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Connecticut Student Writers Winners and Honorable Mentions

Gold Medalists
Silver Medalists
Honorable Mentions
Teacher Awards
Kindergarten

A Safari

Reese Clukey
I am going on a cruise ship.
I am going to Islands
I am going on a slide.
I am saying, “Yeah!”
Kindergarten
I have an Elf on the Shelf.

She is Red. Her name is Ell.

Ell is dancing with the elves.

They are getting ready for Christmas.

Ell wanders around my house at night. She moves from place to place.

Once, we left Skittles in the Playroom. Ell ate them! Skittles are My favorite candy, too.
YETI: MY NEW PUPPY
OTTO GREEN

When it snows,
There is a snowman.
There is my house.
There is a tree.
There is my puppy
Sniffing around
   And playing
Happy Chinese New Year

Ivan Jiang

Kindergarten
My Little Pony
Ruby Wilson
Seals
Ana Novak

Seals have big eyes to see in the dark. Did you know that they have fat too? Hey seal, when you are having that baby it is on land? They have whiskers to feel. In the water they can breathe through holes. And speaking about water, they eat squid.
Once upon a time there was a beautiful land with healthy food and a land filled with junk food. The Nutrition Heroes kept their land safe until then came the Junk Heroes. They came face to face. The Junk Heroes tried to destroy their land, but the Nutrition Heroes used their weapons. The leader of the Junk Heroes took out a sword that was extra sharp. Super Apple tossed an apple slice. It bonked the machine the leader was standing on while Sharp Carrot used Sharp Airplanes to hit the junk food. Extra Sprinkles was so angry that he made it rain large sprinkles. Peach was so confused he flicked a sprinkle at Extra Sprinkles. The Nutrition Heroes only needed to defeat the leader. Even the nutrition heroes themselves couldn’t defeat him. Then they got an idea and then with one spark shot together. They had defeated him once and for all and continued to protect their land.

The End
Fixing with Dad

Zachary Wilkosz

Tiled kitchen floor-

happy cabinets filled with

fun fixing with Dad.
HOCKEY
RUBY WILSON

by RUBY WILSON

Grade One
What you need to play hockey:

- Helmet
- Ice skates
- Pads
- Hockey stick
- Puck
Where you play hockey

You play hockey at an ice ring or a pond. You can practice ice skating there too.
There are Twelve Players on the Ice skating ring.

There are six Players on each team. That is on the ice.
Pishins

There are 3 people who play offense. 2 players have to play defense, and there is a goalie.
What the mascots are and what the teams are.

Every team has a mascot. The reason why I picked the mighty ducks logo is because I like the mighty ducks movie.
The Team That Gets the most points wins. The Game you have to get the puck into the goal last.

Goaley make sure you have fun.
MY DOG CHESTER

BY: John Zucccon

1st grade age 7
Grade Two

Cat on the Fence
Naisha Varma

Grade Two
The Haunted House

By Vera Briggs

Part 1

I was out trick-or-treating on Halloween night when I saw an old house. My brother dared me to go inside. I put down my candy and slowly walked toward the house. As I walked toward the house I noticed an empty grave in front of a gravestone with my name on it. I knew it was a bad idea to go inside. I walked toward the house as slow as I possibly could. Every step I regretted it more. Then I noticed closed off windows. I shivered as I saw shutters falling down off the house. I looked at the gray walls of the house. Then I noticed the walls had cracks on them. Eyes looked out cracked windows at me. There were spiders spinning webs all over the house. I saw boards falling from the house. I shivered again. When I looked at the roof I was shocked to see bats flying around. Just then I heard howling but I saw no wolves, then I thought the wolves must be hiding. I was scared to figure out why. Bang! I jumped and looked around and noticed the sound was just a shutter banging in the wind. Then I heard screaming from inside the house. “Quiet!” shouted a deep voice.

I walked into the house and as soon as I stepped into the house I heard another scream. Then I heard a voice “soon I will not have to hear your screams” That creeped me out. The voice said “I think I hear someone” I knew the voice was talking about me. I ran to the closet, but someone caught me in the act. It was a witch! She said “yes another one “ The witch grabbed me and I yelled “let go of me!” “Never!” yelled the witch. I grabbed her hand and pushed as hard as I could. Her hand fell slowly down and I ran away. I ran through the dusty hallways and into the dining room. I saw a lot of broken items in the dining room. Just then I noticed the TV screen had cracks in it. I turned around and saw that the sofa was ripped. Then I noticed ants crawling all over the TV cables. I screamed. I ran to the closet and hid in it. Then I heard breathing behind me. I turned around and looked. I saw a mummy! I screamed and ran out of the closet. I ran to the attic but I knew I was being followed. The whole way to the attic I heard footsteps behind me. I turned around and saw the mummy. I slid through the mummy’s legs and back into the closet. The mummy ran straight past me. Then I ran to the front door. I shook the handle. It was locked. So I ran to the attic and found a pipe. I slid down the pipe. I was relieved! I had escaped!

While I was running away I heard laughing. That made me wonder if the whole thing was real or if someone was playing a prank on me. I hoped someone was playing a prank on me.
I was running and panting when I saw my brother. I said “hey, that was scary but now it is your turn to go inside” “I dare you” My brother walked as slow as he could toward the haunted house. He shivered. “Ha! Ha! You’re scared” I shouted. That straddled him. He shivered again. He stared at the closed off and cracked windows as he slowly walked closer to the house. My brother and I both heard a scream. We both shivered at the sound of the scream.

Just then my brother surprisingly ran up to the door and knocked. “A trick - or - treater” said a voice from inside the house. My brother shivered as a witch answered the door. She grabbed him and pulled him into the house and through the dusty hallways all the way to the kitchen. She put him down in the kitchen and locked the door. He was trapped!!!! I could hear him screaming from inside the house.

I ran to the door and jiggled the handle. The door was locked!!! I kicked the door as hard as I could. Suddenly the door creaked open. I ran into the house. The witch found me and sent a zombie after me. I ran as fast as I could. Then the zombie cornered me. I thought about what to do. Then I came up with an idea. I think I can hear the witch calling you,” I said to the zombie. The zombie ran right out of the room. I guess he understands English, I thought.

Just then the zombie ran back into the room and said “You tricked me!” screamed the zombie. “Okay, okay just calm down” I said. The zombie calmed down and said, “are you related to that boy in the kitchen?” asked the zombie. “Yes,” I said. I explained to the zombie that he is my brother. “Well I can help you,” said the zombie. “Please help me” I said to the zombie. “Okay” said the zombie. Then the zombie ran out the bedroom door.

The zombie found the witch and said to her, “I need the key to the kitchen door. I will trap the other kid” Okay”, said the witch as she handed him the key. The zombie ran to me and handed me the key. I ran downstairs and unlocked the kitchen door. My brother ran out of the kitchen and I told him to follow me. He listened and we ran all the way up the creaky stairs. Soon we reached the room the zombie was in and I sat right down next to him. “Do you have any idea what you are sitting next to??” my brother asked. “Yes” I said “a zombie” “Why are you sitting next to a zombie??” asked my brother. “He is my friend,” I said to him. My brother screamed right as he heard me say that. “Calm down”, I said to my brother. “He is a nice zombie” I explained to my brother that I told the zombie you needed help and he got the key from the witch to save you. The zombie told us to follow him.
He led us to an empty hallway. “What do we do here??” I asked. “Look closely,” said the zombie.”A trap door!!” I said. Just then the zombie pushed us through the shiny trap door. “Bye” we said as we gently touched the ground. We began walking away. I turned around and looked back at the zombie. “Bye” I was glad to leave the house but at the same time I did not want to leave the zombie. “You let them escape!!!” shouted the witch. “Yes” “On purpose!” shouted the zombie. “You are useless!” shouted the witch as she walked over to him and pushed him out of the house through the trap door. “Look” I said. “The zombie” Me and my brother ran to the zombie and said, “You can live with us” I said to him.

“Are you nuts?!?!?” shouted my brother. “Mom and Dad will not like him one bit,” said my brother. “Let’s just ask,” I said. Our parents said yes as long as he stays in the basement. So we took him down to the basement and ate our candy.
ALL ABOUT AXOLOTLS
VERA BRIGGS

Introduction

Axolotls are very amazing and interesting creatures that some people don’t know about. Did you know that the word axolotl means water monster in Nahuatl, the Aztec language? Read on to find out what they look like, where they live, what they eat, and their life cycle. I hope you enjoy learning about axolotls.

Body

Have you ever heard of an axolotl before? Let’s learn about what they look like. Axolotls are salamanders. Axolotls can be lots of different colors including yellow, white, black or speckled. Axolotls have four legs, webbed feet, and long tails. Feathered gills help them to breathe underwater. Axolotl’s legs are small, but its tail is long. A fin extends from the back of the head to the tip of the tail. A lower fin extends from between the hind legs to the tip of the tail. Axolotls are twelve inches (twenty to thirty centimeters.) But it is often shorter. Axolotls weigh about two to eight ounces. That is less than a can of soda. Axolotls look like larvae their entire life. Axolotls usually look like they are smiling. Did you know axolotls can regrow their limbs? Axolotls have small eyes, and look like tadpoles with legs. The fin and tail on an axolotl help it swim.

Habitat

Do you know where an axolotl lives? Let’s learn about where axolotls live. Axolotls live in two lakes in Mexico. They are found in canals and waterways. Most salamanders spend time on land but axolotls spend their entire lives in water. Axolotls hide in plants and mud.

Food

Life Cycle

Do you know about an axolotl’s life cycle? Let’s learn about the life cycle of an axolotl. Baby axolotls grow inside tiny eggs. Did you know female axolotls lay hundreds of eggs at a time? Mother axolotls lay their eggs on leaves or rocks. Larvae hatch from the eggs after about two weeks. Axolotls live about ten to fifteen years in the wild.

Conclusion

Axolotls are my favorite animal and I enjoyed learning about them. I hope you did too.

Glossary

Webbed: having toes that are connected by a fold of skin
Gills: a body part used to take oxygen from water
Larvae: the second life stage of some animals, after hatching from eggs; larvae look very different from adults
Regrow: to get back a lost limb
Tadpoles: babies of most amphibians and other animals
Vacuum: a device used to suck things up; usually used for cleaning
Prey: an animal that is hunted by another animal for food
EASTERN NEWT

Mihin Witharana

Grade Two
ALL ABOUT DANCING
FRAZIER INGRAM

Introduction

I have been dancing since my second year of preschool. I love dancing. I have danced to the songs: Blow Your Mind by Dua Lipa, Me by Taylor Swift, Treasure (the clean version) by Bruno Mars, I'm a Bad Guy and Watch Me Now. I have a lot of experience for dancing. Whenever I get home from school, I get off the bus and I’ll play a song nonstop. I feel joyful!

What is Dancing?

Dancing is when you move your body to a song. You can dance however you want.

Different Kinds of Dances

There are all kinds of dances. There is hula dancing, ballet dancing, pop dancing, tap dancing and more. Hula dancing is in Hawaii. People go to the beach and dance the hula in the shallow end of the water. Ballet dancing is when you get a skirt and a shirt with really thin straps around your shoulders. You get special shoes that are like pink slippers. You have to be very careful to not get dirt on them because they can get dirty easily. You need to practice ballet and do a lot of stretches so you can be very graceful with your moves. You can dance ballet on ice skates at the rink by spinning very carefully and dancing on the ice like you are dancing on stage but with thin blades. You have to balance on stage and on the ice when you dance ballet. When you do ballet you sometimes hold onto a bar, stretch out your leg, hold your knee straight like you don’t even have a knee and turn your head to look at the bar. You put your arms straight out and stick your fingers together without touching the bar. It looks like you are flying gracefully with one leg down on the ground. To tap dance, you need a special pair of shoes with metal on the bottom. When you put your foot down it makes a tap sound. It is like the Rockettes but they have a microphone on their shoes. Last is pop dancing. Pop dancing is dancing to a pop song. You match your moves to the words and the beats in the song.

You are you. No one can tell you how to dance. You choose how you dance. You choose how you are. When you hear music, what do you do? If you like the music, just dance!
Halloween Night
Harrison Kons

On Halloween night
Under the moon so bright
Decorations galore
Pumpkins to squish, wicked witches, huge, scary skeletons
One spooky
Or should I say, too spooky
Panicked – My heart beating
  Bump...bump...bump
I step back startled
My brother takes an even bigger step back
But, then - we see the candy bowl
Kids walking, skipping, jumping
Dressed as Minecraft and Fortnite characters
  Skeletons and wolves
  Leaping from house to house
  Nonstop candy at every door
Sour Patch Kids, lollipops, M&Ms, Kit Kats and more
I take a bite – but parents say, “No more!”
  Dripping drizzle drops
  But we don’t stop
  We’re fine
It’s Halloween night!
Riding a Bike
Hazel McCarthy

Introduction

Riding a bike feels hard at first, but after a bit of practice it will feel easier! In this book, you will learn how to be safe, balanced, and make turns when riding a bike.

Being Safe

You need a helmet when you ride a bike. Wear sneakers because with boots it is harder. When you first start out, don’t go down big hills because you don’t know how to do that yet. You need to stay on the right hand side of the road when riding your bike. Don’t skip any steps when it comes to staying safe.
Balancing

Keep your hands on the handlebars when riding the bike. Start peddling s-l-o-w-l-y. Move your feet with the pedals. Sit up straight. Keep going, don’t stop. Now you need to stop. There are two ways to stop, but only one way to stop on each kind of bike. On the beginner bike, pedal backwards. If you are on the other kind of bike, you squeeze the brakes on the handlebars. If you want to stop instantly, you press the left brake, if you want to slow down and then stop, press the right handlebar brake. You can fall off if you press both brakes at once. Don’t forget- no riding down steep hills until you learn to balance.

Turning

Grab the handle bars. With both hands on the bars, turn them slowly. Pedal in a circle until you have finished. Now you have turned! Next, go into a spiral. A spiral is a circle that doesn’t connect and keeps going. Turning and spiraling are fun moves you can learn to do on your bike.

Conclusion

In this book you learned how to be safe, balanced and turn on your bike. If you thought this was a good book, then go do it in the cul-de-sac, the sidewalk, or your driveway and have fun riding your new bike.
All About Caracals
Abdul Monem Alsitt

Introduction
Caracals are amazing animals. Did you know that caracal actually means black ears? Because some people don’t know. Read on to find out what they look like, what they eat, and their life cycle. I hope you enjoy learning about caracals.

Body
Have you ever seen a caracal?
Let’s learn about what they look like. Caracals are small wild cat’s caracals weigh 13 to 44 pounds 6 to 20 kilograms.
Caracal bodies are about 3 feet 1 meter long and caracals have sent gland. Between their toes. They make their range with sent. Caracals have white fur under their belys caracals have black ears the black ears help them hear very well caracals have long tufts of black fur on their ears.

Habitat
Do you know where a caracals lives?
Read on to learn about their habitat. Caracals live in africa and india some live in asia caracals roam savannas and dry woodlands. Their fur is reddish gold and caracals can blend in with dirt and grasses.

Food
Do you know what a caracal eats? Let’s learn about what they eat. Caracals eat robents and rabbits they leap up 10 feet long to catch bird’s caracals have stiff fur under their paws caracals hair help’s them hunt quietly caracals sneak up on prey caracals grab prey with their sharp claws caracals sometimes hide food in trees they return later to eat it.

Life Cycle
How long do caracals live for? Here are interesting facts about their life cycle. Caracals have two or three kittens in a litter, caracals are born in a den, kittens stay with their mother for one year, caracals can live 12 years in the wild caracals mother can feed them, and caracals also spend most of their time alone.
Conclusion

If you ever go to Asia and India and Africa and see a wild cat that can leep and they have white fur and black on their ears that is a caracal. They are amazing animals!

Glossary

- **scent gland** - an organ in an animal’s body that makes a smell unique to the animal.
- **range** - a space of land where an animal lives.
- **savanna** - a flat, grassy area of land
- **prey** - an animal hunted by another animal for food.
- **litter** - a group of animals born at the same time to the same mother.
- **den** - the place where a wild animal lives.
- **tuft** - a small patch of hair or fur
THE WRIGHT BROTHERS
ABDUL MONEM ALSITT

Introduction
The Wright brothers are known for building airplanes; Read on to learn about their early life, when they built the first airplane, and other interesting facts about the Wright brothers.

Early Life
The Wright brothers’ names are Wilbur and Orville. Wilbur was born 1867 in Indiana and Orville was born in 1871 in Ohio. They dreamed of flying after they got their toy helicopter. They were lucky enough to grow as inventors. They dreamed of building one.

Big Accomplishment
The Wright brothers finished the first airplane in 1903 they tested it next to North Carolina. In 1900 they tested the newest glider. They are known for building airplanes. It was their best airplane that they had ever built!

Interesting facts
The Wright brothers kept building airplanes together. On May 30th at the age of 45 Wilbur died. He had typhoid fever in Dayton Ohio. On January 30th 1948 Orville died at age 76. Had two heart attacks.

Conclusion
The Wright brothers made hard work on building the airplanes and when the people build the airplanes they always think about the Wright brothers. As you could see, the Wright brothers are amazing people!

Works Cited

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Grade Two
Grade Three

The Prettiest Night
Anna Barton

Grade Three
The Typewriter Mystery
Kayleigh Buoniconti

One breezy, chilly December afternoon, Jackie Cassadine rushed into her mother’s car, excited to share the great news she had learned in school. “Mom!” Jackie exclaimed. “Guess what? My school is having a writing competition!” “Wow,” said Mom. “That sounds very exciting!” “The winner has their story published in the Daily,” said Jackie. The Daily was her town’s newspaper company. She couldn’t wait for tomorrow when she would start writing her story.

The next morning, when Jackie went downstairs, her big brother, Sean, noticed how thrilled she was and curiously asked “What are you so excited for?” “Today after school I’m working on a story for a writing contest! The winner gets their story published in the Daily,” said Jackie, scarfing down her breakfast. Jackie got worried and confused when Sean didn’t look happy for her. Before Jackie could ask why, her father said, “Jackie, Sean, hurry, we have to leave for school.” They both jogged down to the mudroom and grabbed their backpacks. When their dad came down, they ran out the door.

The school day went quick for Jackie because all she could think about was the contest. Her mom picked her up from school and they drove home. “When we get home, I’m going to start my story,” Jackie told her mom. When they got to their living room, Jackie saw her typewriter. But when she saw it, ink was splattered everywhere, and some keys were missing. “No!!” screamed Jackie. “I can’t compete in the contest now!” Jackie knew she had to find out who did this and get the ink and keys back before the competition was over.

Jackie started to inspect the typewriter for clues. “What are you doing Jackie?” asked her mom. “You’re going to get ink all over you. I am sorry that happened though. I know how much the contest meant to you.” “To answer your question, I am looking for clues, and I promise I will not get ink on me,” said Jackie. “Okay, but hurry, you have homework,” her mom replied. On the typewriter, Jackie saw a piece of teal-greenish color cloth near a key that had been torn off. Must have come of when they ripped the keys out, thought Jackie. She inspected the color of the shirt and went to go see if anyone currently had this type of cloth clothing. She went to Sean’s room first. She found him pacing back and forth. “What are you doing, Sean?” she asked. Her brother came up to the door and said, “Knock first,” then slammed the door in her face.

Jackie was shocked, she couldn’t speak. Sean had never been so upset that he yelled at Jackie. She worried for Sean. He wasn’t acting normal. As Jackie walked downstairs, she saw her dad. She looked a little closer at his hands and saw an inky black substance under his fingernails. She almost gasped at the sight. Did her father sabotage her plan for the writing contest? The thought of that made her stomach flip. He was supposed to protect her and help her.

She didn’t know for sure. But what she did know was she had her first two suspects. Sean and her father.
Later that day, while Jackie looked for clues, she remembered that when she was in school, some of her younger cousins came over. She was in a feud with one of her cousins, Elise. She may have done it to get back at Jackie, but why didn’t her mom see it and do something? When they left did, she not leave with them, and did Elise sneak back up there to wreck her typewriter? She walked over to the kitchen to question her mom. As she did that, she accidentally walked into Sean. He was pacing around again and squeezing his fists. She didn’t see him, and almost made him trip. “Sorry Sean, I didn’t see you there,” Jackie apologized. “Be more careful next time, Jackie,” he snapped at her. She couldn’t believe what she was hearing. Not once had he ever raised his voice at her. She was so stressed, she felt nauseous. Jackie wished she could understand what happened in her household while she was at school.

Jackie searched and searched for her mom, but she was nowhere to be found. She instead found her dad, and asked him, “Dad, do you have any idea where Mom went, I can’t find her anywhere.” He was paying bills and didn’t hear her, so she asked again, “Dad! Do you know where mom is?” He stopped, and was silent for a minute, then responded, “I don’t know, I haven’t seen her for some time. Why don’t you ask Sean? He may know where she is.” So, Jackie headed to her brother’s room, and before entering knocked on the door. Sean opened the door and angrily said, “What do you want? I’m busy.” “I was wondering if you knew where mom was?” she asked. “She went to the grocery store. Is that all you want to know,” he asked, but not in a kind way. “Yes, thank you Sean, love you” Jackie said. But instead of getting a response back, he had already shut the door. Jackie felt like she was going to faint right there. Instead of focusing on Sean, she went to call her mom.

Jackie dialed her mom’s phone number. The line rang, but no one answered. She walked downstairs and sat on the couch in her living room next to the wrecked typewriter. She turned the TV on to the nature channel as a distraction. Minutes later, the door creaked open, and her mom came home. “Hi mom,” said Jackie. “I have a few questions, and I was wondering if you could answer any of them.” “Of course, what do you need?” asked her mom. “Did anyone go near the typewriter today?” asked Jackie. “While you were at school Elise was here, admiring it and your father was making sure you had ink for it when you came back from school. Your brother was acting odd and asking a lot of questions.” said her mom. “What type of questions?” asked Jackie. “He was asking what you were going to type your story on,” said her mom. Jackie just realized who probably did this to her typewriter but wanted to make sure she was right. “Do you know who owns a teal-greenish colored shirt?” Jackie said. “Yes, Sean does. Why do you want to know?” her mom asked. Jackie thought about what to tell her mom, and said, “No reason. Just curious.” But she knew that was a lie.

She thought the best thing to do would be to confront Sean. Before she could go upstairs, Sean came down looking more stressed than he had been all day. “Sean, could I talk to you for a minute,” said Jackie. He didn’t look like he was in the mood to talk, but Jackie continued. “I know it was you who destroyed my typewriter.” A few seconds later, she saw his eyes getting wet.
There was a minute of silence, like Sean forgot how to speak. She saw a tear roll down his cheek when he said, “Your right. I was afraid…afraid you would lose and be sad and embarrassed.” She could tell he regretted what he did, so she ran up and hugged him with all her strength. She said, “I understand. You where just trying to be the best brother you could be. I love you.” And this time when she said it, Sean replied, “I love you too.”

Two days later she woke up and got ready for the day. It was a Saturday, so she didn’t have school. When she came downstairs, Sean was already awake. They had gotten rid of the old, wrecked typewriter, but something new was on the table where it had been. It was a box wrapped in blue wrapping paper. “Jackie,” Sean said, “this is for you,” handing her the box. “What is it?” she asked. “Open it and see.” Jackie ripped all the wrapping paper off and took the tape off the box. What she took out of the box almost made her cry with joy. Sean had gotten her a new typewriter. “Thank you, Sean, thank you!” she exclaimed. “How did you pay for it though,” asked Jackie. “I used my allowance,” said Sean. “You are the best,” Jackie told him. No matter what he did, she understood it was done out of love.

That afternoon, she happily typed her story with the new typewriter and handed it in on Monday. She did not get 1st place, she instead got 4th place. But she, in her adulthood, wrote many books and won many awards, and she learned a life lesson that day and taught her brother one. “It is better to try and lose then not try at all.”
Parade
Stella Macio

It was 5:00 AM on Thursday, and my eyes were wide open. My alarm would not be going off for another 30 minutes. I could feel butterflies in my stomach. Today will be a big day, I thought to myself. I couldn’t wait any longer until my alarm went off to get out of bed. I rolled out of bed, put on my clothes, brushed my teeth and hair. I was ready to go! I dashed down the stairs. I looked out of the window and I could not see the sky yet since it was still dark out. I started tapping my foot impatiently. What is taking them so long I wondered. Just then I heard heavy footsteps on the stairs. Clunk, clunk, clunk. It must be my sister Sophia, I thought to myself. All of the sudden I heard my sister’s voice. “Good morning Stella,” she said. We talked for a little about our big day. “Why are our parents so slow?” I said to my sister. Just then I heard my parents bounding down the stairs. I yelled, “We are going to be late for the parade!” We all ran to the car, piled in and began on our way to the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day parade! As we started along on our journey I glanced out the window thinking about all the balloons I would see. My mom was just starting to say something but I interrupted her. “How long is the ride going to be?” I asked. She said about one hour. Thirty minutes passed and then another. We had finally got there.

As we drove into New York City I could see all the tall buildings around and people walking up and down the streets. We found a spot to park the car and I could hardly wait any longer. We all jumped out of the car and started walking down the crowded streets of New York. I could smell the yucky smells and hear music in the distance. All of the sudden I could see large balloons down the street. We finally made it to our destination! We saw the first balloon. It was huge! Then a few more floated by. It took a bunch of people to hold it down. I was worried that they may float away with the balloon. Then an odd looking one came into view. I knew that something was wrong but I wasn’t sure what it could be. All of the sudden the balloon was swaying side to side. I was starting to get nervous and I think my mom and dad were too. The balloon was not getting any better. The balloon handlers looked confused and worried. I asked my mom, “Are we going to be ok?” She said, “yes” but she didn’t sound very reassuring. It swayed really fast now. The balloon handlers figured out the problem and got it fixed quickly. We found out that there was a hole in the balloon. They were able to patch it up and it was ok after that. The parade ended with Mr. and Mrs. Clause. After the parade was over we all walked back down the streets, but I realized that we weren’t heading back to the car. I asked my parents, “Where are we going?” They said that there was one more surprise. All of the sudden I saw flashing lights and a sign that said theater. “Awesome!”, my sister and I shouted. We went into the theater and found our seats. I asked my dad, “What are we doing in a theater?” He said, “We are watching Aladdin!”. I was so excited to see the show. The play started off with the Genie singing a song. There was dancing and singing. There was so much energy in the room I didn’t even want to blink, I was afraid I was going to miss something. The whole day was so much fun! I didn’t want it to end. The day may be over, but I am full of memories!
Show the Light, Shine the Light, Be the Light

Anshika Nigam

Grade Three
LUNAR NEW YEAR
ANGELA MENG

Do you celebrate the Lunar New Year? More than 2 billion people around the world celebrate Lunar New Year each year. Lunar New Year usually comes between late January and mid February.

2023 is the year of the Rabbit and it came a lot earlier than usual. I wear my traditional Chinese dress. It is called Qipao. We decorated our house and put on lanterns. On New Year’s Eve, my family made dumplings with various stuffings. My mom mixed the flour dough and made dumpling wrappers. My father prepared dumpling fillings including leek, celery, and mushroom. My sisters and I gathered around the table and made dumplings. It was so fun!

This year’s Lunar New Year falls on Sunday, January 22nd. I was lucky to watch the four and a half hour Spring Festival Gala Show. This is my favorite part of the celebrations. There are a lot of amazing performances. For instance, there are beautiful dances with Chinese traditions as well as modern style, funny talk shows with several people, unbelievable magic shows, astounding acrobatics, impressive martial arts, prestigious traditional operas, chorus, solos and more. I enjoyed watching the gala show, especially the funny talk shows and acrobatics.

On the first day of Lunar New Year, I received red envelopes with lucky money from my parents and ate sweet rice balls. That symbolizes unity and happiness of the family. I give my New year greetings to my parents and grandparents. We also play games. For instance, we play monopoly. Its a game where you roll a dice and you jump to a spot by what the dice says. The good luck will be around the whole year. The celebration lasts for fifteen days.

As you can see, Lunar New Year is tremendously fun and awesome! I am so excited for the Year of the Rabbit! I hope its a terrific year!
TITANIC
Reilly O’Neill

By
Reilly O’Neill

Grade Three
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<th>Chapter Number</th>
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<td>The Floating Palace</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Iceberg Right Ahead</td>
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Introduction

Have you ever dreamed of going on a ship called Titanic?

Well, you can’t go on it, but you can learn about it!
The Floating Palace

The year is 1912. It is April 10 and the Titanic is ready to set sail. But below deck there is a fire burning! On board for first class, there is a pool, the grand staircase, a gym, and a barber.
FLAW!

If you've ever made an origami boat, it gets soggy and capsizes. Think of the Titanic as the origami boat. The Titanic had a gigantic amount of design flaws, but I won't tell you ALL of them. The sixteen "watertight" compartments didn't have roofs. There are 20 lifeboats and it needed 40.
Iceberg Right Ahead!

On April 15, 1912, the Titanic glides silently through the calm, glassy water. The only sound was the soothing sound of the engine. Up in the crow's nest, officer Lightoller saw a big iceberg. "Iceberg right ahead," Lightoller yelled, ringing the warning bell.

April 12:00

But it was too late. There were...
There was a grinding noise, then silence.

April 15, 1:00 A.M.
The bow is halfway underwater.

April 15, 2:18 A.M.
The Titanic snaps in half.

April 15, 2:20 A.M.
The Titanic slips into the sea.
Now you know how they failed. How they said it was "unsinkable". The Titanic was the ship that taught the world the mistakes they made. Now ships are bigger and safer.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>barber</td>
<td>someone who cuts hair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Titanic</td>
<td>something that is giant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>capsize</td>
<td>to sink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>origami</td>
<td>paper creation</td>
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<tr>
<td>flaw</td>
<td>A fail</td>
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<tr>
<td>crow's nest</td>
<td>a place on a pole called a mast</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The Big Fish
Oliver Reid

It was a hot summer day. I could hear the birds chirping loudly. What a great morning for fishing I thought. The sun made the lake look like gold. We were in a patch of grass enclosed by trees. My brother Rusty and I were going fishing.

“I want to catch a big fish,” Rusty announced. As we slowly walked along the dock I could hear the old planks creaking beneath my feet. I stopped at the end of the dock. I could see the waves rippling across the lake and the huge trees made shadows on the lake. Then I cast my line with excitement about the day.

My line flew across the water and landed with a little splash! I heard another splash as Rusty’s line went in. I watched my worm as it disappeared in the rocky and muddy bottom of the lake. Suddenly, I saw a little fish. It was swimming through the water gracefully with its fins flapping against the current. “I want to catch that fish,” Rusty whined. But it swam over to my hook and bit really hard! It pulled first, next I pulled very hard and quickly started reeling in my line, but the fish stole the worm! “Shoot,” I muttered under my breath. I walked over to get another worm. I slowly dug through the wet dirt. After that, I spotted a nice and juicy worm. I quickly grabbed it and shoved it on my hook.

“Look, it’s a fish!” Rusty’s voice came over to me from the side of the dock. I turned around and walked over to Rusty. I saw a large bluegill swimming away. “Oh come on! I wanted to catch that fish,” he said sadly. “Well, it’s gone now,” I said.

Out of nowhere another fish swam over to me and stared at my worm. It grabbed my worm in its mouth really hard. It was a war between me and him, who was going to win? He was pulling really hard and I could feel the fishing pole slipping out of my hands but it was too late, I was already reeling him in.

I took the fish out of the water and noticed it had orange stripes like a tiger. I looked at the gills slowly flapping, then the eyes which had a sad look in them. I felt bad for the fish, so I put it back. It slowly slipped down into the water, and I watched it swim to the middle of the lake. “Good catch,” Rusty complimented. “Thanks,” I said. I cast my line back out.

“Wow, giant fish!” Rusty exclaimed. I quickly turned around as I heard his line getting reeled in. I dropped my fishing handle when I saw how big his fish was. I quickly ran over and grabbed the fish. It was green with light orange stripes that looked like tic-tac-toe.
We realized it was a huge smallmouth bass! We measured the bass; it was eighteen inches long! It also weighed two pounds! “Wow, that’s an amazing catch,” I said as I gave the fish back to Rusty. He was so scared, he dropped it!

The huge bass flopped across the old wooden dock but I ran over to get it. I could barely pick it up because I was shaking with excitement! I snatched it off the dock plank. I could see the bass’s mouth gasping for water. I knew the fish just wanted to go home. I put it back in the lake and watched it slowly swim away, a green blur gliding through the water.

“Let’s go home.” I said. “That was fun.” Rusty replied. As we walked back down the old dock I wondered what other fish were lurking in the murky depths of the lake.
Under the Sea

MEGHAN CERNAK

Grade Three
**The Adventures in Breckenridge**  
**By Anna Shin**

It was a two hour drive to Breckenridge. I jumped out of the car and waited for my family to come and pull into the driveway. Once they came I had my aunt, uncle, dad, mom, siblings, grandma, and grandpa with me. We all walked onto the porch and I opened the white door. Inside, there was a beautiful and big home. I explored the house. I took the room with a small bathroom and two bunk beds. Lia, my sister, took the top bunk and I got the bottom bunk. My nice brother got the other bed. I argued with my sister saying, “I want the top bunk! I found the room before you!” My brother said, “You two can take turns on bunks. And Anna, let her have the top one.” Then I went to sleep.

The next day I played hide and seek with my grandpa and sister. Then after a round it was my turn to hide. I hid where my dad was grilling. My dad was grilling galbi. Galbi is a Korean dish that is meat with a special kind of sauce. I talked to him for a while. After talking, I looked into a green forest. Then I saw something brown. It was a moose! I said to Dad, “There’s a moose, Dad!” “Actually?” he said. “Yes!” I said excitedly. He looked into the forest, too. He saw the moose and he said “Oh wow!” The moose was bigger than me and it was just standing on Mountain Goat’s Trail. I ran inside and called, “Moose!”

“Where?” everyone asked. Lia and Grandpa saw me by the door. I waved my hand at my mom to come outside. She carefully walked to the door, smiled, and opened the white door. Then her eyes widened. After she saw the moose she looked at me and said, “You’re right.” A smiled appeared on my face instantly. My mom yelled, “There is a moose outside in the backyard everybody!” My whole family came to the kitchen and looked outside. Everyone took pictures of the moose excitedly.

“Wow!” said Lia.

“Cool!” said my grandma and grandpa.

“Kay.” said my brothers. Josh and Owen went downstairs to play pool. My family walked away. Also the moose went away. A frown formed on my face and I walked away sadly. I went downstairs to my bedroom.

I walked into the basement to my room. I climbed onto my bunk. Lia was above me. “Lia, is there anything we can do?” I said. “No, Anna. I’m sorry.” she whispered.”

So I decided to watch the trees outside. I went up to Lia’s bunk and went to the window to watch all the animals. “Oh Lia, I can draw the animals I see outside!” I said loudly. I ran upstairs with my notebook and went outside. “Creak” went door as I walked outside. “Chirp, chirp” went the birds. Suddenly, I saw a black and white bird. So I drew that in my notebook.

At the end of the day, I went into the hot tub in the backyard with my uncle, brothers, sister, and dad. After a few stories, I was sent to bed. That was the end of the day. “I wish I could see another moose in Breckenridge.” I thought.

Grade Three
Grade Four

Outer Space
Reagan Parker
Waves
Alexander Gajewski

Chapter 1

“Crunch!” The sand crunches once me, my brother Henry and my parents step on to the beach of Watch Hill Rhode Island. As usual, when we go to the beach in the winter, we started walking on the crunchy, brisk sand, from the beginning to the end. Me and my family strolled around walking to the other side, prepared for the cold weather with jackets and sweaters. My brother, Henry, was yawning and fidgeting with his hoodie, slowly dragging himself as we started walking. Suddenly his frown dropped, and he skidded to a stop. “Hmmm,” he muttered.

Then he put a cheeky smile on his face. Uh oh, I know that smile, it’s the smile of mischief, I thought. Henry started jumping and said “Alex! Alex! Alex!” “Let’s run at those big waves, and when they try to hit us, we run away and get dart back to them again. We have 3 lives and whoever doesn’t get hit by the waves 3 times or has the most lives at the end wins.” After 25 minutes of walking, Me and Henry started playing the wave game. We rushed towards the waves and when they smashed down we zipped away. “Alex, Henry don’t get too close to those frigid waves. They’ll get you soaked and freezing, and we don’t want to send you to the hospital!” My mom and dad scolded us together. We got close to the overtowering waves and rushed away from them some more. One of the little waves was a micrometer away from my new gray Nike sneakers when “skidd”, I skidded through the wet, heavy sand at the last nanosecond. “Dang it! I thought out loud, “My sneakers are soaked!” My mom rolled her eyes and disappointedly said “I told you so.” The waves grew taller and taller the farther we walked until they were like mini tsunamis! I’m definitely not going to those big waves, I thought. Henry loves danger, so I knew he probably didn’t care, staring at a 6 foot tall wave that just approached. After he bolted away from the six foot wave and quickly turned back to go to another wave a 8 foot tall wave approached him. He just stared at it in amazement with a smile a mile wide like he just won five million dollars! The wave was getting a lot closer. “HENRY, what are you doing, don’t just stand there, RUN!” my mom and dad howled.

Chapter 2

Henry didn’t listen, instead he just kept staring at the giant wave in front of him. I stared in terror as the giant wave started to droop down on Henry. The thick, wet, crunchy sand didn’t even make a tiny “ts” Henry was standing so still. It was like Henry was sleeping! I really wanted to yank him out of there but if I tried I knew the giant wave would squash me and Henry by the time I’d
get halfway there. “HENRY, GET BACK HERE RIGHT NOW, YOU’RE GOING TO DIE!” my mom and dad screamed at the top of their lungs. Henry finally came back to earth, sprouted up and started flashing back from the wave to shore, but it toppled over him in an instant. When the wave fell on him, Henry stuck his hand out and would’ve said something like “help!” but the wave was like soundproof glass and it sucked up Henry’s voice and hand like a vacuum. Henry toppled on to the gray mushy sand and froze on the ground face first. My mom and dad fell to their knees in the soft, delicate sinky sand above Henry, hand over their hearts with tearing eyes. They were so out of breath and shocked they couldn’t make as much as a gasp. As soon as the eight foot wave washed away back to the ocean, I sprinted faster than the fastest soccer player ever, Kylian Mbappe, to pick up Henry and bring him to the surface. When I got to Henry and turned him over he murmured “Cough cough cough” he was gasping for air tossing and turning making him look like a wet sand monster. He tossed and turned for a few seconds like a fish without water, eyes closed and mouth still coughing.

Chapter 3

I sat Henry up in terror and felt his heart. I really hope Henry isn’t dead, but his heartbeat is slow, I thought. A person’s heartbeat was supposed to sound like “PomPom PomPom” when it beated, but right now Henry’s sounded like “pom pom pom pom”. The waves around me started to lower a lot, so I dropped Henry on the soggy rough sand and kneeled. I didn’t know how to do CPR so I just pushed on Henry’s heart and said “You’re gonna be ok, I know it”. Luckily Henry opened his mouth, but my hand covered my mouth when the whole NIAGARA Falls came out of him! A few seconds later I was more shocked than my parents were. I could feel Henry Breathing! I was biting my lips while my palms were sweating cats and dogs and Henry was still breathing! It was amazing, but I had to move quickly. “Mom, dad c’mon and help me, Henry is alive! ”I shouted. My parents flashed over five times faster than I did when I sprinted to Henry, and we carried him up. Henry wasn’t moving or talking so I knew we had to call an ambulance and send Henry to the emergency room.

Chapter 4

Me, my mom and dad started carrying Henry to shore so we could call the ambulance. The freezing water and the blizzard of a wind made our teeth chatter and our bodies shivering non stop. My parents still had very watery eyes and were tearing up. We quickly hopped out of the water, careful not to drop Henry. “I’m I’m I’m calling an ambulance,” stuttered my mom when me and my dad carefully dropped Henry on a dark brown sandy log. I hope he’s okay, I thought,
running around in a circle. “Help will come in a few minutes”, my mom murmured to me and my
dad after she finished calling. “Let’s get out into the parking lot”. My parents picked up Henry and
we started to walk back to the parking lot. About 15 minutes later we heard the last “crunch” and
stepped off the beach. An ambulance arrived just in time and three nurses came out with one of
those hold up beds they used when a soccer player got injured. My mom plopped Henry in and
went in the back of the glistening silver ambulance. Me and my dad quickly walked to the car and
sadly waved to my mom. Our gray Volkswagen glittered in the pink and orange sunset. Me and
my dad barged into the car and started following the ambulance to the nearest hospital.

Chapter 5

Once me and my dad got to the bright white hospital, we caught up with my mom and piled
up into the emergency room. Everyone, even the doctors stared at Henry in the big light gray cold
hospital bed, lying with his mouth wide open. The doctor did CPR and less water came out of
Henry’s mouth. I realized that I didn’t push as hard When I tried. I glanced at the monitor and it
showed Henry’s heartbeat lines, small but moving. For a few moments Everybody in the room just
stared in silence, dreadful faces on most of our heads. The doctor broke the silence and told my
parents, “It will take a few days for him to return to a regular breathing state. We will keep Henry
here overnight. When we let him go, no school, parties or anything, he has to rest for a few days.
A nurse gave some pink antibiotics to my mom to help Henry’s breathing. We started to leave the
room when Henry opened his eyes and winced “I will l-listen next time.” We walked out of the
hospital and our gray Volkswagen still glittered, but now in the moonlight. As we started driving
home I prayed, Please please God, let Henry be ok, and when he comes home help him listen to
the people that are supervising him. We were all wary from what just happened. It was a long,
scary afternoon.
REFLECTING HIS WORDS
SHELDON HSIAO

(This poem was inspired by astronaut Alan Bean’s, “Hello Universe!”)

Yes, it has occurred finally!
We shall now achieve more than just landing.
More will most definitely occur through dreaming.
Just think about it, what a historic moment.

An extraordinary record,

Surprises beyond the limits,
The Universe is gradually changing.
At start, this was far out of reach,

Now we have done it
All because of NASA working tirelessly

More will come
To continue our journey,
More steps on the moon,

Do not worry,
The world is always changing

Hello Universe!

Grade Four
CAT

Elvire Hugon

I am a cat. Yup, a cat. You find me at a vet or a place for orphaned pets. When I’m happy, I purr and rub myself against my owners. It’s different when I’m angry, though. I’ll bite, scratch, do anything at all to get people to leave me alone!!! My scratching post moves, and it’s blue. But when I scratch on my post, the owner is towering over me, and pushes me away! I don’t understand. Why would the owner be always above me when I’m on my post, and why would they “shoo” me away? It really doesn’t make sense.

When your new owner comes, it’s like they’re saying “OMG! Our new cat! Be my friend! Be my friend! Please? Please? Please pretty please with a cherry on-top?” But you must think about it before accepting it. It’s the same concept as in one side accepting to the other side to surrender in war. Just consider it like this: tall things, called humans, are plain truly your enemy’s.

My favorite food would be cat food. Organic, of course. But I’ll beg, and I mean BEG you to never, ever give me vegetables. I mean YUCK, who would ever eat vegetables? No carnivore would eat the stuff! Besides, I only eat meat! It’s the same for my relatives, that include tigers, lions, leopards, cheetahs, lynx’s, and more. My best gift at a birthday party would be mice. Dead ones, of course. But live ones work fine, too. When I bring them to my owner, they always seem terrified and spray me with water, to force me to drop the mouse on the ground and get it dirty. I don’t get it; there’s nothing wrong with bringing a mouse to your owner as a gift. And worst of all, they take the mouse and throw it out in the world beyond!

It’s not always easy to know how a cat is feeling, so let me explain. First of all, anger. When I’m angry, my ears will face back, I might hiss, and I’ll scratch and bite and do anything so that my owners will realize that I’m not a fuzzball right now. Lots of times you’ll call me, but I won’t come because I don’t care. When I’m happy, I’ll follow you around, I’ll rub myself against you and purr; when you sit down, I might even settle myself on your laps. Sometimes I’ll settle next to you, but won’t want to be cuddled forever and for eternity. If the tip of my tail is is moving from side to side, it does NOT mean I’m happy. Or at least, it means that I wanna be left alone. And of course, there’s the scratching post. It’s blue, my owners are always towering over head, and they “shoo” me whenever I harmlessly scratch to get my claws nice and sharp. And the only reason that I scratch is to get ready for a nice, long… HUNT!!!! For what, you say? Well, nothing harmless. Just… A MOUSE!!! Or two. But whatever. Like I’ve said, I may not come when you call me. My owners are like my servants. I’m not going to help my servants when they ask for help. If I did, they wouldn’t really be servants anymore, would they?

When you get a cat, you’re gonna have to be careful, because we’re a lot of work. You’ll have to clean out my litter box very often, or it’ll stink worse than ever and I won’t want to do my business in there anymore and I’ll do it all over the house instead and everyone will go kaput because
then the whole house stinks so much! You can find
my food at Big Y, or a pet shop. You will also be needing to take me to the vet at least once a
year, to check my health and give me the vaccinations that include rabies, meningitis, and much
more. Okay enough of that because I’m bored of it. But you have to know something; our owners
are like servants and we’re kings, unlike powerless dogs. You see, dogs treat their owners like kings.
For us, it’s the opposite. It’s simple. I touch on everything… from the mom’s bed to the living room
rug, to yet the window sill.

So now you know why us, the cats, should rule. Now, you’re probably thinking “I’m lucky to
be a cat. This life is so purr-fect”, and you’re right.
NATURAL BEAUTY

SAMARTH SWAIN

Grade Four
Hope
TESSA MIRABELLO

“Screet screet”.. went my paper. I sat on the top floor looking out the window. I started to draw. I let my body take over. I drew what seemed to be a family, a mother with blue eyes, a father who had a thick beard, and a little boy. The mom’s head was a little crooked, and the dad was too skinny, but hey, no one’s perfect. *RING RING RING* went the doorbell. My heart skipped a beat. A family was coming to adopt! All the kids around me started to make themselves look presentable while I sat there giving only a glance at the door. “Oh hello Mr. and Mrs. Kent, are you ready to adopt?” Said Mrs. Lorenzo. I crossed my fingers. “Yes, that would be wonderful.” As the Kents walked in, I sat frozen, so still it seemed I was not even breathing. “Hullo children. I Am Mr. Kent.” *COUGH COUGH* The Kents were extremely old. I wasn’t sure they were the best fit for me. They seemed a little weird, but nice and… sick. Mr. Kent started to look around. He tilted his head toward a group of boys playing cards, then toward some girls who were gossiping about the boys. Then he looked right at me sitting on the top floor next to the window. My heart started to pound as he took steps toward me. One- two-one-two- as he got to the first step my arm started to twitch and my eyes bulged out of my head, until he was standing in front of me. But- he kept walking? Towards some kids on the deck playing with chalk. Of course. No one wanted me. Why hope anymore.

That night I went to bed in my sleeping bag on the floor in my usual spot in the darkest corner of the room. I put all my blankets on top of the sleeping bag, but I was still freezing cold. I dreamed about a black figure flying towards me. “Wait no, come back wait! AH!” I couldn’t finish the dream because I woke up. Dang it! I wish I could see who that was. I crawled out of my sleeping bag and walked to the kitchen for breakfast. No one was there. I looked around but still saw no one. It was an empty hall. Was I forgetting something? What is it? Ugh! NOW I REMEMBER there’s a field trip to the zoo! Oh no! They left without me! What am I going to do now?!

I guess I’ll just go upstairs and draw like every other day. “REEP REEP” What’s that noise? I looked at the window and noticed that it was open. I didn’t open it. Could it be a ghost? “AH! oh no!”- then I saw a colorful creature fly into the room and perch on the railing. “Reep reep”

“Wow!” This truly was an amazing creature. It’s a Toucan! Where did he come from? At first I was really nervous. I stood pressed up against the wall. The toucan looked at me and I looked at him. I didn’t want to make any sudden movements because I didn’t want to be attacked. He was so majestic. He zipped towards me and perched next to me. Hmm? I’ve always liked animals but I’ve never seen a toucan before. Did it have rabies? Was it sick? “Cheep, cheep, row.” He looked at me with those beady blue eyes. But then out of nowhere the toucan jumped on my lap and started to pull on his neck. SNAP! A little charm came off of his neck. He gave it to me. “Huh?” I clapped my hands over my mouth. That was the first word I said in weeks! It doesn’t feel that
bad talking to the toucan. It’s harder talking to people. You never know what people will say, but
toucans won’t insult you or talk back. I looked at the charm. There was a word on it. Hope! “Is
that your name, little one?” (I said my first sentence eek!)

He bounced his head up and down excitedly. Then he lifted his wings and started to fly around
everywhere. He flew back to me and he perched right on my head. “What are you doing?” I
said quietly. “Cheep, cheep, tookie, tookie” went Hope. Then he jumped onto my lap. As he sat
there I felt myself grabbing a piece of paper and starting to draw Hope and his beautiful colors.
He watched me drawing him, correcting me as I went along. I laughed and laughed with my
new feathery friend. I could finally see the sun and the light. And my dark corner was not so dark
anymore.

“Hey Hope?” I said, “you probably don’t understand me but do you ever think I’ll get
adopted? I don’t feel like I will”, I said while I was drawing. “I don’t know if anyone wants me.
I’m not normal. No one likes me and I don’t know why. I’d just really like a family.” I smiled. I
saw that Hope was listening to every word, carefully nodding along to my voice. Finally, someone
was listening.

“DING DONG!” There was a ring at the door. The caretakers of the orphanage said never
open the door if you don’t know who it is. Hope urged me to the door. He was banging my foot and
pointing his beak at the door. “SKWAK” Now he was physically pulling me to the door. “Hope
no I don’t want to answer the door. I don’t know who it is”, I said. Then Hope looked at me with
his beautiful blue sapphire eyes and I could understand him. He was telling me it was okay to
open the door and I needed to trust him. We went to the door together. I grabbed the handle, took
a breath and opened the door. My mouth hung open and my eyes were glued to them. It was a
mother with blue eyes and a father with a thick beard. Just like my drawing. It’s everything I ever
wanted but would they want me?

“Hello!” the woman said. “I am Kate and this is Bart. We are here to adopt a child. May we
come inside?” I looked at them and nodded. This was a bad idea. Stranger danger! What I was
doing?! I breathed heavily, but Hope looked at me like it was ok. I wondered why they didn’t
notice Hope. “Oh my gosh!” Kate screamed. I ran to the lounge. Kate was screaming and Bart
was laughing. Hope had flown off and had toilet paper on his face. “Hope why do you have toilet
paper on your face?” I said. Kate and Bart looked at me. I can’t believe I said that out loud!

How did you forget Leo Patricia? You are going to give us a bad reputation.” Mrs Lorenzo,
the orphanage caretaker, was coming into the orphanage with all the orphans behind her. Everyone
stopped when they saw us. “Who are you and why is there a toucan with toilet paper on his face?”
She pulled off her shoe and held it up like a weapon. I cleared my throat and I did something I
never thought I would. “ehm, ehm. t- they are Kate and Bart and they are amazing. The toucan is the reason I’m speaking, and happy.” Hope got the toilet paper off his face and flew over to the railing where I was standing and smiled at me. “Excuse me Mrs. Lorenzo?” Kate said. “Leo is an extraordinary little boy. And we would love to have him as our son.” My heart was beating out of my chest. I looked at them and gave them my biggest smile. “Uhm. Yes of course you may adopt him.” Mrs Lorenzo said as she put her shoe back on.”

I ran to Kate and Bart for a hug. Hope was perched with a sad smile though. Maybe he thought I didn’t need him anymore. He was about to fly away but I stopped him. “Uh-uh Hope! You’re a part of our family too now.“ Hope looked at me and his eyes widened. He flew to me and jumped on my face. He nestled my hair. “Caw, caw, tookie, tookie!” We all giggled. I hugged Hope with all my might. Then Kate and Bart joined in. I felt all mushy and gushy, I felt loved.

I said goodbye to the orphans, my old sleeping bag, and the spot I sat in every day drawing. I said hello to my new life with Hope by my side.
Fall is Beautiful
Ahmed Siddiqui

A beautiful day,
I’m looking at the sky,
I feel the breeze,
As I’m walking by.
I think about,
All the leaves,
I look around,
And I see the trees.
They all look so brown,
The leaves blow quickly,
Quiet as the wind,
And very swiftly.
There are three pigments,
The first is chlorophyll
Which is just green,
Completely filled.
But in the fall,
It either turns,
Into carotenoids
or
Anthocyanins,
With a swirl.
The pigments do shine,
Out in the sun,
And when you rake them,
It’s always fun, fun, fun.
Some people like it,
And some people don’t
But when you rake leaves,
You definitely won’t,
Just jump in it!
Sunrise in the Suburbs

Aniela Raucci

Grade Four
GRADE FIVE

Adele Morgan

Grade Five
THE DOMAIN OF 0’S AND 1’S

THARAN CHIMMIRI

Part 1

Have you ever wondered what life would be like without the Binary Number system? Well, before I tell you that, let’s explore this interesting duo of numbers, to find out what it really is.

In order to understand the binary number system, we’ll have to explore the decimal number system first. The decimal number system is a Base 10 system. This means that it has ten digits (0,1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9) and each of its place values is a power of ten (ones, tens, hundreds, etc.), as in 100 101 102 103 etc...

The binary number system on the other hand is a Base 2 system. Its 2 digits are, of course, 0 and 1, and each of its place values are powers of 2 (ones, twos, fours, etc.), as in 20 21 22 23 etc...

With this information, let’s take a look at converting binary to decimal and vice versa.

Our first example will be converting the binary number 110 to decimal. As you can see there are three place values, the 1’s, 2’s, and 4’s place. Since there is a 1 only in the 4’s and 2’s place, you would find the sum of 4 and 2. 4+2 is 6, so 110 in binary would be 6 in decimal.

Converting the binary number 110 to decimal:

110 : 1*22 + 1*21 + 0*20
110 : 1*4 + 1*2 + 0*1
110 : 4 + 2 + 0
110 : 6

Now let’s convert the number 240 from decimal to binary. For that, we divide the number by base 2 until the quotient is zero to get the binary digits from all the remainders bottom up.

Grade Five
So 240 in decimal would be 11110000 in binary.

As you can see, Binary may seem complicated, but with enough practice, you can become a master at it!

Part 2

How and why do computers use the binary number system?

Before I explain how computers use the binary number system, let’s understand why. One of the main reasons is that it is more reliable than using other numeral systems. In any other system, there will be more than just two digits. As an example, if computers were using decimals as their number system, they would have to use 10 digits, instead of just 2. So in reality, since the devices interpret digits as signals, they would have to recognize 10 electrical transmissions (signals). And for a computer, that’s a lot to process. Furthermore, these electronics might translate a signal differently from what it should be, since they would have to compute more than two transmissions, which would mess up a lot of data.

To add on, as the signal that is sent travels, its transmission might get weaker and weaker. Normally, you’d think it wouldn’t be a problem, but there is a perfectly good explanation behind why it would be, if you don’t use the binary number system.

The computer recognizes the signals depending on the power of the transmission. If the power of the signal is very strong, it could be the digit 9. But if it has minimum power, it could be

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<th>Quotient</th>
<th>Remainder (Binary Digit)</th>
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<td>120</td>
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the digit 0. So, let’s say a signal is sent, and it represents the digit 8. It has to travel a long distance, and on the way, it loses some power. So when it reaches its destination, the computer will translate it as perhaps the digit 7, since some of the transmission’s energy was lost. So if you think about it, it’s a major problem. But, if you use binary, the device will only have to recognize only two digits, 0 and 1. And, the digit 1 could have the most power, and the digit 0 could have the least.

So, to conclude, the electronics could be a lot slower which would make the user extremely frustrated. But, if the computers used the binary number system, it would be a lot quicker, and more efficient.

Since the binary number system is very reliable, it also makes it much easier than most systems when it comes to the computer’s understanding. First, because if it used another system, it would take up a lot of storage, the devices would only be able to do simple things. Second, they would take up a massive amount of space. Last but not the least, computers use binary because sometimes complex mathematical equations can be hard for the computer to compute, so using binary is extremely easy for the devices to calculate equations.

So now that we know why computers use binary, let’s explore how.

Computers have very tiny things called transistors in their processors. These transistors are what makes the whole computer function, from enabling you to watch videos all the way to letting you code. However, these transistors wouldn’t be able to function without the binary algorithm.

How the computer uses the algorithm is quite simple. There are rows of 16 transistors in the computer. They can be lit up with the slightest charge of electricity. If one is lit up it represents on, or ‘one’. Similarly, if one is not lit up, it means that it is off or simply ‘zero’. Using this method the transistors create numbers the same way the binary number system works in real life. From there, the numbers that the transistors create transfer into code, letters, and more numbers which then makes the computer function. To conclude, the binary number system is very important to computers, and if they used any other number system today, who knows how things would turn out.

Part 3

Now let’s get back to the original question I asked: What would happen if there was no binary number system?

Well, the first thing that would happen is that computers would be more sluggish. This is because computers would have to use a different number system, and as I explained before, there are numerous reasons why it would be more difficult. Another thing that would happen is that there would be no modern day technologies like iPhones or iPads. This is because these devices rely completely on the binary number system. And if you think about it, there are tons of things you can’t do without them. This means there would be no e-calculators, e-mail, facetime, productivity tools, easy access to the internet and many other things, which leads to a difficult life. Not only would there be no modern devices, it would be a lot harder to take digital photos.
The reason as to why this would happen is because these devices use binary to transfer their code to images. To add on to this, NASA also uses binary to take images in space. So without the binary number system, we wouldn’t know nearly as much about space as we know today. The last thing that would happen is that there would be no video games, which in my opinion wouldn’t necessarily be a bad thing. As you can see, the binary number system is very important to our everyday lives and without it, there would be plenty of things we wouldn’t know.

Overall, the binary number system is very fascinating, and with it, there are so many things we can accomplish. From what it is to how it is incorporated in computers, all the way to all the things we couldn’t do without it, this team of digits is amazing!

As James Gleick once said, “At its most fundamental, information is a binary choice. In other words, one single bit of information is one yes-or-no choice”. So, the next time you use an electronic device, think of all the binary action behind the scenes!
Night Lights

THARAN CHIMMIRI

Grade Five
Chapter 1

Once upon a time, there was a little girl whom everyone called Little Red Riding Hood, but whose true name was Pinecone. She lived in a tree house at the edge of Safely Village, right near the Woods of Doom. Pinecone was an orphan, since her parents disappeared after a devastating fire.

Pinecone’s only surviving relative, her grandmother, lived close by, in a cottage at the other edge of the Woods of Doom.

Perched up in the holly tree, Pinecone was making an apple pie. However, it was not for her grandmother, (both hated each other a lot) but for her dearest and wisest friend, whom many villagers called The Big Bad Wolf. Pinecone knew that her friend, Gus, was not a mischievous, house blowing, pig eating, little girl kidnapping carnivore. He was actually a peaceful, kind, vegetarian.

The person the villagers called “Big Bad Wolf” was only Gus’s brother, Killer. The pie was ready. Pinecone knew because it gave off an aroma of crisp, pie crust, and soft, thinly sliced apples.

After wrapping the hot pie in a checkered blanket, she put on her lightweight red shawl and slid down the smooth holly trunk and landed with a brief crunch on the golden autumn leaves. Pinecone checked that a disapproving adult wasn’t lurking in the shadows, and she set off.

Unlike Gus’s reputation, the Woods of Doom was aptly named. Ghouls and ghosts lived there. Huge, thick eels hid in the numerous lakes, ponds, and rivers. Legends even said that werewolves loomed in the shadows, at night. Ogres and trolls stomped in some of the deepest parts, where twisted trees would be sure to snag any fleeing deer’s antlers.

The borders were more welcoming, however. The birds would sing cheery songs while zipping past colorful flowers, and deers pranced happily, eating the lush, abundant grass that carpeted the forest floors. It was like a happily ever after.

Pinecone did not like that part of the wood. It was too rosy, too sweet. She preferred the dark part of the wood, where no birds sang and the grass was all gray or brown, with trolls lurking somewhere in the grim depths.

She would love fighting a troll. Or two.

Gus’s home was a cave next to a dead pine tree. Behind the cave was a huge field of apple trees, row after row after row. It was the reason why Gus had chosen this place. He loved apples. Pinecone thought he might like apple pie, because he also liked pie crust. “Gus! It’s me! Pinecone!” she yelled, standing at the mouth of the cave. No answer. “Gus? Suddenly, she heard a noise. Stomp. Stomp. Stomp. Grunt. She turned. A huge, pale olive skinned, tiny eyed, face stared down at her. It was a troll.
Chapter 2

Pinecone gasped. The troll’s body was huge. The only clothing it wore was a thick, leather belt made out of humanskins. Its muscled arms resembled the trunks of trees, and one hand was gripping a vast, spiked club.

Maybe she only wanted to fight one troll after all.

Pinecone set the pie down on the old leaf mulch beside her and drew out her own weapon, a strong, sharpened stick.

She leaped onto the troll’s free hand, which was lying on the forest floor, and climbed up the arm. Huge, rock-size warts helped her climb, and so did the huge human-size insect stings. Soon, in no time at all, she was standing on the troll’s bald head, banging her stick against the hard skull.

A small lump was starting to form as Pinecone hit the same spot on the troll’s head. The hideous monster felt the lump, and thought, something is trying to hurt Stub! (For the troll’s name was Stub), so he raised his hand and hit hard on his head, knocking himself out completely. Pinecone had just the time to realize that her plan was working, and jumped off. The troll hit the ground hard, with a loud “THUNK!” and Pinecone thought, maybe I could deal with two trolls after all.

Pinecone peered into Gus’s cave. “Gus?” she called. Still no answer. After lighting a torch, she stepped inside. Gus was not there. There was, however, a note that was hastily scribbled with Gus’s handwriting.

Dear Pinecone, it read, I think I know what made your parents disappear. Forgive me that I wasn’t here in person to tell you this, but whoever these people are knew I knew their secret, so they came for me too. Your parents’ disappearance is part of something bigger. Actually, things like your case are happening all over the place. Goldilocks is missing, and so is Snow White and Hansel and Gretel. Someone is ruining the fairy tales! Most of them, like ours, are already messed up. Only a few are still untouched. It won’t be long, however. Here is a list of possible suspects.

1. The evil witch that lives in a candy house
2. The other evil witch from the tale of Snow White
3. The queen, Cinderella

Pinecone stared at the list. How could it be so short? She was flabbergasted at all three, especially the last one. Sure, Cinderella was pretty smart and cunning, but seriously? Her? Why would the queen want to mess up the fairy tales? The fairy tales were her kingdom! Unless… she was messing up the fairy tales for more order. It didn’t make sense, but perhaps nothing in this world did.

Pinecone thought. The letter seemed to tell her to go save the fairy tales, but how could a ten year old save the world?

“I can at least try, and anyway, if I fail, it’s not like losing a kid will make any difference.”

With that, she ran back to her treehouse and grabbed some things. Then, Pinecone set off on her quest. She would never come back home again.
Chapter 3

Pinecone decided to see the suspects on her list in order. First stop, the candy house, she thought. After having walked mostly the whole day, Pinecone set camp near a river. She reviewed the contents of her bag.

Stick, check. Map, check. Food, check. Then there were other items, like a blanket, water, matches, and rocks.

The next day, she far from Safely Village, and from the Woods of Doom. Suddenly, her nose bonked into something. A donut. From a donut tree. Only one person kept donut trees. A person who lived in a candy house.

“Arrival at the first stop.” Pinecone sighed. Five minutes later, she was knocking at the front door. Made out of chocolate.

No one answered. Pinecone pushed open the door, which was unlocked, just like Goldilocks had done thousands of times with a lot of doors. Inside, there sat a round table piled with food, mostly sugar-filled treats. Pinecone wasn’t interested in the food.

She was interested in the basement. Pinecone walked across the gummy-bear floor to a caramel door with a knob made from a gumdrop.

She opened the door with a sugar treat she had picked up from the table. It stuck.

Pinecone walked down dark chocolate steps. Torches hung from the wall, producing an eerie green, unnatural light. Magic.

She soon reached the bottom of the stairs, where the foundations of the house lay. They were the only walls not made out of candy.

Pinecone wasn’t looking at that, though. She was looking at all of the statues that were in a standing position, all covered entirely with some kind of caramel. Here was Goldielocks, frozen in a pose with her curly hair bouncing. Here was Snow White, in the position of backing away. There was Hansel and Gretel, who looked ready to run screaming, but couldn’t. Then there were dozens of other characters, all from fairy tales.

Then Pinecone saw him. Gus, frozen in a sitting position, with his pen-feather still in his paw. Looking up, his face stuck in a gasp.

Suddenly, a woman burst out in front of her. “HA!” she shouted, “HA HA HA HA HA!” Pinecone screamed. It was the witch!

She knew she should move, but something stopped her. As if her legs were getting covered with caramel. Then she looked down, and saw orange slime crawling up her legs. And hardening. Forming a thick, uncrackable shell.

She looked up at the witch, screaming, “NO! NO! NO! MOTHER! FATHER! GUS!” Pinecone then screamed every bad word that has been created and every one that shall be created. And caramel hardened around her mouth, inside, too, until every single hair on her head had its own salty, sticky shell.

Pinecone’s mouth was frozen into an eternal scream of despair, fury, sadness, and rage. The End
NIGHT

LEVENTE PEK

Grade Five
Chapter 1: The Plan

Chunky was an ordinary turkey living on an ordinary farm, but he had a huge problem. Next week was Thanksgiving, and he was the prime target for dinner. He stared longingly at the extra load of delicious, flavorful turkey feed he was given. He knew that he shouldn’t be eating it because it made him bigger and juicier and more of a target for a Thanksgiving feast, but it was so delicious that he couldn’t help himself. Now, back to Thanksgiving, he thought. He would have to make an escape plan.

As he was eating, he thought about a plan. The one advantage he had was that the farmers were away for the weekend, so that gave him some time to put his plan into action. The biggest obstacles were the gate around the farm, and the barn cats on patrol. The barn cats were boastful and constantly bragging that they were outside, and he wasn’t.

Once Chunky finished eating, he paced back and forth inside his pen, waiting for the barn cats to leave to patrol the chickens. He knew about a secret broken piece of wood that he could fit through, that would lead to the food shed.

Once the patrol cats left, Chunky ran to the wood. He pecked hard at it until the secret door came loose. But when he ran at it full speed to squeeze through, he was surprised when he bounced right back! He tried again, and again, and again, but he finally came to the conclusion that he was too chunky to fit! After all, that was his name.

Maybe if I open the gap more? Chunky suggested to himself.

As he kept chipping away at the hole, he thought out his next step for the plan. Once he broke out, he would run to the food shed, and hide out there. The patrol cats would come back, and see that he had escaped from the hole. That meant that he had to be extra careful.

POP! Chunky squeezed through the hole. He checked his surroundings, and made his move to the shed.

As he entered the cold, damp shed, he could smell the heavenly smell of the bird feed. He was about to feast on it all, when he reminded himself, wait, I’m kinda chunky enough. I could barely fit through the door!

Suddenly, he snapped out of his food trance when he heard the patrol cats in the barn, screeching in rage. A second later, they emerged from the barn, ready to find him.

The battle was on.
Chapter 2: The Process Begins

Okay, Chunky thought. A million thoughts were racing around in his mind. *I just have to take this one step at a time.* First he had to sort out the priorities. He paced back and forth, trying to think over the cat’s commotion. To get out of the farm, he had to get the key to the gate. He was pretty sure that they were in the farmer’s bedroom. That meant that he just had to—“SCREECH!” Strained a tiny voice.

“AHHHHH!” Chunky hollered, trembling as he turned around.

“Who’s there?” Chunky whispered as he met green eyes in the darkness.

Then they both froze to the sound of the patrol cats prancing confidently to the shed. Chunky didn’t know who this creature was, but he knew that they both needed to get out. The small animal climbed onto his back, and they both made a run for it. Chunky nearly got caught as he turned the bend, and ran under the farmer’s porch. In the warm sunlight, he could finally see that he had met a small mouse.

“Hello, I’m Chunky,” Chunky greeted the mouse. *Maybe he could help me escape!* Chunky thought.

“Hello, I am Sir Squeak,” The mouse replied. “What are you doing out of your pen?”

“I am escaping. Would you like to help?” Chunky asked. The small mouse nodded excitedly in agreement. As Chunky explained his plan, they both agreed to get the keys to the gate first.

As they entered the house, they snuck across the floor to the stairs. Well, Chunky tried to, anyway. With his chunky body, it was almost impossible! Each step he took ended in a loud *creak* from the floor. While on the other hand, Sir Squeak had no problem scampering across the floor with ease. Frustrated, Chunky decided to stay downstairs, and let Sir Squeak get the keys.

In less than a minute, they were out the door, with the keys. But Chunky had a mysterious feeling that someone was watching him. He decided to ignore it, and move on. *It was probably nothing,* he convinced himself.

With Sir Squeaks on his back, they trotted toward the gate. But Chunky still had that weird sensation that someone was watching them. He couldn’t help but check his surroundings.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw a sliver of black.

Then followed by a screech.

Then followed by a chase.

Chapter 3: The Key

The next thing they knew, Sir Squeak and Chunky were running for their lives, being closely chased by a patrol cat with fur as dark as a spider, and piercing yellow eyes. Chunky had the keys in his beak, and had no idea where he was running. Then he had an idea.
Chunky ran to the garage, and headed straight for a fishing net. Then he slowed down just a speck, so the cat would think they had a lead. Just as she leaped, Chunky and Sir Squeak swerved to the left, and the cat got tangled up in the net.

Chunky looked around desperately, looking for a place to hide in the time he had bought them.

Just in the nick of time, they found a staircase leading to the Farmer’s upstairs porch. It was the safest place they could stay while they developed a new plan.

“We should find a way to the gate,” Sir Squeaks managed to gasp as they climbed the steep stairs, out of sight from the cats.

“Yeah, but we need a better way than last time,” Chunky concluded, forgetting that the keys were still in his mouth. There was a clink, and they both watched in horror as the keys slid down the side of the house, and dropped right into a well with a splash.

“That did not just happen,” Chunky grieved.

Sir Squeaks moaned, a tiny mouse moan.

The well was way too steep and deep for even a mouse to climb down! Chunky looked around, confused how much everything could change in just a few seconds. At that point, he just wanted to give up from exhaustion and accept defeat.

“That was our one way out of here, and the sun is going down in an hour!” Chunky blamed himself as he peered into the now crimson horizon. Chunky looked at his feet in shame, as Sir Squeaks tried to comfort him.

“I failed us all,” Chunky sobbed.

“We can still find another way. It’s not your fault!” Sir Squeaks comforted.

Just those little words of encouragement sparked a little light inside Chunky. It gave him enough energy to look up, and see the answer that he was waiting for.

Chapter 4: Out the gates

Chunky and Sir squeaks raced into the dusty dirt, like there was no tomorrow. They peeked into the garage, glad to see that the cat was gone. Then they looked up to see a beast of a tractor, towering over them. Just what they needed. Sir Squeaks swiftly climbed the tractor, tweaked a few things inside it, and gave Chunky a thumbs up. Chunky struggled to get on the tractor with his very chunky body, but eventually found a way. As they pressed the go button on the tractor, all the adrenaline rushed through Chunky and Sir Squeaks, and they hesitantly nodded at each other.

The next thing they knew, they were cruising toward the gates on the tractor. If they couldn’t go past it easily, they would have to go through it. Chunky heard the familiar enraged screech from the patrol cats, but he didn’t worry. He was going to be free and away from those annoying cats. They couldn’t stop him. No one could!

The next thing Chunky knew he was bouncing all over the place, with the sound of
crunching of metal following as the tractor crushed the steel gate.

“YEEHAW!” Chunky hollered with joy. He could feel the freedom blowing in his feathers, as the two of them cruised past the crushed gate and through the woods.

“WOO!” Sir Squeak yelled at the top of his little lungs.

 Chunky felt triumph in every bump.

Sir Squeak felt big every second.

They had done it. Goodbye, Thanksgiving! Chunky thought. And right then, rolling through the wilderness of freedom, he was no longer an ordinary turkey on an ordinary farm. He was Chunky, the free turkey.
Waking up with everything wrong or so my thoughts tell me
Minutes lead to hours of faking it through
Will they notice me
School bus rides seem way too long
Going home with confidence gone
Then homework, sports, bedtime soon
Early mornings late nights, the same routine
Will they notice me
What would they do if I share my true thoughts
That bugs crawl on my skin when I shower
Its jeans, dresses, leggings, and head wraps too
Loud chewing and lip-smacking swallows send chills to my brain
No hives, no rashes, no visible signs for them to see
When I cover my ears and say “PLEASE!”
They think I’m rude or sassy
But I’m just seeking comfort to be happy
When will they know my thoughts are not right
When and how will it end, I often write
Wars, stress, and busy lives or so they say
Will anyone see the kids who will soon change the world Then will you notice me?
You were standing on the mountain cliff
the wind in your hair, your eyes calling out to the moon.
I watched you, your mouth
silently whispering to what left you.
All the hope all the love all the pride,
slipped out of you that cold summer night.
You might have given up that time, but no.
You knew your emotions
were telling you that you could make it through
that night.
In the morning
you told me you were leaving.
You told me you
were going out to the mountains
to breathe in the light.
You stayed there.
When you came back
you were very old.
Your golden locks turned to gray
your cheeks were lined
your honorable posture was a slouch.
But you did not worry.
You said goodbye and left into the sky.
But I held back tears.
I loved you.
Burj Khalifa

Lauren Techar

Grade Five
There are days where all you want to do is fly away. That’s a normal feeling for Monica Granger. When she is not at school, trying to fit into a tough crowd, she is staring out the window, waiting for things to make sense. She is the youngest in her family, but it feels like she is an only child. That’s because her older brother, Adam, ran away to a college in California and doesn’t come back for the holidays, or even summer break. Adam said he “couldn’t come home” because he has “so much work.” She knew that he was lying because he only had to write a book review for the summer. Even though Monica’s brother doesn’t seem to miss home, Monica still loves her brother.

“Tip tap tip tap, SPLAT!” The rain was sometimes soft and soothing, but other times it would fall off the roof all at once, and make a disturbing plop. As Monica peered out through the window, she saw her clumsy mother stumbling through the wind, with her cluttered purse. Her mother’s curly brunette hair whipped wildly in the wind. Monica’s mother angrily opened the door and shook her curly wet hair. “Oh my gosh!” her mother yelled. Monica ran down the stairs, “What happened?” Monica asked. “Some people can be so thoughtless and rude! I had finally got a taxi, and an awful woman shoved me out of the way to get there first!” her mother shrieked. “I’m sorry,” Monica said empathetically. She could tell that her mom had to walk back in the rain. “It’s okay dearest,” the mother sighed.

Monica walked up to her room and opened her rusty doorknob. Then, she fell onto her bed. “Uggggg!” she moaned. She thought about her brother, how they used to always play together. Everyone was happy back then. A layer of sadness and nostalgia covered her mind. The thing that she remembered best was the tiger closet, this game that she and her brother made up. The rules made no sense, but back then, it didn’t matter. The way the game worked was that her dad would hold up a tiger puppet, put it on a stick, and when Monica or her brother said, “I’m so glad that the tiger is gone,” her dad would jump out of the closet with the puppet on the stick, and try to get them. Now, it sounded embarrassing, because she actually believed that the tiger was real, but even if she knew that back then, she wouldn’t be embarrassed.

“Monica, it’s time to walk Mrs. Shersey’s dogs,” her mother told Monica. “I told you mom, I quit!” “I am not letting you quit, so walk the dogs. You get paid!” “Fine!” Monica huffed. Mrs. Shersey’s dogs were so low to the ground, and their legs were as short as teacups. Their names were Chikalinda, Mordecai, and Gargantua. They were all the color of gingerbread and sort of stumbled on each other. Monica walked to Mrs. Shersey’s big white house, “DINNG DONGGGGG!” Her doorbell was so loud it could be heard from miles away. “Yes?” Mrs. Shersey said. “Um, I’m here to walk your dogs.” “Oh, very well, then.” She closed the door and came back with the three dogs in her arms. “Mordecai, well…he lets a lot of his inner food out, so you’ll
need seven bags for Mordecai’s, you know what.” Monica reluctantly took the dogs’ leashes and began to walk the dogs. But the moment Mrs. Shersey closed the door, the dogs started sprinting every which way. Chikalinda went forwards, Gargantua went backwards, and Mordecai went to the side. Her face turned red. How could this turn out so terribly? Monica thought. After catching the dogs, she didn’t even bother to walk them any further.

Once she got back to her house, the sky was fading into dusk, and Monica never liked being on Walder street when it was dark. Not because she was scared of the dark, but because there was a house that was full of insane people. They were always drunk, and crashing cars. So Monica ran back to her house as quickly as she could.

When she opened her house’s red wooden door, she saw her mother sitting on a chair, slouching. She knew what that meant. It meant that something was wrong. Her mothers eyes were a dull red, and she was repeatedly blowing her nose. “Oh, no. What happened mom?” she said nervously. “It’s Adam. We got into a fight, and he said he hates me, and is never coming back. He says it’s my fault that your father…” Monica’s eyes filled with tears, and her mind went back to the tiger closet, when everything was perfect, when all the many bad moments ahead of her seemed like myths. All of a sudden, they were both sobbing, Monica couldn’t take it anymore, she collapsed onto the squeaky couch and just cried. She remembered the time when she and her brother were dancing around in circles to the most babyish music, how he always rang the doorbell twice, before walking into their house. But the memory that was the most emotional was when they went swimming at the beach, and Adam said he would never ever leave her.

Once the day passed, the next day came. The birds seemed like they were chirping extra loudly, like they were trying to tell her something. It felt like wherever she went in the house, the sun was blindingly beaming through the window. Monica took some chewable expired milk out of the fridge, threw it out, and made herself some toast. All of a sudden, a hawk flew over the house, and she saw a green car pass by. She was just about to bite into her toast, when somebody rang the doorbell twice. Then somebody walked through the front door. “Hello?” he said. For a moment, she thought that the person was a delivery man or something, but then she saw his face. “Adam?” “Monica?” Tears rolled down both of their cheeks. Monica ran into Adam’s arms. “What’s going on?” Monica’s mom asked, as she shuffled out of her room. Maybe she was still so tired that she couldn’t tell that that was Adam. “What? My baby finally came back!” she almost screamed. They all were crying. Monica felt as happy as she did when she was playing the tiger closet with Adam and her dad. She knew that one day, Adam would finally come back for her and her mom, she knew it.

That was the most amazing moment for Monica Granger. Time passed, and Adam and Monica began to grow older. Now Adam is out of college and Monica is in High School. Adam had a baby girl when Monica was 15. One day, when the baby girl came over, they played the tiger closet. Even though Monica misses when she was younger, playing it with just her brother and dad, she knew that it was time to move on.

And I know that too. I know that I need to let go. I am Monica’s dad, and I think it’s time
that I come back for my family.

GRADE SIX

NAYAN VARMA
Babysitting for Ghosts
Kenley Flippo

5:15 Jan 5

Maya
Hi

Ana
Hey what are you doing

Maya
I am babysitting

Ana
Are you at the same
place as last night?

Maya
Yes

Ana
How long have
you been there?

Maya
About 3 months

Ana
Oh are they
nice?

Maya
Yeah but they never respond when I call them

Ana
That’s
weird

Maya
Yah once I tried to ask them about it but
They changed the subject

Ana
I wonder
why they do that

Ana
How many kids do they have?

Maya
Just 1 they say he’s adopted and his parents were murdered

Ana
Oh why would they not want to check on him?

Maya
I don’t know but I am here every afternoon and he is up in his room

Ana
Weird

Maya
I know right. They also told me not to go in his or their room

Ana
So you never actually watch him?

Maya
Only once right before his parents leave

Ana
Why do they pay you to babysit if you don’t watch the kid?

Maya
Idk it doesn’t make sense

Maya
Oh his parents just got home
Talk to you later

Ana
Ok

The next day
3:15 P.M.

Grade Six
Maya
I am babysitting again

Ana
You should go talk to him

Maya
NO

Ana
Why not?

Maya
They told me not to go in his room

Ana
Why?

Maya
I have no idea but when they said it, they sounded scared

Ana
Then go in their room

Ana
They have to be hiding something

Maya
I don’t think I should

Ana
Why not?

Maya
It is an invasion of their privacy
Ana
Yeah but if they are afraid of their son
Something is wrong

Maya
I guess, but what if I get caught?

Ana
What is some kid going to do?

Maya
Ok I’ll do it

A little while later

Maya
I’m in the room

Maya
I see a bed and dresser

Ana
Look under the bed

Maya
I’m looking under the bed

Maya
There’s nothing there

Ana
Ok check the dresser

Maya
Ok I’m looking
Maya
I only see clothes

Maya
Wait I moved them
There is something underneath

Ana
What is it?

Maya
There are 2 pieces of paper

Ana
What does it say

Maya
It says…..

Ana
What is it

Maya
It is a certificate of death for Mary
And Chester Smith

Maya
It says they were murdered

Ana
What!?
Ana
So you’re babysitting for
ghosts??

Maya
I guess so

Ana
Get out of there

Maya
Why Henry is alive not dead

Ana
Yeah because he killed his parents

Maya
Then why did they say he
was adopted

Ana
They needed
a cover up story

Maya
Do you think he will kill
me?

Ana
He might

Maya
Ok I’m going to get out of
this place

Maya
Ana
Maya
I turned around and Henry was in the doorway

Maya
He is staring at me

Maya
It’s really creepy

Ana
Just push past him and run

Ana
Maya

Ana
Maya

Ana
Maya this is not funny

Ana
Answer me

Ana
please
MAVERICK

LIAM DAVIES

Grade Six
Wishing for Wishes

Alyssa Flugrad

The snow lightly tapped on my windowpane. People from my neighborhood pulled sleds full of snow toys. I wish with all my might I could study and play in the first snow, oh the white snow! I longingly looked outside at everyone. Then, the doorbell called me downstairs.

“Hey Meggie! How are you?” I greeted my friend, Megan.

“Great, it’s a snow day! Who wouldn’t be happy?” Meg asked.

“Of course! I must have forgotten that!”

“Is that why you’re not outside with everyone else?”

“Oh you know, I want great grades.”

“But how could you resist the snow?”

“Oh, it’s easy once you get used to it. Bye Meg.”

I wished more, even though that might not have been possible. I couldn’t keep it in anymore so I ran up the stairs to my room, and pounced on my bed, while diving head first into my pillow. I cried, thinking of all the time in the world I could have. All the time I could’ve laughed and played like a normal kid. But at the time, I didn’t want to be the same. I just wanted to be a unique kid who could do so much more with her life. I crawled into my soft blue chair, spun, and wheeled it over to my gray wooden desk. Bored, I looked from notebook, to worksheets, to old quizzes and tests, to homework pages. At times, I lazily lifted my head up from whatever I was reading to look longly out the window, wishing so much.

I wish I wished for wishes when I blew out my birthday candles. I wish I could be different but the same. I wish I could wish forever and have them come to life. I wish something could change my life forever and ever! 45 minutes later, I finally finished studying, so what would I do now? Finished homework? Yep. Finished wishing for wishes? I guess for now. Should I think of a plan to overcome any fears I had? Ya right. I slumped down in my chair, bored to death.

What to do, what to do. I looked out the window at all my friends. I felt like a queen looking down at all her subjects. So much work to have done and doesn’t have enough time to do it all! Should I read a book? Should I clean the house? Should I go for a walk? Should I make some lunch? My stomach agreed to get some lunch with a big growl. I hopped off my chair and headed down the wooden stairs. I raced to the kitchen and pulled out some Raman. I heated the black tea kettle on the stove, while placing the broken noodles into a large mug. Next, I poured the steaming water into the mug and, using my fork, pushed the noodles down into the hot water to soften them up. After placing three ice cubes into the boiling water, I walked into the living room and sat in my bean bag chair. Slurping down the Raman noodles and warm water, I walked into the kitchen. As I placed my dishes into the sink, I filled the cup with water.
What should I do next? Read a book? Do arts and crafts? Study some more? Have a nap? I guess my eyes agreed to having a nap because before I knew it, I was waking up from my bean bag. My body was cramped from the weird position I was in, so I decided to go for a little walk. Getting my jacket, scarf, hat and gloves, I walked out the door.

“You decided to come out and play!” Meg cried as I walked across an area where people were building snowmen. Meg’s snowman stood out to me, as I looked at the crowd of happy snowmen, hers looked the saddest of them all.

“I should probably change it, now that I’m happy. Come on! Let’s get you started on a snowman!”

“Sorry, Meg, I came outside to go for a walk, not to play. I still have so much homework to do,” I told her. I knew half of this was a lie and half of this was the truth.

“Oh, okay,” Meg said, her voice dipping into disappointment. I looked at my watch: 1 p.m.

“Got to run,” I said, as I raced away from the disappointed group.

Wow. I didn’t know they were that sad, especially Meg. Should I go play outside with everyone? No, everyone is disappointed in me. I can’t go back out there now! But what will I do? I can’t stay here forever! Should I set goals for next year since it’s soon? Yes. That’s what I will do. I got my diary, and wrote, New Year’s Goals to Achieve:

1. Write more in my diary
2. Read more of my books
3. Get better grades since they are A’s and A-’s
4. Submit classwork and homework on time

That didn’t take as much time as I thought it would take, I thought aloud. I lazily looked at my watch; 2:30.

What to do, what to do. Should I get all my snow gear on and play in the snow alone? I guess my feet, arms, legs, and hands agreed because before I knew what was happening, I was ready to go play in the snow.

I have to avoid the other group so I don’t get caught, I thought. I walked out the door and looked around the corner of my house, careful I didn’t get caught. No one was in sight and all the snowmen suddenly looked sadly at me.

No, they all aren’t that sad. They can’t. Then, I realized the truth. I had really upset my true friends.

I have to fix this! I knew this time what to do. I walked up to the first house I came across that had one of my friends trapped from coming outside. Shaking my hand in fear of being yelled at, I knocked on the door.

“Hey Sean! I finished my homework, would you like to come outside and get the gang back together? I’m sorry for not coming outside sooner, but I was afraid you guys wouldn’t want to play with me after the way I treated you all. Friends?” I asked.

Sean looked at me in surprise at first, then smiled. “Let me get my things ready.”

I literally jumped in joy off his front steps. I ran to Makalya’s house next. I knocked and said the same thing, then had everyone join in.
I got Sean, Makalya, Rosie, John-Luke, Henry, Paige, and Drake. I jumped up the steps of the last house. I was about to knock when I realized that the house that my friend was trapped in was Megan. Maybe she was still disappointed in me! The same fear that was inside of me when I knocked on Sean’s door came back. I couldn’t knock on the door. Then I realized, when I came outside, joy was spread all over Megan’s face. If I came up to her door, I would make that up to her and we would have a stronger friendship than ever before! Gathering all my strength and courage, I knocked on Megan’s light gray door. The door swung open and there, I saw my best friend standing in front of me.

“Hey M-” I started. Then, with a loud bang, the door was slammed shut!

I stared in amazement at the thought of my friend, my best friend, just turned around and slammed the door in my face. The worryness inside of me now turned to rage. The rage made me want to break down the door, stomp into the house, and scream at her. I silently walked away. Then, I heard laughter and wanted to just turn around and scream at them.

*Stop laughing! This isn’t funny!* I thought. Suddenly, I got hit hard in the back. I bit my lip to stop from crying. I crouched down, made a huge snowball, and turned to see my attacker. Everyone was hiding behind huge snow banks, everyone except Megan. We stared into each other’s eyes, squinting through the bright sun. Then it began. Soon, we all joined either Megan, or me, crouching to make snowballs. This was the end. Snowballs flew through the air, hitting others, then it was just Megan, Emma, Jason, and myself, staring at each other. Emma was the first to be hit, then Jason went down, then Megan and I were adding ammo to our sleds. Then the idea hit me. I ran toward Megan, and just on the other side was a massive hill which I would sled down, throwing snowballs in Meg’s direction. This was the end. Running, then sliding under Megan. Then she hit me. The game was over, once and for all. Now, all I knew what I wanted all those years, a true friend.
Mouse Trap

Eleanor Klemann

Grade Six
THE TEARS OF A GHOST
ELLA KILLORAN

I breathed heavily as the ghosts surrounded me. I grabbed my sword, ready to wield. This is not how I wanted to spend my Winter.

Two Weeks Before

“Eliá, wake up,” Mother says.
“Yes, Mitera,” I say rubbing the sleep out of my light blue and dark brown eyes.
“I feel like everytime I see you your hair is a different color,” she teases.
I don’t reply, clearly too tired for her jokes about my curly black and blue hair. I head to my fridge, and I open the door to find nothing of course because Callumn has eaten everything.
“I hate step brothers,” I grumble under my breath. I walk back into my room to put on my clothes, a normal gray sweater with a white collar. I touch my face, a new scar has appeared on my warm brown skin from yesterday. I grab my backpack and my swords.
“I’m heading to the cemetery Mitera,” I say.
“Mhm, ok.”
I put my black converse on and head to my family’s graveyard to do my daily ritual to try and summon a ghost. I grab my bag of goat blood, an easy way to summon a ghost. I hold my thnitó vasíleio (attachment to the Mortal realm), a black cat bracelet. As I arrive at the gravestone I slowly let the blood drip to the floor of the grave. I place my bracelet in the blood and I chant the words To pio agapitó pnévma sikotheíte apó to diarkés méros sas gia na mou deixete to prósopó sas tha sas evlogíso me to aíma pou cháthike.” I wait silently, nothing steers. Typical, I turn my back and start to stand up when…

“Uh rude,” someone says. I turn back as fast as I can.

“Hi,” the ghost says, smiling at me.
“I-I…” I stutter.
“Hmm?”
“I did it!”
“Uh...good job?” the ghost says with a confused look.

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Olive
Olive is a feminine given name of English origin meaning olive tree. The name is associated with peace because of the symbolism of the olive branch. An olive wreath has traditionally been worn by champions as a symbol of victory. It has also been seen as a symbol of fruitfulness.

Mother
A mother is a female parent; mothers nurture and mother children. It’s also a term for an elderly woman or mother superior. Your mother is the woman who gave birth to you: mothers are parents, the female equivalent of a father.

dearest spirit rise from your lasting place to show me your face i will bless you with the blood spilled

Grade Six
“I actually did it for the first time since Patéras' death - oh I haven’t introduced myself. My name is Olive. What’s your name, age of death, and the reason you died?” I say getting closer to the ghost.

“Um, the name’s Jackie. I died at like 15-16 ish and I don’t know how I actually died”.

“Ok?” I say, somewhat confused, “Well, uh, you can go away now.”

“Uh no” Jackie says.

“What?!” I say.

“N.O.” he spells out.

“Uh, yes, you need to go back,” I say.

“Nah, I think I'm good,” he says, looking at a butterfly.

“You know what, I don’t care. Bye! Go become a freakish nightmare, spirit monster!” I say, giving up and walking back inside my house to do my chores. I grab a list off the fridge that says “Goblins are roaming behind the Mobil gas station.”

“How swell,” I say sarcastically, rolling my eyes. Of course I had to be the only Norwegian 15 year old whose family was cursed by a witch to forever do “quests.” I walk out the door when Jackie jumps at me.

“AH!” I yell. Jackie giggles.

“Not funny,” I say, brushing off my shirt.

“Where you goin’?” he says.

“Nowhere,” I say.

“Can I come?”

“No.”

“Please.”

“No”

“Pretty pleaseeeeee!”

“UGH, fine!” I say, as he walks behind me.

“There are we going?”

“Gas station.”

“Why?”

“Goblins.”

“Oh.” We walk in silence for a bit. This is mighty awkward, I think suddenly.

“Uh, I like your hair,” Jackie says.

“Oh look, we’re here,” I say, interrupting Jackie, my face flustered as we walk into the abandoned gas station.

Father

Father refers to the male parent of a child in a family. He is a very important member of the family. He is the one who takes care of the entire family including his own parents, wife and children. He earns his bread and butter for his family and tries his best to fulfill their needs and demands.
“Creepy,” Jackie says shivering.
“Mhm,” I say grabbing cat treats from my pocket.
“You have a cat?” Jackie asks.
“No,” I say, placing them on the ground. “Hear Telônio, 5 Telônio,” I see four small goblins approach us.
“Aw, so cute,” Jackie says.
“These are the kits. The mother will approach soon,” I say as a massive goblin lunges at Jackie. I swing my swords, slashing her in the stomach. I then proceed to stomp on the baby goblins.
“Oh, so not cute,” Jackie says, shaking.
“Yes, we now must find a Manticore that’s been terrorizing a village,” I say, checking my list.
“Allah, please save me,” Jackie says. As I have finished my chore list, Jackie and I place camp. I start a fire.

“Why do we have to sleep in the woods?” Jackie complains.
“You really wanna travel five hours back home?” I sarcastically say.
“No…”
“Good, now don’t float away,” as I say it, Jackie floats down and plops next to me. I smile at him. People can really make friends in a day.

I awake the next morning, rubbing sleep out of my eyes. I checked my list which had previously been blank and now had a new list of chores. “Ready to start the day, buddy?” I say to Jackie.
“Ready as I’ll ever be,” he says, blowing his chocolate brown locks from his face.
“Good, because we are starting strong by capturing and relocating a baby Foínix 6 to a safer place than a live volcano,” I say.

“AN ACTIVE VOLCANO?!” Jackie says, clearly concerned.
“Don’t worry, the nest is at the roots of the volcano. We just need to relocate it into the volcano.”
“How easy,” Jackie says sarcastically. I burst out laughing. Jackie laughs with me. As we approach the volcano I hear the squeal of a baby phoenix. I cover my slightly pointed ears in pain. Jackie does the same. “Why do they sound like a fire alarm x10?!” Jackie says.
“To alert their mother, yet they have no mother,” I say.

“One thing a bird and I have in common,” Jackie says, staring at the ground. I start running toward the bird. I grab the nest and throw it into the air so Jackie can catch it. He does so and throws it into the volcano. He floats down. “Well done,” I say.

“Thank you,” he says, raising his hand as we high five each other, ready to take over the world.

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5 Goblin
A wandering sprite that is usually mischievous but often malicious

6 Phoenix
A phoenix is a mythical bird known for rising from its ashes. Don’t try that at home! Accordingly to ancient legend, the phoenix is a bird that cyclically burns to death and is reborn from its own ashes. For this reason, the phoenix often serves as a symbol of renewal and rebirth.
“Ah!” he says.

“What’s wrong?”

“I’ve been getting very bad headaches for a while.”

“I think I have nectar in my bag.”

“Nectar?”

“The drink of the gods. I can’t drink it but spirits can. It can also cure all pain and gashes,” I say. Jackie grabs the flask. We travel around for weeks, killing creatures and growing closer.

“Phew, that’s the last fairy,” Jackie says.

“You killed it like a pro,” I say.

“Yeah,” he says silently. That’s strange. Jackie had been starting to act weird? No, stranger? Maybe he had become a bit distant. It scared me slightly. What if he was becoming a nightmare? No! I- he can’t. He- No! I shake away my anxieties as we continue walking.

“Olive?” Jackie asks.

“Yeah?” I say, wiping sweat from my brow.

“Can I hold one of your swords?” he says, his face darkening.

“Sure?” I say as I pass him my sword. Jackie smiles. His face darkens.

“Θάνατός σου θα είναι γλυκός όταν σου μαχητό αφθό στο λαίμο,” he says.

“W-what!?” Jackie raises the sword to my head and I move as it stabs me in the arm, blood trickles down my arm. I run behind a tree.

“You can’t hide from me, Olive!” Jackie says.

I chant the words, “Το πιο αγαπητό πνεύμα σικοθείτε από το διαρκές μέρος σας για να μου δείξετε το πρόσωπο σας την ευλογία με την αίμα που χύθηκε!” I chant it as many times as I can trying to conjure any and every spirit that can help me. The ghosts surround me as Jackie finds me and runs at me.

“Jackie, please!” I wail.

“Be quiet! It’ll be over soon!” he says. I grab my other sword, piercing him in his stomach. He falls to his knees.

“Olive? I- I’m sorry. I don’t know what happened, why am I fading away?” Tears fall from my eyes and my cheeks are wet.

“You became a nightmare,” I say.

“I-I’m sorry.”

“It’s ok.,” I hug my best friend for the last time as he slowly disappears. My tears fall to the ground as a small Mohavea flower blooms. I fall to my knees and touch the flower gently as more tears fall to the ground. I place one of my swords in the ground next to the flower and walk further into the forest.
Abby

Abigayle Luzietti

Grade Six
Ode to my Imagination
AARON PALKER

Falling for thoughts
Digging in Dreams
Waiting for wonders
   You,
   My
   Vivid
   Mind
Infinite imagination
   You
   Are a magnet
Attaching to my thoughts
   You,
My massive, magnificent mind
   My creativity
You dig through my brain
   Tossing out ideas
And adding your own
   You are a wonder
You are like air to me
   You,
   My creativity
   You,
   Are a wonder
   To me
Vivid, vivacious visions
Infinite, Ingenious ideas
A true phenomenon
   I give thanks
   To you
   Because
Without you
   There is no
   Me
   I need you

Like a fish needs water
Like a plant needs the sun
Like a creature needs food
   But,
   I,
   I
Need you
   More
Because,
   I can’t
Last a single second
   Without you
MY SELF PORTRAIT OF ME!

SARA KULLA

Grade Six
Ruff! That’s what I hear right now. It’s not real though, I’m lost in a memory. A memory of my dog, Iris.

It’s Iris’s first birthday and I was only six then. I was still young and happy, my mom helped me make Iris a giant doggy biscuit and I had tried to tie a pink polka dotted cloth around my head but my wavy brown hair kept getting tangled in the cloth. My mom had tied one around Iris’s head like a bandana so we could match. As the memory fades away, I remember that she’s gone now and that was seven years ago.

I’m lying on my bed eating takeout when my parents come home. They said they would come home late and that I could use their credit card to buy food. I hear their footsteps as they come up. As they open my bedroom door I look up from the picture in my notebook. There’s a tear streaming down my pale face and I wipe it away with a delicate finger before anyone can spot it. The picture that I was looking at was a picture of Iris and her first litter of puppies. They all died before the end of the week because of fading puppy syndrome. Iris died soon after that. I hold back that memory because I know I will lose myself to it, then I notice that my parents are holding a box.

“Stacey, I thought we told you that you could order anything but fast food,” my mom says.

“I don’t think you mentioned that in your text, anyway Chipotle isn’t fast food it’s healthy. It has rice, beans, and chicken,” I told her while putting another spoonful of my rice bowl in my mouth. My parents are doctors so they always obsess over my eating habits.

“Anyway,” I say, spooning more of my rice bowl into my mouth when I remember that Iris used to love when I ate rice bowls. I sigh and continue my sentence. “What’s in that box?”

My mom glanced at my dad and smiled. “I’m glad you asked,” she said “me and your dad… you see we feel like you’re spending too much time thinking about Iris. And since she’s no more we thought it might be better so you could have something else to keep you content and healthy.”

“Mom!” I say “You know how much Iris meant to me. How could you try to make me forget her?”

“We aren’t trying to force you to forget her, we’re just trying to make you realize that what you’re doing right now is wrong.”

I turned away from them.

My mom sighed and opened the box. Inside, by the thud it made on the floor was probably a crate. My mom opened that too and then she and dad quietly left. I finished my rice bowl and took out a book. I tried to ignore whatever was in the crate. Soon I gave up and peered at the animal over my book. It was a small dog and it looked exactly like Iris did except this dog was fluffier and was a grayish color. I couldn’t look at the dog anymore. I turned off the light and went to bed. Soon enough when I was on the edge of sleeping though, the dog somehow leaped onto the bed and
burrowed through the blankets and cuddled up next to me. Because that reminded me so much about Iris, I let him stay.

It was two mornings after my parents had presented me with the dog. I hadn’t named him yet because after that night, I ignored the dog however I could.

I took walks, my mom insisted that I tie a leash onto my hands. I played catch, my dad insisted that I throw the ball to the dog. I watched TV but this time the dog cuddled right on my lap. I had to admit I was starting to like the dog. But what if that was forgetting Iris? All of a sudden, the pancake hit the pan.

I was watching my dad make my breakfast while all of these thoughts rushed through my head. The dog is in the living room right now. I should go pet him. But what if Iris would want me to remember her? Should I go pet him? What about Iris? Would Iris want me to do this? It felt like I was battling myself. One part of me wanted to love the dog like I loved Iris, and the other part of me wanted to ignore the dog because I didn’t want to offend Iris wherever she was. I didn't know what to do.

“Are you alright?” my dad asked. “You seem tense.”

“I’m alright,” I say but I know that I’m not fooling anyone.

“Here,” says my dad, he hands me a bowl with dog food in it. “go feed the dog, you know, you really should give him a name.”

I don’t respond to that. I take the bowl wordlessly. I head to the living room and drop the bowl near the dog’s feet. I turn to go back into the kitchen when my dad calls for me to give the dog a bone too. I take a bone from the big bag near the couch and drop one in the bowl.

I turn to go again and this time I take a step before anything stops me. I hear a whimper come from near my feet and look down and see the dog pawing at my feet. He gives me the puppy dog eyes that Iris used to give me. My heart breaks. So I kneel down and start to pet the puppy until I remember Iris. She’s in my head telling me not to pet the dog, but then the dog whimpers again. I can’t do it. Tears are sliding down my face now silently. I wipe them away and this time Iris tells me not to worry and not to stay in the past. I reach out my hand slowly and pet the dog. He looks up at me and it looks like he’s smiling at me. Everything slows down at that moment, I have no doubts anymore.

It’s been a year since Iris died and I have decided to name the puppy, Pepper. My parents adopted another dog for me, that looks exactly like Iris, from the color, to the eyes, and the adorable tiny nose. I named the dog Salt. Salt and Pepper get along like their names, and they act like they came from the same litter.

Plus now I can remember Iris without feeling like I’m betraying her by playing and caring for Salt and Pepper. It’s almost relaxing. Sometimes when I have free time I look back and wonder why I ever worried over that. It seems so silly now. At least now I know that you’re never supposed to get stuck in the past because if you stay too long the past will kick you out itself, and it will hurt.
Golden Crowned Kinglet

Emily Meng

Grade Six
SHE IS.

CORINNE RICH

The lighting is warm and dim. The temperature? Warm and dim.

Just kidding. It's not cold, but not hot. Lukewarm. Strong. But it's chilly to her, because she stands in her underclothes, posing in her mirror. She smiles at her reflection, stepping back and letting her hair cascade down.

She's grown it out ever since fifth grade, and it's almost four feet. With a hair elastic built for thick hair, she ties her hair back loosely. She's got the perfect outfit laid out for tonight. Tonight, no one will mess anything up. She looks into the mirror once more, the mirror that's usually ever-so-harsh to her spitting out compliments like it's her best friend. She steps away from the mirror and opens her closet, a closet decorated with midnight thoughts and phrases. Past crushes. Other beautiful things. Writings when all hopes were lost, and other writings when everything was euphoric and perfect.

She doesn't need to suck in her breath as she shimmies up inside a black, victorian gown. She pulls up her hair into a loose bun. She paints her lips in lipgloss and pinches her cheeks. Gazes into her eyes. Not absolutely stunning, not disgustingly ugly. Just…..usual. Usual her.

She is dressed her best, but she goes nowhere.

She runs her hands over the lace design. Collapses into the pillows on her bed, and turns her head to the fan, closing her eyes. In this moment, she doesn't think about school. Doesn't think about grades and assignments - and things to do. Doesn't think about the future, or the past. She doesn't feel that stab of confusion when she realized her texts weren't coming through, why her emails weren't working, the happy birthdays and how are yous they weren't working because she had not been responding but when she sent that text it it popped up and said that user has blocked you. You have been blocked. You are no longer welcome here.

But in this moment, in the present, this rainy moment where everything seems so perfectly fixed and out of place, she does not think about the fact that her user has been blocked. That she is no longer welcome there. that her friends haven't left her but it's obvious that they want

Grade Six
to but still
they stay because they don’t want to leave, and she’s stronger without them. She’s stronger now. She’s stronger alone, weaker when she’s pulling dead weight around because she’s strong
independent
phenomenal
young woman and they take that away from her. They pull her down. But in this moment, she does not think about that.

She thinks about how her life is not good, not bad, average, how she likes doing little things to make people feel like they are the main character, comes in and leaves random people’s lockers open, she passes notes to certain people saying special things, makes them feel like it’s only them in the world because she can and she wants to because it makes her feel good it makes her feel powerful because she likes making people feel like everyone else is just an illusion, an NPC, someone who is not there, just a thing programmed to make their life better, and she likes doing that because she likes making…..She likes cooking, she likes making collages even though she’s not the best at it, she likes fashion which she is good at, she likes making……
she doesn’t know what she likes but i guess she thinks that’s okay because it’s not a survey and she’s not going to college yet she’s not getting quizzed but i guess that’s fine because she’s only small. Is she though? She feels much bigger. She feels like…..

What does she feel? You’d have to ask her that. And if you were to ask her that her answer would not be sad not happy not mad not pensive but calm because of marshmallows.

No, she is not small, unless you call highschoolmiddleschoolelementryschoolelementaryschoolpreschoolelementaryschoolpreschoolcollege young and small, she is not young and small. “Age ain’t nothing but a number”, a singer said that. A female singer: Alyssa aleigha adaliea something like that but she can relate because age is only a number because because because because age does not determine your worth and age does not
determine your weight size height
your name or
your life because age is nothing but a number - age does not determine, age does not. Help.
Age doesn’t help. But you see, in this moment she does not think about what age determines or
what age does not determine because in this moment, she is so lost in thought the thoughts have
been lost to the sea and to our knowledge and she is lost but she is not found because she is not the
damsel in distress because she does not
need a knight in shining
armor to save the day to claim her
hand in marriage because
she can find her own way
she can break free from the knight’s ropes and tangles and threads and buttons before turning
her into a puppet she can break free from the cage of birds and the birds of cages she can break
free because if
one
is
not
in
prison,
one cannot break free.

And so in this moment, she is at peace. She does not think. She does think. She is a
mess, and she is clean. She is beautiful, and she is ugly. She is fat and she is skinny, she is tall and
she is short, she is smart and she is dumb, she is she is she is she is…
she is.

She might have tricked you in the beginning. Where everything seems calm and slow and easy
and collected, she is an uproar of emotions. She is a sea and you are the boat. She can decide to
carry you. And she can decide to flip you over. She can decide to break you into a thousand pieces
but what is so powerful about her?
nothing.
She is just like you. She is just like me. It’s just that she is….
she is.
GRADE SEVEN

COLORFUL GAZE
OLIVIA CHILDSD

Grade Seven
Staring into the night sky, I wonder.
Past the clouds of skies and thunder,
What secrets are beyond our skies of stars?
Where lies the galaxy we define as “far”?
Are there other planets that mirror Earth?
Can we change our fate and increase our worth?

Will we explore space before we slumber?
Staring into the night sky, I wonder.
Can our creations take us to the end?
Or will fate become condemned?
Suppose the Big Bang theory isn’t true.
What mysteries still await for us to pursue?

Beyond the edges of space,
Will we ever reach that faraway place?
Staring into the night sky, I wonder.
Which invention will be the number,
To take us to the outer edges of the universe?
Will our creations help us for better or for worse?

Is venturing into space just a crime?
To seek out the mysteries of space in our time?
Will the unknown broaden the border?
Staring into the night sky, I wonder.
Are we going to be forced to leave?
Will we accomplish what we meant to achieve?

The earth we call home, a gift so dear.
But we take it for granted as waste comes near. Pollution and trash, a constant sight to see.
Freshwater so pure, fading away from thee.
Staring into the night sky, I wonder.
Is there a solution waiting to be discovered?
Never Giving Up
ChiAmaka Chiadadi

Have you ever tried something that was too tough that made you quit?
Or maybe you couldn’t quit and stuck to it since you had to commit?
Well, most likely we’ve all been there at some point in our lives
So we to remember that God is there for us
Always there to help us thrive as we survive

Persistence is key

But we need to realize that it’s what we need
Wouldn’t you also agree?
As God what it is that you need
Because I Know
No matter what he’ll always be there for us as we succeed

Persistence is key

As life is seen in many rounds
There are also numerous ups and downs
As they are around for an assist
To help recall our “extinct” thoughts
The ones that we may have forgot
Which help us to look at another obstacle
In an unfamiliar way
Yeah, if your way doesn’t work, that’s ok!

Persistence is key

Helping us see thoughtful glee
In others who may need
The strong aid to not quit
All they may need is to just get back up on their feet
Which will give them courage to give their best to submit
Even if you fail

Grade Seven
Remember that you tried your hardest and really that’s all that counts
Placing too much pressure on yourself will start giving you major doubts

**Persistence is key**

Just a little reminder for those in need
Never Giving Up is what will always guide you as you continue to proceed!

**Persistence is key**
In this one,
I’m holding him tight
His warm arms holding me tighter.
My tears drip down
onto his green uniform.
His uniform green as the grass
Green as the Christmas tree
That he’ll probably never see.
As I stare at his uniform
I noticed his CO pin isn’t there with him
Just like he won’t be here with me.
He’s missing a pin.
And I’ll soon be missing him.
His pin is at home
In that blue and white case.
But he’ll be underway
In that tiny little stateroom.

Everyone’s eyes are wide upon us
While mine are squeezed shut.
Cameras approaching
News anchors surveying.
Choir singing
Anchors Away floods my brain.
Before I know it,
He’s disappearing down the hatch.

Goodbye, Dad.
I’ll see you in six months
Or seven.
Or eight.
When the grass won’t be covered with snow.
Across the horizon
beautiful trees
all standing tall.
The spring brings peace.
The spring brings you.
My grandma was very kind and nice, and she was someone who would always be a “role model” to everyone. When I was young, she got sick in the lungs because she smoked a lot like many people did in her generation. When we visited her one day in Colombia, we were eating breakfast.

She asked me if I was thirsty saying, “Samuel, are you thirsty? I know I am.” “Yes, Grandma.” I said.

In Colombia, they still have a version of maids who cook around the house and clean. So my grandma asked the cook to make us something to drink. A couple minutes later, a cup of chocolate was sitting on the table, cheese sitting on the side.

She began to cut the cheese into little pieces and put it in the chocolate!

“Grandma! What are you doing?” I asked.

“Don’t deny it before you try it. You might like it.” She responded.

“Yeah, but cheese with chocolate? That sounds so weird.”

“Samuel, everything is weird until it becomes popular or good.” She put the cheese in the chocolate and gave me a spoon. “Are you gonna try it?”

The chocolate sat in front of me getting cold, so I did the only thing I could do. I grabbed a spoon and slowly fished out a block of cheese. The cheese was slowly melting, looking more like a gooey liquid. I forced myself to take a bite and the slimy cheese filled with sweet chocolate slid through my mouth and hit the back of my throat. I forced myself to swallow them, but soon, instead of it tasting bad, it was amazing! The sweetness and sourness tasted almost like a sour patch kid, but ten times better.

“Wow!” I said.

“You like it, Don’t you?” My grandma said. “Everybody does!” She said.

“Yea bu-”

“Just because it looks and sounds weird doesn’t mean it’s bad, Sam.” She cut me off. My grandma was very wise, but she was also funny. She always played board games, and if I ever went over to her house, she would always be playing either Snakes and Ladders, Checkers, Jenga, or one of her favorites, Parques. Parques is a more interesting version of the American game called Sorry. “Sami, want to play Parques?” She asked.

“Only if I win.” I responded.

My grandma chuckled. She knew she would beat me. We both started in jail, and we had to roll a pair in order to get out. My grandma went first.

“Look at this, Mijo. I’m gonna get out first!” She yelled.

“No way, Abuela.” I responded.

She responded without talking, but rolled a perfect pair of six.
“Hahaha!” She laughed. “I have to go again.”

She rolled the dice again, and it was another pair! She was almost halfway there! “Ooooo, Sam! If I roll one more, I’m gonna get one of these pawns out!” She boasted. She rolled one more time. The dice spun and spun, bouncing against the sides of the board and off each other. I couldn’t possibly lose now! The dice spun and spun, and eventually they slowed down. It looked like it was going to end in different numbers! I began to celebrate, but they stopped. My eyes darted towards them, and I saw two dice each with six dots on them. With that, my grandma got one of her pawns out, and I hadn’t even moved. “But how?” I cried.

“Just luck.” She teased.

It was finally my turn, and I made it all the way to the halfway mark. My grandma rolled, but there weren’t any pairs for her.

“Did you forget to blow in my dice? You gave me bad luck!” She accused me.

It was my turn. I needed a total of 18 to get into my base. I rolled, and out of the dice collision came a pair of sixes, so I only had six left. I rolled and got a six and a two. I moved my back pawn which was sitting there for a long time collecting dust, and I moved my main dice all the way to the base!

“Look, I’m gonna get one out!” I boasted.

“Not so fast there, Sam.”

She counted the number of spaces before she could eat my base pawn. She was sure she was going to make it no matter what.

“Look, a combination of a five and two would give me just enough to take your pawn.” She said. Then she rolled 6 and 1. I had a brief moment of relief before I realized that it still equaled seven!

“No way,” I said. “How?”

“Luck, Sam. Luck.” She chuckled.

I knew it was all over. I rolled, but my pawn was too far back to stop her. She rolled her dice and got her last pawn out. She had beaten me.

“Look Sam. I just got lucky.” She laughed.

“Yeah, but okay.” I said frustrated.

Along with board games, she also always played music in the background. Music is what stuck to me the most from my grandma. I’ve always liked music, but when I lost my grandma, it was like I unlocked a new memory of her every time I heard a song.

The lyrics of songs would remind me of her. It was like they were telling her story. A couple months after my grandma passed, my dad played her favorite song. It was a song about living life, and how even if it’s rough, if you live it with the people who love you, it will be amazing until the end. It depicted her perfectly, and I promised myself I would never forget it. Every time it comes on, I can almost see her watching her garden peacefully.

Grade Seven
When we visited her one last time, my parents were crying, and I didn’t know why. I was too young to understand why they were sad, and my grandma was happy. She sat there on the porch with her oxygen tank watching us leave with a smile. My guess is that she already knew we wouldn’t see her again.

“Adios, Mijo.” She smiled.

“Adios, Abuela.” I responded.

The day she died we received a phone call. My dad didn’t say anything but called us over.

“Sam and Oliver, your mom and I are going to Colombia. Your grandma died.” He said it in a slow calm voice, but the truth is we could tell he was sad.

“Your other grandma is on the next plane.” My mom said with a solemn face. I wasn’t really thinking about how someone died. I didn’t understand what it was. When my parents left, I was worried and anxious. My mom’s Grandma came to take care of us, and the next day, we went to school.

I was in third grade, and I remember going to the counselor. She said, “I can’t imagine what it feels like. I know you must be sad, so if there is anything you need, let me know.” I stayed in that room for a while, slowly processing what she was talking about. In my head, all I could think about was my grandma playing a board game while smiling a big giant smile. Then I realized why my parents were crying, and I began to feel sad. I thought I wouldn’t see her again. Then the counselor said something that stuck with me.

“I know you’re sad, but think of what she would call you.” She said.

I imagined my grandmother calling me over. She always had a special name to call me. Usually it was something like “Blanquito” because my brother and I were born in the United States. To her, that was something special. We didn’t have to suffer through poverty or all the bad crimes. It was weird, but it made sense. It was like she was happy to have someone related to her in the USA. That made me laugh. Thinking about what she would call me made me happy and smile.

Every time I got sad, I would think about how she called me different names. Eventually, I got over my loss. That process wasn’t easy for the rest of my family. But, eventually, we got over our grief each in our own way. One day during the summer, I learned how to play her favorite song on my guitar. Everytime I play it, it reminds me of how she was always happy and smiling. It’s like she’s living through the music. I know that I keep my grandma alive because I keep her traditions alive. I learned that losing someone is hard, but they never die, because they live on through your memories.
Alive With Spring
Maggie Littler

The awakening world, alive from a deep slumber
Extending its wings
Expanding its leaves
Learning to soar
A hibernated hope
Spreading like ivy, flourishing like forests
An ever-changing globe
Seeking old
Discovering new
An extraordinary invitation
Stealing glances of future dreams
Enticed by what’s to come
It was some day in the middle of July when Mirage disappeared.
But we’re getting ahead of ourselves; let’s go back to when this all started, almost five months before:

It had been a normal day, as far as Mira was concerned. Entirely dull, if you asked them. Full of meaningless lectures about numbers and people who died a long, long time ago.

Mira saw the world in an odd way. They saw it in colors, like the gentle brown wood of the cabinets and the dusty white of the whiteboards. Words had less meaning than the fluffy gray ashes in a fireplace.

Mira knew far too many of them, anyway. Weird. Freak. Crazy.

Mira saw the glinting red in people’s eyes when they said those words. The flicker of harsh, deep orange longing. Longing to be liked. Longing to fit in.

If Mira could say they didn’t see that in their own eyes, they would.

Mira was sitting on their bed with their legs sprawled carelessly in front of them, gazing blankly at their homework assignment. Their room was small; it was painted a light yellow. There was a collage of pictures along one wall and a dresser in the far corner. The bed was across from the bright white door.

“Hello, Mirage.”

Mira’s head snapped up. There was no one there.

They gazed around the room, eyes flickering across the mahogany brown furniture.

That’s when their eyes landed on the mirror.

This was an ordinary mirror, hung up on the wall next to the door and level with Mira’s head.

The key word in that sentence is was.

Mira’s reflection was sitting primly on their bed, legs neatly criss-crossed on the sheets.

“Well, the least you could do is say ‘hi’,” the reflection said pleasantly, leaning forward. Mira smothered a scream, and it came out as more of a strangled squeak.

The reflection laughed. “Yes, I usually get that sort of a response. Don’t worry, the shock will wear off eventually and we can get to the interesting bit.”

Mira could feel their heart beating painfully in their chest, and their mind spinning with questions. They took a deep breath and studied the image in the glass.

It looked just like them, really: scraggly, dusty brown hair that was getting a bit too long; a colorful T-shirt; light tan skin. The only difference that Mira could make out was that the reflection had blood-red eyes.

“Oooh, you are a bright one. This is going to be fun.”
“Who- what-” Mira began, unable to draw their eyes away from the reflection in the mirror.

“Ah, yes, they always are a bit confused. Allow me to spell it out for you, so we don’t have to waste time on meaningless questions. I am your reflection. I am here, put simply, to save you.”

“From what?” Mira asked, faintly aware of the cloudy feeling in their mind, like someone had draped a sheet across their brain.

“Life, obviously,” the reflection responded, as if this were exceedingly obvious. “I know quite a bit about you, Mirage. I know how awful people can be. I can save you from all that.”

Mira blinked. Then blinked again. Surely they were asleep, dreaming. They pinched their arm and yelped in more surprise than pain when it stung. The reflection watched with an amused expression.

Perhaps they were hallucinating, then.

“You aren’t hallucinating.”

Mira supposed that it would make sense that a hallucination would know what they were thinking.

The reflection rolled their eyes. “Must we go on like this? I do have things to do, whether you believe it or not.”

“I want to know who you are,” Mira said, feeling much calmer than they did a moment ago. Something about the thing in the mirror was comforting, almost familiar, in a way they couldn’t quite place.

“I’m sure you do.”

There was a call from downstairs. Mira held their gaze with the person in the mirror for a moment before getting up.

“I’ll be back,” Mira said quickly, hurrying from the room.

“You will,” The mirror said quietly back, when Mira was too far away to hear. “I’ll make sure of that.”

Weeks went by. Mira and the reflection became acquainted, so to speak, talking together every time they were in that room. Mira became more comfortable near them. It was a relief from their real life.

“Hello, Mirage.”

“Hi,” Mira responded, not bothering to look back at the reflection and jumping straight onto their bed. They were more troubled than usual, and they didn’t feel all that eager to talk. It was the same old problem: judgemental eyes, sneering faces, ugly words.

“Yes, words do seem to be quite a cause of suffering.”

Mira sighed, staring desolately at the ceiling.

“You’re jealous of them.”

It wasn’t a question. It was a statement. Mira didn’t bother to respond.
“I can save you from that.” It was a whisper, an offer. Had Mira felt like theirself they would have asked what the reflection meant. But they hadn’t felt like theirself in quite a while. They just couldn’t put their finger on why.

“Mirage, look at me, please,” The mirror said softly. Mira obeyed, mind still elsewhere. The reflection took a step forward. “I can help you.” They held their hand out. Mira watched as it flowed through the glass like it was made of water, sticking out into the real world.

“Take my hand, Mira. Take my hand, and I can free you.”

The words echoed in their mind. The foggy, troubled remains of their mind.

The air stilled, two very different outcomes balanced in time, teetering on the edge of the present. Outcomes that had, at that moment, an equal chance of happening.

Mira did not take the reflection’s hand.

Not yet.

Time seemed to speed up as life passed by. Days became weeks, weeks became months. Mira stayed confined to their room every moment they were at home. They stopped answering calls. Their thoughts slowed, slurring together. Colors had less meaning than the ashes in a fireplace. Every day, the same offer was given.

Every day, Mira declined.

Until one fateful day when the two futures slipped out of balance.

It was a particularly harsh day for the teasing, mocking, and chaffing. Mira came home and headed straight to their room, like always. And, like always, the reflection was waiting.

“Hello, Mirage.”

Mira did not notice the triumphant golden glow in the mirror’s eyes, nor did they notice the sly look on its face.

“I know what you’re going through. I can help you, if you would let me.”

They held out their hand.

The two outcomes wobbled. One more than the other. Then one fell, as if in slow motion, crashing into the past and shattering like glass. That only left one option.

Mira took the reflection’s hand.

The image grinned and gripped the hand with brute strength. Mira was vaguely surprised by how cold and bony it was.

The reflection began to pull Mira towards them.

For a moment, the blanket over Mira’s brain lifted.

Colors came rushing back. The evil red glint in the reflection’s eyes, the sickly color of the reflection’s hand. The icy blue triumph written all over its face.

Mira tried to pull away. They screamed. The reflection did not let go.

When Mira’s hand slipped through the glass, there was a sudden searing pain similar to the one you would feel when getting burned. Red-hot pain.

Mira screamed again as their body was hauled through the glass. Footsteps hurried up the
steps. Whoever it was would not make it in time.

Mira’s last glimpse of the outside world was of a picture of a sunset on the wall. So many colors. Colors they would never see again.

With one more yank, they were pulled into the glass.

And Mira was gone.
IN THE CITY

MIKA MARTINS

Grade Seven
GRADE EIGHT

ALEXIS HOWE

Grade Eight
WHY DID THE SAVIOR STOP SAVING?
GRAYSON ANDREWS

Superheroes. We all love superheroes, don’t we? Why wouldn’t we? They help us, protect us, and save us. My favorite was the Superior Savior, which is very basic, I know, but it’s the truth, what can I tell you? He was the strongest hero, the fastest hero, and the most extraordinary hero that has ever lived. And I met him. Oh yeah, I met him. It was back when I was a small child in New Orleans, Louisiana in 2004 and there was a terrible terrible flood, a lot of people died and I was with my mama on the roof. I was petrified- I could see cars getting swarmed from where they parked and other families on their roofs that were probably terrified as well, and then, as I held on to my mama as tightly as possible, I saw him. I remember vividly, this shadow of a man with a long white cape flowing like a river in front of the sun. He had long, luscious blonde hair in a white and yellow suit with a big white S on his chest. And he held out his hand to me, and I will never, ever forget that immense feeling of relief. He was a god. But I’m not here to talk about him. Well, I am. Sort of. You see this is the story where the Superior Savior stopped saving. And why you should never meet your heroes.

Fast forwarding to right now, today is the day of the Superior Savior’s medal of honor and the grand reveal of his new statue, which in my opinion is still cool even though he has six of them. People aren’t really excited about it, as it requires that every citizen has to attend. I don’t mind, though, because I was going to go anyway. I mean, he saved our universe from the hands of a sociopathic alien race. It was the least I could do. It started at 12:30 in the afternoon and ended at 1:30. And as they were starting, I could see him clear as day, but something was off about him. He usually has a very stoic and somewhat charming demeanor; however, today he looks dejected and disoriented, as if he has a hangover or something. I’m a psych major, so naturally, you pick up a thing or two. But I brushed it off, the Superior Savior can do whatever he wants, I thought. I should have known better.

“Hello everyone,” said the announcer, “and welcome to the Medal of Honor Ceremony and the revealing of the Superior Savior’s brand new statue. Before we get started I think we all have to give a big thanks to the Superior Savior for his constant efforts to protect us from bad guys, aliens, and even a dolphin one time- that was an interesting afternoon, to say the least- it almost makes you think… when are we not going to be in constant danger all the time?” The entire audience laughed. “Now I’ve been told that, apparently, the Superior Savior wants to say a few words, so give it up for the Superior Savior!”

When I saw him walk up on stage, he looked really pissed. But before he could say anything the city alarms indicating that the city was under attack went off! (quick side note the alarms go off so much that they need repairs every six months, so no one batted an eye). , people backed up just to avoid the shockwave that happens when he takes off. And when he did we all thought that
he would have just beat whatever thing that was destroying the city…


Several weeks go by and the city is still under attack, and most of the public still doesn’t know what’s attacking us, the government is not telling us anything and have blocked off anything around whatever the creature is, and whatever the monster is or is doing has scared the government so much that they’ve ordered an immediate evacuation and they’re going to nuke the city within the next three days. And I can not stop thinking, where is the Superior Savior? Where did he go? Over and over again in my head, as if it’s on replay and it’s driving me to the brink of insanity, I have been doing a little detective work in order to find the Superior Savior and I think I’ve tracked down his address don’t ask how.

Later when I came by his apartment building or at least what I thought was his building, I thought to myself, what kind of superhero lives in such a crummy area, I mean he’s the Superior Savior, so he deserves to be living in the biggest mansion ever in the Bahamas or something. It’s weird to me. Anyway, I knocked at his apartment door:

“Go away!” he yelled at me in response and I thought to myself, god I hope this isn’t him and I just balled on the wrong door, but I reluctantly asked him, “Sir, are you the Superior Savior?”

He opened the door immediately and grabbed my arm, pulling me into his apartment, yelling “Who do you work for?! Do you work for Barbarian? Do you work for the Black Guards?”

I yelled, terrified “No, no, I’m just here to ask you where did you go?”

He looked at me for what felt like minutes, staring at me, as if he was studying my face in order to tell if I was lying or not. He eventually let go of my hand and told me. “Why do you think I stopped saving people?”

I didn’t respond, but I did think about it; maybe some supervillain is holding him hostage, or maybe he is dying of an alien disease, or maybe he lost his powers somehow. But no. “I stopped saving people because humanity isn’t worth saving.”

My jaw dropped when I heard that.

I was dumbfounded, I mean how? Why? “Excuse me? I said in disbelief.

“You heard me,” he says after chugging a beer.

“Why isn’t humanity worth saving?” I ask

“Simple, you people are the most greedy, selfish, ungrateful, and the most stupid of creatures. Do you know how many times I have had to save this planet, kid?”

I don’t respond but I do know the answer. Seven-hundred and thirty-two times.

“Seven-hundred and thirty-two times I have saved your planet from psychopathic idiots, greedy corporate jerks, and a freaking tree that was created because of a selfish, bored scientist. And everyone says, oh why are we always in constant danger? When is the Superior Savior going to stop all crime and do his job of keeping us safe? Humans are the ones causing the planet to be in danger! And they blame me? That baffles me, kid! Your species is so stupid, you all have the ability to access all of the available information in the world on a device that fits in your pocket, and yet
people can not differentiate facts from fiction! The number of people that believe the moon landing was fake, that the earth is flat or that Bill Gates is a lizard man is scary and I am freaking invincible!

He pauses. “I fear the issues are getting worse, this generation of kids is being brainwashed by social media, whittling attention spans to mere seconds. And another thing, kid, humans are the most greedy creatures I have ever seen in my thousands of years of existence. You charge money for things that you can not function without, like food and water, clothing and shelter. While we’re on the subject of money, greedy CEOs are killing the planet just so they can make a buck, and it’s dumbfounding!” Humans will do anything for money or fame, at the cost of each other! And the worst part is they seemingly don’t care; they are dooming future generations and the planet that you call home. I’m just done, kid, I don’t want to do this anymore so if you don’t mind, can you leave me alone, please?”

I was speechless. I walked out of his apartment with the most discouraged and miserable face you could ever see. I just didn’t know what to do, I didn’t know what to feel, because deep down I knew that he was right, I may not have wanted to admit it, but he was right, and that scared me. I mean, my hero, someone who I have looked up to my whole life, just told me that he hates humanity? How do you react to that? I walked out of his apartment and contemplated my existence. I walked across the street and noticed the monster had broken out of containment and was destroying the city and coming straight at me.

And I did nothing to stop it.
Screen Addiction
Aleksander Barborak

My phone is a leech sucking the life out of me.
My old soccer and math trophies are forgotten memories growing dust on the shelf. I am mesmerized by my phone,
Until my Mom’s appearance startles me out of my trance.
My Mom unexpectedly takes my phone with a firm hand.
My face turns hot as I lash out, “I hate you!”
My eyes water up and hot tears race down my cheeks,
I tremble taken aback by the anger that consumed me,
I spit out, “Please Mom, just give me my phone.”
My Mom replies, “Go outside. Then maybe.”
I step onto the front steps.
My shoulders tense up,
Then in front of me is a sea of emerald,
Green blades of grass.
I let my shoulders drop,
I glance over at the soccer net I forgot about,
The golden flare of the sun,
The same color as my Mom’s hair;
Turning around to face my Mom,
I smile,
And she smiles back.
Lucas Jade

Rachel Chaleski

Grade Eight
THE NATURAL BORN HEALER

RHEA DOSHI

Grade Eight
THE BEGINNING OF THE END OF TIMES

NAOMI GRAMLING

Christina strolled home after babysitting. “That was the sweetest kid I’ve ever met!” she absently thought while mulling over what to eat when she returned home, noting the hunger growing in her stomach. The quiet, slightly warm night blanketed her in a veil of black, as the sun finally fell gracefully below the horizon. She hesitated slightly, questioning whether to go to the 7-11 or home.

“Eh. I guess it’s getting late. I’ll get a Big Gulp tomorrow.” After huffing slightly, she traipsed leisurely into the enormous cornfield between her and her home for the billionth time. This time, however, the rows of corn swallowed her body instead of the motherly embrace they usually provided, trapping her in uncomfortably stale yet moist air. Hyperaware of her surroundings, an uneasy feeling bubbled up in her body and a clammy sweat spread on her hands, mind racing through all the things that could possibly go wrong. Her heart pounded in her ears and a faint ringing that was growing exponentially filled her brain. Cornstalks crowded her, moving closer and closer with every passing second stealing more and more air by the second. The dark night stabbed through the small remaining gaps in the regimented lines of corn, and she became conscious of the screeching crickets whose tiny bodies were obscured by the endless maze. A weak but unnerving breeze whispered through the stalks, bright glimmering eyes of all shapes and sizes glaring upon her, flashing a warning of danger. Lifeless grass crunched loudly under her feet, the seemingly parched ground cracking under her steps, sinking her feet into the mud that hid underneath.

Everything appeared off in one way or another. She began to jog, quickening her pace until a full sprint in a feeble attempt to escape the endless rows of corn that viciously ripped into her arms and legs while gasping for air that left quicker than her lungs could grasp to it. Turning sharply around a corner as her feet slapped the ground, she lost her advantage on the force that chased her, running out of energy. Heavy clouds towered over her, adding to the claustrophobic atmosphere while stealing the last pinches of light that forced themselves into the slim openings that remained in the corn. Plunging helplessly to her knees, she was instantly devoured by terror, eyes squeezing shut, and only small, weak gasps could escape her drying mouth. Catching her breath but still shaking slightly she peeped through her fingers that she found pressed threateningly hard to her eyes, wet tears smeared on them. A menacingly massive and monstrous figure overcast her, taking her shadow with it. She whimpered, the only one there to witness the shadow become bigger and bigger until the inevitable end.

“Please be a dream, please be a dream, please be a-” she plummeted to her stomach with a slam as she was yanked back by the slimy tentacles that had emerged from the shadow. The goop soaked her jeans and she felt sharp teeth sink into her legs, the monster slowly taking her over.
She screamed desperately, her entire world leaving her as she hopelessly tried to escape the grasp of the tentacles, darkness clouding every part of her brain. Despite this, when she finally released herself into the shadow, she felt somewhat peaceful.

A rapid warmth spread throughout her limbs as Christina gasped and consciousness flooded her body quickly. It was instantly apparent that the night had been taken over by a hazy morning, the sky filled with pastel blues and dusty yellows. She was filled with the serene feeling that comes after a cry. After skimming the horizon, she decided that the field seemed much more barren yet it was still comforting after the terror of the night before. A thought flashed through her mind as to why nobody would have found her in such an empty field, but she determined that she would ease their minds and return home. She gently picked herself up off the now dewy grass and floated away from her place of rest, passing effortlessly through the rows that had suffocated her the night before. A sense of calm fell over her while she drifted away, blissfully leaving the field behind and becoming a misty figure in the distance.
I CRIED: A MEMOIR
Lily James

Pain is a curious thing. You never know when it’ll punch you in your gut, leaving a gaping hole right through the middle of your body, puncturing your lungs to prevent your breathing, and shaking your heart to send a jolt through the rest of you.

Thor had been with me since I was just a baby. A loyal, protective, and fierce cat I loved. He had died just a couple of months before at fifteen or sixteen years old. A stroke, attacking like a villain in the middle of the night.

Turtle, his husband and a big orange tabby, was my cat. He was my familiar. My kindred spirit in cat form. My friend.

Since Covid, I hadn’t been seeing him as frequently. All of the cats lived at Elise’s house. Elise has always been very prone to getting sick, so my sister and I hadn’t been to see her and the animals often. I still loved him though, and I missed him. Just as wolves love the moon, even when it isn’t visible to howl at.

I was in a good mood before my mom told me - in the living room of my house, messing around before bed. She had gotten a text message from Elise. A message meant to be passed on to me.

It’s interesting how a human’s first reaction toward the possibility of loss is to mourn, even if the worst of it hasn’t yet passed.

When Mom told me Turtle had cancer, I didn’t cry. Not at first. No, I don’t do that. Cry with a crowd, I mean. Vulnerability in front of other people just doesn’t work for me. I have to maintain control.

“What’s a Turtle?” Phineas asked. He’s my mom’s husband. An awesome, funny guy, but sometimes a little…well...

“Her cat,” Mom answered sympathetically.

“Oh!” Phineas laughed, surprised, but he stopped when Mom shot him a glare. “What?” he asked. “I thought it was a person, and it’s just a cat. Isn’t that a good thing?”

Mom didn’t say a word, continuing to give Phineas a dirty look. I swallowed a lump in my throat, trying to keep it down. My nose felt tingly.

“I’m going to go take a shower,” I said, just wanting to get out of the situation. I really needed to be alone for a minute. I couldn’t deal with this, caught off guard. I had to regain my composure. Get my emotions under control. Seem okay.

Phineas was debating with Mom, saying he was sorry my cat was sick, but he was just glad it wasn’t a person, that’s all. That’s all.

I closed the door to the bathroom, with my pajamas bundled up to my chest. In front of the mirror, I saw tears slide down my cheeks, and my face contorted. I covered my mouth and closed my eyes, silencing an ugly sob.
The sound of the shower drowned out any noise, and the thick warmth blanketed the room. In the shower, the water ran with any tears on my face, cleaning them off. I was okay. I was okay. I was okay. He wasn’t gone yet. I was okay.

Yeah. Turtle wasn’t gone yet. I still had time. You don’t…You don’t mourn something that is gone yet. Yeah. I was okay.

I forced my harsh breathing to settle down, taking slow, shaky breaths. He wasn’t gone yet, and I shouldn’t mourn him early. I shouldn’t act like he is already gone.

That night, I went outside, even though it was cold. I looked up at the sky, and I asked a favor of Bast, the Egyptian protector of cats.

I said, “Bast, if you’re up there and listening, I have a favor to ask. Will you please help Turtle? I know all things end, but if possible, please help him get better. Please. But if he gets worse, let him be at peace with Thor when he’s gone. Thank you, Bast. If you heard me.”

Now, what I did might sound a little stupid, but people pray all the time. I’m not particularly religious. I did know, though, that the Egyptian goddess Bast was known for watching over and protecting cats (I’m a mythology nerd). So, I tried sending a message to her. Who knows if gods exist, or, if they do, if they listen to us? I’m sure they have better things to be doing. But I was near breaking and I had to do something.

The next weekend, we went to Elise’s house to visit Turtle. I hadn’t seen him in a long time, and that night I got a little taste of nostalgia because seeing him again felt like those easier times before Covid. The entire visit, he was pushing for my attention, and I petted him and gave him all of the affection to make up for the lost time. He was the joyful and silly cat I always knew.

He was much thinner than when I had seen him last, but Elise said that the lump on his neck from the cancer was significantly smaller than it had been originally, and he was doing a lot better. He had chemo once a week, and things were finally looking up. We were hopeful. Maybe my cat, my familiar, would fight through it.

About two weeks later, there was a light rain coming down. It was easy and soft and the night was quiet and peaceful. I didn’t notice it at first.

I cried again that night.

At first, I thought nature was sharing my grief. Then, when I went outside and stood as water fell from the sky, I felt it was more of a goodbye, sent from him. I had a feeling Bast gave us time, and both Turtle and I were thankful.

Even now, I do think it was a parting message because as I stood in the middle of the rain at eight o’clock at night, I felt reassured. I felt like it was okay because Turtle would be with his husband and he felt better. Call me crazy. Don’t believe me. But if you’ve lost a loved one you were connected to, human or not, you’d understand what I’m talking about.

I still carry the grief with me, but from this, I’ve learned not to give up, let go, or walk the other way down memory lane until I’ve really reached the end.
A Playlist Like Nostalgia
Lily James

I have a playlist
On my step-mom’s old iPod.
A playlist that feels like nostalgia.
When I listen to the beat of the old songs
I loved when I was little
It feels like the summer sun peaking through clouds.
I’m eight years old again, oblivious to the world
I don’t know what Katy Perry’s “I Kissed a Girl” is about,
But I don’t care.
It sounds cool so I love it.
(I still do).
I haven’t grown out of Taylor Swift’s “White Horse” yet,
Because she’s a girl in a small town singing about horses
(I loved horses)
And not needing a guy to save her
(I was already a feminist).
Every day I’m here is the best day of my life
With American Authors
(My fourth-grade Graduation song).
The playlist my step-mom created for me
On her old iPod called “Lily’s Favorites”
Brings me back to a time when I didn’t care
What the state of the world was.

When anxiety
Never came knocking.
A time when my only job was to be little.
To sing at the top of my lungs and be nice
To my family and peers.
To fantasize and not worry
About reality.
The playlist on my step-mom’s old iPod
Feels like dancing in the rain
And playing tag under the sun
And watching the fire under the chimney crackle
And reading silly books
(Captain Underpants was a favorite)
It feels like family
Like being young and always joyful.
Like never once wishing things were different.
Like nostalgia.
Like home.
UNTIL THE DANCER HAD FALLEN
SAGE SCHROEDER-WRIGHT

The sound of my heart beating inside my chest was nearly tangible. I could feel my legs shaking, and based on my teammates’ and opponents’ expressions, it was quite obvious. Family and friends of the players filled the stands. I don’t think I saw a single empty seat. Just out of the corner of my eye, I could see my mother staring at me, holding her breath. Just like everyone else, she was on the edge of her seat.

Stop staring at me, I pleaded in my mind. Maybe if I thought it hard enough, it would come true. Alas, all eyes were still wide and hovering on none other than me.

Surprisingly, I was somehow just fouled while trying to awkwardly throw the basketball back towards the hoop after I had got the rebound, and was about to take my one foul shot. I had actually made the basket, too, which incredibly surprised me and my teammates. Usually, I was the one hiding under the basket, trying to avoid the ball as much as possible. Everyone else, including me, knew very well that if the ball was passed to me, I would mess everything up and make an unnecessary turnover, just like I always do.

And turnovers were definitely not the thing we needed right now. The game was tied, 28-28, with less than 10 seconds left. If I made this shot, then we were practically guaranteed to win. If our team could keep our opponents from scoring for just a few more seconds, which our better players could definitely do, we would win. News flash: I wasn’t one of the better players.

I realized that I was like a dancer, in a way. A dancer that was performing her heart out on stage. Nobody could see her constant apprehension while she danced, but her bones that trembled with every move she made was quite conspicuous to her. I was, too, in this place of unceasing nervousness with every pass or shot I made, having a premonition of only the worst to come.

If I missed this shot, then the game would go into overtime, and I absolutely HATED overtime. It was too stressful, too much pressure, too many eyes on you all the time, just waiting for you to slip up.

I did have the tendency to be overly repentant for things I didn’t even do. But this time, it was all on me. If I screwed this up, I would never forgive myself, never stop beating myself up about it.

Nevertheless, it was now or never, and the crowds were getting squirmy. I performed my usual foul shot routine: a spin bounce back to my hand and three dribbles. I crouched down, making sure my feet and elbow were in line with the basket. My eyes were locked towards the basket, I couldn’t pry them away even if I wanted to.

“You’re gonna miss it.”
Uh-oh, I thought.

As if things weren’t already onerous enough, that little voice in the back of my head showed up, always making its appearance at the absolute worst times. It came around, destroying any sliver
of hope I gained as easily as a three-year-old knocking down a tower of blocks. It was nearly always present in my mind, threateningly lingering, like a snake slithering in the shadows, waiting for the perfect moment to strike. This little voice’s prey was unfortunately my confidence.

You’re going to miss it, it spluttered to me again. You’re going to miss it and nobody will ever rely on you again.

You’ll be a failure.
Everyone will hate you.
Nobody will ever care about you and your deplorable life.
Nobody will trust you.
You’ll disappoint everyone, just like you always do.
All because you won’t. Make. This. Shot. A persistent little creature, that voice was. Its words echoed in my brain over and over again, rapidly crescendoing its evil presence.

No, I thought back to it, softly but firmly. That won’t happen. These are my friends. They’ll still trust me either way.

Even I could hear my thoughts shake on the word friends.

Oh, you poor thing, the voice responded. I can practically compile your shaky, uncertain thoughts to make an entire collection. They’re lacking so much reality.

I didn’t want to admit it, especially to the voice, but I knew that it was right. I do try to make my thoughts replace reality, to cover up the truth, and all for what? Comfort? I already knew I was a pathetic failure. I didn’t need the voice reminding me.

The worst part of this whole situation was that I know exactly how it’ll all play out. I’ll miss the shot, everyone will say it’s okay, they’ll say that I tried my best. What they didn’t know was that I could see right through their enormity of lies to what they were really implicating: Disappointment. Anger. Pity. Hatred.

It felt like an eternity, having the conservation with that despondent little voice, all inside my bustling mind. But in reality, it had only been a few seconds. Heads in the stands began to turn to one another, whispering to each other. Questioning my ability, probably.

Although I had already accepted defeat, my teammates hadn’t. I was going to have to shoot the ball to concede our defeat.

So, I stood up from my shooting position, using the little power I had left in my trembling legs to force the ball out of hands into the air.

Now I had the crowd’s attention. The ball hit the backboard and spun around the rim of the basket. I held my breath, with my heels still up and arm outstretched. The ball circled the rim, as if the dancer was about to take her last magnificent leap as her finale. But alas, just like I had expected, the ball tipped over the left side of the rim, away from the net. I could clearly hear the sighs of disappointment from my teammates and coaches and family. The dancer had fallen, and everyone was laughing at her. Although no one could see it on the outside, her heart was full of failure and defeat. It was a defeat caused by no one in particular, but it was still there, eating away
at any chance of exultation.

I felt the same way as this dancer. We had both failed, but we both must still perform as if nothing ever happened, which we all know wasn’t true. I still persisted and ran to the opposite side of the court, as the other team had rebounded the ball, but all my hope was gone. I defended the best I could, which wasn’t that well, considering the headspace I was in. The dancer was starting to falter…

At one point before the clock ran out, I just stopped dancing altogether, my mind swamping with anguish and guilt, and let the girl I was guarding make an easy basket. She and her entire team were all so excited, jumping up and down and hitting each other on the back. Their side of the stands erupted in cheers and whistles. But I couldn’t hear them. The blaring outside noise was cloaked, as if I had earplugs in my ears that were too far back to pull out. The people on our side of the stands lingered, their heads towards the ground, as if they were looking down at me. But could I really blame myself? It was only a matter of time before I failed, yet I had still managed to get my hopes up too high AGAIN. But I still felt so, so sad. Empty, drained of all my motivation and happiness.

The only thing I could hear was the little voice in the back of my head, whispering, I told you so.
RISING ABOVE THE DARKNESS: A PATH TO A BRIGHTER AND JUST FUTURE

Karthik Srikumar

The skies above us are shrouded in a toxic veil, and the very air we breathe is poisoned by the reckless destruction of our environment. Nature itself is in peril, with species becoming extinct and habitats reduced to wastelands. The cries of the oppressed and marginalized are ignored, as the rich and powerful revel in their wealth, amassing resources and exploiting the vulnerable. The once-lush fields now lay barren, stripped of their fertility, as famine and starvation grip the land.

The root cause of many of the world’s problems can be traced back to one underlying factor: An insatiable drive for wealth and power called greed. These lower instincts have taken over society and are emerging as the dominant forces driving human behavior and decision-making. The results were devastating, as the wealthy and influential used their newfound power to amass even more wealth and cement their position in the social hierarchies top. In this world consumed by greed and selfishness, the rule of justice seems to have lost its hold. The poor are crushed underfoot, their voices drowned out by the deafening roar of the powerful. Inequality and poverty reign supreme, as the most basic needs of humanity go unmet. Children go to bed hungry, families are torn apart, and communities are devastated by war and conflict.

It is deeply felt as the poor face daily challenges unimaginable to those living with privilege and comfort. As a result of this social paradigm, the world is plagued with problems. It is a world where the rich are indulging in luxury and luxury, while the basic needs of millions are not met. It must be relegated to and replaced by a more humane and compassionate approach.

The sky, once a symbol of boundless grandeur and hope, and inspiration, is now a symbol of destruction and degradation. The once-clear blue sky is obscured by a thick curtain of pollutants, a constant reminder of the damage we have done to the environment. The impacts of this environmental degradation are widespread and devastating. The alarming rate of species extinction and rapid biodiversity loss are among the most immediate consequences. When habitats are destroyed, entire ecosystems collapse and many species lose their homes. The planet is losing its vibrancy and color, taking on a morbid pallor that speaks to the gravity of the situation.

The present state of our world, characterized by increasing devastation and devastation, is a clear departure from its former prosperity and lush nature. The emptiness we live in presents an uncomfortable legacy that we must change. The world we leave behind for future generations is not a desolate wasteland, but a prosperous, green, and full of life. It must be filled with It is our duty to take the necessary steps to ensure the implementation of this change. It is imperative that we take.
action to change this world for the better. Our only hope for a better future lies in spreading love and kindness, rejecting greed and stinginess, and embracing a more sustainable and just way of life. United as a global community, we stand ready for future generations. We must work towards the common goal of creating a better world.

This means changes on both an individual and systemic level. On a personal level, we must reject hatred and greed and strive to live in love and kindness first and foremost. We need to learn about the issues facing the world and have meaningful conversations with people who have different perspectives. We must also strive to reduce our environmental impact by adopting sustainable practices and supporting initiatives that promote environmental protection. At a systemic level, change must be championed and leaders held accountable. We must demand them to take action to address the problems facing our world, from poverty and inequality to environmental destruction. We also need to work to promote a fairer and more equitable distribution of resources and build systems that prioritize the well-being of all, not just some. The world is a dark and lonely place, consumed by war and hatred, justice is no longer a top priority. The earth is crumbling beneath our feet as the consequences of human actions take their toll. Greed and greed are the dominant forces that crush the poor and make them suffer a nightmare of endless pain. A toxic veil surrounds our skies, stunting nature itself, wiping out species, and destroying habitats. The world becomes a barren wasteland without life and hope.

But there is a ray of hope. Amidst the darkness and destruction, a small flame of love and kindness still burns. It’s a flicker, but it promises a bright future. It is the beacon that leads us out of the storm and into a world of healing and perfection. A world where the sky is clear and nature flourishes. A world where justice and equality reign and the poor are no longer oppressed. There is an idea to solve this.

International trade policy has the power to narrow or widen economic disparities between developed and developing countries. In the past, these policies have often favored the interests of developed countries, exploiting the cheap labor and resources of developing countries to boost their own growth. The result is a perpetual economic divide between rich and poor countries, perpetuating poverty and inequality worldwide. It’s time to shift the focus of international trade policy to those that benefit both developed and developing countries. This will require all countries to work together to create a system that prioritizes the well-being of all. The international community must advocate fair and just policies that promote sustainable growth and development for all countries. An important aspect of this is to ensure that international trade is conducted ethically and transparently by taking steps to prevent the exploitation of developing countries. This includes fair labor practices, protection of human rights, and responsible use of natural resources. Developed countries must also work to break down trade barriers that limit the ability to develop countries to enter international markets and grow their economies. In addition, developed countries should be willing to invest in the growth and development of developing countries through both financial and technical assistance. This will help developing countries build their capacity to participate equally in
international trade, reduce their dependence on developed countries, and promote self-sufficiency. Ultimately, developing international trade policies that benefit both developed and developing countries requires a shift in thinking from a focus on short-term gains to long-term sustainability and equity. need to do it. Breaking down the barriers that divide us and fostering global cooperation and understanding are the challenges we must face if we hope to build a better future for all.

Overall though, this is a future dream that can only be achieved if we come together as a global community, embrace love and kindness, and reject the forces of greed and destruction. Now is the time for us to act and make the changes we need to build a better world. Now is the time for us to stand up and be counted, speak up and fight for the future we want to see. The road ahead is long and difficult, but worth the journey. A world of love and kindness awaits us. It’s up to us to seize it. The time is now and the choice is ours. Will we face the challenge or succumb to the darkness?

The answer is in our hands.
The Collector

Grace Hanzlik

Grade Eight
GRADED NINE

Faded Childhood
Linda Chen
我是谁？

As I add the finishing touches to the 国画 painting,
A drop of ink falls like water from a leaking faucet,
Rippling into an endless ocean without a trace.
The smudge of ink pervades the landscape,
Creating a restless dissonance.

In the mirror,
A medley of
Red, white, and blue
Waves valiantly in the stirring wind.
When the sparrow’s sing-song ensues,
I drown in its melody of pride and belonging.
Like a pair of driftwood chopsticks in a sea of ornate silverware,
I stand out.

Like perpendicular lines turning parallel,
The connections between my roots falter.
And my native language escapes my tongue,
Like falling petals of a mourning lotus.
Once a strong tree, my branches fall like chipping paint on a cold day.

But when Mother wraps the delicate skin around the steamy filing,
Or when Father, Brother, Mother, and I sit around the circular table,
I am whole.
And like the steam breaking from the rice cooker,
I feel free;
The sparrow that sings and flies!

Stored in the dusty cabinets,
Sitting in the faint shadows,
My eyes catch the smudge of ink spilled on the thin rice paper.
My hand moves on its own,
And I smile proudly at the blossoming lotus flower,
Fighting a slow race against the current upstream.
After the documentary “Ten Dollar Death Trip: Inside the Fentanyl Crisis”

It’s not forbidden
Frank, Ellen, Nellie, Tam
It didn’t stop us
Shoot ambrosia up our veins
A person who is loved
A person who is happy
We don’t want to go to prison
But to go to prison
You need money on the streets
Would you rather be happy
Or be miserable
We all chose happiness
Because none of us are bad
We just want a hug

Give me that dark green
None of us want to be here
I wouldn’t wish the person
This life I live because
I’m going to hell
Leslie called me a leech
She worked her skin alive
While I was having epiphanies
Whistling and hooting to the Lord
Cloud nine
Leslie abandoned me that night
And then I slept on the streets
And then I met my brother Jimmy
And then I had to bury Jimmy
And I had to bury a few other friends
And that’s all there is to it
Been living my best life since
I freaking love it
My headphones were sold
The sirens are my breakfast
Lost more friends than
But I love it
I love it to hell
A Time Journey
GENEVIEVE CORRICELLI

A hill rises under my feet. Before me stretches a broad, immeasurable land, and above me is a striped mass of color. I see today’s sun shining warmly, stacked next to millions of suns in skies of blue, white and furious gray. Stormy days, sunny days, cloudy days. Between them are tiny rips in the yellow daylight, a dragon’s talons streaking down a colossal stone, revealing nights. Millions of stars peer through these narrow openings of black. The days and nights pile on top of another, tracing a clear timeline through the skies.

Before me lies a cracked, gray asphalt road, littered with broken bottles and plastic wrappers. It is familiar. It is current. It is where I’m from.

I begin walking down the hot, hard rocky surface. I am aware that my bare feet sting from the pain, but I feel as though someone else experiences the nuisance. I have left myself; I am feverish.

As the lonely road moves away from me, it dies into a dirt path dusted with horse hoof marks and traces of old-style bootprints. None have wandered this route in a very long time. I walk along the dusty surface, my feet making no trace upon the ground. I never was. I am a ghost. I am an observer, nothing more.

The path reduces further into a narrow impression. It is barely noticeable among the shifting desert sands, now free from forceful human formation. They dance and spin just above the horizon line, frolicking around my calves. The sands do not stick; I am just an observer.

I can now see bare footprints, ones I did not see before. They are ancient and wise. This is because the person who left the prints only came once, long ago. There was no need for a path here, for we were once all travelers.

The sand dances over the footprints, tiny white sparks erasing the shallow marks from everything but my memory.

Ahead of me, the fine sands swiftly harden and slope into a vast and monstrous ocean. It salivates white froth and pounds its great fists; it writhes in fury unseen.

The raging winds rock and anger this ocean. They irk the flurries of sands. They pass through my flesh; I am an observer.

A drumming pound enters my soft human ear, and I turn to see a creature walking near the water. Its majestic footsteps are echoes of a long-dead heart. It stops and lowers its wide, scaly head to drink from the ocean’s waters, which calm to bow and kiss its monstrous feet. It has a long neck and tail; I know, clearly as if it told me itself, that it is a dinosaur.

This creation of life, this imperfect chosen creature that lived and died, calls a great sadness from me. All life was made to continue life, pass on the gift of living. We are meant to stay in balance- to perfectly counteract each other.

This great force that created us all, life still depends on it. And humans are destroying our master, we are killing our maker, while we still rely on it.
The dinosaur lifts its head, water flowing from its cheeks and neck. Then, slowly, it lumbers away. Its footsteps echo in my head, always an echo. An echo of what was alive, and now is dead.

I begin to understand the breathtaking display. This is a performance of the earth’s majesty. It is a reminder of all that has been, and a suggestion of what could be—no, what should be. What would be, if we didn’t tip oil into the waters, smoke into the skies and trash into the lands.

Soon, I find that I cannot look behind me. I cannot turn back, so I must go on until I see this through. There is more waiting for me, I have a purpose for observing this splendor. It is here, in this world of the past, as steadily as I am.

In the absence of its master, the ocean leaps and grasps at me from below. Instinctively, I step into the frothing body, ducking under its stormy surface. A cool, heavy peace rolls over me thickly as the roaring cuts off completely. Smoothly, as if in a peculiar dream, I walk through the still blue.

Strange brushing noises announce the presence of small, dead fish. They scamper and frisk amongst each other, and skim my face lightly as they move. I cannot feel them, for I am an observer.

The fish pass me as my feet sink into thick green waves. The tentacles sway, mesmerized, as tall as my face. They are curious and innocent, baby-like. As I walk through them, their shape changes slightly and they shrink softly and wordlessly under my feet, growing younger and smaller as time ticks backward. After silent, sleepy minutes, I walk on soft white sand again. I feel presences around me, and I know that the neighboring life has dwindled to creatures too small for my imperfect human eyes to see. They are so fragile, so tiny. And yet they are the ancestors of every single entity of life that sees and walks upon the lonely, broken asphalt road that I call home.

The bacteria fades away with raw finality. Soon, the surface above me changes from heavy blue to soft cyan, and my head ripples through the surface. Before me is a fiery land. Lava slimes from black rocks. Pores on the earth’s surface viciously spit orange flame. No life grows here, the earth is still too hot—but it will. I realize that I have seen it—the plants, the fish, the dinosaur, the human footprints. Me. We all started as bacteria.

I step through the blazing landscape, my feet numb. I feel nothing. I am an observer. But all observers see with a purpose. What is mine? Why am I seeing this spectacle of earth’s triumphs?

And, suddenly, I step onto a surface of deep black, of nothing.

Above me, the striped skies pile atop one another, and I realize that I can look behind me. I observe the plains of fire, the ocean, the dinosaur, and the short, lonely path. The striped skies extend far above me, eventually coming down to rest on the hard, silent, gray pavement: the beginning of my journey, my origin, my home. My journey is coming to an end, not unlike a fairytale—even if in this case, the end is the very beginning.

The last sky, the first sky, the one right above my head, is filled with color and movement that resembles a large, strikingly magnificent firework. As I watch, the large sphere contracts to become denser and smaller, until it is a small white-hot dot. Scientists call it a bang. They call it big. But it is silent and perfect and so very far from where I stand, on nothing.

For a split second, the dot disappears and everything around me takes a small, soft breath.
And then I am standing, once more on the hard asphalt, a single sun gently cradled by passing cloud, the broken bottles and silver wrappers lying injured on the gray, lonely road. The road that I walk upon, the road I belong to. I’ve observed splendors unimaginable in places that do not exist anymore. Observance is more than seeing. It is seeing with purpose, using sight to perform actions.

What did I observe? The earth is our origin and home. It is delicate and tough. It relies upon us as much as we rely upon it. I observed for the purpose of realizing, of realizing that our planet is in deep need. Of realizing the sheer glory that is at stake.

Our strong, brave earth has seen the rise and fall of species and ecosystems. It has seen life and it has seen death. It has nurtured humans’ ancestors, protected our species, and watched us grow up. It has seen our triumphs, it has seen our mistakes. The earth has forgiven our carelessness over and over and allowed us second, third, fourth chances.

When something is broken, fix it.
When something is lonely, help it.
When something is failing, listen to it.

When the earth is broken and lonely and failing, we are leaving broken bottles and silver wrappers on our paths. We are pushing toxic chemicals into skies that gleamed for our ancestors for billions of years. We are suffocating the wild white desert sands with hard, gray asphalt roads. We are casting trillions of pounds of plastic into the untamed oceans that quenched the thirst of dinosaurs. We are destroying our makers. And we will not survive if we finish the job.

I reach down and pick up the bottle and wrapper. I will throw them away when I am near a garbage can. And then I will do it again, and again, and again, as long as the earth needs me.
ReASOns Why We MUST LOOK Up
Genevieve Gorricelli

I remember this day very well;
The day I learned what life is, the day I learned to fly
it stands a bit away from everything else
a hero and their accomplices
a sun next to its stars
alone in the foreground, painted with harsh color
when everything beside it is gray shadow

On this day
I stood in warm grass with stringy flesh, soft roots, and a bitter, green taste
my mind was a serene, empty alcove
my body a motionless object

On this day
a white line began to spread across the sky; a soft, straight arrow
it was led by a tiny plane

This poem is not about the grass
It is about the plane
Just as
This life is not about the earth
It is about the sky
It is about the birds, balloons, witches, rockets, time, dragons, butterflies, kites

Specifically,
Do not allow yourself to be captured by reality
because imagination lives only in abstraction
On this day
I realized that
Freedom constitutes flying, and
flying constitutes planes

planes are wise
as are birds, balloons, witches, rockets, time, dragons, butterflies, kites
because they have learned to fly

and on this day, I have found that the meaning of life is the state of being airborne
and this is why we must always look up

After all, inspiration is found during flight
Drainage
Iris Hida

“Arabella what is wrong with you?” Mother yelled. I spilled my water glass on the table. “Why did you do that?” My father didn’t say anything. I looked at him with hopeless eyes. “You idiot!” My eyes welled with tears. “Oh now you’re crying great, I’m a terrible mother.” The beer bottle was empty, but her next one was only a fourth of the way full. Trust me I’m sure there was more in the fridge. I ran into the bathroom. Water, soap, lather. Water, soap, lather. Washing my hands was the only thing I could think of doing. The soap created a plaster on my hands. “ARABELLA!” The rush of the water drained out her screams and didn’t let her hear my sobs and sniffles. Water, soap, lather.

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I dragged myself through my second to last class-- biology. It’s only been twenty minutes but it feels like two hours. God. I flicked my brunette waves into a messy bun and cramped into my gray sweatshirt. Ecology this, Carbon-cycle that. One girl was hiding her phone behind her computer, another was asleep. Two guys were kicking each other underneath the desk and this girl just wanted to get out. Mrs. Nelson created doodles on the board, a building, clouds, a tree, water, and a little mushroom. She titled it, “The Carbon Cycle.”

“After combusting from the factory, the carbon will travel to the atmosphere and then respire into the ocean...” Maybe I was carbon in a past life, I feel like I could combust. For the rest of class, I picked at my nails, bit them, and played around with my hair.

“Oh my God and I just can’t even get over it,” She grunted and flicked her dirty blonde hair behind her shoulder. Kiara was blabbing about how her boyfriend broke up with her. I think they were together for two months maybe? It’s so hard to keep track nowadays. I stared at the math posters plastered on the wall. One was decorated with a rainbow:

Math Talk, what are other ways we can solve this problem?
If she would realize people have it worse.
This makes sense because...
It doesn’t make sense, why me? There are so many other people. Why did I deserve it?
“Arabella? Are you even listening to me?” No, I’m not. I don’t care about what you have to say. Instead, I shook my head.

“Yeah, sorry.”

“Ugh, just have sympathy for once. You’re like the most unsympathetic person ever.” Is that even a word? She chomped on her gum. “Do you have feelings?” Her head drifted down to the left.

I rolled my eyes, “Just carry on, Kiara I’m listening.”

I must’ve fallen asleep or zoned out forever. I didn’t remember anything she said. According to her, we agreed to go over to her house for math homework. The bus ride was long and dragged...
along the tar road. Somedays I wonder if they actually cleaned the buses. They all had that damp smell of wet socks. Ew.

Picking at my bottom lip I looked through the window only to be presented by the cool air of a November day. My legs shook, I couldn’t control it. The taste of metal had entered my mouth. My thumb touched my cupid bow lips. I was bleeding. Is carbon always in the atmosphere? I didn’t want to go home, but I didn’t want to go to Kiara’s house. It was hard to be sure where I wanna be. Wherever I went a sense of guilt followed me. I felt like I had too much pressure, but I didn’t wanna talk about it. In the moment on the bus I was ready to cry.

We reached Kiara’s house. “Woah,” My blue eyes glistened in what looked like a castle to me. “This is your house?”

“Oh yeah?” She passed it off. My house was probably four times smaller than hers and was probably at its last life. Floor boards out of place. Dust accumulated in the corners. I could not mess anything up when I was there. My lip began to bleed again.

For a while we sat on the couch while she tried to help me with my homework. She tried to teach me translations, I spaced out between points, A(-7, 2) and B(1, -10). Somewhere between those points I couldn’t stop but wonder why I couldn’t keep my emotions under control. Why couldn’t I just feel like a normal person?

“Girls, I have water in the kitchen for you,” Her mothers voice was so sweet, and barely pierced the air.

“Coming,” Kiara hollered back. I followed her into the kitchen. The floor was lined with gray marble tiles and her counter was a lighter shade of black. The two glasses of water awaited us. As I went to grab mine, my finger tips crashed into Kiara’s. Water spilled all over the counter. I was frozen.

“Arabella what is wrong with you?” Kiara questioned. My lungs felt heavy. My eyes fixated on her; Kiara’s eyebrows were sewn together, her mouth was slightly open. My mothers fits, screams and blames echoed within my ears. I looked hard at Kiara, all I could see was my mother. I couldn’t stand the blame. My breath got faster, I could no longer hold back the feeling. I ran to the bathroom.


“Why would this stupid water go down the drain!” I couldn’t breathe. Kiara opened the door abruptly. I backed away and sat on the closed toilet. Kiara stopped the water, my sleeve was soaked.

“Arabella, are you okay?”

“No, you’re mad because I knocked over the water, I’m sorry it’s my fault and I can’t handle
the blame.” I sniffled and rested my heavy head in my palms.

“You are perfectly fine. I was just joking,” She laughed, “Your hands are so cracked, do you always wash your hands when you’re overwhelmed?” I shrugged.

“I should probably get home.” I walked out of the house and ran home. It was getting late anyways. I’m embarrassed of what I did.

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“Arabella,” My mother was lounging on the couch waiting for me to be home. “Where have you been? You can’t just leave for that long.”

“I’m sorry I had math homework.”

“Oh so that’s it? Math homework? I can’t believe you,”

“I texted you and told you.”

“A text isn’t enough, there’s something so wrong with you.” I wanted to run to the bathroom, I wanted the plaster feeling around my hands, I wanted the rush of the water to rinse out her words.

I didn’t move. Instead I stayed. I listened to her words. My eyes didn’t swell anymore, I didn’t turn to my father with hopeless eyes. Water, I didn’t allow her words to rush into my mind. Soap, The plaster was my silence. Lather, her sharp expression didn’t cut me. I didn’t feel anger, stress, or overwhelmed. I felt numb. I created the border between her voice and my mind. I drained her out.
Game of Cigarettes
Iris Hida

His hands are calloused and rough.
His fingertips are stained yellow.
Not the kind of yellow that is full of sun kisses and dandelions,
but the kind of yellow when an apple core has sat on the counter for too long.
Or, in this case, a father who has wasted their time for too long.

An index finger and middle finger holds up the rolled-up tobacco.
A thumb lays on the bottom for extra support.
It’s been about twenty years of wisps
of smoke on the porch, and grating coughs.
He’s focused on a soccer game on his phone—I swear it’s been hours

When will you quit?
I stare at the crushed cigarettes piled on the ground next to his foot.
He doesn’t respond for a second or two,
flicks the end of the cigarette onto the porch and without looking up from the game murmurs,
We aren’t even at halftime yet.
Sometimes I wonder as the candles are alit and incense burns what the world up above is like.

People say that seconds there are like years here. A world built from clouds, roamed by angels and gods.

Maybe Aththamma is one of them.

I wish I could remember more about her. Searching memory after memory for her presence.

My grandmother had soft yet strong hands. Hands that held me when I was born and bathed me. Hands that gently fed me little bites of rice and curries. Hands that wrapped me up tight for what I now know was the last time.

A beam of sunshine that she was - a lady who touched the hearts of all. She was a giver-my mother’s idol.

The love she had for the world was woven into her gentle words, kisses, and her smile.

Once a sensation is now a memory. A reminiscence sewn into my soul with her needle and thread. A piece of me.
THE SYMPHONY OF COLORS

HIRUNI WITHARANA

Grade Nine
Graded Ten

Chipping Sparrow
Amy Meng
"Dad, where did you get dinner tonight?" I asked, opening the front door, and walking towards the table. He looked in my direction, and quickly hung up the phone, clearing his throat loudly. Unzipping my bag, and dumping its contents on the table, I shrugged, reading the first question of my homework, twisting the pencil in its sharpener once, twice.

"Somewhere around that elementary school," He said from the kitchen, slowly mixing a large pot on the stove. "This one was a good one. It was still alive when I got to it, so I know this one’s fresh!"

"Dad! Mom said that you can’t take the alive ones! It’s not roadkill if it’s still alive when you take it." I chided, shuddering a bit. Dad’s never been all that squeamish when it comes to getting our dinner off the road. As long as he doesn’t talk about it too much, Mom agreed that we’ll eat it. Of course, if Mom’s not around, he’ll talk about it for ages. I finished the question on my homework, and plucked an eraser off the pencil, turning it in my hand.

"I only do it sometimes, I swear. But this one was a good one. Maybe you should come out with me. I can teach you this, teach you about the live ones, and when to speed up to hit the small ones." He wipes his hands on the dishrag, and turns towards me; beginning to cut more meat. This one must have been small, there’s almost nothing for us to eat tonight. I shudder again, hoping that if I stop responding, he’ll stop talking; and that I can stop thinking about what’s across from me. I reached for the remote, and left the channel on the news. Dad hated it when I watched the news, he always complained that watching the news was a sure way to ruin any faith that we have in people. Too much “bad stuff,” that’s in there. “Sweetheart,” he warned, checking his watch.

"Dad, get over it. It’s just the news." I slid from my seat, and walked towards the living room, reaching for my computer. I tripped over a pair of small worn pink shoes. They’re strapped across the ankle, imitating ballet flats. "Dad?" I asked, holding up the shoes. "Who shoes are these?" Every muscle in his body tensed, only for a moment, and I almost missed it.

"I got them for your sister, she wanted different shoes. So I bought them." He turned from me quickly, before continuing. "There’s a backpack by the door too," he finished, before motioning towards the door. I followed his hand, and dropped the shoes, by the even more worn bag. "Dad, these look so old. Where did you get these?" He stopped a second before responding.

"I got them from the second hand-store," he looked over his shoulder for a moment. "Don’t look at me like that, your sister saw them in the window and wanted them. He smiled at me, and I returned to my homework.

"Sweetheart," he started, pausing to take the cleaver to the meat. The way that he works was mesmerizing, in a sick way; he chuckled when he caught me watching. "I don’t mind teaching you how to work with this," he said, motioning towards dinner. "It’s a really freeing experience, one of
a kind each time. That’s why I love it.” He grabbed four plates out of the cupboard, and motioned for me to set the table. “It’s fun too, makes you feel real powerful. A workout as well. They’re heavy sometimes.” Dad loved this. I’m not sure why, but he loved this. I swear, he was a chef in his past life. “Makes it easy to get my anger out. Especially when I’m angry with you girls.” He winked, barking out a laugh. Dropping the last fork in its place I smiled.

“Shit.” Dad said under his breath, pulling his hand away from the cutting board. He looked up apologetically. “Sorry for the curse, but I resliced open my finger. This one was a fighter,” he explained, wiping his blood on the dishrag, then tossing it in the garbage. “It’s okay though, I like the fighters, the fighters make this fun.” He went back to cutting the small of the meat, his eyes following the knife, the way it cut through the meat.

“Dad.” I groaned. He’s muttering to himself now, and I picked up small words like “beautiful,” and “my favorite,” he kept his back towards me, his head bent over the pot. The TV turned bright red, a dulled beep sounding throughout the living room.

**AMBER ALERT:** 2nd grader, Anna Grace. Last seen by WIndermere Elementary School, wearing a black skirt, a purple shirt, ballet flats, and a disney backpack. Contact 860-377-3911 with any information.

Dad shook his head at the TV, balancing four plates of food on his arms. “This is why I don’t like you guys watching the news. Horrible stuff.” He slid one plate of food on the table, and turned off the TV. Sliding the last plate onto the table, he called for the rest of my family. Mom followed my younger sister down the stairs, rubbing her hands together, pulling her chair from the table. We sat down together, clasping our hands together in Grace.
YOUR LIFE
MARINA HUNLETH

You deserved better. Your parents shouldn’t have said those things to you. That boy that you walk past in the hallway should have never touched you. Your friends should have never called you fat because now food doesn’t find its way to your mouth without tears. You’re not hurt anymore but that scares you, because now you feel nothing. Your heart has gone numb and your brain has shut down. You can’t determine if you’re losing yourself or if you are already gone.

You walk into school and your face turns a pale shade gray, it trickles down your body until you’re completely filled up with it. You fade into the endless abyss of people. Motivation is lost and you find your head buried into your arm on the desk hiding your face again. You’re not trying to cry, the tears just fall from your cheeks without feeling.

No one knows how just last night you were on the floor looking at the ceiling crying so hard you went to bed with your eyes puffy. No one knows because you stay quiet, you don’t talk much but when you do no one notices. You can’t even say you’re sad because of everything you have been through because that’s not the only reason, you’re just sad. You tell yourself everyday that you have to make it through school, the sad reality is you just want to sit in a corner somewhere and do nothing. People talk to you and you are pleasant, it is not hard to act normal you just put a mask on. Then when school is over you run away into your room. You take a long nap and wake up at random times with drool on your face.

No one talks about your room because you don’t let anyone in it. Beside your bed is your old phone, crumbs scattered across it and papers underneath it. The smell of your room was vile, like something died in it. The bed is left un-made everyday you leave for school, and the floor has such a thick coat of dirt you could draw on it. The TV is old and flooded with disgraceful amounts of dust, the beauru holding the TV up had clothes hanging from every open drawer. You walked through the piles of your clothes and plop onto your bed. You used to find enjoyment in cleaning your room, now you don’t even have enough strength to walk in it. You opened the white cracked doors to see pictures everywhere. Old memories captured in small images.

You never go downstairs for food, instead you stay buried under your covers and pretend like you’re asleep when your mom calls for you. She’s used to it. She never talks to you anymore instead she stays worried you’ll never get better. The rest of your family doesn’t care.

You wake up every morning and shove those pills down your throat. The pills the doctor said would help, they don’t. It’s not fair you live like this but that’s how it is. You did deserve better in your life but that’s how your brain functions, that’s depression.
at the age of 9, I wasn’t able to say i love you
I couldn’t allow my childish self
to let go of my fears
that loving someone
meant having to risk them
slipping through the cracks between my fingers

at the age of 11, he told me he loved me
so I let go
and i let myself fly with him
for 6 beautiful months
then he left me behind
in the dark
to cry

at the age of 13, I began telling friends
classmates
anybody
that I love them
so that the meaning of love was stripped away
so that
when someone tells me they love me
I can’t expect anything more

now, at the age of 16,
i still don’t understand love
blocked by Cupid’s barrier
I don’t truly belong anywhere
because Aphrodite never did love me
as much as Hades did
but
loving you
makes life worth it
this month of September

so
when I say I love you
when I pour my heart out to you
I beg of you
please don’t leave me behind
to wallow because
the green and white capsules I swallow
the lavender scented candles
and my bleeding wrist
aren’t enough for me anymore

life might be worth living
if I could just love you
this September
“Why do you fear the stars?” Kelly, my sister, might only be a fourth-grader, but she still asked the question like she’s a therapist fourteen years into the job. I looked around for a second as I shivered. The night breeze brushed against our skin as Kelly and I reclined in the grass and watched the night sky. The breeze didn’t make me shiver though. It was Kelly’s question that bounced around my head as I contemplated how to respond.

“Why would I be scared of the stars? They’re stars, silly. Who would be scared of them?” I forced a laugh up my closing throat, and even though it made me nervous, I shifted my gaze from the moon to the smaller lights above. It would be horrifying to let an eight-year-old know about my irrational fear of tiny sparkles in the dark sky.

“I don’t think it’s silly, Ms. Nelson told us our stars can be up to 1600 times the size of the whole earth, and big things are scary. Like those tall monkey bars at the lake park, those are scary.” I didn’t know how to respond, so I didn’t. We continued to stare into the sky, shifting leaves and singing crickets the only sounds coming from the darkness, and for a minute, I thought Kelly had forgotten her first question— but she didn’t.

“Are you scared of the stars because they’re big? Or is it something else?” She’s doing that therapist thing again. Staring into your eyes so intensely, you felt like she’s splitting your soul open and reading the pieces like pages in a book. What’s the point of lying? She’d just turn to the next page and learn the truth anyway.

“Who told you I was scared of the stars anyway?” I tried to play it off as a joke, but Kelly was flipping the paper and saw right through me.

“When I told Mama we were star-gazing tonight, she said it was funny because you used to be scared of going outside at night. She said you used to be scared of the stars,” she paused to give me that soul-splitting stare again, “but I don’t think you ever stopped being scared. I think you just got better at hiding it.”

And not for the first time tonight, I questioned how my sister could be eight years younger than me, yet eight years more mature. How she could recognize the avoidance tactics I’ve spent years practicing, tactics that even fooled my mother. How she could form sentences I couldn’t even respond to, questions I couldn’t answer. How she could peer through humans to their souls and see their dirtiest darkest secrets and lies— yet, still be kind and accepting to us.

“So why—”

“Why do I fear the stars?” And at that point, I figured, there really was no use hiding anymore. “Well, I don’t know, I guess, what else did Ms. Nelson teach you about stars?” I turned my body over this time, laying on my side to face Kelly. The grass scratched at my now sticky skin, but I ignored the red lines of irritation in favor of watching Kelly’s face light up.
“Oh! Did you know that the sun is actually a star, and the stars are actually just big, huge balls of fire? And, all the stars are the same size as the sun, too. They just look tiny because they are billions of trillions of miles away, and—”

“Did you know that stars explode?”

“Huh?” Ms. Nelson had clearly not informed Kelly of that fact, rightfully so. Kelly’s facial features shifted and contorted as she processed the new information. She had questions.

“Wh- why do they explode?”

“Stars are giant gas balls that produce heat and fire as you said, but they are also living. Living things like humans and animals and plants all eventually die. When a star dies, it explodes.”

“Is our sun going to die?” And then I’m brought back eight years.

A sleeping newborn Kelly on my mother’s shoulder, a nearly empty bottle of tequila held in my grandpa’s large shaky hands, my grandma wobbling around trying to pick up the reminiscence of the New Year’s party but just making a bigger mess. Mom had tucked me into bed the hours before the ball dropped. I was determined to stay awake for it. I passed out immediately but woke in the pitch black morning staggering to the kitchen to see if I had made it.

“You know scientists are now saying the sun’s going to explode one day, Alyssa and take us all with it in a fiery painful death.”

“Really Dad, how interesting,” my mother was more concerned with rocking Kelly and less with Grandpa’s drunk garbling.

“And it will be over in a second, no preparation, no saying goodbye. Every planet and living thing in our galaxy, dead. All within seconds.”

“Oh dear, that’s not gonna happen for millions of years anyway. Stop getting so worked up,” Grandma’s voice echoed from the kitchen that she found herself attempting to clean.

“Yeah Dad, everyone we love will be long dead by then anyway. There’s nothing to worry about.”

It was my introduction to the concept of death, and the nightmares lasted a month. Confusing mom as I would never tell her what happened, only that I refused to go out under the stars at night. When they stopped she assumed the problem was over. I never corrected her.

Kelly’s finger jabbed at my arm.

“Yes Kelly, all living things do,” and she looked dejected at that, “and what sucks is, it’s gonna take us with it. Every time a star dies and explodes and kills all the life around it. Everything and everyone we know, Kelly, gone. In the blink of an eye. No more school, no more clubs, no more new years parties with grandma and grandpa dancing until sunrise, no more Disney movie nights with popcorn and jolly ranchers on the couch, no more couch, no more of our love and laughter and happiness. No more us.”

I took a long breath of the grass and breeze as I looked at the night sky.
“And the worst part is, even if the stars don’t explode, even if they never blow the surface of Pluto, we will still die anyway.”

And that’s it isn’t it. No matter what, everything you love, everything you are, will die. Die bitter and cold and alone. And the eternal immortal stars in our sky, the constellations that ancient humans mapped and named millions of years ago, the very things that give us light and life, are our constant reminders of the end of it.

Bitter and cold and lonely.

“Well I’m not scared to die,” my head turned back to Kelly, I had forgotten she was there.

“What?”

“I’m not scared. Because even if the sun exploded right now, even if we never got another Disney night with popcorn and Jolly Ranchers, I would have the memories,” Kelly’s smaller hand slipped into my on the grass, “I would be here holding your hand. And I wouldn’t be alone. I’ll always be here, and you’ll never be alone.”

And Kelly has done the one thing no one has ever been able to do for me.

Remind me I’d never be alone.
Market Strolling

“You won’t believe what happened today.” My grandma, Lao Lao, smiles broadly at my sister and me through the phone screen, her face shining with excitement. She neatens her ruffled shirt, a plain, white top, with a small hole forming on her left sleeve. Lao Lao insists that shirts with holes are perfect for the summer heat. Her closet is an assortment of clothing that range from dull-toned fabrics to the brightest flowery reds and pinks. Today, it seems like she has chosen a plainer look. Lao Lao senses the anticipation in the air and sits up straight in her chair, beginning her weekly comedic story.

“There was a pickpocketer on the bus today. I guess he expected to find something good from this poor old lady. He shoved his hand into my pocket only to come up with a fistful of toilet paper.” My sister and I can’t stop ourselves from holding in our laughs. It’s amazing how my grandma’s seemingly uneventful retired life is filled with surprises and adventures at every turn. Lao Lao tries to find the hidden sunshine in the sky no matter the weather and always returns from the market with new stories to tell.

Even at 81, my maternal grandmother always finds time in her day to go to the market. Her day is impeccably organized, with market shopping at the top of her list. Pulling her small shopping trolley across the street of her neighborhood in China, Lao Lao finds solace in the bustling shops that sell meat and vegetables. She somehow manages to finish her shopping spree in under an hour, returning to her apartment with a bag filled with fresh produce.

The summer two years ago, I was given the opportunity of going to the market with my grandmother. Although waking up at 6:30 in the morning was not a desired start to my day—the sky was still streaked with pinks and purples, scurrying from left to right like a flightful ballerina—Lao Lao seemed more pumped than ever. At the market, the atmosphere was even busier than I expected. The noisy, bustling center was a comfort to Lao Lao as she walked the aisles, faintly humming a tune. Most of the stall owners seemed to expect her, giving a quick wave as she progressed deeper into the sea of colorful vegetables. My grandmother is an expert when it comes to buying items at a reasonable cost. While most people would not question the weight inside the small plastic bag that the seller gives them, Lao Lao is an exception. She eyed the green beans on the seller’s scale suspiciously, then took out her own scale. It was tiny and old-fashioned, a pole with a weight dangling from one end, worn out by decades of use. Hanging the bag of green beans on one side of the pole, Lao Lao slowly adjusted the small weight on the other side, her suspicions confirmed.

“This isn’t a kilogram,” she plainly remarked.
**An Intelligent Mind**

If there is one thing that Lao Lao’s friends and family must know about her besides her lovable personality, it is her passion for Yang Sheng Tang, a Chinese TV show that addresses topics related to maintaining health. Although my grandmother majored in chemical engineering, devoting more than 30 years to the profession, one might mistake her for a retired doctor. Most of her early evenings are spent at home with my grandfather in front of the TV, listening attentively with a notebook and pen at hand. For Lao Lao, no age is too old to learn something new.

On the phone, Lao Lao almost always manages to center our conversations around her newest findings from Yang Sheng Tang, whether her discovery is about a dangerous snack or the guide to stretching properly. When it comes to health, my grandmother’s words flow out like a never-ending waterfall, often transforming a casual chat into a speech, the importance of her words emphasized by her serious face. No matter what the phone call starts with, it almost always ends with words of advice from a grandmother, who is a medical expert at heart.

“You kids these days are always eating candies and desserts. Even kids are getting diabetes now.” Lao Lao states plainly with the air of a concerned doctor. Squinting her eyes, she reads off a list of scribbled notes in her black leather notebook. Remarkably, not only does Lao Lao manage to write such detailed notes, but she also successfully concocts well-rounded arguments over the phone, clearly prioritizing her family members’ health over anything else in life. She has also kept her own health in check over the years by taking daily walks and paying attention to the food she eats.

My grandmother’s determination to do well in school catapulted her into a bright future that was unreachable for most civilians during her adolescent years. With both social and economic instability in China at the time, the 1960s was also an especially hard decade for students in China to continue their academic journeys, and my grandmother was only one of around sixteen people accepted into a college in her province of Henan that was well known for its excellent institutions in the field of chemical engineering.

“Your Lao Lao has never been afraid of challenges,” said her husband, my grandfather, once. At first glance, one would not expect this unassuming schoolgirl standing at five feet tall to be one of the top students in her class. After a successful graduation, her college made the decision to send her to Sichuan, a Chinese province in the southwest, nearly 700 miles from her hometown. Sichuan was highly in need of engineers in all fields, but most graduating students used their powerful connections to stay in prosperous cities such as Beijing or Shanghai.

“I was urged not to go. We all knew Sichuan as ‘The Land Without Sun’ back then. But I still came because I knew that there was still so much for me to learn, and why not start with Sichuan?” My grandma mentioned one day when the topic of Sichuan came up. Most college students in the 1960s were unwilling to go to Sichuan, which was economically behind at the time, trying to stay in large cities such as Beijing and Shanghai. However, Lao Lao accepted the challenge and has lived in Sichuan for over five decades.
A Performer At Heart

On a breezy morning, a passerby hears a soft tune drifting from Building 16. “Peng hu wan, peng hu wan, wai po de peng hu wan…Penghu Bay, Penghu Bay, grandmother’s Penghu Bay.” While others are busy catching up with the latest trending songs, Lao Lao prefers to spend time with songs released decades ago, sticking to her favorite joyous melodies. Surprisingly, Lao Lao has never taken any singing lessons, nor has she participated in a chorus. It is almost as if Lao Lao is surrounded by a glowing embrace when she sings, shining with pure content. Even through the phone, her favorite tunes manage to dance into my heart.

“Singing always makes my day so much better. Of course, every day is awesome, but singing adds that extra bit of spice.” My grandmother marvels.

One of my vivid memories of my grandmother in China was her singing performance in a busy public park. Attracted by the cheerful music in the park square, she accepted the microphone from a fellow traditional Chinese music lover and started to sing along to the music speaker. To me, the song was familiar but distant, however, Lao Lao seemed to have known it for years, slowly dancing to the beat as she swayed, her eyes half-closed. With the microphone at a bit of a distance in front of her, Lao Lao’s cloth shoes tapped against the granite ground, finding the soul of the song. At that moment, it seemed like my Lao Lao did not have a single care in the world. She was only there, at the park square, to enjoy music, and to share music with others.

If there is one thing that my grandmother’s family and friends can all agree on, it would be her love for life. Lao Lao isn’t here to simply live but to enjoy every moment. Her seemingly overwhelming enthusiasm for what she loves to do is in reality a remedy in disguise for those complaining about the smallest of matters. Lao Lao? She is truly an adventurer who has gone on numerous journeys. But in the end, I find myself standing at the corner of the park square, admiring how this octogenarian can still do so many things that her children and grandchildren do. Whether it be shopping in the market, marveling about health discoveries, or spreading her love for singing, my grandmother does everything wholeheartedly. Most importantly, she always finds time in her day to care about those around her.
The World, Unchanged
Smriti Rajan

Today marks the 15th anniversary of my only aunt’s passing. I think I should cry, but I never knew her. My mother tells me she was supposed to do great things. She was destined to change the world, she’d say. Except she never did, and I’ll never know why. I have two C’s and a D- in math. My parents tell me they’re proud of me when I get a B-. I know they’re disappointed, but they’d never tell me that. There’s sort of a taboo surrounding the words “pressure” and “stress” in my household, so no grade is too low for praise. I’ve always known that it had something to do with my aunt. My mom blames her parents. They haven’t spoken in years. My friends think I’m lucky that my parents care so little about my grades. “Mine would kill me…,” they say. I wonder if my aunt ever said that to her friends. The doctors walk on eggshells around my family. They used to give me the same survey each year. Do you feel pressured? Unusually depressed? One day my mom yanked the clipboard out of my hands, threw it away, and that was that. Now they whisper the questions to me when my mom is preoccupied. My dad’s a little better, but he could never contradict my mom. I joined the mock trial team this year, apparently, it was my aunt’s dream to be a lawyer. My dad’s the only one who ever tells me what little I know about her. I look just like her, he’ll tell me. He’s also the only one who tells me to do anything, like clean the garage. My mom would probably argue, but she spends this day each year holed up in her room, so I’m stuck cleaning. I grab a broom and head over, inspecting the pile of boxes we’ve managed to hoard since my dad last cleaned this place. Holding back a sneeze, I haul the garbage bin over and begin sorting through the old junk, filling the garbage with newspapers, CDs, and baby toys I know will never be touched again. The last box is filled with photo albums. Of course, they’re all of my dad’s family. I love my dad, but there just aren’t any big secrets on his side of the family. Dejected, I begin organizing the albums. I pick up an album with someone I don’t recognize on the cover, mindlessly flipping through it until I stumble across my mother standing at the foot of a hospital bed. A friend? Relative? The person in bed wears a distant expression. I trace the lines of her unfamiliar face. Who is she? What was my mom doing there? The door creaks open. My dad’s head pops out. “Everything alright?”

“Just sorting through these boxes of junk.”

“Oh, would you like any help?”

“I’m good.” His face droops as he heads back inside. I feel a pang of guilt. I know my dad just wants to spend more time with me. I’ve been inexplicably distant for the past few years.

A diploma on the patient’s bedside brings my focus back to the photo. I squint my eyes, but I can’t make out the name. I drop the album in frustration. It falls to the ground loudly and my father’s head pokes back in. I shove the album back in the box and flash him an apologetic smile. As soon as he leaves I search the photo for any indication of when it was taken or by whom. Tulips sit in a vase near the diploma. My mother hates tulips. It’s the only flower she won’t ever plant. I
pull the photo out, haphazardly put the rest of the boxes away, sweep the floor, and sprint to my room. My dad seems to shoot me a confused look, but I barely register it. As I set the photo down on my desk, I notice some writing on the back.

“Day 3,” it starts. So a diary of sorts. I notice a few dried water stains in the corner. Tears. The rest of the writing doesn’t mention a name. It seems like a report of the bedridden woman’s condition. The entry begins hopeful, the writer lists the things she plans on telling “her.” Eventually, the pen color changes, as does the tense. The writer sounds distinctly sad reporting the lack of response “she” displays. One line stands out to me, “I read somewhere that people in a coma can still hear the world around them.” “Can she hear me? Please come back to me.” I pause, noticing a fresh teardrop take the place of the stains. Hurriedly wiping my eyes, I place the photo on my desk and take a moment to recollect my thoughts. As my eyes dry, I finish reading the entry. A change in handwriting at the bottom of the photo surprises me. “I’m sorry honey, I know the two of you were close. I wanted to return this to you, please talk to me, I’ll send you the rest. - Mom.” My eyes linger on the word Mom before drifting, against my will, to my mother’s closed door across the hall. I close my eyes and imagine my mom clutching this photo to her chest, hoping, praying, that maybe this day would be different. That maybe her sister would smile back at her, listening to the fond memories of her childhood being retold by the one person she could trust. The scene playing in my mind switches to my mother’s sunken face, the one I see this day each year. She still clutches the photo to her chest, this time on the floor outside the hospital room she was previously in. Tears roll down her bare face as she scribbles down the failure that this day was. A wave of anger overcomes me. The pain I watch play across my mother’s face replays in my head. I grab my bag and coat, rushing past my mother’s room, past my dad in the kitchen, past the boxes I just stacked, and onto the street, no longer worried about my disheveled state.

I know where my grandparents live. My mother would’ve moved farther away if my dad didn’t want to live near his parents. Tears are streaming down my face now, blinding me, but I blink them away and move forward. Forward, to the only place I can finally get the answers I’ve been searching for. As I reach the front door of my grandparent’s house, I fall to the floor helplessly. I’m a mess and about to visit them for the first time in my life. I wipe the tears from my cheeks and tie my hair into a ponytail. Sucking in my breath, I collect myself and knock at the door. A woman, not more than a few years older than me, answers the door. She looks me over, obviously confused, as I choke out my grandmother’s name. She nods in understanding and wheels out a senile lady resembling my mother. I pause, deciding what to say, finally pulling out the photo and ungracefully shoving it towards her. A distant look fills my grandmother’s face before changing entirely to confusion. She mutters what seems to be her caretaker’s name, grabbing my face endearingly. Noticing the distressed expression on my face, my grandmother’s caretaker motions for me to come in and offers to make tea. I don’t decline, desperately wanting her to leave the two of us alone. I attempt to confront my grandmother again. Her response changes. She mumbles a sorry and a name I recognize. My mothers. I scan the room, finding exactly what I was looking for, photo albums.
Quietly, I flip through each album. Baby pictures fill each page and my frustration grows. Finally, I notice a familiar face lying asleep on a hospital bed. This picture is zoomed in. I recognize her immediately. My father was right, we do look frighteningly similar. I flip it over eagerly before jumping backward at the sound of the caretaker walking in. Shoving the album inside my bag I return to the couch I was previously at, innocently staring at my grandmother. It’s not long before I pretend to receive a call from my father, searching for any opportunity to leave. I mouth a quick sorry to the caretaker before making my way back home.

My dad sprints over as I emerge from the garage. I tell him I had some more to clean while he professes his worries to me. As I take out the new album, the first picture confirms my suspicions. My mother confesses in pen what happened to her sister. “She worked so hard, trying desperately to earn the respect of my parents. If they had just told her they were proud. I hate them. I hate this world that moved too fast for her.”

My aunt was a brilliant woman, but her ending left the world unchanged. Endings typically do.
PORTRAIT OF LAOCOON: A PARENT’S GRIEF AFTER LOSS OF A CHILD

MELINA VELENDZAS

Graded Ten
GRADE ELEVEN

INSPIRATION
LEO MAHLKE

Grade Eleven
A CYCLE OF TROUBLE
CONNOR COWAN

A few minutes past noon, Dhruv hurried outside to his bicycle which lay propped against a pot of his mother’s perfectly groomed roses. With enthusiasm, he ran down the short, cracked walkway that led to the street, before propelling himself onto the bike. He could make it in time.

Dhruv did his best to navigate the winding streets, avoiding the increasing amount of traffic on the road. Rickshaws swerved, taxis honked, and people walked about, all hindering his arrival to the impending cricket game. As he rode, he imagined it. The crack of the wooden bat, the ball flying, whizzing, past the other’s outstretched arms… what’s going on? Dhruv skidded abruptly to a stop. His usual turn was blocked off with orange cones and sawhorses. Men who appeared to be working did their best to ignore aggressive drivers and passers-by. Dhruv wiped a bead of sweat off his forehead; he needed to find another way to make it in time.

The shimmering river lay to his left, the blocked off street to his right, and he knew that backing wasn’t an option. There was only one option: straight ahead.

To his horror, Dhruv realized the situation he had gotten himself into. One hundred meters ahead was the entrance to Town Hall Park. The only throughway was a thin dirt path, flanked by merchants. To make matters worse, the park was buzzing today. Women struggled to control strollers with thrashing children. Men gathered in large clumps to smoke together.

Panicking, Dhruv rashly kicked back onto his bike, and headed straight towards the park.

Adrenaline coursed through Dhruv as he navigated the masses of customers. His bike rolled effortlessly along the path until about halfway through the park. A crowd had formed around a vendor selling fried groundnuts. At the same time, a short elderly woman was backing up from her stall, carrying a tray of laddus. Dhruv desperately attempted to stop his soaring bike, but realized it was too late. With a thrash, he swerved around the woman, barely missing her, but she dropped her tray in surprise.

At that moment, Dhruv knew he should have stopped but in a sort of shock-trance, he continued biking. As he pushed forward, he snuck one glance behind him to take in the scene. The elderly woman was being helped up and scowled in his direction. A number of women were shouting at him. This disheartened Dhruv but what he saw next made his stomach twist. One of those women was his mother.

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The evening breeze made Dhruv shiver as he walked his bike up towards the front door. Ordinarily, his mother would have been pleased he was home in time for dinner but today, he wasn’t so sure. He laid his bike on the ground now. Stepping inside, the first thing he noticed was how dark it was. As he entered the kitchen, he found his mother hunched over a cup of chai. His lone place was set at the table with food that appeared to have gone cold.
“Mama, I...I can explain,” he started as he walked towards her.
“I don’t want to hear it, beta” she said. Dhruv stopped, closed his mouth, and lowered his face. From the sound of her voice, he could tell she was suppressing some emotions. He just couldn’t pinpoint which.
“Please...let me explain, I was going to play...” Dhruv pleaded.
“I’ve already made arrangements with her,” his mother replied stone-faced. “You are to rise bright and early tomorrow and assist her for the day.” With this, she turned, set the cup of chai in the sink and walked up to her bedroom.

The next morning, Dhruv was up before the sun. The ride to Town Hall Park was particularly simple, as the road had not filled up with morning traffic yet. He arrived before the woman, and hurried to help her when she appeared ten minutes later.
“Ma’am I just want to say first...” Dhruv began.
“Ms. Nandakumar,” she said bluntly.
“Ms. Nandakumar, sorry. I just want to apologize for my actions yesterday. They were truly inexcu-” Dhruv attempted.
“Show me, don’t tell me,” Ms. Nandakumar said shortly. She walked past Dhruv, not meeting his eyes, and began setting up her sweets stand. Dhruv knew this was deserved, so for the time, he followed silently.

Throughout the day, Dhruv assisted Ms. Nandakumar in whatever way he could. He swept crumbs away, set out certain sweets, and sang in an attempt to attract customers. All the while, Ms. Nandakumar spent the day perched on a blue folding chair, watching him intently.

When the day’s work had ended Ms. Nandakumar shooed Dhruv away from the stall and directed him to sit down on her chair. Sitting, he watched as Ms. Nandakumar hand-made gulab jamun and placed it in a small paper cup.

Ms. Nandakumar held the cup out to Dhruv, who accepted it thankfully. Raising the sweet to his nose, his mouth began to water, and his eyes glazed over with an expectant haze. Unable to control himself, he took a step back into the path, and immediately heard the screeching of scooter tires behind him.

One second the gulab jamun was in his hands, the next it was covered in dirt. Frowning, Dhruv crouched down to pick up the cup when he heard a frightening cackle. Ms. Nandakumar sat doubled over in her chair pointing at the scene before her. With this, Dhruv began to chuckle and when he looked up again, the two met eyes. Ms. Nandakumar shrugged her shoulders funnily and all at once, both of them were overcome by hysterical laughter. Although he was frustrated, Dhruv knew in that moment he was forgiven and for that, he was grateful.
GRACE DENHEL

free fall
/ˈfrē ˌfôl/
verb
“to move under the force of gravity only; fall rapidly.”

Vertical descent--
I was weightless.
My body began rapidly
approaching the ground--
reaching its terminal velocity.
Time is impermanent & I
wondered who it was going to take next. [Was I the one chosen on Time’s waitlist?]
A gravitational pull--
intangible & untouchable & yet
doesn’t let you leave does it?
My body steadily becoming limp.
My eyes feel dry, my mouth arid & my
arms sting from the harsh gusts of air
that tear at my skin. [Razor blades]
I think I’ve accepted that this is it for me--
Perhaps my body will become a cloud
& overlook the sky--
Transitory clouds
do not have worries or fears.
I feel my body shutting down--
My eyes unfocus as I stare at the sky
littered with clouds--
I see nothing anymore [Dead before I had hit the ground.]
Revenge is a Dish Best Served with Ribs
ELIZABETH E. DWELLY

I blew out a puff of smoke flicking the end of my cigarette. Cold air caressed my face through the open window of my car door. I don’t drink though, that shit’s bad for your liver. It’s what got my grandfather. The old man survived Vietnam but not his memories. Grandma always used to say that it was the memories that got him in the end, not the drinking. A shadow moved outside my window, the car shuddered and squeaked as two hundred pounds of muscle carefully arranged itself in the passenger seat.

“You wanna tell me what I’m doing out here in this damn cold,” My brother demanded. Withholding a sigh I turned to my brother and took him in. Gray was a beautiful man. Sporting a thick shock of dark hair, straight white teeth, and golden brown eyes that glow like fire when he’s pissed.

“Blair,” he began.

“Let’s look at the lights around town,” I grinned at him cheerfully. His glare landed on my hand as it put out the Marlboro. “Blair, you know I hate your smoking.”

He shifted in his seat and I stared at my hands watching the way the bruises on my knuckles blended out with my bronze skin. I watched him warily as the click of his seatbelt echoed throughout the car.

“I’m trying to quit,” I whispered, gripping the steering wheel, “This is my first one today.” “Don’t lie to me Blair,” Menace was laced into every word. “I–I…”

“Why am I here?” He repeated a snarl painting his features.

Oh no. He hated having to repeat himself. Ugh! I’m so stupid. And now I’m taking too much time to answer. God I’m so screwed! Shit! Just say something.

“The..the lights!” I stammered. “A-around town. I thought we could go look at them. The way we used to. We don’t have anything to do tonight. And I heard about how they were even decorating The Peak.”

His voice cut through my rambling, “Why would they decorate The Peak?”

“Well I was actually the one who came up with it. It was a volunteer project. You know? For the graduation requirement?” Quit rambling Blair, I coached myself. You’re gonna be fine, take a deep breath.

“What a waste of time. I’d like to see this for myself,” Gray chuckled darkly. Shit! Goddammit! This is just like last summer! Wait no! Don’t think about last summer.
I opened the door to my house carefully to catch it before it could creak. Gray hated that creak. Kicking off my muddy boots I reached for the swiffer to remove the droplets of mud on the floor. Gray couldn’t stand when the floor was dirty. Edging into the kitchen I kept my head down hoping to avoid the confrontation until tomorrow morning, maybe even tomorrow afternoon. Or forever.

“Put your bag down and come help me with the dishes,” A sinister voice said from behind me. Too loud against the quiet backdrop of our small suburban home.

There’s no way he knows. It’s the last day of school he could not have possibly found out this quickly. That’s not how the mail system works. Unless they emailed him. The thought clanged through my brain like a clock striking midnight. Quickly spinning to hide my hesitation I dropped my bag on a kitchen chair and picked up a towel keeping my eyes on the dishes.

“Aren’t you happy school’s over?”

“Nope,” Maybe he just heard a rumor he doesn’t know, “but I heard about that. It was another girl.”

A flash too fast to track and a glass shattered against the wall.

“What the hell were you thinking?” He shouted so loud the walls shook.

“I- I wasn’t,” I stammered feeling the walls start to close in. He’d broken my friend’s heart. It only seemed fair that I broke his nose.

“But what if he doesn’t? I don’t want to admit to more than one thing. Pressure built in the room until it’s so hard to breathe I’m surprised the walls didn’t collapse. But still he stared.

“I don’t suppose,” he began, “that you broke Jason Montgomery’s nose today?”

“Nope,” Maybe he just heard a rumor and he doesn’t know, “but I heard about that. It was some other girl.”

A flash too fast to track and a glass shattered against the wall.

“What the hell were you thinking?” He shouted so loud the walls shook.

“I- I wasn’t,” I stammered feeling the walls start to close in. He’d broken my friend’s heart. It only seemed fair that I broke his nose.

“Do you know what I’ve had to do to keep our reputation in this town?” There’s no use trying to explain he doesn’t stop when gets like this. “His father is the mayor. You think I’m gonna bail you outta jail? No way! You’re a screw up Blair.”

“No,” The denial was more for me than him. I couldn’t stop staring into his eyes. He had our Mom’s eyes. But not. I didn’t feel the pain that exploded in my head as it hit the counter top. No, that would come later. All I saw were my Mom’s eyes framed by a monster’s face.
“Blair! Blair!”
I jolted. Gray’s face was inches from mine as he shook me.
“Hi, yes I’m fine.” I smiled pleasantly hoping to mask the terror running wild in my stomach.
“God! Where do you go?” Gray leaned back into his seat.
“We should get going!” I exclaimed. Please don’t ask again. Please don’t ask again.
“Whatever,” he muttered, pulling out his phone.

Losing my breath, I eased out of the auto repair shop’s parking lot. We were the last ones to leave. Turning on the radio to a channel with Christmas music, my left knee began to bounce to match the rhythm of Mariah Carey’s, “All I Want for Christmas is You.”

“Do you wanna hit the town or the residential area first?”
“Town. I’m starving. Unlike some lazy people I work all day.” Right. Like you’d ever let me be able to support myself and get away from you.

Don’t say that out loud Blair, my survival instincts steal my tongue until I promise not to do something stupid. Well, stupider than what I’m already doing.

“What would you like?” I asked instead.

“Let’s hit up Ricky’s Ribs.”

Ricky’s Ribs was the best restaurant in town. Despite it’s stupid ass name. Ribs were like currency here. Want help with your homework? Buy me a rib.

The lunacy was complete with a tacky picture of a cow. The ribs were pork. I know, right? The worst part was the damn place had a beautiful view of the mountains surrounding our little town. As I walk in to place our order the tension in my body fades away. For the first time in half an hour my muscles have relaxed. Feeling, more than hearing, a soft pop in my spine I savored the controlled chaos of the restaurant. The air warmed by the ovens blasts you in the face the moment you enter. Muffled shouting in the back mixed with the intermittent clanking of pots and pans.

I loved cooking. Maybe it’s because Gray always makes me do it and I’ve learned to associate cooking with being left alone. Or maybe in an alternate reality where there was no Gray and I’m a better person I’d own a restaurant and that girl was calling to me. Like a fucking siren. The only way I’m answering her call is if Gray was dead.

***

“Shit!” I fumbled with the baggie trying to keep the drink steady with one hand and pulling the bag full of drugs open with the other. This shit was expensive and I am not wasting a single mother fucking bit. Seated on the toilet with the food on the bathroom floor below me. Which I am trying not to think too hard about, I empty the contents of the bag into the soda. Swishing it around so it dissolves into the liquid I seal the plastic lid again.

A small hysterical laugh slipped out. My brother was about to fulfill his childhood dream of being able to fly. At least for a short while. The hundred foot drop off The Peak would definitely kill him. A little too quickly for my liking. Once we’ve reached The Peak I’m gonna have to move
two hundred pounds into the driver’s seat and push the car off. Not the most foolproof plan but I really don’t care anymore. Not taking my eyes off the drink I rise from the toilet. Sighing I put my head against the cool plastic of Ricky’s bathroom stall.

How in the hell did I really think I could do this? Fear flooded me like a tidal wave, washing away my resolve. Spinning, careful to avoid the precious ribs, I ripped the cap off and watched as a drop dripped over the lip into the toilet.

***

My bathroom looked like someone had a baby in here. With no towels. Seriously! Who knew head wounds bleed this much? A drop of blood dripped from my brow into the toilet. The smell of vomit wafted up and burned my nose. It’s really my fault though. Hugging a toilet full of vomit like it’s my last friend in the world wasn’t gonna have good results. It probably was. Gray hated me now. This was all because stupid Val invited me to her house for her thirteenth birthday. Val made me drink. I told her no but she wouldn’t listen! Everyone just kept staring at me and calling me a wuss so to make up for it I drank two whole gulps. Sue me!

Gray couldn’t stand people who drank though. Our dad drank. That’s what killed him. He went over the guardrail on The Peak. Mom was in the car and I moved in with my older brother. This was last year. It must have scared him to see me a little drunk. That’s why he hurt me. He’s not bad. He’s not.

***

Shaking myself loose of the memory I put the cap back on. So much for not losing a single drop.

At the car I found Gray jamming out to Led Zeppelin. The guy’s got a weakness for the oldies. He’s not the only one. For one moment I saw the teenager who stayed home with me when I had the flu. The young man who danced like a maniac with me in our living room. I saw the quiet strength my mother was known for. Looking over at the small smile on his face as the music crescendos I almost threw the cup out the window. Almost.

***

I twirled a cigarette in my hand. Weaving in and out of bruised fingers.

“Blair? I understand that this is a huge shock but would you mind if we asked you a few more questions?” The cop seated on the couch across from me says gently.

Crunched up in the armchair opposite him I sniffled before nodding. The tears falling down my face are not those of a heartbroken sister. But the tears of joy a victim sheds when they escape and find that the world remains as it once was. Beautiful and full of color, no gray in sight.

“Does your brother have a history with addiction? Reckless behavior? Anything that would lead him to his decisions after having dinner with you tonight?”

“Yes,” I whispered softly. “Addiction runs in the family I suppose.”

The cop raised his eyebrows and before he could speak I added, “Lucky for you I’m a survivor.”
How the Emergence of Pro LGBTQ+ Music is Effectively Fostering Empathy

Zain Farooq

“So if I’m losing a piece of me, maybe I don’t want heaven?” Without context, an audience may perceive this lyric as part of an atheistic song. However, when mentioning these lyrics as part of a song that strives to convey the difficulties of growing up LGBTQ+, the message is clear: be true to yourself, even if you have to sacrifice. For those who identify themselves with the LGBTQ+ community—this may be a daunting task. This is because our society, particularly in the past, has shunned individuals from expressing their authentic feelings. Homophobia is rooted in the opinion that being gay is a sin that violates traditional religious and ethical values. As a result, adherents of such religions display hostility to those who identify as gay or lesbian. Many of these presumptions, however, are shifting as time goes on.

Music has always been one of the most vital mediums for influencing our beliefs, because no matter what language you speak you can understand music, making it a “universal” language. Music also has shaped our communities and cultures throughout the world. Numerous pop songs have integrated “hidden” messages because they aim to voice their ideas into a tool that can propel change. LGBTQ+ music heavily focuses on the perspectives of sexual and gender minorities and is a product of the broader gay liberation movement. Lyricism and song content frequently portray the dissatisfaction, fear, and hope connected with quasi-sexual and gender identities, providing a platform for oppressed people to express themselves. Songs that aim to illustrate such concerns tend to incorporate diction, imagery, and biblical allusions to underscore the importance of providing equality to people who identify as LGBTQ+.

In March of this year, a close friend of mine came out to me as bisexual, though I was initially confused because the person portrayed themselves as straight. I reassured my friend that I accept them for who they are, regardless of their sexual orientation. My friend continued by saying how difficult it would be to explain to their Hindu, religiously devoted parents. I remember saying, “just wait until the moment feels right; your parents will love you regardless of your sexuality.” “They would kill me, and I wish I was joking,” they countered. My friend hasn’t told their parents about their sexual orientation yet and has no intention of doing so. When evaluating data regarding depression among LGBTQ adolescents, suicide is the second largest cause of mortality among young people aged 10 to 24. LGBTQ+ adolescents are disproportionately more likely to attempt suicide. The primary causes of LGBTQ-related teen suicide were peer pressure, family pressure, and religious pressure (Hedegaard, 2020.) I couldn’t imagine how hard it is to come out, especially if your parents are religious. As mentioned earlier, religions typically detest non-heterosexual individuals because it is believed they violate tradition and God’s intentions when creating humankind since
its inception. Through further conversation with my friend, they began sharing songs that support the LGBTQ+ movement. Pop songs by LGBTQ+ icons were discussed frequently. Including music by artists like Lil Nas X, Elton John, and Katy Perry, all of whom have significantly advanced the LGBTQ+ acceptance movement via their musical careers and empowering lyricism. One song in particular that sparked my interest was “Take Me To Church” by Hozier. After all, this is because every time the song aired on the radio, my younger and more naive self assumed it emphasized religious principles and the virtue of going to church. Boy, was I wrong...

Released in 2013, Hozier’s single sought to capture the fear many LGBTQ+ “allies” discern as they struggle to reconcile faith and sexuality. Specifically, the song was intended to vocalize against inhumane practices perpetuated by the Catholic Church targeted at persons who are LGBTQ+ (Howell, 2013). “I’ll worship like a dog at the shrine of your lies, I’ll tell you my sins so you can sharpen your knife” (Hozier). To clarify, Hozier’s usage of the verse “at the shrine of your lies” is a jab at the church and other groups who demonize other people’s sexuality. Because depictions of dogs are devoted and faithful in literature, the term “worship like a dog” is a simile. Hozier is comparing individuals who worship at these sorts of organizations to dogs, who are obedient to their owners even when that master mistreats them. Ultimately, these “dogs” blindly devote their lives to causes that cause pain and suffrage to others without comprehending what is happening. “I’ll tell you my sins so you can sharpen your knife” is a biblical allusion to the practice of confession that many Christians observe. Individually or as a part of collective worship, church members confess their mortal sins before a priest, pastor, or church elder. Sharpening the knife is imagery that alludes to blackmail or how someone will have a sharper knife to wield against you if they learn of your wrongdoings. When people find out that someone is homosexual, they can become violent and “sharpen their knife.” Adding to the suffering of the person merely speaking of their reality and accepting themselves for who they are and are not.

Though I am not homosexual, songs such as “Take Me To Church” enable me to empathize with the LGBTQ+ community and understand their struggles. After all, music is a medium for influencing our understanding. I can picture the anguish endured by victims of same-sex bigotry thanks to the song’s compelling imagery by Hozier. His descriptions of how two homosexual couples may be considered a “sad earthly scene” by Christians, who may interpret the phrase in such regard. In the end, he realizes that he is pure because of the sincerity of his love and that he is a human, not a monster. This is consistent with humanism’s overarching principles, which hold that one need not be religious to live an ethical life. This is consistent with humanism’s overarching principles, which hold that one need not be religious to live an ethical life. Humanism is a philosophy of life that emphasizes reason and our shared humanity, acknowledging that moral principles should only be based on human nature and experience (Sheldon, 2001)

In my religion, homosexuality is taboo for Muslims. To this day, people are encouraged to discriminate against and shun homosexuals. Certain nations that have sizable Muslim populations continue to forbid same-sex marriages. Homosexuality is punishable by inhumane forms, including
flogging, stoning, and the death penalty (Alles et al 2006.) Although I was raised in a religious household and am a Muslim, it is heartbreaking to visualize these archaic forms of punishment in the context of a subject that pertains to necessary civil rights. Protest songs akin to Hozier’s allow me to solidify my position as an ally in the LGBTQ+ community because they help me apprehend the perspectives of individuals who deserve the same impartiality as heterosexual people. Even as someone whose religion is their leading moral compass, I detest my religion’s notion that sexual attraction is only expressible by the opposite sexes because I believe that many factors determine physical attraction. These factors vary significantly from person to person.

Our sexuality, regardless of what it is, is a crucial aspect of who we are; sexuality is a component of what it is to be human. Denying someone a sexual relationship or marriage should be considered a violation of human rights. A happy life may depend on our ability to express our sexuality honestly. With time passing and cultures shifting towards a more accepting environment, it will be a matter of time before religious groups become conscious of the struggles homosexual people undergo. Songs that express the hardships LGBTQ+ people face can help those who still actively oppose the LGBTQ+ cause by fostering empathy, fostering morality, and fostering positive change. These songs can vocalize the difficulties the LGBTQ+ community face and the adversity they overcome as they battle society’s gender and sexual relationship norms through their powerful diction and thoughtful metaphors that indicate why change is necessary.

Works Cited


When he fell off the stone staircase
we stopped for a moment. Heat waves rolling us out like dough.
We would sweat standing still. The reminiscence of warm milk seeping between teeth.
Me, the ones I knew, and those Silverhawk kids.

Because of decisions I could not yet comprehend, my school and their school
shared a tiny patch of asphalt, milk crates for cubbies, and trailer classrooms
in the heart of the city.
They were a separate school, and through congested classrooms, drying knuckles,
and the disappearance of the only good bouncing ball,
we decided to hate each other.

Side eyes were chocolates being passed around. They had made fun of my new shoes.
Those kids.
_Those weirdos_, said a friend, after the Silverhawks were no longer surrounding us.

And then he fell.
Glazed and sparkling, a Silverhawk no one paid attention to, dropped from
the stone staircase, landing so gracefully with a silent ‘thud’.
Splayed like a snow angel on concrete.

Sometimes I try to imagine what he was thinking when we were all staring down
upon him. And I wonder if he still remembers the way we sucked in breath, scrunching our
faces as we bent over and cocked our heads, trying to get a better view of the gash in his scalp.

Mumbles rose when he began to writhe, delirious. A few chuckles, even.
And _oohs_ and _ohhs_ as the blood broke off into strings and strands,
stretching towards us.
We all watched with intensity.
Yet lost interest when a kid announced that he finally found the bouncing ball.
The good one.
The Trifolium Repens that Lived
To be 68 Years Old
Lauren Tedford

Saturday
May 19, 2012

white clusters speckle the yard / the vines are growing up the molded wood that holds up my
rusted swing set / the one that papa built for me on the hill where the white clovers grow / the
ones I pick for grandma every weekend / the ones that wilt on the glossy marbled island every
weekend. dixie cups line the driveway filled with the flowers / my hands-- brown from the dirt
with streaks of green chlorophyll / my eyes glow with anticipation as I hand the cups to grandma
/ they fill their place on the kitchen counter

four days later they were dead

Saturday
June 11, 2016

black and yellow cats litter the deck / squirrels climb and throw each other out of trees / I
pick the wild raspberries and blackberries off the bushes in the backwoods / grandpa lifts me up
to the higher ones when my arms struggle to grow enough to reach.

he puts me down and I am no longer airborne / my feet cement to the ground and I feel safe
and steady again / I see the white buds slowly turning brown in the field next to the house / I rush
to pick them / wilting slowly in my grasp / I hand them to grandma.

three days later they were dead

Sunday
July 15, 2018

up the driveway / first time in almost two years / it’s weird coming back to a home you once
spent so much time at / old but new- but this time- not so familiar / grandma and; well- grandpa
passed a few months ago / grandma sits in her rocking chair with a wine bottle in her hand.

Grade Eleven
she looks sad and somewhere else / she is gone / her eyes peer into the deep woods from the front porch / I gaze over to match hers / my eyes rush over the field of clovers / I smile knowing how much she loves them / I yearn for the dirt and grit on my hands again / I bend down to pick them- then find a dixie cup from under the sink.

I fill it with water from the sink that doesn’t stop leaking / I place the flower stems into the water as the dirt flows through the liquid and turns it into muck / I race outside to the porch and touch her shoulder / she jolts- but when she sees the cup she smiles / she doesn’t look at me- she doesn’t need to / we both know the other is there / and that is enough for now.

I return two days later - they are dead on the counter.

Saturday
August 13, 2022

a lot can change in four years- but grandpa is still gone / the house is empty / my stomach drops as I feel her presence slipping away / empty bottles of wine / cigarettes diffused throughout the house / walls burnt- floors stained / shelves dusty / gone / gone / gone / everything is gone / running away from my life.

the house consumes me as panic floods me / pushes me over / I fall onto her recliner / tears slid down my face / my eyes burn / the tissue box on the side table is out / not empty- but filled with burnt out cig butts / repulsed- I throw the box and shatter the tv across the room.

nothing is right / everything is wrong / gone / gone / gone / I walk into the family room and look to see my father doing yard work outside / it’s really time to sell it / the new owners will be here in less than two months / I go outside and see the Trifolium repens scattered in bunches like they do every year / this time they are dead / dying / gone.

hope gone / gone / gone / except one patch / The sun only covers this patch / I pick them and find my dixie cups / I carry them with me in my black dress / I place the cup down next to her name / rest in peace / grandma and grandpa together again / with their white clovers.
Never Again
Caitlin Chatterton

Maya and Ben

Red lights reflected across the rain soaked streets, flashing as we drove past roads cloaked in darkness, his hand rested on mine. The darkness surrounded us as we rode through the night, our only company was each other, along with the rain which pounded against the mirror. With the radio on, I was in the moment. I could still smell the faint trace of Ben’s ocean breeze scent clinging to the air, and the sweet smell of rain on our clothes.

The memories of the past hours flooded me as I navigated the winding streets. It was too perfect, the rain which streamed down on us, but neither of us had cared. We simply twirled and laughed along with the rain.

The night continued on and the lights kept flashing until I pulled into his driveway, the familiar grey Toyota greeted us as I shifted into park mode, and turned to his emerald eyes. As deep as a jewel, they shined as they looked at me and my soaked curls. Wrapping a finger around the scarlet tendrils, he leaned closer and pressed his lips against mine. An electric current shot through me and his hand grazed my cheek. Heat rushed through my chilled bones, and when he leaned back, I knew he knew just how fast my brain was racing.

With a slight smirk, he whispered, “We should dance in the rain more often. I’ll see you tomorrow in English.”

A nervous giggle escaped my lips as I nodded and he leaned down again and the fire erupted again before he opened the door and walked away into the rain. As I drove home, the memories of our dance and then his lips on mine darted through my mind as the lights shifted from red to green to yellow, and the rain continued to stream on.

Sam

My green tea swirled as I highlighted another section for my English homework. The excerpt of The Catcher and the Rye, along with my stats homework laid down on my worn down desk. Filled with streaks of color from stray highlighters and Sharpies cover it, as I check to see how much more I have to read and annotate. Other than this annotation, I was done for the night and could go to bed as soon as I finished.

I checked my phone at the end of the paragraph, granting myself a break for making it that far in the text. I responded to my friends talking in our group chat about the football game tomorrow night, before I turned it over again. The rain was still pounding against my window, adding a soundtrack along with my Spotify in the background, but it was back to the Times New Roman font and my trusty green highlighter.

“Are you almost done, Sam? It’s almost 10:30.”

My mom’s voice asked from the hallway before she appeared in my doorway. Already in her
pajamas, I knew she was about to go to bed, but wanted me to go to sleep soon.

“Yes, Mom. I just have to finish this annotation. *The Catcher in the Rye* is not the most interesting at 10 at night, but I'll go to bed as soon as I finish.”

My mom smiled then, and I knew it was because she was remembering herself reading it in high school, but for some reason she enjoyed it way more than I ever will.

“Well, don’t stay up too late, but give it more credit, Sam, it’s a classic. I love you, good night.”

“Of course, Mom. Good night, I love you too.”

Gracie and Lee

The gym lights lit up the floor as I walked out for the final set. The smell of sweat surrounded me as I wiped my forehead as my team gathered together for our last huddle before play would resume. We did our signature clap to break our huddle, and then I got to my position.

The game continued on, our team started to take control and we got to one point away from winning as they served it. My teammate got a dig off it and then our setter put the ball right in my sweet spot and I finished the game off with a dominant spike.

The stands erupted as my teammates raced towards me for high fives as we lined up with the other team. Our smiles gleamed with the adrenaline from a five set match, and the glow of victory. It was our seventh of the year, and we were playing our best before playoffs started.

After our coach talked to us, I walked out to find my friends who came to the game. They had cheered me on all game long, and they jumped up and hugged me when I went up to them.

“Gracie, you did so good! Ahh, that spike was amazing, girl! You did so good!”

My best friend, Lee, practically yelled in my ear, as I beamed back at him. He was always exaggerating, but I did think the spike was pretty epic. As Lee let me go from his headlock, my stomach growled because all I had that afternoon was a small snack before my game.

“So, who wants to go out? I finished all my English homework before, and I’m so hungry.”

My friends all erupted in agreement, and I gathered my stuff and we headed out to Lee’s car and pulled out to head to the local staple, ready to eat some of the best fries ever created.

Henry

Five minutes left in the game, I watched as my little brother ran in as a substitute for offense. As usual, his jersey was untucked and practically down to his knees, but his smile was just as jubilant as it usually was. Nudging my dad, I pointed out his jersey, and he responded with just a contented sigh.

“That kid always manages to get it untucked. I don’t understand.”

Shaking my head, I laughed along with him. Danny always would do this, but I was just excited that his shoes were still tied. He always managed to run around with the laces whipping around, causing my mom to have a heart attack that he would face plant into the grass.

His wild blond hair whipped around as he beamed at us with his crooked front teeth. “Go, Danny!”

His smile grew even wider until the ball was thrown in and he went right to work trying to pass to his teammates. As usual, they all ran towards the ball creating a giant mass of five year olds
attempting to kick the ball, but mostly missing. These games were hilarious, but I always loved seeing their faces when they scored. Danny hadn’t scored yet this season, but all the other kids’ faces always lit up, the pure joy only a five year old could have. I couldn’t wait to see Danny score, I knew that it would be an amazing moment.

It wasn’t Danny’s day though, although he did have an assist. We had to hurry to the car though to miss the rain that started right as the game ended, plus I still had English homework to finish up before my class tomorrow, but it was hard to even think about *The Catcher in the Rye*, with Danny talking nonstop about his game, he was a little fireball, but one I never wanted to leave.

One Day Later

Red and blue lights flashed, the sirens blared throughout the town. Sounding like a haunting melody, they surrounded the school as the cries and the yells joined in the song. This high school was no longer two hours away from the bells signaling the weekend, instead they would never be heard again by six students.

Simply sitting in their English class, their young lives ripped apart by steel shots from someone who never should have held their lives in their hands, yet with the power from a legally obtained weapon.

Maya, Ben, Sam, Gracie, Lee, Henry
Six lives, six children, six kids simply sitting and talking about *The Catcher and the Rye*. They’ll never finish it, they’ll never return home, they’ll never see another day.

Never again will they dance in the rain.

Never again will they sip green tea and make their mom wait up for them to go to sleep.

Never again will they get the game winning spike and eat fries without a care in the world.

Never again will they watch Danny and one day see his first goal.

Never again.
Hope Is The Thing With Feathers

Clarissa Halpryn

I

Being young, the world is new.
It’s full of new experiences and ideas, and we do little else but search for an explanation; for understanding of it all.

I think that’s why we invented superstitions, like wishing on shooting stars—or eyelashes, or candles on birthday cakes, or coins thrown into little ponds.

As a child, we believe that anything we wish will come true. What else can we believe, we don’t know enough, we haven’t experienced enough, for the truth to be anything different, and the people who do know, who have experienced, tell us it is so? They keep our small worlds full of wonder and joy, full of hope.

II

But people aren’t children forever, everyone grows up, and as we do, our worlds expand to include disappointment and sadness, and fear.

We want to grow up, though. We want to be seen as grown-ups are, and grown-ups don’t make wishes on shooting stars, or eyelashes, or birthday candles, or coins in pools. We’re stuck—wanting so desperately to grow up, so we give up on wishes—on anything that seems childish.

Fifth grade isn’t the end-all be-all, however, and even in as little as six years, our worlds can expand to include much more than we thought ever really existed. We start to realize that maybe we can allow ourselves a wish or two. Not because it isn’t childish, but because maybe childish doesn’t mean bad. Maybe it means exactly what it is: common of children.

They’re young. Their world is new and tiny as they slowly learn of the gigantic one that surrounds them. Their people who know, their people who have experienced, tell them to make a wish on a shooting star, or an eyelash, or the candles on their birthday cake, or coins they toss into little ponds, and they do it without restraint. There is no doubt in their minds, and their capacity to wish, to love, to hope, knows no end. The concept of being “childish” means nothing to them; childhood is all they’ve ever known.

Perhaps that’s exactly why they’re told to wish. Because their people who know, who’ve experienced, want them to wish, and to love, and to hope without shame for as long as they possibly can. Because maybe it is the deepest desire of those people to be able to wish and love and hope like that again, and they wish, they hope, that this child might never lose that ability.

Grade Twelve
III
Maybe we’re wrong. We convince ourselves not to wish or to hope because the grown-ups don’t, and we lose our concrete belief in the veracity of dreams and wishes. But as we grow more, we are faced with challenges that were unimaginable to us, and little by little, the idea of a dream, of a wish, creeps back into our psyche.

We become desperate as reality fails us. We long for the times in our lives when we didn’t know that it took more than stars or eyelashes or candles or coins for things to happen. But we cannot tell anyone, because it would be childish to admit that we still make wishes on these silly things, and we are still trying to be grown-up. So we scoff at making wishes. When a shooting star passes overhead, we point it out as an interesting astronomical occurrence. When we spot a fallen eyelash, we brush it aside. When birthday cakes are placed before us, we smile at the people around us. When we see pools full of coins, we pass right by.

At least, that’s what others see. It’s what children see.

They can’t hear our thoughts, in those split seconds, full of our dreams and love. They don’t know the terrifying ache that exists in those moments as we resist the urge to scream our wishes at the top of our lungs because it has been so exhausting to hold it in.

No one makes a wish on anything, not stars, not eyelashes, not candles, not coins, if there isn’t a part of them that wants it to come true.

IV
Maybe we don’t believe in it, not really, not fully. Not like we did when we were young.

But we hope.

Perhaps dreams and hopes
Are just tiny rebellions
Against our own selves
PEARLS

CLARISSA HALPYN

i.
Complicated.

Her wide array of feelings over the past month condensed into a single world.

Complicated.

It was all, always so very complicated.

She was in charge now. That’s what they said, hidden among the jokes about having ice cream for breakfast and abolishing bed time. It was clear; she now had a new role.

Despite what everyone told her, she wasn’t grown up. She was just the opposite. She was still discovering the world and her place in it.

Was.

Perhaps the universe had had enough of her musing and decided it would simply give her a place so she might stop asking. She wished she never learned to speak.

She was cleaning, because she now had to, when she came across the journal. She tried to tell herself that she shouldn’t look in it, that her mother, even now, deserved privacy. But her curiosity got the best of her, as always. How many times had she been scolded for it? She looked anyway.

There was a picture tucked in the front cover. She traced the outline of her own, young face that grinned a gap-tooth smile back up at her. It had been taken before the boys were born, when it was just her.

Short notes, thoughts, and plans littered the pages. A small scribble dated 15 years ago informed her that her first word had been ‘mama.’

She continued to flick through it, pausing to look at the pictures scattered throughout, ones she’d never seen before despite being the subject of them all. She stopped on one from when she was four. She was standing in her room, smiling at herself in the mirror as she twirled in her brand-new dress. It was the first time she picked her own clothes, and she’d been so happy.
There was a note on the page next to it:

She told me she wanted to be just like me when she grows up.
What a horrible fate for a little girl.

ii.

She blinked once, twice, three times. It wasn’t long after that, only a year or two, that she remembered refusing to put on a dress.

People told her that she was growing up. She hated it.

And it wasn’t just dresses. It was princesses and jewelry and pink and glitter. It was girlhood.

If it wasn’t for the corner of the picture sticking out of the pages, she would’ve just put it down and walked away. It was her first day of second grade. She bore a noticeably smaller smile.

That wasn’t her favorite year. She couldn’t tell you why, though. All she remembered was being angry.

Grief. That was the year she had learned that word. What was she mourning? What had she lost?

It wasn’t long after that picture had been taken that her mother had gotten pregnant again. That she could remember clearly. It was weird to her, from a biological standpoint. She didn’t understand how there could be something living inside of her mom. She also didn’t understand why it had made her mother so incredibly sad, all the time.

She remembered wondering if she had made her mother sad, too. Did she look at the ground with tired eyes and wander the house in silence then too? She wanted her mother to be happy, it was all she’d ever wanted.

There was a sort of ice that settled over her mother’s gaze whenever they locked eyes. It had slowly crept in as she’d grown up, and it scared her. But she didn’t know how to thaw it.

Neat handwriting accompanied this picture as well:

She’s beginning to hate herself. I can see it starting. At first it was the dresses, but I can tell that it’s the whole thing. She’s starting to dislike being her. A woman. Is it some kind of generation curse? Did I pass it on to her like a genetic disease?

This pregnancy is draining. It’s hard to get up in the morning, harder than it was when I had her.

Grade Twelve
It’s hard to look at her. All I can see is me. I want her to be so much more. She deserves it. She deserves to live the life I wanted. She deserves to break the cycle. I can’t believe it’s taken me this long to understand, but I don’t even know why I hated my mother in the first place. This is exhausting, watching her fall into the same traps I did. My poor little girl. The worst part is, I can feel myself treating her just like I was treated. God, I don’t know how to stop it. I just hope she can forgive me someday.

iii.

It was getting harder to breathe. She tried to stifle the tears, to hold them back. She failed.

There was never a single part of her that truly hated her mother. There never had been. There was, however, a wall of resentment that had built itself higher and higher as she grew up. An air of disappointment hung in every interaction. She had no idea why, and at first she was too afraid to ask, but it turned into resignation. She was just so tired of trying to figure it out.

Tears dripped down her face as she watched herself grow up through her mother’s eyes.

It was horrible, reading her mother’s thoughts. Seeing how she believed she’d let her daughter down, how her daughter hated her, how her daughter was just like her.

She was getting older now, and she couldn’t believe that was how she truly looked, with forced smiles and tight shoulders. Was that why her mother believed she hated her? Was that really how she looked at her favorite person?

She’s so strong. I wish she didn’t have to be.

I can’t let this thought sit in my head anymore, but I can only hope anyone who possibly reads this won’t hold it against me.

I’ve felt, for many years now, like I was hiding something from her. This sense of guilt would accompany any time I told her that I loved her. I do love her, I love her so much. But she is me and I cannot say that to myself because it would be a lie. It’s just so hard to accept the fact that maybe I’m not deserving of the self-hatred I’ve subjected myself to for so long because when I look at her, I see an intelligent and beautiful and strong young woman that is capable and has so much potential.

I have to treat her better. Because she deserves it. Because I deserved it. Because I owe it to her, and to myself, to let her become that person that I always wanted to be.

I told her I loved her after I had this revelation, and it felt like a weight was lifted off of my chest. I only hope she believed me.
She closed the journal.
Wiping her eyes, she began to walk towards her room. She needed her keys and her wallet. She would wear her mother’s pearls and a skirt to the funeral.
Wintering
Brenna Schnitzke

Your words are growing
in pots in the pits
of my stomach
& maybe that’s why
I cannot forget
the way my name bloomed
from your mouth
& grew gardens into mine
Maybe you are something
I am supposed to remember
Keep you rooted
to my shoulders & carry you
barefooted through the cold
Like our love is seasonal
& the promise of spring
comes with the return

of you too
It was a cold winter that flew by and bloomed into a warm spring. He’d noticed life becoming harsher the lonelier he was. There was no particular reason he slashed his wife’s throat and buried her corpse underneath an already dead John R. Hancock, soldier in Vietnam. He just did it. Maybe it was the cold winter, maybe it made his brain foggy. Maybe it was because he felt entitled to the space underneath the grave, since he dug it in the first place, making barely any more than minimum wage. Either way, she was dead, and that made it a lot easier to talk to himself while watching sports on the tube TV. He was indifferent to her death, but disappointed by the lack of companionship. Maybe, I should get a dog.

Swinging the trailer door open he threw five cans of Bud Light onto the ground outside. The trailer was cold, despite the heat outside. He thought maybe his presence was making it cold. Where flowers used to bloom around his trailer, there was none, just earth, dirt and mud. He had no intention of cleaning up the beer cans later. He looked quickly at the gravestones that cluttered the field adjacent to his trailer. A job is a job, he thought, but thankfully he had today off. He’d be lying if he didn’t admit his back hurt from digging. The taller you are, the more you have to bend. And he was 6’4. Back inside, he picked up a red solo cup on the kitchen table and spit chewing tobacco in it. It felt like an anvil was lifted off his shoulders, and he felt like it didn’t matter who he was anymore. Who would see? There was a reckless knock on the trailer door. Begrudgingly, he firmly put down the Solo cup and waddled to open it.

“George Mortensen, you’re under arrest.” He was now gazing down the barrel of a gun. George was suddenly delighted,

“Bobby, got damn! Where you been the past…” he started counting in the air, “six months!”

Bobby coughed lightly and basically fell into the trailer. “George… you know I ain’t tryna dog ya but this place smells like…” It smells like failure. George knew exactly what he meant. It was a distinct smell but indescribable, it’s pungent and eats at your nostrils. It engulfs you until you can hardly bear it. Everything had gotten so much worse since the last time he’d seen Bobby. The other smell could be the dead rotting squirrel corpse in the wall. George spit more chewing tobacco into the cup. That’s probably it.

“So where’s the missus hiding?” George was expecting the question, but his eyes glazed over when he heard it.

“She’s visiting her mother. She’ll be gone for a while, if you’re planning on staying here.” His wife, Barb, didn’t like Bobby too much. Another thing she was wrong about, always wrong. He never minded, because she was so beautiful. But looks fade. And then you’re left with the useless existence of a significant other. Bobby sprawled out on the couch after setting the TV on his channel.
“Nope. Not stayin’ just visiting. I bet things get lonely round here withoutcha wife, right?” George rolled this around in his head.

“Yeah. Yeah things do get a bit lonely.” Bobby looked unsympathetic, in fact, he was completely consumed by the television. Nobody understood him. Not his wife, not Bobby, no one. He began to feel sorry for himself once more, similarly to when he first buried her under the soldier. No one would find her, no one would ever see her again. George could relate to that. Nobody ever truly saw him.

“Bobby, you know, you can stay for as long as you need. I know sometimes—”

Bobby jumped up and screamed, “NOOOOO! HE COULD’VE SCORED! WHAT AN IDIOT! GODDAMN IT!” George flinched at his sudden explosion. Was he invisible? This kindness he paid forward, met with complete incompetence, it didn’t quite infuriate George. George was never mad, he always kept his composure. Some would say he’s stoic. Maybe he had an inflated sense of importance to Bobby, to his wife. Always trying to be nice, but never getting anything in return. He felt isolated in a room with other warm bodies.

George’s gaze locked on Bobby. Memories flashed in his mind, years of his best friend flying by, the first time they met in 1998, the first time they stole alcohol from his mom’s locked case in her bedroom, the time Bobby got arrested for shooting cats in the neighborhood with a bb gun and took all the blame so George wouldn’t get in trouble, even though it was his idea. George didn’t know what overtook him, once again, there he was. Standing still, body twitching with an odd sensation, an urge. It was a familiar feeling this time. A hammer he’d lazily flung onto the kitchen table (along with much of his other random trash) was catching his eye. Too messy, it’d take too long.

Without a second thought, George grabbed the gun Bobby had irresponsibly tossed on the kitchen counter and swiftly brought it down on Bobby’s neck. Almost instantly Bobby was out, and George had little time to act. He was surrounded by a dark, cool night as he dragged Bobby’s unconscious body down the trailer steps and out into the field of stones that had accumulated over the years. People die. Look at all these sad saps. That’s the way it goes. It’s inevitable. But Bobby wasn’t dead yet. George would have too difficult of a time killing him the way he did his wife, so instead he buried him unconscious, knowing he’d soon join the others along side him.

He felt like he needed more justification for this. Bobby would’ve found out eventually right? That his wife wasn’t coming back from her mother’s? Her mother who’d been dead for 13 years? No, he would’ve left again and it would’ve been easy to cover up her lack of presence once again. Oddly, this lack of justification came with no guilt, and maybe George did it all for no reason. He still couldn’t figure out why he did it to his wife either. It was just a matter of time before Bobby’s raging alcoholism got the better of him anyway. George just sped up the process. In a probably less painful manner, too. He picked up his shovel. Maybe I’m not such a bad guy after all, he thought. George made his way back to the trailer, leaving a fresh grave and lines in the dirt from his dragging shovel. His wife was clearly miserable, and Bobby was a complete basket case. He went inside and got a beer from the refrigerator. These were mercy kills. He turned on the TV, and slumped.
down in the same spot Bobby had sat a few hours ago. Or maybe, he pondered, he just… did it. Maybe it was just like that sometimes. Maybe it was all simpler than he was making it. Maybe not everything pointless is not worth doing. The silence in the trailer became deafening, despite the TV’s background noise. He sighed, lonely again.

Yeah, I’m definitely getting a dog.
ANYTHING FOR MY LITTLE GIRL
JAYLEE ZEIGLER

Most girls dream of being a ballerina or a doctor, my dream was to be a mother. As I grew up, I imagined what my child would be like at my age. Every fight with my abusive dad, my mom coming home drunk, and being taken away by foster care gave me a hundred reasons to not let my future child go through what I did. When I saw those two blue lines at fifteen, I would do anything to protect my child. My life was a shitshow and thousands upon thousands of suicidal thoughts raged through my head. I told my dad that I was pregnant and he pulled a gun on me. In the back of my mind, I wished that he’d pull the trigger but he was too much of a coward. Finding out she would be a girl made me realise I would do anything in my power to keep her safe.

As I watched her grow, I saw a little more and more of me in her every day. Being a single mother came with financial burdens. Though we weren’t as well off as others, I would give her baby anything she wanted. She would be the better version of me. Working two jobs and providing for my child was difficult but I knew that she deserved a better life. In fourth grade when she told me she wanted to be a teacher one day, I was ecstatic because she had an idea for her future. I tried the best I could to hide her from the cruel life I had to live so she could live hers. As high school came around, I knew my little girl would no longer be wrapped around my finger. She would enter a new world that would require her to push away from me. Though I was excited for her, I was upset that she was not as grateful as I expected her to be considering I never had those chances. It felt as though I was just a stepping stone in her life and all the work I had put in suddenly was not as appreciated. It had been me and her through everything. Now, the little girl that used to prance around in princess dresses and wear my highest heels would be becoming a woman.

I believe I raised a beautiful and poised girl. She was top of her class, extremely smart, and athletic. I knew that she was on the right track to being successful in life. She had a good group of friends that she spent most of her time with and though it killed me that she no longer needed me, I knew she would want me less if I held her tight. The first time she brought a boy home, she promised she would be smart. I always reminded her that in order to become a teacher, she must stay on the same path she had been on all her life. I did not like the boy that knocked on my door. He smelt of cigarettes, dressed poorly, and talked as if he had not been educated. I did my best to not judge a book by its cover, but with him, I felt as though I had no options. When he came over, I did my best to be polite, but with him, it was too hard. I tried explaining my feelings to her but she would listen. Simple conversations had turned into raging and anger. He had no respect for my daughter and was putting my daughter on the wrong track. I had tried to talk to her but she was in too deep. Nothing could take her away from this boy. When her 17th birthday came around, she came to me and told me that she was pregnant. I was furious at the cigarette-smoking, illiterate boy she had been dating because I knew he would do the same as her father did. Leave.

In a furious rage, I showed up at his doorstep. Behind my back was a .44 caliber I planned
to use. When he opened the door, I made my way through his house and there my daughter was, bewildered as to why I was at her boyfriend’s home. I ordered her to stand. The cigarette boy dashed past me and held onto her closely. “After every fucking thing I have done for you and you throw it away for a piece of shit? I did everything I could to make you a better me and you just throw it away.”

“Your mother is psycho, you don’t need her, you deserve me I will give you everything” her boyfriend exclaimed.”

“Don’t you dare give her a false reality, I gave her room to become her own person but she looks just like me. Young, stupid, and broke, and you will just dig her hole deeper!” In a fit of rage, I reached behind my back and pulled the trigger. “I saved you, baby, I saved you! You will never have to hurt as mommy did.” I could not bear to see my baby girl go down the same rabbit hole I did at her age so I did what I wish someone did to me seventeen years ago. I threw the gun in my pocket and knelt down. The boy ran in behind me, in shock as to what I just had done. I dropped to my knees in shock at what I did. As I looked at my child, bloody and departed, I remembered that I could not live without her. I took off the safety, put the gun up to my head, and insured, that I would be with my little girl forever.
PARTS FOR SALE

KYLE SCHAMBACH

Grade Twelve
Connecticut Student Writers Winners and Honorable Mentions
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# Silver Medalists

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| Natalie Sheehy   | Bugbee Elementary School | West Hartford | Danielle Herbertte | 5 | Non-Fiction | *Zooming in Mexico*!
| Cameron Stanciu  | Greenwich Academy       | Greenwich     | Dana Johansen     | 5 | Non-Fiction | *The Worst Year of My Life* |
| Emilie Mathieu   | Braeburn Elementary School | West Hartford | Danielle Herbertte | 5 | Poetry      | *To My Eyes* |
| Sophie Vadasdi   | Greenwich Academy       | Greenwich     | Dana Johansen     | 5 | Poetry      | *Snow Falling* |
| Julian Benmosche | Coleytown Middle School | Westport      | Valerie Jarret    | 6 | Art         | *A Drop of Color (A Closer Look at What Cement Actually Looks Like!)* |
| Anaya Chumpitazi | Ledyard Middle School   | Gales Ferry   | Rebecca Snay      | 6 | Art         | *Making a Splash!!* |
| Hannah Haron     | Bi-Cultural Hebrew Academy | Stamford      | Laura Miller      | 6 | Art         | *Poppy* |

Silver Medalists
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Silver Medalists
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| Grayson King | Glastonbury High School | Glastonbury | Michelle DiMeo | 11 | Poetry | Mea Cygnus |
| Lauren Tedford | Rockville High School | Vernon | Victoria Nordlund | 11 | Poetry | Garden of Flowers |
| Kaylen | Rockville High School | Vernon | Victoria Nordlund | 11 | Poetry | Obituary of a Living Person |
| Charlotte Monty | The Morgan School | Clinton | Leslie Chausse | 12 | Art | Valley Home |
| JC Castro | Rockville High School | Vernon | Victoria Nordlund | 12 | Fiction | Two Weeks Have passed and it happened again |
| Abigail Lawrence | Wamogo Regional High School | Litchfield | Carly Tutolo | 12 | Fiction | A Day in the woods |
| Cierra Martinotti | Wamogo Regional High School | Litchfield | Carly Tutolo | 12 | Fiction | Echo Of Peace |
| Madison Stevens | Wamogo Regional High School | Litchfield | Carly Tutolo | 12 | Fiction | The Lullaby |</p>
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Honorable
## Teacher Awards

### Platinum Teachers

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<tr>
<td>Anthony Millard</td>
<td>Timothy Edwards Middle School</td>
<td>South Windsor</td>
<td>6 &amp; 8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Victoria Nordlund</td>
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<td>Vernon</td>
<td>9, 10, 11 &amp; 12</td>
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<tr>
<td>John Stinchon</td>
<td>Timothy Edwards Middle School</td>
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<td>Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts</td>
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