't want to believe it.  
Can't move.  
The words, *I forgive you*  
squeeze my neck, refuse to let go.  
I can't breathe.  
I only saw her a day ago.  
One day.  
The memories begin to cut.  
like my fingernails, scratching into my arms  
again and again.  
It hurts,  
but there is no blood.

# Heat

by Gabrielle McKayle, 10<sup>th</sup> Grade

I

My legs run in slow motion,  
The danger growing nearer.  
There's nowhere to hide.  
I can't outrun him can I?  
Crack.

II

My question is answered.  
I fall to the floor with a painful thud.  
Heat engulfs my chest, as my ears ring like a phone.  
Blood is rising in my mouth.  
The silence is deafening.

III

The panic makes it worse but my mind still wanders.  
I wonder if anyone will come to save me?  
Will I lie here forever in the pool of my blood?  
Alone with my thoughts and what if's?  
Staring silently at the ceiling?  
Hoping for help that never comes?

IV

I feel cold.  
I wish for my mother to come running in.  
For her warmth to heal me.  
The only heat left comes from the bullet deep in my chest.  
More blood rises in my mouth with each shallow breath.  
I don't wanna die.

V

My body feels heavy.  
Moving seems impossible.  
The pain in my chest starts to arise again.  
I succumb to the heat.  
The warmth is all the comfort I need.  
Smiling, I mistake the Angel of Death for my mother.



## Validation Of A Mundane Existence

by Kimberly Yankson , 10<sup>th</sup> grade

Recognition or affirmation that a person or their feelings or opinions are valid or worthwhile.

All anyone wants is to be seen as worthwhile.

To be looked at in any way or viewed in the light of someone's eyes.

Most likely the brightest of lights,

But there are those who are so desperate for a gaze,

Even if it's shrouded in darkness,

And sinister intentions.

But it's human nature.

That's what they always said it was.

An excuse if anything.

But human nature or not,

Good attention or terrible attention,

It just feels so good to be seen.

You were only 15.

You were quiet, innocent, ignorant

To the world of dangerous wolves

You'd just sit there 'pretty'

But just sitting there is enough for them to start talking.

"She's asking for it,"

Asking for what?

Apologize for living in this body of yours,

A distraction.

"Boys will be boys."

You were only 13.

To grow,

And wonder what you'd look like when you grow older.

Go to school,

To be ridiculed,

To be loved,

To be looked at in any way.

To be accused of having implants by your classmates,

But you were only 9.

## Hello/Goodbye

by Anaya Tolton, 11<sup>th</sup> Grade

Hello/Goodbye

Hello/Goodbye

**Hello, you've reached the voicemail box of 860-837-5731. At the tone please record your message. When you finish the recording hang up, or press one for more options.**

“Hey, just checking in to\_\_\_ see how things are going. I can’t wait for our sleepover. I have Disney Princess chutes and ladders for us to kick the night off \_\_\_\_\_of course. So yeah, hope you had a great day. \_\_\_\_\_ Remember, I love you to the moon and back. See ya later, bye.”

*Is it weird saying I love you to the moon and back to your best friend? I’ve been doing it forever, but people say that it’s weird. I dunno, maybe next time I won’t, I’ll ask for her thoughts later.*

**Hello, you've reached the voicemail box of 860-837-5731. At the tone please record your message. When you finish the recording hang up, or press one for more options.**

“Awe, I heard you were sick. I’m so sorry, we can reschedule our sleepover for a different day. \_\_\_\_\_ Why didn’t you call? I could’ve come over and brought soup, and we could’ve watched Fresh Prince till we \_\_\_\_\_ fell asleep. Hopefully see ya soon? Bye.”

*Ugh I sounded like a bitch. ‘Why didn’t you call’? She was sick! I should call her back and say I’m sorry. Not saying I love you to the moon and back feels a little weird.*

**Hello, you've reached the voicemail box of 860-837-5731. At the tone please record your message. When you finish the recording hang up, or press one for more options.**

“Hey I saw you in school today but you never called me back. It doesn’t matter \_\_\_\_\_ though it was great to catch up with you. Um, \_\_\_\_\_ Darren just dumped me. I kinda need someone to talk to. If you can call back could you? I love you to the moon and back. Bye.”

*I hope she’s doing okay. I haven’t gotten calls back from her. I don’t want to lose my best friend too. I Remember when we were eight, she liked Tom and I liked Ben and she asked Ben out for me and I asked Tom out for her. And I remember when we used to cover our notebooks in graffiti stickers and for a week I wrote her entries and she wrote mine. I need my best friend.*

**Hello, you've reached the voicemail box of 860-837-5731. At the tone please record your message. When you finish the recording hang up, or press one for more options.**

“Thanks so \_\_\_\_\_ much for coming to the diner with me today. I really needed that. It was so good to spend time with you again outside of school and to talk like we used to. We definitely \_\_\_\_\_ need to do this more often. \_\_\_\_\_ I hope everything works out for you. I love you to the moon and back.”

*It isn’t weird to say I love you to your best friend, I know that now. We went to our diner and we ate pies and drank apple juice and laughed at each other’s jokes. We laughed so hard it came out of our nose and we just*

*laughed harder till we were in tears. I wonder why she hasn't called me back though. I know things are rough at home, but we could always talk it out. I want to be there for her like she is for me. I think something's wrong.*

**Hello, you've reached the voicemail box of 860-837-5731. At the tone please record your message. When you finish the recording hang up, or press one for more options.**

“Listen, I don't know what's wrong but I see you in school and I see you on your phone but you don't ever call me back and you barely \_\_\_\_ text me now. Did I say something? Is someone hurting you? Please call me back, Kara. I don't want to lose you \_\_\_\_ too, you're my best friend. If I did something wrong I'd rather you tell me than for me to feel \_\_\_\_ horrible because you won't bother to talk to me anymore!”

*This is so frustrating. I forgot to say I love you. Shit, she definitely is going to think I'm pissed with her. I'm bothered, yes, but I'm not pissed and I don't want to make things worse. I think I should call her back. Oh, she texted me. Oh my god.*

**Hello, you've reached the voicemail box of 860-837-5731. At the tone please record your message. When you finish the recording hang up, or press one for more options.**

“Kara! Kara, pick up the phone. You better \_\_\_\_ not do anything stupid, remember we do stupid things together. I know something is wrong. You need to explain that text to me. What the hell do you mean by *I'm ending things, I'm sorry. It isn't your fault?* I'm so sorry I should've seen the signs, \_\_\_\_ I should've known things weren't okay, but I swear to you that I'll be by your side and that everything will be okay because if it isn't okay I'll be your shoulder to cry on. We can have more days like the ones at the diner, I promise. \_\_\_\_ Jesus Kara please call me back, this isn't funny at all. You can't do this to me. Or you can't do this because of me. You can hate me all you want but don't do it. I need my \_\_\_\_ best friend and I need her alive. Please don't do it, please don't leave me. I love you to the moon and back.”

*I'm shaking. She wouldn't. How did I not notice things were going so horribly wrong for her. How come I was so unaware. I'm her best friend for Christ's sake. I hate her for planning this, I hate her for even thinking about doing it.*

**Hello, you've reached the voicemail box of 860-269-8150. At the tone please record your message. When you finish the recording hang up, or press one for more options.**

“I loved the days we spent together, so many fond memories that some \_\_\_\_ of the bad ones went away. You're going to try to blame yourself for not catching on to my feelings. It's not your fault you didn't \_\_\_\_ see the signs, I hid them on purpose. \_\_\_\_ Yes things have gotten worse, but don't think for a second that I'm ending it because of you. You're my best friend, \_\_\_\_ thank you for choosing me. I love you, Payton, to the moon and back.”

*She's probably trying to call me now, Trying to talk me out of it, but this is something that I need to do. I remember when she told me that we would grow old together. That we were soulmates, because soulmates can be best friends, it doesn't always have to be romantic. I remember the day I met her, I was so scared in 3rd grade to make friends and she just walked right up to me and said “My name is Payton, and we're going to be best friends”. I don't regret anything about that day. I loved going through middle school with her, even though it was a pit of pre-teen hormones. I loved watching her make new friends in high school and becoming a basketball star. I didn't like watching her fall for Darren and I definitely didn't like watching him break her heart, but I loved that we went to the diner. She had apple pie and I had pumpkin and we both had apple juice and laughed. We laughed so hard it came out our noses. It burned but we laughed so hard we were in tears. I'll miss days like those.*

*C'mon Kara, pick up the phone. Please pick up the phone.*

**Hello, the number you are trying to reach is no longer in service. Please call your service provider if you believe this is a mistake, Goodbye.**

## **My Little Red**

by Kimberly Yankson, 10th Grade

She always wore that bright red cardigan. I could never complain about it though, It was so beautiful on her. Such a small, docile thing she was. I can't help but wonder if she knew what the other boys said about her in the locker rooms. I envisioned how her little face would contort into disgust and it just makes me all the more excited. Because of course she's mine. She's just unaware of it yet.

"Hello, Little Red," I grin at her. In return, she smiles back at me so innocently.

"I told you to stop calling me that, remember," her sweet voice giggled. It sounded like music to my ears. "Maybe I should stop wearing red for the time being—"

"No," I answer with haste. Why would she want to do that to me? How could she do that to me? She knows how much I like it on her, so how dare she threaten to change it?

"O-Oh, I'm sorry," she replied. Her hand gripped her phone much tighter than before. She was nervous, intimidated. It was amazing how much power I had over her. "Hey, do you need help studying again? I don't mind going into the library—"

"You should actually come to my house. My parents aren't home, it's much quieter, and we have much more privacy. I'm sure you'll love it," I tell her. There's a confused look on her face, and I can tell she wants to say no. "You wouldn't want me to fail the quiz, would you? How cruel..."

"I— I don't—, I wouldn't want you to fail. I'm sorry, I've just never been to a guy's house and— especially not while their parents aren't home, so I don't know," she mumbled under her breath but I heard all her words so clearly. Poor Little Red, I want to feel bad, but I just don't.

"You can trust me, cmon,"

"Okay..."

I knew she would come around. She's my Little Red after all. And she will be whether she likes it or not.

## **Shark**

by Natalie Eva Naa Aylee Armah, 5<sup>th</sup> Grade

Like a fish in the ocean  
Here is where I thrive  
When I hit the water  
I come alive

My hair floating above  
While I cut through  
The clear floors  
Like a bird through the air

Legs joined together  
Like a mermaids tail  
Making bubbles  
That fly into the air

Fast as a hawk  
As graceful as a swan  
I propel through  
This overflowing pond

The water has given me  
A nickname  
Shark

I breathe the water  
In and out my nose and mouth  
Instead of filling with water

I'm filled with air

Slowly but surely  
I descend

All I hear is the drum  
Inside my chest

Beating faster  
As I realize

That this is real  
And not a dream

Gasping for air  
I surface

When I emerge  
Above the water  
I am relaxed, rested,  
And re energized

As if woken up  
From a long  
Much needed  
Refreshing nap

And my day begins  
All over Again



by Lee Ernset  
12th grade

# Melanated Confidence

## **Black Women, The Blue Print**

by Lizamishel Boateng, Undergraduate

Model: Tae’Niajha Pullen





## **I'm Me**

by Sarah Parsard

6th Grade

I used to feel quite out of place.  
Everyone looked different than me,  
Lighter skin and thinner lips,  
Flowing hair and brighter eyes that transfix me.  
I always wondered if I was just really tan,  
Or why it took my mom a whole hour and a half to do my hair,  
Or why my lips were so different.  
I used to think that's why I talked so much.

But sooner or later I realized that I was different,  
I am different, but that's okay because  
I'm me. That's all that matters,  
That's all that's ever mattered,  
And I'm ok with that reality.  
A realization that made me a better person.

I think it's better to be different than be like everyone else.  
I have a sense of personality, so does everything else about me.  
I also think my cool hairstyles that take hours,  
And the unique food my mum makes me,  
Like dumpling and saltfish,  
Or Jerk chicken, something that's always too spicy for my taste,  
Or my big mouth that never stops moving,  
Are the reason I'm me, and I love me.

## **Still A Black Woman**

by Amelia Mercy

7th Grade

Brown, umber, hickory, chocolate, mocha, wood  
black, ebony, midnight, jade, raven, jet black  
Shades of her skin  
Shades of her roots  
Shades of her afro  
Taken for granted  
Rises from the dust of a man  
Walks on the path of his past life  
Fixing what he broke  
Showing the worth of her weave  
Lifting 6,270 pounds worth of stress  
Bringing life, proving them wrong  
Making her own opportunities  
Assorted with  
African, German, Italian, American, Asian  
Still a Black woman  
Lesbian, straight, bisexual, queer, transgender  
Still a Black woman

## **Beauty In Brown**

by Katherine Grace Wright-Goodison, 11th Grade

There's so much beauty in brown,  
the color often overlooked, discounted.  
But it's natural and rich with history.

Brown is my skin, inherited from my parents,  
darkened by the sun's rays,  
lightened by the cold of winter.  
This skin is beautiful; it connects  
me to so many others. So many shades  
from peach to umber,  
mine is gingerbread, syrup, sepia,  
no one paint shade can capture it.

Brown is my hair, so dark it's almost black,  
but the sun's rays illuminate the tight curls,  
revealing its true color. Coils that shrink  
as water soaks in, stretch when I  
pull at them, revealing length that's hidden.  
Curl patterns are unique to each of us with African Ancestry:  
are tighter, looser, softer, more coarse,  
types all refuse to be tamed for long.

Brown are my eyes, warm and full of emotions,  
portraying what I'm thinking before I say it.  
I get them from my mother. They shine  
and crinkle when I smile and  
Tears darken my lashes when they fall.

Black is how they define me, but brown is what I am.

## **A Black Girl Boast**

by Aaliyah Brown, 12th Grade

Hail Nubians and negroes, sons and daughters!  
From whom I procure my poise, and pilfer power.  
I am Aaliyah, the off  
spring of Orlando.  
I belong to the brood of the Browns, known warriors.  
Buff of Beyoncé, believer in the magic.  
The magic I maintain, enemy-avenging.  
My enemies, I encounter daily,  
Yet I still rise, skin melting with melanin.  
As the sun shines upon me, I shall surmount  
Standard-scorner; ideal-defier,  
I shall be careful to conform; norm-neglecter.  
My words, I wield as weapons, my mind a shield.  
My kinky curls crimp into a crown, I am queen.  
Defense to my dynasty, guard of my own throne.  
Amid my royal reign, I battle hate and fear,  
Lamenting in my fallen sisters, I stay strong.  
In Breonna's bloodline, I take pride.  
Descendant of a damaged people, I still win.  
My tenure is timeless, and my virtue is true.  
I am Aaliyah, Empress of ebony.

## **For Black Women**

by Iris Jordan, Undergraduate

They say the darker the berry,  
the sweeter the juice.  
but you are too beautiful  
to measure to fruit.

You're gorgeous,  
breathtaking,  
flawless and kind  
a blessing to have  
nothing short of a dime

your dark-skinned glory  
is the finest to see,  
the blueprint to what  
most girls want to be

Your fro,  
your curves,  
your smile,  
your skin.  
You're magic all over,  
outside  
and in

Never be ashamed  
of your true complexion  
The universe built you  
To its utmost perfection

I want you to know that your beauty is true  
and if you forget,  
you know what to do

read this poem one time back  
and remind yourself it is a blessing to be black

—period.

## Definitions

by Danicia Brown, Undergraduate

To be black is to be resilient.

To have faith in yourself when your environment clearly tells you that you are not wanted.

To be black is to feel beautiful in the sun but less than in the cold.

Hearing your name pronounced correctly brings you joy. When said right on the first try your heart jumps with excitement.

To be black is finding comfort in the presence of strangers that look like you.

To warn your friends of your loud family or the aunt that will try to get them to drink with her.

To be black is to be sensitive both as a child and as an adult. It never gets much easier. You may get better at hiding your pain, but it is unavoidable when in the arms of your mother.

Listening to the pointed words of disapproval over your hair, being subjected to the touch of people you don't know, learning to be quick in your dodges.

To be black is to force yourself to be polite in order to avoid being labeled as something you are not.

To run from specific perceptions, to change yourself for the sake of not attracting attention.

Ignoring your soul for the comfort of others. Silencing your voice to live without conflict.

Not recognizing your image in the mirror.

Finding yourself far from the child you used to be, you grasp onto the essence of her inside you. Her curls were stronger then.

Your apologies are said with tears in your eyes but strength in your lungs. You feel yourself coming back after years of forcing you down.

You have given yourself a second chance. You can breathe again.

To be black is to love freely. Without limitations.

To walk towards happiness at your own pace.

To be black is to view the world as home.

Keeping in touch with your emotions and caring for them like they are a newborn.

Constantly comforting and nonstop kisses.

To be black is to step into yourself with a confidence that cannot be removed from your body. Or from your soul.

It is to live completely.

It is a complicated existence.

But I would not give it up for anyone's satisfaction.

It satisfies me.



# Normal Is An Illusion

by Sahnra Sawyer, Undergraduate

I WROTE A POEM FOR YOU...

SUPREME 'SAHMRA' DIVINITY |  
IG: @\_WHENSUPREMESPEAKS

Titled:

*Normal* Is An Illusion...

SUPREME 'SAHMRA' DIVINITY |  
IG: @\_WHENSUPREMESPEAKS

Sweet, sweet child  
When was the last time you looked into your  
own eyes?  
There is only one you in this entire world  
You are no less than the stars, the trees, the  
sun, and the moon, you belong here.  
Life only begins when you resonate with the  
moment in complete awareness of your  
existence.

SUPREME 'SAHMRA' DIVINITY |  
IG: @\_WHENSUPREMESPEAKS

It is our resistance of self that kills us before we  
even realize we're alive,  
You are right on time.  
Energies floating in motion on sacred land that  
bears more than just fruit  
And we're blinded by things that can be gone  
whenever our Creator wants it to  
So to tell you the truth...  
Be.

SUPREME 'SAHMRA' DIVINITY |  
IG: @\_WHENSUPREMESPEAKS

Sweet, sweet child  
Remain still in the body that was carefully crafted for  
you and shine  
I mean so bright that you mimic the sun  
Radiating on all that comes into your presence  
That kind of authenticity that never goes out of style  
And when it's all said and done you'll realize  
*Normal* was just an illusion.

SUPREME 'SAHMRA' DIVINITY |  
IG: @\_WHENSUPREMESPEAKS

# Programmed

by Sahnra Sawyer, Undergraduate

## Programmed

PAGE 1

Some ask what is life?  
I say life just is.  
because it's something powerful about discovering life before puppet  
strings like plugs electrified my cerebrum keeping my brain from  
functioning in its *true* consciousness.  
Propaganda and lies playing with my mind like *my* right to *know* me is  
a sinful crime.  
The more I analyzed this system of what living should be like,  
the more visible my Creator had become...  
Her timing is always right.  
Waking up *this* eye that sees more than these two ever could.  
I couldn't do it on my own.  
I needed life to show me what it is not.  
& it did.

SUPREME 'SAHMRA' DIVINITY | IG: @\_WHENSUPREMESPEAKS

PAGE 2

I found the key to freedom when I escaped this silent war zone  
and entered the portal of divine intellect that has lived in my  
mind waiting for me to notice its presence.  
I rescued me like God knew I would.  
Shackles breaking and I've come to find that this earth does not  
move without melanated entities.  
For it is my people who keep the world in motion.  
& so I see that it is we who come out victorious  
because that is who we are *naturally*.  
Meanwhile they believe *they* are God herself...  
A shame.  
But hate is just another form of love so I forgive them.  
Because even when they murder me over and over I *still* arise more  
times than they'd ever know.  
*Still* living.

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And their hate for me only exists because they know me and God are the  
same.  
Something their power could never equal to.  
But my mind is mine and I am no longer living in the world they built for  
my destruction.  
I was slowly drowning in their deadly ocean but the God in me swam to  
shore and made it home, back where she belonged.  
So I've come to find...  
That their program only controls those who don't know the power of  
their minds...  
Program canceled.

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# Short Fictions

## Alignment

by Jessica Bostick, Undergraduate



# Lady of Wood

by Gabrielle McKayle, 10<sup>th</sup> Grade

Once upon a time there was a kingdom called Idzora, and in that kingdom was a King. This King had a terrible fate, and his death was coming near. His only dying wish was that his pregnant wife would bear a son good of heart and loving of soul. Time passed and the king's death eventually came, and the Queen was forced upon the throne. She later gave birth to the most beautiful boy in the whole world, but unfortunately, all of the goodness and love that was once in her heart was passed onto her son, Fredric.

As Prince Fredric grew, he couldn't help but fall in love with every woman that came into life. He started to veer further away from the throne and became enthralled with life in the village.

The queen slowly started to despise her son, "Fredric!" she would scream, "How dare you visit those ungrateful peasants below!"

"Mother, you don't understand," Fredric would try to calmly explain. "I love them, they are all good people, please just give them a chance!"

"Those mangy rats get 0 chances! You are an heir to the throne, you should not be conversing with people below you. This is my last warning, Fredric. If you go to the village one more time, you will be banished forever." As the queen shouted Fredric cowered, but he couldn't help but love his mother.

He knew his mother was right but Fredric didn't listen, that same night he snuck out of the castle and made his way into the village. He knew the people in the village were not as well bred as his royal family, but due to his fathers dying wishes he could look past their appearance and into their soul.

The next morning Fredric could hear his mother calling for him, "Fredric! How dare you visit those ungrateful peasants below!"

Fredric could have lied but he was too good at heart, "Mother," I said "I'm sorry. I-I just needed to see them one last time, please forgive me!"

The Queen paused, "Last warning means last warning, glad you got your goodbyes in because YOU ARE BANISHED!" The Queen's words echoed throughout the empty castle.

Fredric whimpered, "But mother, where shall I go?" A single tear fell out of his eye.

"You shall live in the woods," Her tone was cold, "maybe it will teach you how to be a man, not everyone you meet will be so kind as those in the village!"

The servants quickly pushed Fredric out of the castle and into a dingy carriage. When the carriage started to move Fredric couldn't help but start to cry. How could his mother do this to him? Just for visiting the village?!

"Sir, we were told to drop you off here" A little servant shyly spoke and stuck her hand out. Fredric thanked her as he grabbed her hand and stepped out of the carriage. He started to crumpled to the ground and started to cry as he watched the carriage leave just as fast as it came.

The woods had always scared Fredric, it was always dark and misty, and the trees looked like they were once people. The knots in the trees looked like eyes that would follow you wherever you went.

Fredric couldn't tell how much time had passed as he continued to cry, but suddenly he heard a soft voice whispering from behind him. "Why do you cry?" The voice asked.

"What? Who goes there?!" Fredric stood up in fear and wiped his eyes, trying to seem tough.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to scare you." Fredric heard dead leaves crunching as if someone was walking on them, but everywhere he looked he couldn't find who was speaking. "I'm over here, silly!" He turned around and found where the voice was coming from. In front of him was a woman made out of pale bark, her dark green hair was matted and had dead leaves and sticks tangled in it, her eyes were so dark green that they appeared to be black. To be honest, she looked like a dead tree. Some may find her ugly, but Fredric found her beautiful.

Fredric was astonished. "Who are you?" He asked.

"Oh, my name is Lady of Wood," She shyly spoke.

"You're.... Beautiful! I've never seen a woman like you before!"

“Oh wow, thank you. You really should watch your back in these woods, they can be pretty dangerous.” From that moment on Lady of Wood and Prince Fredric became best friends. She agreed to help him survive in the woods but only under certain conditions.

“And what may those conditions be?” Fredric chuckled.

“You mustn't touch me,” She coldly said.

“What do you mean, Lady of Wood?”

“Do you see these trees? Do you notice how they look like men?” Lady of Wood asked, Fredric nodded. “They are all my previous lovers and men who tried to take advantage of me. I’m poisonous, I’m destined to kill anyone who touches me.”

Fredric nodded, “That's alright! I can do that!” Already forgetting the one condition that the two of them set in place, he reached out and grabbed Lady of Wood’s hand.

“No!” The Lady of Wood quickly pulled her hand away. Fredric looked at her confused because at first nothing happened, “This has never happened before!” The Lady of Wood whimpered. “Your heart! It must truly be too pure! I must find something to save you right now before you turn to wood!”

“But Lady of Wood, nothing has happened, maybe nothing will happen?” He shrugged.

“Fredric you don’t understand, no one can escape the fate I put upon them. You will turn into wood no matter how much you deny it.”

He didn’t believe The Lady of Wood at first, but as days started to pass Fredric noticed his entire arm was starting to turn into wood. As more hours went by the wood started moving up his body faster and his entire body slowly started to turn into wood. The more time that past, the more Lady of Wood fell in love with Fredric.

A couple days later Fredric, now unable to move with the wood up to his neck, was now stuck in one spot with The Lady of Wood by his side. “Lady of Wood,” He suddenly said “I was wrong. I should have listened to you when you warned me, I deserve this.”

Lady of Wood started to whimper, “Fredric, please don’t speak like that.” But it was too late. Lady of Wood watched as Fredric’s last breath escaped his lips, and he fully turned to wood.

Lady of Wood fell to the floor and started to ball. *How could she let this happen again? Especially to someone she truly loved.* Suddenly she got an idea. She stood up and wiped her eyes, then she spoke her chant.

“With leaves of green  
In the land where men once stood  
Spirits come to me and heal thee  
for I am Lady of Wood!”

Her head flung back, her dark emerald green eyes turned completely white, she raised her arms up and directed all of her energy towards Fredric, then she screamed. Her chilling scream echoed through the forest, a few seconds past and nothing happened. Just as she was about to give up hope, Fredric’s wooden body started to lift itself off of the ground. Once he was about six feet off in the air his body started to glow, then without warning, the bark that was once enclosing his body flew off, revealing his pale body. Time seemed to move in slow motion as The Lady of Wood watched his body fall and hit the ground. As soon as he hit the floor his eyes opened wide, he rolled over onto his back and started taking deep breaths.

“Fredric!” The Lady of Wood yelled and ran over to him. She wanted to help him catch his breath but her curse stopped her. “Fredric are you alright?”

He sat himself up and pushed himself over to a nearby tree that he could lean on. He continued to take deep breaths as he said, “Yeah, I’m fine.” The Lady of Wood could tell he was lying.

“I’m so sorry Fredric.” She said and lowered her head. “You should just leave, I’m no good for you.”

Fredric shook his head, “No Lady of Wood, I will never leave you alone, no matter how bad your curse is.” Lady of Wood couldn’t help but smile, no one had ever treated her like this before. She didn’t say anything but in her head she promised to always stay with him too.

At that moment Lady of Wood decided she would do her best to nurse Fredric back to health. Obviously she couldn't touch him, instead she would gather fruits and other healthy supplements while he was sleeping at night and during the day she would make sure he ate them.

After what felt like forever spring time came and Fredric was finally healthy again. It took him a while but he learned how to walk again, he would even help The Lady of Wood by going into the woods with her and finding fresh fruits to eat. Everything seemed to be going great between the two of them, but one day something went terribly wrong.

One night the two of them were sleeping next to each other, making sure not to touch, when suddenly Fredric woke up to a loud thump beside his head. He sat up quietly, making sure not to wake Lady of Wood, and pondered at the green pear that was now lying in the dirt.

"Lady of Wood!" Fredric yelled in excitement. He grabbed the fruit in his hands and took a delicate bite of the pear. "Look, it's the first ripe fruit of the season!"

"Fredric, put that down!" Lady of Wood advised, but Fredric didn't listen and took another bite. "Fredric no!" She grabbed the pear and forced it out of his hands "Fredric, that pear came from me, this is poisoned!" As soon as she muttered these words the pear in his mouth turned to mush and he started coughing up dust. He gasped for air, then grabbed his heart in despair, and fell to the floor.

For once the woods seemed quiet, Lady of Wood didn't know what to say. "Fredric?" She muttered, "Fredric!" She cried out again. Tears started streaming down her face as she knelt next to Fredric's lifeless body, she couldn't help but feel defeated, until she remembered her magical chant. *It worked last time*, she thought to herself, *it has to work now, right?* She stood herself back up, took a deep breath, then said.

"With leaves of green  
In the land where men once stood  
Spirits come to me and heal thee  
for I am Lady of Wood!"

Once again, her head flung back, her dark emerald green eyes turned completely white, she raised her arms up and directed all of her energy towards Fredric, then she screamed. The forest seemed to glow for a couple moments, but nothing happened to Fredric, his body just layed still on the ground. Lady of Wood's legs buckled underneath her and she started weeping, suddenly she could barely breathe, just blinking made her feel like she just climbed a mountain. She realized that wasting her energy like that really takes a lot out of her....maybe too much.

"Fredric I am so sorry!" She started weeping and crawling over to him. "You didn't deserve an ending like this, I'm sorry," she was now right next to Fredric, "sleep well my love." The Lady of Wood then kissed him. His lips seemed to glimmer and sparkle, but she couldn't admire it because right after she kissed him, she died.

As soon as Lady of Wood's head hit the ground, Fredric awakened. He looked around the forest confused then dramatically started to spit, noticing the taste of the poisonous pear in his mouth. The woods around him were eerily quiet, everything appeared to be frozen in time.

"Lady of Wood?" Fredric asked, but then he noticed her body lying on the floor right next to where he was once lying. Her eyes were wide open with a look of both fear and sadness painted on them. "Lady of Wood?" He asked again with his voice quivering while he started to move closer to The Lady of Wood's body. Fredric knelt down next to her body and shook it while crying out, "Please! Lady of Wood! Please wake up!" He started to shake her body harder, but it wouldn't move, almost as if her body had grown roots that left her completely confined to the ground. Fredric started to cry, he couldn't help but feel like this was all his fault. If he hadn't eaten that pear than Lady of Wood wouldn't have had to heal him, if he had listened to her and didn't touch her than she wouldn't be so scared that she would hurt him again, and if he hadn't gone to the town that one night after his mothers warnings then none of this would have even happened. Fredric then cried a single gold tear that landed perfectly onto Lady of Wood's heart. Her whole body started to glow with gold dust circling around her, Fredric looked around the forest and noticed everything was going back to how it once was.



The eerie mist suddenly lifted, the creepy and rotted trees started to look healthy again, the grass beneath him turned green, and the sun even started to shine down on him.

Fredric looked around in amazement until he heard the Lady of Wood excitedly say, “Fredric, look!” He turned around and saw Lady of Wood, but she looked different. Her bark was a healthy brown again and it even had a little bit of green moss growing off of it, her leafy hair was no longer matted, Lady of Wood now radiated a different type of energy than she did before, Frederic even saw a true smile on her face for the first time. The one thing that stayed the same though, was her beautiful emerald green eyes.

“Wow, I-I-” Fredric didn’t know what to say, he didn’t think that the Lady of Wood could be even more beautiful than she already was.

Luckily Lady of Wood didn’t need him to say anything, because for one last time she spoke her chant,

“With leaves of green  
In the land where men once stood  
Praise the spirits  
Because my true love has finally healed me”

Lady of wood walked over to Fredric and gave him a big hug. At first he winced, not wanting to turn into wood again, but to his surprise nothing happened to him. A big smile spread across Fredrics face.

“Fredric,” Lady of Wood sweetly said, “you healed me! My curse has been reversed!”

After that day, Lady of Wood and Fredric decided to go back to the kingdom. Fredric tried speaking to his mother but she wouldn’t give up the throne, luckily he had all of the village peoples help. Fredric became king of Idzora therefore making Lady of Wood the rightful queen. The two of them lived happily ever after.

## **Be You: Inspired by *The Hate U Give***

by Eva Delaire, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade

Most African Americans face discrimination every day because of how they look or how their hair looks, or even the color of their skin. And there needs to be a stop before we don’t have many people to go to when we need help. We won’t have our friends by our sides, maybe even family. We aren’t the same, but that should not define who we are.

## **Do Things for You and Only You**

A lot of black girls and women think that they are not capable of achieving their dreams because of the discrimination that is going around in the world. People may say that they are too black or they are not good enough and that is what society tells us. Since when should we listen to what society says? The only thing that matters is you and only you. It is not about what society says or what your family and friends say, it is about what you want and what you believe. As a young black girl, I have been told that I am too young to follow my dreams or that I am not what society looks for in a person, or that I may not have blonde hair and I am not good enough, but what keeps me going every day is the peers that I surround myself with. My “haters are my motivators.” From different points of view, people have said to me that they don’t believe that I can do it because that is what other people think. Society looks for thin hair, not curly. They look for blonde, not black. They look for blue eyes, not chocolate brown. But who cares? Everyone is different. Everyone is their person. Everyone deserves peace no matter how much they have messed up or hurt others’ feelings. they are still a person and when is society going to recognize that?

## Skin Color

We may have beautiful chocolate brown skin or white milky skin, but we all have feelings. We may not always think the same, but we all have more in common than all of us think, no matter our gender, religious beliefs, or sexuality. During this time I thought about the book called *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas. This book was about discrimination and black human rights. The main character, named Starr, had gone through a traumatic experience after seeing her best friend Kahill get shot and killed because of his skin color. This book made me realize everything that is happening in this world we live in. We would have never thought that someday this would be the real world our parents always pretended was filled with candy and beautiful rainbows but no, this is one rollercoaster that you can't get off if you don't pull the trigger.

## Motivation

Motivation is the key to becoming successful and to become independent. A lot of people think that they would need money or a relationship to be happy but in the real world at the end of the day, it is every man for themselves. There won't be a relationship, there won't be a person who knows your youth, and you know you better than anybody else. Sometimes you don't know when to let go but when you let go you have something bigger than ever to look up to. You may think that you need someone to cry to or to lean on when you need help but no, because you are a part of the situation everything always comes back to you, not the person that has helped throughout your darkest moments. But one day there is going to be someone you wish you never met. One day they are going to just be a memory. One day you may fall apart and be by yourself, but the one thing that should wake you up every morning is motivation. You may feel like you can't handle the heartbreak, the depression, the loneliness, but motivation is key to everything. So if you or someone you know is going through a rough time let them know you love them to get them back on track, especially the Black girls. People may say you look too fat or too skinny or too gay to get the job, don't let that bring you down. With the right people in your corner, you can be anything you want to be. Remember you can't be too young or too old to be who you want to be. You define yourself, nobody else. You know your body better than anyone. Hope to see you take on the world with your bright future. As Winston Churchill said, "Success is not final, failure is not fatal, it is the courage to continue that counts."

## **Creatures**

by Jahmiya Beamon Scott, 8<sup>th</sup> Grade

Virulent Creatures do exist  
These creatures feed on lies and toxicity  
Key to survival means risks  
To these beasts  
Losing a spirit is the value of dirt  
They feed on agony and emotions  
Gaslights are like nectar to these devils  
They vow they are the spirits of a saint  
But deep down in their hearts  
They could never be pure  
Nobody can  
Not even an angel is 100% pure-hearted  
Nobody ever is  
Everyone deep down inside has a reluctant trait that makes others view them as demons if seen  
Hiding this trait does not seal it forever  
It just makes this trait larger and easy to view  
Lucifer was an angel once  
Now look at him  
The immoral beings aren't hidden  
Because they're right in front of you  
Every time you justify an action you make or even vow it was pure  
It just shows how immoral and horrible of a person you can be  
You don't see it yet  
And after reading this you probably will try to beg to differ  
But everything you read is true  
The guilt just turns into a fragile ego of always wanting to be correct  
To feel good  
To make yourself feel justified

That's why others let their ego get the best of them  
or why they feel "good" destroying saints, But the only thing being destroyed is spirits.  
These saints lose control of reactions and turn into what destroyed them.  
This should be prevented not only for humanity but if this isn't prevented who will be able to  
control the intensity?  
Justification is pure evil.

## **An Unknown and Twisted Fate**

by Gabrielle Wheeler, 11<sup>th</sup> Grade

Teo had gone out, early before Giuliana had woken up and early before school started. Gio and Giuliana were sitting at the kitchen counter making their breakfasts when he finally returned. Teo held something behind his back. He gave his two younger siblings an apologetic look that morphed into a sad smile before taking his hands from behind his back with a flourish. He held a bag from Moira's and one of Giuliana's favorite smoothies from B&B. The bag of croissants and bagels that was carelessly tossed onto the counter wasn't of concern. It was the to-go cup that held the smoothie that made his two younger siblings turn their gaze on him rather than the goodies. The strawberry mango smoothie was a treat that soothed Giuliana. One that Teo needed if he was going to tell his siblings about their soon-to-come separation without a meltdown. It wasn't that the separation was a surprise, in fact it had been expected, but it was the promise that Teo was now forced to break if he let his siblings go.

A month earlier their social worker, or rather just Giuliana's, had told them that they wanted to move her to a home with more specialized attention. A home without her brothers and without a family. Well, at least that's how her brothers saw it. Giuliana would be going to live with a single mother in Charlottesville, Virginia and her brothers would be moved to a group home. While they did fight against it and succeed, the social worker reminded Teo that it was only a temporary win. No one was going to take them all and this was Giuliana's best chance. It was a guilt trip that was meant to tell Teo that he was holding his siblings back. It was also a trick used by many to get the oldest to let their siblings be stolen from them. Teo promised that they would never be taken from him, no matter what. That promise was beyond his control and the social worker made sure he knew it.

It was an event similar to that of later that evening that had caused him to make such a promise. They had all been watching a movie together. Neither sibling could be closer to their brother. Giuliana began sobbing at a scene in which Cinderella's father left her. It was at that point that Teo decided that they were going to have to run away because despite his reservations and knowledge that this would get him into far more trouble than trying to get his younger siblings back later, he knew that letting his two youngest siblings be separated was going to cause more trouble in the long term and that was of greater concern to him than his own personal losses that were sure to come.

## Maker of Heroes

by Piper Jones, 9<sup>th</sup> Grade

Often when we think of heroes  
We think of the ones wearing capes  
Soaring through the sky saving those in need  
Not even human  
We forget the ones who run in when the rest run out  
The ones who continue despite their struggles  
The ones who themselves in danger for the sake of others  
They are human  
They can break  
They can bleed  
And when they reach their finish line they'll know they did a good deed  
But to them it was what they had to do  
They didn't have a choice  
They had to help protect others from pain  
You can't help but wonder if they were born or made  
Unaware of the struggles they faced  
You assume they just do it for the fame  
Constantly fighting a silent battle  
They fake a smile  
Cause they can't show pain  
And all you do is sit and watch what they became



## Hopefulness Seeps Out

by Graciela Cazenave, 8<sup>th</sup> Grade

The flag of red, white and blue  
has been torn in two;  
Many lives, including mine,  
Continue to be sacrificed.  
Yet, will my lost blood go to waste?  
Our oppression has yet to be faced.  
It's been 267 days since I left,  
267 days since I hoped to be whole.  
267 days since I had a chance at dignity.  
267 days since I assumed this role,  
Of being desperate for *my* American Dream.  
We've joined this battle for the world to hear our  
plea.  
We put our lives on the line; I'd rather be dead if  
not free.  
The path of this war has been trekked  
By many of us before me.  
We stumble, and trip, and fall,  
As we walk in circles.  
My morale is more sunken than my cheeks.  
The toll is heavier than the bags under my eyes.  
Did I really leave for this? Was it worth it?  
Will it ever be justified?  
The days have passed, but they shall pass no longer.  
Will this longing be fulfilled, or will it continue  
through the ages?  
Will they keep us quiet? Keep tearing out history  
pages?  
Your promises are translucent lies; we can see right  
through.  
You emancipate us from others -- to make us slaves  
to you.  
My wishes are unrealistic;  
The color of my skin remains.  
The once lively brown is now dull and gray.

As I lie here and fade away,  
My hopefulness seeps out with my blood,  
Hit by a bullet of lead and truth.  
While you force your flag together  
And unite yourselves into one,  
We continue to be outcast,  
Waiting for a world that will never come.

## Broken Beauty

by Piper Jones, 9<sup>th</sup> Grade

Gliding down the road with perfect complexion  
Smooth sailing they say but that's not always the  
case  
One wrong turn, one straightaway  
You've lose control  
An endless spiral as you fly off the road  
A throbbing pain shot up through your spine  
Stay as still as you can until help arrives  
Not long after the sirens come  
But you're unable to be rescued  
You're stuck in place  
You're now nothing more than a disgrace  
The beauty you once had was gone in the blink of  
an eye  
You pray to god begging him to let you die  
After what feels like an eternity  
A layer of white paint covered the ground  
You hear a voice  
Such a lovely sound  
A warm hand on your face  
*Wow, I've never seen something quite like you*  
You realize that rust is not a fault  
A dimmed light is not hopeless  
A broken window is an open door  
Beauty is not always what it seems  
Sometimes it can be more



## Little Red

by Gabrielle McKayle, 10<sup>th</sup> Grade

Once upon a time there was a nurse who everyone called Little Red due to her red scrubs and her unnatural red hair. She worked at an assisted living residence called “The Woods” and took care of a variety of patients, all ranging from different ages and walks of life.

There was one patient in which she dreaded seeing, her name was Agatha. However Agatha wasn’t really the problem, the person she really dreaded seeing was her son Kyle who Agatha called her “wolf”. Most children of the sick are passionate and care about their loved ones, Kyle however only cared about himself. He had straight black hair and an ugly black beard that Little Red doubted anyone found attractive. Everytime Little Red came around Kyle would hit on her, saying things like “How’s my little Hot Head” and “Are you an exam, because I’ve been studying you like crazy!” Most of the time she would just ignore him, but one day she didn’t.

Little Red sat in her car holding a cake and a little pot of butter for Agatha. When she pulled into The Woods she saw Kyle standing outside of door 1697 smoking a cigarette, she let out a scoff. “You’re not allowed to smoke here you know.”

He smirked, “The only thing smoking here is you babe.” He drew one last breath from the cigarette and put it out, blowing the smoke into Little Red’s face. Little Red has dealt with men like this before, she knew that Kyle was just trying to get under her skin because he probably had a grade school crush on her. Little Red’s only question was, why does that allow Kyle to treat her like trash?

Little Red stepped into the little dingy apartment and saw Agatha sleeping on the couch. The place was a mess, her floor is littered with fast food bags and candy wrappers, her once green carpet is now a musty brown, and on top of all of that it smelled like something had died in there.

“Agatha,” Little Red said as she stepped towards the sleeping woman, “I brought you a cake!” When Agatha didn’t move Little Red started to get nervous but after a couple of moments Agatha let out a soft yawn and started to sit up.

“I thought the old hag finally let go.” Kyle said while he sauntered into the apartment.

Little Red turned around in shock, “That’s really how you talk about your own mother?”

“Oh don’t worry about it,” Agatha croaked “My little wolf’s words don’t bother me much anymore.”

Little Red remained quiet, trying her best not to snap at Kyle. She couldn’t help but feel bad for Agatha, she didn’t deserve her son’s horrible treatment on top of her Stage 4 Breast Cancer. She just sat there contently, almost as if she had been accepting of her life’s end.

“When I’m done with your meds would you like some cake?” Little Red sweetly asked Agatha.

“Oh yes dear, that would be wonderful!”

Kyle smirked and stroked his ratty beard, “I’d like a piece of that cake.”

“I find you absolutely disgusting. Go make yourself useful and get her some water for her meds.” Kyle chose to back down and walked into the kitchen, grabbing a bottle of water.

“Does this make you happy?” Kyle aggressively said and slammed the water on the table. Little Red Didn’t respond, instead she just gave him a dirty look and gave Agatha the water. Kyle clearly wasn’t satisfied with this, “I gotta go smoke” he said and then stormed out of the apartment.

Little Red wanted to follow and give him a piece of his mind but she knew that Agatha was supposed to be her first priority. “Would you like some cake now, Ma’am?” She asked after Agatha swallowed her pills. Agatha answered Little Red by weakly nodding her head. Little Red then made her way to the kitchen to get Agatha eating utensils and a plate, when she opened the drawer that held the forks, knives, and spoons, she saw Kyle outside the window with a cigarette in hand and looking as smug as ever. Suddenly little red was filled with rage, she ran to Agatha, cut her a piece of cake, and practically threw it at her. “Here” Little Red said then started to make her way out of the apartment.

“Wait,” Agatha grabbed Little Red’s arm, prohibiting her from moving another step. “Please go easy on my wolf, he is feeling lots of pain right now.” Little Red gave her a sympathetic look, nodded, then made her

way out of the apartment. Although by nodding she agreed to follow Agatha's instructions, she didn't care one bit about how Kyle felt.

As soon as Little Red stepped outside and slammed the door behind her Kyle said "Y'know I like my girls feisty?" Little Red angrily stared at him, trying to come up with the words to say. "What? Sorry I have a type." He chuckled then took a drag of his cigarette.

"How can you even act like that right now?" Little Red practically screamed.

"Like what?"

"You're so selfish you know" Little Red shoved her finger into Kyle's face.

"If being selfish gets me what I want," Kyle grabbed Little Red's arm and whispered in her ear "then I'm fine with being selfish."

"And what is it that you want exactly?"

"You" Kyle whispered again.

"Get your hands off me you creep!" Little Red yelled and flung her arm back, causing Kyle to release his grip on her. "After today, you better not try to speak to me!"

Kyle chuckled, "If I can't ever speak to you, how will my heart go on?"

The two of them continued to argue. While Kyle kept trying to get in Little Red's pants she kept yelling back at him. Little Red pointed out everything he did wrong and made sure he noticed how bad of a person he was. One thing neither of them noticed though, was Agatha lying on the floor choking on her piece of cake.

"Well now that she's gone I guess I won't be seeing you anymore..." Kyle said as soon as the Hearse left. Little Red knew what he was doing. Trying to fake pity so he could get into her pants. For a moment the thought made her sick but then a sinister idea came to her mind.

"Who said I had to go so soon, hm?" She batted her eyelashes at him, purposefully making herself sound all innocent. "I can keep you company until you're not so sad." Little Red knew she sounded ridiculous but that didn't stop her.

Kyle licked his lips and smirked. Little Red grabbed his hand and led him into the guest room, sitting him down on the bed. "My what soft hands you have."

The compliment made Little Red uneasy, she took a deep breath and focused on speaking. "The better to hold you with my dear." Kyle let out a sigh and chuckled. Little Red leaned closer to him, giving him a peck on the lips. Kyle eagerly returned the favor, lengthening the kiss. Bile was rising in Little Red's throat, she hated this. Just when it became unbearable he drew back, trying to catch his breath.

"My what soft lips you have."

"The better to kiss you with my dear." She pecked him again, shorter this time, just in an attempt to shut him up. When Kyle started to get handsy Little Red couldn't take it anymore. She backed up, looking at his flushed skin.

"Leaving so soon?"

Little Red tried to speak sweetly, "No I just have to... set the mood first. There's some stuff in my bag." Getting up she left the room, grabbing some candles and a lighter from the kitchen and her purse she reentered the room. "Close your eyes," Little Red playfully said. Stupidly Kyle followed directions and sat on the bed with his hands over his eyes. After lighting one candle Little Red opened her bag, pulling out a bottle of hairspray. As she pulled off the cap Kyle questioned the noise.

"Is that.. hairspray?" Kyle asked. Shit she thought to herself.

Quickly she came up with the best lie she could. "Yeah, just trying to freshen up for you." Little Red reassured and Kyle just shrugged it off.

Little Red made her way back over to Kyle and said "You can open your eyes now" She quickly lit the lighter "Who is the hot head now, bitch?" Spraying the hairspray on the flame Little Red aimed it at Kyle's head. His eyes immediately became filled with fear as he watched the raging flame engulf him. He started to scream in pain and Little Red just ran out of the door, she couldn't help but feel satisfied. On her way out she lit a candle and threw it onto the couch, feeling a little bit of guilt for ruining Agatha's things. As more of the house became engulfed in flames Little Red jammed the door, making sure Kyle had no escape. Getting into her car she drove away, while apartment 1697 turned to ash in her rear view.

From that moment on Little Red lived her life hunting other wolves like Kyle. She made sure every girl like her could live safe and far away from the claws of toxic wolves, she made sure that she could live happily ever after.

## **What's so Good about Bye**

by Gabrielle Wheeler, 11<sup>th</sup> Grade

We are all born similar.  
No clothes and ripped from our parent's arms.  
What changes?  
We all had no riches  
yet no rags.  
when does this change?  
When placed back into our mother's arms?  
When wrapped in a blanket  
When clothed for the first time?

Why is it that family means much more than the word?  
Economics,  
dreams,  
chances,  
but most importantly, family.  
Family is what I want.  
What I can only d r e a m of  
with a slim chance of getting.  
O p p o r t u n i t y doesn't just fall into my lap,  
not like some.  
I have to go l o o k i n g.

in my little black bag,  
t o r n to shreds  
my r a g g e d y old lamb  
my means to a living,  
there isn't much to find.

walk up the steps,  
wait at the closed door  
r e a l i t y.  
A cold hard slap to the face,  
another door shut since my family l e f t.  
family is nothing but a trick,  
luck even for those who have it.  
It's what I don't get.  
Except,  
I do get s o m e t h i n g.  
I get what I deserve.  
A slap to the face.  
and I fall.

The door opens.

"I'm fine."

I cross the threshold,  
in I go.

Up the stairs.

This is my chance.

Turn a n e w leaf.

Family.

one step forward.

two steps forward.

"Let's play a game,  
the g a m e of life."

three steps backward.

"You have to get away, you have to!

Please hermana!

Do it for me.

Please. Just stay safe for me,"

her pleading words replay in my head.

Her anxious screams create a sharp pang in my heart.

"Take my hand! I'll pull you!

q u i c k!

q u i c k!"

I move five steps forward.

"I love you."

the last thing that I heard.

The game stops.

Cheers and groans erupt around me. I look around at my friends.

They laugh. "You won!"

I freeze.

I have never won.

I smile, but I know what's coming next.

10 steps back and never again.

"5 strokes!

Come on!

You can do it!

You can swim, I know you can!

5 strokes and then I can reach you!"

she *told* me 5 strokes was all I needed.

then she would pull *me* to s a f e t y.

My weight offset her.

I couldn't save her.

It's all my f a u l t.

I don't deserve a family.

That Hurricane.

s e p a r a t e d families.

t r a s h e d homes.  
k i l l e d.

~

I cross the threshold.  
This time,  
the opposite direction,  
an exit this time.

“Do you want to say goodbye?”  
walk down the steps  
stop in front of the usual gray honda.

I don't say 'bye.'  
Bye is for importance.  
For people who love me.  
For my family.  
It's what I never got to say.

# Merry Christmas?

by Gabrielle McKayle, 10<sup>th</sup> Grade

## Cast of Characters:

Bill Barlowe: Typical overprotective father, owns a shotgun and is not afraid to use it

Elizabeth Barlowe: Loving and welcoming mother, pushing for grandchildren

Charlotte Barlowe: Evelyn's older sister by 3 years, known as the family flirt

Oliver Pierce: Evelyn's first boyfriend, tries his best to make a good first impression

Evelyn Barlowe: Twenty year old whose never brought a boy home before

## Setting:

(The curtain opens on EVELYN and OLIVER downstage right, they appear to be arguing. We can see the inside of the home upstage. Quickly EVELYN knocks on the door and waits for an answer. ELIZABETH opens the door and greets them with a smile.)

ELIZABETH

*(Pulling Evelyn into a tight hug.)* Bill, she's here!

BILL

*(Gets up from the couch, joining them at the door.)* Oh, it's so nice to see you. Come in here honey, I bet it's freezing out there.

EVELYN

I know, I'm glad to be back. Uh, everyone this-*(pulls Oliver inside the house.)* is my boyfriend Oliver.

OLIVER

Hello, it's nice to finally meet you all. Thank you for having us over.

ELIZABETH

Oh my, he's so respectful. Welcome to our home, just make yourself comfortable on the couch. Dinner will be ready in about 10 minutes if you don't mind waiting.

CHARLOTTE *(from the couch)*

Wow, she finally got a boyfriend. Only took forever.

EVELYN

Awww I missed you too Char. *(jumps on top of her and hugs tightly.)*

CHARLOTTE

Ow! I think you just broke my ribs.

BILL

Alright girls knock it off you're acting like a five year old.

EVELYN

*(lets go of Charlotte.)* Okay okay, we're done.

ELIZABETH

Charlotte, come greet our guest please.



CHARLOTTE

Hello-*(freezes.)* uh, you're gorgeous.

OLIVER

Thank you?

EVELYN

Okay...I think we're gonna head up to my room before Charlotte drools all over the floor. *(grabs Oliver's hand and starts heading upstairs.)*

BILL

Actually I was thinking we could bond all together, dinner will be ready soon if you two just wait.

EVELYN

*(walks toward the couch with Oliver.)* Okay then.

ELIZABETH

Charlotte come help me set everything up in the dining room!

CHARLOTTE

Coming!

BILL

No no no, I have to sit in between you guys.

EVELYN

You're kidding right?

BILL

No I'm not kidding. I don't need any funny business happening.

EVELYN

Dad we are twenty not thirteen.

OLIVER

It's okay, I'll just sit in the recliner over there and you guys can have the couch.

BILL

See Oliver understands.

EVELYN

No he just doesn't want to make a bad impression.

OLIVER

Ha. You know...This isn't about me. This is between you and your father babe.

EVELYN

Fine. *(crosses her arms.)* Dinner will be out soon anyway.

BILL

Okay you're acting like a brat.

EVELYN

I don't think I'm gonna last till dinner if you keep this up.

CHARLOTTE

The table's all ready, come on in.

OLIVER

Oh thank goodness.

(BILL, EVELYN, and OLIVER walk into the kitchen, joining ELIZABETH and CHARLOTTE at the table.)

ELIZABETH

Evelyn, why don't you say grace for us?

EVELYN

Oh, uh...God is neat, let us eat. Amen. (*picks up her fork and starts putting food on her plate.*)

ELIZABETH

She gets that from you. (*looks at Bill across the table.*)

BILL

(*mouth full of ham.*) What?

CHARLOTTE

Okay can we get along with the usual Barlowe Q&A.

EVELYN

Absolutely not. You can't scare him away already.

OLIVER

Oh please, it's just a few questions. Let's humor them, shall we?

EVELYN

(*chuckling to herself.*) "Just a few questions."

BILL

First things first. What are your intentions with my daughter?

EVELYN

Don't answer that.

BILL

Sweetie let the boy speak for himself.

EVELYN

Man.

BILL

Right, sorry. Let the man speak for himself.

OLIVER

I do not have harmful intentions sir. I just want to love and care for your daughter for as long as she will let me. (*smiles at Evelyn.*)

CHARLOTTE

How gross. I hate people in love.

ELIZABETH

(*in a warning tone.*) Charlotte, be happy for your sister.

CHARLOTTE

I am... kind of.

BILL

Can you pass the potatoes over here Char?

CHARLOTTE

(*passes the bowl.*) Here you go.

BILL

(*licking his lips.*) These mashed potatoes are amazing honey.

ELIZABETH

Why thank you. (*stops to take a bite.*) So Oliver, how'd you meet our lovely Evelyn?

OLIVER

I went to hang out at my friend's dorm and there she was, charming as always.

BILL

What are you going to school for son?

OLIVER

Medicine sir. I have my sights on being a doctor. Maybe a surgeon later on.

CHARLOTTE

That's so Derek Shepherd of you.

EVELYN

Yeah and I'm his Meredith Grey. Not you.

CHARLOTTE

(*rolls her eyes.*) You aren't even in med school.

EVELYN

Whatever. Just get back to making him sweat.

ELIZABETH

What are your plans for the future? Do you see yourself marrying Evelyn soon?

OLIVER

(*coughs.*) Uh, I don't know about soon but I would love to. We have to settle down first, move in together you know?

ELIZABETH

You two aren't living together yet!?!?!?

EVELYN

No mom. Not everyone moves as fast as you and dad.

BILL

That was uncalled for.

EVELYN

Bite me.

CHARLOTTE

(*whispering.*) I'm sure Oliver does.

BILL

I heard that.

EVELYN

Next absurd question please.

ELIZABETH

Are you two using protection?

OLIVER

(*in shock.*) What?

BILL

No answer the question. This is important.

OLIVER

Well uh (*starts sweating.*) We...(looks at Evelyn for help.)

EVELYN

I don't think that's an appropriate question for the table mother.

ELIZABETH

I just wanna know if I should expect grandchildren.

BILL

We better not be expecting any. I'll kill you boy. You hear me!? I'll take my shotgun out and kill you right here!

EVELYN

O...kay. I think he just peed himself honestly.

OLIVER

What!?! I did not!

EVELYN

Please you're as pale as a ghost. You practically match the napkins.

CHARLOTTE

If it makes you feel better he's never shot one of my ex boyfriends. He's all bark and no bite.

ELIZABETH

No more biting talk girls. I'm begging.

BILL

Back to the question. You two are keeping away from each other right?

OLIVER

Define "keeping away".

BILL

Well it means just that. Keeping your composure when she's showing some skin, looking away when she's naked you know-

EVELYN (interrupting her father)

HA! You think he does that!?! (*laughing a little harder now.*) You think he has never seen a woman naked before?!? (*laughing so hard there's tears.*) Especially me. Oh my God, you really are funny dad. (*catching breath.*)

CHARLOTTE

Ev (*coughs towards dad.*)

BILL

No one is laughing young lady. This is a serious topic.

ELIZABETH

Sweetheart she knows it's serious... But, you delivered it like a 1950's pastor.

EVELYN

Thank you.

ELIZABETH

After all, how do you think grandkids are made? They can't keep away from each other when we expect-

EVELYN

(*stands up from the table and slams her hands down, interrupting her mother.*) I've had enough of this! You are all insane. I am a grown woman who does whatever she pleases. I'm not your little baby girl anymore so stop treating me like it. WHAT OLIVER AND I DO IN OUR PRIVATE TIME IS *NONE* OF YOUR BUSINESS. YOU ALL HAVE OTHER THINGS YOU NEED TO WORRY ABOUT. Charlotte has been trying to get in Oliver's pants since we got here. She's been staring at him like vampires stare blood, all hungry, ready to pounce. It's weird, nobody has said anything about it, and frankly it's making me uncomfortable.

Oliver's too nice to tell her to back off so here I am. LAY OFF MY MAN YOU PSYCHO. Alright, who's next? 'Cuz I've got it out for all of you. Mom needs to stop pushing us together like an arranged marriage. Yes, we love each other but we're not just gonna hop in a chapel and then push out 3 kids. BE REALISTIC FOR ONE SECOND WOMAN. YOU AREN'T GETTING GRANDKIDS RIGHT NOW JUST ACCEPT IT AND MOVE ON. Oh and don't even get me started on dad. You put up a facade of a nice dad just looking out for his youngest but now you're crossing the line. You literally threatened to shoot him. WITH A SHOTGUN. I don't even recall you owning one of those things. You all need serious help at dinner conversation because none of this is appropriate. We are not talking about baby making, marriage, a home, or anything related to the future. DO YOU PEOPLE HEAR ME?!

OLIVER

I agree.

EVELYN

*(sits back down.)* Thank you. I've been holding that in for so long.

BILL

I didn't mean to scare Oliver. I'm just protective of you.

OLIVER

There is no need for that sir. She's in good hands, I swear.

CHARLOTTE

Speaking of hands-

EVELYN

*(holding her butter knife threatenly.)* Open your mouth again and I'll slice you like bread.

ELIZABETH

Okay the mood is a little tense lets all just calm down and finish eating.

*(A few moments pass as everyone eats. The only noise being utensils hitting the plate)*

ELIZABETH

So what dog do you think your kids will want?

EVELYN

You've gotta be kidding me. *(puts her head down on the table.)*



