# Table of Contents

## Elementary School, Grades K-5 Poetry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Flowers Around The Mountain</td>
<td>Juliette Courtin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>What I Think of When I Fly</td>
<td>William Space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Volcano</td>
<td>Mason Burhoe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Ready to Rest</td>
<td>Gabrielle Fisher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Snowflakes</td>
<td>Cassidy Gemme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>The Sky, The Sea And Me</td>
<td>Caitlin Devanney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Jesus</td>
<td>Eric Li</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Pink Doesn’t Stink!</td>
<td>Claire Tenney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I Am From</td>
<td>Madeleine Pascavis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>The Necklace by Your Heart</td>
<td>Matthew Weisgerber</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Peacock Feather</td>
<td>Audrey Zhang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>So Much Depends Upon a School</td>
<td>Maryn McConkey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>My Street</td>
<td>Sequoia Rawls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Firefighters</td>
<td>Alexa Scott</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>An Acorn’s Perspective</td>
<td>Emma Lavery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>The Mermaid</td>
<td>Bronwyn Mogck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Poetry</td>
<td>Annabelle Strong</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Elementary School, Grades K-5 Prose

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Pretty Bride</td>
<td>Kyleigh Lapsis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>The Bad Frog</td>
<td>Jazias Ortiz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>The Candy Cane Left Out In The Snow</td>
<td>Amelia Salazar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>The Five Senses Garden</td>
<td>Sophie Teresa Araque-Liu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>My Friend the Penguin</td>
<td>Delaney Grimaldi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>On the Beach</td>
<td>Nicholas LaRosa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>The Frog and the Tadpole</td>
<td>Olivia Boling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Turtle Shell</td>
<td>Adrianna Graul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>A Farm Story</td>
<td>Patricia Kellogg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>The Mystery at the Cafeteria</td>
<td>Ella Consla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>The Ancient Aztecs</td>
<td>Ethan Hamlin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>A Dramatic Situation</td>
<td>Natalie Wong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Baseball Girl</td>
<td>Catalina Costache</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>A Long Journey for Firewood</td>
<td>Noah Hanka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Be Strong</td>
<td>Cecily Meehan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Iron Showdown</td>
<td>Pei Chao Zhou</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>A Smile From the Clouds</td>
<td>Gabriel Dick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>The Farm</td>
<td>Ian Kamperschroer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Middle School, Grades 6-8 Poetry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Life is Different Without You</td>
<td>Allison McCormick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>My Perfect Place</td>
<td>Mia Pasquariello</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Light</td>
<td>Kaleigh Perkins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Dear Shadow</td>
<td>Sofia di Tommaso</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td>Chelsea Lorenzano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>The Pain of War</td>
<td>Austin Reynolds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Serenity in my Heart</td>
<td>Kaitie Dilan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Middle School, Grades 6-8 Prose

43  Grandma’s First Time Playing Laser Tag  Brianna Carney
45  Camden Yards – The Experience  Thomas Schlotter
46  The Ride  Paige Stickel
47  First Beach Trip of the Summer  Kate Luongo
48  Call me Lizzie  Clare Meehan
50  A Diamond in the Rough  Pritika Seshadri
51  When it’s All Said and Done  Maia Czaikowski
53  How Music Saved My Life  Kyle Kowalchik
54  Distances  Saskia Martinez

High School, Grades 9-12 Poetry

56  Sextet  Hannah Carpino
58  The Moment  Matthew DelMastro
59  Ease  Sofia Melian-Morse
61  The Surviving Race  Nora Greenstein-Biondi
62  Longing  Ryan Bonacum
62  Worth the Trouble  Briana McDermott
63  Tongue as Wide as Whispers  Hannah Boulier
64  Aimless  Hannah Gerhard
66  Collision  Lauren Silver
66  Life in Red Lipstick  Madison Gretzky
68  ∞ (Infinity)  Ashley Pecorelli
69  Hand in Hand  Elizabeth Ta

High School, Grades 9-12 Prose

71  Smoke or Ghosts or Memories  Hannah Carpino
72  The Poet of the Lake  Anthony Flores
73  The Sixth Sense  Cassie Martin
76  Silky White Gowns  Rebecca Kaufman
78  Enslavement  Christiane Lee
81  Distant  Skyley Parizek
84  Unrequited  Megan Chabre
85  Cold  Hannah Gerhard
86  Making Choices  Karely Vega
87  One Flame  Jenny Mears
89  #rant about my generation and @Twitter.  Chris Nicastro
91  Lessons from the Club  Amy Tomasso

94  Honorable Mentions

96  Teachers of Published Authors
Foreword

As readers poured over the entries for the 2012 Connecticut Student Writers magazine, they were struck by a persistent theme—no power. Tropical Storm Irene and Winter Storm Alfred left their marks on young authors from across Connecticut who wrote about the pleasure of board games with their families by candlelight, the nuisance of no running water, the joy of an extended summer vacation, the discomfort of a cold house, the exhilaration of building a snowman in October, and the greatest hardship of all—no technology.

There was no dearth of power in the 1000 plus writings submitted for publication however. Essays galvanized readers to action, poems crackled with emotion, and stories conducted us to different worlds and times.

The Connecticut Writing Project congratulates the young writers whose works are published in the 2012 Connecticut Student Writers Magazine and thanks the parents and teachers who generate the sparks of creativity and love of writing.

Nadine Keane
Editor

We have been hearing a lot lately from politicians, journalists, and the public about the need to reform education. And while I don’t contradict the broad goals of improving education, I have taken odds with the pervasive emphasis lately on teacher effectiveness—or ineffectiveness, as the focus so often is. We have even heard from our own governor that all we apparently do is show up.

So I take odds with these so-called reformers because the teachers affiliated with the Connecticut Writing Project are some of the most effective, dedicated, committed teachers in the profession, as is evidenced here in the pages of Connecticut Student Writers. As in past years—23 of them, to be exact—we have received over 1,000 submissions of student writing from hundreds of teachers from throughout the state. Teachers who have taken the time and made the effort to step outside their narrow curricula and make time for creative and personal writing. Teachers who have made the effort to find an audience and a purpose for their students’ writing. Teachers who have taken the time to distribute and complete submission forms and chase after signatures. Teachers who care enough to make the extra effort to provide their students with meaningful, affirming experiences with literacy.

And so while the goal of this magazine is to celebrate student writing, I’d like to take a moment to carve out some space to celebrate the teachers who make this publication possible, from the editor and the co-editors, to the readers, and of course the dozens of teachers who submitted their students’ work. Thank you for doing so much more than show up to work each day. Thank you for the work you do to improve your students’ writing and to help them to fall in love with words and stories in ways that transcend the standardized tests and the sterile emphasis on job skills. Thank you for helping your students live richer lives through the world of words.

Jason Courtmanche
Connecticut Writing Project Director
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assistant Editors</th>
<th>Selection Committee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kelly Andrews-Babcock</td>
<td>Kelly Andrews-Babcock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laureen Anthony</td>
<td>Laureen Anthony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catherine Holdridge</td>
<td>Jane Cook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raymund Kasper</td>
<td>Joanne Gertler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth Kowal</td>
<td>Catherine Holdridge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex Rode</td>
<td>Raymund Kasper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marcia Rudge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle Vigue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Elementary School, Grades K-5 Poetry

Flowers Around The Mountain

Juliette Courtin
Annie E. Vinton Elementary School, Grade K

Flowers around the mountain
Smell like butter
Flowers around the mountain
Purple, yellow
Look like a rainbow
Standing still

What I Think of When I Fly

William Space
Annie E. Vinton Elementary School, Grade K

Stars
Snowman
Snowflakes
Snow on the ground
Airplane in the sky

I am thinking of seeing mom.
When I get down from the airplane,
We will play in the snow.

Volcano

Mason Burhoe
Latimer Lane Elementary School, Grade 1

The ground
Throwing up
Boiling, hot lava
A rumble
and
A shake
and

CABOOM!

The ground is
So mad
It bursts open!
Ready to Rest

**Gabrielle Fisher**  
*Frank M. Kearns Primary School, Grade 1*

The sunset rises  
Hot cocoa roasting warm  
Cool wind blows  
Burning wood breaks  
Branches shaking  
The warm cup in my hand  
The soft wool  
I smell the cup of hot cocoa  
I feel the fire  
I feel the soft blanket  
I’m ready to rest  
The blanket cuddles me  
I feel safe and warm  
I take a sip of my cup  
I close my eyes

Snowflakes

**Cassidy Gemme**  
*Frank M. Kearns Primary School, Grade 1*

I see icicles  
and snowflakes too  
I see different designs  
and silence too  
I touch snowflakes  
I taste snowflakes  
falling down  
and my brother comes  
with me  
to play

The Sky, The Sea, And Me

**Caitlin Devanney**  
*Anna Reynolds Elementary School, Grade 2*

In the sky, there is a butterfly  
And a twinkle in a fairy’s eye.  
As a dolphin swims around,  
He doesn’t make a sound.
A frog leaps at the bottom of the sea,
Then he looks at me!

Joyful
Excited to be king
Sad that they would kill him
Unites new people
Sets a happy new life in heaven

My brother said, “Pink stinks,” but I say, “It smells like Santa’s peppermint breath.”
My sister said, “Pink is boring,” but I said, “It is like the monkey cages at the fair.”
My dad said, “Pink is for babies!” but I said “It is a favorite for the elderly!”
My mom said, “When I was a baby, I had the most beautiful color pink shining from my eyelids, cheeks, and lips.”

That made me happy.

I am from the sunshine orange body
Short white tail – spotted with black
That clutches with pinching claws when scared
Of my brother, Ben’s lizard, “Lizard”

I am from soccer
Kicking my round pink, white, and blue soccer ball
Scoring goals
Hearing parents cheer

I am from Jon’s lizard, “Beardie”
Jon, my other brother
Beardie, grayish with a tail as long as a sapling
Pencil tipped spikes stick out of his stomach, but don’t hurt
Claws that don’t scratch
You can cup his body in your hand
With his face facing you, his tail goes past your fingertips

I am from pitch black nights
Twinkling stars painting pictures in the sky
Sparkling stars shining so bright looking like they will
Explode in silver, shiny glitter and
Rain down on the black streets and treetops

I am from nights that rain of light showers
Rain hitting my windows
Sounding like a famous orchestra playing their best song
Of soothing music

I am from the beach
Golden yellow sand that burns my bare feet
Clear waves that become one as they run to the shoreline like lightening
Seaweed sitting four steps from the edge of the sand tingles around my legs
As I run through it with my boogie board
Farther out, when my toes barely touch the sand
I wait for waves to push me closer to the glistening sand
Suddenly a wave with full force appears and pushes me through the seaweed

I am from horses
Their manes flying as they turn their heads
They run faster than the sound of symbols crashing
Horses are strong and graceful
They may seem scary, but they are not
Every bristle on a brush that brushes them is a symbol of care

I am from my best friend
Her brown hair shimmers in the light
We have sleepovers, put on makeup, and have a fashion show
We compete against Aiden
We do all of this in Chicago at my best friend’s house
My best friend Vaden

_The Necklace by Your Heart_

**Matthew Weisgerber**
_Sandy Hook Elementary School, Grade 3_

When the sun goes down
And the moon comes up
The necklace by your heart turns green
   Just
Like
Your
Eyes.
And when the moon goes down
And when the sun comes up
The necklace by your heart turns golden
Just
Like
Your
Smile.

Peacock Feather

*Audrey Zhang*

*Central District Elementary School, Grade 3*

Soft as cat fur,
Slender as a willow branch,
Green like an emerald,
Its golden eye shines
Like the sun.

A bright blue circle
Twinkled in the middle.
Delicate like a rose petal,
Light as air,
Wavy like tender leaves,
Blowing in the springtime wind.

*So Much Depends Upon a School*

*Maryn McConkey*

*Regional Multicultural Magnet School, Grade 4*

So much depends
upon
a school
filled with active brains
next to
the weekend’s empty thoughts

*My Street*

*Sequoia Rawls*

*Regional Multicultural Magnet School, Grade 4*

The burnt tires screech
my ears pound
a white, bright truck
moves on
with a honk
A car slows down
on the rocky road
“The light’s green,”
a passenger says.
It speeds quickly away,
turns onto Main Street
with a splash
of a rain puddle

Firefighters (September 11, 2011 — on the 10th anniversary of 9/11)

Alexa Scott
East Farms Elementary School, Grade 4

Flames
like lightning
Men
trudging
through soot
Water
like a heavy stream
Smoke
like a dusty cloud
Dirt
on sweaty faces
Pictures
are taken
Lives
are threatened
Some are frightened
Hoping
for the best
Saving
the rest
Risking lives
trying to stay alive

They think
the world
has come
to an end.
An Acorn’s Perspective

Emma Lavery
Barkhamsted Elementary School, Grade 5

A small, round acorn
falls off an oak tree
along with crimson, yellow and golden leaves
facing the immense world.
The earth changes from chilly to arctic.
Suddenly,
a gray squirrel
rushing from winter’s impending challenges,
picks the seed up
in a pouch in its cheeks
and carries the acorn
to a shallow hole in the ground.
It buries the nut in the soft, rich soil.
Winter comes,
the acorn is unprotected
except for its hardening green shell.
Months pass by
during the hard, frigid winter.
The pocket-sized morsel
struggles to survive.
Finally,
warm rays of sunlight
beam down on the seed,
now a growing sprout.
Hopeful.

The Mermaid

Bronwyn Mogck
Squadron Line Elementary School, Grade 5

The waves are capped in blue gray foam
Upon them rides a girl all alone.

The waves take her captive in their murky deeps
Bones in the bottom, the ocean plays for keeps.

But only bones that slowed the girl
Lay on the sand, white as pearl.

She tells her story
As she strokes a new grown tail.
Poetry

Annabelle Strong
Simsbury Central Elementary, Grade 5

Poetry is an emotion expressed with a pen
Poetry is a passion from within.
Poetry is love shown with rhymes.
Poetry is a garden of sweet, sweet times.
Poetry is a story without a cage.
Poetry is a song within a page.
Poetry is a feeling expressed with rhyme.
Poetry is a treasury throughout all time.
Poetry is will that can make a moment freeze.
Best of all, it’s a cloth that the writer weaves.
Pretty Bride

Kyleigh Lapsis  
Annie E. Vinton Elementary School, Grade K

One day, the pretty bride wanted to go on a walk. She loved to smell flowers. She also liked to pick all the beautiful leaves. She also loved to catch snowflakes in the winter time. The pretty bride would dance in the park. She would dance in the park with a fancy prince. She loved to kiss him. They got married again.

The Bad Frog

Jazias Ortiz  
Annie E. Vinton Elementary School, Grade K

The bad frog eats people. The bad frog steals brains. He will eat glue. He lives in the woods. When you go into the woods, he will try to eat you. DO NOT GO INTO THE WOODS!

The Candy Cane Left Out In The Snow

Amelia Salazar  
Annie E. Vinton Elementary School, Grade K

There was a naughty candy cane. It sneaks outside when his mommy says, “Please stay inside the Gingerbread house.” When his mom says, “No cookies,” he takes the whole bag. When his mom says, “Please go to bed,” he stays up all night and plays Candy Land. One snowy night the naughty candy cane sneaks out and he gets lost in the dark. The next day, a little girl playing in the snow finds him and brings him home.

The Five Senses Garden

Sophie Teresa Araque-Liu  
East Farms Elementary School, Grade 1

One day my class and I went to the five senses garden. I saw monarch butterflies flying in the sunshine with the bright light of the sun glittering on them making them look like golden birds. The colorful flowers made it look like sunset had fallen from the sky. Brown buds were blooming. There was a plant that had soft leaves that felt like a lamb. No wonder it is called Lamb’s Ear. Yellow and black bees circled around me. And best of all, there was a pond filled with goldfish swimming around. Some of my friends say there were turtles too. I did not think so. When my teacher said, “Time to go!” I was a little sad. But then, I remembered that we might go again.
My Friend the Penguin

Delaney Grimaldi
Frank M. Kearns Primary School, Grade 1

Your face is blue. You eyes are purple. You smell like fish. You are my friend. You are nice. You are a penguin like me. We are good friends. We both have the same friends like the narwhal and the polar bear. Your Mom is funny. You waddle. I never get mad at you. You also eat crayfish. Your Mom gives you the fish. You like to slide on your belly. You like to swim. You live in Antarctica. It is an icy and snowy place. It is one of the coldest places. It is freezing. When you get cold you huddle together with me. There are different sizes of penguins. There are thousands of us. They are big and small. My favorite friend is you. There is not much to do in Antarctica but penguins have fun anyway. No flowers grow in Antarctica. It is not too bright where it is cold. There is not a lot of color. It is almost all white. We will always be friends if you want. I hope you say yes! I say goodbye. It is time for dinner. See you at penguin school tomorrow.

On the Beach

Nicholas LaRosa
Philip R. Smith Elementary School, Grade 1

One day I was sitting at the beach. I saw a seashell beside me and it started talking to me. It said, “Follow me.” I was scared. The shell walked into the water so I followed it. All of the fish were talking in the water so I said hello. They said hello back. I was happy they said hello. It made me less scared. I jumped in the water and landed on a blue seahorse. It was fun! I was shocked how fast it went. Then a flounder came by and told me how to not get caught by a fisherman. He said one of the fish did get caught because it did not listen. I saw a fishing line near me, so I swam as fast as a shark and got away. Next a crab came and showed me what to eat so I would not be hungry. After that a whale told me to stay away from boats so the motor wouldn’t cut me. I started feeling upset and missed my family. When all of a sudden I was lifted up, swoosh, a big dolphin carried me back to shore. On the beach, I woke up and looked around. This was all a dream! Gosh, I miss the talking fish!

The Frog and the Tadpole

Olivia Boling
Anna Reynolds Elementary School, Grade 2

My friends and I were having a sleep over on a foggy Saturday night when a noise coming from outside woke us all up. In our pajamas and slippers, we went outside to figure out where the noise was coming from. As we walked to the pond across from my house the noise got louder and louder. When we got to the pond and saw a frog on a lily pad, we knew where the noise was coming from. It was a little frog, all green and slimy, and we couldn't believe all that noise was coming from this one little frog. All of a sudden, the little frog saw a fly and snatched it with its sticky tongue, as he swallowed it his eyes blinked because that's how frogs swallow I told my friends. Out of nowhere, a raccoon saw the frog and at the same time
the frog saw the raccoon and the frog jumped a long distance into the grass turning him camouflage. We couldn't see the frog anymore but we did hear more noises. We looked around and couldn't find where the noise was coming from even though the noise was growing louder and louder. When we looked in the water, we saw a least 70 frogs fighting over one fly, then 69 more flies came so every frog got one fly. In the corner of my eye I saw baby tadpoles; so did the raccoon and in a flash the raccoon was eating the tadpoles. One of the tadpoles lived, it was a girl tadpole. We took her home where she would be safe from her predators. By the next morning she had already grown her front legs. After my friends and I ate breakfast and went to the park. When we came back, the tadpole's tail was gone. We played all day and stayed up until 9:00 at night and we fell asleep on the couch watching TV. When we woke up the next morning the tadpole was a frog. She had babies, who also had babies so I always had tadpoles for pets.

Turtle Shell

Adrianna Graul
Ledyard Center Elementary School, Grade 2

Many moons ago the turtle did not look like the way he does now. The turtle did not carry his home on his back. He did not have a shell. The turtle was a sad creature because he was always lonely. He was lonely because he had no way of protecting himself from weather or other animals. The turtle was as slow as the slowest river and as quiet as two tip toeing feet. The turtle was the color green like the green in lima beans. His skin was soft and was wrinkly as a silver rock. The turtle wandered for shelter day and night. He had found a humongous rock shaped like a fat pencil without a tip to protect him but it was not good shelter. The depressed and lonely turtle felt worried that he would not find a shelter ever. On a hot summer day, the lonely turtle found a man painting the jungle so the turtle went under his stool. The sun was not hitting his wrinkly green skin anymore. He felt happier now that he had found the right shelter. Suddenly, the man saw the turtle. The man was allergic to turtles! When the turtle saw the man, he slowly tried to run away. But the turtle was so slow that he could not get away before the man started to sneeze! The man sneezed on the turtle and boogers came flying out of his nose. The boogers landed on the turtle’s back. The turtle kept on walking until he was far away from the sneezing man. He had walked for a long time. He felt so tired that he needed to rest. He quickly fell asleep. The next day when he woke up he noticed that the boogers had hardened. He now had a shell! He was so proud of his new home that he invited some animals from the jungle to a party. The monkey, the lion, the jaguar, and a cheetah all came and congratulated him. He now had found new friends and he was not lonely anymore. So if you see a turtle with a little bit of boogers just remember that is how the turtle got his shell.

A Farm Story

Patricia Kellogg
Squadron Line Elementary School, Grade 2

One perfect, breezy day, I opened the door of my Aunt's house. The door creaked as I stood outside. The wind rolled on my face like I was a roller coaster. Betsy followed and hollered,
"Yea!" My Aunt Porscha followed me and Betsy and told us that we could feed and pet the animals. I jumped for joy. The food was in a bag. First, I fed the donkeys. The food was small and crunchy. Inside, the donkey was covered with dirt. It tickled when the donkey touched my hand with its mouth.

When I started to pet her, I noticed her fur was as soft as a blanket.

I was ready to go on to the next animal, until I heard I was going to the chickens. I was scared they would bite my fingers, but I had to try. Aunt Porscha helped me like she knew. Instead of hurting, it tickled. I was jolly that it didn't hurt. The chickens were actually cute and fun. I lifted my head for breath. Then, Aunt Porscha said, "Next, we are going to the goats."

I was excited to feed the goats. I wanted to run and hug the goats because they were baby goats. I felt so good to be feeding a black and white baby. I jumped and laughed and clapped! I ran up and started feeding the goat. Its horns just popped out of its head. The brown goat house stood as still as a rock. The nature all around us swished in the wind. The trees in the background waved as I fetched the baby goat. It tickled. My feet itched in the soft grass. My hair was in my eyes. The sun was in my eyes, too. But, I didn't care. I was loving it! All I wanted was to be a goat. I loved their cute little faces sparkled in the sun. The brown dirt was like candles lit. Everything seemed to dance (except the house). The bright yellow sun sparkled like jewels. I was thinking about lunch. "The sun is so hot," I said. I was also thinking about what my new teacher, Mrs. Warren, would be like.

I was looking in the goat's eyes when Aunt Porscha said, "Lunch time!" Now I was a professional farmer.

"Let's eat," I said. I was happy and sad, but felt fresh like a flower.

The Mystery at the Cafeteria

Ella Consla
Tashua Elementary School, Grade 3

Chapter 1: The Cafeteria
Growl! It was Monday and time for lunch. Amber's stomach kept on growling as she walked down the hallway towards the cafeteria. But something seemed wrong as Amber got nearer to the cafeteria. There was no noise like the clinking of lunch boxes or the yelling of voices. Amber ran ahead to see what was going on. Wham! The wooden doors swung open. Amber stood and gasped, the whole entire cafeteria was covered with trees that had lunch boxes in their trunks and the floor had grass growing from it. "Hello is anybody here?" Amber called but all she heard was her echo. Where is everyone? Amber wondered. Then it hit her. What if all of the students had turned into the grass and trees that were all around her!

Chapter 2: Who?
Now the question was who could have done it? It certainly wasn't one of the students because they were all in the cafeteria. So it had to be somebody that was already in the cafeteria. Could it have been the lunch lady? Yes that had to be it! It must have been Lucile the lunch lady. Lucile was a woman who was dressed in brown patched rags. She had a very bad temper and did not like students. She also had a power that was very strong but only Amber knew about this. The power could turn one thing into another thing. For example, when Amber told Lucile that there was a spill, Lucile reached out to grab a washcloth but when she touched it, it turned into a milk carton! Amber hoped that nobody saw. Luckily she had never heard anyone
mention it. All Amber had to do now was to find Lucile. Where could she be? Amber needed to find her to turn the students back.

Chapter 3: Where?
Amber’s mind was racing. Where could she be? Within a minute she had searched the whole cafeteria but didn’t find the mysterious lunch lady. Amber made up her mind that she would check the classrooms instead. She tiptoed very quietly towards the doors and ran through them without stopping. Once Amber was out in the gloomy hallway she started thinking about which classroom to search first when she heard a loud shattering noise like broken glass. "What in the world?" she said under her breath. Amber hurried off towards the noise when finally she came to a halt in front of the language arts classroom.

Chapter 4: Why?
Could this be it? Could this be where Lucile was hiding? Could this be the answer to the problem? Amber slowly opened the gray shadow-like doors to find a female deer lying in the corner of the classroom with silvery tears trickling down her face. "Hello, who are you?" Amber said in a gentle voice so she wouldn't scare it. To her surprise the deer transformed herself into a woman that looked like Lucile. "Are you Lucile?" Amber asked in a shaky voice.

"Yes, I am Lucile" the used-to-be-deer replied.
"Then why did you do that to the cafeteria?" Amber asked gathering confidence the more words she said.

Chapter 5: The Truth
"I did it because I am really a deer that lives in a forest far away and I was getting homesick," Lucile said while sobbing endlessly.
"Oh it's alright," said Amber her mind racing rapidly for what to say to poor Lucile.
"I'm really sorry," sniffled the helpless lunch lady.
"Every thing will be all right if you just turn things back to normal," whispered the terrified but brave student.

A few more tears trickled down Lucile's face when finally she said, "But if I take away the trees and grass I'll be homesick again," the lunch lady stammered.
"Leave it to me," said Amber, who was now beaming.

Chapter 6: The Plan
"I'll make you a deal, if you turn things back to normal then I will ask the principal if you can retire so you can live in the woods." Amber said sure this would work.
"Oh, all right," Lucile mumbled starting to turn back to her normal self.

Chapter 7: The Perfect Day
The next day Amber was once again walking down the hallway towards the cafeteria and finally heard the clinking of lunch boxes and the yelling of voices. Like in the deal Amber had talked with the principal and he had agreed to let Lucile retire. Amber was glad to have the other students back. When at the same time feeling proud for solving her first mystery but deep down inside she knew it wouldn't be her last.

The Ancient Aztecs

Ethan Hamlin
Squadron Line Elementary School, Grade 3

The ancient Aztecs are a group of people who lived nearly 515 years ago in the Valley of Mexico. Even though the Aztecs lived long ago, we have a lot of similarities like the need to
bathe, the desire to play music and using the wheel, but the Aztecs did these things very differently.

The Aztecs did not use the wheel like we use it today. They used the wheel in pull-along toys and when they carried items around they carried them on their backs. Now-a-days people use the wheel on cars and bikes. Cars are kind of like big pull-along toys, except with seats and no string.

The Aztecs kept their body clean like us, but in a completely different way. The Aztecs put a fire on one side of their mud house. Then, when the wall got hot, they would throw water on the wall to create steam. They then bathed in the steam. The Aztecs then hit themselves with twigs to clean their skin. We wash ourselves with water and soap. We then dry ourselves off by using a towel.

The Aztecs mostly played wind instruments, especially the flute. They did not have guitars or drums or basses like us. The Aztecs used hand-crafted instruments. Some small flutes had flat mouthpieces and round horns sort of like our trumpet.

In many ways we are like the Aztecs. We do not want to smell around other people so we bathe. We use tools like the wheel. And we enjoy music for entertainment. But the way we do these things are different.

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A Dramatic Situation

Natalie Wong  
West District Elementary School, Grade 3

The recess bell rang. Ring ring! Most of the kids in 3rd grade crowded around the door like hungry dogs waiting to be let out. But not Elizabeth. She was more of a thoughtful, quiet person. She liked flowered clothes with light colors, like the outfit she was wearing that day. She picked up a stack of books. (She had been planning to spend her free time reading.)

Elizabeth slowly headed for the door. But just then, the cool girls, Devonne and Bree, walked by. Elizabeth had envied them since kindergarten, and had always looked up to them. The problem was, they had always ignored her. But what were they up to? Elizabeth decided to follow them, but tiptoed because she knew that she was breaking a school rule: no following or spying on people. She found out they were signing up for the Drama Club. “Finally,” Elizabeth thought. “A chance to impress them.” Elizabeth’s goal was ALWAYS to impress them. She had never succeeded, but this was just the thing to get them to talk to her. She timidly walked over. Out of the corner of her eye, she could see her two best friends, Lyndsey and Jenny, peeking around the corner.

“What are you doing?!” Jenny called. “You don’t even like drama! And, you’ll miss recess!” she added. But Elizabeth didn’t listen to her. Lyndsey was more like Elizabeth, except more intelligent. She aced almost ALL the tests. Jenny was very outgoing, and liked to talk and start conversations. She also liked to dare people. All Elizabeth could do was listen. But Elizabeth still did not listen. She printed her name under Bree’s signature.

“Great,” she thought. “Now if only I could write in cursive.”

It was a few days later, Wednesday, the first day of the Drama Club. The day . . . she had really dreaded. She had never really liked drama. She was only doing it to impress Devonne and Bree. If she was going to become like Devonne and Bree and be popular, she needed the right guidance. Definitely not them – they would laugh. And ignore her. No good. And since Elizabeth was shy, she thought she could be more outspoken, a girl who’s ready to start a
conversation. And she knew just the person to talk to . . . Jenny. But she never got the chance. The day whizzed by so fast she felt dizzy. Pretty soon the bell rang. It was time. She took a deep breath and walked with Devonne and Bree to the Drama Club room. She was following because she didn’t know where it was, which made her even more nervous. What if it was scary? Sweat was running down her face and she could feel her heart jumping in her chest. She slowly approached the room. It wasn’t a very large room. In fact, it was tiny. It looked as though a tornado had hit it. It smelled of paints and old, musty cardboard. Elizabeth only wished that the window was open. She thought about reaching for the lock. It was just too musty! And messy, too! This was not at all what she expected! Papers and books and scenery and costumes littered the floor. There was a short woman with silky blonde hair just like Elizabeth’s. She was surprised to see that she was wearing flowered clothes, too. Elizabeth was so happy to see someone like her. The teacher smiled at her. Elizabeth felt it was extra special. The first thing she did was announce what kind of play it was. It was titled “Hawaiian Hula” and when she began to pass out the parts Elizabeth hoped for the best part – Kanani. She daydreamed, imagining herself in beautiful Hawaiian clothes, dancing on stage. But her thoughts were interrupted by Devonne, who said, “You’re the dolphin. I’m Kanani.” A dolphin. Elizabeth felt like crying, but she didn’t say a word as the rehearsal began.

“How did rehearsal go?” asked Lyndsey. It was a couple of weeks later, the day of the dress rehearsal, and Elizabeth was as nervous as ever. She only said, “Oh, fine.” Jenny and Lyndsey had said they wouldn’t miss her performance for anything. That meant she had to practice twice as hard. She had promised to give them front-row tickets, too. The lady’s name was Ms. Angela, and she had said you could pick some friends to give the tickets to. She (of course) had given them to Jenny and Lyndsey. She had been planning to give the tickets to the other popular girls, but she was too nervous. And dress rehearsal was tonight! She was sure that her costume was very ugly and just not right.

It was time. Elizabeth was backstage. She sighed and slipped on her dolphin costume and practiced her clicking sounds. The day before had been decorating day, and Elizabeth had been on the scenery committee. She had spent hours painting palm trees and waves. Deep in her thought, she nearly missed her cue. When she stepped on, she could picture people laughing. She could tell that the performance was not going to go well.

When Elizabeth woke up on the day of her performance, she had a queasy feeling in her stomach, and millions of questions were swirling around inside her head. All of this made her feel dizzy. She slowly crawled out of bed to dress. She put on her darkest colored clothes. She slowly trudged down the stairs for breakfast. But the French toast didn’t taste so good, not even the hot chocolate her mother was famous for. And in school, that queasy feeling came back – it felt like butterflies were doing a dance inside her. She wished they would stop. And when she saw the big sign for the performance, her stomach did a flip (especially when she saw her name). And when her teacher asked her, “Do you feel alright?” all she could do was nod. Jenny and Lyndsey seemed concerned, too. After all, Elizabeth hadn’t said a word since yesterday. But when the bell rang, Elizabeth felt worse than she ever had. Suddenly, the people around her vanished. She was alone in the dark, doomful hallway of Lancaster Elementary School. She slowly approached the girls’ bathroom to change into her dolphin costume. She looked at it from all sides. It wasn’t that bad. She quickly changed and hurried backstage. The stage had been totally transformed! Streamers had been put up and the scenery stood up neatly. Her heart raced. She had not practiced at all and she felt guilty in not keeping her promise to practice twice as hard. But even from backstage she could hear Ms. Angela announcing the play. She almost wanted to cry, but she held back the tears. She felt her pulse,
which was going as fast as a cheetah could run. Even though she had a very, very small part and didn’t come out for a long time, she was too scared. And just when she was beginning to feel better, she heard when she was supposed to come out. When Devonne said, “Akina, where are you?” Her eyes began to water as she stepped onto the stage into the hot lights. She just froze. No words came out of her mouth. Tears stung her eyes, and she tried to look away. She couldn’t hold back the tears any longer. Tears flowed out past her eyes and down her cheeks. She felt very small, like a helpless mouse lost in a maze about to be eaten by a hungry tiger. The only thing she could remember was “Hello Kanani. I’m here.” She said it very quietly. She heard people begin to snicker. She managed to make it through the rest of the play.

That night, all Elizabeth could think about was the play. She still hadn’t seen Lyndsey and Jenny and didn’t want to. She was too afraid to hear what they had to say. What if they called her a crybaby? She found it impossible to sleep.

The next morning, Elizabeth didn’t want to go to school. When she walked in the doorway, Jenny and Lyndsey were there. But instead of pointing and laughing (like Devonne and Bree were doing), they just smiled.

“You did great!” said Jenny. She had a smile about a mile wide on her face.

“But . . ?” Elizabeth started. She was very confused. Why did Jenny think that? After all, she had cried on stage in front of the whole school.

“It doesn’t matter,” said Lyndsey. Elizabeth only smiled, even though she could hear Devonne and Bree bragging about their parts. And then it hit her! She didn’t have to prove anything to them! Because the important thing was that she knew who her true friends were—and to be true to herself.

Baseball Girl

Catalina Costache
Squadron Line Elementary School, Grade 4

Trees towered over Amy giving her only a little shade from the blazing hot sun above. A cool breeze brushed her short strawberry blond hair back and gently pushed the hammock back and forth, as if it had two giant hands. The green leathery material was a tiny bit rough, but it was cold so it was a nice thing to feel on a summer day. It was kind of like she was floating in water; her back was cool, and wet, while her front was hot and dry. She had an old banged-up radio, which she pulled from all the junk stuffed up in the attic. One button didn’t work. It was supposed to have four knobs, but one came off, and there was a slinky spider web in one of the corners on the pitch black handle. But Amy would not dare to touch the web because a small brown spider was standing there glaring at her with those small beady little eyes, as if to say, "One move I bite." But even though the radio was in poor condition, it still worked. Amy now perked up her ears as she listened to the Yankees fight against their rival team: the Red Sox. Amy always loved the Yankees, even though she was born in Boston. Amy was so happy when she was 4 years old, because she moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts, which is closer to New York where the Yankees play. As she listened to the radio her eyelids began to feel heavy and she stretched out her shoeless feet, then her eyes began to close. She began to imagine what happened yesterday, and the bet. Remember when I said Amy liked baseball? She doesn’t just like it, she loves it. Whenever there is a game in town Amy would beg her parents to take her. If there was a game on a Friday or Saturday night at 7:00pm, Amy would be watching it on TV with her dad, nestled in her fluffy blue blanket with a bowl of
plain popcorn at her side. When she was in 3rd grade she asked the baseball coach if she could sign up for the team. He laughed at her. She even tried to play baseball with the older boys at recess, but they would just sneer at her and tell her to go away. But yesterday Amy was fed up. She stormed across the playground toward Will James who was talking to her brother Alex. Will was tall for his age and had short black hair always hidden underneath a Yankees baseball cap. Also he was the best baseball player in the school. Amy was just thinking that maybe she should turn back, but it was too late, Will already spotted her.

"What are you doing here?" Will asked.

Amy stuck her hands into her pockets, and started to trace a face with her shoe into the ground. "Do you want to make a bet?" she called out.

"A bet? With a girl?"

Amy winced. There it was, the mean bite in his voice that only bullies use. Amy is a pretty nice kid. But when she is bullied by a bully, it angers her a little. And that's exactly what Will was at the moment. A bully. Amy took her hands out of her pocket and glared at him.

"Yeah a bet, or are you so chicken that you're scared to make a bet with a girl?" Amy asked angrily with her hands on her hips. The boys who play baseball with Will laughed at him making chicken noises. "Buck baaaauuck!" Alex shook his head like he couldn't believe his little sister was challenging "Will the Almighty." Will furrowed his brow. Amy smiled, knowing that she had trapped him. He either said no and made himself look weak, or he said yes, which he didn't want to do.

"Fine," he finally said. "What's the bet?"

Amy smiled with a mischievous glint in her eye. "You, throw me three throws. If I strike out all 3 times I won't bother you again."

"What happens if you win?" Will asked.

"Then I get to play baseball with you, every recess until the end of 8th grade."

"That's it?"

"That's it." Amy answered.

A grin crept across Will's face. "Then get ready to be pul-ver-ized," he said in a deep gravely voice.

"Get ready to lose tomorrow!" Amy called over her shoulder as she jogged away.

Suddenly a familiar voice pierced through her dream. She rolled over to see who it was, and mistakenly rolled so far, she landed with a big thud on the moist green grass. Amy's little sister Amber, covered her mouth, stifling a giggle.

"You had to wake me up?" Amy asked.

"I had to." Amber shot back in her Texan accent. Amy rolled her eyes. Ever since Amber started taking acting classes she was speaking in different voices.

"You really had to."

"Yes I did." Amber said again. Then she pointed to the sun, which was slowly going down. "It's dinnertime. And I don't want to be late." Amy smiled. Amber was known to never miss a meal. Amy thought that was amazing because Amber was thin as a stick.

"Then we better hurry up!" Amy called teasingly over her shoulder to Amber who was lagging behind. The moment she ran up the back steps, they groaned under her weight. She sighed. Her dad used to have lots of fun with her. But after he got the new job as a lawyer for the government, he barely had time to even fix the back steps. The only time she had him for herself is when they were watching baseball. Amy pushed the red door open and walked into the kitchen. Mom held two platters in each hand; creamy mashed potatoes, and burnt chicken
with a flavor so strong you could burn your tongue off from all those spices. Just the way Amy loved it. Mom placed the platters in the middle of the wooden table, wiped her hands on her apron, then she wrapped her arms around Amy, and gave her a kiss on the cheek. Then she asked, "How was your day sweetie?"

"Just getting better." Amy smiled.

But the moment she sat down Alex started blabbing. "Do you know what Amy did today?" And without someone asking he continued. "She walked up right to Will and asked him to make a bet. Imagine! My own sister!"

"What happens if she wins?" Dad asked absent mindedly as he cut his meat.

"She gets to play baseball with us until 8th grade is over." Alex replied.

"Good job, sport. I know you'll do great." Dad said to Amy, whose face turned the color of a ripe tomato.

"But if she loses I'll be embarrassed for life!" Alex interrupted.

Amy's face, which had a huge grin on it all day suddenly turned purple and her smile took an upside down turn. "Thanks for having complete faith in me." She thought sarcastically. But out loud she said in a flat voice, "May I please be excused?" Amy said while she pushed her chair away from the table.

"Are you sure?" Mom asked.

"Yes I am," Amy answered, tears streaming down her face. She ran upstairs, slammed her door shut, leaped into her bed, buried her head under the pillow, and cried herself to sleep.

1:10 pm. Amy found herself on home plate; her baseball bat was gripped in her hand. Will aimed the ball and threw it. Amy swung at it and missed. The Umpire called out. "Strike one!"

Will smiled, and then said, "This is as easy as taking candy from a baby." Then he threw the ball again. This time Amy swung, started spinning, and kept on spinning! The boys started laughing so hard, some of them were crying. One of them said in between tears, "I didn't know we had to learn to dance balla to play baseball!"

Amy turned to him and said with gritted teeth, "It's ballet! But it will take a few brain cells for you to figure it out." She turned around again and placed her gaze on Will. This time she looked where the ball was coming from instead of where she thought it would go. She carefully aimed and... "Crack!" The sound sliced through the air like a saw slicing through a piece of wood. The boys watched in awe as the ball sailed over the fence. A home run. A screamed escaped from Amy's throat. She ran around the home plate 10 times. She might have even kissed the ground! Amy knew that people were watching her. But she didn't care. For once in a long time she was happy. Amy had shown those boys that when someone tells you you can't do something...you have to show them you can.

A Long Journey for Firewood

Noah Hanka
Southeast Elementary School, Grade 4

Day 1: I shimmied out my wigwam and scurried over to the dead fire waiting for the hunters to bring deer for breakfast. Suddenly I heard a faint voice signaling my name. They were my relatives contacting me to get firewood. My family was wearing baize deer hides and dirt brown moccasins. As soon as I heard their message I charged around the campground to look for my woven basket to carry extra wood. In the woods, leaves red, yellow, orange, and
brown scattered across the ground like a puzzle while a cool stream drowned pebbles in a field of wheat. Rotten trees lay still, making peaceful movements as they started to crack. A slight breeze blew the leaves out of the way and let a slit of light from the sun land on the rocky forest.

Suddenly I heard a rustle in back of me. I slowly turned my head and noticed enemy Indians were marching by. I quickly flipped over a boulder and dived into a hollow log. My heart pounded and my chest heaved as I strived to stay quiet. But then I caught my attention on my basket it was laying out on the leaves. I knew if they saw it they would find me, so I slowly crawled over. Right when I reached the basket, I leaned on a twig too hard and it snapped. The tribe’s heads jumped at the direction of me. Their feet sounded like a boom of thunder. I started to sprint, but their horses were too fast. They quickly grabbed hold of my deer hide. Soon I was sitting on the back of a horse. Later the stream in the field disappeared as we galloped down a hill. My hands were bound and I had no escape. The night was approaching when they started to set up camp in a prairie. They tied my hands to a stick bursting out of the ground. I was planning my escape all night since it was hard to sleep anyway.

Day 2: CRACKLE! The fire snapped and popped in the morning light. Suddenly I noticed that the hunters were going out to gather food for the day. Women scraped deer skins for deer hides and others sewed moccasins. I was forced to be quiet; one sudden movement would mean death by razor sharp arrow. After breakfast we started riding again.

Surrounding me were large mossy green boulders. The ground slanted and pebbles were collecting everywhere. A slight temperature change started and frost grew on the sharp blades of grass. My stomach churned from not eating a decent sized meal. I tilted my head and discovered we were climbing a mountaintop. I closed my eyes and imagined that I was in my own village playing with my cornhusk doll. But then I was disturbed by a sudden shake.

“ROCKSLIDE!!”

Rocks tried to hold their positions, but the shake was too strong. The mountain shifted and collapsed cracked and twisted. All of a sudden, the ledge snapped and the tribe was falling. I cut my bindings on the sharpest rock I could find. I knew now was my chance. I leaped off the back end of the horse and buried myself in a pile of rubble. The sun started to lower and I stabbed my hands out of the rocks. It was quiet, then I strained my ears and heard the hoot of an owl in the deep heart of the forest. I started approaching people cut and crushed by rocks everyone laid dead. Slowly I walked over to the dead chief. His face dripped with blood. One hand held a bow and arrow and the other held a cutting knife. I quickly hid both in my animal hide and started running back to the direction of my village.

Day 5: As I walked for three days I could not find where my village was settled. Out of nowhere a black bear pounced out of the brush. GRRRRRR!!! Its snout was moist as a blob of pearl white drool dripped from his jaw. He started walking to me then he gained speed. I knew it was my instinct when I pulled an arrow from my quiver and guided it along the string of my bow. My hand broke away and the arrow went loose. It jumped at the bear and pegged it in the heart. The carcass lay dead in the leaves.

“YES,” I hollered in a thrilling voice. Step after step I ran past monkey brown twigs, suddenly, as I turned my head, I noticed a plain patch of land with fire burning and wind whistling the narrow walkways of the land. Little speck started to move when I squinted I saw my family in there buffalo hides and slipping on there moccasins and burrowing in their wigwams for the winter cold. They let the wind take away the leave orange fires. Sparks of flames flew into the chocolate brown dirt.

Mint green ferns, cherry red leaves, mighty blue lakes, and stale gray rocks. Soon I got
there and told everyone to wake up. People came rushing out of their wigwams. I told my
story as more of my friends and family ran out to hear my story. I told them about the bear
escaping the Indians and etc. I hoped I was never sent out to get firewood again.

Be Strong

Cecily Meehan
Union Elementary School, Grade 4

Slurp! The big black and brown bulldog was trying to lick his owner’s hand.
“I told you no licking!” Gertrude’s voice bellowed at Strong.
Strong whimpered.
“NO!” shouted Gertrude again, but Strong just kept on perking up his black ears up at
Gertrude. It looked as if he was asking for something. All of the sudden, Gertrude’s hand
whooshed out. SMACK! Her hand hit against Strong’s stomach. This time Strong ran under
the table with his buddy, Madness.
“She’s in a bad mood today,” said Strong. “Worse than yesterday?” asked Madness.
“Oh, yeah, TOTALLY!!!”
“I hope she’ll get nicer,” Madness responded.
“I know. Haven’t you had enough of her?” said Strong.
“Yay,” said Madness.
“All right. I have a plan all ready in my head to get us rescued. Let’s now be quiet and
follow my lead,” Strong said.
They made sure to make no noise. Otherwise Gertrude would beat them. They quietly
padded across the floor so that Gertrude wouldn’t hear them. Finally, Strong reached the spot
where he was aiming to bring Madness.
“Up there on that table is our solution,” Strong whispered. “That device up there is how
Gertrude communicates with people. There must be some way for us to be able to use it. There
are no buts to this, Madness. We need to be rescued. On the count of three, we need to jump.
Ready? 1-2-3!”
“Wait, I don’t know if I can jump with my swollen leg. It really stings,” said Madness.
“But the only way we can get your leg better is if we get that device down and get help
and it would be much easier if we both worked together,” said Strong.
“I’ll try,” said Madness.
They both leaped off the ground in unison pushing their legs up. Crash! The phone
came clattering down to the ground. Gertrude did not hear because she was blasting the T.V.
with the sound of opera music. Strong and Madness quickly dialed the three important
numbers that Gertrude had hanging on her cabinet. 9-1-1. They heard the bbbrrringgg of the
phone and then they heard a lady’s voice on the other line.
“Help, Help!” yelped Madness and Strong.
But all the lady could hear on the other end of the line was barking.
“Hello?” she kept repeating.
But still it was barking. She knew something had to be wrong. All of a sudden, Strong
and Madness heard nothing. No noise, only silence. They pushed the telephone on the ground
near the counter and they both skidded back under the table.
About 5 minutes later, the ding-dong of the doorbell sounded throughout the house.
“Ugh,” said Gertrude. She got up to answer the door. She pulled open the big, wooden door and was so frightened to see the police right in front of her. She managed a hello and a question of why are you here?

“Did you make a 9-1-1 call?”

“Um, no. You must be at the wrong address?”

“Well is your address 132 Mountain Road?” the officer asked.

“Well--yes,” said Gertrude.

“Do you have any dogs, ma’am?” the police asked.

“Yes, I have two,” Gertrude replied.

“Let me see your dogs please,” the man said firmly.

“Okay,” Gertrude said. She slowly walked on her wobbly legs and fumbled to grasp the collars of Madness and Strong. She dragged them to the door.

The first thing that the police heard was stomachs growling. The low rumble of their stomachs sounded like thunder. The policeman also noticed that the two dogs were mostly only skin and bones. The last thing the policeman noticed was some fairly bad scratches and wounds.

“When was the last time you gave these dogs food?” questioned the man.

Gertrude knew to tell the truth to the police because she had been in situations like this before in her life. One situation she had been in was when she first got a cat. It bit her and she kept it cooped up in its cage for several days.

“No, I don’t give them a lot of food. I don’t care for them as well as I should. I’ve already had one warning and this is going to be my second warning so just take them away.” Gertrude ran off in tears to her bedroom.

The man held out a treat, and called, “Come on boys, you’ll be in better shape once we get you to the shelter.”

He put the two dogs in his car and drove to the animal shelter.

The walls at the shelter were painted white. Wood cabinets lined the walls with tools and supplies stacked inside of them. Cages were stacked up on top of each other. Dogs were barking, and cats were meowing. A team of veterinarians came out to help bring in the two new dogs.

“Wow,” said Madness and Strong.

“There’s so many tools and supplies that the vets use in here!” said Strong.

Madness just nodded.

After Strong had been checked over and only had a couple minor problems, it was Madness’s turn. Madness turned out to be much worse than Strong. He had a contagious disease that the vets tried to cure. The doctors knew that Strong had been good friends with Madness because they lived together so they put them in the same kennel. As the week went by, they put bandages on Madness’s leg and gave him all different medicines and pills for his disease.

One time, when it was 3:15 in the afternoon, two veterinarians were sitting near the kennel at a table discussing something very quietly. Madness started to hear more clearly what they were saying and he put his ear to the metal cage wires of his kennel. It was nothing good that the vets were saying. The vets were talking about Madness’s bad disease and swollen leg. They definitely thought it was serious.

Another night, Madness was sitting up in bed, not being able to sleep from the tick tock of the clock and the whispers of people talking. But after 5 minutes of getting used to where he
was, he began to gain interest in what he was hearing from his cage and they were not good
things. The vets were thinking of putting him down.

Well, they’ll have to deal with me first, thought Madness.

Madness became too much work for the veterinarians and the vets now knew they
finally had to put the dog to sleep. Strong was devastated. He whined, and cried. He just
could not believe that Madness was leaving him! Their entire friendship was torn in two.

On the day that Madness died, he said to Strong, “Look, I’m sorry I have to die, Strong.
I was in much worse condition than you were when we got here. Your name is Strong because I
know that you are strong. I want you to be happy in whatever new family who adopts you. I
loved being friends with you while it lasted and I always knew everyone has a time to die and I
guess today it’s my day. I don’t know why they picked this day it just came and that’s how it is,” said Madness. “I tried to help the humans push back the idea of putting me down, but it
was not meant to be. I’ll miss you Strong.”

And so Strong decided to take in what Madness said. He found a family who loves,
cares for, and understands him and what he went through. There were 3 girls and 2 boys who
love and care for him; even the parents loved him. Strong thinks that his new adoption family
and the house are much better than Gertrude’s house. The people care for him much better.
Even though Strong still misses Madness, he loves his new family and has so much fun playing
and driving that he finally overcomes his sorrow. He gets to do all this new stuff that he’s never
experienced before.

This story has a sad ending for Madness, but remember him in your hearts. Strong
always remembers what Madness said to him on the day that Madness was going to be put
down as he falls asleep in his new dog bed. This story also ends with love, fun, and a happy life
for Strong as Madness lies on a cloud watching over him in heaven. They both think about each
other and remember one another deeply. No matter where Madness might be, Strong wants to
always have him know that he is grateful for his help in escaping and finding a new life. Strong
will always let him know how he is doing … and right now he is doing great!

Iron Showdown

Pei Chao Zhou
Vogel-Wetmore School, Grade 5

It is 1862. I am Sebastian Miller from Kentucky and I am a crewmember on the U.S.S.
Monitor. I feel anger boiling up inside me. The Union drafted me into this bloody and pointless
war. They tore my family apart. All of my brothers were drafted. I was drafted. Nothing can
describe the anger and pain I feel. This anguish permeated through me as I struggled to sleep.

I woke up on the morning of March 9th, 1862. The berth deck was dark, but I could make
out other sailors waking up in the cramped, damp, sweltering room. "This life is pretty vile," I
muttered to myself as I dragged my body off my hammock, half asleep. Then I swiftly drank
my coffee and ate my bread so I would not be late to my battle station.

Everyone was tense. My body was shaking. This was because today the ironclads of the
North and South are going to face off in battle. The Confederate ironclad is named the
Merrimack or the Virginia. The Union ironclad is called the Monitor. When I was first drafted
into the Union Navy, I served on the U.S.S. North Carolina. Lieutenant Worden came aboard
one day to gather a crew for the Monitor. I saw my chance for a little revenge on the Union so I
signed up to be a crew on it. The Monitor sailed through a storm to get here to Hampton Roads
to protect the Union blockade from the Merrimack.

Breakfast was over so I clambered up the stairs to the turret. It's a tower shaped like a
can that is able to rotate. Dana Greene was in charge of the turret. Mr. Stoddard was at his post
to control the rotation of the turret. Mr. Stimers was his assistant. Mr. Stocking and Mr.
Lochrave were the supervisors of each cannon. I was part of the sixteen man gun crew. Eight
men for each gun. The two guns were set on carriages so they could be rolled in or out to be
loaded or fired. There were two holes on the turret wall for the guns barrels to go through.
There were hatches covering the holes. They would be lifted or lowered depending on the
situation. If the cannon was ready to be fired the hatch would be lifted for the barrel to go
through. If the cannon needed to be loaded the hatch would be lowered so the enemy shot
wouldn't fly inside the turret.

Stealthily I pulled the picture of my family out of my pocket. My mom gave me this
photograph when I left. As I stared at the photo of my brothers, sister, my mother, and father
my eyes began to tear. I quickly put the photo away.

All of the sudden I heard someone shout, "The Merrimack! She's coming!" The
showdown of the ironclads had begun!

The crew jumped into action and quickly loaded the cannons. The Monitor sailed
around the U.S.S. Minnesota to shield her from the Merrimack. Our priority was to protect the
Union flagship, the Minnesota. We were soon facing the Merrimack. Mr. Greene tugged at the
lanyard rocketing a cannon ball towards the Merrimack.

I suddenly heard the sound of a cannon ball striking the wall of the tur-
ret. A
Confederate cannon ball!
The ground shook slightly. No damage was done. I was
disappointed, but the crew cheered and received new hope.

Soon smoke filled the turret and surro-
unded us. Noise rang in my ears
The sound of the
cannons seemed to be the sound of a demon slowly creeping toward us. The atmosphere was
intense. I took a deep breath of air. I smelled the stench of smoke and other unidentifiable
smells. Fatigue shot through me and sweat slid down from my body. The ironclads fired
mercilessly at each other. The Monitor circled the Merrimack in search of a weak spot. I used a
soaking mop to cool the cannon. I tried to take as much time as possible in an attempt to delay
the gun from being fired. After a few minutes cannon was inserted with a wire called a worm to
pluck out bits of the old gun powder bag. Then it was loaded with a new gun powder bag and
cannon ball. Finally it was rolled out and fired.

Suddenly Mr. Stoddard who was leaning against the wall collapsed onto the ground.
Mr. Greene rushed to him. "A Confederate cannon ball must've struck the wall while he was
leaning on it, and gave him a concussion." Dana Greene told the crew. "The surgeon shall treat
him. Stimers you take over." He added.

Commander Greene's orders were carried out, and the fearsome battle continued. There
was a problem with the turret. It is simple to get the turret rotating, but the trouble is when you
try to stop the rotation. Commander Greene hatched a plan. When a cannon is ready to be fired
it's pushed out and the rotation of it begins. Greene would peek out above the barrel of the
cannon and when he spots the Merrimack he would give the order to fire. We often missed, but
sometimes we hit the Merrimack straight on.

As the two ships fought I didn't pay a lot of attention to loading and firing the gun. My
mind was clouded with thoughts about my family. While I was daydreaming a yell pierced my
ears. "Merrimack!!! She's preparing to ram us!!! Load the guns!!!" I raced around gathering
materials to load the gun. My heart pounded in my chest. What if the Merrimack sinks us with

—29—
its ram! The cannons were soon ready to fire. I felt the ship turn. The Merrimack had missed us. "Fire!!" ordered our commander. The lanyard was pulled. The sound of the gun powder exploding was followed by a deafening sound of metal against metal. We have hit the Merrimack! "Great shot." Someone said to me.

I felt several shots hit us as I dashed around the turret. Suddenly I fell to the ground. Pain shot through me. Some of the crew saw me as I collapsed to the floor. Their faces full of worry. Commander Greene came over and reached out his hand and pulled me up. "Are okay, son?" Mr. Greene asked. "Yeah, I think so." I said weakly.

As the battle raged on I thought of joining the Union, but I quickly pushed those thoughts away. After firing more shots I heard a voice below me. "Captain’s been hurt!!! Captain’s been hurt!!!" A man came up to Commander Greene. They talked and then Greene nodded. "I will be gone for a while. I must go substitute for the Captain who has been injured in the eye by flying metal," he said.

A few minutes later I felt the ship moving. I knew we were retreating to shallower waters. I peeked out above the barrel of the gun and saw the Merrimack for the first time. It looked like an iron roof. It was retreating down the Elizabeth River. As the smoke floated away and the cannons ceased their loud blasts, the battle drifted to conclusion.

The crew was quick to rush out of the stuffy turret. Once outside I took deep breaths of air. The fresh air felt good. There was a light gale blowing. A few officers who were watching the battle on shore came aboard to congratulate us. I strode around the deck when suddenly I felt a hand on my shoulder. I turned around it was a man from the gun crew. "You dropped this." He was holding my family photo. Then he studied my face for a moment. "Weren’t you the one who was cursing at the Union last night? Why?” he asked. "Because I’m angry," I blurted out before I could stop myself. Then I went on to explain, "The Union is fighting for a more noble cause, to abolish slavery. The Confederates aim is to make money while their slaves suffer which includes destroying their families through the sale of them," he said. He handed me back the photo of my family.

My mind was swirling with thoughts. At that moment I knew what I believed; the Union is fighting for the greater good. The more I thought of it the more my anger disappeared. My mind was made up.

This battle shaped me into a more grown up young man. It made me stronger. It made me tougher. I serve the Union again proudly even though I yearn to be back home. I stared at the photo of my family and whispered, "I will be back."

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*A Smile From the Clouds*

**Gabriel Dick**  
*Coleytown Elementary School, Grade 5*

Yawn. "Another bright and sunny day," I said to myself as I looked out the window into the back yard overlooking the chicken coop. I glanced at the calendar... I froze. It was 9/11, the day I hoped would never come. But, it was here and I was prepared to have the worst day ever.

The sun shown down on my back and pushed me forward through the maze of grave stones. It was like the day 9/11 took place — clear blue sky, the sun high in the air and a slight breeze, only ten years later. It was the perfect day to visit dad. There it was the small gray stone, with the inscription, "ARIEL LOUIS JACOBS." I rushed to the grave and sat in the grass with
my mom. We said our words and then talked about him. As we talked, we picked the green grass, piece by piece and put it in the letters of his name. It felt like remembering him in a way he would like. That made me feel good because my dad liked it when people laughed.

I soon found out that there were going to be more memories shared with me that day. This was a special anniversary since it was ten years since that awful day. Danny, my uncle, called everyone to the family room. Everyone was gathered around the television to watch a video of my dad. I discovered many things about my dad in the video, but it was sad to get a look at what I had missed and it made me think about what life would be like if he was still here.

After the video, I knew what was next. Everyone grabbed a pen and a note card and began writing their personal message to my dad. Every year, we carry on the tradition of releasing notes tied to balloons. I grabbed my card and wrote my note.

As I grasped the pen, I began to tap it on the table until everyone cleared out so I could write my note without anyone bothering me. I thought until an intriguing idea hit me. Questions raced through my head like, "What would my dad and I do together? What would our life be like?" While what I wrote was personal, I basically let him know that I miss him and I love him and that I am OK. I headed outside with my balloon in hand and joined the others.

I released my balloon into the sea of red and hoped that it would reach the door to heaven. When I let go, it floated up above my head. With the breeze, it danced back and forth, slowly making its way up to the heavens. I stood watching, with my neck craned to see the balloon that was now a tiny red speck in the air.

The balloon went up and up until I could no longer see it. A smile came from the clouds, and that is when I knew my dad had received my message.

The Farm
Ian Kamperschroer
Ledyard Center Elementary School, Grade 5

I climbed into the car, my eyelids slowly closing. After a long day of visiting, I waved wearily to Aunt Dacia, standing in the driveway. "Mom, when will we be back?" I asked.

A hesitant sigh came from the passenger seat in front of me. "Dacia’s selling the farm,” she answered. “This will be the last time.”

A pain started to creep into my body and spread like a gathering fog. Tears slowly trickled down my cheeks, but this time, I didn’t just cry from my eyes; my heart cried too. I looked back at the tiny yellow house, fireflies scattering across the yard; the porch light, emitting a bright, loving glow. And then the barn, stacks of hay piled neatly, one side of the roof caved in, rusty plows lined with silver cobwebs, and memories of dare-devil dreams and rope swing wonders. I cried until my eyes were dry, until the Farm was miles away, gone and lost forever. I cried for the fireflies, the yellow house, the crippled barn, the land that Grandpa harvested with his whole loving heart, his life, his memories of family, and of our memories of him, a man who not only was the love of our lives, but the soul of the Farm, and most of all, our everlasting family.
Middle School, Grades 6-8 Poetry

Life is Different Without You

Allison McCormick
Memorial Middle School, Grade 6

I've cried a few more tears, facing the horror of reality, knowing you are no longer nearby me. But in my heart I know even if you aren't physically near me, you'll be there for me to lead me along the confusing paths that life leads me through.

Life is different without you.
On holidays with the family, there is one empty untouched seat. There is one less gleeful voice. There is one less charming smile. There is one less great person.

Life is different without you.
Much more echo fills your house, barely any humor or laughter is there. There is not nearly happiness to satisfy my expectations, what I am used to being around. The house just isn't the same.

Life is different without you.
There isn't as much amusement in my eager self anymore. I can no longer watch and puzzle over how you made a quarter come out of my ear or over all the other tricks that you hid up your sleeve.

Life is different without you.
I no longer get to hear all the stories of life on the sea that you had to tell, taking place when you were young. You'd tell me what life was like traveling on a boat, and how you felt. I listened with both of my ears, paying attention to every word that put together the amazing tales. I could paint a picture in my mind with them. Now there are no words, no stories, no pictures.

Life is different without you.
I miss watching your talented hand almost effortlessly sketch a playful cartoon drawing. You'd show me it and smile, waiting to see the reaction that would appear on my small, childish face.

Life is truly, most definitely different without you.

My Perfect Place

Mia Pasquariello
Tootin' Hills Elementary School, Grade 6

My perfect place is on a sandy beach.
All my worries are washed away by the excess water that Creeps its way up the shoreline.
The ocean whispers into my ear in a hushed voice.
It tells me to listen to the wave's serenity.
To find my own uniqueness in the shell's marks and lines.
I make a deep footprint in the sand
To show my difference to everyone else's.
To show where my toes curl and curve.
The clouds inspire me to be anyone I want to be.
They keep changing until they find their perfect self.
Beach shrubs sway to their own beat.
Waves curl and gather their own strength.
I reach within my heart to find my true self.

Light

Kaleigh Perkins
Vernon Center Middle School, Grade 6

Light is the rainbows
That arc across the sky
The soft light of day
A glowing orb of pride
Light is the happiness
That gleams within our soul
The strong shine of love,
Held high, a might of old.
A never-ending power
Rising to our call
Drifting through dreams
A warrior, never to fall
Meant to chase the darkness
Its everlasting foe
Each day it is victorious
Each night it strains below.
And as the children drift to sleep
You know that when they say
Monsters shall surely get them
Light keeps their fears away
After every challenge
Light is standing straight and tall
The winner of every battle
Protector of us all.

Dear Shadow

Sofia di Tommaso
John Winthrop Middle School, Grade 7

Dear Shadow,
You follow me everywhere
Always drenched in blackness,
Never smiling
Or frowning,
Or feeling anything at all.

You pester
And you prod,
Never giving me a chance to be alone,
To be myself;
The self I want to be.
You are half of me.
But I am the whole of you,
We clash
Like love against hate.
Neither willing to give in.

I’d like to believe that
I am the good side,
You the bad,
For I am the one to act,
You the one to follow.

I am your mind,
Your eyes,
Your ears,
Your friend,
Your enemy,
Your whole existence,
But you are more than that.
You are me.

You are a part of who I am,
Who I shall always be,
And despite the fact
That you torment me,
You stalk me,
You imitate me,
You cling to me
When I wish to push you away,
I will never
Cease to find comfort
In your presence.

You grow,
You change,
You laugh,
You cry,
You sing,
You shout,
But only when I do.
You are half of me,
But I am the whole of you.
Without you,
I’d be small,
Lost,
Confused,
Frightened,
But without me,
You’d be nothing.
Nothing at all.
You’re fortunate.
You can come in and out of this world as you please;
Vanishing amongst
Unlit areas
Where the light of day
Cannot reach.

Me,
I’m here to stay.
I cannot die
And be reborn as you can.
You are lucky,
But I am luckier.

You don’t live
So to speak.
Your only purpose is
To drift;
Fade to the background,
While I get to have
All the fun.

You are like
A fallen leaf,
One in a land of millions;
No one to really care
What you become
Or what you don’t.

This can’t bother you though,
Because it doesn’t bother
Me,
And what I say,
What I think,
Goes.

—35—
You are my shadow,
And nothing more;
A silhouette
Of my form,
A ghost of my being.

You are half of me,
But I am the whole of you.
We clash like
Joy against sorrow,
Without you I’d be
Lonely,
Friend seeking,
Terrified,
But without me,
You’d be nothing,
Nothing at all.

You are my shadow
And nothing more.
I am you,
And you are me.

Bullying

_Bullying_

_Chelsea Lorenzano_

_Interdistrict School for Arts & Communication, Grade 7_

Roses are red the ground is Black
I see the tears falling back.
I know I hear the calls the screams,
But I don’t want to respond.
I know I hear the calls the screams
But I still ignore it all.
The fear in the person’s eye it wants,
To make me cry I close my eyes and
Walk away but yet the pain still remains.
Oh mighty beasts go away who is the tortured
Thing I would love to know? But it’s all a blur
But wait I’m nervous.
I want to run away but I can’t so I fall to the deep oblivion ground wondering
What is going on I look up and see tortured soul it laughs at me for just a second.
And I see it, I see the beast and I look very close and I see I see it, I see the beast
And I look and it was I…
But my tortured self just coming back to get the rest of me that part of me that was
Still filled with hope & dream now I know what’s left of me.
The Pain of War

Austin Reynolds
Old Saybrook Middle School, Grade 7

The pain of war is what the troops face
The separation of them and their families
The death of a loved one
The holding of a comrade's lifeless body
The knowing you might never make it home
It's the never being able to walk again
It's the watching a comrade being blown away
It's missing your son's birth
It's missing your daughter's first dance recital
It's missing your daughter graduating from high school
It's not playing football with your son
It's not being home for the holidays
It's not having a Thanksgiving dinner
It's having people forget that you're fighting for their freedom
It's having no one appreciate you
It's people thinking that war is just a game
The pain of war is something we think is silly and imprudent
It is not...it is the pain that our veterans and service men have faced or are facing
We have forgotten the lives that have died for our freedom
These are the pains of war

Serenity in my Heart

Kaitie Dilan
Tolland Middle School, Grade 8

Wandering, wandering lost
through the brush
and the trees and
the lane that divides

As I wander down the lane
my bare feet
graize the forest floor
I am serene

My dress flows in the wind
the thin fabric billowing behind me
like a sea of white
The birds and butterflies
seem to play hide and seek
with me

The tiny, glowing bits
of magic and wonder
float in the air

The fairies dance
in the rays of
the sparkling sun
their wings are
lace
and their fingers
  so, delicate
  so, tiny
  so, fragile

I am serene

The children of the forest
Woodland girls
as they are called
peek out from behind
their trees

Their hair long
and beautiful
cascades down
their backs
rich colors of
red
black
chocolate
golden
their eyes wild
and bright are their dreams
they wear clothes of bark and flowers
I long to live in the trees

The magic gathers and
with it comes
the wonder

the magic swishes and
swirls around me
and it flutters like the wings
of a butterfly

and then comes the change

My thick black hair grows
to spread night down my back
my dress of white transforms
into a beautiful mahogany
flexible and light
purple pansies
grow in my hair

My forest,
my home it whispers
tells me secrets
I play with the others
The wonder keeps us young

I stay 15 forever

My beautiful forest
where dreams
never
die

Wishes are not just wishes
My wish
My dream
My beautiful forest
The leaves above are the sky
The flowers and trees are my home

I am serene

But there are things I left behind

One day I see what has
never
been seen here before

A boy, like no other
A boy, my age
A boy, I know
A boy who is like a goose in a gala of swans
A boy, who stands out
A boy who...
Can look into my eyes and
I know
We walk hand in hand
Down the lane I walked
So many years ago
As I leave my forest
The nature leaves my clothes
The flowers float away
But the magic and wonder stay
the magic in my life
the wonder in my heart
I am ready to be 16
I am ready to
move on
As I walk down the lane
hand in hand
with my love
my eyes along with his
stay wild and bright till the end of our journey

What Is

Mackenzie Egbert
Old Saybrook Middle School, Grade 8

Put your ear to the door,
And hear the world for what it is.
Watch the clock go by
With knowledge in your eyes.
Fantasies no more,
Waiting with dust forevermore.
Grains of sand pass through my divine insanity.
How many bullets does it take to kill a mockingbird?
How many tears does it take to drown?
Opening my eyes at the end of time,
And awakening what is hidden deep inside.
Becoming lost inside my sweet memories,
While the world crumbles around me.
To be or not to be was once meant for me,
Now ruins at my feet of what was and what will never be.

Come to the house of waves with me.
We will walk hand in hand until time ends.
I find it hard to cry, for I have locked these tears inside.
Let us command the sea and shake the earth.
Together you and I could take the world.
If only it was worth stealing for.
These waves of hate grow larger,
And my hope even smaller.
Yet sometimes I find insanity to be my only relief.
Together, we will feel the sea’s rage.
Breathing waves and hearing thunder.
I will smell the lightning with glory in my eyes.
The harbor of life and taker of souls.

As you begin to hide from me,
I begin to fear sweet memories.
They turn my mind black with ashes of the world’s demise.
Why do you do this to me?
Why do you hide in your black grave?
Even so far away, you taunt me with joyful glee.
Hiding behind doors and in dark shadows, to my dismay.
I watch the clock in hopes that one day; you will come back to me.
The world, I fear, is a terrible place.
It is much better to be insane, than to open your eyes for the first time.
I drown not in tears, but in a dry sorrow that ends…with a door.

Flowers

*Marilyn Lowell*

*Vernon Center Middle School, Grade 8*

At winter’s close
Come Snowdrops
resigned and cold
in January snow
Violets
bold and lyrical
with its purple petals aflutter
whisper in the February wind
greeting one another
Daffodils
all in clumps
gazing in reflections
chatter in the March sun
offering protection
Daisies
Thick and white and yellow
grow along the April Grass
bowing at our feet
as we meander past.
Lilies of the valley
like angels’ porcelain bells
play their song in May
when all the rain fell
Roses
full and Burgundy
redolent in June
envious of all the lips
for which the boys did swoon.
Water lilies
sharp and prim
peeking from the cool lake rim
laugh and giggle in July
watching fireworks in the sky.
Poppies
red in pulchritude
setting a fading summer tune
sit up on the hill in August
listening to the children play.
Morning glories
oh so sweet
greet the school children on the street
first one up and back to bed
not a single word it said.
Cosmos
faint and pretty pink
gracing the October sink
reach for the chilly sun
while kids in costumes have their fun
Chrysanthemum
of many petals
brightly colored in November
strong and stable
never weak
even in the winter streak
Finally comes noble Holly
begging all of us to be jolly
so to you we raise our glass
and give a merry December laugh
flowers of the children’s birth
circle round the children’s earth.
Grandma, who was taking a trip to Fusion Zone with Cole and Grandpa, was so excited she woke and started to get ready at 5:00 in the morning. It actually took her 3 hours to get ready, and this is the hectic story of Grandma's first time playing laser tag...

Grandma was drying her hair, which she had separated into 20 sections equally between the top, middle, and bottom of her head. She had just enough clips to do the job, and she immediately woke up Grandpa the minute she turned on the hair dryer.

"Are you nuts, Grandma?" Grandpa exclaimed. "It's 5:45 in the morning, and you look like Godzilla!" Grandma actually did look a bit funky with her hair sections going all over the place.

"Whatever, Grandpa, I'm getting prepped up for this big event!" Grandma explained. Grandpa just pushed the door shut. Grandma rolled her eyes, and by this time, she had managed to finish drying her short hair, which had taken her 45 minutes. Grandma tugged the closet open, trying to capture a smooth movie move, but accidentally fell, and took one of the doorknobs with her. "NOOOO!" she cried.

At 6:30 in the morning, Grandma was getting on an outfit that looked NCIS worthy, but she couldn't find anything, except for her usual jogging outfit. Usual as in she wore it a lot, and hadn't washed the clothes in a while. She was just too lazy to do her chores and that was why she hired Maria to do the work for her. Anyway, Grandma tried to jump into her jogging outfit, to see if she had any good balancing abilities, but crashed to the ground. SNAP! Her jogging pants waistband snapped, and now, she had to wear her second Land's End jogging outfit, and it had so many stains on it you couldn't count them all.

By 8:00 Grandma had her hair done into a half ponytail, because her hair was too short to fit into a true "NCIS bun" Grandma thought it was very professional for laser tag, but Grandpa thought it was downright nonsense. When Cole and Grandpa were in the car, Grandma turned her "Siriusly Sinatra" station on high blast. Cole started to laugh, but Grandpa was starting to get irritated, because Grandma was so wrapped up in the music, she hadn't even started to move the car yet. Grandpa suddenly yelled, "Michele, let's get going!"

"Oh!" Grandma exclaimed, snapping back to life.

The three had finally reached Fusion Zone at 11:00. Grandma had planned everything out. "Okay, on today's agenda, we have to first, play a game of laser tag, then eat a snack, but a quick one, and then we will play another round of laser tag." Grandma was actually really tired with her own agenda, so she took full sprint, and ran for the entrance, a "slow" Grandpa and Cole following.

Cole, Grandma and Grandpa were all on separate teams, and since it was Grandma's idea to come play laser tag, she was 100% positive she would win. "Ten second head start!" Grandma shouted from the corner she was in. That was a very bad idea, because neither Cole, nor Grandpa believed in ten second head starts, so they both ran head first towards Grandma, Grandpa getting there first. Grandpa shot at Grandma. Grandma shot about 50 times back at him, and started doing a strange victory dance, but stopped. Poor Michele did not know that once you were shot,
you couldn't shoot back, because your suit turned black, and it was sort of like saying you were tagged. "Phooey!" she exclaimed, and ran right behind Grandpa, thinking it was the smartest thing a person could do. Unfortunately, Cole was smarter, and he ran behind Grandma, and when she turned around, there was Cole, and he shot her before she could even take in that he was 2 feet in front of her. "This is not nonsense, this is great!" Cole exclaimed, and Grandma frowned, but an idea popped into her head when Cole and Grandpa were gone, trying to find each other. Grandma hid behind a wall, but unfortunately, her butt was sticking out of the little window that she hadn't noticed. Grandma was only looking side to side and not behind her, so she couldn't see Grandpa or Cole coming her way. Grandpa saw Grandma's butt on his search for Cole, and he sneaked around the corner, shooting her in plain sight. "How did you get me, Grandpa?" Grandma asked, confused to the max.

"Grandma, your butt was sticking out of the little window thingy!" Grandma was so upset! Once Grandma had managed to get her bottom out of the window, she could've sworn she heard Cole's voice. By this time, she could shoot someone, so she peered out of the window, and there he was... COLE. He shot Grandma and said, "Got ya!" Grandma had the feeling she would never end this laser tag game. It made Grandma feel a little downtrodden to think she might not win. Both Grandpa and Cole had two points, and Grandma had none. When Grandma finally got out of her area, she saw Grandpa, and shot from a really far distance, so she did not reach him. Unfortunately, Grandma also didn't know that you had to be somewhat close to the person to shoot them and score a point. It was also unfortunate that Grandpa had heard the distant gunshot, and he ran towards Grandma. Grandma tried to run, but since she hadn't gone to Weight Watchers in quite some time, and she also ate three slices of leftover cake from the night before, she couldn't run very far before Grandpa caught up to her. "Gotcha!" Grandpa shouted, smiling at Grandma, whose suit turned black. She actually couldn't wait until she could retire to the snack bar, but she was still determined to kick some butt in the last minutes she had! Suddenly, Grandma saw Cole out of the corner of her eye, so she screamed, "Rahhhhhhh!" and started running straight for him. In Fusion Zone, there is an open space that contains barrels, but you can't really blame Grandma for her lack of laser tag experience and sight, because it was dark in the laser tag arena. Grandma didn't see the barrels, so while running straight for Cole, she tripped on one of the barrels falling to the ground with a thud. Cole had shot Grandma before she could even stand up properly without falling over again. "Nice try, Grandma," Cole said, and ran to find Grandpa to get even more points. Grandma sort of concluded that she was no match for Cole and Grandpa, but still dreamed of the moment she would shoot Cole and Grandpa. The bad thing was... TIME WAS ALMOST UP! Grandma tried to capture an NCIS move by trying to dive through one of the windows, but completely missed and almost broke the laser tag jacket she was wearing. The screen was slightly cracked. Well, so much for trying to make a good NCIS move, Grandma thought as she got up trying to find Cole. "Come out, Coley my cutie!" looking around to see nobody but herself stupidly poising in ready positions, just in case Cole or Grandpa came out of nowhere. Well, they did, but not when Grandma had expected it!

Cole laughed and ran off. Grandma hadn't even heard the person say that their time was up, so a clueless Michele wandered through the maze without knowing that nobody was there. When Grandpa shouted, "Grandma!" Grandma ran for her life, thinking that she would find Grandpa and shoot him. When Grandma kept running, she found Grandpa, and shot at him about 4 times before realizing that Cole was also standing there, and both of them had no jacket on. "Game over, Grandma!" Cole shouted. "And I won!" It was really embarrassing to think that Grandma got zero points, while Cole and Grandpa had got at least 2 points. Especially Grandpa, because if you knew him, you would know he would never join in on such nonsense.
Later on when the three ate a delicious, soft pretzel, Grandma's half with no salt for Weight Watchers, Grandma had to cross off one thing on her agenda — Play another game of laser tag. This was not an option, since she knew Cole and Grandpa would beat her anyway. Well, first tries don't always work out, do they?

Camden Yards – The Experience

**Thomas (TJ) Schlotter**  
*Bethel Middle School, Grade 6*

As we strolled into the poolroom, the smell of chlorine filled the air. My brother decided to jump into the pool at the exact moment we entered the poolroom. "SPLASH!" water went everywhere. I joined him, but without much of a splash. The poolroom was a room with a long skinny pool, a hot tub, and a great view of Camden Yard's out field. There was a line of plastic chairs on both sides of the room. The walls were basically windows. Who ever designed this room must have wanted you to have a good view. As I was staring out the window at the ball field an idea formed in my head. Maybe we were going to Camden Yards. I got out of the pool and walked over to my mom who was knitting a scarf for somebody.

"Hey mom," I asked. "I remember you said dad did a job for the owner of the Orioles and we might go to Camden Yards. Are we going today?"

"Yes we are," she told me. And as an added bonus she said, "We have front row seats and the owner said that we could go on the field." Wow wee I said to my self, what could be better.

When I walked outside the first thing I noticed was the weather. It was a hot muggy day where your clothes seem to stick to your skin. After one minute I was sweating bullets. The field was on the right next to the hotel so we only had to walk a block to get there. Mom said we had to wait at gate D for a tour guide named Colleen. After a few minutes of waiting we walked over to the tour entrance which was only a few feet away from gate D. We quickly found Colleen and she handed us Orioles magazines. Our tour guide was average size and had blond hair. She had a high pitched voice and looked like she had been a tour guide for a while. My mom started talking to Colleen about how nice the stadium looked, as we passed through a set of double doors into the interior of the stadium. The first thing I thought as I passed through the double doors was wow. Camden Yards interior was filled with vendors, shops, and Oriole pictures, posters, and banners. We were led to an elevator marked staff only. Colleen let my brother push the down button. I noticed that none of the other elevators had a down button; I wondered why. I soon found out. When the elevator opened it looked like a box of wood. We got in and waited for the doors to close. When the doors opened on the bottom floor we got out. We walked through what looked like an office until we came to an opening in the wall. We walked curiously walked through the opening and we were outside except this time we were on the field.

I had forgotten how hot it was as I stepped out onto the field. There was very little advertisement at Camden Yards which just added to the beauty. It was a medium size field abundant in bricks. The designer of Camden Yards must have liked the color green because there was a lot of it. We were standing right next to the on deck circle. My brother pointed out that there was a giant coke bottle standing up next to the score board. In the outfield I saw the Toronto Blue Jays warming up. As I was watching I noticed camera crews from at least three different channels rush over to the dug out to capture an interview with Buck Showwalter. After the interview the crew rushed inside to the cool air. Colleen started talking about the history of the stadium when I saw a man with a white polo shirt and khaki pants emerge from the dugout.
He walked right up to us and said, "Do you mind if you take the boys into the locker room to see batting practice?"

"Uh, that would be great!" my mom replied. My brother and I had wicked grins on our faces. I was glad to be going in the locker room to meet the players, but I was relieved to be out of the sun. I could tell my brother was happy to be out of the sun because he had finally stopped complaining. The man introduced himself as John and said he had been a tour guide here for 5 years. We walked past the dugout and into a long hallway. I was happy to be back in the air conditioning. As soon as we got in the hallway, we saw the catchers gear, (which my brother tried on) the batting helmets, and an endless supply of baseballs. John gave us each one ball that we ended up getting signed by most of the Orioles.

He led us a little farther into the hallway and through a doorway. I could not believe my eyes. It was the Orioles having batting practice inside their indoor batting cages! Wait a second, I said to myself. Is that Adam Jones! I never thought I would get to see him in real life (he had hit a grand slam the night before)! When Adam was finished hitting, one of the players asked us if we would like to pick up the balls in the batting cages. We both said, "Yes, please," and picked up the net to go inside. It was no different than a normal batting cage except that it was inside Camden Yards. After we were done and said bye, we went back into the hallway.

We walked for a while before we came to the locker room. I don't get why they call it a locker room because it was a big room with a pool table and a ping pong table. Each player had their own cubby with their gear inside. The room was orange and it had black stripes. It had a big black leather couch in the center and a flat screen TV mounted on the wall. Most of the Orioles were playing cards, eating, or putting on their cleats. My brother and I went around asking for signatures and having short conversations with the players. I even got to meet my favorite Oriole, Mark Reynolds. I was walking around when I heard John say, "Isn't that Mark Reynolds!"

I quickly spotted him putting on his cleats. I walked over to Mark and asked, "Will you sign my ball?"

He said, "Sure," and quickly scribbled down his name. I think he was in a rush to put his cleats on. I was so happy and excited, I lost track of time. After what seemed like ten minutes we said bye to all the players and walked back down the hallway.

As I walked out of the locker room, I couldn't help thinking about how privileged I was to have this experience with my mom and brother. Mom said that I should write a memoir about today. "Nah, I will never do that," I said to her.

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The Ride

Paige Stickel
Wells Road Intermediate School, Grade 6

(The amusement park is back in town and this kid is terrified to go on the SCARIEST, better yet, SPINE CHILLING, better yet, MORTIFYING ride ever.)

I feel a knot in my throat. Beads of sweat form on my forehead and upper lip. My hands are clenched tight and my heart is beating so loud that I am sure that everyone can hear it. Every step I take gets slower and slower as I get closer and closer to the ride. Now it feels like the line is moving faster. As I try to keep up with the line, I wipe away sweat from my navy blue sweatshirt. I look down at the jacket to find that it has become stained. I am almost getting over my fear as I hear the menacing word, "Next."
I gulp and can hardly breathe. I lick my lips and glare towards the towering machine. I step on and hear suspenseful creakings. I shout, “Let me off!” But it’s already too late! I hear a click, then another, and another! I grasp the belt bar for dear life. I once again shout, “LET ME OFF! LET ME OFF!” but no one hears me. I feel sick and tears are burning under my eyes. I close my eyes and squeeze them tight. The tears go away. I take a deep breath, open my eyes, and let go of my grip. When the ride comes to a complete stop, I juggle the belt buckle until it pops open. I hop up and think, “This wasn’t SO bad.” Then it hits me. I feel sick to my stomach and scream, “I’M NEVER GOING ON THIS THING EVER AGAIN!!” But I just scream it in my head so no one hears me and so that I don’t draw attention. Oh, and believe me when I say…I AM NEVER GOING ON THIS FERRIS WHEEL EVER AGAIN!!

First Beach Trip of the Summer

Kate Luongo
Newtown Middle School, Grade 7

I close my eyes and smile. I could already smell the sea air and can taste the sand in our sandwiches. My family and I, along with towels, buckets, and books to read in the car, were headed to Rhode Island to one of our all-time favorite places, Watch Hill. With a big blue sky, hills of sand, rambling waves, and lots to watch, this beach is full of fun and great memories. Although there is a price to pay, a two hour car ride, when you get there, it is always worth it. Tiny streets are full of small shops and bursts of color like a brand new paint set or an ice cream topped off with rainbow sprinkles. The charmed town is like a dollhouse world with a little harbor of boats and cute cottages on a green hill beyond it.

Just like every beach, sparkling water stretches all around casting an invitation to anyone who steps on the sand and takes a moment to breathe in the ocean air. On this day, I was just glad to see the sun, because the last time we came the bright burst was hidden by sudden rain. As we entered the world of seagulls and striped umbrellas, I kicked off my sandals and let my feet reunite with the soft warm sand. We set up our big towel and prepared ourselves with sunscreen before escaping down to the bright blue waters. A dip of the toe was enough to know that the water was freezing. I don’t care! Going through an entire year without swimming is too much. After working my way up to my waist, I take a plunge! Oh, it felt so good! Cold but refreshing! As I lean up to the sky, the sun kisses my face and the water blankets me into a loose hug. I let myself be carried up and down on the wave rollercoaster.

After we all had taken a swim, greeting what we had left behind for the past 12 months, it was time for lunch—sandwiches, buttery bagels, juicy grapes, and crunchy chips. It was all so yummy and even better because of being outside in the salty air. The seagulls began to get interested so my mother hid the rest. It was time for our walk to the row of giant rocks that reach into the ocean like a long arm reaching to feel the waves. It’s a bit nerve-racking when you first climb up, but once you get used to it and are steady, it’s great to be up on the rocks feeling like you own the world.

After a photographing the great view of the ocean and the beach, we head back to start packing our belongings. With our bags and towels tucked in the trunk and backseat, we walked over to the shops. As we were walking, something caught my eye. With a little of my own spending money, I stopped to look at a pair of sandy tan flip flops with green, pink, white and blue plaid straps. I bought them knowing that when I wore them I would always think of this beach day. We then got our choice at the ice cream shop. Mine was an Oreo milkshake this
time—sweet and cool. The sun warmed my shoulders while walked the little harbor street. When it was time to pull away in our car, and the town grew smaller in the distance, the colors swirled together to form a dream. Once we turned the corner, it was a dream one could now only imagine. Every good thing has to come to an end. This isn't always bad, though. How could I write about this fun day without an ending? Besides there will be more beginnings and I can hardly wait!

Call me Lizzie

Clare Meehan
Irving A. Robbins Middle School, Grade 7

6/3/11
Dear Journal,

My name is Lizzie. I am only called Lizzie, not Elizabeth, not Liz, not anything else. Lizzie. Anyway, I'm 11 years old and live in Kentucky. I think that living here is awesome. My best friend's name is Savannah. Savannah hates it here, but she has a good reason for that, I guess. See, her brother Ryan died a year ago in the Licking River. He was fooling around with his friends. They were playing a game called manhunt. Manhunt is a game where either one or more people are it, and the other people try to get away from whoever's it. He was running and turned back to see whether anyone was chasing him, and fell into the river that crossed through his neighborhood and drowned. Ever since then, Savannah's family has been very discombobulated, especially Savannah. Today, I met up with Savannah walking down to the bus stop. Savannah thinks that I am the only 'good and interesting' thing in our town. I personally love Cynthiana because of its little shops and restaurants. The school day felt like forever! My first period is reading. Have I mentioned that I love to read? My favorite book is Judy Moody and the Not Bummer Summer. It's so funny! My favorite part is when the elephant falls on Opal's car. After reading was lunch. I decided to let Savannah choose where to sit since she was a little bit sad today. She chose to sit at Ava, Jamie, and Scarlett's table. Why? Don't ask me, I have no idea. I'm going to replay the scene for you...

"So, Elizabeth," Ava said, "How's your brother, Charlie, right?" First off, have I told you that I am only called Lizzie? Second off, she does know that Savannah's brother died, right? Thirdly, let me make this clear to you. Ava's mean. She says things purposely to make people mad, sad, or annoyed. This was something that would make me annoyed, and Savannah sad. She's 11 years old. My brother is a freshman and we are in 5th grade. Something's wrong there, right? It's not just me? I mean, yeah, my brother may be a little cute, but she's in 5TH GRADE! She should not be worrying about boys just yet. Anyone who is, is a pervert. But anyway, I said, "Excuse me? That is none of your business, and to even think to say that means that you are such a clueless slut." I looked over at Savannah and she just gave me a look. Ava just smirked her smirk that she always does. It's like a "Yeah, shut up look!" You know what I mean? The conversation stopped after that at lunch, but Ava kept glaring at me. I felt as if I was a worm and she was the bird about to slurp me up. Later on in the day, after we got off the bus, Savannah asked me why I said that to Ava at lunch. I was like, HUHHH??? She was being a jerk! Then she was all I'm trying to make friends and all of that girly stuff. Let me put this in perspective for that you can see my thoughts: She has already spent way too much time with Ava. Could you imagine what could happen if she spent more time with her? Then Savannah just walked away. I thought that I was her friend! A friend does not walk away from a friend.

—48—
Love,
Angry Lizzie

6/4/11
Dear Journal,
I may have to turn this 'journal' into a diary. I'm writing some pretty personal stuff in here!!
Anyway, Savannah is not over it! She gave me the silent treatment today! On the bus, we always
sit in the 5th seat on the right side, and she was in the back chatting it up with Ava! I sat in our
seat all alone. When I got to school, we had a surprise reading discussion. I love these! My teacher
calls it a buzz. I looked over at Savannah because we are always partners in these, never with
anyone else. She and Ava had already locked eyes. Ava leaned over and squinted her eyes at me
and gave me the look...again! Then, at lunch, I had to sit with these kids I didn't know because
Ava made sure that there were no seats available at her table and made it clear to me that she was
sitting next to Savannah and that I wasn't. How convenient for me. Also, if Ava was watching the
scene, it could turn into a school wide rumor as fast as a cheetah sprints across the desert. I
guarantee Ava will do anything in her power to make me look pathetic. I'm contemplating over
what to do. I've never had a situation like this one before. I mean, yeah, Savannah and I have
gotten into fights, but not like this one. I don't know what's going on. Why does she want more
friends? Am I not good enough?
Love,
Depressed Lizzie

6/5/11
Dear Diary,
My so called journal is now officially a diary. Anyway, Savannah was so unhappy today. I
don't know why, and I'm really concerned about her. I was sitting in the 5th seat, right side when
I looked back and saw her crying in her seat in front of Ava. Worse yet, Ava didn't even notice. It
killed me to see that, but to know that she would get angry with me if I went back there and
comforted her killed me more. I also noticed that she wasn't in reading today. She never skips
reading. It's mine and her favorite class! I think that she must've gone to the school social worker,
but she never does that without mulling it over with me. But then again, she hates me now. At
lunch, she didn't eat her food. I was sitting with some kids I didn't really know again, and was
watching her from a distance. She got a caesar salad instead of her regular grilled cheese. But all
she did with the salad was take her fork and prod it. That's unlike her. I need to know what is
going on with her because whatever it is, it's worse than it has ever been. I'm going to investigate,
but my mom says that it's time to get ready for bed.
Love,
Curious Lizzie

6/6/11
Dear Diary,
I was so antsy at school today that I barely noticed anything that happened with
Savannah. But boy, do I have gossip for you. Apparently, yesterday was the yearly mark for
when Ryan drowned. How could I ever forget something like that? I feel so dumb! No wonder
Savannah was not herself yesterday! If only I had known. I could have helped her, baked dinner
for their family, something! Why didn't my mom remind me? Did she forget too? I have so many
questions for so many people. But I know now that I have got to help Savannah, whether it makes
6/7/11
Dear Diary,

My masterful plan worked. I asked my teacher whether I could leave class a little early and she said she would give me a pass. So the period before lunch, I slipped out and went into the lunchroom and sat in Ava's 'assigned' seat. Savannah believes that early is on time, on time is late and late is unacceptable. As always, she was early. She looked at me and opened her mouth to speak but nothing came out. Then she said, "That's Ava's seat. She'll beat you up if you stay there." I shrugged and stayed seated. Seriously, what could Ava do to me in the cafeteria? She'd be expelled if she did anything! So ha! Before Savannah could speak again, I told her that I was sorry. At first she didn't say anything. Then her whole story just gushed out. "You're not the only one who should be sorry. I've been selfish and a self-centered brat. It's been a year, I should be more put together than I am, not to mention my family. It's just been so hard. Did you know that we are still receiving sympathy notes?" I stopped her there. "Look, Savannah. I am so sorry I forgot about the one year mark. I have been planning to do something for you for a while, and we weren't on good terms, and I just forgot." I gazed into her bright blue eyes and she knew exactly what I was asking. We leaned in and squeezed each other tight. I whispered, "You should know that I'll always here for you. Don't forget that." She nodded. Then I noticed Ava. She had seen the entire exhibit of apologies. But right now, who cares? Ava is the least of our problems.

Love,
Elated Lizzie

A Diamond in the Rough

Pritika Seshadri
Henry James Memorial School, Grade 7

Dear Best Friend,

You’re stupid. You fail. You’re weird. You’re far from perfect. But, that’s okay. I'm like that too. I'm stupid. I fail. I'm weird. I'm far from perfect. We laugh at the randomest things. You know my ugliest side. I know all your secrets. Even though we disagree sometimes, we never fight. Even though we cry, we never stay crying for long. When I'm sad, you're always there to make sure I'm okay. Thanks for being there for me. I love you that way. Sometimes, when I feel down, I vent on you. But you're part of a brick wall we created together, through tears, despair, joy and the power of friendship. And you'll never come crumbling down.

When I'm feeling down, I ask what the point of love is if it never lasts. Why love and let your heart be broken, when you can keep it safe inside? Why do we claim to love even if it doesn't exist? Your answer always is we love because it gives people hope and happiness. Your heart only gets broken if you love for the sake of it. Love exists, only if we want it to. Your positivity makes it impossible to be sad. Without humor, life sucks. Without courage, life is hard. Without love, life is hopeless. But without you, life is impossible.

They say, "A good friend knows all your best stories, but a best friend has lived them with you." You've been here for all my life. You believed in me when I ceased to believe in myself. Pushing me, challenging me, making me want to do better, I can only hope that I did the same for
you. After all this time, I have to say I've learned a lot from you, about you and with you. My teachers say, "We should never take a person for granted, but hold every friend we find close to our heart. Because, one day, we just might wake up and realize that while we were too busy collecting stones, we lost a single diamond." I guess they're right, because for me, you're that diamond.

Every day, when I make a mistake, you don't just get me out of it like a good friend. You sit there right next to me and say, "Darn it, we screwed up." We get into trouble. We make people proud. We mess up, fail, act stupid and fail again. But ask this, is it worth it? Maybe. Maybe not. What really matters though is that we were there for each other. Or at least, you were there for me.

You're the sibling God forgot to give me. You're the diamond I couldn't miss. You're the wall that'll never fall. You're my right-hand man, my partner in crime, and we'll probably do things we'll regret for the rest of our teenage lives. But even if these painful years last for what we think is forever, won't it be amazing to look back on our teenage years when we're 20 or so? To see how far we've come? Forever?

I don't know what tomorrow brings or even what I'm gonna eat for breakfast. I couldn't tell you if I'll find my soul mate or my worst enemy. I have no idea what outfit I'm gonna wear tomorrow, or if I'll wear pajamas to school. I still can't figure out what my destiny is or even if I'll feel like doing my homework tonight. But as they say, "I've got my music in my car, a closet full of clothes, and the best friend a girl could ever have. And baby, that's all I really need."

From,
Your best friend

When it's All Said and Done

Maia Czaikowski
Henry James Memorial School, Grade 8

As my mom and I turned onto Susan Circle, I sank down a little farther in my seat. I took a shaky breath as the giant oak I had climbed on for all those years came into view. Now the leaves were dead and lying in a pitiful heap at the base of the trunk. I had always had the same image of grandpa's house from when I was a little kid: the bright red shingles and the little apple tree surrounded by marigolds in the front yard. I can still imagine myself letting my head hang and my hair swing down as I hung from the giant oak and watched the sun reflect off of the bright green leaves and cast different shadows on my arms when I moved from side to side. Those sunlit, cheery memories were gone as we pulled into the icy driveway. As I got out of the car, I saw a new image of the house I once adored: the paint was fading and the flowers were frozen over. The tree that was once full of life and playing children was now stiff and barren.

After my grandpa's death, the house we once went to for Fourth of July barbeques and fireworks was now un-owned and missing the thing that really made the house special: my grandpa. I still remember the seven of us, his grandchildren, huddled together in front of his grave as we laid roses by his casket. Some of us were still too young to understand death, and none of the older children had the strength to explain to them that grandpa wasn't coming back.

I thought of all these memories my parents thought I had forgotten as I hurried from the cold driveway into the back door; we always used the back door, there was no use to start being formal now. I was flabbergasted by the bareness of the living room; boxes were strewn around the floor, some full, some empty, all contained albums, picture frames, and little memorabilia that my
grandpa used to be so fond of.

I picked up a photo of my grandpa’s golden retriever, Bridget. He loved that dog, and her faithfulness to him was the light of his life when he was alone. She stayed by his side until she died. I think a part of him let go when Bridget left; he died a few weeks after her. I hope he is with her now, playing fetch somewhere with her favorite tennis ball.

My mom got right to work, sorting pictures and putting, in essence, her entire childhood into neat cardboard boxes. She wasn’t one to show her emotions; she worked with hospice patients every day as part of her job; death was a familiar event to her. I was still surprised that she wasn’t as outwardly affected by this as I was.

I took a walk around the house; it felt so lifeless. I walked into the bedroom and I remembered hiding out in the secret closet under the eave with my cousins. It was our hide out. I opened the closed door, but it no longer held the appeal it did when I was at the house under different circumstances.

Dust had settled over the quilt on the bed; it hadn’t been in use for years since my grandpa stopped using the stairs and had to sleep on the first floor. His battle with cancer had left him weak in his final days. I remember visiting him in the hospital. When I gave him a hug, I could feel every rib in his emaciated body. His frailty reflected in the house now; I felt like I couldn't touch anything, like it wasn’t our house anymore. Proof of him living here was scarce in many of the rooms that had been emptied. I was starting to convince myself that it had been a different house I visited for all those years. How could such a laughter-filled, joyous place also contain such a cold, din side?

As I padded down the carpeted stairs, I turned into the living room to see my mom sitting down against the wall with a photo frame in her hand. As I crossed the room towards her, I realized she was crying.

I would say that I’m a pretty sympathetic person, but what little previous skills I had were useless to me as I stared at my mom’s sunken posture and streaming tears. I sat down next to her and looked at the photo she had in her hand. It was my grandpa, in a way I had never seen him before; he was young, strong, and smiling from ear to ear. On his knee sat a little girl who was laughing. "That's you!" I exclaimed. This was also a rare form of my mom; it's easy to forget that our parents were kids too once.

"Yea, that's me." She smiled a little, which gave me hope.

"You must have been really happy," I cooed.

"He made everyone happy." My mom had stopped crying now and was starting to pack up the boxes again. I could tell she wanted some time alone.

I smiled an unconvincing smile, returned to the dining room where I sat down, and imagined the now empty table once packed with all of our family members saying grace and laughing.

As humans we are never immune to death or the sadness it brings to those that the deceased has left behind. But I realized that I had confused the sadness I felt in the empty house with the sadness I felt about my grandpa dying. The house was just something he lived in, just one aspect of his life. I could leave it behind now, that wasn't what I was missing. I was missing the sense of life in the house. I was missing the way my grandpa affected the house, and made it a home. But that wasn't the only thing he affected. He affected me, and my mom, and all of my cousins. So why should he be remembered as a vacant house? He should be remembered by me and my family, which is what he would have wanted.

I know now that life isn’t about the size of your home or the money you possess. It's about how many lives you impact positively, because that is ultimately how you will be
When I first started writing this essay, I stared at a blank page for hours while my mind exploded with colors. I had so much to say, but not a single clue how to actually say it. I didn't know how I could possibly show anyone what my life used to be; how close I've been to being destroyed. I never thought I would be able to relive that, but then I realized I had to. This isn't just about me anymore; this is about anyone who has ever been pushed down low by other people. This is for anyone who doesn't know just how beautiful they really are yet. I needed to do this, to give hope to someone, anyone, who was being bullied. So I put pencil to paper and illustrated my journey.

My story is one that, unfortunately, millions of teens, children, and even adults across North America alone can identify with. When you think back to your school days, back to the people you went to school with, you must remember those kids, the ones with the hollowed out eyes and dejected expressions. The kids who cloaked themselves in silence and shadows, who hid themselves in music and cigarette smoke or schoolwork, the battered, twisted souls barely existing on the fringes of society. As dramatic as it sounds, it is the sick, hideous truth. Millions of human beings, all across America, are tormented, beaten, and harassed in school. I'm just one of them. Countless others felt the only way out was suicide. These are young men and women with their whole lives in front of them, who felt the only way out was death. I have hit that low before. I've wanted to die, to not have to feel anything anymore. It takes a lot of ugliness to do that to a person. I personally turned to music to give me something to believe in. Somehow, hearing Bob Marley tell me everything was going to be alright, strange as it sounds, made me feel better. He taught me how to smile again. And hearing Lady Gaga say that I was born this way, that God didn't make a mistake with me, gave me confidence. For the first time in a long time, I didn't feel like a freak anymore. Words couldn't cut me as deep, and the kicks and punches didn't hurt anymore. The things they threw at me to break me down only built me up.

Music really saved my life. Even beyond that, it gave me the courage I needed to share my story, to preach love and acceptance of people of all races, colors, ethnicities, and sexual orientations. I learned that if we can tolerate each other, it will make it so much easier to love ourselves. However, this message hasn't been adopted by everyone yet. Everyday, you hear another story about the pretty girl, the one they called a whore, the one the other girls all threatened, the one who cut herself until the very last drop of life had long since left her arms. You hear the story of the gay boy, who all the other kids beat, who was crushed and stomped on and humiliated, who swallowed pain pills until he couldn't even feel the good anymore. Everyday, you hear another story about the kid who committed suicide. It is an ugly, ugly truth, one that our society as a whole must deal with. I once heard someone, somewhere, say that "You aren't ugly, society is." Truer words have never been spoken. Society is, by definition, a group of people who are all very similar. It is my belief that everyone is born with something special, unique, something beautiful about them. To all the other people that get bullied: that something special, that thing that makes you you; the bullies are trying to destroy that. Don't give up on it. Never. Stay strong, stay true to you, because you really were born the way you were. And when this is all over, it will still hurt at first, sure, but it will make you stronger. It really will. All you
have to do is take the ugly truth of what happened and turn it into something beautiful, like I did. Take what you’ve learned from the blind ignorance and hatred of others and pass it on. Whether whispered into your child’s ear, or shouted from the rooftops, it doesn't matter. All we need is to show love, pass it, bring it from ugliness and teach it, because you never know when it can save someone’s life.

_Distances_

_Saskia Martinez_
_Mansfield Middle School, Grade 8_

November was a dreary image on the calendar in the kitchen, with trees bare, their crooked forms exposed to the biting wind. The sky in the picture was as dark and foreboding as the one outside, and in the background, a barn with chipping paint and a broken door seemed to stand sheepishly in the cold, as if it didn't want to be there but had been dragged along to the photo shoot. The choice of black-and-white for the image only made it more dismal.

According to the aforementioned calendar, it was still fall. However, the weather disagreed. Snow already adorned every lawn, filthy from little footprints and snowplowing. Some had already melted, leaving lonely piles of grimy slush on street corners. Jack Frost was well known in this area, and just before every wilted, flattened lawn was fully displayed, the snowflakes once again began to fall from the darkening clouds.

I climbed the hill in the middle of the park with all my friends one evening in late November, after a recent snowfall had once again blanketed the world in white. Our mothers had fretted over our snow gear, making sure we were wearing as many lumpy, hand knitted scarves and mittens as were available. I wore my grippy gloves, despite Mom's protests that the separate fingers didn't keep your hands warm. But how else, I argued, could I handle the equipment? Stargazing was the point of our endeavor.

At the top of the hill, we set up the tripod on one of those rough circles of cement that covers one of the entrances to the town's pipelines. Using the positions I had inked in on my star chart, I angled the telescope toward where Saturn would be tonight, saving the position for later on. We huddled near the telescope like penguins, while I pointed out Orion, Cassiopeia, Perseus, and my other nighttime companions, as I liked to call them. As I reached up to show them Ursa Major and Ursa Minor (the Big Dipper and the Little Dipper, for those not in the know), I felt my hand hit something hard and smooth. It stung my fingers, which had been outstretched, but the feeling of dread that had followed the impact overshadowed the pain. The crunch of snow and the thump of little collisions as something rolled down the hill seemed almost obscenely loud, an insult to the sudden silence. I turned around, deathly afraid of what I might see.

The worst had been realized. I had whacked the telescope, somehow dislodging it slightly from the tripod. When the entire thing fell over, the telescope had gone bouncing down the hill, skipping over little rocks and branches, gravity increasing its speed and momentum as it continued. It lay forebodingly at the bottom, nestled in a dip in the snow.

I stood, staring, frozen in that one catastrophically awful moment, and then broke into a sprint towards the fallen object. It was only when I neared the telescope that I came to terms with what had happened. The smashing noise I had heard close to the end of the cacophony was not some extra bit of plastic shattering. It was the lens. Lying in shards of glass scattered across the snow, the former lens of my telescope reflected the night sky above, pinpointed with stars. I had a strange desire to laugh at the universe's perverse sense of humor, but this feeling was far
outweighed by reality. The telescope was dented all across its metallic surface, and my gateway to the stars lay in bits all around it.

A sudden catatonic feeling swept over me, and I collapsed, my knees hitting the ground with a bang that seemed to echo in my ears. That is the most important thing in my life, smashed, over there, my brain said. But something inside me ceased to respond. The last gift was gone. My friends seemed to move as one, rushing down the hill as I fell. Once they could see the glint of broken glass, they paused, unsure of what to do, until one moved towards me. I was enveloped in friends' arms, questions washing over me: "Are you okay?" "Can it be fixed?"

No. No. It was the last gift. The last one I have. It’s ruined. He’s lost forever. And seemingly, they knew. They closed in tighter around me, as if trying to shield me from the blame I was placing on myself. It was my hand. It’s all my fault.

"It," my voice cracked, and I attempted to swallow the lump in my throat. "It...it...it was...it was from my dad." When the sentence finally burst out in a quick whisper of agony, it spread through the group—it was from my dad—meander of murmurs punctuated by a short explanation to the newest member of our circle of friends. "What happened to..." they asked, and the answer was short and brutal: "He died." But to my heart, it sounded like, he’s gone, and now the closure I was supposed to find was disappearing into the air like fog in a breeze.

The distances I had tried to close were now wide open. The chasm of space between me and the heavens was just as big as it had been the night he died, and the stars seemed as cold and impassive as the newly fallen snow. The distances of death seemed bigger than the light years between the sun and the nearest star, Proxima Centauri, bigger than the vast span of darkness between the Milky Way and the Andromeda Galaxy.

I felt left in these distances as the shards of my dad’s joy were collected by gloved hands that seemed far away, and yet, so close. And the universe continued spinning through distances, spinning through space, undisturbed, as my gateway to the stars collected the sky in its shiny surface, a bridge of glass between me and my dad.
High School, Grades 9-12 Poetry

Sextet

Hannah Carpino
Avon High School, Grade 9

I (Persèphonè)

Calling to me
With roses on your shoulders
Beckoning
To your blue-eyed Paradise
But should I spend the night
In pain, in darkness
Wrapped in your forbidden fruit
Your spell would enchant me
And I would bide my time
Staying forever

II (Twisted)

I fell for you when I watched her
Pick up your pieces
Year after year
Bottled up and all
Broken glass and beauty
Only denying the truth to yourself
When you two
The happy couple, stood together
Silent ghosts
Of a couple years back
On the edge of memory lane
On the bank of your own
River Styx
And when it hurt for you to smile at her
Because you were forever thinking of someone else,
You just
Passed her cigarettes
Smile like a stiff glare
Laughed like a warning
And the air smelled like marsh
And you smelled like cologne
And she knew that you couldn’t go home
Just two kids then
Beautifully, stupidly fearless
With two lucky lights

**III (Sur Terre)**

I painted the air for you  
With pretty pictures of tomorrow  
Admitting they were hopeful, yet  
Watching you sink deeper  
Watching you watch me  
Promising that we would dance together again  
Sub nova, in luna  
Under a black twisted night

**IV (Marie Antoinette)**

I watched the life fade from you that night  
After hours of chanting dares  
And mindless dancing  
You fell  
Victim to your pride  
You cannot balance your castle  
On four inch heels, my dear  
That much is a gamble  
And your breath was shallow  
And your heart was shallow  
And you flatlined  
Lying on my lap  
Eyes open  
You were my safehold to sanity  
You were my lesson in vanity  
To bring yourself up  
You must learn to go down  
But they all would rather you fall  
Than carefully dismount

**V (Older)**

It’s not that I love you  
Or miss you, really  
But when you trace your fingers  
On the rim of your bottle  
And smile like water  
And say the Three Little Words  
I do not explain  
The acoustics of truth  
That for every “Hello, operator”  
There will be a “please hold”

—57—
Or a “call failed”
Forever my poison and antidote
Causing my death only to revive me
And I will write you not a tribute, darling
Nor pretty words
I will write you my truth

VI (That For Which The Sea Breaks Against)

It’s wishing
That my presence scorched the air with intensity
That days were sweetened by my company
That endlessly liquid lyrics
Poured like molten gold
From the heart of my guitar
That I spoke a language
Of summertime gothic
And had adventures
Worth writing down
For daughters and descendants
But I am just a comet’s tail
Destined to chase beauty forever
Quietly;
Silently

The Moment

Matthew DelMastro
Glastonbury High School, Grade 9

The white has begun to fade
Mixing in with the powdery soil
Blending more and more as time progresses, until it is completely gone
So many others have crossed this boundary before
Acting out personal rituals, and silently reciting short prayers on their way
Some have entered with high aspirations, and left with deep regrets
Others have completed the daunting task
They were welcomed back with open arms and hearty praise
Now it is my turn to cross the line
A deep breath helps me maintain my focus
Every noise gently cancels out
No more laughter, no more cheers, just utter silence
What once was a booming roar, has numbed down to a lull
But I am the only one who feels the solitude
Then the time has come
Everything I have learned is rapidly leaking from my mind
No thoughts occur, just my natural reactions
I am completely independent, all help was forcefully pried off long ago
My insides are replaced with air, a sensation of weightlessness rushes over me
The only thing that matters right now is he and I
I rhythmically swing my arms forward, once, twice
My hands come together, negligibly rocking back and forth
My head pivots, my pupils focus in like a lens on a camera
The only thing I see, is it
Churning over and over in his hand
His approach is similar to mine
I know because I have learned those techniques as well
But no matter who you are
Nobody truly knows what will happen next
The possibilities are limitless for him
But for me, only one outcome is accepted
He creeps back into position
Pausing as he settles, on his elevated perch
He motions
I cock my hands back, and my front foot does the opposite
My balance must be impeccable, and my motion is second nature
He releases
It heads down from the peak
A guided missile locked on target
The clock says this all happens in less than half a second
But in this split second, time stops all together
In what some people miss in a blink, I can see forever
My arms come around faster than the opponent
Everything is perfectly on line
I can see everything so clearly, when it is a blur to everyone else
Thirty one ounces of maple wood, colliding with a five ounce rubber ball covered in leather
Just as quick as it came at me, I sent it the other way
Many feet over the glistening chained link fence it lands
A home run

Ease

Sofia Melian-Morse
Simsbury High School, Grade 9

I wish I could even begin to understand

The way she is thinking.

Even if good things are good, there is bad in it

somewhere?
It is a dis-ease.

An ease that is shaking
And broken.

And I feel responsible
To put her ease back together.

Never to be separated again.

A tear sheds on my lap,

A light drop that feels like

A TON OF BRICKS.

If it feels that heavy to me,

WEIGH HER DOWN

Is her mind a jumbled mess?
It must be even more.

Of words and phrases that she can't say?

I wish she knew that she

I wish she knew that
she might think her tears speak sadness,

but they sigh RELIEF to me.
A raindrop being let go, only to bring
ease
to the thirsty plants down below it.

The Surviving Race

Nora Greenstein-Biondi
North Haven High School, Grade 10

Those 3 little letters: J-E-W
They brand you for life
Brand you as different, as interesting, as monstrous, as frightening
Invisible to the eye (lucky or not?)
Life is ever harder with it
All the stares, confusion, hate
But it's a tattoo I would never have ripped from me
It shows identification
A pass to the surviving race

Our numbers have been cut down
By people both recurring and changing
Who wish us to be purged from the earth
Those who believe this life of sin will gain us a fiery embrace
And for our children, and perhaps theirs as well
Or simply that we don't deserve to live
Yet these people are our brothers and sisters
Families we hope will foster us for as long as they can stand us
And perhaps a little bit longer

We stand as the oldest in the field
The father of many
Yet possibly the least understood
You'd think that being 100,000 years old, someone would have listened eventually
No I don’t celebrate Easter
No I don’t believe in Santa Claus
Matzo is only unleavened bread, nothing added I promise
And I don’t know who this Jesus guy is, but I assure you, I have never laid a hand on him

In this way I consider myself one of the lucky ones
I don’t hear too many coarse words
I pray without interruption
I don’t have to deal with bombs or missiles
The people around me are simply kind and curious
Even in my gratitude I have to wonder if
But all I can say is, I guess after centuries of oppression of my ancestors, it was decided I needed a break.

**Longing**

*Ryan Bonacum*

*Edwin O. Smith High School, Grade 10*

Trying forever to touch the fleeting reflections
Twisted vines claw at my heart twice seared
A single flower marks the pale scar
Of an immortal memory til now revered
Longing strangles a star of glass seen from afar
Snaring these feet, cradling them in a bitter hold
The thorns are too pleasant to tear away
Against this temptation I cannot help but fold
Wallowing in a field of needles, my memories at play
A flower that grows at ease under frost
Makes even the barren ice seem perfect
Wandering in such a land comes at a cost
No more grace from life will you collect
A potted plant with its roots shriveled
Has no ties to the living earth
Forever it remains gasping for water, crippled
Damned to longing by a hand once meaning rebirth
Past beauty always fades to aching remembrance
Because a missing limb is lost till death
A shattered star and withered flowers’ dull radiance
Chokes me till I no longer draw breath
Who would want to when left alone in the night
Basking in a pool of sundered connections
Sobbing for the return of glimpsed light

**Worth the Trouble**

*Briana McDermott*

*Coventry High School, Grade 10*

That rock wall stood in my way like a stubborn kid,
Keeping me from the one place I so craved to be.

Soon Dad and I found ourselves navigating the barricade.
Tricky boulders were littered with flecks of white shell,
Water filtered recklessly through the massive rocks.
Attempting to give an unspoken warning.
The minnow marched in masses of thousands along the wall,
Winning first place in the race to perfection.
We came in second; I glanced up and down the haven.
One or two people flitter neither here nor there.
Dad sat on the sand beside my backpack;
My book was plucked from it before I knew I was grabbing it.

This is the moment I was waiting for.
My feet buried themselves in the sand where the water
Continued to kiss the shoreline even after being sent away.
I read until the sun started setting in the distance.

“That was a lot of trouble just for a place to read,” Dad had said.
“Yeah…” I turned to him, “But it was worth the trouble.”

———

Tongue as Wide as Whispers

Hannah Boulier
Green Street Homeschool Coop, Grade 11

1. I’ve never had this feast
It consists of Edith, she is
our daughter- and a yellow teacup full
of our blood / I went out and asked Mother for
See, Goddess started to dance upon the sky, which
is earth, so I ran to a new place to stand
and the leaves brushed my skin for ailment
I removed my clothes The deer came
to feed upon my bones, and the bears, my flesh
I asked, save my blood for / and I will spell you
that way for it is the way my tongue screams So,
here’s my corners, and the aftermath the rose smoke you
asked for / Suddenly the bites along my pelvis have turned
into birds and a voice high and seedy / You say my birthday is
everyday seed this again,
this type of rain
Look at me birth
our Moon-daughter

2. One Night I ask you to give me
your old selves for me to
singe away under my tongue,
One Night something falls
upon your hand, something falls from
the ceiling, a part of
you more / because once
you told me you
were going to wane across
my ceiling and so every Night I
make sure that's just
what you're doing,
One Night I ask you to not
make a sound
so I might
make them for you, and
our new culture
devised / of what we took
and what they'd never heard,

3. now my tongue as wide as whispers, it is
a call forbearing sight / I can see your fumbling
hands, the ones that cursed on my skin and made
me well / No, no! you say, surely you
didn’t make me heal, for
here I sit drugged, a skin like Devil’s, scars like trees
I see you wanting to incorporate me / Oh, pick me
up in back-bending
ways, here I am / outstretched for you, and here
I’ll stay for two seconds more
before I dive the sky / in place of you, run faster
faster

4. This is carrying too far across
these legs and you won’t
tell me who you are.

This is
unfurling
drinks in my eyes
so dry like wet sand,
scabs formed of Winter-sea
Have you remembered to kiss her waves//braid her veins?

Aimless

Hannah Gerhard
Rockville High School, Grade 11

I’ve bunked with Thoreau
for a mere 52 weeks
on the lonely crust of Walden Pond.
I have run around Paris,
eager and free,
attached to the tipsy hip side of Hemingway’s vain realities.
I’ve spent weekends
consuming dry gin and cigarettes, 
enticed by the decadent disasters of which Gatsby lived upon. 
I held hands with Ms. Plath 
as the hollow air ignited 
haunting thoughts 
I had wished to suppress for far too long. 
I trailed behind Robert Frost, 
wandering down deserted pathways, 
amazing by the miles we had to walk in order to fall asleep. 
But if you had asked me, 
I would’ve said I was already lost beneath a dream. 
Aimlessly, I walk 
oblivious to who I am, 
who I could be, or 
who- by God- I couldn’t be. 
I am a fleeting moment in time- 
broken clocks, 
unorthodox perceptions, 
wallowing, wallowing, wallowing 
with each instance of slight success, 
digesting the day dreams I dream each evening, 
breathing in my life as if it owed me something. 
Aimlessly, I walk 
blind and deaf 
and kind and dead, 
these times behead my fickle fretting feats and feats 
defeats I meet- 
a weak and seeking soul, 
burns me dark and slow 
I will never love my life the way I fell in love with theirs. 
I’m so tired. 
And not once 
have I found myself recommending a novel I wrote- 
God knows how incredibly unsatisfied I will remain 
For I know, 
my life is but a bore 
when propped beside a published name. 

Collision 

Lauren Silver 
Rockville High School, Grade 11 

The alcoholic took to coma 
Like the artist to her painting. 

His hands are withered,
His smile is broken
He finds comfort in drowning
In that ocean of confusion and whiskey on the rocks.

Her hands are delicate,
Streaked with blues and greens and reds
Her lips press together,
Creating a thin line that keeps her words concealed in her mind
She paints an ocean.
She finds her comfort in the tips of her brushes.

Stumbling to his car,
Fumbling with his keys
He finishes off the bottle,
And smashes the glass on the ground
As he drives away the tires scream.

With keys in one hand,
And a wet canvas in the other,
She slips into her car
And puts the painting in the backseat
She leaves the empty parking lot
With the sound of the radio, gently vibrating the air.

His eyes are burning,
From the tears and
From trying to remain focused on the road
Lines blur into streaks of yellow and white
The grass and the pavement become one.

Tired,
She yawns, humming to the music
Her eyes water
The moon shines over the roof of her car
She smiles at its brilliance.

Clashing metal pierces the soft air
The hollow color
Of one man’s pain
Permanently combines with the
Ephemerality of one woman’s fate
To paint the sky the darkest shade of gray.

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Life in Red Lipstick

Madison Gretzky
Edwin O. Smith High School, Grade 12
There was no further thought behind the red lipstick that morning beyond "why not?" But red lipstick is a time investment.

It's the kind of dark and stormy night that sends normal people running for warm fires and bad mystery writers running for their pens. The rain is cold, though not unbearably so. The night is stormy, but nothing too bad. When you step out of the door, You have every intention of walking straight to the coffee shop. To do what you are always doing: what you are supposed to do. Or, maybe, If you're lucky, To just sit, And sip, And think.

It's the kind of night where the wind tosses the rain up into your face, Right under the lip of your umbrella, The kind of night where your wet shoes squelch every time they hit the wet ground. Where your socks are wet. It's the kind of night where the rain that has been tossed into your face settles happily and with a sort of vengeance onto your hair, ruining any order there was.

It is the kind of night where you walk across the wet grass instead of the less squelchy pavement, because that's what you think you deserve. It is the kind of night for thinking, for ruminating on all the tangled strings that make up a life.

As the rain falls, you're thinking about all the ifs that would make your life easier: If she didn't, If he did. You're thinking how it's nights like this that make you want to give up. That make you remember all the reasons why not. That make you long for the warm sunny days when you can recall the reasons why.

It is the kind of night that has you holding your head in your hands, Because you don't want this. You wanted simple. What happened to simple? This night is fitting for you. You can feel the December rain mixing with all the thoughts to all the things you don't understand, and you hope something less confusing will come from their union.
You want to be the kind of girl who knows what she wants,
And goes and gets it.
But you’re the kind who waits.
Who thinks it all out to herself.
Who is politically wise.
And that is what makes you angry.

So you walk in the rain.
You let your hands stiffen.
And melt them with a coffee cup,
No paper sleeve.
Let the searing heat sear your hands.
You look at the hole in the lid,
Clean and white, speckled only by rain.
And you want that red lipstick off before you drink.

∞ (Infinity)

Ashley Pecorelli
Bristol Central High School, Grade 12

You, in the back of class, attempting to disappear,
eyes negative slopes, concave downward,
avoiding the carnage of red scrawls on your paper
you are the outlier

That face walking past, spitting out numbers
no eye contact, you estimate your result
gritting your teeth for the final calculation
these are points you haven’t plotted

You, in the back of class, staring at the window
reflection as blank as your sheet of paper
confidence divided, doubt multiplied
resenting what the calculator cannot fix

That two digit number, controlling your fate
you let your fear be derived from its value
your pain the second derivative
to which a limit does not exist

You, in the back of class, losing yourself,
take note: a number is constant, staying still
but you are not; from this you will grow
your future is undefined
Hand in Hand

Elizabeth Ta
Rockville High School, Grade 12

Part I: The Game
Long tips protrude from the elongated fingers of my best friend; my brother. They are in motion, concentrated on the keyboard of his mind, his computer, entranced in a fictional game. The sounds of our laughter and his fantasy world echo through our empty and lonely home.
“Wait, so what are you supposed to be doing?” I laugh and point at his character. His eyes break free from the screen and are now fixed solely on mine. He stammers out of scruffy, unshaven lips, “Something with my life.”

Part II: Hold on Tight
Her unfamiliar hands grasp his tightly, then clench the pain of her self-destructive habits of pummeling her fragile hands into concrete. Silence and memories of a broken past smother them as she gazes at him with damp eyes. “When will it stop hurting?” She asks. “When you finally decide to let go,” he stammers.

Part III: Madame Zora
One hand holding my white Blackberry, my eyes constantly drift towards you then back to my phone. The other relaxes, because for the first time in a long time my nails aren’t dug into my always clenched fists. Your hand slowly brushes mine, and my fingers intertwine with yours, worn down from regular work. You pull me closer.
I can see it in your eyes, how badly you want me to be yours. My eyes shift towards the sky. “Hebron Harvest Fair” hangs above us, and the stars are masked by all the smoke. The smell of fried dough fills the air, as does the laughter of the children surrounding us. You pull me along your side, guiding me to the fortune teller across from us. You jokingly ask, “What do you think she’ll predict about us?” “I don’t know,” I murmur. “That nobody will ever love me as much as I have loved him.” “Not even you.”
Part IV: No Lies
A pulse oximeter holds his delicate hand,
And I hold the other, hoping to ease the pain.
The aroma of hospital floods my nose,
Along with the food that hasn’t entered his system for days.
Concerned, I ask, “Grandpa, do you want me to feed you?”
His cloudy eyes strain to meet mine,
“Lies won’t make me live any longer, sweetheart.”
I am twelve and discontented. It is late in the night and still I cannot capture the image of the full moon on my camera. When I look at it above the unsleeping Block Island, it is huge, a mystery with its craters and scars. Yet on my screen, it is a tiny orb that pales in comparison to the Island’s bright lights. It is like smoke from a candle. You can catch it in a quick fist, but when you unfurl your palm to examine it, it’s gone. This is a lesson in desire and ghosts.

I am thirteen and pacing the room all night, talking with my friend Kay on the phone, letting her desperate voice pour into my ear: an outlet. I soak up her sadness as she dissects the details of her parents’ divorce to me. When the conversation winds down, she announces to me that she saw a ghost this past weekend.

“It was fast,” she said faintly. “Just a girl standing behind me in the mirror. Bright red hair and a smile.”

I’m speechless, and assure her things like this could be a result of stress. I do not believe in the supernatural or surreal, but not for a moment do I believe my words. This is another lesson in ghosts, though the desire would not come till later.

I am seven and playing with Kay. We’re playing Scooby Doo, chasing a criminal ghost. I want to be Daphne, but Kay gets the role because of her bright red hair. I cry of jealousy and hide in her closet. After a long ten minutes of sniffling, I hear Kay’s knock. “I caught the ghost,” says her little voice. “But it wasn’t fun without you.” I emerge from the closet. Her huge toothy smile and startlingly blue eyes make me feel at home. Burying my face in her bush of red hair, I feel the happiest I have in my seven years. This lesson was the most innocent and basic of all those in desire and chasing ghosts.

I am me. Now. Thinking about how long it has been since I have seen Kay that happy, that fully smiling. It seems an eternity. I am overcome with the desire to trap her in that frame of life and preserve her like a ship in a bottle. Why couldn’t I capture her, save her from this spiral of despair? It was my fault: I assumed her happiness was mine to claim. I held it tight in my fist without care and let her go when I opened it. It is my Pandora’s box, it is my realizing moment. It is my final lesson in desire and ghosts, the most painful.

It is night and I am near sleep, but millions of thoughts still make a barrier. I wonder:
If the other girl in the mirror looked happy.
If she had the innocent smile of a seven year old, content with chasing made believe ghosts.
If she realized she would become one.
If the other girl knew her hair would fade to brown, but her eyes would remain ever-blue.
I wonder:
If Kay looked at her long enough to see her former self.
If she held her gaze long enough to feel the girl’s pure heart, unscarred by hurt.

—71—
If Kay looked long enough to feel what the girl felt.
Or did she only look quick enough to feel the paradise of ignorance, and then the pang of leaving.

The Poet of the Lake

Anthony Flores
Stamford High School, Grade 9

Once a day the bay moves in a chaotic swirl, giving off an intense feeling of danger that scares the fish into the nearby caves. At the bay’s end, the ocean, using its brutal and rough force, thrusts in hundreds of more fish around the bay, and once the waters calm, the fish finally return to the surface in a great dense pack, only to be caught and eaten by the many fishermen waiting for their catch of the day.

Suddenly, lots of fishermen rush out swarming in stampedes with their newly made, grand designed boats with great fishing hooks and claws that seem as if they have the ability to catch fish from the heavens. However, one of these fishermen isn’t as excited as some of the others. He simply rows out there with his small boat and his nets at his side with little interest in actually fishing. The truth is that this fisherman isn’t a fisherman at all, but rather, a poet with a lethargic attitude and a simple lazy lifestyle. He brings with himself a notebook to maybe write some poetic words. He is a very poor man whose only love in his life is the beauty of poetry and so he comes to the bay not to be a fisherman and fish, but to be a poet looking for a beauty to write about. Each day he comes back only to be ridiculed by the others, who accuse him of lies because he calls himself a “poet.” In fact, he never works hard enough to write a good poem. Many even argue that he should find something else to do besides write poetry, like fishing.

While he was sitting there, with his fishing nets and rods on his forsaken wooden “Titanic” another fisherman pulls up beside him with a recent successful catch.

“Excuse me, Sir, I see you’ve been very successful so far; would you mind sharing with a poor man like me?” said the poet with a humble, bad actor’s voice.

“Look here, ‘poet’,” replied the large, dark skinned man with his full net of fish. “These fish are mine and mine only. I put a lot of hard work getting these and I’m not going to give them to a man who is too lazy to catch his own. Look! You can get at least fifty fish that are at least five pounds each if you just try to catch them yourself!” and so he leaves, for he doesn’t want to be involved with a lazy person like the poet.

The poet simply shrugs and walks in another direction with his small boat dragging behind him. He finally goes into the water but comes out only minutes later, bored, sitting in his boat waiting for fish to appear. All men need to do work, but this poet doesn’t care about that.

That evening the poet goes to his small house in the forest near the bay, a one-door, two-room wooden place with a chimney that doesn’t even reach the height of the tree branches growing next to the house. The poet enters his room where he has placed several shavings of wool on the floor as a bed. He lies on the floor reviewing his whole life, “I am a man who simply sits in the seats of the theater of society but can never watch and understand the shows,” he thinks to himself. His ideas are deep, but he never works hard enough to write them clearly. So instead of his words being considered profound, he is often ridiculed and disliked for his failure to complete his goals. Just a do-nothing, that’s what the people dislike about him. If he is to not be a hypocrite, then he must work hard at everything he does.
He decides he has to go out to fish again, and this time he will work hard at fishing, although fishing for him is mainly a hobby, not a job. “My hypocrisy will end,” he thinks to himself, “tomorrow is a day that will be an interesting one,” and finally, he sleeps.

The next day is, indeed, an interesting one. He races out to the bay with his equipment along with the other fishermen. This time he really works on finding a beauty for his poetry.

In the span of only forty-five minutes, the poet has made many successful catches, but suddenly the boat starts to sink with his fish in it. He realizes that the boat’s old hull is too worn out for the overwhelming weight of the fish to rest in its shell. He starts to panic; he rushes, moving his hands frantically around the boat attempting to keep many of the fish in the boat, but they just continually flip back into the lake’s warming waters. “All of my success”, he thinks, “is it going to escape?” Fortunately for him, not all of his fish have escaped, for the poet miraculously manages to hold on to some of the smaller fish, stuffs them in his jacket and journeys home.

At home he reflects on his annoying day. Feeling frustrated after what has happened, he roughly takes the fish out of his jacket and prepares to cook them near the chimney. He cuts the fish open only to find an odd looking coin that shines brightly in the darkened house. The poet feels a lot better, and returns to cutting, ignoring the coin. He then starts to stare at the rest of the fish that are still uncut and lay on his table. The beauty of the fish soon goes from lines, to pictures, to colors, then to words in the poet’s head. The poet quickly writes down his ideas in his notepad before they disappear from his mind. The beauty he has been looking for has finally been found. He sleeps for a period of time, then wakes up the next morning to go to the marketplace to buy an old rowboat with the coin he has.

The marketplace is packed that morning, but the poet wants to share his poetry with the rest of the townsfolk to show that he really is a poet and not some poor man without any work ethic.

He finds a new cheap boat to buy before he goes to show the town his new poetry. He walks up to the merchant selling boats and the poet shows him the coin he has found. The merchant’s jaw drops in surprise.

“These boats don’t cost that much, Sir! Are you sure you don’t have a smaller coin?” the merchant asks. The poet is in disbelief that the coin is of very high value. The merchant has become so excited to see such a rare coin, he forgets to pay attention and insists the poet take a boat for free. The poet immediately becomes rich after getting the value of his coin, and many people start to notice him and start asking him questions like, “How did you get so rich?” and “How can I become wealthy like you?” Many mistake him for a man already with wealth. Soon, however, the poet starts to worry that he may never express his poetry. He quickly stands on the tall rock where people are gathered...

“Look here, people! I have poetry to recite to you that I have created myself!” shouts the poet. The people turn, confused at first, but they listen closely, and more closely. Suddenly his poetry becomes well loved by the people, so much so that he becomes famous in the region. He keeps fishing as a hobby and he creates more and more poems about the fish of the bay. Soon the poet lives on knowing that his success has inspired others and gives life to literature. No more will the poet be an outcast from society or a man known as lazy by the people. Success and hard work has led the poet to greatness.

*The Sixth Sense*

*Cassie Martin*
I see.
I see you standing there, big brother. You are clean-cut and sharply dressed, standing tall. Your dark suit is in stark contrast with the rays of sunlight dancing throughout the church. Despite the humidity causing sweat to form on my brow and my hair to hang limply past my shoulders, I couldn't be happier. We are paralyzed - frozen in place as we watch the momentous union of the two people before us. A proclamation is made, reverberating throughout the edifice in which we stand. A ring is slipped onto a finger. A kiss is exchanged, and then it is over, swept away by time. I turn to look at you once more and we exchange a smile. We are siblings now, and hope for the future blazes within me.

I touch.
I touch the duct tape on the window, big brother, and quickly pull my hand away. Pure fear keeps me paralyzed as I stare up at the sky. It is ominous - the churning clouds are black as night, with unspeakable dangers hidden within its tendrils of darkness. The silence only adds to my apprehension. The joyous moment in the church seems to be an entire lifetime away, even if it has only been a week. For the past few days, I have constantly been plagued by foreboding messages that constantly crackle over the radio and TV.
"Hurricane Irene is projected to make a direct hit on the East Coast. Extreme flooding and widespread damage in coastal areas is expected."
"Winds are estimated to reach upwards of 75 miles per hour, with gusts as high as 110."
"A state of emergency has been declared for Connecticut. Residents of coastal areas are urged to evacuate as soon as possible."
Each warning has made me more and more afraid until I became a tightly wound ball of pure anxiety, much to my own dismay and my friends' amusement. Now, as I stare past the giant 'X' that we taped across the large window overlooking the rolling waves of amber marsh just past our backyard, I cannot help but wonder for the millionth time what the outcome of this storm will be. Only one thing consoles me: you. I know that if you're here, I won't be totally overwhelmed by fear.

Just as I finally back away from the window, I turn, and my heart sinks. I see you with a backpack on, the hood of your sweatshirt pulled up as if you're about to leave. I find myself beginning to pray.
"Are... are you leaving?" I stammer.
Please say no.
"Yeah," you say with an apologetic smile.
I curse under my breath, a panicky feeling beginning to wash over me once again. I see concern flicker in your eyes for a moment, and as I look up at you with my own petrified gaze, you seem to understand.
"Come here," you say, opening your arms. I hug you tightly, embracing you as if my life depends on it. "Don't be afraid."
In that moment, a new kind of feeling begins to pervade through the fear: comfort. As I finally pull away from you, I exhale deeply, managing a smile. The desire to be brave - be brave for you, big brother - makes my fear of the impending storm seem laughable; insignificant.
"I won't be. I promise."

I taste.
I taste the pizza you ordered, big brother. We sit in comfortable silence at the kitchen
table, devouring the food as if we haven't eaten in days. Our parents have been buying twice
the amount of food ever since they married just a month ago, but for us, no amount of nutrition
ever seems to be enough. Occasional conversation breaks through the munching.

"How was school today?" you ask in between mouthfuls of pizza.

"Good," I reply without thinking. I was used to answering that question - ever since
I began my education, my answers had dwindled down from an enthusiastic, meticulous
recounting of everything I had done that day to a simple "fine" or "good."

"What did you learn?"

I pause for a moment. This was a question I didn't typically receive every day. You look
at me expectantly, waiting to hear my answer. I am a bit surprised - you seem to be expressing
legitimate interest; something that is foreign to me.

"I guess I learned that upperclassmen actually don't all want to torture freshmen."

"What made you learn that?"

"Well, I met this really nice senior..."

From there, the words come easily, and, much to my surprise, you never seem to
lose focus or grow bored. I am receiving attention tonight that I haven't gotten in quite a
while.

This has become somewhat of a ritual - you ask me what I learned in school that day,
and I answer, explaining what steps I have taken so far down the beaten path on my high
school journey - all over a copious amount of food at the dinner table. Slowly, I begin to realize
that having a big brother is quite possibly the best thing that has ever happened to me.

I smell.

I smell the smoke drifting up from your cigarette, big brother. We stand in the midst of
chaos as a river of people rushes out of the theater, eager to escape from the cold November
wind and return to the comforting warmth of their cars. You and I, however, are oblivious - we
are still, a stagnant patch in the hustling crowd. I can still hear the music from the concert we
just left ringing in my ears, and in this moment, it is the best feeling in the world. For a few
hours, our world consisted only of a small theater and the tales being spun through
breathtaking melody produced by the singer onstage. For a moment, the past did not exist, nor
did the future - only the music of the present. The woman singing is your favorite artist, and
although it took endless hours of babysitting and resisting the allure of purchasing expensive
junk food to save up for the tickets, the smile on your face was worth it.

The crowds of people around us are finally beginning to dwindle, and you drop
your cigarette, snuffing it out with your foot, before smiling down at me, twenty-one years
of perspicacity reflected in your gaze. You open your arms for a hug, and I step forward to
meet your embrace, clasping my arms tightly around the person I look up to so much.

"Happy birthday," I mumble into your sweatshirt, unable to wipe the smile off my
face.

Happy birthday, big brother.

I hear.

I hear you outside my window, big brother. You are silent in the midst of all the shouting, only
grunting occasionally to acknowledge that you hear your father before you. "You're a bad
influence," he shouts at you. "Just a burden on this family." I sit quietly in my room, listening as
you are taken apart, piece by piece, by harsh words and cursing. I want so desperately to
interfere; to intercept the hate being shot at you like poison darts. My own silence crushes me,
and its weight is becoming more and more palpable as the shouting continues. Still, I say
nothing. I wonder for a moment how things can go downhill so quickly in just a few months.
Only a modicum of hope for the happy family I've always wanted remains within me after being trodden upon by argument after endless argument. I simply cannot take it anymore, and so I run.

I dash down the hallway and out the door, unfazed by the biting cold that greets me. My surroundings begin to blur as I sprint away - away from the arguing, the dysfunction, the hate. Each slap of my ratty sneakers against the pavement mocks me. "Coward," my footsteps seem to jeer. "You could have said something, but instead, you're running away. How valiant!" I can almost hear the sarcastic, ridiculing laughter as I continue running through the empty night. My breathing is growing labored, and I am gradually becoming aware of the stabbing cold that pierces my bare arms and face like a knife. My gait finally begins to slow. My entire body is on fire, but I still don't turn back. I don't want to go back - back to the hate, the shame, the fear. But, I know I have to. I slowly turn and begin to head back, wading through a sea of regret as thick as molasses.

"What can I do?" I whisper to myself, my arms tightly crossed in an attempt to retain some warmth in my body. I don't understand why I want to save him so much - after all, he is only my stepbrother. We've only been in each others' lives for half a year, and yet he has become such a prominent part of my life. I don't know why I become so defensive when he is only being disciplined. I don't understand the restlessness that festers in the back of my mind when he is away from home. I cannot grasp the incomprehensible joy that comes with simply knowing that I have an older brother.

I sit down on the side of the road for a moment, my thoughts draping a temporary veil between me and the freezing air, and slowly, I begin to understand. My stepbrother is the person I look forward to seeing when I come home. My stepbrother is the person who can immediately make my day a little brighter, even if I only see him for a brief moment at the dinner table. My stepbrother is the one person in my family I can actually relate to.

Suddenly, everything becomes clear. Throughout this new life, the true sense that encompasses the relationship between my brother and I has existed quietly, buried beneath six months' worth of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and feelings. Now, however, it could not be more prominent, and as I walk back down the moonlit street, I smile for the first time that night. I love.

Silky White Gowns

Rebecca Kaufman
Edwin O. Smith High School, Grade 10

If I told you that I knew where I was going—if I told you that I have dreams and plans and hope—I would be lying. I remember when I was little; the days lasted hours instead of minutes.

I remember raspberry bushes in the summer and I remember cold wind on snowy hills and I remember hot cider and apple picking in red and orange orchards and the sweet fermented smell of the autumn ground. I remember chocolate ice cream cake on my birthday and smiles and warmth. I remember when the world wasn’t collapsing on top of me, but it’s strange, unfamiliar, and sometimes I wonder if it’s only a figment of my imagination.

Because when Emmy got cancer, everything changed. Suddenly everyone’s eyes were outlined with dark puffy circles and they grasped their forks and spoons so tightly that their knuckles turned white. I was only six and Emmy was fourteen but her pale face and bald head
made her seem more fragile—more vulnerable than an older sister should look. Emmy’s favorite season was fall. She said it was perfect because it wasn’t too hot or too cold and the sun shone a lot. She said the colors reminded her of a romantic sunset. We used to lay on the top of the hill behind the brook in our back yard and Emmy would hold my hand in hers and we’d look up at the blinding blue sky and the falling red and orange leaves. Emmy died eight years ago and I don’t remember her much now. Soon after, Sarah and Jeff stopped trying. Sarah and Jeff are my parents, and I only call them by their names behind their backs, but that’s how I really see them: Sarah and Jeff. Tired and pale and sad.

I have developed two escapes. Sometimes I run. This makes me feel better. Sometimes I like to feel invisible and I land softly and I fly and all that’s there is pitter-patter and the cars with their rights on my face. Sometimes I wish I could scream and I land hard—feel the ripple of my fall deep in my muscles. But most of the time, I find solace in something entirely different.

My head is pressed against the wooden chest; my bare shoulder touches the cool plaster of the wall. My chin is pressed up against the faded denim of my pants. I push myself into the corner, trying to make myself smaller, smaller than the tiniest piece of dust, smaller than the atoms that make up that piece of dust, until I am invisible. The raw, puffy welts along my wrist sting and I press them with my fingers, cringing as the pain shoots up to my teeth, to my head, my ears, but this is almost better than being alive and it’s something I crave in the midst of my despondency.

In my room, wrapped in a piece of purple tissue paper, sealed in the jewelry box my grandma gave for Christmas when I was twelve, I hide a blade. It’s sharp and shiny and clean. I close my eyes and I slowly slide the cool metal across my skin and feel the pain being released: all of the sorrow, and the cold embraces, and the silence at dinner. It releases itself in crimson droplets of satisfaction. In my state of ecstasy, I can wash away all of the toxins. Still smothered by this blanket of euphoria, I lay on my bed. I try to grasp the windowsill, I try to pretend it’s reality, and I try to close my eyes.

I know that I can’t drain myself too quickly. I’ll die if I do. But other times I imagine what it would be like. Death. I imagine falling. I imagine losing myself. I imagine people crying and I imagine seeing them love me the way I saw them love Emmy. I’ve thought about this a lot. I’ve thought about God, and Heaven, and Hell. It’s nice to think that when I die I would be going somewhere better—it’s comforting even, which I suppose is the reason people believe what they do. If I did leave, I wonder if I would wear silky white gowns and live peacefully forever. But I don’t think I would. I think I would rot in the ground, but it’s more pleasant to think that there’s something out there to hold me and protect me from all of the pain that’s down here.

What nobody understands is that I’m not doing this for attention. This is not my call for help. I do not want anybody to notice the disgusting swollen mutilations that criss-cross my pale arms. This is my secret—the single fragment of my life that I can control. This is my power. Still grasping the blade, my hand moves in a familiar, methodical motion. But this time, I decide to cut against the scars. I’m sick of looking at their puffy exterior, red and aggravated. I want to release their secrets instead of adding to them. Surprised, I notice that this time it’s deeper; there is blood covering my entire arm and everything is red. And this time there’s no windowsill to hold on to, no reality, no power.

But soon I’m running and it’s light and quiet because I’m not hitting the ground at all, I’m in the air and my legs are moving silently against the wind. My arms are clean, smooth, white. The sky is black, open. And millions of stars whisper to me, seduce me. I have one
thought in my head—the thought is of seeing Emmy again, wonderful, perfect, Emmy. I have just this one thought until I look down and see a body—broken, small, and unattached. For a moment, I try to turn around and grab the mangled part of me that is still left on the ground, but the breeze is too strong and I can only glance back. For a moment, I try to call out, but my shrill call is silenced—I have nothing left to say. Draped softly around my delicate frame is a silky white gown. It feels unlike the big woolen sweaters and weathered leather boots that I wear at home. Silk is colder than I had imagined.

Enslavement

Christiane Lee
Rockville High School, Grade 10

Dylan

“You owe me twenty-seven dollars.”
“Can’t ya cut me a break? I’m a returning customer.”
“No. Pay up or nothing. This stuff’s not cheap.”

The weather was warm for March. I ambled around at the cross of Ainslee Road and Basil Avenue with my newly bought quarter ounce of marijuana. Just the smell of it wafting from the hidden pocket inside my long black coat was intoxicating. It made me fidgety. Walking by friends at school, I breathed in the fumes of weed radiating from their clothes. It calms me. That’s when I know I need to get more. Where is she? I told her six.

Sky strolled up the sidewalk of Ainslee Road, avoiding all of the cracks between each block of gray gum-stained cement. Her curly, dark brown hair was pulled back into a ponytail, hidden by the hood of the black sweatshirt that seemed to consume her. Sharpied stars and scribbles stained her tight, ripped jeans. She was listening to her iPod. I had told her to meet me at six o’clock. It was five fifty-three. She was early. I’ve trained her well.

Skylar

He’s smart deep down
I know it.
I know I can change him.
He just doesn’t have the support he needs
He’s a good person
Deep within himself.
We just need to find it.

Dylan

“Hey baby doll, walk faster. I’m dying over here!” My hands flung up to my neck in a fake choke. Skylar cracked a smile. I always know how to make her laugh. She walked faster and practically ran into my arms. They surrounded her, made her feel safe and warm. I let my lips caress her hair, then her neck and forehead. I grabbed her little hands in my big ones. Her big hazel eyes looked up at me, lovingly. I have her wrapped around my finger...

Skylar

I remember
It was my 16th birthday.
You came over
In a drunk rage.

—78—
I just happened to be “bothering” you that day.
I always seem to annoy you.
The counter is still blood stained.

Dylan
“Can we go back to your house? I don’t want to go home right now. My mom's nagging again, telling me to get a job. Lazy woman should get off her own butt and get her own job.” I slung my arm over Sky’s shoulder, and started strolling down Basil Avenue, not patient enough for her response.

Skylar

Our seven month anniversary,
You bought me a sterling necklace
Shaped like a heart.
Said it represented your love for me.
I wear it every day.

Dylan
We finally got to Sky’s little powder-blue ranch. Her parents are that “uptight” kind of people that actually have a garden...with flowers, paint the house when it starts to look crappy, and care about her grades. That's why she's an “A” student.

“Did you hear me, Dilly? I said I got accepted into Berkeley!” Her face lit up in the most beautiful way. It almost made me feel bad for how I treat her. Almost.

“Yeah that's great, Kitten, but you're not going anywhere I can't follow you.”

Skylar

The letter came in the mail
Addressed to “Miss Skylar Caitlyns”
“We are pleased to inform you that you have been accepted into Berkeley University.”
How am I going to tell Dylan I’m moving to California
To study neurobiology and psychology?
I must be crazy.

Dylan
We finally settled down on her cushy, leather couch. It was in the middle of our make out session that I started to feel fidgety again.

“Hey, babe, I need a smoke.” Quickly, I pulled out my quarter ounce, lighter, and bong. We were the only ones home. Who could possibly catch us? After taking a few hits, I offered the bong to Sky.

“Umm, no thanks Dill. You know I don't smoke.” She choked on getting the words out as I exhaled in her face. If I didn't know better, I'd say she was afraid to say it. She could be grateful and take a hit. This stuff’s expensive.

Skylar

We were on a walk in March.
I guess I said something wrong.
What did I do to deserve this?
I told Tiana it was an accident,
You didn’t mean it
But I think she suspected something.

Dylan
“I offered you weed. You’re going to take it.” She was testing my patience. I’ll just show her who wears the pants in this relationship. Sky looked nervous. A strand of curl fell in her face. I brushed it gently back behind her ear and offered her the pipe one more time, a stern
look across my face. After a slight hesitation, Skylar reached out to take it from me. She held it reluctantly to her lips... one, two, three, four hits. *That a girl.*

**Skylar**

The next day,
You brought me flowers
To say you're sorry.
They were beautiful.
A dozen pink carnations.
Reminds me why I'm still with you.

**Dylan**

I've gotten sick of pot. I'm onto harder stuff. I took the pipe back and put it on the table. Reaching into the same coat pocket as before, I pulled out a packet of cocaine. Staring at her face, a smirk crossed my lips as her beautiful hazel eyes widened.

“Dill, I don't think that's a good idea. I don't mind the smoking too much, but this is just too much for me.”

“You're going to do what I tell you to do, and you're not going to complain.”

**Skylar**

June 2, 2011.
I still love you,
Even though you hurt me
Physically and emotionally.
I know you're good
Somewhere deep inside you.
You pulled me aside
Why are all of the secrets you tell bad?
“I got some pot. Took a few hits off it.”
I went home
And cried
Your life flashed
In front of me
I tried to grab your hand,
But it was holding a cigarette instead.

**Dylan**

“Kitty?” I kicked away an empty vodka bottle and the empty bag of cocaine. *Maybe I pushed her too hard...* Sky was on the ground. She obviously can't handle anything hardcore. Mental note for next time. “Babe?” I bent over her, poking her hard on the shoulder. *She better wake up before her parents get home.* She didn't move...at all. Her arms were cold. “Sky? Skylar? Wake up. Come on. You're pathetic!” By now, I was shaking her. Sky wouldn't open her eyes. *Dear God...*

**Skylar**

I hate when
You tell me these things
And I have to act okay.
I have to support you and love you,
But I die on the inside.

**Dylan**

“Someone! Somebody, Please help me!” I couldn't scream any louder as I ran Sky on my back into the Emergency Room. She was completely limp. I could barely carry her to the car, so
I threw her on the back seat. It was a sickening sight. A creature so beautiful, as limp as a boned fish, and as white as a marshmallow. That's what she was. A marshmallow. Flimsy, pale, and soft. There was nothing I could do to help her at this point.

**Skylar**

Always know
The scars you leave on my heart
With every blow
And each slap
Are deeper
More painful
And more permanent
Than the ones that you leave
On the shallow layers
Of my skin

**Dylan**

“Hey doc. Is she going to be okay? We were just messing around. Nothing serious.” I swear to God when I see her, the first thing I’m gonna do is cut this whole thing off. How the hell can I have a girlfriend that can't even stand a little coke? The short little woman looked up at me with a blank expression. She had smile wrinkles around her mouth that just seemed to emphasize her anger and contemplation. The lady glanced down at the clipboard in her hands and flipped through the first few pages.

“One, I'm a nurse. And Skylar Caitlyns? Is that who you are talking about?” Her facial expression changed slightly with an added hint of sympathy. “Skylar died a few minutes after she arrived. Her parents were contacted. I'm very sorry. And you are going to have to stay here until the police arrive to question you. There are seats back there.” The nurse turned and walked back down the hall she came from, not looking back, avoiding all the cracks in between the white tiles.

**Skylar**

Don’t Linger Too Long
You can let go now
Let me rest.
I will not come back.
I promise.
Leave my memory alone
It did nothing to you.
Don’t manipulate the truth.
I am not yours anymore
I am not anyone's.
I am gone
In the one place you can’t follow.
You can let go now
Because there’s nothing left of me
To hold on to.

**Distant**

**Skyley Parizek**
*Edwin O. Smith High School, Grade 10*
On a faded wooden dock, perched over the sea, they sit shoulder to shoulder. The thick planks are faded to a gray-brown, worn smooth by water, salt, and bare feet. Etched into the boards are doodles and names, carved by anonymous beings. The sun begins its descent, dipping lower on the horizon. Water stretches on forever, like their futures; the possibilities are endless. Both girls look up in unison, and then, with a final burst of crimson, it disappears. Darkness creeps in as the hazy clouds obscure the sky.

Lilly runs her toes languidly along the water’s edge. Back and forth, back and forth—a pendulum. An aura of calm settles in. The ocean’s waves continue to roll and break: a heartbeat, the tide of life, the only constant thing in their ever-changing world. Running her fingers across the wood, Lilly begins to read: Nell loves Max, 1995, Rhode Islander, Lauren. She is searching, searching until she finds it. Aha—here it is, a single square of graffito: Grandpa R.I.P. Love, Lilly.

A cannon fires, signaling the day’s end. The thunderous sound ricochets across the water. The two girls hesitate. For what? The future? For a moment, the world holds its breath. Bess makes a move, Lilly follows suit. She’s always the follower who just waits, observing, with big, open eyes, taking in the world. Lilly is self-critical, always unsure. She hesitates, holding back, then rushes to catch up, hurtling across the dock.

Lilly is never herself. What would the real Lilly do? She has always let others make decisions for her. Her honest personality was repressed long ago, buried under sadness. A permanent veil of mourning hangs over her life like a storm cloud. The other Lilly is always beneath the surface, hiding. She is a closed locket, an old rusty safe that no one knows the combination to. Forgotten. She is the girl who waits in the wings, content letting someone else be the star. Everything she appears to be is a façade. She is hiding behind a mask; her life is a masquerade ball. Lilly is a princess, locked up in a tower of her own creation. She radiates a sense of nothingness, no depth of character.

On the outside, everyone sees the same Lilly: 5’3”, gray eyes, short hair. She has locked her true self away and lost the key. This Lilly is a deception; timid and shy. She is alone; the one person she could confide in is gone, never to return. All Lilly wants is to be free; liberation from herself. The inside Lilly has high hopes: she is smart, creative, and witty. But she is waiting. Lilly wants her life to start so that she can be herself. Each day, she, from the sidelines, watches others live their lives. Lilly claps for them, congratulates them, and cries with them. Within is different; all is dark. Her inner flame has been extinguished, blown out by a wave of self-doubt, uncertainty, and sorrow. Is it too late? Can the real Lilly ever come out or has she suffocated herself?

She reaches Bess at the end of the dock. They continue their tradition. Reaching down, both girls select smooth, round pebbles. Lilly chooses gray—not as boldly dramatic as black, less courage. It’s a washed out shade—plain and forgotten. No one truly likes gray, it just is...like Lilly. Simultaneously, the cousins lift up the stones to their lips, whispering wishes, dreams that no one will ever hear. Bess wishes for many things: good health, new shoes. The list goes on and on. Lilly, however, speaks her mind, unleashing her innermost desires passionately...to a rock. A chunk of inanimate metamorphic can’t talk back. Can’t criticize.

Bess hurls her stone into the bluish-gray tide, admiring the satisfying thunk it makes upon impact. Turning to face her younger cousin, she is able to decipher a few fragments of the intimate conversation between Lilly and the beach stone: “...gone...left me...”

“Come on, Lilly, it’s getting dark.” She tips her head, jerking a tanned shoulder towards the lights emanating from the distant shops. Lilly, sensing the irritation accompanying the
gesture, rubs her sandy thumb a final time across the surface and hurls the pebble out into the deep, dark Atlantic. To her, it’s not just a rock, it’s a piece of her soul. A part of Lilly. An offering to the universe that says, “Listen.” Once again, Lilly’s bare feet pad across the sand, scurrying to catch up.

Bess flicks a wispy tendril of chestnut-brown hair from her eyes. She is worried, the skin on her forehead crinkled with concentration. Summer is supposed to be a time for letting go — swimming in the frothy waves, reading in the hammock...Not a time to be stuck with her reclusive 12-year-old cousin. Lilly used to be so much fun. What happened to her? As their grandpa had often said, “Kids will be kids.” Now that he was gone, everything was different. Still...Bess sensed a peculiar charisma about Lilly: she jumped at loud noises and was always peering around with those slate-gray eyes. To Bess, she resembled a mouse with delicate features and a timorous way of moving. “Oh” thought Bess, “it’s going to be a long summer.”

They flop down on a green metal bench in front of the St. Clair Annex, ice cream cones in hand. Bay Street, downtown Watch Hill, is laid out before them: a smattering of clothing boutiques, restaurants, and beach stores that sell boogie boards, ocean-themed tchotchkes, and postcards. The street overlooks the bay, a stunning expansion of ocean, dotted with small fishing vessels and pristinely-maintained yachts.

Licking her dripping scoop of cocopineapple, Bess speaks up, “I had fun tonight, Lilly. Thanks for walking out to the point with me.”

“You okay?” As if hearing the silent plea, Bess casts a worried look in her cousin’s direction, arching a single eyebrow. Lilly mumbles a response, but Bess misses it. A herd of sunburned tourists tramps past, laughing loudly.

The moment is broken. It is like a fractured glass of water, gushing out a torrent of discomfort. Both girls shift uneasily. Bess and Lilly have suddenly become very aware of themselves, crossing their legs and fiddling with their hair. They finish their ice cream in silence, focusing on the reflection of the dancing lights on the water.

After a while, the cousins walk silently out of town, following the familiar narrow streets to their recently-inherited summer house, a bungalow covered in well-weathered gray shingles. They walk up the driveway, white crushed shells crinkling under their sandal-clad feet. The fragrance wafting from the lush blue hydrangeas hangs heavily in the humid evening air. Lilly inhales, letting the sweet perfume fill her senses.

Suddenly, Bess breaks the silence, causing her cousin to jump. “Y’know, you’ve changed a lot since last summer. I know it’s not the same without Grandpa, but he’s still here, I mean, in spirit...” She seems to lose her courage and trails off, a strangled sob catching in her throat. Then, with a sudden burst of resolve, Bess speaks again.

“Remember when we were little and we used to sneak out to the beach at night to catch...? Never mind, I mean, we’re too old for that.”

“Ghost crabs” Lilly interjects loudly, startling Bess. “I remember” she adds shyly, staring down at her sand-encrusted toes.

Unanimously, the two cousins are struck with the same thought. They both break into wide smiles and take off towards the shore. The roar of the ocean pulls them closer, a sound that becomes magnified as their breathing grows shallow. Panting, the girls collapse onto a dune.
Immediately, Lilly jumps up, shrieking. “A crab! A crab was on me! Get it off!” The small white crab skitters away, hurtling towards the foamy surf. The girls race down the moist sand, laughing hysterically as they try to recapture the terrified nocturnal.

Above their heads, a single star arcs across the inky sky, dissolving with a flash of light. It’s an answered message, a sign from the universe. Bess wraps her cousin in a tight bear hug and says, “It’s good to have you back, Lilly-Lu. He’s watching us, you know, and you’re making him proud.”

As Lilly grins and returns the hug, tears spill from her eyes, glittering in the moonlight. Tentatively, she takes her first step out of the shadows, welcoming her new life with open arms. The scars of loss still sting, but they are beginning to heal. Now, the grief is a memory, blown away with the balmy summer breeze.

Unrequited

Megan Chabre
Rockville High School, Grade 11

He was gorgeous. From the top of his brown hair to the bottom of his neatly rolled khakis. He was the best athlete in the school and the best student as well. But he wasn’t like most jocks. He was friendly to everyone. Anyone he met was his friend and I admired him for that. He stood up to others and spoke his mind openly, something I could never do. I could never tell anyone how I felt about him. Not only would they think I was crazy, but they wouldn’t take me seriously. It also didn’t help that we’d only spoken minimal times during all of our high school years. Like one time, when he backed into me in the hallway and my papers seemed to explode and dump all over the floor. He bore his indigo eye straight into mine and I could swear he could read my thoughts, or at least hear my heart beating in my throat. He smiled his 30 degree smile and apologized sweetly as he helped me pick up my scattered items. As he stood, his scent drifted into my nostrils. It was beachy and it made my taste buds tickle and my palms sweat.

I was doing just that right now. Just looking at him, even from this distance, made me crazy. He said goodbye to all of his friends, shaking hands and giving hugs to giggling girls. I wished I could hug him, like all of the lucky people who acquainted with him. Just to feel his body against mine. The winter dance was approaching quicker, and my stomach lurched at every gaudy poster or the girls’ screeches about dresses and hair. I would give almost anything to be able to say that we were going together and we could walk into the dance not even the slightest bit ashamed of who we were. I smiled at the thought, but it vanished as the burgundy Buick slowed near the sidewalk where I stood. I clasped the frosted door handle and looked back at him. He was laughing, his breath icy white in the air. Everything about him seemed to be frozen with perfection, not even time could crease his beauty. I was happy to even be in the same proximity as him. To laugh with him, smile at each other as I stare into those gorgeous eyes, fingers lightly holding the others. But he’s not a freak like me. I swung open the door and slid inside.

“Hello kiddo,” my dad said dully as I buckled my seat belt.

I nodded in response. He started to drive and I glanced out the window one more time. He was still standing there. And I could swear he looked straight at me. I look away quickly as my heart convulsed.

He would never feel the same, you’re a freak.
“So bud, who’s the lucky girl you’re taking to the winter dance?” he asked, nudging my arm. My heart collapsed in on itself and my chapped hands balled into fists.

“I haven’t decided yet.” I spoke flatly through gritted teeth.

He would never understand.

Cold

Hannah Gerhard
Rockville High School, Grade 11

It was so cold, it burned.

The heavy darkness dripped onto my skin and into my pores, molding my veins with toxic air. My stomach felt hollow—as if every time I exhaled, I was one second closer to suffocating. The creaking floorboards made me paranoid as I swam through the murky river waves that once held you the exact way they were holding me. I stood at the large mirror above your green, wooden dresser and stared into the dusty glass. It wasn’t my face in the reflection. I swore it wasn’t. Such frigid eyes could only be those of a monster, and I refused to believe I reflected such obvious apathy. Frustration tightened my frozen fingers into a coiled mess of muscle, and in the time it takes to swallow pride, I had shattered the face that didn’t belong to me. I watched billions of tiny glass slivers softly spill from the frame, and then suddenly, there was nothing. A blank wall. And I was convinced, I had finally found my reflection. I felt your ashes tickle my shoulders as I walked away from the room. And I swore I saw the walls melt from the corner of my eyes. Your wax castle was on fire.

We had plans. We were supposed to road trip up north, and make mix tapes with our sufficient tastes in music. We were supposed to buy Mr. Wuggles a new best friend since all our other cats ran away. We were supposed to plan you a party, and celebrate the bittersweet stomach aches of your graduation. We were supposed to go hiking and nap beneath the sky because you said there isn’t a blanket in the world that can warm you like the stars. You made me believe in your over-thought philosophies and dreamt-up concepts, to which everything worked out in the end. I just wish you had told me I would have to walk on burning sand in order to get to the ocean—that I would have to see an empty room, with blank walls, in order to appreciate the happiness we once felt. You kept telling me it was out of your control.

“Inevitable.” That’s how you described it. I never believed you though. Love is inevitable. Depression is inevitable. But, walking out of someone’s life... that’s nothing but a choice.

Everyone said time would make the stomach ache fade, but I walked by that empty room everyday for six years and felt nothing but a gut full of the harshest air I’ve ever had to breathe in. Time didn’t make his room any less of a room I had to forget. And each day, I swear those curtains formed devil-like creatures, casting horrible shadows onto the wall—the only thing separating his absence from my absent mind. I remember all the nights I had to fall asleep with sheets wrapped around my face as you and mom screamed your thoughts, as if no one else lived on that floor. You were so angry, all the time. Frustrated. Your pencils were always broken and the chalk for your black board was constantly too tiny to even write with. You were out of words anyway. And even if you had some, we weren’t listening. Because we didn’t care. We just trusted you’d stay safe. And after all, you were the one that said only those who were good died young.

I remember visiting your dorm for the first time. It was so cold and gray... like one of those dreary days in November when the snow hasn’t fallen yet. The tiles on the floor were
coated with a thick layer of dust, and the beds, the beds were nothing like the pictures on the website. It was so small, and sad. I wanted to bring you home. It was a jail cell, at best— a miserable, dusty jail cell. I remember turning back to you and seeing that polished look on your face— pride. You were happy. So damn happy. In all 16 years I lived with you, I had never seen you so alive. This room did something to you that our house never could. And I realized then that you did not miss me like I missed you. You didn’t need me the way I needed you. I stood in that skinny doorway, and listened to you boast about your new life. You had found your home. And you didn’t need anything more. And that’s when I knew, you did not love me the way I loved you.

You said it would all go back to normal with time. But time couldn’t erase May 31st off the calendar. And it couldn’t erase May 31st off the tombstone. Together, we had watched our brother’s life become a crumpled up rough draft of what we shouldn’t be. He was our reason ‘why,’ our grim inspiration. And when I stood in that abandoned room, the day we dropped his blue body into the ground, you stood right next to me and told me I would never feel so horrible ever again. You promised me that. And my ten year-old, hopeful soul believed that bullshit promise. I was naive and ignorant to think I would never feel so miserable again. I used to stand in your empty room every night and sip the colors of our past in hopes that one day I’d get both my brothers back. But for now, I have to stand on Matt’s dried up wax castle and watch as yours starts to collapse. And it will splash into the murky river waves and bits of water will pierce my cheeks like bullets. But it won’t bother me. It’ll never bother me. The water will fill the room, and blanket my skin. It will be so cold, I’ll burn.

Making Choices

Karely Vega
Windham High School, Grade 11

We were living in Puerto Rico, but then came to Willimantic, Connecticut when I was five. I came with my mom, sister, and brother. We all moved in with my uncle. We lived with him for about three months and then mom found an apartment at Windham Heights. My family moved into the new apartment.

I was a really shy girl. When I started school, I did not know any English, all I spoke was Spanish. It was horrible. I walked into my class and everyone spoke English, but me. The teacher tried to talk to me, but I didn’t understand her. I felt left out and scared. Little by little I started to learn English in school.

I hit 5th grade and met new people. I started making friendships with other kids and I was really happy. I was doing really well in school. Then about the middle of fifth grade, I started hanging out with kids who were making bad choices in school. I started acting really different. I started screaming at the teachers, looking for problems and fights, disrespecting everyone, and skipping classes.

One day I left school to skip. The office called the police. The cops were chasing me around Willimantic, until they finally caught me in Kingswood Apartments. My friends and I were hanging out. We saw the police coming up to the apartment through the window and we started to run out the back door, but the police were there. They caught us and brought us back to school. At that time I was only 12 yrs old. I was making a lot of bad choices. I didn’t listen to my mom; I came home whenever I wanted without letting my mom know where I was. I used
to smoke cigarettes, drink, and steal. It came to the point that my mom had enough of me and reported me to juvenile court. Not only was I reported there, but I also had a case with DCF. My mom couldn’t deal with me anymore. One night it came to the point that I came home late and she hit me. I went to school the next day crying and bruised up. I told my social workers at school. They called my DCF worker and the cops. I couldn’t leave school until they came and interviewed me. Then I went home. I was really scared that I would have to be taken from my mom and given to another family, but instead they took me to Natchaug Hospital, to the Joshua Center.

A few months later, I went to court and they were asking me why I was doing this these bad things at such a young age. I didn’t know what to say, I didn’t really know why. The court put me on probation for 6 months.

Time passed. The court took me off of probation, because I started doing well. My grades were going up, I was listening to teachers and going to class. When it came to seventh grade and eighth grade I was a much better student. I started to realize that all the things I was doing were affecting me in a bad way and I didn’t want to end up in Hartford Detention, dropping out of school or hurt. I stopped hanging out with those girls and made better friendships with new kids. I started to behave the way I was supposed to behave. I was doing really well in school, and I was really proud of myself. I knew that I was able to turn myself around. I sat down with my mom and said sorry to her for everything I had done to her as a daughter. She started crying and told me that everyone makes mistakes in life.

I have learned a lot since then. When I came to high school and since then, I have not gotten in any trouble with my mom. I go to class, I joined clubs and I am getting good grades. I met Mrs. Frazier my freshman year and she taught me how to become a good writer. To this day the only way I let things out is by writing in my journal. I am really proud of myself and of all the changes I have made in my life. I know that I am a really smart girl and I can make good choices that will get me far in life.

I am so glad I have learned a lot from my mistakes. It has made me a strong young woman. I am doing well, I am happy. I know that I can have a good life. I want to go to college after I graduate. I want to study cosmetology.

If I could give other kids who are making bad choices some advice, I would say, if you are one of those kids that are doing bad, open your eyes. Realize that in life bad choices won’t take you anywhere but to unhappiness or jail.

One Flame

Jenny Mears
Rockville High School, Grade 12

One flame. A single flame pierces through the black room. A tall cream-colored candle with dark pink roses and green vines painted around its edgeless surface. Minutes ago, the priest pressed five blood red nails into the wax as he carved them into place with the words of our faith. “The father. The son. The Holy, Spirit. Amen.” The cross is engraved into the candle which represents the miracle of renewed life, spirit, salvation. Our priest has a new idea this year, why not have a bonfire to wait for our Savior to rise again? So we stand outside on this Easter Vigil and sing songs awaiting our redemption. The fire is gaining fury as the sunset casts a shimmering glow on the gold cross atop our church steeple. We bow our heads in prayer and begin our own journey of solemn mourning into the dark church that waits. But I wasn’t

—87—
consumed by the feelings of mourning I was supposed to experience. There was that flame of the Easter candle that could be seen above the bobbing heads. I felt perfectly serene. Fire and candles have always meant much more to me than burns and wax. They are the questions that burn in your mind; the flames of curiosity within me.

I simply cannot pay attention to words when my thoughts are wrapped around a single flame. As I take the first step through the doors of the hall, my eyes struggle to adjust to the blackness. I was not prepared for this change. Only staring into the flame kept me on track as I followed blindly into the dark beyond. For answers I didn’t have and reasons I didn’t understand, I kept staring.

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The Easter candle is not tilted to ignite the other candles, rather the alter server reaches up with a long golden rod to acquire the flame before passing it on to the next candle stick. It takes the poor boy a few times before he successfully passes the flame from the powerful Easter candle to the inferior wick of the person in the last pew closer to the door. At this point we’ve all come to a standstill, hoping for the sake of the messenger that the wick will catch fire. The young boy’s arms shake and he blocks the seemingly devilish wind from the flame he guards. Towering above the blustery breeze where the alter server struggles to pass on the flame, the Easter candle glows brighter than ever, illuminating the area around it and transmitting light to all the corners of the hall. Rays of light bounce off the faces of the congregation—frustrated, curious, giddy, tired, confused, bored, and ecstatic—diversity forms in the glow of the holy light. I was a mixture of them all. Finally, the server breathes a sign of relief; he has successfully transmitted the light. The first person, an elderly man with wrinkles accentuated by the growing light, looks down at the flame for a brief moment. A crooked half smile spreads across his lips as the congregation looks on. The alter server has a proud, toothy grin as he watches the man’s candle flourish. The Deacon lightly taps the boy on the shoulder and points to the other side. Reluctantly, the boy faces his next challenge—the other side of the church.

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The flame has finally been passed and now begins to circulate the room. Moments of shy smiles and friendly taps mark the scene where stranger meets friend in an exchange of fire. With deep concentration and murmurs of excitement, the congregation breeds light in an attempt to illuminate the room. Parents hold children’s shaking hands as they clench to the candle for the first time. Some stare into their own newly lit flame, while others let their eyes wander about the room, dancing off each new light with a thrill of reborn energy. Then there are ones like myself who find themselves overwhelmed by the beauty of the experience. Eyes fluttering back and forth from my own newly born flame to the dotted congregation behind me, I watched to room glow. I sat there with the warmth of my new flame slowly protruding my finger tips and I took in the scene around me in awe. Flames like stars in an endless sky danced and swayed to the rhythm of the breaths by those who held them. Together in harmonious motions, the flames mirrored the defiant Easter candle as they slowly filled the pews.

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The Easter Candle rests in its sacred place, secure and at home, with the statue of Jesus overhead. It takes a long journey to secure faith. Standing tall between the sanctuary, the holy oils and the statue itself, the candle highlights the foundation of our faith—the holy trinity. The longest moments of the mass occurred when Father Steven told us to blow out our candles. In a matter of seconds, the beautiful arrangement of flames began to disappear before my eyes. The incense overwhelmed my nose and stung my eyes as smoke crawled along the walls up to the arched ceiling. For a brief instant, my eyes began to water. “Blow it out...” Becky elbowed my
in the side. I clung to my candle and stared straight into the burning colors of night; blue mixed with yellow as it fades into the atmosphere. With a pinch of remorse, I blew out my flame and watched the smoke gather for an instant before racing to meet that of the other candles. We sat in silence as the darkness was once again protruded by solely the Easter Candle. When smoke and people cloud my vision and darkness begins to consume me, it’s good to know that I still have a flame to look for.

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Joy. Pure joy is the only way to describe the emotion which circulates throughout the room when the lights are turned on. The altar servers race to light the six candles on each side of the priest’s chair and the two candles on either side of the altar are lit. Pastel colors of every sort greet the light as it dances its way through the pews and races through the door to the starry night beyond. Families smile at each other as they sing in jubilant praise, “Gloria, in excelsis deo!” Children ring bells and scream the words they can pronounce, one and all join in song for the moment of exaltation, the moment we acknowledge the Good News of the resurrection. The Easter Candle stands proud over the celebration below. I grab my sister’s hand and wave my candle in the air. The wax that has dried to my fingers is a reminder of all that the flame represents. It is everything I believe in which cannot be extinguished. Even when it burns out, the remnants of the wax still exist in my fingerprints. We sing, we ring, we jump in childish glee as we praise anything and everything; we praise our Lord. We are the people of Christ, led together by a single flame. And in the remembrance of the moments of sacrifice and suffering, we sing, “Gloria!” As the song dies down, I cannot stop smiling. The candles on the altar are so numerous I feel their radiance burning through me, but the Easter Candle stands above them all.

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The Easter Candle leads its people through times of troubles and triumphs to a place where peaceful celebration is the only possible result. My faith is everything that I am, and everything that I need because I am nothing without God. The flame of my faith is ignited in me always and I strive everyday to let this light shine through. This fire is that of my faith, my belief, my hope and my salvation. It is a constant reminder that I am not alone. It takes one flame to start a fire. Behind every cloud, the sun still shines, and in every sky, the stars burn brightly. Even when life seems hopeless, I believe that my faith will be there to carry me through. Now confirmed, I am Jennifer Susan Monica Mears, and I will make the most of every opportunity. This is my faith; these are my people. United in one Spirit, ignited by one fire. Every aspect of my being—consumed by the flames of faith. It’s more than burns and wax; it’s the questions that can be answered and the curiosity which leads me to new life. Together, we can change the world: burn down the barriers which block mankind from peace. I believe we can ignite the sky. All it takes is one flame.

“There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit.”

Corinthians 1:12

#rant about my generation and @Twitter.

Chris Nicastro
Bristol Central High School, Grade 12
I hate to say that I was sucked into the infamous phenomenon that is Twitter. I felt at the time as though I was missing out on a worldwide sensation—a piece of counterculture that would change the way we communicate with one another. Users are allowed to write blurbs of information—in the confines of 140 characters—and express their ideas to the world. However, what I found was that, by joining, I was contributing to a Huxley-esque downfall of American literacy, syntax, and language that will be studied by archaeologists for millennia to come.

I-The “Hash-tag”

The idea of the hash-tag is quite a helpful one. After the archetypal, “tweet,” the tweeter adds on a pound sign—or “hash-tag,” if you will—followed by a category that describes the preceding tweet. The hash-tag then tags the tweet which allows other people who are talking about the same topic to see what other tweeters are tweeting in their tweets about tweets by tweeters. Okay. It’s a noble and fair concept—but it has been bastardized into something that is utterly useless but used only for pointless style.

The following sentence is an example of a tweet with proper use of a hash-tag. “I took my dog for a walk earlier. I love that little guy. #mydog”

The following sentence is an example of a tweet with improper use of a hash-tag. “I took my dog for a walk earlier. #Lovethatlittleguy”

If you hash-tag sentences, no one will ever find your tweet by category, and the point of the tag is moot. I can get over myself if people simply don’t want to be found through their tagging, but then what is the point of tagging anything in the first place? There is none at all—but wait. There’s more. People are now even starting to hash-tag on FACEBOOK. I want to clear something up; there is no purpose to hash-tagging on Facebook. It doesn’t do anything. It doesn’t link to tags by other people, it doesn’t even become highlighted. The Twitter users of this generation—let’s call them the Darwinian Evidence—do not understand this concept at all.

But I digress.

II- Grammerrrr

It pains me to say that the American school system has failed the teenagers of this country in the field of grammar. I, being one of the failures, don’t think no good when it comes to formatting sentences, even in an informal manner. Recently, I asked one of my classmates to look at a sentence I had written to see if he could recognize the grammatical error within it. The sentence read, “Where is the best place to eat at?” My classmate, dumbfounded, could not find a single problem with the grammar in the sentence. Twitter has also brought about aberrations of language that I never thought possible. “Definantly,” “definateley,” “definitley” and “definetlay” are all REAL-LIFE examples of Darwinian Evidence attempting to spell, “definitely.” The above fallacy has become such a phenomenon to the point where it has inspired the website http://d-e-f-i-n-i-t-e-l-y.com just to steer Twitter users back on the right track.

The previous idea leads to the next issue with Twitter. When restricted to 140 characters, people cannot fully express their ideas wholly and correctly—especially when the teenage girls of today feel the constant urge to have multiple repeated consonants on the end of their words, such as, “I love the holidayssssssss (sic).” The first time I read this particular tweet, I wondered if the tweeter had a speech impediment that caused the voice to resemble that of a snake or if the keyboard had become jammed and there was no access to a backspace button—the possibilities were endless. However, this was a choice of style. The Darwinian Evidence had felt that the extra hissing at the end of the tweet would add emphatic pizzazz, or pizzazzzzzzzzzz, if you will. It is, though, more tolerable than phonetic spelling.
U cant undrstnd how anoyd i git wen ppl tipe funetikly on twttr. I realize that when texting and instant messaging came about, typing phonetically was hip—it was a modern day Morse code, so to speak. Unlimited texting plans were unheard of, and texting in conversational form was considered rude. When needing to type a long message without going over the character limit to avoid additional charges, typing words like “people” as “ppl” or “that” as “tht” was understandable. In this day and age, though, there is no excuse. In reality, it is much more difficult to use 4’s for A’s while making sure the recipient understands the meaning of the message. For example, if I were to type as many tweeters do, and wanted to say “I love apples,” I would write, “I luv 4ppls.” However, “ppl” meaning “people,” would cause 4ppls to mean both apples and “four peoples.” In addition, lately there has been a trend of Capitalizing Every Word In A Tweet. When Typing Out Tweets In This Manner, One Wonders If There Is A Subliminal Message Within The Tweet In Acronym Form—in this case it would be, “WTOTITMOWITIASMWTTIAF,” which is an acronym synonymous with inanity.

But—I digress.

III- The Question

People always argue what the real question is that we should be asking. Some say the question is, “To be or not to be?” Some say it is, “Why not?” Some even say the question is, “Who is John Galt?” All of the above are the wrong questions to be asking. The correct question that needs to be asked daily is, “Is this worth tweeting?” The amount of unneeded tweets is asinine. Teenage girls manage to create so much rage using only 140 characters—in fact most of these tweets I do not feel at liberty to repeat due to their indecency and sheer anger. While young males are able to shake off anger through a fisticuff-rumble by the skate-park or a roundhouse-kick to the bedroom door, young women resort to Twitter to spread rumors and hate. Twitter was meant to be a haven where users could get across the information they needed to have known by others in a fast and easy manner. The reason CNN and MSNBC and local news stations have so many followers is because it allows their followers—those who are above Darwinian Evidence on the hierarchal chain—to be informed of breaking news quickly while also providing mobile links to more in-depth articles regarding the tweet. Useful tweets are contemporary news headlines; they are things people care to be cognizant of. Though I hate to break it to the broken-hearted girls of America whose boyfriends left them after discovering their internet paper-trail, no one cares to know about the mentioned “s*ut” he left you for. The repercussions in the coming years for people tweeting this way will be immense.

Young people who are abusing Twitter and do not pay attention to what it is that they post online are now stepping into college—as surprising as that may be—and will eventually be in career mode. They will be in great shock when they lose their chance at a dream job when their would-be bosses check their twitters as background precaution. Now is the time to ask yourself—“Is this worth tweeting?”

But—I digress.

Twitter began as a noble idea. Staccato prose written by commoners could have led to a writer’s revolution. Hemingway would have adored the concept. However, all the wrong people use it for all the wrong reasons and have debased its purpose in the world. I can only hope it’s a fadddd. #rant

Lessons from the Club

Amy Tomasso
Farmington High School, Grade 12
The way she stooped, even waddled, into the Learning Center of the New Britain Boys and Girls Club seemed to me like she carried the weight of the world on her shoulders. The thick framework of her body supported a backpack of hiker proportions; a knowing, weathered look emanated from her eyes; the way she gripped her pencil like it was the last thing she might hold struck me as more of an old señora than a little girl of six, a girl named Desirai, who was quite simply stealing my heart.

It was the same when I approached little Angeliz in the corner, so small I could tuck her into the crook of my arm and carry her away to a much better place.

Encounters like this are a weekly norm for me as a homework and literacy tutor at the Boys and Girls Club which neighbors my isolated suburb. Since I began tutoring my freshman year of high school, I have assisted children in overcoming simple addition and multiplication problems, forming grammatically correct phrases and conquering basic spelling—seemingly small feats. But each child’s joy at a right answer registers as if he or she had just moved mountains. They are deeply appreciative and proud of their success, and so am I.

However, our lessons extend far outside of textbooks and word problems. They teach me immeasurably—about life, about our differences, about hope. I sometimes struggle to relate adequately to the children I work with, to be a strong mentor and friend, especially when their questions throw me a curve ball.

“Are you pregnant?” one girl asked out of the blue.

“No, of course not. Why?” I answered, shocked at her audacity but nevertheless intrigued by her motives.

“Because everyone else your age is!” was her saddening response. I came to the harsh realization that the majority of teens in this little girl’s world are pregnant. I also grasped that I beheld my little friend’s future, and along with it, her perceptions of the world and the path she would follow as a maturing young woman. She seemed stunned by an alternative to premature motherhood.

We paused from her homework, and I explained patiently but forcefully that teenage pregnancy is not ubiquitous or desirable, that her dignity and future are far too bright to compromise. I hugged her and offered my support, now and in the future. Later, I cried.

Across three years, I have learned the children’s idiosyncrasies and relish my spontaneous conversations with them. One afternoon, Antoine and I were reading a book about black bears. “Have you ever seen one, Miss?” he asked between page turns. I told him they sometimes walk through the backyards of my suburban neighborhood. His dark eyes beamed surprise and his animated, “They DO?!” seemed like he was the one who had just seen a bear. We might as well have been talking about unicorns.

When I first began tutoring, I was timid and easily shaken by this drastically new environment, by the children who grasped at the novelty of my blond hair and smelled as if they had not bathed in days. As I grew closer to the children, I made them friendship bracelets to acknowledge our companionship, and I brought my Student Council cabinet members to volunteer with me. This year my primary initiative as Student Council President is to engage a broader community from my high school in the opportunity to share its talents and enthusiasm with this organization that so strongly supports young people’s development. I have earmarked three community service days on the high school calendar for this purpose.

What has changed? Surely I have: I’m more compassionate, accepting, appreciative. I’m stronger, because I know that somewhere, young girls look up to me as a role model. Yet what stand out aren’t so much our differences; what have made the biggest impact on me are,
remarkably, our similarities. A girl named Jasmine confessed to me her aspirations to become a pop star, Destiny fantasizes herself as an actress, Antoine, a teacher. I tell them I hope to become an author. Together, we dream. We are girls and boys who have retained the power to hope, who haven’t forgotten the impact of a single smile, who adore singing, dancing, and playing board games. We show each other how to trust, and to love. Our relationship will not solve world problems or even the problems of this inner city, but we have bridged a socioeconomic, racial, and age gap, and it is a start.
Honorable Mentions
Poetry Honorable Mentions

Jacquie Thibodeau, Grade 1
Tate Loonie, Grade 2
Natalie Smyth, Grade 2
Rachel Solomon, Grade 2
Keeley Flaherty, Grade 3
Marie Gay, Grade 3
Chloe DeMaio, Grade 4
Emily Feeney, Grade 4
Joshua Fresco-Hawes, Grade 4
Molly Fording, Grade 5
Katherine Hosack, Grade 5
Ian Kamperschroer, Grade 5
Cole Goodrow, Grade 6
Sophia Ladyzhets, Grade 6
Terry Zhao, Grade 6
Roselyne Anyah, Grade 7
Emily Hendry, Grade 7
Sarah MacMullan, Grade 7
John Carew, Grade 8
Maiwenn Gauvrit, Grade 8
Catherine Gonzalez, Grade 8
Stephanie Nichols, Grade 9
Anna Ricciuti, Grade 9
Katerina Voegtle, Grade 9
Cassie Bartol, Grade 10
Skyler Parizek, Grade 10
Conner Sloat, Grade 10
Tory Jo Bauer-Pisani, Grade 11
Courtney West, Grade 11
Natalie Wisehart, Grade 11
John Bugden, Grade 12
Kathryn Eichner, Grade 12
Alyssa Hamilton, Grade 12

Frank M. Kearns Primary School
West Elementary School
Frank M. Kearns Primary School
Gales Ferry School
Tootin’ Hills Elementary School
Sandy Hook Elementary School
Ledyard Center Elementary School
Tootin’ Hills Elementary School
Regional Multicultural Magnet School
Long Lots School
Kelly Lane Intermediate School
Ledyard Center Elementary School
Kelly Lane Intermediate School
Gideon Welles School
Juliet W. Long School
Vernon Center Middle School
Windham Middle School
Newtown Middle School
Henry James Memorial School
Old Saybrook Middle School
Windham Middle School
Simsbury High School
Simsbury High School
Simsbury High School
Rockville High School
Edwin O. Smith High School
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Haddam-Killington High School
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<td>Nicole Durand</td>
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<td>Chelsea McDonnell</td>
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Teachers of Published Authors

Denise Abercrombie  Edwin O. Smith High School
Amanda Abbott     Old Saybrook Middle School
Callin Aceto       Anna Reynolds Elementary School
Patricia Baruzzi   Edwin O. Smith High School
Anjanette Belmonte Henry James Memorial School
Wendy Bourget      Union Elementary School
Kelly Brouse       Mansfield Middle School
Mary Bucuccio      East Farms Elementary School
Carleen Bumsch     East Farms Elementary School
Alison Burke       Squadron Line Elementary School
Kathryn Case       Irving A. Robbins Middle School
Rose Clack         Interdistrict School for Arts & Communication
Michelle Converse  Vernon Center Middle School
Jena DeMaio        Coventry High School
Gale Dickau        Bristol Central High School
Amy Doyle          Ledyard Center Elementary School
Diane Drugge       Stamford High School
Caitleen Eckler    West District Elementary School
Sarah Foster       Simsbury Central Elementary School
Cynthia Frank      North Haven High School
Lynn Frazier       Windham High School
Kristin Gemaly     Regional Multicultural Magnet School
Virginia Gillis    Farmington High School
Natalie Hammond    Sandy Hook Elementary School
Michael Hartford   Old Saybrook Middle School
Maria Hedus        West School
Jeff Helming       Anna Reynolds Elementary School
Jeremy Hoon        Glastonbury High School
Sandra Horning     Green Street Homeschool Coop
Sally Kenler       Tashua Elementary School
Barbara Keiser     Barkhamsted Elementary School
Edith Klein        Squadron Line Elementary School
Kathleen Kortis    Frank M. Kearns Primary School
Maryann Lindquist  Latimer Lane Elementary School
Nichole Long       Philip R. Smith Elementary School
Joanne Lukowicz    Central District Elementary School
Karen Macbeth      Squadron Line Elementary School
Megan Magner       Edwin O. Smith High School
Barbara Marano     Memorial Middle School
Kristin Norden     Newtown Middle School
Victoria Nordlund  Rockville High School
Jeanne Proctor     Old Saybrook High School

—96—
Kim Reilly
Paula Robinson
Alex Rode
Elizabeth Rollins
Olivia Rolston
Marcy Rudge
Melissa Russell
Patricia Saimond
Tom Salvador
Michael Savignano
Karen Schick
Stephanie Stupienski
Kris Walker
Chuck Warinsky
Sharon Wendler
Ed Wolf
Christina Zarotney

Tolland Middle School
Simsbury High School
Ledyard Center Elementary School
Squadron Line Elementary School
John Winthrop Middle School
Annie E. Vinton Elementary School
Henry James Memorial School
Tootin’ Hills Elementary School
Bethel Middle School
Vernon Center Middle School
Vogel-Wetmore School
Kelly Lane Intermediate School
Squadron Line Elementary School
Southeast Elementary School
Avon High School
Coleytown Elementary School
Wells Road Intermediate School
Colophon

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