This publication was produced by the Connecticut Writing Project – Storrs.

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**Cover art**
(front) Emily Feeney, “Connecticut Thirteen.” *Tootin’ Hills School, Grade 5*
&
(back) Cassidy Ward, “The Fluffball Chase.” *Museum Academy, Grade 2*
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# Teachers of Contributing Student Writers

**School** | **Teacher**
---|---
Academy of Aerospace and Engineering at the Learning Corridor | Cara Quinn
Annie E. Vinton Elementary School | Marcy Rudge
Avon High School | Kim Kraner
Avon Middle School | Jan Brennan
Berlin High School | Katrina Bafumi
Bethel High School | Mary Fernand
Bristol Eastern High School | Joanna Peluso
Buttonball Lane School | Ann McFee
Buttonball Lane School | Jennifer Main
Canton Intermediate School | Lori Burrous
Colebrook Consolidated School | Amy Helminiak
E. C. Adams Middle School | Cheryl A Grappi
E.O. Smith High School | Denise Abercrombie
Eastford Elementary School | Sandra Greer
Eli Terry Elementary School | Amy Graney
Elizabeth C. Adams Middle School | Cheryl Robertson
Emma Hart Willard Elementary School | Mike Kulak
F. M. Kearns Primary School | Jessica Landolfi
Fairfield Ludlowe High School | J Ingram
Fairfield Ludlowe High School | Tina Rembish
Farmington High School | Melissa Lukanik
Farmington High School | Russell Crist
Gideon Welles School | Kristen Brennan
Glastonbury High School | Christopher Balda
Glastonbury-East Harford Elementary Magnet School | Sheri Raffalo
Glastonbury-East Hartford Elementary Magnet School | Shamel Lewis
Goshen Center School | Heather Blanchard
Goshen Center School | Michelle Williamson
Granby Memorial High School | Lauren Shafer
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<td>Stacy O'Donnell</td>
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<td>Greenwich Academy</td>
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<td>Hall Memorial School</td>
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<td>Kelly Lane Intermediate School</td>
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<td>Mansfield Middle School</td>
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<td>Mary Pat Noonan</td>
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<td>Metropolitan Learning Center for Global and International</td>
<td>Julia Kelly</td>
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<tr>
<td>Metropolitan Learning Center for Global and International</td>
<td>Kristen Churila</td>
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<td>Montessori Magnet School</td>
<td>David Adamson</td>
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<td>Montessori Magnet School</td>
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<td>Montessori Magnet School</td>
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School
Museum Academy
New Canaan High School
New Canaan High School
North Windham School
North Windham School
Northwest Catholic High School
Old Saybrook High School
Philip R. Smith Elementary School
Reggio Magnet School of the Arts
Regional Multicultural Magnet School
Regional Multicultural Magnet School
Regional Multicultural Magnet School
Rockville High School
Simsbury Central Elementary School
Squadron Line Elementary School
Squadron Line Elementary School
Squadron Line Elementary School
Squadron Line Elementary School
Squadron Line Elementary School
St. Mary School
Stamford High School
Tashua Elementary School
The Ethel Walker School
The Williams School
Tolland Middle School
Tolland Middle School
Tolland Middle School
Tootin’ Hills School
Tootin’ Hills School
Two Rivers Magnet Middle School
Two Rivers Magnet Middle School

Teacher
Heidi DellaBianca
Jessica Cullen
Susan Steidl
Helen Martin
Eva Jimenez
Valerie T. Doucette
Edward Vautrain
Melissa Simmons
Caroline Mooney
Chrismae Gooden-White
Kristin Gemaly
Stacy Pleau-Guckian
Victoria Nordlund
Laurel Urda
Ann Rusinko
Maureen Billings
Renee Kluznik
Elisabeth Rollins
Kris Walker
Renee Kluznik
Nancy Novack
Diane S. Drugge
Megan Kelly
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John Becker
Henry Fay
Joann R. Desy
Mary Nichols
Frank Zuliani
Jessica Flaherty
Ruth Macijauskas
Christie Hazen
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Foreword

We are cups, constantly and quietly being filled. The trick is, knowing how to tip ourselves over and let the beautiful stuff out.

—Ray Bradbury (1920–2012)

As this year’s writing reveals, our young writers are no strangers to the shadows: to loss, confusion, anger, and regret. 2012 filled our cups with darker realities than we would ever hope to hold. Nevertheless, these young writers have managed to confront these realities and to produce beauty. In spite of the darkness, these writers have continued imagining, writing, and sharing. Through their writing, our young writers transcend the isolation hard times can bring and invite all of us to share in their words. They inspire us with their stories and with the strength and resilience they reveal.

The Connecticut Writing Project congratulates the young writers whose works are published in the 2012 Connecticut Student Writers magazine. On our 25th Anniversary, we also wish to recognize the support of the parents and teachers who stand behind them. Thank you for encouraging our children and young adults to value their writing and themselves.

Katrina Bafumi and Marcy Rudge
Editors-in-Chief

I have two elementary-age children, and part of their morning routine when they get to school is to greet a special-needs classmate who arrives with his grandmother at about the same time. The other day, my kindergartner surprised one of the janitors, and me, when she stopped to give him a drawing she’d made for him because he’s leaving for a new job. He is holding a mop and a flower. I have spent my career in secondary and higher education, and while I have witnessed many acts of kindness between and among teens and twenty-somethings, the innocent kindness of little kids has been one of the most profound parts of fatherhood for me.

We sometimes joke about how dark the writings submitted by the teenagers can be, which is somewhat accurate, but the writings from the youngest authors here reveal much more innocence. There are poems and stories about mud puddles, trains, cats, pigs, dogs, bees, wind, sun, moon, summer, chickens, yo-yos, wishes, and pirate princesses. My graduate assistant and I were especially impressed by the sincerity of one submission from a girl named Solangelys—a name that means angels of the sun—who wrote a letter to President Obama:

Dear Mr. President,
Can you come to my house for my birthday party? You can sleep in my brother’s room because you are a boy.
Love, Solangelys Lebron, Kindergarten, North Windham School

I’m sure President Obama wishes such sleeping arrangements were his highest concern!

During WW II, someone once criticized E. B. White for not writing more about the war effort, and White responded that he wrote about life as it should be lived so that once war ended, people would remember how to live. In a year when we have witnessed trying events in the world of teaching, I’d like to celebrate our 25th year of Connecticut Student Writers by focusing our attention on the gentle wisdom and sincere compassion of our youngest writers, whose interests remind us that the important things in life should be our pets, the summer sun, a good puddle, and yo-yos.

Jason Courtmanche
Connecticut Writing Project Director
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Dedication

The Connecticut Writing Project (CWP) at Storrs has been fortunate enough recently to celebrate two very significant milestones. Last year, we celebrated our 30th Anniversary as a writing project, and this year we celebrate the 25th issue of Connecticut Student Writers, our annual publication celebrating student writing. On such happy occasions, we celebrate the many wonderful accomplishments we’ve been able to achieve through hard work and dedication, the hurdles we’ve overcome, and the lessons we’ve learned. It is a time for considering where we’ve been so that we can look ahead to where the road might lead us next.

And it is also a time for giving thanks—a time to honor the Teacher-Consultants who, through their tireless efforts and unwavering commitment to better writing for teachers and their students, make possible the many CWP programs. Without such talented and dedicated professionals, the CWP would not exist. Without their leadership, the CWP would not be where it is today. In this spirit of gratitude, the CWP-Storrs would like to recognize the outstanding contributions of three Teacher-Consultants who have been outstanding leaders: Nadine Keane, Penny Baril, and Kathy Uschmann.

A few of the teacher consultants who’ve worked with Nadine, Penny, and Kathy have written about the impression these women made on them.

Nadine Keane served as the chief editor of Connecticut Student Writers magazine for seven years. Nadine made the role of chief editor appear effortless. Reading days have been a pleasure—even, a party—because of Nadine's leadership. She also served for many years on the CWP Leadership Council, where she endeared herself to her colleagues. Those who know her characterize Nadine by her passion—for her teaching, for her students, for her family. As a colleague and as a teacher, she is remembered most for her encouragement to write with an authentic voice. Nadine teaches more than English; she teaches life lessons. The CWP leadership council and CSW magazine staff will miss Nadine's kindness, humor, and writing expertise. Thank you, Nadine. Our lives have been graced by you.

-Marcy Rudge
Penny Baril became a Teacher-Consultant and Aetna Fellow of the CT Writing Project in 1991. For over twenty years, her passion has been building community through writing. To that end, Penny coordinated the popular semi-annual CWP Writing Retreats at the Wisdom House in Litchfield, which brought many TCs and their friends together in a supportive and nurturing environment where writers of all skill levels could meet and share their writing. As well, for the many years Penny has taught English at Montville High School, she has been a leader and a reformer for the way in which writing was taught in her district. Penny’s greatest gift to all of us, however, is reminding us to make and take time from our busy schedules for our own writing.

-Lynn Hoffman

Kathy Uschmann, who ran the CWP Teacher As Writer program for many years, conducted her writing workshops with utmost grace and expertise. At each session, Kathy shared inspiring poems, essays, and stories, as well as advice on craft and a range of creative prompts. Participants could always count on Kathy’s gentle and nurturing approach to writing workshop. Kathy established a safe space not only for the imagination, but for true community between teachers. We are all grateful to Kathy Uschmann for her dedication to the Connecticut Writing Project, and for her belief in us as teachers who choose the writing life.

-Denise Abercrombie

Kathy Uschmann has been an inspiration to her students and fellow teachers for many years. She was a past member of the Leadership Council of the Connecticut Writing Project and former co-editor of Connecticut Student Writers magazine. She received training with the Amherst Writers & Artists as a Writing Group Facilitator. She led the Teacher as Writer program for many years, encouraging teachers to seek out their writing voices and experiment with their own writing. She continues to write as a member of two writing groups, one of which she facilitates.

-Cathy Holdridge
HONORABLE MENTION
- KINDERGARTEN -

Ava Benson, “The Evergreen Trees.” Annie E. Vinton Elementary School
Declan Bayne, “The Lonely Train.” Annie E. Vinton Elementary School
Symarie Edwards, “My Friend.” Annie E. Vinton Elementary School
Hasini Gunda, “Untitled” International Magnet School for Global Citizenship
Jadyn Hamley, “Soccer.” Annie E. Vinton Elementary School
Charlie Ruthen, “Tips and Warnings.” Glastonbury-East Hartford Elementary Magnet School

Jumping

By Anthony Manning
Annie E. Vinton Elementary School, Grade K

I found a muddy puddle
I am going to jump in it!
I found snow inside the puddle.
I jumped in it!

A Train

By Benjamin Semenza
Annie E. Vinton Elementary School, Grade K

A train
A train
So fast, So slow
A train
A train
So new, So old
A train
A train
So hot, So cold

I Love Cats

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

A Cat
A Cat
I love Cats.
A Spotted Cat
A Big Cat
I love Cats.
A skinny Cat
A Fat Cat
So
I Love Cats!

How To Take Care of a Pig

By Sophia Caneira
Annie E. Vinton Elementary School, Grade K

I feed her grain.
I wash her.
Soap and water.
Always every day, bring her outside.
Bathroom.
It takes time.
I need to bring her to bed.
Basket and white blanket.
I sing I love you Piggy and Purple Blankie like my mommy sings to me.

How to Train Your Dog

By Luke Smith
Glastonbury-East Hartford Elementary Magnet School, Grade K

I’m going to throw the stick.
If he rolls over he will get the bone.
He can get the bone because he rolled over.

Maya the Pirate Princess

By Emma Desrosiers
Annie E. Vinton Elementary School, Grade K

She rides a pink princess ship. The sails are broken. The wind caught them.
Maya lost her rainbow wand. She is searching for it. Maya is looking by the rocks and salt water. She is looking for the rainbow wand a long time. Maya finds it buried in the sand. She is able to make a rainbow. Maya throws the wand in the air. She makes a rainbow in the sky.

The Tornado

By Benjamin Wang
Annie E. Vinton Elementary School, Grade K

Once upon a time, there was a tornado. It was going down the sky really fast and strong. I was still standing outside, on grass, near a Christmas tree. It knocked everything over. All the houses and mailboxes were destroyed. I ran inside my basement. My family was with me. Braydon, my little brother, was crying super loud. I wasn’t scared. I was hugging my mommy. It lasted for 6 days. Everyone wanted to get out of the house but it was too dangerous! We knew the tornado was over
because there were 2 windows up high. The sky was dark. Then the sky turned blue. The tornado was over.

HONORABLE MENTION
GRADE 1

Chase Ciccarelli, “Jack and the Boat Parade,” Goshen Center School
Anthony D’Agostino, “Dad and the Jobs,” Goshen Center School
Brianna Jackson, “My Day at Newport,” Tashua Elementary

Beehive

By Hannah Granger
Latimer Lane School, Grade 1

Sweet
Gooey
Sticky
And the honey inside
Melts in my mouth
But...
Bees don’t like to share
And here they come
Pouring out of the hive!

Wind

By Molly Pane
Latimer Lane School, Grade 1

I wonder if
There’s a giant somewhere
In the sky
His breath
Giving us wind
How else?

The Sun and the Moon

By Nathan Youmans
Latimer Lane School, Grade 1

The light sun
And the dark moon
Have a fight
When the sun is rising
And the moon is setting
And the sun always wins.
The First Day of School/ Summer

By Dayami Torillo Cortez
Annie E. Vinton Elementary School, Grade 1

El primer día de escuela yo hice un conejo con senora Galioni me enseño también me enseño hacer una hoja de colores como un arcoiris.
[The first day of school I made a bunny with Ms. Scaglione. I also learned how to make the colors of a rainbow on a paper.]

En el verano pasado mi papa me llebo al bosque cual fue mi sororesa cuando en contramos un nidito de conejito pequenitos yo nunca los abia visto son pelonsitos y bonitos.
[Last summer my dad took me to the forest which was my surprise when we found a little nest of bunnies. I never saw it and they have a lot of fur and were cute.]

Isaac’s Chickens

By Kaleigh Lynch
Goshen Center School, Grade 1

Isaac was 6 years old and had black hair and he lived on a farm. He had chickens, ten cows and twenty horses and twenty pigs and two ponies. His family members were Mom, Dad and Timmy his brother. Isaac was playing with his chickens. Then he accidentally opened the door! “Dad” he yelled, “The Chickens are loose.” Mom came running outside. Dad came running. Mom screamed “AARRGGHH.” One hundred chickens were loose I thought but it was really thirteen. “It’s going to take a while to do this,” said Isaac. They ran around. Isaac caught one then Mom caught one. Isaac caught another one. Dad said “Isaac scoop one up.” “I did!” Dad was mad he didn’t catch one. His cheeks were red. He screamed. The chickens ran. It made Isaac mad now his cheeks were red. The chickens ran again. Timmy caught one too. They finally caught them. It was hard! But they did it! Isaac helped his Dad do chores, so did Mom and Timmy. At the end of the chores they all agreed that better not happen again! They went to dinner and went to bed. But then it happened again and again and again! Isaac said, “I think there is something wrong with the gate. His family said, “Ya think!”

The Yo-Yo

By Zoreena Latiff
Museum Academy, Grade 1

When Jessica’s little sister had a yoyo she hit her in the eye. Her eye hert. She felt mad. Her mom is a dockder. She put ice on it. It felt beder. Sara, her little sister, said “I’m sorry.” They got a toy because their mom is a dockder. They felt happy. Mom gave them a kiss.
My One Wish

By Justin Daddona
Button ball Lane School, Grade 1

My wish is I don’t have diabetes. Fact 1 - You need to have a lot of finger pricks. Fact 2 - 25.8 million people in the United States have diabetes. Fact 3 - You can’t have as much junk food as your friends. You can only have about one piece of candy a day. You have to watch out for too many carbs. Fact 4 - You have to have a shot at every meal and at night.

It is hard to have diabetes. It’s really hard to not have that much junk food when my friends do. IT STINKS! It’s almost as bad as school and school is not cool! If you had diabetes you would say it stinks too. You would need to get about 20 finger pricks a day and about five shots a day. It’s horrible. I HATE IT! It hurts and I don’t like it. I really don’t want it. You would say the same if it was you. Once you get used to it, it won’t be so bad, but it still hurts a lot. It takes a long time to get control of diabetes.

My parents and sisters support me. When I’m sad my sisters make me feel better by doing silly stuff. When I first got my shots and finger pricks my parents did them too.

Scientists are trying to get rid of you, diabetes, so goodbye. I want you to know that every single night I pray some day they will find a cure. Every night I wish it wasn’t so hard for me and people with diabetes.

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HONORABLE MENTION
GRADE 2

Meghan Gaffney, “Stray Dog.” Squadron Line Elementary School
Eva Geiger, “One Snowy Night.” Goshen Center School
Taylor Henry, “The Missing Pumpkins.” F. M. Kearns Primary School
Scott Taylor, “Evening Sunset.” Squadron Line Elementary School
Sophie Viar, “A Christmas Poem.” Philip R. Smith Elementary School

The Delight Song of Kelsey

By Kelsey Alonzo
Squadron Line Elementary School, Grade 2

I am the light of the bright moon shining in the dark sky
I am a dark brown sand dollar hiding under the water and the sand.
I am a tall yellow sunflower swaying in the wind.
I am a butterfly fluttering in the bright blue sky.
I am a monkey swinging from bar to bar as I grab the cold metal.
Beautiful world. Beautiful world.

Ne Pa Co

By Kaeden Stefanik
Squadron Line Elementary School, Grade 2
Ne pa co
Ne pa co
The sun has set now
The sun has set now
Time to sleep
It's time to sleep
Everything is asleep
The bees in their hives are asleep
The dogs under the stars are asleep
The bird in their nests are asleep.

Ne pa co
Ne pa co
Day will come
Day will come
Sweet dreams now
Sweet dreams now
The shining moon light
The flashing fireflies
The twinkling stars
Will light up the night
While you dream

Tomorrow will be another day
Tomorrow will be another day
Ne pa co
Ne pa co

Paralyzer

By Braden Ayer
Eastford Elementary School, Grade 2

Crawling Arachnid
Poisoning paralyzing
Bundle the victim

Dark Sky

By Paige Owens
Eastford Elementary School, Grade 2

Creepy, crawly spy
Catch, stab, poison, yummy bug
In his spider web

A Wonderful Field

By Betsy Kellogg
Squadron Line Elementary School, Grade 2
“Emilie” I shouted. I ran toward her and hugged her. I felt the rough blue necklace she was holding in her hand.

“Come on!” I shouted. “Look!”

There was a beautiful field. I slipped. I felt the cold wet green grass.

“You okay?” Emilie asked.

“Yeah,” I said. “Nora!” I shouted across the field. “Patti where are you?” I asked.

No bother. Look. I looked up. The sky was all shades of blue and the sun was orange and yellow.

Nora said, “Cool.”

Emilie said, “Look!”

I shouted. She was pointing at a small tree. I ran toward the tree and started the climb. I felt the bark on my hand. I felt the twigs in my hair.

“Hey, do you want to play house?”

“Yeah!”

“Okay,” I said. “This is my bedroom.”

I climbed even further in the tree until I got to my branch. I swung back and forth, upside down, until my legs got tired soon. I went back to the field and sat in the grass. I picked up a yellow flower. I stared out into the sky. I saw the sun setting in the distance. I felt the cold grass my hand was touching. I saw a butterfly fly by and a small ladybug landed on my hand. It tickled. I looked into the sky and saw a cloud almost dancing in the air. I felt Emilie, Nora, and Patti sit next to me on the ground. I rolled down the hill and laughed at the bottom. Patti, Nora, and Emilie rolled after me.

“Whoa!” Nora said as she hit me.

“Ouch!” I looked up in the sky. It looked as if there was a flower in the sky holding four bumble bees. I can’t wait to go back.

My First Fish

By Sophia Viar

Philip R. Smith Elementary School, Grade 2

My family and I went to Maine in the summer and had a fabulous vacation. One day, we rented a red canoe, and went fishing on the lake. I was feeling very lucky about catching my first fish. We paddled out, out, out and into the middle of the lake. I pressed a button down on my fishing pole and if I wanted to cast out, I could just let go of the button. I was not catching anything at first, but then I felt a tug, a wiggle, and a jiggle.

I yelled, “I think I’ve got something!”

Dad said, “Reel it in, Sophie.”

I turned the crank, looked in the water, and I saw the fish swimming towards me! I could barely see my fishing line in the water because it was clear, but I could see the shiny silver lure by the fish’s mouth. My Dad helped me bring the fish into the canoe, and took the hook out. I caught a fish!

Everyone was saying, “Good job, Sophie,” and “Awesome.” It was a rainbow trout. We tied the fish to a string, put it back in the water and dragged it behind our canoe. When we got back to the dock, we put the fish inside the cooler, in a plastic bag, and on ice. We drove to the campground, and on our way, we stopped by the ocean and my dad cleaned the fish. Soon the fish was dead. That night we cooked the fish on our uncle’s gas grill that he let us borrow. We sat down at a picnic table and split the fish into four pieces for Mom, Dad, Alex and me. I liked the fish because it was super warm, a good temperature, and it was great because my dad cooked it perfectly.

Mom and Dad complimented, “Sophie what a lovely, tasty fish.”

“Thank you,” I told them.
The Basketball Game

By Ethan Garbart
Glastonbury-East Hartford Elementary Magnet School, Grade 2

“Hey Abby, want to climb the tree?” Nathan asked his little sister.
“That sounds fun!” said Abby.
Abby and Nathan climbed the tree up high. Nathan has to go to basketball practice but he
doesn’t want to because he’s afraid his coach will be mean. He falls off the tree and breaks his leg. He
cries. The ambulance took Nathan somewhere. “Whooooo...” Nathan hears the siren blowing as the
ambulance takes him to the hospital. A volcano explodes and the hospital blows up. The people are
safe because there is a secret basement place that has the hospital stuff in it, in case an earthquake or
volcano explodes.
Nathan gets four casts so he can run.
They drive to basketball. Nathan runs out the doors. He runs all the way out to the car. He tries
to turn it on but he gets caught. He plays basketball. His team wins. He loves basketball.
“Yipeeee!!! I will not jump out the tree again,” said Nathan.

The Adventures of Daphne and Lucky

By Delaney Grimaldi
F. M. Kearns Primary School, Grade 2

One day the Bennett family decided to go on vacation. Abby the oldest, and CC the youngest,
Lucky their dog and their Mom and Dad packed their bags, got in the car and drove off. When the
Bennett family got to their vacation house, Abby and CC ran to the house, put their stuff down, got
Lucky and ran to the ocean and started to swim. Suddenly something touched CC’s foot.
"SHARRRKK!!" CC screamed. Everyone sprinted out of the water and looked at the ocean. Then
something jumped out of the water. It was a dolphin. Abby laughed and said, "It's not a shark, you silly.
It’s a dolphin!" Just then Mr. Bennett yelled over to them, "It's time to come in now for dinner!"
"Okaaaaay," Abby shouted back. Abby, CC and Lucky ran to the house for dinner. When the Bennett
family sat down for dinner, Abby talked about how they saw the dolphin and how the dolphin jumped
out of the water. Mrs. Bennett and Mr. Bennett thought seeing a dolphin was pretty cool!

After dinner it was time for bed so everyone put on their pajamas, brushed their teeth and went
to bed, except Lucky. She snuck to the ocean where the dolphin lived because Lucky wanted to be
friends with her. When Lucky got to the ocean she waited for the dolphin to jump up. Finally the
dolphin did, so Lucky yelled over, “Hey what's your name?” The dolphin yelled back, “Daphne.” “Hi
Daphne, my name is Lucky,” Daphne swam over to where Lucky was sitting. Daphne and Lucky talked
for a while. They talked about their families and their adventures. Soon Lucky had to go so her family
would not think she was missing. When Lucky got home everyone was still sleeping. An hour later Mr.
Bennett and Mrs. Bennett woke up and started making pancakes. The yummy smell of the pancakes
woke up Abby and CC so they ran down the stairs. After breakfast Abby and CC decided to take Lucky
for a walk. While they were on their walk they saw some birds. Lucky tried to chase the birds but Abby
stopped her. Since it was getting dark it was time to go home. Lucky was excited for bed time because she
was going to go to the ocean again so she could see her friend.

That night Lucky ran to the ocean and waited for Daphne to jump out of the water. Lucky
waited and waited for a long time, but Daphne didn’t jump out of the water. Finally Lucky decided to
jump in the water and find out where her friend was. She swam and swam until she got to the sea floor.
Lucky was so surprised to find her friend tangled up in a fishing net! Lucky raced to the surface of the
water, ran to her house, and made Abby and CC get their bathing suits on. All of them ran to the ocean
and followed Lucky to the bottom of the sea. Abby noticed right away that Daphne was tangled. Abby
and CC untangled Daphne. Daphne was so thankful she nuzzled up against Abby and then CC. Lucky
was happy her friend was not tangled anymore. After Abby, CC and Lucky said goodbye to their new friend they all ran home, got in their pajamas and went to bed.

The next day it was time to go home. The whole family was sad. Before they left, Lucky ran to the ocean one last time and said goodbye to Daphne. Daphne was disappointed that Lucky had to leave, but they knew that they would see each other next time Lucky came back to the ocean.

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**HONORABLE MENTION**

**– GRADE 3 –**

Ava McCann, “Jadeworlf,” *Reggio Magnet School of the Arts*
Nia Shields, “Killer Wave,” *International Magnet School*
Alexa Esparza-Finsmith, “The Whole Alphabet,” *North Windham School*

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**I Am From**

*By Eric Li*
*Squadron Line Elementary School, Grade 3*

I am from a lab, exploding everything I test, and making predictions about what could happen on Earth, like Earthquakes shaking the ground and twisters taking up everything in their path.

I am from Virginia, learning everything to know about history, like when George Washington, our first President, was born and how to clean cannons before putting another ball in.

I am from the pond, catching tadpoles and minnows, all kinds of fish, even the betta fish with its swirling fins, swimming around and hiding in the sand, or fighting with a small fish.

I am from New York City, going everywhere from the Empire State Building to the Brooklyn Bridge, seeing all the buildings and skyscrapers in sight, and busy, noisy Chinatown, where my Dad’s aunt lives, eating dumplings and other Chinese foods.

That’s where I’m from.

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**Our Kittens**

*By Rachel Solomon*
*Juliet W. Long School, Grade 3*

Queenbee, Willowcat
One grey, One black
One Stormy, One Willow.
She sleeps, furry, purry, and soft
In my lap
and
On my bed
and
Even on my book.

In a moment she is up,
With a yawn and a stretch.
She’s gone.

Racing here and there,
Gray in front and black in back
Sister after Sister.

A Grey flash, Willow after a pipe cleaner.
A black streak, Stormy after a ball.
With eyes that melt my heart,
She nestles under the blanket beside me.
I stroke her to sleep.

Special loving kittens,
Part of my family.

_Diary of a Girl: Santa? ...Bah, Humbug!
_(A graphic short story inspired by Jeff Kinney's _Diary of a Wimpy Kid_ series)

_by RaeAnn McLean_
_Montessori Magnet School, Grade 3_

Well, it's almost the last week of school. Most of the kids in my class are excited about Christmas break because of all the presents and stuff. But me, well I quit on Christmas years ago! Why?

But the thing that creeps me out is the Santa thing. The saying “He can see you when you're sleeping and when you're not” ...is like CREEPY!!!

Then there’s that Naughty or Nice List. You hear about it, but you never see it....

But get this, my friend got grounded for 8 weeks last fall for getting mad and slapping her little sister .... and she still got a KAYAK for Christmas.

Monday - December 16th - School
Most of my friends aren't just thinking about Christmas though. You see there's this “Stop Bullying” poster contest at school. Just after introducing the contest and getting this whole speech about bullying at the school assembly, both 5th grade classes must have had the same idea because the first class wrote “Bullies are Mean” and the second class had the same thing with “ies” added to the last word.
The whole thing got out of control and yes, they started bullying each other over who had the poster idea first and whose poster was better.

Thursday - Dec. 19th
Well, it came just like they said on the TV...three feet of fluffy SNOW! It looked like a field of cotton. It was so high my family couldn't even open the front door. I really wanted to play in it so I went into my bedroom and opened the window...and just jumped out! OW!

Sunday, Dec. 22nd
Dad told me to go down cellar to my sister Raina's bedroom to wake her up so we could all go to church now that some of that snow had finally melted. When I went downstairs I found out where all that melted snow had gone ... into my sister's now flooded bedroom!

Mom was pretty bummed out because most of our stuff got messed up. But I didn't care! What I cared about was that the flood was still getting bigger. You can imagine my sister might have drowned if I hadn't gone downstairs to get here. Then I found the waterlogged copy of the lame book Moby Dick that my dad makes me read every Sunday after church. Good thing it was destroyed - I hope he can't find another copy!

Monday, Dec. 23rd
Well it happened like I said ... more snow but even higher this time— 4 feet. I know it's stupid because it's 1 foot deeper than last time but snow means that chance to make shoveling money. So I did what I do best ... CLEAN. So this time I swung myself out the other window, the one that is closer to the ground so I didn't have to jump.

Tuesday Dec. 24th
The power went out and at the worst possible time ... I was making a burrito. And it happened right when Mom had planned to go to the store because we didn't have any food left. Now we don't have any food for dinner. Oh I just remembered, I have two pizzas, a candy bar and 19 donuts.

We basically grabbed a flashlight but there was nothing to do. (Hungry) So we all went to bed. It was only 6:24 so I read a book until my batteries ran out.

You know how I got money for cleaning driveways. Well, I had a new plan but it meant sneaking out and walking quite far through the snow.

When I finally got home, the power was still off and everybody was still sleeping. So I went down in the basement to check the cable and I found WATER in it!
I knew how to fix this! Cut out all the red wires. Then rub the green wires together to make energy. Aha, the lights all came on. I had done it! After the lights woke everyone up, we all ate!

When our friends down the street saw our lights on, they came over and we all slept together downstairs because it was Christmas Eve. I really wasn't upset that no one would get any presents on Christmas morning because of all the snow we'd had, the power outages in most houses and my friends not even sleeping in their own house on Christmas Eve.

Wow, look at all the presents, everyone got everything they wanted! Hmmm, I guess Santa isn't as Bah Humbug as I thought!

Why Drake?

By Alessandro Benvenuto
Montessori Magnet School, Grade 3

“Drake, no more excuses, now go to your locker and get your homework right away!” said Mrs. Wilson, the most annoying teacher Drake had ever had. He walked down the hall to his locker wondering why he was always last - the last student called on to leave, the last one to get to kick the ball at recess, the last one called on to get in line, the one who got the last teacher anyone would want and even the one who got the last locker in the hallway. Just his luck... BAD! He got his backpack and started back to class. Looking at his backpack he didn't see the men until he bumped right into one of them. He looked up and saw two old men looking at him. They told him their names, Harold and Jarold. He couldn't help it, he started to laugh and then it happened! Harold and Jarold got angry at him and told him to watch where he was going.

“You watch where you’re going!” Drake said and then he felt afraid because they were adults and they were BIG! They grabbed him, covered his mouth so he couldn't yell for help and took out a large bag and put him in it. Back in the classroom, his friend Josh told the teacher that Drake had been gone a long time. The teacher went to the school camera and saw the two old men put Drake into a big bag. Right when she saw that, she knew that Drake had gotten kidnapped. She called his parents and explained it to them. His mom and dad went to the police and told them their child had gotten kidnapped. Everyone gave information about what he looked like and what the teacher said the two men looked like but the police didn't know who they were. The police said that they will call the parents when they find out who took Drake. His mom and dad were very sad. The police went to put up pictures of Drake that said 8 year old boy missing, REWARD! It had the police phone number on the poster.

Jarold and Harold had stuffed Drake in the back of the car so no one would see him. While Harold was driving the car, Jarold was watching Drake. They were driving a BMW. When they got to their cabin they put Drake into a little room. Harold and Jarold decided what to do to Drake because he talked back to them. The plan of Jarold and Harold was to drown Drake by throwing him into the ocean. So that Drake would sink they were going to put rocks in the bag too.

First Drake was locked up in a room with no food for three days. Drake tried to open the window inside his room but the windows were locked too. It was very hot and he was very tired so he went to sleep. The next day Drake made a plan. His plan was to look out the window to see when the two old men left the cabin. Then Drake tried to open the door with a toothpick but when he put it in the lock it broke so he needed to try something else. He tried to break the window with the metal chair in the room but the window was made of Maxyglass that was really strong and can't break! Drake checked
his phone but it had no service. Drake was about to try something else but the two old men were back. They unlocked the door to check on Drake but they couldn't find him inside the room because he was hiding behind the door. Then when they came inside to look for him, he saw they left the door open so he ran out and locked the door so the two old men couldn't get out. Drake went to the kitchen and he looked for an exit. There was a door there and he was so happy he escaped into the woods. He ran and ran. He did not know where he was or if he was far away from his house. He kept walking until he got tired and sat down on the ground. The woods were very big and he couldn't find a way out. It was like a maze and he did not know where he was.

After a long time walking Drake looked and saw he was back near the kidnapper's cabin and because Drake was starving he snuck back into the cabin and he found some cookies so he took the cookies and left again.

After a very long time Harold and Jarold had finally broken the door down and the two old men both ran out the door to look for Drake. They looked and looked. They couldn't find him and almost gave up but then they saw Drake as he was leaving with the cookies, so they both ran after Drake. Drake started to run. He ran as fast as he could. The old man Jarold took out a gun. He wanted to shoot Drake but he missed the first time. Then he tried again and this time he did not miss. Drake fell on the ground and the two old men were very happy. Harold said, “Good shot Jarold! He deserved that for talking back to us!” Jarold answered, “Ha, ha! Well, he won't talk back to anybody anymore now that he's dead! Let's bury him in the woods.” So that's what they did.

Months passed and then a young man named Darold called the police with a message. He told the police that he found a cell phone in the dirt near a cabin in the woods and the phone had the name ‘Drake’ on it. The police asked him what he was doing in the woods and Darold said he was on his way to work. When the police got there, Darold gave them the phone he had found and told them where the cabin was. Then he said he had to go. When the police found the cabin and went inside, they found a backpack and they saw some pictures of Harold and Jarold. The police recognized the pictures because they had been looking for them for years. They were cousins who had been sent to prison for killing a woman but they had escaped a long time ago. Jarold and Harold were hiding in their room because they had heard the police come. The police went inside the rooms to search for Jarold and Harold. When they went into Jarold and Harold's room, the police found them hiding in the closet. They put handcuffs on both of them and told them that they were going to be back in prison for the rest of their lives. The police asked them if they had seen Drake. At first they said no, but then the police asked them, “How come we found Drake's backpack in your house?”

They said, “Fine, we killed Drake on February 18th.”

The policeman yelled, “Well, that's the LAST child you'll ever kill!”

The police told Drake's family that Drake had died. They told them that he died last February. Drake's mom and dad started to cry and the police helped Drake's family plan the memorial for Drake. The police found Drakes picture inside his backpack but that was the only thing they could find. The police searched and searched but they never did find his body and Jarold and Harold never told what they did with it. Drake's family was sad but at least didn't have to wonder any more what happened to Drake. They also had Drake's pictures but they still miss him very much so they decided to try to live the rest of their days the way they used to when Drake was alive.

Oh, by the way, if you are ever in the woods and you see some bones sticking out of the dirt, it might just be Drake!...and if you see an old dusty cabin in the woods, please don't go inside because you never know about Darold and why he was in those woods in the first place.
My Dad’s Story

By Veronica Cunniskey
Squadron Line Elementary School, Grade 3

This is a true story about my dad, sister, and me.

Two sisters wait for their dad to come home from work to tuck them into bed with a special story. VROOMMMM! They hear the garage door open and they know he will be up soon. When their dad comes into their bedroom they spring out of bed to give him a huge hug. The girls beg and plead with their dad to tell them the magical story of Pollyianna and Elizabeth. Every night the story begins the same way.

Chapter One - The Portal

Now that we are cozy under our fluffy pink comforters we journey to the magic forest. Soon we find ourselves whizzing through a dirt portal. Along the way we see dirt, ladybugs, worms and other insects underground. As we pass the special mint ladybug, she is light green with black spots, we change from our real selves to Pollyianna and Elizabeth. As we leave the portal we now are entering the magic forest but we must sign in with the tall lady. She checks off our names to make sure we are part of the forest. The lady says “It is nice to see you back, now go on in!” We are so happy to be back in our favorite place where everything is made from candy and love! And you can eat as much as you want and no one ever gets sick! The rivers flow with gooey melted chocolate. In these delicious rivers swim alligators with candy corn teeth and sweet, colorful gummy fish. The trees are made of chocolate covered pretzel rods and the leaves are made of breath mints shaped like leaves. Lemonade fountains line each side of the beautiful walkway. The walkway looks like cement but it is really light blue frosting that is smooth and dry. We take deep breaths to fill ourselves with the sweet smells of berry, peppermint, chocolate, lemon and so many more. As we are walking we meet up with our dearest friends Hazel and Basil. These friends have the most unique house! They live in a hallowed out tree. We always have fun adventures with Hazel and Basil! We look forward to seeing them every time we enter the magic forest.

Chapter Two - Adventures

Our first adventure is fishing for alligator teeth, which is Hazel and Basil's most favorite one. We use our line made of stringy, red licorice. At the end of our line we attach colorful gummy worms to use as bait. We cast our lines into the chocolate river hoping to catch a candy corn alligator tooth. We never know what we will catch because the water is not crystal clear blue water. It is thick, velvety and dark. Elizabeth feels a pull on her line so we all run over to help her reel her line in. She caught four candy corn alligator teeth. One for each of us to enjoy. This never hurts the alligator for he is happy to share his special teeth with us. Plus they immediately grow back! We say goodbye to Hazel and Basil and tell them we will see them again soon.

We decide to visit our dear friend the little, plump tea lady. Elizabeth chooses the caramel toffee tea with cream. Pollyianna's favorite is the sweet lemon tea with a scoop of honey. As we drink our tea the little, plump tea lady shares stories about when she was young. We always ask to hear her tell the story about how she used to ride her red bike with lifesaver candy tires! We realize the time has gone by so fast, like race cars racing around their track. We must say our goodbyes. She says “Come back soon for more tea and stories.”

Chapter Three - Heading Home

We know that we need to get back to our beds for it is time to go to sleep. We can hear mom's footsteps climbing the stairs and heading down the hallway toward our bedroom. We know we need to hurry! We race to the sign out with the tall lady. We sign our names and say goodbye! As we are swept up through the portal we pass the mint ladybug and change back to our real names. We come out from under our covers just as mom says “Girls, lights out. Time to sleep now!” We know it is time for dad to
go but we keep our secret and look forward to the next bedtime! He tucks us in with a smile and says “Goodnight!”

The Camping Trip

By Connor Doran
Juliet W. Long School, Grade 3

It was a blazing hot, sunny day in the Adirondack’s enormous mountains. Mom and Dad were thinking about going on the new green canoe. So we jumped into the truck and set off. It took about 10 to 15 minutes to get to the sandy beach. When we got to the beach, Dad and Mom put the canoe in the warm water. When Dad got into the canoe...it tipped over in two feet of water! So then, Mom and Dad tipped the water out of the canoe. After that, Sam, my sister, Mom and Dad and I got into the canoe without any tipping. The water in the river was rough that day. It took about 1 hour to get to the beach at the end of the river. At the end of the river there was water that was trickling down the rocks and fools-gold on the sand. The smooth sand hit my feet. The water had rocks on the bottom that looked like massive marbles. As soon as we got there, Dad flew out of the canoe, snatched his fishing pole and fished...not surprising for my dad...he loves fishing. I had a peanut butter and jelly sandwich for lunch. It mostly tasted like soggy bread. Suddenly, Dad caught a bass but I was too busy exploring the water trickling down the rocks. “Come on, why can’t I see anything?” After that we hopped into the canoe and set off onto the river. The wind was blowing against my back, which meant that we could get to the road faster than before. When we got to the road where the truck was, Mom and Dad put the canoe gently on the truck. At last we jumped into the truck and went back to the campsite.

HONORABLE MENTION
GRADE 4

Caroline Fording, “Welcome to Winter,” Long Lots Elementary School
Elijah Hauser, “Street Music,” Regional Multicultural Magnet School
Lang Le, “Just Then,” Canton Intermediate School
Griffin Marquis, “Believer,” Tootin’ Hills School
Natalia Shields, “Heart of the Rose,” Ledyard Center School

The Chair

By Abby DiRico
Regional Multicultural Magnet School, Grade 4

The chair calls
Sit
Sit
Static electricity
Spits out a welcoming gesture
The chair is chosen
Hard
Bumpy
Familiar
The back of
The chairs stands tall
Strong
Straight
Proud
The chair is aware
That it's
Useful
Needed
Necessary
For wide awake rests
When empty it cries
Come back
Come back
Come back
And fill my vacant space

A Dog's Story

By Ben Flower
Harwinton Consolidated School, Grade 4

Between now and the time I was a puppy, many things have occurred. Back then I was a scruffy, weak dog. Now, I am a strong, full-sized dog. I've gone on many adventures. Ones that changed me from who I was then and who I am now. I was scared of everything then, and now, I am brave and smart. Sometimes I wonder if I didn't do any exploring, would it change who I am now? What happened wasn’t a mistake, it was a decision. I know that now. I think about what I did all of the time, and how that affected me. So, if you’re wondering what happened, here we go. It’s time to tell my tale. About ten years has passed since then...

In an abandoned barn, my life began. There were three of us altogether, but my brothers died in those first few days as they became sick and weak from the cold winter outside. Life was difficult in those first few months, but my mother taught me to hunt and fish, and I soon adapted to the world around me. Together, we could do anything, and she was always there when I got into a rough spot. Life stayed that way for some time, until one morning...I heard quick, scampering feet, and I opened my eyes. As I remember it, I was one year old. Dogs were everywhere, wild dogs. Huge, scraggily, and famished, searching for their next meal. I remember being clawed, scratched and bitten. I curled into a ball as tight as a potato bug, hoping they wouldn't come after me. Suddenly, I heard a big yelp. It was my mom. After that, it was silent. The dogs had killed my mom for her milk, and dragged her away. I waited patiently not knowing what to do next, so I laid down. My ear and legs had slashes on them. After licking the warm, flowing redness, I went to sleep exhausted and sad. In the morning, I was hurt, starving and alone. I looked around, let out a quick whimper and limped over to a nearby stream. I soaked myself until what felt like night fall. Then, I lay down in a soft patch of moss and drifted silently back to sleep. When I awoke the sun was setting and I knew that night was coming. My stomach ached with flashing pangs of hunger. I came across a patch of Dogtooth Violets which I knew were edible from my mom. When I finished, I walked back to the stream once more to take a final drink. Then, I set out looking for a better place. I walked for some time in the darkness, not knowing what dangers there might be ahead of me. Before dawn, I found a small town in a meadow. It looked friendly enough as I passed people waving and chatting with each other on the street. That night, I found myself behind houses knocking down trash cans and eating everything I could find. Finally, my tummy was filled with food. Satisfied, I went to sleep. That morning, I set off again, until I found a large pine forest. It reminded me of the times my mother spent teaching me how to survive and find happiness with so very
little. I ventured in, hoping to feel her close. Then all of a sudden, I heard a noise that seemed to shake
the whole forest. A dark shadow cast over the leaves and branches. I wanted to run off, but a little voice
in the back of my mind said to stay. Then it stepped out....

Ruff! Ruff! A dog, not as big as me, but his bark was loud and annoying. I wagged my tail in
delight and left out a soft, playful bark. In response, he wagged his tail and jumped around with a crazy
energy. We pranced, ran and barked with a happiness I hadn't felt for quite some time. I soon found
out that he was just a young puppy and his name was Otis. He had escaped from his owner's house who
had hurt his mother and was treated terribly. I listened to his story and felt my own sadness well up
inside me. We had both felt it. He needed me and we had each other now, I thought. I felt a leap of
great joy somewhere inside me. That afternoon we hunted for fish, slept when we wanted to, and
wrestled each other when we felt like playing. Life would be grand with my new friend by my side. That
night, I got lucky and killed a small mouse hiding in a bush. It wasn't much, but I was glad we had it.
We munched it down quickly and fell into a deep sleep. The first one in such a long time. All of a
sudden, everything happened so fast. There was a yelp followed by us looking up. A girl stood there.
About six years old. She had perfect blond hair with a yellow flower in her hand. She ran quickly
away yelling as she left. Then someone much bigger, her father, showed up. He was much quieter, and
held out something in his hand. He seemed gentle and kind with his soft smile on his face. He held out
his hand as he slowly leaned over. Something delicious filled my nose. Chicken! We ate it with large
gulps, and then looked back at him as if he would give us more. He and his daughter spoke with soft
voices as they looked in our direction. What were they saying? If only I could understand. They
seemed to know what they were going to do. After a few minutes, they picked us up with great care and
loving hands. As they walked up to the beautiful red barn, I saw pigs, horses and flowers growing in the
window boxes. I knew we had been put in great hands. We passed the place where my mom was killed
and knew that she would be extremely proud of me. And that's how I remember it.

Now as I lay by the fireplace, years later, I feel the warmth of love inside and out.

Silent Street

By Sabrina Tolppi
Regional Multicultural Magnet School, Grade 4

The black pavement
Waits for wheels
To squeal
To mark a trail
The skies are
A still painting
The road
Seems to be posing
For a picture
But abandoned
Even the birds
Are soundless
Only the leaves
Make their way
Into my ears
Drifting into my ears

My Life as a Leaf

By Charles Botts
Montessori Magnet School, Grade 4
I am a leaf. I have stipules to protect me from the cold and rain. Finally, it is summer and I am fully grown. I take in carbon dioxide and ooze oxygen. I soak up sunlight from my tip to my axel. Now that it is fall, I am turning yellow, brown and then red. My petiole has become hard. Twenty-four days later it is winter and my axel is weighed down by the snow. Finally, my axel gives way and I flutter to the ground, safe and sound until I crinkle up and die.

That’s the life cycle of a leaf.
This is the story of my life.

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**An Old Cat**

*By Gabby Savaria*

*Regional Multicultural Magnet School, Grade 4*

An old cat who lives outside
with a warm heart.
Always there
to help me
he’s my best friend
for life
as I hold
on tight
to that cat.
He knows all my life’s stories
of times
of bad like going
to the hospital
and of good
like celebrating my birthday
and when
Summer came home
from the hospital.
I know soon
I will have to say
goodbye
to my great
secret keeper.

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**The King Who Cared About Himself**

*By Keshav Ramesh*

*Eli Terry Elementary School, Grade 4*

Once there was a king in Greece named Alpha Theta. He was very selfish, cunning, foolish, and only cared about himself. His subjects were poor and needy, but he never spent his time thinking about their health and needs. He considered himself to be the greatest of the greatest, and admired himself. King Alpha wanted everything perfect for him and only himself. But he was a believer in god. The king wanted to become a supreme ruler like Zeus, the King of the Olympian gods.

Another trait of the king was that he was greedy. He secretly sent his trained animals to sneak into other people’s property and take valuable possessions which did not belong to him in any kind of
Day after day gigantesque sacks of gold and silver would be brought to the kingdom. King Alpha would proclaim it all his.

The king was also always depressed because he had no company. People steered away from him as much as possible. He had a rash mouth and was always complaining. When he got angry, the people trembled in fear.

King Alpha had slaves who he treated poorly. He never agreed with anyone. He thought his opinion was final and no one could counter it, not even his ministers. He hated children and never talked to his own ones.

The people of the kingdom were peaceful, so they never hated their king, but didn’t like his behavior. He would make sure his guards were stationed everywhere so he always knew what the people were doing. If there was a small accident or mistake, the guards were to whip that innocent person very painfully.

During holidays, King Alpha would check the mail cart and if there were any gifts, money, or jewels inside being given to someone in his kingdom, King Alpha would take it and keep it for himself. He barely bought anything because stealing gave him everything he needed. He didn’t want his people having gifts. He thought everything belonged to him! The people were outraged but didn’t say a word. Most of them would have loved to move out of the kingdom and live somewhere else, but King Alpha devised a rule at the beginning of his reign of the kingdom that no man, woman, or child would be able to move out of the kingdom. The king would not be able to get anything he wants from the people if they move out.

The king captured other places and kingdoms in Greece and tortured the people living in those areas for not giving the land to him. He conquered so many places, but there was no use of conquering them because he would never again pay attention to those conquered areas. He wanted to be high and mighty.

A young boy named Zeta Omega, who was from a poor family decided to teach King Alpha a lesson he would never forget. He wanted to make sure that the king felt ashamed of himself. One night Zeta sneaked out of the hut he and his family lived in and headed for the castle. When Zeta arrived at the entrance of the castle, he saw that the guards had fallen asleep and he sneaked easily behind their backs. Zeta tiptoed up a long flight of shiny polished marble stairs until he reached the king’s bedroom. He slipped inside the king’s bedroom as quiet as a mouse. Zeta saw the king sleeping peacefully in bed, unaware that a boy was in his room.

Zeta spoke in the king’s ear in a raspy voice. “If you do not give your subjects what they need, I, Zeus, king of the gods will make sure you perish for never caring about your people. You will die if you do not provide your people with what they want and need. You have been selfish for too long. There will be consequences if you do not listen. The gods and I are very angry with you and we will punish you if you don’t agree. You will have to stop this injustice.”

In his sleep, King Alpha shivered and mumbled, “Yes, O King of the Heavens. I will make sure I will never be greedy and selfish again. I will treat my subjects to the very best of my ability. They will receive everything they need and I will share everything I have with them. People will not be treated unfairly, I have learned my lesson. I will not die.” He woke up with a start and looked around him. He saw Zeta’s shadow moving away. He thought that he saw the King of the Heavens. “Zeus! Is that you?” he asked.

Hearing the king shout Zeta smiled to himself. Mission accomplished! Zeta hurried back outside and ran from the castle to his hut.

The next day, King Alpha sent out a royal proclamation that all the people in his kingdom were to come to the castle grounds to have a large feast. There would be games and prizes and gifts for everyone. At the feast, King Alpha distributed bags with large amounts of golden and silver drachmas and food. He gifted it among his subjects, who were quite pleased to see how much the horrible king had changed. The king was happy and felt more joyous than he used to be. He felt happiness swirling around him as he watched his subjects eating, playing, and talking. This, he realized, was more fun than having all the fun to one person only.

At one of the tables, Zeta Omega watched as the King beamed with happiness. Zeta knew that King Alpha, selfish, possessive, and powerful, was no longer that way. He was being friendly, sharing,
and helpful to the people of his kingdom. He saw King Alpha talking merrily and laughing with his people. He gave gifts to anyone who came across him. Zeta felt good to see the kindness in King Alpha. King Alpha was never greedy, selfish, or cared about only himself ever again, and all was well in the kingdom through his reign. From that day onward, King Alpha had learned his lesson and always provided his people and subjects with everything they needed.

My First Friend

By Natalie Williams
Colebrook Consolidated Schools, Grade 4

Violet carried her tray out of the lunch line and set it down on the table by the door. The rest of her class was all boys, every last one of them. Violet had no one to sit with at lunch, to play with at recess, or to have play dates with after school. It had been like that since kindergarten, so Violet had pretty much lost hope of having a girl, or friend, in her class. Boys came and went, but Violet had never even seen a girl her age in her town, let alone her class.

* * *

Rose trudged down her school hallway toward her classroom. Not watching where she was going, Rose walked right into her best friend Erin.

“Sorry, Erin,” Rose mumbled.


“I’m moving.”

“What?”

“I said, I'm moving!” Rose said louder.

“Oh, Where?” Erin asked quietly.

“Connecticut.”

“Whew. That's not TOO far. We could still visit each other,” Erin said, relieved.

“Still, I won't go to school with you anymore,” Rose replied, still upset.

“You’ll make new friends, but I will always be your BEST friend. Promise. We won't miss each other as much as you think. We'll send letters, call each other, and visit really often,” Erin said, trying to comfort Rose.

“I know. It's just…I won't know anyone.”

Suddenly the bell rang, so Rose and Erin rushed off to class.

* * *

The school bus rumbled past one stop after the next, stopping to let kids get on. Violet leaned her head against the window and saw a blue mini-van approaching up the hill behind the bus. The bus slowed to let it by, and, for a moment, Violet saw a girl about her age looking intently out the back window of the car. The girl had long, wavy, dark brown hair that fell down around her shoulders. She was staring at Violet with huge green eyes. Freckles dotted her face. She wore an orange wave patterned shirt and black flowing pants with a gold sequined belt. As soon as it had come the, the car sped away. In a few seconds, Violet had taken that ALL in. She had also got the most exciting thought of her life; the one thought that she never thought she would have.

“Could that girl really be someone new in my class?” Violet thought. The feeling of hope, luck, and wonder bubbled up inside her as the bus drove the rest of the way to school.

* * *

Rose’s mom put on the brakes in their car as they approached a school bus when they came over the crest of a hill. The bus also slowed to let kids get on. Violet leaned her head against the window and saw a blue mini-van approaching up the hill behind the bus. The bus slowed to let it by, and, for a moment, Violet saw a girl about her age looking intently out the back window of the car. The girl had long, wavy, dark brown hair that fell down around her shoulders. She was staring at Violet with huge green eyes. Freckles dotted her face. She wore an orange wave patterned shirt and black flowing pants with a gold sequined belt. As soon as it had come the, the car sped away. In a few seconds, Violet had taken that ALL in. She had also got the most exciting thought of her life; the one thought that she never thought she would have.

“Could that girl really be someone new in my class?” Violet thought. The feeling of hope, luck, and wonder bubbled up inside her as the bus drove the rest of the way to school.

* * *
lavender striped t-shirt. Moments later, Rose’s mini-van sped up the road toward the school, followed by the school bus.

* * *

Violet stepped off the bus last and walked up the front steps of the school, into the building. Sure enough, Violet spotted the girl she had seen from the bus coming out of the office and heading straight toward her classroom! Violet glanced up at the clock in the main hallway. Uh oh! Five minutes before the bell. She hurried past the girl and her mom, pausing to mutter a short “Hi,” then rushed down the hall to her classroom. Violet spun the dial on her locker and, with difficulty, shoved her backpack in. Violet was in such a rush, she almost ran down the hall to class. She burst through the door and rushed to her seat just as the bell rang. Mrs. Bud, Violet’s teacher, glanced over to where Violet was sitting.

“Violet, you’re almost late AGAIN!! You really have to start coming in earlier,” Mrs. Bud stressed. To the whole class she announced, “Class, we’re going to have a new girl joining us. Her name is Rose Johnson. Please welcome her.”

As if on cue, the girl Violet had seen on the bus stepped into the classroom with her mom. Rose walked quickly to the seat across the aisle from Violet. Violet smiled and said, “Hi. I’m Violet.”

“Hey,” Rose replied shyly.

Mrs. Bud clapped to get everyone’s attention, and then started the lesson.

* * *

Rose hopped out of her car and looked around. There was a playground off to the side on the right, with a blacktop parking lot bordering it. A long chain-link fence surrounded it all, including a basketball court.

“Okay, I don’t think I’ll get lost,” Rose thought, smiling to herself. Rose had jumped up the front steps and raced to the door before her mom was even out of the car, “Can I go in?”

Rose was literally jumping up and down. “Okay, you can go in, but make sure you wait by the office for me,” her mom replied.

Rose didn’t answer. She just opened the door and went in. She found the door that said OFFICE on it. Her mom came in and spoke to the lady at the desk for a little bit and then led Rose down the main hall. Rose was so excited; she almost crashed into the girl she had seen looking at her from the bus.

“Hi,” the girl mumbled then rushed away toward a row of lockers. Rose just continued excitedly after her mom. They passed open doorways, closed ones, rows and rows of lockers, kids’ running to class, but finally stopped at a door that was closed with the name Mrs. Bud, and the words “Room 12” on a plastic plaque screwed to the door. Rose went in and completely lost her excitement. There were boys, boys, and more boys. Rose gasped. She had one single unhappy, exhausting thought bobbing around in her head. “Mostly boys + almost no girls = almost no new friends for Rose.” All of a sudden the girl from the bus burst through the door. Then Mrs. Bud stood up from her desk and sighed. “I thought I told you boys to stay in your seats in the morning,” Mrs. Bud said, more sad than angry.

“Especially since we have a new girl this morning,” she said. “Everyone this is Rose Johnson. Please welcome her,” Mrs. Bud said, smiling at Rose. Rose went to an empty seat across from the girl and sat down.

“Hey. I’m Violet,” the girl said.

“Hi. I’m Rose,” Rose responded quietly.

* * *

Before Violet knew it, lunch time was already there. Mrs. Bud called line and everybody filed down to lunch. Violet found herself hoping that Rose didn’t sit with someone else. Rose couldn’t sit with any other girls from their class because there were none, but she could always sit with 5th and 3rd grade girls.

“Oh just let me sit with you.” Violet thought desperately. When she finally entered the cafeteria, Rose was sitting with two fifth grade girls laughing, giggling and talking. Violet’s heart sank. She got her tray and went to her usual spot, the far corner by the door, where few people sat. Maybe Rose
wouldn't be her friend after all. She hadn't asked to sit with her. Rose had only said her name to Violet, not anything else. Violet's happiness and excitement had gone down the drain.

* * *

Rose walked silently down the hall behind five boys. Her only hope to make a new best friend was Violet. Ever since she had walked through the door of her classroom, Rose knew that most things were going to be difficult. Two girls, eleven boys. Not many best friends for Rose. Rose got her lunch and searched for a place to sit down. Soon enough, two fifth graders offered a seat to her. Rose hadn't promised anyone else, so she agreed. Rose's bad mood was instantly cheered up when the three of them began joking, laughing, and chatting. When Violet appeared in the cafeteria, Rose glanced at her. Violet was looking sadly at Rose, shoulders slumped. Violet trudged off to a corner to eat her lunch. Rose continued her own lunch a bit less lively.

* * *

Violet rode home on the bus alone. She watched Rose talk with a third grader. Rose was not even noticing Violet. Violet just wanted to be friends. Why was it so hard? She felt invisible. Violet hadn't had a friend in school in her whole life, and now that she had the chance, Rose was not even talking to her!

When Violet caught Rose's eye, she was always looking at Violet while sitting with someone else, or talking to other people, as if to say, “Sorry. I'm occupied.” Violet was starting to have more and more doubts about a friendship with Rose. If Violet didn't get up and talk to Rose soon, she would never get another chance.

“Just talk to her,” Violet thought to herself. “Just talk to her, then you’ll have a friend.”

* * *

Rose nodded absently to the third grader's question, whose name was May. May was a complete chatterbox! She would not stop talking! Rose wasn't thinking about what she was answering, just about Violet. She looked so lonely all the time, no matter what she was doing. She probably was lonely. After all, there hadn't been any other girls in their class until Rose moved in. She hadn't seen Violet talk to anyone but the teacher. Rose was determined to make friends. She was going to make friends with Violet.

* * *

Violet awoke early the next morning to begin preparing what she would say to Rose on the bus. “Hi. Can I be your friend?” No, What about, “Hey, you're Rose, right? I don't have any friends, so I was wondering if we could maybe be friends.” Yes, that was perfect. She would go up to Rose first thing on the bus.

Unfortunately, the bus came sooner than Violet would have liked. Violet hoped she was prepared. She stepped into the aisle and saw Rose's head poking out of a seat. She walked down the aisle until she was at the seat and asked, “Hi, can I sit with you?”

“Sure,” Rose answered. Violet sat down and began talking.
“Hey, you're Rose, right?”
“Yeah.”
“Well, I don't have any friends because we don't have any other girls in the class, and I was wondering if you wanted to be my friend.”
“Sure! I was going to ask you the same thing!” Rose cried happily.

* * *

Rose was tingling with excitement as the bus pulled up to Violet's bus stop. “Please be my friend, please be my friend,” Rose thought desperately. As Violet walked on the bus and down the aisle, Rose's excitement grew.
“Can I sit with you?” Violet asked Rose. Rose could barely get out the words.
“Sure.”
“Hey you're Rose right?”
“Yeah.”
“Well, I don't have any friends because we don't have any other girls in our class, and I want to be your friend.'

Rose was delighted. “Of course! I was going to ask you the same thing!' she cried in excitement. Rose had finally made a forever friend.

***

Rose and Violet sat and chatted together all the way to school. They played tag and jump rope together at recess. They spent summer vacation in Florida together with Erin who soon became the third friend. Every weekend, they called Erin. Every summer they visited each other. That was how they did everything. Together, together, together.

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HONORABLE MENTION
- GRADE 5 -

Audrey Feldman, “Bullying.” Emma Hart Willard Elementary School
Quinn Higby, “Untitled.” Kelly Lane Intermediate School
Anastasia Holl, “Deodorant Stick.” Kelly Lane Intermediate School
Samantha McCormick, “To Let Her Go.” Buttonball Lane School
Cecily Meehan, “Feng.” Westwood Upper Elementary School
Kaite Simpson, “What Goes on When You’re Sleeping.” Kelly Lane Intermediate School

Even the Toughest Problems Have Solutions

By Karen Ru
Squadron Line Elementary School, Grade 5

Have you ever been scared of trying new things for the first time? Don’t worry, everyone is always scared of something, just it’s always fun to try something new and set a goal to overcome your fears. If you don’t try, you will never overcome anything. I had to overcome my fears when it came to bike riding, swimming, and piercing my ears for the first time.

Everyone knows that riding your bike for the first time can be hard and scary. I remember the first time my dad took the training wheels off my brand new bike I got for Christmas. He said I was ready to take them off, but I wasn’t so sure. Without the training wheels, my bike felt super wobbly. I thought to myself, how do I ride the bike without it falling on top of me? As I gathered all of my courage, climbed on, and biked slowly, it became so much easier than it used to be. I rode faster and faster, with the wind pushing against my face. I didn’t feel that scared anymore once I got the hang of riding it. Sometimes, I don’t even have to think about pedaling my feet and saying left, right, left, right, inside my head. Now, I’m glad I took the training wheels off because now I can ride faster and go on bike trails. Don’t be afraid to try new things because if you don't, you never know if you will like it or not.

Another time I had to face my fears was when I was swimming for the first time without my noodles or tubes holding me up. It was very terrifying for me. The first time I swam was at my grandma’s house in China. At that time, there was a tube around my waist in my grandma’s backyard pool. When my family took the plane and flew back home in the United States, my mom signed me up for swimming lessons at the YMCA. I started as a polliwog and then a guppy, and then a minnow. Those were the levels of the swimming lessons at the YMCA. After taking lessons, I learned that swimming without noodles or tubes wasn’t scary or hard. It’s fun especially when you learn it well. Look at the
bright side when you are frustrated on something you can’t do. As they say, if you say and act like you enjoy something, most of the time, at the end, you will most likely enjoy it.

Have you ever wanted to get your ears pierced but was then afraid that it will be very painful? Ever had mixed feelings where one day, you really want your ears pierced but then the next day, you’re like, I’m not really sure? Well, I have thought of that. It was a really hard decision but I had to pick one so I picked getting it over with and having my ears pierced anyway. Getting my ears pierced makes me nervous when I think about it. My hands were sweating and my stomach had butterflies in it as the lady at Claire’s took out the ear piercing gun. Even when she put the two dots on my ears with a pen to see where she was going to pierce my ears, it made me feel all jittery inside. I could feel the wetness of the ink pen as it touched my ear in the cool air conditioned room. When she pierced my ears, I didn’t flinch. Now that I’ve passed the hard part, when I rewind, it doesn’t seem that scary at all. Now you see, some things aren’t as scary as it seems.

Now I am starting to realize that all of my feelings are related to the book “Scaredy Squirrel” by Melanie Watt. Scaredy Squirrel was afraid to leave his tree house because he was afraid to face the dangers outside. He was just like me because I was afraid to ride my bike, go swimming, and pierce my ears for the first time. At the end, he found out that being outside is just the same as being inside his tree house and he was not afraid anymore. He had to work on solving his problem even if it was a tough problem. He worked hard and he didn’t give up. He always remembered that even the toughest problems have solutions. If you work hard and not give up like Scaredy Squirrel, you will achieve big things. At the end of my three experiences, I felt very happy, proud, and not afraid anymore. So overcoming your fears can help you learn new things and bring a sprinkle of joy and a teaspoon of happiness to your life.

Thought

_by Joshua Fresco Hawes_

_Regional Multicultural Magnet School, Grade 5_

A jumbled mess
of words
fighting to get
out
rearing
writhing
whipping
lash ing
striking
stabbing
beating my head
until I write
a poem
the thoughts
seep through
the paper
and
disappear

_Scooting Through Life_

_by Xaiyon Chapman_

_University of Hartford Magnet School, Grade 5_

—35—
Riding a scooter is a lot like daydreaming. Only instead of sitting back and letting the world pass by, you are passing by the world. Once you zoom down that hill the breeze hits your face and catches wisps of your hair allowing it flow and reflect flecks of light like sun on water. That ray of sunlight extends and shines down on you like a spotlight, and your leg flies behind you like an ice skater cascading across the ice. The wind blows through you and around you sending a cold breeze of fresh air dancing with the sun across your scalp. It is a moment of pure freedom to think, dream, and enjoy the possibilities of being carried away. This is a moment that is given to you just by riding a scooter.

Once you are on that scooter, you never know where the wind will take you, or where your mind will travel. In the novel *Zip* by Ellie Rollins, the character of Lyssa gets so caught up in her daydream, scooting down a hill, she falls off a cliff. Almost magically she lands solidly on the ground in perfect shape; no scratches what-so-ever. Her mother, a talented singer, who let magic, “float through her life like a breeze,” always used to say, “The wind moves in strange ways.” And that is why I love to ride my scooter so much, because there is no telling where you will go.

I skim across a breeze and past a tree and I am eight again. My cousin on her little bike is zooming next to me, going the same way, at the same time about to slide directly into each other. Before we crashed, I jerked toward the grass and flew onto the concrete, scraping me from arm to elbow. Although I was hurt, it is a moment that I am often carried back to as I daydream on that breeze.

It lifts and carries me up again and I am four years old on Christmas Day in the early morning. My sister Qu'n and I woke up before everyone else and ripped open any present with our names on it. In a flash everyone else woke up and snapped pictures of us holding up our presents comparing what we got. My dad came over with something in his hands, and laid it down in the corner of the dining room. Curious about what he was doing, I scooted up next to him to give him a kiss and get a closer look. He reached down in the corner where he had laid it down, grabbed the gift, and handed it to me to open. I ripped open the Christmas wrapping to find my first Razor Scooter. The handles were light, hot pink made out of soft foam. The neck was long with a shiny silver coating. The light in the dining room reflected in the silver of the neck making it sparkle. The wheels and bottom matched the light hot pink of the handles. The word, “Razor,” glittering in silver was spelled across the pink bottom. It was magic, about to float through me. After that day I would drift away on my scooter from day until night until the day that I grew too tall.

These days I have a bike and cannot ride my scooter because my legs have grown up past the handles. I long for the time again when I will be able to fly through life on a breeze. I will cherish these moments and my scooter, enjoying the mystery of not knowing where life will take me.

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The Darkness

*By Meghan Smith*

*Kelly Lane Intermediate School, Grade 5*

Dark, shadowy clouds reaching slowly out to grab you by surprise
But fade away as the sun starts to rise
Seeping out as the sun begins to set
And marching forward as a small army that can only stretch
Watching the world as it sleeps through the night
Cascading forward as people turn out the lights
A place to hide the monsters that you made in your head
Heaps of dark, dry storm clouds rumbling freely in the space under your bed
Its dark black curtain is perfect for concealing ghosts
And all of the ghouls we fear the most
A person lurking in the shadows, not distinguished as a friend or foe
Sends a chill down your spine like the wind’s chilling blow

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King of the world when the electricity is gone
Opposing the small fires the burn on and on
Powdered coal finally free from the ground
Clouds in the night gliding around
But are these dark, black shadows all that bad?
Maybe they’re just the thing yet to be had. . .

Sledding

_By Catherine Yang_
_West Woods Upper Elementary School, Grade 5_

I admire the way the sun glimmers
Off my periwinkle sled
I notice how light layers of frost
Cover the windows
And how the snow falls down
Like a sprinkle of powdered sugar
It seems as if nature
Has spread a giant blanket over the town
The bitter snow numbs my face
Painting my cheeks a rosy pink
Snowflakes interlaced in my hair
Slowly shrivel away dampening my fleece hat
A rustle of unfallen leaves
Brings down a miniature avalanche
I close my eyes and catch my breath
And then...

I push off

Old McDonald Did Not Have a Factory Farm

_By Jessica Juoni_
_Juliet W. Long School, Grade 5_

Healthy food, like nutritious apples and carrots, chicken and eggs, lean beef etc., should help you get healthy and grow, but sometimes, the opposite can happen. Imagine yourself put into a three by three cage. You can’t stand up, stretch, or go for a walk. This is what life is like for many if not all animals raised on factory farms. Factory farms are cruel, unethical places for animals to live. Factory farming is one of the reasons humans get sick. Factory farming is a dangerous way to create food, for the animals, workers and environment.

Factory farms started in 1920 when vitamin A&D were discovered. Farmers realized that the animals didn’t need to exercise or be in the sun. They simply added it to the animal feed. At first, the animals got antibiotics. Chickens get crammed into tiny three by three cages, while others animals’ cages were slightly larger, with no room to turn around or lay comfortably. Most chickens and other small animals have no light and if so it is artificial. The farmers change the animal’s genetic make up with hormone injections to make the animal grow faster. The problem with this is that their bones are weakened, and most of their bones are broken before reaching the slaughter house.
Factory farming can have negative effects on humans too. For example, people who eat meat from a factory farm can get sick easier and can’t resist certain types of bacteria which can make you ill or even cause death. Furthermore, neighbors of factory farms complain about frequent illness as well, even though they did not eat the meat. Last, people who work at factory farms get many illnesses and injuries are very common.

Factory farms can also cause damage to the environment. First, chemicals and animal waste are often flushed down waterways and make their way to public water sources, harming innocent people. Also, factory farms have few regulations for safety to the animals and workers. Large fish farms are filthy. The fish leave a huge amount of waste. For example, there are about 250,000 pounds of waste, which is equivalent to a town with a population of 4,000 people.

Factory farms treat animals like machines, not the animals they are or the way they deserve to live. Why should these animal wastelands be allowed to continue to operate when they make life miserable for the animals, people who consume their food and put themselves at risk for illness, the workers, and last harm to the environment? These cruel places should be shut down!

Cloning and Genetic Engineering

By Ally Tran
Ledyard Center School, Grade 5

“If we can make better human beings by knowing how to add genes, why shouldn’t we?” says genetic pioneer and Nobel Prize winner James Watson. Watson may be right, but that was in the 1950’s. He imagined that the future world would have cities on the moon and energy pills for diets by the year 2001! Cloning and genetic engineering are one of the exciting sciences around. To use this innovation wisely for all human needs, we need to consider the positive and negative side.

Cloning and genetic engineering— is there really a difference? What do you think of when someone says the word, “cloning”? Identical twins? Two of the same thing? That’s exactly what cloning is. A clone is a living thing made from the same DNA characteristics as the parent. Genetic Engineering is different. But what is the difference? Genetic engineering is taking traits or genes from a living thing and giving those traits to another. For example, it is possible to make a cat that glows like a jelly fish, by taking genes from a jelly fish and putting them into a cat. Therefore genetic engineering is a science of exchanging genes and cloning is only a specific type of genetic engineering.

Genetic engineering and cloning can be helpful in many ways. Gene therapy is one of them. Many diseases such as cystic fibrosis are caused by mutated, defective cells. In the future, scientists could find a cure for the diseases by putting corrected genes, changing the defective genes, or even treat the gene before the baby is born. Did you know that genetic engineering could save farmers money? With this genetic technology, we can make featherless chickens. Featherless chickens were created so that farmers wouldn’t have to pay to get the chickens’ feathers removed and the farmers wouldn’t have to pay to cool down the barn in the summer. Genetic engineering is also used for some crops to be resistant against insects. For example, genetically engineered cotton would produce a special poison inside, which would kill the insects so it could protect itself from its eaters.

However, not everybody is approving these technologies. Some say, “Just because we can, should we?” According to my survey, 8 out of 12 students in this class think it is wrong to use genetic engineering to make a baby prettier. Ever since Dolly, the first cloned sheep, was created, some people point out the danger of cloning humans. First of all Dolly lived a short sheep life in comparison to regular sheep. Second, she had arthritis problems. If we clone humans, it is possible that the cloned humans will suffer from many unexpected health problems. Threat from the new technology can be found in our kitchen. Because there is no requirement for labeling yet, genetically modified food is already in our market, and we are consuming them without realizing it. Currently, 94% of soybeans and 88% of corn are genetically modified. Some scientists say that genetically engineered food might not be safe for us. Debates on “should we? or shouldn’t we?” continue.
Cloning and genetic engineering are a controversial topic. As you can see, some of these technologies could improve our lives. On the other hand, some might be harmful, or just don’t seem right. They may affect our lives in the future, so I recommend you to keep up with the newest developments. Would you like to eat feather-less chickens?!

**HONORABLE MENTION**  
- GRADE 6 -

Emilee Adami, “Lawnmower.” *Memorial Middle School*  
Grace Huang, “Hybrid vs. Gasoline.” *Squadron Line Elementary School*  
Bronwyn Mogck, “Ocean Waves.” *Squadron Line Elementary School*  
Alexander Nordlund, “Nothing But Net.” *Gideon Welles School*  
Abigail Strong, “The Homework Store.” *Simsbury Central Elementary*  
Abigail Thrall, “Headstrong.” *Kelly Lane Intermediate School*

**Your Sea**

*By Ian Kamperschroer*  
*Ledyard Center School, Grade 6*

The waves slowly crash against the ebony rocks  
clear, yet disguised memories,  
shattered by an inevitable death.

The seagulls gently soar through the cyan sky,  
Free, graceful, riding among the breezes of Peace.  
The crystals of sparkling sand,  
purified by the cobalt ocean,  
remind me of you.

This was your favorite place to go,  
whenever you were lost or afraid.  
And now I stand here,  
burying the ashes of your irreplaceable soul,  
Washed away by the sea.

**Fifty Two States**

*By Liam Scott*  
*Gideo Welles School, Grade 6*

I had heard wonderful things about her...Mrs. Ball that is. I was informed by a friend that she made everything a blast and that you wouldn’t want to leave her by the end of the year. So when I received the letter in the mail that told me for fifth grade, I was going to be taught by Mrs. Ball, I was as excited as when I had gotten my new puppy, Jameson. I was counting down the days, waiting in
anticipation for the school year to begin. Fifth grade was going to be the best year yet! Little did any of her twenty unsuspecting students know that our lives were about to be changed forever.

Everyone in the class learned on the first day that Mrs. Ball was one of those teachers that just wanted to have a good time and make jokes all day long. But she was also one of those teachers that did not always know the correct answer to her own question and a student would have to interrupt her with the right one. She was my dream teacher, and I could tell that everyone else thought that way too. However, on the first day of school, Mrs. Ball was extremely hyper like a rabid bunny and was practically bouncing off the walls with energy. Whenever she talked to me, my stomach fell to the floor because I was frightened to speak with her.

One day, Mrs. Ball was teaching Social Studies and we (her class) were learning about what the United States looked like.

"Who knows how many states there are in the United States of America?" Mrs. Ball called out in her trademark fake Western accent. She scooted up to sit on the purple and white counter that was laden with fantasy and realistic fiction books, like she often did while teaching.

*It must be a trick question,* I thought to myself, and I did not raise my hand, for fear of getting it wrong. *Wait, there are fifty states in the United States, everyone knows that. That’s obviously the correct answer.* I reasoned with myself for fifteen seconds before tentatively raising my hand, making sure that it was slightly bent and barely above my ear to be sure that Mrs. Ball would not catch sight of it. *It still could be a trick question,* I thought grimly to myself, hoping that I would not be called on.

"Kevin!" Mrs. Ball cried, looking at my best friend Kevin, who was seated right in front of her at his pseudo mahogany desk, "how many states are in the United States of America?"

Kevin grinned confidently before responding to Mrs. Ball’s question that even a first grader could have answered correctly. "Fifty," Kevin retorted, loud and clear. His response was so deafening, in fact, that I was forced to resist the urge to cover my ears. Mrs. Ball’s face contorted into a grimace, as she tilted her head back, to the right and opened her mouth like she tended to do when she was about to break some sort of horrible news.

I looked around in confusion at all of my surrounding classmates. Kevin had stated the right answer. So why was Mrs. Ball not saying, ‘Correct’ or ‘Good job?’ Even the students that never paid attention had a perplexed expression upon their face.

"Uh, no Kevin," Mrs. Ball began, “I’m sorry, but there are fifty two states in the United States of America.” I noticed that even though Mrs. Ball had said that she was sorry, she didn’t sound particularly sympathetic at all.

*Oh, I know what she’s doing,* I thought certainly to myself, *she’s just pulling a prank.* Pulling a prank seemed like the only logical explanation, so I leaned back in my chair, with a smug smile plastered onto my face, feeling reassured that I knew what was going on.

Mrs. Ball could sense that something was wrong. I could tell from the exaggerated eye-corner crinkling and forehead wrinkling that inhabited her face. “There are fifty two states in the United States, right?” My eyebrows became a long caterpillar and my hand shot into the air as fast as a rocket.

“Liam!” she asked, raising one of her eyebrows, while at the same time, keeping the latter one down.

“There are actually fifty states in the United States,” I murmured, breaking out into uncontrollable laughter.

“Oh,” Mrs. Ball yelled, beginning to giggle as well, “I know what I did; I mixed up the number of weeks in a year with states in this country!” Mrs. Ball said that very simply, as if people mixed up the number of states in the country for number of weeks in a year on a daily basis.

The entire class erupted with laughter and continued so for probably five minutes. Surprisingly, I observed that Mrs. Ball’s laugh was the loudest and it stayed ringing in the air like a bell the longest compared to her twenty other students.

Wow, I thought to myself, *Mrs. Ball doesn’t care that she made a huge mistake in front of the entire class.* I tucked that piece of information in the back of my mind and grinned admiringly at my beloved teacher.
Even though Mrs. Ball makes mistakes, she made me laugh every single day of the year, and her jokes and mistakes still make me laugh today. Mrs. Ball helped me learn that it’s perfectly fine to make mistakes and she was living proof. She also taught me how to have fun, which was something I wasn’t the best at before I met her. I have, and always will, look up to her for that. Mrs. Ball not only changed her students’ lives for the better, I think that I changed her life too. Whenever I think back to those times in room 26, I long for them again.

Life Doesn’t Frighten Me At All*

*Format and content inspired by Maya Angelou’s “Life Doesn’t Frighten Me”

Something in my desk, work that’s not my best... Life doesn’t frighten me at all
Bullies brake and rip, my poor pencil tip... Life doesn’t frighten me at all.
Scary costumes on Halloween, unlike any that I’ve ever seen...
Life doesn’t frighten me at all.
Organs playing, ghosts swaying... That doesn’t frighten me at all.

I yell loud!
They feel proud.
I stomp hard.
They get a red card!
They beware.
I have no scare.
I finally yell shoo!
All a ghost could mutter is b...b...b... boo.

Life doesn’t frighten me at all.
Loud dogs that bark, being left alone in the dark... Life doesn’t frighten me at all.
Nobody to be seen, but monsters big and mean... Life doesn’t frighten me at all.
In the closet, big and dark.
You can’t see, not a spark.
Where the clothes all sway.
I yell “monsters go away!”
Life doesn’t frighten me at all.

Don’t show me darkness or snakes
And listen for my screech.
As I said I’m not afraid.
But maybe in my dreams.

I’ve got an over imaginative brain
That I hide inside my head.
It never gets a strain,
Not even in my bed.
Life doesn’t frighten me at all
Not at all, Not at all.

Life doesn’t frighten me at all.
The Dancer

By Kate Hosack
Kelly Lane Intermediate School, Grade 6

The dancer stretches her arms toward her god, her mouth slightly agape. She balances gracefully on one pointed toe, and waits for the lights to illuminate her slim, but strong figure. The lights turn on, and she slowly lowers herself to the ground. The dancer's gauzy dress swirls on the stage around her, and the audience is silent. Suddenly, the music erupts. She shoots impossibly high in the air, and lands as quietly as a fairy on a rose petal. The dancer leaps like a gazelle and twirls like a diving bird. Her long blue-green dress and black hair whip about her in a blur. She makes the most complicated maneuvers seem like child's play. Then she does the unthinkable. She slips. Her head cracks sharply on the stage only once, but she does not get up. The theatre falls silent yet again as a man from the wing shakes her shoulder, first gently, then vigorously. She still doesn't stir. His face pales as he picks up his phone and dials three numbers. Everyone can hear him speak, and everyone can certainly hear his voice crack. Minutes later a crew bursts through the double oak doors and they lift the dancer from the stage. The theatre is filled with the sound of anxious whispers.

The next day, the dancer awakes in a bed she cannot see. Her mother speaks to her from somewhere in the blackness. Fear strikes her like a fist as she realizes that she is blind. Hot tears slide down her cheeks and drip onto rough hospital sheets. Her hand fumbles in the direction of her mother's voice, but finds only air, until a warm hand takes her cold one. The dancer does not know whose hand it is, but she grips it all the same.

Eight months later, the dancer nervously fidgets with her long ivory cane with tapered fingers. Her best friend taps their special tap on her shoulder and gently takes her cane. It's time. The dancer stretches her arms toward her god, her mouth slightly agape. She balances gracefully on one pointed toe, and waits for unseen lights to illuminate her slim, but strong figure. The cue beeps in her ear, and she slowly lowers herself to the ground, smiling.

Where I'm From (inspired by George Ella Lyon)

By Audi Putri,
Metropolitan Learning Center, Grade 6

I am from my grandmother's eyeliner
from Nike and TOMS
I am from the carpets underneath my toes
(Soft, velvet, it looked beige with little chocolate-colored dots)
I am from the daisies,
the tomato plants
looking so refreshing and beautiful
I am from the vanilla cake and black hair
from Nina and Akbar
and Aouli
I am from the music-loving and the talents of cooking
From “Smile!” and,
“I love you.”
I am from the prayers every day before meals,
That God will hopefully answer
I am from Surabaya and Asia
White rice and empanadas
From the grandfather that I lost and was in the Indonesian Army
The grandmother who was obsessed with make-up
Inside my drawers, full of joyful baby pictures
I am from the Muslims in the Islamic religion and the wonderful Indonesia.

Catch of the Day

By Harbour Woodward
Greenwich Academy, Grade 6

As my feet hit the grainy warm sand my body tingles and I get that familiar feeling. The sand squishes through my toes as I walk, like rice running through fingers. It is warm as well as comforting and then I look up. I see the glistening ocean and I also see whirling tide pools, my destination. As I edge closer the scent of sea salt grows filling the air, like salty tears of joy. My vision becomes clearer. I sigh, as I breathe in and out soaking in the glory. The gentle breeze brushes back some of my hair. I am dazed in a good way. The scene of something special nears around the corner as my feet lift up, while leaving behind a trail of silky smooth grains.

“Harbour, Lets go!” Nicky pops my bubble and I zoom back in to reality.
“Coming,” I say as I bounce with excitement over to the marsh.

My cousin, Nicky, who is babysitting us for the next two days, gets out the nets, which are attached to a metal pole. Willow, my sister, leads the way through the green sea grass which tickles my skin with its tips. Now I progress into the refreshing cool water and get my weapon ready for action.

“You have to be quiet and still so the crabs won't hear you,” Nicky whispers knowingly.
Nicky for the summer is working at a marine biology camp as a counselor, so he is going to show us the ropes. Nicky steps forward into the swirling tide pool and I watch as water coats his knees and below, bubbling up and making ripples. Wandering through the shallow water, I follow his lead. He shows us how to catch a crab by sneaking up and then attacking in front of it, so it has no other choice other than to go in the net. I then travel off on my own in the tide pool, but also along the shoreline. I spot two claws and then, slow and steady...

“Aha! I got you, little friend,” I shout. Its green and brown claws face me and seem to say, “I will get you!”

“Nice!” Nicky exclaims as he picks it up and touches the tan rough stomach.
“A feisty one,” I say. Willow struggles with tackling the concept of how to catch one, but then has a great idea.

“Hey guys, do you want to make a wrestling stadium? We could put the crabs there when we catch them and see if their pincher claws could hurt each other.”

“That's actually a really cool idea,” I pipe in. Nicky helps us build the stadium by digging deep into the mucky sand and making it so that water comes in and there is a protective moat around the outside. We put Nicky's crab and my two into the stadium and watch. They circle each other, but then one of them chickens out and buries himself in the sand, only revealing the tips of his claws.

We are on a roll now--Nicky just kept catching and catching more crabs, until the surprise: a big, ugly, barf-colored, two-hand-sized crab! Nicky picks it up, in the net of course, takes one look at it and glares. We want to get it out of our sight, back in the marsh, or in the wrestling stadium--anything but in the net. This guy does not want to move; he gnaws and claws, but won't budge. He eyes us, holding on for life to the net that is about to burst. We spray water on him and on all the other crabs just to see their reaction—not good. More punching in the air and pinching. We wiggle and shake the net, hoping that our crabby crab will have a stunned reaction and leap out. It doesn't exactly go as planned, he does “wake up” but one of his claws is clinging to the net. Suddenly, he loses his grip, stumbles and lands with a thud on the sand. We slowly but cautiously dig them all out from the sand and place them back. They drift away, long gone. We head back through the sea grass and I let the brushing of it calm me.
Just as the sun is setting and making bright reflections and shadows on the silent ocean, we creep up quietly, not willing to break the calmness, to take another peek.

Since we had already met some feisty little pinchers earlier, we are looking for a surprise. My bare feet touch the mucky rough bottom for a change, as I step into the water. This time, though, it is not refreshing, a little chilly. My heart beats faster and I hear it pounding in my chest because I cannot see where I am going and what I could potentially step on. I am thinking to myself, please don't step on a crab, please don't step on a crab! I follow in Nicky's footsteps and hold his hand for comfort. I step in his big footprints and jump, light on my feet tracing his footsteps.

“'You promised there would be eels here,” I whisper, sounding disappointed.

“I haven't been back here in six years and I didn't know that ocean life had left here to go to a better place.”

“Oh, is there anything else we can see?” I ask, hopefully.

“I see something!” Nicky yells, breaking the tranquil stillness of the night. Nicky tries to scoop it up, but it is slippery and as quick as lightning. Now the water is a little further than my ankles and I am getting the chills. Nicky's bare hands scoop up water, dripping, and he places his find into the net.

“A baby flounder!” I cry out! Its brown scales have a faint glow and its tail swishes back and forth. It is only as big as the palm of my hand. I gently place my hand into the watery net; as I touch the flounder, my fingertips tingle with delight. It's slippery, yet feels squishy. I gently release it back into its life and home as I am overwhelmed with the feeling of pleasure.

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**HONORABLE MENTION**

- GRADE 7 -

E. Katarina Acosta, “Otherwordly.” Avon Middle School
Connor Elliott, “Guardian.” Metropolitan Learning Center for Global & International Studies
Victoria Leger, “What’s Left?” Tolland Middle School
William May, “The Sneak Thief.” E.C. Adams Middle School
Saige Tapper-Young, “A True Friend.” The Ethel Walker School
Kelly Zheng, “Dancing Fingers.” Avon Middle School

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**Boxing Up My Life**

_By Katherine Arner_
_Tolland Middle School, Grade 7_

“Hurry, Katie,” Mom shouted up the stairs. “These boxes aren’t going to pack themselves!”

“Coming, Mom!” I called down.

The bustle of last minute packing could be heard all throughout the house. I stepped back and looked at my bare room. A tear slid down my cheek as I remembered all of the memories I had in this room. Getting my first “big girl bed”, my first sleepover. There were so many memories in this house that I wasn’t sure I could let go.

I stepped down the steep, wooden stairs, my socked feet swishing with every step I took. I met my mom in the kitchen.

“Are you ready?” she asked me.
“I’m not sure,” I replied. “Part of me wants to stay here with all of my friends. Part of me says it’s time to move on.”

“That’s understandable,” she said, lifting up a box.

I put a random pair of shoes on and walked outside. I looked at the backyard and saw younger images of myself playing, licking ice cream cones with my friends sitting next to me, and sledding down the big hill that made up most of our backyard. I trudged up the hill to our concealed garden. The tall pine trees stretched their branches to make a protective shield around anyone who crossed its boarders.

I remember when it had snowed about 6 inches. I woke and peered out of my frost covered window. Fluffy ice crystals sparkled and spun as they danced to the ground. I ran downstairs and jumped into my snow gear. I scrambled outside, tripping several times over my big snow boots. In the backyard an amazing site stopped me dead in my tracks. The blank, white snow glistened on the thick branches of the pine trees. Icicles dangled by threads on some of the lower branches. I made my way up the hill to our little garden, now transformed into a winter wonderland. I went under the branches, sagging with the heavy snow. I looked above me at the twinkling flakes falling from the grey sky. I twirled around, trying to capture the full view of the magnificent sight. I fell to my knees in sheer awe of it all. Cold tried to work its way inside me, but I pushed it away.

“Katie, where are you?” Mom called from the house.

I snapped out of my trance. I brushed away a tear gathering at the corner of my eye.

“I’ll be there in a minute, Mom!” I shouted.

“After I say goodbye,” I whispered to myself.

I glided down the hill. When I turned the corner of the house. I stopped to pick a fluffy, white dandelion. I made a wish, blew on the dandelion, and watched as the tiny seeds danced on thin air. *There’re starting a new journey too, I thought. It made me feel better, to know that I was not the only one starting a new life.*

I went to the front, where my family was loading the big, orange moving truck. I looked inside and saw container after container of items from my house. It’s like my old life being boxed up and brought to another place. I thought.

When the last box was stocked on the overwhelmingly large pile, we walked around the house one last time. Memory after memory seeped its way into my head. I smiled as I remembered Christmases, Easters, birthdays, and Thanksgivings all held in this house.

“Time to go,” Mom said quietly.

“Yeah,” I replied in an equally quiet tone.

We loaded into our green minivan along with some things that we felt couldn’t stay in the back of some stuffy truck. We pulled out of our steep driveway, only it wasn’t ours anymore.

“Bye,” I whispered. The blue cape seemed to have a touch of sadness in its windows.

Driving along the back roads I stared out of the tinted windows. The busy streets of Manchester soon faded into thick groves of trees. The vibrant colors of the red, orange, and yellow leaves reflected the sunlight bathing the road and everything around it in light. The rustling of leaves greeted us to Tolland. This town was so unlike Manchester with its bustling streets and stores everywhere, but I kind of liked it. Everything seemed so calm and serene.

Finally, we arrived at the new house. I looked at it. *A new start* I thought. I walked upstairs to my new room. Lavender walls and a fresh paint smell invited me in. I had a new light on everything. Sure that green carpet was ugly, but it could always be torn up.

“Katie, Mom says to get your butt down here and help get the boxes out of the truck,” my annoying brother said, standing at the edge if my room.

“Get out of my room,” I said, glaring at him. He stuck his tongue out at me and bounded down the stairs. I followed, more slowly, though. The whole family pitched in. I carried box after box up the stairs. Geez, I had no idea that I had this much stuff. My dad carried up all of the parts to my new bed. I started setting it up. When I got the frame set up I heaved the giant mattress on top. I smoothed on some fresh sheets and fluffed up my comforter. When I was finished I stepped back and looked at my
new room, I took in the lavender walls, the ceiling fan above me, the two windows, and my bed. It felt right. Then I realized... my wish had come true.

Spring

By Kayla Bryan
E.C. Adams Middle School, Grade 7

Spring, the perfect balance between winter and summer
Not too hot, not too cold.
The bright orange sun glistening down through the trees
Giving the skies a warm, comforting glow.
Buttercups and violets bloom and blossom
Up from the moist earth,
Up through the sunlight.
Birds call to one another,
To both warn and play
And a breeze whips up the quiet tunes
To bring and share them to the world.
Rain splatters down onto the roofs and streets,
A soft drumming noise,
Soothing to the ear and mind.
I'd walk down through the wet morning grass
The dew tickling my toes through sandals
And drops of rain fall from trees
Dripping off beads of water
Onto my head.
I walk through the gardens
The powerful scent of daffodils and tulips
Greet me like a wave washing over my head
And I breathe in as the aroma embraces me.
The sweet scent of fresh air lingers over my nose
Even as I walk away.
Bushes full of honeysuckles
Surround the woods.
I pick a single flower
And carefully slide it apart
Revealing a liquid
Sweeter than sugar on the stern.
I touch the inner flower to my tongue
And a flavor sweeter than honey fills my mouth
Its sugary taste traveling up my tongue
Touching every taste bud
And making me want even more.
I look up, at the pleasant sun
And during the sunny days of spring,
It will always greet me with its warmth.
Childish

By Megan Corbin
Tolland Middle School, Grade 7

I,
was a weird,
child.

Most kids were scared
of The Boogieman,
ghosts,
or monsters under their beds.

But not me.
At night
I was scared
of me.

I couldn't help myself.

Unlocking that dark chest,
hidden in my mind.
Finding my fears
that I had stowed away
during the day.
Fumbling through,
poking and prodding.

Finally pinpointing the worst of them,
pulling it up, into focus.

And you have to understand
that I was a very, very
imaginative child—
seconds later,
I could feel writhing snakes,
all around me.
Dry scales graze my skin,
making me shiver with fear.

I heard the rattles
and hisses,
then jaws unhinging.
I felt their mouths, snipping at my toes,
swallows getting bigger.

To the point where
I thought
I was
no more.

I screamed in the darkness,
trying to throw them off,
rolling and thrashing wildly.

Finally after what seemed like an
eternity,
I would be saved by a burst of light
and my mother’s arms.

It went on for a year.

But slowly, it got old.
I knew how it played out.
And my mind couldn't come up with
anything new.

Until I couldn't think of it,
Until I learned how to save myself.

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**Hummingbird in Flight**

*By Miranda C. Glenn*

*Hall Memorial School, Grade 7*

“The hummingbird is the only bird that can hover, fly backward and forward, and come to a dead stop mid-air. In China and around the world, the hummingbird symbolizes powerful energy, transformation, and joy. This tiny, colorful bird also symbolizes the ability to overcome the impossible, as well as flexibility in life circumstances.” (www.answerbag.com)

I am sitting in class,
looking up at the clock above the chalkboard,
the hands moving so slowly,
it seems like time isn’t moving at all.
I look over across the aisle at Joey Fields,
who’s watching the clock, too,
and wondering when the bell will ring,
and when
we’ll all
be
free.

Finally, Mr. Allen says, *Class dismissed,* and points to the door,
and we all race out,
like wild animals,
excited that math class is over.
I go to my locker,
spin the combination,
get my science notebook.
Joey Fields’ locker is next to mine.
I say hi to him, and he says hi back to me.
I say,
*Do you like math?*
He says,
*No, I don’t understand it. I never have.*
I say, 
*I don't either. Math is confusing. There are too many ways to solve one problem.*
I'm about to say something else, but Joey looks at his watch and mutters, 
*Sorry. Gotta go,* and runs off.
I wonder if he really did have to go, or if he just wanted to get away from me.

The bus ride home is loud and chaotic, 
with yelling, screaming kids and kids punching other kids and kids who just read or do their homework, and
stay
out
of
things.
I'm one of those kids.
The bus driver looks back at us in the rearview mirror sometimes, but I know that, even if a fight breaks out, she won’t do anything.
A big kid,
who I know
from the upper grades,
comes over to me,
leans on the seat.
*Hey Baby, what's up? How ya doing?*
jokes the big boy,
almost a man.
I look up at him
and mumble,
*Go away.*
And then he sneers,
his face bright
and evil
with glee,
*The Chinese girl told me to go away!*
His face
contorts
in mock surprise.
His friends,
big and strong
and stupid
as him, say,
*Beat her up, Larry!*
*Chinese are only good for making Toyotas!*
*Or eggrolls!*
*Or my bike!*
*Or my sister's Barbie!*
They’re all yelling,
their voices sounding
like crows.
And at that moment,
I feel
like, if I could fly,
I would fly away,
far, far away,
and never come back
again.

When I come home,
I smell tofu,
and I see Mother in the kitchen
making supper,
and I hear the radio,
 crackling with static
as it buzzes on the kitchen counter.
你的一天,”蜂鳥”是如何？Mom asks.
 My day was, um, fine, I answer.
I can’t help but smile
at her calling me
Hummingbird, the name I hear only in the
safety of home.
Just then,
the front door opens,
and my brother
comes home.
He has a cigarette
between his lips
like he normally does.
 It makes me look cool, he says. I don’t look too Chinese.
My brother’s name is Wang.
He is ashamed
about being Chinese.
 All those American boys,
with their fancy new bikes
and rich haircuts and jeans.
 I know I’ll never be like them,
 but I want to at least try, he always answers.
 I don’t like it
either
when that mean boy
on the bus,
Larry,
 taunts me
and makes me feel
like I’m nothing more
than
dirt, bound to the earth.
I think
that Joey Fields
and I
could be really good friends,
if he at least gave me
a chance.
But he’s embarrassed
about me,
the “Chinese girl,"
always talking
to him.

**Linear**

*By Jennifer Lee*
*TWO RIVERS MAGNET MIDDLE SCHOOL, GRADE 7*

\[ Y = mx + b \] What does it mean?
I try to follow Ms. Reed, to watch her lipsticked mouth spewing mathematical jargon and her pudgy hand scribbling notes across the whiteboard with that irritating squeak; to no avail. Why are there lines? Infinite lines, slashed across axes on a carefully measured Cartesian plane, assigned a slope and a y-intercept and an infinite host of x's and y's. Nothing in life is a straight line.

Sunlight pours through the window, illuminating streams of dust and casting shadows on the pallid walls. It's hot. You can see the sweat dripping from foreheads onto desks, and smell it too. Ripe as a strawberry in August.

I'm glad it's not August. I'd be trapped then, in the prison that is my home. I would see Mother and Father alternately, but never together, not until divorce court came into session. Mostly Father, but I don't mind. Mother was never the most congenial woman. It figures that she's a lawyer. Figures that she's seeking an at-fault against Father, the talented neurosurgeon, who risked my future on public education rather than pay for a thirty-grand-per-year prep school.

Suddenly, Ms. Reed explodes, wrenching me out of my thoughts. “Ty! Will you ever listen?”

Ty shrinks back in his seat. “I-I don't get it.”

“Algebra is life!” she cries. “In quadratic equations we see the rise and fall of empires! In variables we see the mysteries of love and hope and fear! I am but a teacher. You must accept these truths. Now let's review this one last time...”

I look down at my notes. Don't understand this algebraic philosophy.

Ms. Reed's voice has fallen back into its monotonous drone. The whiteboard squeaks as she scribbles away, enigmatic symbols swimming in a sea of blue ink-

“Girl, you wanna go shopping?”

My eyes snap up to the window. A girl stands at the window—not just any girl. She's impossibly beautiful, with searing blue eyes and a sparkling head of golden hair matched by her short, sequined dress. Dangling from her shoulder is a bulging, feathery purse the color of clouds. She catches my eye and winks.

“C'mon,” she says, “you know you're bored to tears. Let's go to the Shoppe!”

“What's the Shoppe?” I murmur, but I am already bounding over my classmates heads to the window, zooming across the school grounds as if riding atop a magic carpet. It is magical.

The girl is right beside me, change jingling in her purse like a bell choir.

Soon we are soaring over the country, a land even more rural and untamed than the suburbs I have known all my life. A single road paves the way through a dense forest until it breaks out into rolling hills of pasture, our only guide as the girl and I ride the skies above.

“There,” she says suddenly, and she points down at a patch of manicured grass just below. A small building sits in the center, surrounded by flowers and finely trimmed hedges. “That's the Shoppe.”

Taking the girl's hand, I float down to the lawn and touch down softly before I run to the elegant French doors at the front of the building. I can't wait to get inside, see what surprises await me, but the girl holds up a hand.

“Wait. You've got money, right?”

A jolt runs through me. “I don't get an allowance. Why?”
“You need some of your parents’ moolah, girl,” she says, raising an eyebrow. “It’s not cheap, buying life.”

“Buying life?”

“Yeah. You want to buyout your life, you come to the Shoppe.” She holds up her feathery purse with a grin. “My parents bought me a life. Top of the line. Designer label. Awesome, isn’t it?”

“I guess so.”

In a flash, the girl appears beside me and flings open the doors. “Let’s go, girl!”

I peer inside, blink twice. The interior is a bit bleak, not quite matching the girl’s enthusiasm. With only a few lanterns for illumination, the gilded walls seem humdrum and plain.

Three lines of customers extend out of three doorways through the opposite wall, snaking around a large, round desk in the center of the lobby; but despite their dull surroundings and slow-moving lines, the shoppers seem enlivened and chatty, creating a warm hubbub within the space.

One individual, however, seems to lack such a cheerful demeanor. The hawkish-looking woman sitting at the desk squints over at us with narrowed eyes.

“You again?” she growls. “You’ve already been here too many times. Not enough upgrades to keep you happy?”

“Oh, I’m not getting anything,” the girl replies lightly. She slides a slender arm around my shoulders and squeezes me to her side. “I’m just introducing a friend!”

“Hmm. You buying today?”

I shake my head. “Nothing that costs money.”

My companion shrugs and withdraws from my side. “I just want to show her around a bit. C’mon, girl, let’s have a look around.”

“So ... what are the lines for?” I ask eagerly, curiosity burning in my mind.

“This is Line B.” The girl gestures for me to follow her over to the line furthest to the right.

Over the doorway is a gold plaque inscribed with the words ‘LINE B’. Peering over customer’s shoulders, I spy a young girl as she skips inside the small, white-walled room beyond, donning worn overalls and a bright smile of hope. But suddenly, a cloud of smoke erupts through the doorway. She emerges with tears streaming down her face, the smile gone from her lips.

“What happened?” I whisper. The beautiful girl shrugs, unaffected.

“Couldn’t pay up, I guess. Smoke means she won’t be starting life in a good place.”

I reach out as she brushes past me, but my fingers pass through like the girl is no more than smoke.

Within the room, a voice shouts, “Next!” and a young man in a three-piece suit struts inside, the smoke dissipating around him as a vibrant garden blooms into existence. The girl whistles in admiration.

“He must be filthy rich,” she muses. “Mine was just an apple orchard. Here, have a look at Line M—don’t like it much, but you should see it.”

Line M isn’t as long as the other two, but it’s filled with haggard, weary customers, people with jaws set in determination but eyes impatient for rewards yet to come. Looking upon them, the girl wrinkles her nose.

“Ick. Hard-working folks, they’re depressing. But wait.” She cranes her neck and points at something excitedly. “See the girl with the Coach handbag? The Jimmy Choo pumps? I wonder what kind of boost she’s buying?”

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“Ick. Hard-working folks, they’re depressing. But wait.” She cranes her neck and points at something excitedly. “See the girl with the Coach handbag? The Jimmy Choo pumps? I wonder what kind of boost she’s buying?”

I follow her gaze to the fashionable individual, who wears an expression of perfect smugness beneath layers of garish makeup. “What do you mean, boost?”

“A life boost. Line M’s how fast you rise, how high you go in your lifetime. Our existence is finite, you know, so we’ve got to make the most of it. And like everything else, you can buy help, since you have to admit it’s nonsensical; why work hard for something—a career, a goal—you can just buy? But line B’s the better deal, in my opinion, getting a whole new life and all.”

I knit my brow in thought, but don’t say anything.

“Anyway. Observe Line X. The creme de la creme.”
I trail the girl over to the far left of the store. The room beyond the plaque reading “LINE X” is dark and ominous, drawing customers in like a vortex, only to spit them back out moments later, perplexed but vaguely satisfied. My spine tingles. There’s something about the look of that room I can’t put my finger on.

As if speaking my thoughts, the girl continues, “It’s like that one thing you just can’t nail down. The x factor. It’s expensive, buying fate, but if you’re wealthy and willing, you can. You can control your life, like an experiment. You can eliminate variables. I mess with my life a lot,” she admits quietly, “but I usually don’t go that far.”

Line X seems anxious, a bundle of nervous energy. The men and women, adults and children, dressed in rags and finery—they all seem eager, eager to extract an outcome from their linear lives. It’s unnerving.

“Um,” I say, “I think I’ve seen enough. Can I go back to class now?”

She smiles sweetly. “Sure. Bring money next time,” she says, nodding towards the center desk, “or I don’t know if that woman will let you in.”

Suddenly, the Shoppe begins to swim and twist and contort into a seventh grade classroom. My peers still sit sleepily at their desks, and Ms. Reed still stands at the front of the room, squeaky marker etching out equations and formulas in blue ink. Blinking rapidly, I realize the girl is nowhere to be found.

“You! Do you expect to hire someone to do algebra for you someday?” Ms. Reed snaps. Her accusing eyes are focused on me.

“No.”

“Then listen. Again: what’s slope intercept form?”

\[ Y = mx + b \]

The class replies in chorus. And like a light bulb screwed into its socket, it makes sense. I look down at my notes and start to write.

\[ B = \text{where you start.} \]
\[ x = \text{hoping the stars align.} \]
\[ M = \text{where you go from there.} \]

Maybe I ought to pay attention to this.

To Be Continued

By Lauren Pelosi

Memorial Middle School, Grade 7

The morning was sun-deprived with dense, lingering air and bleak grey clouds forming bruises on the sky. Neal never really appreciated the term “blustery” until that morning, the morning when Emilia Elliot died.

Gusts of wind wandered through Neal’s dark hair, arousing brown leaves from the uneven October blanket they formed on the grass. His aunt’s yard was not its usual colorful, playful self. Its cheerful life had gone with Emilia’s.

A man in his twenties, Neal fought to contain the emotions that overwhelmed him. Emilia was his inspiration, his mentor, his friend. The most acclaimed author of horror stories of her time, Emilia had still made time to teach her young, imaginative nephew to write.

His aunt’s first book was clutched in his numb hands. He opened to its inscription: To My Dearest Neal,... He had promised Emilia to keep his copy forever close. Her debut novel was at once captivating, heart-stopping, and above all else, utterly terrifying. Its title, How to Live Forever, stared back at him today with heart-wrenching irony. He felt a careful hand rest on his shoulder. “Let’s go home, Neal,” his wife, Lillian, whispered gently.

The next morning, Neal found himself standing in the threshold of his office building, though he could scarcely recall how he arrived. He was a newspaper columnist for The Lincoln Post, but he was convinced he could never do so much as lift a pen again. Despite this, he trudged inside and wandered
into his office, driven by the promise of a much-needed paycheck. His boss glowered at him from his doorway as Neal collapsed behind his desk. “Elliot!” he spat. “You're late!”

Another face, this one almost more cheerful than Neal could handle, approached him. Parker Benson was carrying a stack of papers from his waist up to his smile. “Morning, Neal.” Parker plopped the pile, as it leaned haphazardly to one side, down on Neal's desk, passing him a folder. “It's a summary for an article Boss needs you to write by noon.”

As Benson turned to go, Neal examined the folder's unsettling contents: “Yesterday morning, the morning of October 5th, a critically injured 112-year-old man was rushed to Lincoln Hospital following a disastrous automobile wreck. The first doctor that treated him insisted it would take a miracle to save the man, and he was running out of time. Dr. Rockley then examined him, and though agreeing with that prognosis, took the man into surgery, refusing the assistance of nurses. Days later, the old man lives on. No amount of questioning could extract the details of Dr. Rockley's miraculous procedure. Dr. Nathan Rockley started at Lincoln Hospital the morning of the wreck. Lincoln Hospital refuses to disclose his professional history, but the life he saved has stopped all suspicious questioning regarding him.”

Neal scanned the following physical description of the doctor. Something about it seemed odd. From his briefcase, he pulled his stout paperback copy of How to Live Forever. He skimmed the pages furiously, until, there it was, the chapter in which the vampire's bite gives perpetual life to the young, terminally ill girl: “The vampire's demonic face is shallow and expressionless, with pale lips stretched thin across the jaw. There is vivid coldness to the eyes: unmistakable cruelty peeking through their icy grayness. The rich chestnut hair is slicked back and greased, bringing attention to his colorless features. He's tall, lean, and bony from the distinct hollowness below his eyes to the black shirt clinging to his jutting-out ribs.”

Surely it was a coincidence that Dr. Rockley's physical characteristics so precisely matched those of his aunt's fictitious nocturnal predator.

Neal soon disregarded this, however, as events over the next few days wrought havoc all over the world. Each day brought its own frightening headline: Egyptians Claim Nile's Flooded with “Ghosts,” Four Aircrafts Disappear in Bermuda Triangle Overnight, Yugoslavian Hairdressers Found Guilty of Implanting Brain-influencing Devices in Clients' Scalps..., The newspaper staff was frantic, and over the following weeks, the world became increasingly panicked, wondering what might come next. Neal poured over details of each incident. It seemed, strangely, he had heard them before, somewhere....

Neal received no sarcastic welcome from his Boss upon his usually tardy arrival one morning. Parker Benson made his customary delivery of his file stack, but something was very apparently different about Benson: the unnatural arc of his lips. It took Neal but a second to recognize Parker's missing smile.

“Has something else happened?” Neal demanded.

“I'm not sure. Boss called a few minutes ago from his house, stammering nearly inaudibly, but all I know is he sounded afraid. Then the wind cut us off. And now he's not showing up for work! What if he's hurt?”

Neal pulled on the coat that he had just shrugged off, striding towards the elevator. “I guess it wouldn't hurt to check on the old curmudgeon.”

Mr. Allison's house was concealed on a side road that wound, seemingly aimlessly, through the woods. Neal stepped from his car and turned up his collar against the unceasing winds. Everything seemed to be in order. He rapped on the door and called out for his boss. In reply, Neal thought he detected a feeble croak from within the house. He hesitantly pushed open the door and pursued into a shadowy room that smelled of heavy smoke. Before Neal could react, his boss's voice summoned him into a small living room, where he was positioned rigidly on the center of his couch.

Neal rushed forward and kneeled by his Boss. “Is everything alright?”

“You have to believe me, Neal. I haven't gone insane. There were candles all over the house when I got home from work yesterday. I walked in and, all of a sudden, every single one burst into
combustion. These weren’t regular candles, Neal. They floated in mid-air. They burned for what seemed an eternity. Then I began to hear echoing, eerie chants. *It must be finished,* the invisible voices kept repeating. I was then told that they would return, with more than just candlesticks, if they were not obeyed. And then the candles disappeared at once."

Instinctively, Neal tried to rationalize Mr. Allison’s account of events, but something tugged at the back of his mind - something familiar. Acting on nothing more than a theory he’d been pondering, Neal coaxed his boss into his car and drove across town to Neal’s favorite place in the wood. Auntie Emilia’s house.

From one of her musty bookshelves, Neal found what he was looking for. Etched in glossy silver print on the cover was its taunting title: *The Candlemen.* Neal slammed it until he came upon those spine-tingling words he knew so well: “...and upon the hearth she spotted another. The trickling of wax and crackle of flame was suddenly all she was aware of. Hovering candlesticks in elegant holders were alight throughout the estate ... peculiar candlesticks with a peculiar odor and feeling about them, mocking her, for she was too frightened to blow them out.”

Neal recited these words aloud. Mr. Allison’s shocked face said it all: Yes, this is what he had experienced the night before. Suddenly, Neal dropped the book to investigate a handwritten manuscript he noticed on the table beside his aunt’s favorite rocking chair. He slammed through what he concluded was his aunt’s unfinished last work, about a spirit who appeared as a clown statue at the local gift shop and was terrorizing the family that had purchased it to decorate their children’s playroom. Neal collapsed into the chair from the weight of what had just occurred to him. He realized now why these recent horrific events seemed so eerily familiar to him... They had each occurred in one of his aunt’s novels. This was the connection that had been tugging at him as he studied each event. He knew in that instant that until he completed the circle of his aunt’s life work with a proper ending to her final story, the menacing characters she had imagined would wander the universe repeating their acts of torment forever.

He whipped out his pen and scrawled frantic words. Hours later, he had put the finishing touches on the story of the evil clown. As he did, somewhere in snowy rural South Dakota, a babysitter caring for two small children called their parents, asking permission to move the life-sized clown statue in the corner of the living room. “It’s not that I don’t like it,” she said apologetically, “it just kind of freaks me out.” The parents’ reaction to her request was even more unnerving: “Get yourselves out of there as fast as you can! Call 9-1-1 and call us back.” The caretaker did as she was instructed, and when the children were safely at the neighbors and the police were on their way, she dialed their parents.

“Tell me what’s going on,” she begged, trying not to sound as shaken and terrified as she was. The father’s voice was just as fragile: “We don’t *have* a clown statue.” He explained that the children have been complaining about a clown watching them as they sleep, but he and his wife just dismissed it as nightmares.

Her last story complete, the spirit of Emilia’s characters could now rest, and would torment the world no more.

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**The Mystery of Color**

*By Faren Roth*
*Elizabeth C Adams Middle School, Grade 7*

As I gaze through my eyes,
I take in a world of color.
It is amazing what you can view,
If you just stop and look around.

The sea, a rolling mass of icy sapphire.
Tree canopies, a stunning emerald shimmering in the Wind.
And the ever-twinkling bright white of faraway stars.
Most astounding yet is the idea of another’s world.
A passerby, who happens to suddenly see as I do,
May glimpse a backwards world.
My shimmering emerald leaves, to him,
May be what I call the shade of dazzling rubies,
Glinting in the afternoon sun.
And my foamy blue sea may appear to him as magenta waves,
Violet waters lapping at the shore.
And what I see as the dark night sky,
With twinkling white lights leading my way,
He sees, in his universe, as a pale white canvas,
Inky stars guiding lost sailors home.
I may see this Earth one way, and you another.
Where I see a brilliant pink, you may see a dull gray.
Yet, we call these different shades by the same name.

What I wouldn’t give to have one look at your world.
To be baffled by the sudden wrongness.
To be stunned, left speechless by a whole new world.
It’s simply amazing, to me,
That no person could see the world as any other.
That maybe color is like snowflakes,
Untouchable in its uniqueness.
Billions of worlds, yet only one you can ever explore.
Simply breathtaking, isn’t it?

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HONORABLE MENTION
- GRADE 8 -

Celya Dahmani, “The Story of Peter Drake.” Mansfield Middle School
Joshua Davidoff, “An Outsider’s Opinion.” Weston Middle School
Ethan Denton, “The Lady of Shalott.” Two Rivers Magnet Middle School
Olivia Ferdinand, “The Impossible Escape.” Weston Middle School
Elizabeth Paulin, “My Failed Love Story.” Two Rivers Magnet Middle School
Lena Reeb, “The Sight of the Blind.” Weston Middle School

Night

*By Carly Bernstein*

*Mansfield Middle School, Grade 8*
Winter Slippers

_by Alicia Chiang_
_Tolland Middle School, Grade 8_

We got out of the car at Christmas Tree Shops. Mama and I were looking for slippers, or more specifically, fuzzy slippers that my great-grandma could wear when her feet were cold. On our way inside, we saw a man in a navy blue uniform standing next to the doorway, playing music on some kind of brass instrument. The sign on the easel next to him said that he was from the Salvation Army, so Mama gave
me eight quarters to drop in. Maybe if we donated, even if it was just a little, we would have more luck in
finding the slippers we were looking for, we reasoned.

Inside the store, a welcoming blast of warm air greeted our cold ears and fingers. We wandered
around, searching the aisles until we found the winter gear section. There were hats, mittens, scarves, and
other miscellaneous cold-weather items everywhere! I discovered the slippers after a few minutes’ worth
of strolling around and called Mama over to help decide which pair to buy.

We had looked at the Dearfoams website last night and found a design we liked. It was called
“fleece clog,” and there were four color choices: black, heather gray, navy blue, and red. Hopefully
Christmas Tree Shops, the third store we checked, had them in stock.

After moving stockpiles of gloves that had been strewn on top of the slipper boxes to their
rightful places, we dug out all the Dearfoams fleece clogs that there were, placing them next to each other
to compare.

Since Mama had about the same shoe size as great-grandma, she was designated the job of size-
tester. We wanted to make sure the slippers were a flawless fit. I picked out the ones that hadn't been
deformed or crushed. All the pairs left were gray and black, which was a slight setback. Mama had been
looking forward to finding a red pair, since red was the lucky color.

It worked out in the end, though, and we walked out of the store with two pairs—one was the
fleece clog we had planned on buying, with blade on the outside and gray on the inside, complete with
blanket stitching around the ankle. The other was a beige open toe slipper that we thought would be
perfect for Great-grandma to wear after taking a shower.

Mama and I had carefully inspected each shoe, checking for stains, ripped seams, and other
possible damages. We’d even made sure that both of the pairs we picked had good traction on the soles,
so Great-grandma wouldn’t slip when she was wearing them, even on wet surfaces. In addition, they were
fuzzy and warm on the inside, perfect for cold toes, and were machine washable—everyone knows that
accidents can happen!

We mailed both pairs out to Taiwan two weeks before Christmas, so that even if the shipping
and arrival was for some reason delayed, Great-grandma could start enjoying them before the holidays.
Now all we had to do was wait for her reaction. And trust me on this: it was one of the most tedious waits
in my life.

After a whole week of wishing and waiting, Mama turned Skype on from the desktop and was
elated to find that the account we used to contact Great-grandma was online. We excitedly clicked “Call”
and waited while the blue ring next to the cursor turned and turned for what seemed like forever. Staring
fixedly at the loading computer screen, I bit my lip nervously and crossed my fingers under the table,
hoping Great-grandma liked our gift.

When the other side finally picked up, Great-grandma was already sitting there, a huge grin
stretching across her face. All of a sudden, she didn't look like the more than 90 years old she was, or
even the 75 that she usually appeared to be. She looked so happy—even her eyebrows were smiling! I had
never seen her face glow like this in my entire life. Mama asked her if she had received the package yet,
even though she obviously had. We knew, too, but we just had to hear her say yes.

Later in our conversation, Great-grandma proudly announced that she had shown my aunt her
“amazing new slippers” when she came to visit a few days ago, a fact that was later confirmed by several
other family members. As I mirrored Great-grandma's blossoming smile from half a world away, I knew
in my heart that no matter what anybody said or thought, to me, this was truly the best gift I’d ever given!

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Impressions

By Sophia di Tommaso
John Winthrop Middle School, Grade 8

Her left foot sunk deep into the sand;
The sand that rubbed right against the ocean,
So close that even when the tides relaxed
And the waved receded back.
It still appeared gray
Unlike the beach behind her,
Where it was scorched and dry
And the color of gold glitter.
It was the sand that looked as if a jar of ink
Had spilled upon it,
And as of someone tried to remove it
Like a stain on a carpet,
And though they tried and they tried,
The blackish tint remained.

Her right foot followed.
She burrowed it far under,
Feeling the squish of water not yet dried
Between her toes.
And there, she paused for a moment,
Planted,
Facing towards the sea,
And listening to the roar like thunder
As one wave leapt hard towards its death
Crashing against the rocky shore.

It’s watery fingers
Left behind a smooth trail as they ventured back
Into the ocean;
The mark it added to the landscape of the Earth
Lasted for just a second,
If not less before another wave of water
Took its place,
Leaving his mark behind instead.

She stood there,
Watching this happen
Over, and over, and over again,
She watched as a seagull landed from flight,
Its three-toed footprints scattered across the beach;
They were dainty,
Small,
And so, so fragile,
That they soon disappeared
Under a castle of sand.

A call came
From further down the beach,
Snapping her out of her trance.
She stared down at her own footprints;
Longer than the bird’s,
Wider than the waves,
But just as easy to erase,
And right as she dashed away,
The tide rose,
Wiping away her mark
too.

A Life Lesson

*By Aaron Pezzullo*

*Woodbury Middle School, Grade 8*

December 16, 2012

At 9:30am on Friday morning, December 14, 2012, I was learning how to say the word “banana” in Spanish. I thought about the daunting schedule I still had ahead of me: a test in math, a long half-an-hour of solving equations in ac-lab, and two hours of tennis in the afternoon. I have to admit, I was feeling a little sorry for myself. Little did I know, just 11 miles away Adam Lanza was moments away from commencing the second deadliest shooting in the history of the United States. With the help of a semiautomatic .223 caliber rifle, two handguns and a psychotic mind, Lanza mercilessly killed 26 people, 6 adults and 20 children. None of the kids surpassed the ages of 6 or 7 years old. But I continued on with my day, oblivious to what was going on. I continued to joke around with my friends, I continued to feel sorry for myself, and I even felt it was necessary to complain about the fact that when lunchtime came I didn't have enough money to buy another chocolate chip cookie. I was unaware of what was happening just one town over, at Sandy Hook Elementary School.

I was walking to Health class at around 1:20pm when I first heard the news about the shooting, but the facts didn't fully register in my mind until I got home and saw that every TV station had the news of the violent incident on. I just happened to walk by one of my friends from my math class who told me about the shooting and that Mrs. Hochsprung had been shot, but we were quickly met with a “shhh” from a nearby teacher, who was probably hoping not to worry more kids than necessary. In school, I noticed that every student's reaction was different. Some kids laughed it off, some kids were automatically angry, and some cried out of sadness or worry. My reaction was automatically anger. How could somebody do this to a group of 1st graders? I almost didn't believe it. I thought (or hoped) that somehow this was all a mistake, and that 26 people hadn't been brutally murdered, including my former principal. But unfortunately, there was no mistake. When I walked in the door to my house I saw my dad sitting in a leather armchair, intently watching the television. I threw my backpack down and sat down in the chair next to him. “Did you he—” I started, but judging from the look on his face and the man on TV “Reporting live from Sandy Hook Elementary School,” I guessed he had already found out. “Why would someone do this?” I asked him. He looked at me and said, “I don't know, Aaron, but he must have been insane to kill all of those innocent people.” I think that pretty much summed up how we were all feeling at that time.

C'mon boys lengthen your steps. That's not how principals are supposed to walk,” Mrs. Hochsprung energetically says to me and Griffin Smith (one of my friends) as we shuffle our way down the main hallway of Mitchell Elementary School. She was a couple of feet ahead of us, walking with big strides, and had to stop and wait for us to catch up. We were in the thick of our third grade year at Mitchell, Mrs. Hochsprung's second year as principal there. Griffin had won “Principal for A Day” in a school raffle, and he had chosen me as his “Vice Principal.” At the beginning of the day she led Griffin and me into her office, and showed us around as if we were applying for a job. She showed us her desk, with all of her “important papers” on it, along with pictures of her kids and her husband. There was a huge bowl of chocolate kisses sitting right in front of Griffin and me, and she met our longing gazes with a smile. “Go ahead and take one,” she said. “Principals have special privileges. Rows of teaching books lined the shelves, more proof of how dedicated she was to her work. Then she moved on to show Griffin and me our desk, where we would be “working” while she carried out her duties as principal. She told us
that our day would consist of walking around the school, observing teachers as they taught their classes, and that we would be taking notes on what we liked and disliked. Then, at lunch we would be interviewed by the school paper, and give a quote as to what our “key to success” was. “My key to success,” Griffin says, “is to work hard and try your best all the time.” Mrs. Hochsprung beamed at us, clearly proud of how we had handled the interview. As the day went on, she led us from classroom to classroom, with a skip in her step and a smile on her face.

When the end of the day finally rolled around at 3:10, she sat us down in her office and asked us to tell her everything we had observed about the teachers and the students. She talked to us like we were her equals, and listened so closely that it made me think she might actually implement some of the things we eight-year olds were suggesting. For instance, her serious expression didn't change even when we suggested naptime because, even though we were third graders, “We still get tired too.”

. . . .

To me, she was Mrs. Hochsprung. To her colleagues she was Dawn. To millions of people all over the world, right now she is simply known as, “The Principal.” But it doesn't matter what she is called. All that matters is that you know how heroically she acted on December 14, 2012. As an armed Adam Lanza stalked into Sandy Hook Elementary School, Mrs. Hochsprung was finishing up a meeting with few members of her staff. At the sound of gunshots, she and school psychologist, Mary Sherlach, rushed out into the office, only to be shot. But, with the courage and wisdom that she showed throughout her entire life, Mrs. Hochsprung turned on the intercom so that the other teachers could hear what was going on, and prepare themselves as best they could. It takes an extraordinary person, in their last moments of life, to think only about the well-being of the people around them. It matters that the world knows the type of energetic, passionate, and optimistic person she was, and will always be in the minds of her friends, family and people all around the world.

On Saturday after the shooting, everything that had always been a big deal to me, in my mind, didn't seem to matter anymore. I had to wake up to go to a tennis tournament in the morning, an event that I would usually be extremely nervous for. But as I dragged myself out of bed in the morning, I wasn’t thinking about my upcoming match. I was thinking about how hard it was for me, and how much harder it must have been for the families of the victims to get out of bed. I will think twice before complaining about having one less cookie to eat, or feeling sorry for myself because I have to stay and work at my nice, safe, school a couple more hours. Before the Sandy Hook shooting, I had always thought that bad things would never happen so close to me, and that they would always happen to people and places far away from me. But now that it has happened in a place just minutes away from my house, and to a person that I once knew, I realize that nothing is guaranteed. At 9:30 a.m. on Friday morning, December 14, 2012, I was learning how to say the word “banana” in Spanish. By 3:30 p.m. that day, I was a completely different person. Everything around me was the same, but on the inside, I had changed. My house was still red. I still had a miniature poodle that yipped at me when I got home from school. I still went straight to the pantry to get my after-school snack of Frosted Flakes. But I now appreciated my house, my dog, and my favorite food because I knew that in an instant, it could all be taken away.

The Old Oak Tree

By Daisy Petersen
Weston Middle School, Grade 8

I am the old oak tree;
I have the oldest deepest roots in the forest.
They are the depths of the deepest ocean,
Dark and undiscovered.
My branches,
Like the large world below;
A great big family.
I have survived many a night,
Dancing with the strongest of winds.
I have pulled through
The sorrow of losing close friends to
The many storms in my years.
I know that I shall enjoy my life;
For now I know time will come.
The time where I shall feel my final rain.
My last wind will rustle my leaves gently.
Then my time shall come.

Chasing Ghosts: The Road to Perfection

By Savannah Herbek
Henry James Memorial School, Grade 8

Perfect |ˈpər-fikt| adjective: 1. Being entirely without fault or defect: flawless

There are some words that even Webster couldn’t define flawlessly, capturing the colossal, whole meaning contained in diminutive, English lettering. There are some words that humans can’t even explain without confusing themselves. Sure, we could recite a standard definition depicted in our class notes, but really, nobody has the slightest idea about the level of intensity behind the word. Words don’t just come with a simple cardboard definition, though they are instead painted with thoughts and emotions beyond comprehension; synonyms and antonyms are simply the bare minimum to the word. One of these words happens to be perfect.

This small little seven-lettered package wrapped in black ink has been torturing me for years. For I have seen my fellow peers searching for it and claiming that they have achieved perfection, but I still am suspicious of the whole concept. They say practice makes perfect. Well, what is perfect? Is everyone’s view of perfect the same? Why is there such obsession for this quality? Well, as life unraveled I began to understand what perfect means and how to stop the obsession clinging onto it.

Growing up I was big on competition and I loved to win. This came hand and hand with perfection. In school, I would compete with some other students dedicated to their studies, the type of kids who would always get the answer right when a teacher asked; failure was foreign. I wanted to be like them and, in turn, perfection was introduced in my life. To me, then, perfection was that impeccable one hundred circled in red on the spelling quiz or being the first person to collapse on the shriveled green school lawn and spectate the rest of the student body finishing the mile. Ever since that first crave for perfection, I have been hooked, I was an addict for the need of perfection. That’s when perfection turned into more than a noun wandering around in the “P” section in the dictionary. It was my California gold rush of 1849; I wanted it and sacrificed an unimaginable amount of things to be able to live in the fantasy world of no error.

I was programmed for perfection ever since the beginning of sixth grade. My friends had started the perpetual path to perfection which meant placement in the most advanced math classes, being selected to sing in all the honors choirs (state, regional, and national), and winning every essay contest their teachers could dig up for them. That’s when jealousy took its turn and snatched me out of my average grades and threw me into this world of stress, struggle, and wanting.

Sometimes perfection reminds me of an advertisement for a vacation home. Its descriptors include the luxurious balcony view of the sun leaking orange into the sea, sparkling countertops highlighted in the kitchen, and the azure water basking in the sun while being cuddled by tiled structure of the pool. It has you hooked like a fisherman’s dinner only until you find out that the vacation home really isn’t what it was portrayed as. Apparently the sun is blocked by a massive, genetically-engineered
palm tree, the kitchen houses vermin in the back corner of the pantry, and the pool's sparkling water has all evaporated leaving a rust blanket on the bottom and chlorine bottle leaking all over the pool deck. Perfection only brings stress and an unrelenting flow of worry pooling in your head. Some nights I'd lay in bed, tossing and turning like cookie batter in the electric mixer, thinking about whether or not I studied hard enough for that science quiz and if the paper I handed in today will satisfy my perfect score streak. Sometimes I'd cry about how other people were more perfect than me. To me, I was always on the bottom. Nothing could push me past this fog over that perfection shouldn't run your live. Well, it was too late. Perfection was running my life. It even came down to the most minute things like whether my lettering was exemplar of the alphabet strip on the wall, whether or not my bookshelf was perfectly in balance, or whether the cupcakes were all frosted evenly: everything must be perfect. Perfect. Perfect. Perfect. PERFECT!

It was at the climax, now, the point were it just drove me over the edge. In the second semester of seventh grade I finally just screamed stop. I was sick. Of worrying, of stressing day and night over every little detail, of comparing myself to other people, of striving for perfection. At that point I had just given up. There is no such thing as perfect. It just doesn't exist. SNAP.

Since then I have been very observant of perfection in its work and working hard to not fall into its trap. I was starting to realize that perfection wasn't everything and the mystery behind the word really unraveled. Perfection is different for everyone and it comes in many forms. Perfection is more than just flawlessness, but flawlessness for that person. For me perfection is merely accomplishing my goals. For example, perfection this week would be getting all my assignments in before the semester ends. Then, I could finally relax, sit back, and breathe in the air of perfection.

Looking back, I can't believe the mistakes I have made. Chasing after something that didn't even exist is quite a misstep. Though, through tears, sleepless nights, and struggles to accept myself, I am glad I went through this journey. They say that no one is perfect, but I beg to differ. I am my own type of perfect that has its flaws and its upsides. I'm sorry Webster. I applaud you for recording every word of English, but there is one word need of fixing.

Perfect |ˈpər-fikt| adjective. 1. A state of pure satisfaction that varies for every person.

Now that's a perfect definition.

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**Jarrod Daniels: The Rise to the Top**

*By Matthew Mangieri*

*St. Mary School, Grade 8*

The cold ground crunched beneath Jarrod's sneakers. Fog enveloped the town of Danbury, CT like a dark mist, and the streets were bare except for the sound of crunching pavement. Jarrod was a muscular man, of 6' 1" and weighing in at 200 pounds. Jarrod's face was broad and his neck was thick. His short hair, cut in the fashion of a crew cut, stood at attention. Jarrod had a light dusting of a beard from all the nights he had forgotten to shave. He was wearing a hooded with the hood pulled over his head. His thin Nike pants were not much protection from the frigid cold, but still he ran. Puffs of smoke came out of his mouth like a frosty mist. He ran passed his old middle school, a warming reminder of his long gone childhood. Down the long road he ran, past an old Ford F-150, which was the only car on the road this early in the morning. Jarrod's heart burned as he passed the old quaint restaurant where he had always stopped to get a warm cup of coffee. He skidded to a stop as soon as he saw his old friend Mike Jordan. Mike was a great MMA fighter who emerged with Jarrod as top contenders for fighting in the UFC. Jarrod greeted Mike warmly,

"Hey man, what are you doing this early in the morning?"

Mike paused and ran his hand through his thick black hair and replied, "Early mornin' training—I gotta get ready for the big fight Thursday. I need the money if I want to continue going to the Dragon
Fight Club." Jarrod nodded. Without the fight club neither he nor Mike would be able to continue their
rise to the UFC. The Dragon Fight Club taught both of them everything they knew about fighting.

“Yeah, I'm also training for the fight Thursday; it'll sure be a big day for our fighting careers,”
Jarrod stated.

Mike nodded and said, “I gotta go Jarrod. See you around.” Mike slowly jogged off into the icy
mist. Frozen smoke was rising from his lips. As soon as Mike was out of sight, Jarrod pondered to
himself, did he have what it took to take on George Cleopas on Thursday? The fight will only leave him
two days to train. He shivered just a little at the thought of losing to George; it would probably ruin his
chances of making it to the Octagon. He continued the cold painful jog to the Dragon Fight Club.

A day in the Dragon Fight Club was always very physically trying. It is a small run down gym,
with many small fighting rings spread around the miniature building. The sound of groaning fighters
echoed around the gym as they pushed themselves to the brink of their physical ability. Jarrod nodded to
a few gruff looking fighters doing pull ups. He passed his friend Dennis Newcomen a star fighter, who
with his tall green Mohawk looked more like a rock star than a fighter. His muscles pulsed as he
pumped the two hundred pound weight repeatedly. Jarrod walked right up to his personal trainer Ross
Johnson. He was a man of rugged countenance. His long scraggly black beard bobbed up and down as
he walked, but despite his looks he had the heart of a true warrior. He barked at Jarrod immediately,
“You think you're going to beat George at the semi-finals fight Thursday-well he's gonna kick your butt if
you don't start training!” Jarrod heeded the advice, and stripped down to a white T-shirt and sporty
looking shorts. At Ross's count, he dropped down and did fifty push-ups and as a result he was drenched
in sweat. While he was jump roping to get his cardio up, the haunting thought came again. If he could
not beat George in the light heavy weight semi-finals match in just two days, his chances of ever fighting
in the UFC are slim to none. He let out a pained cry as he pushed himself to the brink. “Well" he
thought, “I just better train harder."

Two hours later he had completed his morning exercises, and was ready to practice some
fighting. Outside the small fight club the sun had risen, burning away the remains of the morning's thick
fog. His friend Mike Jordan had just arrived from his previous five mile run and was getting ready for
some fighting practice. Ross's loud voice barked at Jarrod, "Get moving, I want to see you hitting the
punching bags, not patting it!” Jarrod grimaced as he rained down blows on the rag tag punching bag.
Ross barked, “Right jab, left hook, REPEAT!” The bag bounced off of Jarrod's fists as he slammed
them with all his might; the chain that connected the bag to the ceiling rattled loudly. Ross hollered,
“Time for kicks, left front ball kick, right round house kick, REPEAT!” Jarrod's surgically taped up feet
slammed against the bag. Jarrod's face seemed to be in a permanent grimace sweat rolled down his face
like raindrops. His haunting thoughts resumed. Could he actually beat George Cleopas a monstrous
opponent? He was built like a bull dog, and had what it took to fight in the Octagon. The sound of Ross
barking repeat, repeat, sounded far away. Still his feet pounded the bag- he needed to beat George-he
would beat George. Finally Ross screamed, “STOP!” Jarrod stumbled back exhausted but confident.

Two days later, Wednesday had arrived; it was six o'clock in the morning. The sun was shining
in Danbury, Connecticut. Jarrod Daniels and Mike Jordan where sitting in a quaint coffee shop called
“Java” sipping warm coffee, and pondering their big fights coming up the tomorrow. Jarrod was dressed
in his usual attire of a hoodie and a pair of sweats. Although the sun shown brightly outside, a brisk wind
swept the town licking peoples faces like an icy dog gnawing on your ears with its icy teeth. Mike was
dressed similarly, in a hoodie and a pair of sports slacks. Jarrod broke the icy silence, “I've been thinking
about my upcoming fight, and I have realized that even if I lose, which is very likely, I will put my best
foot forward and try my best. If I lose I may not be chosen to enter the UFC, but why can't I try again
next year? There is no limit to the amount of time I can try to enter the UFC.”

Mike responded, “I can't agree with that, man. I quit my job as a clerk at the local 7/11 to pursue
my dream of becoming a UFC fighter. I was signed up to fight Rod ‘The Wrecking Ball' Johnson. He is
an absolute monster. There is no second chance, if I lose this fight I will lose my membership to the
Dragon Fight Club. I'm already in debt, so if I lose I will have to embrace bankruptcy!”
Mike got up angrily and tipped over his coffee. The warm, brown liquid spread and enveloped the grungy wood table. Jarrod quickly got a napkin to clean the mess up. As soon as he turned around, Mike was gone, and the little swinging door jingled as if it had been slammed hard.

The sound of Jarrod's feet slamming against the pavement filled Jarrod's ears as he sprinted towards the Dragon Fight Club. Sweat beads rolled down Jarrod's face. His face burned red with fatigue as he passed the coffee shop, passed the Chevy dealership, passed the old run down high school. Finally he had reached the Dragon Fight Club. He swung the door open, and peered in. Inside the fight club he was immediately approached by Ross Johnson. He barked, “You're late Jarrod, get moving!” Jarrod stripped down to a plain white, sweat stained T-shirt. Jarrod rubbed chalk on his hands to dry them out, and soak away the sweat. Jarrod immediately did his normal workout routine, except with more intensity. He pounded the bag with his fists, practicing his right jab and his left hook. When he was confident that he was ready with his punches, he practiced his kicks. His feet slammed into the bag over and over again; his face molded into a grimace. His intense eyes stared down the bag. Finally he was done. Mike Jordan approached Jarrod, and patted him on the back, and whispered, “Good luck man, didn't mean to explode my temper there!” Before Jarrod realized it, Mike was gone taking a long jog home down winding streets to reach his apartment.

It was Thursday, the day of the fight. Jarrod and Ross had taken a cab to the Survivor Arena which is a world famous arena. At the arena, many UFC scouts would jot down notes about the fighters, watching to see which ones had what it took to hack it in the UFC. They were directed in to a small metallic room where Jarrod and Ross would talk about the upcoming fight. Ross looked Jarrod intensely in the eyes. His deep brown eyes almost pained. He spoke, “Jarrod, just get out there and try your best, that's all that matters. Stop it Jarrod, stop being so damn nervous all the time…” Ross's voice trailed off. Ross dropped his head down, so that his beard draped over his “Heart of a Lion” shirt. Jarrod nodded, and began to take off his sweat shirt, and baggy pants. Jarrod sat down on the small wooden bench in the room, and then it was time. The loudspeaker blared: “Jarrod Daniels and George Cleopas please report to ring 21, thank you!” Jarrod rose up from the bench, bare-chested and ready to fight. As he jogged down the long hallway to ring 21, he stopped and looked behind him at his shorts which read, “Heart of a Lion.”

Everything was a blur to Jarrod—the people in the crowd screaming loudly—the bare grey blood-stained ground on which he stood, right down to the mean looking George Cleopas. The ref was a tall, elderly man dressed in black sport slacks. The ref looked at both of them and said, “You follow what I say, and let's have a good fight.” Then he and George shook hands. George was a squat, yet incredibly muscular man. His face was twisted in a vicious grin as he bounced up and down on his surgically taped feet. Jarrod looked into his eyes with his face in an angry scowl. His muscles rippled as he loosened them. He did not lift his eyes off his opponent. Finally the ref yelled “FIGHT!” It had begun.

George jabbed at Jarrod with his vicious left fist. Jarrod countered them easily, and continued circling his opponent. Jarrod rushed at George connecting his left fist to George's jaw, causing George to stumble back. Jarrod continued, slamming his fist in George's stomach. George gasped for air. Jarrod's foot rose up quickly smashing into George's nose; Jarrod's tape on his feet smeared with blood. George rushed at Jarrod grabbing for his feet, but Jarrod answered with a punch combo that broke George's skin.

Blood and sweat particles flew in the air; the blood thirsty crowd roared. Jarrod advanced no longer afraid of his opponent. He kicked George's leg viciously causing George to topple, and Jarrod rushed on him slamming his face with his fists. George's face bounced off the hard mat, staining it with blood. George looked devastated, his face covered in bruises and gashes - he cried out, but the onslaught didn't let up. Finally, the ref tapped Jarrod telling him George had had enough. Jarrod pumped his fist in the air and screamed in victory. His buzzed hair, now a dark brown from all the sweat, glistened under the bright light. Jarrod rushed towards the screaming crowd egging them on. He felt someone's eyes were on him. He turned around only to see Mike Jordan who was yet to fight, cheering the loudest, a twinkle in his rugged eyes.
Clare Burhenne, “Stars Are All They Are.” Fairfield Ludlowe High School
(Emma) Lee Fornal, “Flesh.” Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts
Danielle Hoffman, “The Window.” Farmington High School
Brittany Marson, “Why Can’t We Be More Like Trees?” Fairfield Ludlowe High School
Tetiana Winiarskyj, “Ode to Below Zero.” Old Saybrook High School

My Response to the Newtown Murders

By Hannah Bassett
Windham High School, Grade 9

Turn off the TVs,
they say.

Look away from the disaster,
from pain.

Look away from 20 little coffins.
Look away,
Look away.

The government will fix things,
like they always do.

Look away from the TVs,
turn away from the truth,
that people are such a mess
they would kill children.

Kindergartners.
Twenty beautifully innocent children.

Look away.
Turn away.

But if I look away,
how will I ever
understand?
Don’t Be Sad

By Riley Blumenfield
Fairfield Ludlowe High School, Grade 9

Thud. My dad’s back hits the wall. “Oh, no...” he gasps as he slumps down the wall. He keeps talking to the police on the phone but I hear nothing. Nothing has been said but I know. Tommy is dead.

I met Tommy in the fifth grade through Math Masters. He was stubborn, awkward, and at times downright mean, but despite all of that, we developed a friendship. On the same team was my soon-to-be best friend Max*, who also had a knack for getting on people’s nerves. He and Tommy would bicker back and forth for what seemed like hours, until the coach, my dad, stepped in. “Max,” my dad would scold, “Tommy has the right answer to number ten. Please stop arguing with him about it.” Grudgingly, Max would surrender, and practice would move on until the next argument.

After Math Masters, I did not see much of Tommy and Max. In sixth grade, however, I was in Tommy’s class, and we had a strange relationship. He didn’t have the best social skills, so our conversations consisted mostly of him insulting me and me snapping back at him. Our relationship was the epitome of “love-hate.” I remember asking my teacher specifically not to seat me by Tommy because my experiences with him hurt my feelings. Oddly enough, when I look back on those days, I realize Tommy never wanted to upset me. He thought I was too tough to let those insults get to me; not for the last time, he had overestimated my strength.

About halfway through the year, Tommy did a surprising thing. He told me he liked me. I didn’t know what to do; what do you say when your bully has a crush on you? I eventually got out, “Oh.” Unsatisfied with my response, he stalked away, leaving my friends and I to discuss what had happened.

The rest of my sixth grade year was uneventful. School went on, life went on, the world kept spinning. It was seventh grade when the world came crashing down around me.

That year Max was in all of my classes. We became inseparable, calling and talking on the phone at least once a week in addition to our chats in school. Max was also really good friends with Tommy, who had not forgotten about me. After a fair amount of pestering, Tommy and I exchanged phone numbers.

In January I began texting Tommy. It was the start of a new year and a new relationship between he and I. Things went well until I went on a trip with my dad and sister. The first night of the trip I laid in bed sobbing, clutching my phone. I had just received a text from Tommy saying, “I don’t know what will happen when I die. That is why I would do it.” That was the first time he told me he was contemplating suicide.

My simple reply to his text was, “Don’t.” No punctuation, no grammar. I just needed him to know suicide was not an answer. I told him to talk to someone and threatened to tell the school counselors myself.

His response? “If you tell, I will just do it sooner.” So I kept my mouth shut. I didn’t tell a soul and just tried to convince him not to kill himself. But, as I learned at Math Team, he was a stubborn little boy. Finally, after weeks of my badgering, he said to me, “Either do it with me, or don’t be sad.” I was devastated; how could he think I would ever kill myself? How could he want me to make that sacrifice? It was at this point that I showed my mom his texts. Sitting in the car, crying my eyes out, my mom told me I needed to talk.

“Riley,” she soothed, “you need to talk to the counselors on Monday. I will go in with you, and it will be okay, but you need to stop texting Tommy.”

“Okay,” I said, and we went inside. Saturday went by without incident. On Sunday Tommy would not stop texting me, so I pretended to be my dad and sent him a text.

“This is Mr. Blumenfield. I need you to stop texting my daughter,” I typed. I was relieved to have come up with a solution that would stop his texts.
After Tommy’s initial response apologizing to my dad and promising not to text me again, I gave my phone to my mom. As we ordered pizza, I received another text from him. My mom and sister told me not to read it, saying it would only upset me. I listened to them and we had a great family night, filled with pizza and games, until I got one last phone call, from the police.

“Hello?” I asked cautiously, my whole family watching. After confirming my identity, the woman on the other line began to talk, but I couldn’t understand her. “Ma’am?” I interrupted. “I’m going to put my dad on.” I handed him the phone and he went into his bedroom, then the bathroom, with me, my mother and sister right behind him.

Suddenly he fell back against the bathroom wall. “Oh no,” he whispered, and I tuned out. I focused on the soft spikes in my dad’s graying hair, desperately trying to grasp some sense of normalcy. I had heard enough from the detective to know something was going on with Tommy. When my dad hung up the phone, we all stared at him anxiously.

“Tommy is dead.”

The rest of the night was a blurry mix of phone calls and tears. I couldn’t wrap my mind around the idea that a thirteen year old boy could take his own life. Tommy had so much to look forward to, so much to live for. Even in death he made me feel insecure; I began to wonder why he took his life. Wasn’t his family worth living for? Wasn’t I? My sister and I just cried and cried, and I didn’t go to school the next day. I met with the detective, friends came over, but I didn’t read that last text.

After a day of crying in my dad’s bathrobe, I went to school on Tuesday. Everyone knew about my relationship with Tommy; I got a lot of sympathy hugs. In second period when we were read a note explaining the suicide, I lost it, and began sobbing violently. I cried into my friend’s shoulder for what seemed like hours, trying to ignore the boys making fun of my tears. They didn’t know what I was feeling; what gave them the right to judge? My teacher tapped me on the shoulder after a few minutes and asked, “Riley... Do you need to go to the counselor?”

I sniffed, getting one last whiff of my friend’s strawberry body spray. “No, I just need a minute,” I choked out. I stumbled to the water fountain, my vision blurred by tears. As the cool water trickled down my throat, a blush spread across my face. Embarrassed by my sudden display of emotion, I delved into my work with fervor until the bell rang. “Class dismissed.”

The next day, I went to New Jersey. The visit with family could not have come at a better time, and I missed the funeral. I had my friend Alex bring me back a memorial bookmark, and I have it to this day.

A month after the suicide, I finally read his last text. Two months after the suicide I deleted his texts. It’s been two years since his suicide, and on bad days I still blame myself. I have yet to stop thinking about him.

“I love you riley. Don’t be sad.”

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Gorgeous

By Eliza Elliot
Fairfield Ludlowe High School, Grade 9

How do you tell someone goodbye forever? My family knew it was coming. I knew it was coming. My grandpa had been sick for as long as I could remember.

“He probably won’t make it through the night,” my dad had told me from the other side of the line. He was at the hospital with my grandpa, visiting him for what was most likely the last time. My grandpa had been moving from hospital to nursing home and back to the hospital over the past few months. We were all unsure of his condition, or even how he would be day to day. My dad continued speaking, “I’ll put the phone up to his ear so he can hear you say goodbye, but he won’t talk back.”

My heart dropped. Why couldn’t my grandpa talk back? Why would he probably be gone tomorrow? I envisioned my grandpa in his hospital room with the bland white walls. He was lying in
bed, with numerous tubes attached to his pale body. I could picture his bald head, which I always loved to look at. It had tons of freckles sprawled about. Sometimes I would count them. My grandpa had a scratchy white beard that was barely noticeable until you got up close. Even though I loved his kisses, his beard always pricked me when he delivered them.

I didn’t know what to say. I was in shock — I had hoped this day would never come. I wanted to ask my grandpa if he remembered all the special times we shared — like riding in his red convertible on a hot summer day together or going down the street from his house to fetch him ice cream. So many words flew through my head like a flurry of snowflakes and I didn’t know which to say. At the same time, I had nothing to say that seemed good enough for a goodbye.

“Hi Grandpa Wes,” I finally choked out. “I just want to let you know I love you a lot and I’ll miss you. I hope you feel better and I’ll have you in my heart no matter what.” The words escaped my mouth and left my mind blank. I wanted to make sure he knew it was me — I wanted to give him a special goodbye. The words I had just said could’ve come from anybody, but I wanted them to come from me. “Grandpa Wes, one last thing,” I continued, “I’ll really miss how you always used to call me Gorgeous... I really liked when you did that. I love you.” A lump arose in my throat and I tried to swallow it back down. I couldn’t talk any longer without bursting into tears. I shakily handed the phone to my brother so he could have his chance to talk.

I wondered if my grandpa could hear my words. Did he understand when I told him I liked it when he called me Gorgeous? Could he remember me, Eliza, his first and only granddaughter?

I started to recall the last moment we had shared together in person — when he had spoken his last words to me. It had certainly been unknown that those words would be the last words I would ever hear from him. That whole day that we had visited him at the hospital, my grandpa had been in and out of awareness. He could barely remember who his wife was, and at times, he forgot who we were. When it came time for goodbyes, I went over to my grandpa and told him I loved him. As I was walking out the door, I heard him call out, “I love you Gorgeous.” My heart stopped, and then began beating a mile a minute. He remembered his nickname for me. My grandpa could barely remember anything in those last months. But he remembered me. He remembered what he had named me when I first came into the world and what he had called me for years after that. I realized I had never left my grandpa’s mind, even after all that he had been through.

My grandpa taught me many things throughout my lifetime — to appreciate nature, how to make the best of a situation, and even sparked my passion for photography. But the biggest thing that he taught me, through an unspoken message, is to love what you have — you never know for how long you may have it. I wish I had spent more time with my grandpa on our occasional visits together. And that I had told him I loved him just once more. My mom always tells me “appreciate things while you have them.” I didn’t fully understand this, until I lost something I could never get back.

The Haunted and the Hopeless

_By Alyssa Grimaldi_
_Granby Memorial High School, Grade 9_

Every night when I’m attempting to sleep
The thoughts in my head run so thoroughly deep
It is as if I am tragically stuck there
Drowning in my unspoken deepest regrets here
An acquaintance of mine once morosely said
You cannot know everything until you are long dead
So I will reluctantly bow my increasingly heavy head
And try to climb out of the river of my own thoughts
That blaze alarmingly red.
You think you know me, dear adversary?
Well I imagine it is quite contrary
Because you have never been nearly this weary
And I would imagine your eyes are now weeping
And your apathy is finally close to sleeping
We shall see if you still imagine you comprehend so
When you see these words I almost never wrote
Because you don’t know all the words that I have not said
Or all the times I have thought of joining the dead.
But you can loathe your deal of cards
The very ones you have been given to regard
No matter how scalded and scarred
They may appear to exist
Or even under a fiery and chaotic eclipse
While all the same
Accept that you were given a place in this strange and maddening game.
I’ve got battles I build myself
And no, thank you, I don’t need your help.
Not that you offered or asked
For the empathy in your soul still needs to be unmasked
Because we all have that revolution – that fight
That starts and ends in our own heads at night
My unbalanced brain doesn’t move in black or in white
But some shade of a color not taken in by the average sight
And maybe if you knew all of this plight
You would die of your own long forsaken fright
Or perhaps attempt to find a fragment of shallow light
Because I think that you are all just alike
Ready to take off the first chance you might
And don’t cringe at these words that I reluctantly write
Because they won’t leave the locked door in my head
It is sealed impossibly tight.
And what path would I choose?
It seems no matter what I decide to do
Someone will automatically and depressing lose
You cannot always expect to win
Though I know your patience wears incredibly thin
It surely will never erase
That ironic permanent grin
And I know I am not who you think I may be
For behind this shield and in the cavern you cannot see
It’s the darkness that takes a constant hold of me
The darkness that will forever and always plea
To be completely and utterly released
And the door to the sparkling and undying sun
I cannot seem to recover the now-rusted key.
Fishing for Dover Sole

By KC Herzog
New Canaan High School, Grade 9

The hot summer sun pours in through the colored pane windows, and my one size too small black suit adds to the heat. I take a seat next to my sister in the front pews and put my arm around her while she stares at her feet. We sit there silently for a few minutes, and then people swarm in through the doors: family, friends, or people who simply want to pay their respects, and take their seats around us. You can hear the sound of people whispering, shuffling their feet, but Clare and I sit thinking silently to ourselves. Everyone goes silent as the priest gets up in front of everyone and starts talking. “Harold Herzog was a great man, a genius, and a loved father,” he preaches. The words came off as comforting and supportive, but weren’t completely true. I uncomfortably look around, and the light from the candles on the wall catch my eye; candles like the ones on my birthday cake 7 years ago.

“Happy 7th Birthday son,” my father says, a proud smile on his face. I open the box he hands to me to find a Carlos Beltran jersey, my favorite player on the Mets. I immediately put it on, then run up to my dad and hug him tightly. I can smell his lemon scented soap, and his wool sweater is soft. He’s been gone away for a whole three weeks, but it felt like forever. Mom says he needed some help from the doctor and that he would be fine. I noticed that he walked with a stick, but mom told me that it was just for balance. We have a grand birthday dinner, followed by a traditional birthday cake. I sit on my father’s knee, and the candles light up the room. I close my eyes, and wish for one thing: that my father never has to leave for a long time again. I blow out all the candles, and my father rustles my hair.

Person after person comes up onto the pedestal and talks about their fond memories of him. “I can remember Hal saying the funniest thing during dinner one this one business trip in 87.” Yet I can remember my mom calling 911, my father falling down the stairs, drunk as usual.

“You’re the man of the house now,” my grandpa told me the day before. Yet how can a 12 year old really be a man? I definitely feel older than my age, as life with an alcoholic 86 year old father with Alzheimer’s definitely matures a person. The death of my father may mean things will be easier, and my life won’t revolve around his needs, but now I would have to mature more than I already had. My mom would start looking for a job, since bills from the nursing home and hospital still needed to be paid, so I would have to take on more responsibility. But would I be able to do this? I can remember asking myself the same question every weekend I went to visit my father at Brighton Gardens, the nursing home.

The walls of the nursing home are all a disgusting beige, and every room looks the same. The air is stuffy, and I slowly walk down to room 34. I open the door, and the smell of piss fills my nose. I walk in on my father, asleep on his chair in his underwear, snoring loudly. I pick up some of his clothes and take a seat on his bed. I tap him on the shoulder and he wakes up, a dazed look on his face. It takes a good 10 seconds for him to realize it’s me, and then asks his regular question,

“Hey pal, did you bring me my alcohol?”

“No dad, the nurses say you can’t have any drinks,” I reply. A puzzled yet angry look spreads across his face.

“Well those nurses don’t know jack! I’m fine, and definitely fine enough to have a drink!” He tries to push himself out of his chair, but I grab his hand and sit him back down. He calms and lets out a yawn. “How is the football team doing? Think you’ll make it to the championships?” My heart sinks into my chest. My team had won the FCAC championship 3 weeks ago.

“No idea dad, we’re doing great at the moment though.” I continue to make small talk, but the conversation goes nowhere. I listen to him, his thoughts more scrambled than the eggs he tries to eat while we talk. The worst part is thinking how a man can go from being extremely smart to not being able to have a normal conversation.

“And now, some words from the son of Harold, KC” says the priest. I had prepared a speech about my favorite memory of my father, and repeated it over and over. I wanted it to show the great
times I had with my father. However, mixed emotions swarmed through my head. I missed him so much, yet thoughts of him reminded me of the anger he had caused me. Soon, I find tears in my eyes, and I pass my speech to my mother. She gives me a nod and goes up instead.

“I can remember how KC would constantly ask his father if they could go camping, but Hal’s idea of a good weekend did not involve sleeping in the middle of the woods in a tent...”

We pull up to a huge tower with big red letters on the top, “The Marriott”. A bellboy comes and takes our camping gear, and we walk through the big glass doors.

“Dad, this doesn’t look like the camping site to me,” I ask confusingly. I felt disappointed.

“Why son, this is the best camping site in the state!” my dad replies as he goes up to the front desk, and they hand him his card. I hop into the elevator with my dad, press floor 12, and wait patiently for the doors to open. We get inside our room, and take out all the camping essentials: lanterns, sleeping bags, canteens, and a bag of marshmallows. We head down to the restaurant, and delicious smells fill the room. We sit down together, and order a Shirley Temple, a Beefeater Martini with onions, and Dover Sole. “Pal, if you ever see Dover Sole on the menu, always make sure to get it,” he tells me. He told me stories, jokes, and I listened with full attention, enjoying every moment. We walk back up to the hotel room, stomachs full, and my father takes out the bag of marshmallows. He pops one in the microwave, and lets it cook. The marshmallow slowly spins. Soon, it starts to expand, getting bigger and bigger. It gets as big as my fist, and right before it explodes, my dad quickly takes it out, and it shrinks back down. I wasn’t sure if I’d be able to handle it exploding. He smashes it between two graham crackers and a piece of chocolate. “Here you go son,” and hands me the treat.

Years later, I found that just like my dad, I always ordered Dover Sole and hated camping in the woods.

The Pop Quiz

_by Erin Rigney_
_Fairfield Ludlowe High School, Grade 9_

Its tongue, patient and fierce,
Flicks the back of my neck.
\_Flick flick. Flick flick.\_
A rapid shot of anticipation takes control.
Then it is gone.

It comes again
Stealthily
Like a stomach virus in the night.
I knew it would be back for the kill.

This time, it’s here to stay.
It creeps inside me.
Its slimy, scaly, camouflaged body slithers around my head.
The sharp hiss sends a shiver up my spine.

It comes
Like a cancer
there’s nothing that can stop it.
I would run but it will follow me.
It waits.
I wait, too.
I know it will attack
But I don’t know when.
It stares, it sneaks.
It watches, it waits.

I tremble, I quiver
Like a leaf in the wind.
It sticks its tongue out to mock my fear.
Flick flick. Flick flick.

It comes at me with sharp fangs
Like a teacher with a pop quix.
It grasps, it coils, it pinches,
it suffocates, it smothers.
I tighten. I tense. I choke.
Its tangled body too strong to be defeated.

It finally attacks
Ripping at my insides
Gripping at my confidence.
I try to escape its clutch
But I’m a victim of Medusa.
I feel its poison seeping in my bloodstream.
A groan falls from my lips.

Before its venom takes effect
It goes, but not really,
Leaving its toxin to sink into my veins.

I pray for peace
Before anxiety comes again.

The Day I Grew Up

By Alec Williams
Fairfield Ludlowe High School, Grade 9

“The turning point in the process of growing up is when you discover the core of strength within you that survives all hurt.” –Max Lerner

“You three might want to sit down” my mother quietly stated as soon as she dragged herself in from the October cold. It was only two nights before Halloween, yet the frost already began to coat the outside world. The sky, just soaking up the last colors of dusk as she solemnly pulled her wet boots through the house towards the couch. My brother, sister, and I followed, and I could remember a time just two weeks before when I had last worn my shoes inside.

“Get your muddy shoes out of this house right now!” My mother screamed when she came to the end of the trail of soggy, mud-lined footprints that ran from the entrance to our house to where I was now resting. I jolted upright and tore my shoes off while at the same time trying to run past her to place them in my room. The ground quickly came up and smacked me in my face when I stumbled and fell to
the hardwood floor as I was loosening my foot from the shoe. “How many times do I have to tell you Alec? Now go to your room!”

Now, as I walk behind my mother on this dreary Thursday night, I wonder why it is she didn’t care about taking her shoes off. What had changed? She would never think of wearing shoes inside, let alone her muddy winter boots.

When she arrived at the foot of the couch, she threw herself onto it. She didn’t jump, but she fell down to the once comforting brown leather. She had never sat in the position I was seeing her in now. My mother sat as if she was expecting to receive support. This action was so unlike the mother I knew, completely contradicting anything I have known about or have been taught by her. Since I was born, I’ve been raised to not expect help or support. Now at 12 years of age, I’ve mastered the art of staying strong and smart through school and life. But this time was different...

Her expression melted away the rest of her face; it drained her of color, almost as if she didn’t have an expression at all. A black hole. Undeniable nothingness shrouded her eyes; those sparkling, brown, reassuring eyes were vacant, as if in hibernation, afraid to look, for they were already scarred. No sternness to her still eyebrows, no grimace of the mouth. Her pupils, fixed yet unfocused on a distant sight, but I would never know what it was, for there was no window for me to see what she was thinking. Her boneless figure sprawled across the couch, a rag doll thrown and forgotten. Her hair, normally brown as her eyes, is discolored as if for the first time since I’ve known my mother, she didn’t care about the way she looked.

The slow panting of my dogs breath kept time with the clock, rhythmic patterns of respiration mesmerized me for a full minute, the only thing that could be heard, the only thing I wanted to pay attention to. So innocent she looked, longing for someone to play with her, but tonight it was not to be. My little brother, 8 at the time, is the first one to crack. “Mom?” he asked, sensing that she wasn’t herself but not leaving her to her thoughts as my sister and I did. Another minute of silence went by, this time feeling like days. I stare at my mother, wanting so badly for her to come out of her trance, to be a mother. I only got a blank expression, to be etched in my brain, in return. My brother’s innocent face with that heartwarming smile and those bright green eyes vanished from view as a tear slid down his cheek, longing for our mother who was present, yet absent. I didn’t see the sparkle in those eyes again until Christmas morning, two-and-a-half months later.

My mom seemed to recognize his sadness and she snapped out of her trance, but didn’t lean in to comfort him as I was expecting. Then she spoke. I would’ve rather her stayed quiet. That minute of silence with a mother who wasn’t really there was better than what came next.

I stole a glance at my sister after the words were spoken, daring to look away from my mother’s face for the slightest of moments. Her eyes were shut tight, locked in a state of denial, not wanting to believe what my mother just said; as tear after tear spilled from beneath. Stay strong I thought, as my parents had always stressed that I do. I look to my mother for comfort, but her shoulder was unavailable, supporting herself. My brother looked identical to my sister, his dirty blonde hair was the last thing I saw before my own eyes shut and I pulled him in close.

I was only twelve at the time and my struggle to remain strong for my mother and two younger siblings only permitted me to shed a single tear that night with them. I had to show them that things were going to be ok. I waited to express myself until hours later, after they were all asleep. Only then, late in the night, when early morning had already begun, I heard the door shut to my mother’s room, and the flick of a light switch as the house went dark, did I finally mourn, using my pillow as a shoulder, the death of my uncle.
Code Blue

_By Hannah Carpino_
_Avon High School, Grade 10_

It’s September and the sky is bruise-colored purple
And every night I fit words between the notches of the spine
A trail of violet petals to the trellis of your neck
You said it was ugly, I told you I didn’t mind

I told you to make the pain literal
“Describe it to me, maybe I can feel it for you,”
The same way I turned the long-ago bleeding into fragile beauty
The loud voices into music for Friday nights
Outside a dingy white Colonial
Because you love dingy white Colonials

It’s been three years since the white-lined fields
And you say you still feel yourself shiver when you’re going by
And that implacable piece of you that swore you’d buried
Started to shake
And you pray
Words that you know like the back of your hand
Because that is what we are taught to do
We pray and plead to things we can’t see
And for years this is how we’re taught, this is how we believe
And still, every Hail Mary is oil in your water throat
Forgiveness does not come easy to you

“You’re going to have to start saying your good-byes,”
Says the orderly, because this is what he’s been trained to say to
White-faced fathers and white-faced mothers
But no one dies at thirteen
Shrivelng and shrinking in a tiny bed, and still the purple violet grows
I steal glances at you like they’d help me to breathe
The eyes with an intensity exactly like father’s
Prelude to the ski-slope nose
You’re miles away from the Bad Years now
And not afraid of anything anymore
Blue steel in your words like I’ve never heard before

I’ve never asked what it was like
I’ve never asked you to teach me how to be brave
All those stupid games of truth we plated and I couldn’t bring myself to
It’s November now and still we all wait outside
For the sky to turn purple or the jokes to stop or the full wolf moon
It’s the infinite patience, forever sand in the hourglass
And you are slipping between my fingers

In the World of Sound

By Anthony Flores
Stamford High School, Grade 10

When one thinks about the possibilities and combinations a few simple sounds make, he also
thinks about the tone of each sound, and the emotions they emit. Just as light bends when it hits water,
sound bends when it reaches our ears, and therefore, different interpretations of sound reach different
cars. Possibilities are endless, yet that is the beauty of creativity. Sound comes from vibration, and
vibration is undoubtedly, the power of creation itself. Tales of culture are told through perspectives
from forms of song and music and dance. Sounds of the world will unite cultures and settle disputes. A
child living the music of his culture obeys the sounds he feels in his mind. Yes, the arts speak with
innate personality like a child, and this child gives birth to a world of beauty and unity of its people.

There was a young man who believed in the power of music, who listened directly to each small
and intricate sound to understand the world behind nature and the meanings of a simple life. The world
spoke to him just as he spoke to it, the trees gave him air, and he returned the favor with the unity of the
music he created.

In the gray tall building at the epicenter of the action in the rambunctious city, where noise
began and troubles roared with fire, the young man woke up early in the morning to the glistening light
that pierced through the clouds. Even in the mornings the city screamed with the voices of vehicles
rumbling on the concrete pavement, their fierce engines and their heavy rubber wheels flying across the
city into the outer dusk. It was a depressing day for the common city folk, yet it was also one that would
tell its tale through this man, who had awakened to prepare himself for a long day with his studies.

He heeded attentively to the sounds of the morning with its wind that hit the flailing trees, with
its rumbling of threatening clouds and even the munching of his teeth as he chewed his bagel for
breakfast. Each told its own tale, its own story of the way the day started for this man, how cold or harsh
the day would be. He left his house in a swift hurry, for he was nearly late for the screeching subway
train.

The train’s warning shriek almost screeched out to the people around it to board immediately.
The businessmen and women, high school students, and other college students like the musician
himself, had to board the train as quickly as possible on this damp day. The musician rushed onto it
hearing the triumphant roar of the subway train spew out, “Well done.” The one hour ride to the
university, a constant calming and soothing wave of revolving noise, brought sudden drops of silent rain
splayed on the window panes relaxed the musician for the oncoming day of study, and the master who would press onto him only greater stress.

Each day these classes had seemed longer, and each day they had seemed more tiring and more of a job than an education, but the musician desired an entry into the understanding of the world of sound, for in the world of sound, the power of creation was everywhere.

The class was held in a large white walled room, where many other performers and composers like the musician himself, waited for the professor to begin at the designated time. “Is everyone here? Good.” The professor began to lecture briefly on the concepts of music, and then upcoming deadlines, and scheduled tests. Music theory is the most complicated class. Yet the musician had desired this knowledge for all of his life, for he understood the power of music; now he desired the complex world behind it. The class was the most stressful; for the professor’s monotonous prose style often swept sandman’s dust into the eyes of the students. The musician forced himself to stay awake; he couldn’t afford to fail a class he so deeply desired. After all, he was nearly failing.

Soon all of the money put into this class, all of the time and effort, would be meaningless. The professor only said a few words at the end of the lecture: “Remember that the deadline is next Friday.” Time felt short for the musician’s studies, and these words pushed all of the dreams and possibilities that much farther away.

Suddenly the familiarity of the musician’s world became cold and strange. Now dark and sullen sounds mixed with the percolating rain that dripped through the gaps in the leaves above the concrete jungle. The world of sound curled around the musician’s emotions, and he felt sad. Could this deadline be reached? Only time could tell.

Arriving home, he placed himself on a chair in the corner of his room still thinking of the world of sound that he so much desired to understand. With a stereo next to him, the musician fed a disc that held soothing classical music with the sounds of the generous piano, the sounds of the screeching violin and the triumphant blasts of the brass. Soon the rain stopped, and as the CD ended, only silence arrived. The musician opened his notebook after a long silence and looked at one hundred and forty measures of music he has written for a project. Lack of motivation and creativity is the cause of incompletion. “Hopefully, this will be finished.”

As the rain stopped, the birds outside his window chirped gracefully and mysteriously. The sounds of the early twilight filled his ears. The cars drove past his building with their auk-like voices that gave feelings of an odd serenity to the musician. With the rain gone, the musician left his home to walk in the park.

Evening was approaching, for the sun started to set on the city. The park eased his mind to a sense of serenity that stayed with the musician despite the overwhelming concern that he had to be cautious with the little time he had to finally complete his project.

He sat down on a bench under a large tree of many years. The after winds of the rain and the moving clouds moved the trees and the leaves fearfully across each other. Each vibration of the grazing of each leaf and branch created a sound much like the rain, which only contributed to the sullen emotion that portrayed the musician.

The musician, with his trained ear, suddenly heard energetic and jazzy music coming from a building across the street. The tremendous energy that the musician felt from hearing these sounds almost forced his body to move towards the club across the street.

The sounds of the many different instruments grew louder and louder and the noise of people became greater and greater as the musician got closer. The sounds of glass clicking, the voices of the people talking, the harmonic blends of the saxophones and trumpets sang softly from the club; it was beauty to the musician’s ears. Suddenly a wave of happiness and joy came upon the musician. He entered the club.

Blending in harmonious sound, music was telling its tale in this remote place, orchestrating its sounds to be expanded across all boarders. The sounds of the grand piano, with its well separated and controlled strikes on each beat and note, the trumpet screaming and whispering when it’s player allowed it to, the saxophone’s sweet and tender voice filling the room’s cracks and corners, and the drums giving
shocks of energy to the people in the room; it all had a beauty and a story to tell. Inspired to communicate his creation that would explain to all the importance of sound for the peaceful future of the world, he rushed to one of the musicians on stage after their performance. With enthusiasm the musician complemented and questioned them on their beautiful jazz playing.

“It’s nothing brotha; we just know how to let it drive us to do whateva,” swayed the saxophonist. “Nothing stops us from doing what we want, because the music is what drives us.”

“We feel the music man; we have a passion not just for the people clapping, but for the sounds of the music,” sparked the Drummer.

The Music is what drives them, and the passion is what creates their desire. The musician thanked the jazz players and left the club to return home to where his project was waiting for him. He felt inspired. He would complete his composition that he was writing even in the mist of the night, for the grace of sound gave him energy and promise, as well as joy.

Rushing directly to his notebook he turned to his composition. With a great surge of energy, the musician picked up his pencil. He only imagined great harmony in his mind, for he was in a world of sound.

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**Feudal Sins**

*By Trevor Seiders*

*Rockville High School, Grade 10*

Chaos rules like a fallen king  
Choosing Deceit as his queen  
He’s made Hope stand as the Court Jester  
“The best joke,” he brags, “ever seen.”

Wrath is the captain of the guard  
Gluttony the tasteful new cook  
Promise is down in the dungeons  
And Falsehood stacks the shelves with books

Greed keeps toll of the treasure  
Relishing vaults filled with gold  
Sloth sleeps through the warm day  
And rests through the starry night’s cold

Envy takes care of the castle  
Making it the best one around  
Lust remains in the torture chambers  
Where even the toughest man makes a sound

Pride cleans all of the mirrors  
And stares at himself when alone  
While Chaos reigns like a fallen king  
Watching from atop his throne

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**The Pink Pants Are On the Move**

*By Erin Gonyeau*

*Rockville High School, Grade 10*
“Oh my god! Katie, I am sooo fat! Like, seriously! After I ate that WHOLE sandwich, I could totally feel the weight piling on!” whined Jessica.

“Jessica, please! Do you wanna see fat? Look at these huge-ass thighs! I went up to a size 1 in jeans! I should at least be a 0!” Katie argued.

The 14 year old girls stare in awe at a Teen Vogue magazine, admiring the photo-shopped beauty of Kourtney Kardashian on the front cover. They sit together on a bright pink love seat in Jessica’s stereotypical teenage girl bedroom. The soft blue walls create a comforting environment. The only noise in the almost-empty house comes from the shiny, black T.V., hanging from the wall, which is boasting about some new blanket with sleeves. However, the girls are only paying attention to the magazine which is filled with lies and impossible hopes.

“Why can’t my hair be as perfect as JLO’s? It’s so gorgeous and voluminous! Mine is so flat and frizzy!” Katie complained.

“I know. My highlights are starting to fade; I need to go to the hairdresser soon. Maybe while I’m there, I can get a new style or something and try to make it look less ugly... if that’s possible,” Jessica added.

“Your hair isn’t that bad. I have so many split ends! My hair is starting to look like some overgrown jungle!”

“Order now and receive a second snuggie completely free!”

“At least you have eyelashes! I have to put on fifty pounds of mascara to try to make it look like I even have short ones!”

“To order your snuggie, call 1-800...”

“Oh my god! No one freaking wants a stupid backwards robe!” Jessica screamed at the T.V. She grabbed the remote and started flipping through channels. She suddenly stops on a channel chiding about these new skinny jeans that make you look instantly slimmer. Katie, who has been analyzing the magazine’s make-up tips, turns her attention to the brightly lit screen. Both girls’ faces light up as they listen intently to the cheesy announcer.

“You will grow so attached to these pants, you’ll never take them off!”

Jessica and Katie exchange glances and Katie says, “We need these pants!”

“But wait! There’s more!” the announcer persisted, “If you order now, you will also receive a free magic make-up kit! This kit is guaranteed to stop all the cheek-pinching from pestering aunts, and all the ‘Aw you look so cuteee!’s. This make-up will make you look more mature in just seconds!”

“No way! Katie, we neeeeed to order this stuff! Now!” Jessica shrieked, while scribbling down the “1-800” number.

“Uhuhh... duhhh! Every guy in school will be begging to date us!” Katie agreed.

Katie reached for the phone and started dialing the number. Classical music played in the background while she waited for a sales associate to “assist her with her purchase”. Finally, someone took her off hold and calmly said, “You’re calling for the pants. Correct?”

“Ummm... yeah.” Katie replied, turning towards Jessica with a weirded-out look on her face.

Jessica mouths the word “what,” and Katie turns the phone on speaker so Jessica can hear the man too.

“The pants and make-up kit are on their way.”

“Wait. I didn’t tell you how many pairs I wanted.”

“Two pairs are being delivered.”

“Oh... okay. Well how much does it cost?”

“Consider the pants a gift,” the man said in his eerily calm voice as he hangs up the phone.

“Well that was weird,” Jessica muttered.

On edge from the creepy phone call, the girls decide to sit down and continue reading their magazine. The T.V. was somehow turned off along with every light in the house except for one in Jessica’s bedroom. The house became extremely quiet, creating an uncomfortable atmosphere. All of
the sudden, the doorbell rings. Katie and Jessica both freeze and feel the blood in every vein in their bodies turn to ice.

“I wonder who that is,” Jessica gulped, “My mom has her keys, so I know she wouldn’t ring the doorbell.”

Jessica opens the white, wooden door to her bedroom and motions for Katie to come with her. Katie shakes her head “no” and scrunches her body farther into the couch.

“Just get up and come with me, you loser!” Jessica hissed.

Reluctantly, Katie stands up and slowly makes her way to the door, walking only on her toes, afraid of making the wooden floor creak. They both step out into the dark hall and make their way downstairs using the light from Katie’s cellphone. They stand just next to the door so that if someone was there, they wouldn’t be able to be seen through the oval-shaped glass pane in the center of the wooden frame.

“Go look if someone’s there,” Jessica whispered to Katie.

“But you’re the one who ordered it!” Katie argued. “I’ll go look.”

“I don’t see anything,” Jessica began.

All of the sudden, something bangs up against the bottom of the door.

“Oh my god! What was that?” Jessica asked, jumping away from the door.

Katie steps up to the glass and takes a look.

“Nothing’s there,” Katie reported, reaching for the doorknob.

Carefully, she turns the copper knob and opens the door just a tiny crack. She looks through the crack and sees a brown, cardboard box sitting on top of the well-used welcome mat. After looking carefully to make sure no one was around, she swings the door wide open and reaches for the box. The girls stare, open-mouthed at the open box.

“It says it’s from ‘Instant Wishes’. Wait… the order says pink skinny jeans and magic make-up kit. I think this is the stuff we just ordered,” Katie uttered.

“Nuh-uh! There’s no way it could’ve gotten here so fast! We ordered it like ten minutes ago!” Jessica argued.

They decide to open the box and check, and sure enough, there were two pairs of pink skinny jeans and one magic make-up kit. The girls stare, open-mouthed at the open box.

“How is this possible??” Jessica croaked.

“I don’t know. But since we have the stuff now, do you wanna try it out?” Katie asked.

“Okay, we should try out our make-up now!” Jessica piped up.

Jessica walks over to her dresser with Katie following close behind. She places the make-up in an open spot on the dresser. They begin painting their faces with the various types of make-up, following the suggested application instructions very carefully. When they are both finished they move back to the full size mirror to examine their new look.

Katie gasps and says, “We look so hot! We look like we’re seventeen!”
Satisfied with the results, the girls use Katie’s cell phone to take a picture to post on Facebook. However, their facial expressions change from the posed smile, to a look of horror when they see the picture.


“And look how skinny we are! It looks like we’re only bones covered in skin!” Katie added.

Terrified, the girls run over to the wall to make sure that isn’t how they really looked. However, when they looked into the mirror, they saw something so horrible, they burst out in tears. Their once young, soft faces were now bags of old, wrinkly skin, and their skinny legs have lost every ounce of fat.

“Oh my god! I think it might be the pants and make-up! We need to take it all off!” Jessica screamed.

The girls quickly grab some make-up remover and begin scrubbing their faces, trying to get the make-up off.

“It’s not coming off!” Katie whined.

They stop rubbing their faces and begin trying to pull the pants off. They pull on the pants with every ounce of strength they have, but they don’t come off at all.

“Why aren’t they coming off?? It’s like they’re glued to our legs or something!” Jessica shrieked.

They continue to pull on the jeans hastily, trying to get them off before there isn’t anything left of them. However, there was no way the pants would come off and eventually the pressure of the squeezing jeans became too much and the girls popped like balloons, with their old skin flying all around the room. The last sound that came out of their wrinkly, dry lips was a spine-chilling scream. This is why we, here at Instant Wishes remind to always be careful what you wish for.

Destiny Called

By Ashley Starrett
Rockville High School, Grade 10

Destiny called. She said to pack light.
Your answering machine blinks, her message waiting to be heard.
So pull out your suitcase, pack the car.
Pack a sweater for the icy glares.
Bring sunscreen for the heated arguments.
Fasten your seatbelts, she said, because it’ll be a bumpy ride there.
Grab your helmet for all the times you’ll fall.
Pack your high heels so you can look down on everyone.
Bring you mascara, so you’ll have something to say is in your eye for all those times
You’ll cry.
Don’t forget your toothbrush, she reminded you, for all those times you want your smile
To look good for the camera.
Pack a pair of scissors so you can cut them out of your picture.
Bring a ladder for the moments that you need a “pick me up”.
By now, she’ll think you’ve packed too much.
She’ll think you’ve been too prepared for the journey ahead.
‘Cause after all,
Destiny called. She said to pack light.
Modern Monopoly

By Lucy Tomasso
Farmington High School, Grade 10

Last week when I played Monopoly, I got to be Banker. To me, Banker is the coveted role in Monopoly: approver of transactions, keeper of money, and enabler of corporate dominance. When the two electronics-addicted children I was babysitting uncharacteristically recommended we play a board game, I was thrilled to revisit a game that kept my siblings and me endlessly at battle to become Parker Brothers' master real estate mogul. Even better, when Claire and Andrew willingly surrendered Banker to their fifteen-year-old babysitter, I jumped to accept.

No one can deny the traditional Atlantic City based game set has evolved since its origin. Yet this new game layout is almost unrecognizable. Park Place and Ventnor Avenue have morphed into Las Vegas and Times Square. The metal purse, cannon, and Scottie Dog tokens have been replaced by a cell phone, Segway scooter, and laptop computer. Opening a set mysteriously marked “Electronic Monopoly,” I searched for the traditional colored paper one, five, and ten dollar bills, eager to dole out each player's designated money. Nine-year-old Claire quickly shook her head at me in impatience. “What paper money?” she asked with a look of utter confusion: “This is electronic Monopoly. We use credit cards.”

In dismay, I shuffled through the set, amazed to find three Monopoly-branded plastic cards imitating Master, Visa, and Discovery. Each card came preloaded with fifteen grand. Even the “cumbersome” zeros had been nixed, replaced with a single K, so that $15,000 was now denoted as 15K. Similarly, a million dollar property is worth 1M. There was also a calculator-wannabe device with two slots: a green Receive and a red Deduct. When a player spends money, she slides her card into the red slot, simply types in the purchase price, hits either K or M, and the machine calculates the balance.

Gone are the days of counting out a player's change for $500 and staying aware of each remaining total. Gone are the quick transactions, the instant $200 pay-outs upon passing Go, and player-to-player haggling over interest rates. In today's game, each board move requires a labor-intensive ordeal for the Banker to type in numbers and juggle credit cards. The game lagged, the kids becoming distracted as I plodded through a seemingly-simple Community Chest collection - now for database funding for the local high school- which in reality involved over 15 buttons for just three players. Claire and Andrew blindly handed me their credit cards, not knowing it had added 6K or detracted 10M from their accounts. Not to mention that K and M meant nothing to them in their minds, the thousand and million shorthand was equivalent to a dollar sign.

Instead of plotting to have his Hat land on the B+O Railroad, costing opponents a huge sum, Andrew spent most of his money on the overpriced Disney World, although it had little true value on the board. Blinded by the lure of the flashy amusement park, Andrew forewent the opportunity of a profitable investment. “Why don't you buy the Liberty Bell?” I patiently implored. “The rent is much higher.” Andrew's dazed look implied the name meant nothing to him. ‘Who wants that?!” He yelled. “Disney World is cool. I don't need an old bell.”

I stared at the kids cradling their credit cards, just like they will 15 years in the future, and felt a familiar feeling of pity and frustration over the mindless values our digital world is instilling in the youngest generation. There are only six years between Claire and me, and yet she is infinitely more electronic needy.

Whereas my babysitters taught me how to spell "unique" and name the boats in Battleship, Claire was giving me a lesson on Wii Sports and yes, how to manage credit cards. These children were born into a world where parents provide their kids with Angry Birds as an easy distraction, not a picture book or puzzle. An app tells them when it is dark outside, rather than having a parent call them inside at dusk. When I was young, I marveled at how the magical dishwasher transformed dirty plates into clean.

Their technological wonder takes any question they could imagine via Google and spits out thousands of answers. As hands-on board games and a child's natural creativity slip into oblivion, the youngest
generation isn't being handed an improved standard of living. Instead, kids are inheriting something as fake as 'Electronic Monopoly.'

Dear Diary, Love Diary

By Casey Manzella
New Canaan High School, Grade 10

I remember when we first met. She unwrapped me from my constrained cardboard box. I gazed up at her curious face. She was not sure how to react to this unusual gift. I wasn't the doll she wanted or the dress she had picked out. I was something else.

That night she took me upstairs to her room. I remember how her warm, petite hands, still round with the innocence of childhood, clasped my leather spine. She picked up the tiny, silver key that had accompanied me in my box and admired how it sparkled in the light. She placed me on her little, pink table and sat in the chair next to me. The key still in hand, her big, blue eyes stared at me: her perplexity apparent, but a twinkle of excitement hidden beneath it. Finally, she did it. She took the silver key and placed it in my matching lock.

She stared at my blank pages spread before her, not sure what to do. She'd never seen a book that wasn't filled with pictures, showing her what to think. She'd never been given the freedom to make her own story. Eventually, she picked up a nearby pen, fumbling with its size compared to her tiny hand. She drew a picture. I remember it well. If you turn back to my first page it's still there, frozen in time. It was simple: a stick figure girl with a bow in her hair and a smile on her face.

Two years later after many of my pages had been filled with drawings she came home from her first day of school as the clock struck three. She ran through the house, ignoring the hello from her mother, and flew into the same tiny pink chair. She grabbed a pen, clenched it in her fist, and in slow, shaky strokes wrote her name, paying close attention to every letter and pausing between each one to recall how it looked. After she finished she gazed down at me, admiring her work. Tracing her fingers over the large, print letters, slowly reading, "Madeleine". With complete veneration of her work, she picked me up and hugged me close to her warm little body.

Over the course of the next year she came home every day with new words to write. She wrote the names of family members and she wrote the names of the objects around her: doll, bow, dress. The words became longer, and one word became a phrase, and two words suddenly became a sentence: I love you.

Eventually she learned how to put these sentences together. Watching her write her first story was like watching a bird jump from its nest for the first time: scared of what lies beyond their small, simple world, but too curious to resist the temptation of discovering something bigger, better. That day she told me of how she had lost her first tooth. She described to me the story of how at first when it wiggled and she was scared, and how her excitement began to grow as she pictured the tooth fairy flying through her window, and tiptoeing across her pillow to leave her a gift.

A reel fairy is coming to my haws!

The tooth fairy came to her house many times, and eventually there were no more teeth for her to take. Madeleine had traded them all in for little coins which she had then traded for candy. She had traded her two short pigtails for long, flowing hair and she had traded her pretty pink bows for a pair of silver bow-shaped earrings. She had traded her crayons for a bottle of nail polish and she had traded her dolls for a soccer ball, a lacrosse stick and dance class.

She began to tell me of her days at a new school, a bigger school: a school where she switched classes and a school where they gave homework. She no longer had much free time, but when she did, she spent it with me. She told me about winning soccer games, scoring lacrosse goals and performing in dance recitals. Each and every new experience she shared with me. She had just begun to learn French and she wrote a small passage in me.

Two years later her appearance changed. Her bright blond hair began to fade to a light brown and she was much taller. Her teeth had been trapped behind a cage of silver. Little red dots began to appear on her face. One day she unlocked me with the tiny, silver key and turned to a blank page. She began to write, her pen pressing strongly against my paper with excitement. There was a boy, "a gorgeous boy" whose blond hair "caught the sun just right" and who's blue eyes, "sparkled like moonlight on the ocean." Suddenly pages upon pages were filled with 'Madeleine and Mike' scrawled within a heart. "Mrs. Mike Smith" adorned my pages. Without notice she dropped the pen and held me to her heart with her long, thin hands and sighed.

A few weeks later she came rushing home from school. I heard her feet pound up the staircase and the door bedroom slam behind her, echoing through the house. There was a small tap on the door, "Madel—"

But she abruptly shouted, "GO AWAY!" The glass of her bedroom windows nearly vibrated with the sound. She grabbed me off of her desk, the small pink table was long gone by then, grabbed a pen and threw herself upon her bed. Tears streamed down her face, falling on me and smudging the ink as she wrote that she was ugly and not good enough for him. She viciously flipped back through my pages crossing out the hearts and the "Mrs. Mike Smith's with such force it left deep imprints on the pages underneath. She poured her feelings into me and she shared her secret insecurities through our silent conversation.

A few months later the hearts seemed to magically reappear, but this time "Mrs. Luke House" was scribbled in her dainty cursive. She told me of their first date to the movies where they saw Breaking Dawn and how wonderful it was. She told me of how she leaned on his shoulder and how he wrapped his arm around her. Before I knew it she was telling me of her first kiss, her cheeks flushing red as she described it.

Spring turned to summer, summer turned to fall and she began another new school: a school she described as 'the real deal'. She never had free time anymore, especially not to converse with me, only occasionally was an equation or the date scribbled on the corners of my pages.

While I used to be the one she carried with her everywhere, I was replaced by a cellphone that was constantly ringing. She no longer shared her feelings with me. She shared them with the world, posting them on Facebook. Her life was a chaotic spiral and to her I was nothing but worn-leather and paper held together by a silver lock, squeezed between a chemistry and an AP French textbook on a shelf.

She came home from school every day, threw her lacrosse bag down, took a quick shower and immediately began her homework. Not once did she glance my way for four years. Instead, she stared endlessly at a glowing computer screen where she typed literary essay after literary essay, no longer using her creativity or imagination.

She’s no longer awkwardly tall and skinny. Her body has filled out with nice curves and her hair is now a chestnut brown, so long it touches the middle of her back. The bright sunlight of an early fall morning shines through her windows making the layer of dust on me sparkle. Her closets are nearly empty and a high school diploma now hangs proudly above her bed. I hear her feet coming up the stairs, her high heels clicking against the wood. She has forgotten her cellphone charger and she’s back to get it. As she turns around to walk out the door she sees me sparkling in the sunlight. She picks me up with her perfectly manicured hands and gazes at me with her immaculately made-up face. She holds the tiny, silver key in her hand and her big, blue eyes stare at me: her perplexity still showing, but a twinkle of excitement hidden beneath it. Finally, she does it. She takes the silver key and places it in my matching lock.

She stares at my pages just as she did 15 years ago, only this time the pages are full. She tears out the last one writes on it, I love you, and leaves it on her desk. I am carefully closed, locked and gently slipped into her purse.
HONORABLE MENTION
GRADE II

Lauren Baretta, “A Pleasure to Burn.” Berlin High School
Cassie Bartol, “Homecomings.” Rockville High School
Kasey Burke, “The Greatest Thief.” Bethel High School
Alyssa Gunther, “Count on Me.” Rockville High School
Jasmine Jette, “Like an Autumn Leaf.” E.O. Smith High School

Reflections

By Julia Bonadies
Rockville High School, Grade 11

Part 1: Huntress
Shining from deep within her, she is her own guardian angel.
Porcelain skin untouched by the hands of the world.
Gentle like the feather of a dove where people can see the reflection of something that once was.
The treasure she keeps hidden in her heart.
Grace like poise haunts her every move with light.
Symbolizing her steadfast purity, the one thing she will not lose.

Part 2: Hermes
When dry words choke out color and stagnant hearts are too much to bare the wanderlust seeps in through the cracks and gets tangled in our hair.
Fumes tickle the fibers of boredom with adventure waking minds from their slumber.
Wandering through the fog only following the yellow lines guiding us away from home.
Carrying us to the nowhere that’s our somewhere.
Knapsacks packed with hand picked memories and gin.
Both make my head spin and bring back the familiar bitterness if mixed with the wrong dreams.
Dreams of gardens of Eden with little plots of land just for us and our weary souls.
But paradise is extinct and all that’s left is brick and mortar.
Eyes turn grey with broken ambition and we become lost travelers.
Forgetting what joy taste like and sick from feeling sorry for ourselves.
We are warmed by our mother the sun who lights are slow steps of fire, and as night engulfs us we follow the path of Hermes constellation as it guides us through the night to the nest of worn denim and broken promises.

Part 3: Persephone’s Prayer
Oh darling where are you in these winter months when I’m blinded by my blizzard.
You disappear leaving me alone where all I can see is white hate.
I need your kind touch to soften my eyes and warm my heart.
Your blanket of wisdom to cover my mind and awaken my soul from its hibernation.
Washing over me.
Strong like pine trees but ever changing like maples each fall.
Come back to me in the winds of spring and sing to me in the robins bounce, with flowers in your hair and grass to hide our bodies so the world will seem small.
Making our colors blend into each other until all we are is light.
Shining forth like a new day dripping with promises of dew and sweet kisses for wrinkled foreheads and counting freckles on me and you.
Days filled with hushed whispers and wishing on the decay of dandelions for the life that ran out.

Part 4: Styx Mortality
His eyes are a sea of forgetfulness.
Green and blue waves of sorrow crash down on memories.
Spiteful glances seeing turmoil.
Never at ease they sway back and forth looking to drag the fallen to their doom.
To bring them under a fitful sleep of regret.
Ashes in his mouth and dirt in his veins pumping the coldness that can never be contained.
Speaking the dead into debt he is the leader of the lepers.
The reeking stench of death on his lips as he whispers hate into their hearts.
Inhaling the darkness as it swallows him whole blackening the stars.
Forgetting the light as he moves through the tunnel of bitterness.
Splintered steering wheel grasped by bloody hands he is the captain of their chaos.

Part 5: Thanatos
Trapped butterflies stolen souls, in glass jars, with no holes.
Muffled out dreams, crumpled in a corner fade away from suffocation.
Torn wings with gapping holes make it easy for the wind to create new molds.
Shapes of decay and rotting love take root crushing my bones with stones blackening the sun.
Bruised knees and bruised hearts crawl through the night till I'm marching through the stars.

Disembodied, the pain subsides as light seeps in while the atmosphere swallows the tears that float by.

Childhood Memories

By Timothy Lyons
Rockville High School, Grade 11

Mary sat alone in an overgrown field. She had driven out to the big willow in the North West corner of her family’s farm. It was often used as a grazing area for her father’s cattle and other livestock.
A calm breeze had rolled through and one could make out the early chirp of cicadas. It was just about sunset, so everything was visible: the tire swing one of her father’s helpers had built for her and her brother, the two names carved in the base of the willow, and the long waves of pinkish purple cirrus clouds that crawled across the darkening sky.

Mary stood up, brushed off her jeans, and started to fold her blanket. She put it in the back of her father’s truck and pulled herself onto the roof. She’d gotten into the habit of parking off the dirt road a bit, just below the sturdiest of the lower branches on the willow tree and vaulting up so she’d have a good view of the farm.

As the sun retreated past the horizon, she started to see fireflies float around the tree and in the surrounding fields, recalling the stories her mother told her every warm summer’s night when she was younger, “God gave our family the biggest and strongest willow in all of Georgia,” and she would go on to say that it was such a magical work of nature, that the closer one got to the tree, the denser it got with “floating stars.” It was her way of saying that fireflies like to hang out there at night.
She squeezed her hand into her pocket, feeling for the small, pink cow that had settled at the bottom. Mary pulled it out and started to roll it around in her palm, inspecting it, remembering every detail. The last time she had seen the one inch animal was last year, on the same date.

The thoughts of childhood memories flooded her mind. She was drowned in sorrow and took a blurry, tear-filled, look at the swing set and the etched willow. All she could think about was her first and only best-friend, whose life was cut short by a car crash.

“MA + CJ
Best Friends For Ever”

That’s what was carved into the tree. Mary Allen and Caroline Jackson were two inseparable friends, broken apart by a preventable tragedy. Mary squeezed tightly on the little cow until her knuckles whitened. Tears were now streaming down her cheeks to fall and splash on her blue jeans. No matter how old she got, Mary was never able to hold back her feelings on the subject. Here she was, a seventeen year old, sitting in a tree and crying about someone who had died ten years ago.

She didn’t touch the tire that hung on ropes from the branches. It was sacred to her, and everyone on the property knew that the tree was the one place they didn’t go. It was for her.

She noticed a half full bottle of whiskey swaying with the soft breeze. The bright, lime green, light that came from the hundreds of fireflies gave the orange liquid a psychedelic glow. She put the cow back in her pocket, untied the shoelace that was tied tightly around the neck of the bottle and twisted the cork out of the mouth.

Mary took a small sip. She had started stealing cans of beer from liquor stores about two years ago, but none of that could’ve prepared her for the bitterness of the whiskey.

Mary wanted to feel nothing.

She jumped down and slammed the door of the Chevy. She adjusted the rearview mirror and pulled onto the path. The black and white rosary that hung around the mirror reminded Mary of where she wanted to go, but she wasn’t sure what she’d do there. She let the last bit of alcohol flow into her mouth and trickle down her throat, and then threw the bottle out the window where it shattered in the grass.

The only thing that stood between her and the grave was the main street that led through town. No matter what time of day, the street was always busy and full of people, even at this hour, when only the bars and restaurants were open. Even now, the streets were splashed with colors from neon blue Coors light signs and amber streetlights.

Mary slammed the brakes twenty feet away her street. She couldn’t drive tonight. She couldn’t...

She slammed her head down on the upper curve of the steering wheel. Tears continued to drip and form small streams that slid down past the golden cross and down the thin metal bar beneath it.

Mary turned on the brakes and shut the car off, pulling the keys out of the ignition.

She slid out of the car and staggered her way back to the front door of their family’s home, tripping over gravel and any small valley of grass that she encountered.

Once inside, she lay on the couch, thought of Caroline, and nodded off to sleep.

Quintessence

By Christiane Lee
Rockville High School, Grade 11

Part 1: Aphrodite

The clicks of sauntering heels
Echo down the littered street,
Greased with parasitic vermin:
Humans and rats alike.
She tucks away freshly earned bills,
Bad breath escaping,
Ripped tights snagged on sequins.
One night’s salary
Buys a sickly girl’s meal.
Car honks nibble at the fallen pride
Of a lowly woman
As she crosses the road,
Limp hair, legs tense,
To another greedy customer
With kneading hands and little money.
A seedy apartment is occupied for the night,
While on the table of her own room,
A clipped rose grows brown.

Part 2: Apollo
The ebonies and ivories
   Bounce down
And back to their place gracefully,
Grazed by my nimble fingers,
Slowly harmonizing
With the quiet melodies
I hum.
Erasers scratch out chords,
Graphite marks rests.
Chirping cicadas applaud
A mediocre masterpiece
In the making.
Slow, long-case chimes
Move through the rooms,
Kissing the slumbering surfaces
With the glowing, golden light
Of a summer’s morning sunrise.

Part 3: Ares
Mud splatters up
Coating burnt fabric and
Drying on worn boots.
A drop of sweat,
A bead of blood
Trace down warm cheeks
Scarred with broken pride,
Glass hopes and screaming fears,
Salting the open wounds.
Unable to escape
Ongoing pugnacity,
Sobbing hands search pockets
For prayers as the midday sky
Falls dark, and air grows thick.
Worry beads entangled between fingers,
Firing erupts and the world turns black,
Rising quickly to meet a blood-spattered, empty skull.

Part 4: Artemis
Creeping footfalls
Crunch the downed arms of
The forest’s looming warriors,
Scattering the fatigued deer.
The surviving branches sway softly
In the night’s tepid breath,
Mimicking the folds and flounces of
A girl’s white nightdress
As she tiptoes through
For a forbidden midnight stroll.
Crickets chant a lullaby
Sedating the wild for
A few meek hours,
While on the edge of heaven
Where the stars meet the Earth’s grass,
Luna rises, yawning
Stretching arms overhead after
A prolonged nap.

Part 5: Athena
Stalemates on the porch
Summer the silence
Of a humid dusk.
A loyal rook rises himself,
Trotting forward.
The king paces and ponders,
Queen rides to A8
Checkmate.
Brushing sounds of resettled pieces
Begin a new challenge.
The trees sigh longingly,
Contemplating their own moves,
As a petite, brown owl
Lands softly on branches,
Clawing on rotted bark.
While watching the ground closely,
He swoops to the grass with grace,
Nabbing a scurrying rabbit.

A Lifetime of Wonder

By Talia Maselli
Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts, Grade 11

I think the oak tree in my back yard must have stood for a decade, more or less; I have never been good with time. But I can recall playing in it as a younger child. My father would bring home spare wood, and together we built a tree house. It rested between two of the sturdiest limbs of the tree. There
was no ladder, just branches as a makeshift staircase. On my way up, the bark would scrape my knees, but I did not complain because no man cried over a little blood, and it made my skin thick.

My grandfather on my dad's side was a strong man, sturdy as the oak tree. He had fought in two wars, escaped too many near-death experiences, and still managed to hold himself together. I was convinced my grandfather was infinite, impenetrable; he simply was not the kind of person to lie down.

My father worked the night shift, and besides summers spent in our tree house, he was hardly ever home. But my grandfather was. In the lonelier, restless nights of my youth, when I should have been sleeping, he could have taken my night light and told me it was foolish for a boy my age to fear the shadows stretching through the windows of my bedroom. But he did not. Instead, he sat in my bed and offered an array of stories he could tell me.

He would wonder out loud if he had yet told me about the little boy he saved in Korea. He had, but I would listen patiently as he told me again, and again, and I would always beg him to recite it one more time. Eventually we had both come to realize his tales would fill my head with wonder, rather than dreariness. I think they filled his head too. Some nights, when our sleeplessness crept into the early hours of the morning, he would put on his favorite CD and we would listen to 'Brandy You're a Fine Girl.' In his gruff voice he would speak the first four lines: 'There's a port on a western bay, and it serves a hundred ships a day, lonely sailors pass the time away, and talk about their homes.' He would then fall into stories about my father, and how much I was like him; I think my, grandfather must have believed we were the lonely sailors. Once, I asked out loud if this counted as passing the time away, talking about our homes; a home without my father. We both knew it was time to go to bed then, and that night I fell asleep, sadly, with those words carving my dreams.

I will always remember how my father and his father so enjoyed watching a blanket of sparkling snow cover the oak tree and droop into icicles off its branches. With each new layer in its trunk, I would have never believed the snow could become too heavy. But between the weight of autumn leaves that had yet to fall and an early blizzard, the oak tree proved to be too aged to weather another storm. With a sound like thunder, it came crashing down. I don't really know why, but I'd like to say I watched the tree house crumble, perhaps for closure, or evidence that the strongest wooden arms could have failed me. Was all the protection I had known so weak?

I could have cried myself to sleep all those hollow nights, but my grandfather taught me not to pity myself when I was lonely, because love means you can never be apart; I think my father must have known this, as well. My grandfather never cried, and I assume this is why his bark was always so solid. But he was slowly aging; trying to live with brittle bones and fatigue that was beginning to seem ever present. He was war-torn, with a heart too fragile to beat into the forever I had always imagined. And so, as my grandfather sleeps, he remains as present as my father's kisses on my cheek after he leaves and I sleep alone, no longer afraid of the shadows the oak tree once cast through the windows.

The Middle

By Romana Pilepich
Bethel High School, Grade 11

I must say a word about middles. A middle is that which connects those ubiquitous points—A and B. In tessellation, a middle is removed, but in all other cases, a middle is said to be the journey. It's what happens after 'once upon a time' but before 'fin.' It is the moment between you clicking on a link and when it finally loads. It is what happens between spreading jam on bread and brushing crumbs off your shirt. When you balance, literally and metaphorically, you must find a middle. If you take away the head and tail, you are left with a middle. But in essence, a middle consists of your everyday life. It is the meat and potatoes. The plotline. The 'good part.' Anything but the beginning or end. Books and the Eifel Tower: and the growth process of a rose, and, well, everything, are almost exclusively made of middle. You are living middle, right this second. But you've forgotten it.
The problem with middles is that people do tend to forget about them. They ‘get caught up in daily life—going to work, picking up the dry cleaning, tying their shoes—forgetting that daily life is the middle. They get caught up in the mundane, assuming that the middle only consists of the mundane. And in doing so, people forget that middles should be celebrated. Middles are magical! Middles were made for playing ninja, having pillow wars, and picking daisies. Take a moment to celebrate your middle by watching the sun flame across the sky and execute a perfect backflip into the Atlantic, cheered on by rosy clouds. Learn something new—it’s illegal to sell gum in Singapore, you know. Read a book, and experience someone else’s middle. Paint that masterpiece you’ve been meaning to create. Put down your technology. Feel every emotion fully. Take time to experience the journey.

Live your middle or else you might find that it is...

the end.

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Anywhere But Here

*By Conner Sloat*

*Rockville High School, Grade 11*

Send the trains; make haste for the last frontier,
Send the schooners, frenzy overseas to my dream.
Ring the bells in my cathedrals,
Open the skies to let it flood the land of doubt.

Trudge through the bogs to the horizon,
Tear to the fore and face the uncertainties of all.
Shrug off the judgment of clouded minds.

Clutch your luggage close,
part ways with struggle and memory
that have withered you to dust.

Break away from shackles of conformity.
Run from corral into pastures of optimism.
Rejoice will overcome the toughest of minds.

Waves crash into our new shores,
A steady breeze rolls through meadows,
skyscrapers will explode into the clouds.
What we have going will work,
but remorse will strike with such a force.

To those who don’t come to our new dream,
you will stand crippled.
Have mercy on me, for I am the captain
of the last voyage to the places of hope.

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Taking the Stairs, Two at a Time

*By Sana Suhail*

*Greater Hartford Academy of Math and Science, Grade 11*
When my grandmother died, no one was there to hear her last words. But I am pretty sure she called out my name once or twice. My grandmother came to live with us five years ago. I remember sitting on the beaten-down couch of our apartment, struggling with my English homework, when my aunt called from back home. “Brother,” she cried desperately to Father, “Mother is in a critical stage, I have no money for her treatment, please take care of her. I beg of you.” My father got off the phone, crossed to the small tin box we kept in the kitchen, took out our savings, and started counting them. My mother argued with him about how long we had struggled to make our ends meet and how we would never be able to buy a car if he just kept wasting their hard earned money. But two months later, my father and I were on our way to LaGuardia to pick up my grandmother and welcome her to the Land of Opportunity.

The first day she was here, we sat her down on my bed, propping her small, fragile body upright with pillows. My father left for work earlier than usual that day, but I knew deep inside that he was saddened to see Grandmother so weak. My mother and I spent that day buying her medicine and making her soup. She was hesitant to speak, because of her hacking cough and persistent wheezing. But when she did, it would be the same few lines: “Where am I?” and “Take me back.” Eventually, my mother returned back to her job and I returned back to middle school. I despised every day I had to go that wretched school. The teachers snickered under their breaths when I couldn’t understand what they asked, my classmates threw wet paper balls at my back, and bully me because I only had three shirts and two pairs of pants. When I got home, I cleaned out my grandmother’s bed pan, poured her fresh juice, opened the window to the foggy New York air, and sat by her bedside, holding her calloused, yet delicate hands in mine, tracing the maze of blue and green veins branching under her translucent skin.

One day, while sitting with her, I got so frustrated with the big English words in my literature book that I screamed and slammed it on the floor. My grandmother, who had just drifted into sleep, awoke, startled by the noise. Immediately, I regretted doing so. She laughed quietly and beckoned for me to sit next to her on the bed and began telling me a story. It was about a little boy who did terribly in school and would come home every day, crying to his mother, telling her his dreams would never come true. But his mother never gave up on him and encouraged him to keep trying, and eventually that boy grew to be a very successful man. “That man your father,” she finished, her eyes glistening with nostalgic tears. “Never give up, my young Aaliya, the path to success never was straight.” So, I picked the book up off the floor, lay it on my lap, and began reading out loud to my grandmother, who listened intently. She liked how the words sounded coming out of my mouth. The cadence, the rhythm, the beat of syllables was synonymous with the faint beating of her heart, though both of us were oblivious to the meaning of the text.

From that day on, there was nothing I looked forward to more than coming home from school and listening to my grandmother’s stories. At one point she had told so many, I began writing them down, word for word, in case I ever forgot. For those brief two hours after school, before my parents got home from work, our otherwise hollow apartment filled up with the creativity of my grandmother’s tales, as my pen skated along the sheets of my notebook. It was our little sanctuary, void of the troubles and worries of the world.

When I began high school, my grandmother’s health took a turn for the worst. Almost every day, she was rushed to the emergency room and the doctors prescribed her one expensive drug after the other. Soon, our savings ran so low that some nights we slept without eating supper. I could understand my parents’ frustration; sleeping on an empty stomach was not what they had had in mind when they had come to America: what happened to the streets paved in gold? But what I perhaps missed the most were the stories my grandmother told. Now, when I came home, she was usually sleeping or too ill to speak. Without her reassuring words, her tales of inspiration, I felt more vulnerable to my classmates’ taunts and high school became a nightmare.

There were some days when she was able to speak and for those days she asked me to take the stairs, two at a time, so we wouldn’t waste a minute. “I don’t have much time,” she whispered. Her every breath became valuable; my trembling hands, barely gripping the pen, mimicked hers, as I feverishly wrote down everything she said. My father began coming home less and less, my mother barely came
out of her bedroom; it was as my grandmother and I who were the sole inhabitants of the apartment. I still came home and poured out my worries, my frustration, and my confusion to her; and she listened intently, although she didn’t understand American customs.

The last time I spoke to my grandmother was in the spring of senior year. I came home with an acceptance letter to Yale University clutched tightly in my hands. I had tried not to crease the envelope nor the letter too much. I had read and reread it so many times, but I was still in disbelief. A girl like me, who still didn’t understand idioms and colloquialisms, who had a dying grandmother, whose family didn’t even own a car despite having lived almost a decade in America, was there holding an acceptance letter to an Ivy League school with a full scholarship. I remember taking the stairs two at a time, rushing into my grandmother’s bedroom and telling her. She just sat there, unblinking. My smile disappeared.

“Grandmother, are you alright? Did you take your medicine?” I asked.

“Yes, Aaliya, I am fine, but this letter means you will have to go far from me soon. Who will take care of me then? Who will listen to my foolish stories?” tears streamed down her face. I realized I was seeing my grandmother cry for the first time. She outstretched her arm and I collapsed on to the bed, the acceptance letter drifted to the floor, forgotten. “Grandmother, as long as you’re here, I will never leave you,” I promised. “No, Aaliya, it is time for you to begin your future, realize your dream. You earned it. My blessings are always with you,” she replied.

That evening, both my parents returned from work in a jovial mood. My mother had gotten a raise from the factory bought a decent dinner for the first time in months. As we sat down to eat, I remembered my acceptance letter and went to my grandmother’s room to retrieve it, it was still on the floor next to her bed. I picked it up and glanced at Grandmother’s face, it seemed to glow with a tranquility I envied. My parents were elated to hear about my acceptance and together we prayed for my success and Grandmother’s health. For once, everything seemed perfect.

The next day I left early from school. My grandmother’s sorrowful words of me leaving still echoed in my head. I took the stairs two at a time to our apartment, went into my grandmother’s room and found her in the same position as I had seen her last night, except now she was not breathing. I shook her a few times, lifting one limp arm, then the other, discovering my notebook of stories wedged under her arm. I opened it to the last piece of advice my grandmother had given me: “Denial is the greatest obstacle to success. Accept your fate and move on.”

Of course there is a void where my grandmother once used to be. Her stories, her values, her life lessons were the foundation of my character. But the most I can do for her now is continue to defy the odds, continue to succeed, continue to leave my own legacy. One day I want someone to listen to my stories, write them down, implement them. Every now and then as I walk down the narrow streets of New York, I her words of wisdom echoing off the buildings, suspended among the skyscrapers. And I always take the stairs, two at a time, just so I don’t miss anything.

Curls

By Ellie Woznica
Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts, Grade 11

Though you hated it,
I loved your hair.

I never told you—
but the way your long curls bounced
off your hips
never failed to leave me breathless.

You used to complain
and tell me it had a mind of its own,
but I enjoyed its thoughts
and the stories it whispered in my ears
while my head rested
on the pillow next to yours.

When you were sleeping
I’d take a lock
between my calloused fingers
and study each strand,
letting it run across my palms
and return to its perfect spiral.

That one ringlet
that would slip out of line
and gently graze your forehead,
was my favorite.
When you realized its presence
you’d roll your eyes and push it away.
But it would always sneak back out,
and you, sighing,
would always give up the battle.
Each time
I was glad you did.

When you asked me to shave it off,
I tried to talk you out of it.
But no matter how much I pleaded,
you continued to stare yourself down in the mirror
and say *The clippers I use
on the dog are under the sink.*

I did as you asked,
but with each shift of the clippers I watched
the pile of brown get bigger
on the bathroom floor.
When you saw yourself
almost completely bald,
you laughed,
*Chemo can kiss my ass!*

Rubbing where your hair line
used to be, your smile faded.
I watched as tears form in your eyes,
wrapped my arms around your fragile body,
and held you as you cried.

We gave your hair to a wig shop
that gave them to sick children for free.
I wanted to get it back,
but I had fallen in love
with the hairless you.
The warmth of your head
on my chest as we slept was foreign,
and left me alone to focus on other things.
Like the way your cheeks lift slightly when you laugh,
and the way your eyes brightened
when the doctor told you
You have one more month
to spend with me.

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HONORABLE MENTION
- GRADE 12 -

Eileen Dinnie, “University of Magnan – Common Application.” New Canaan High School
Rachael Nutt, “Julia.” Rockville High School
Kaitlin Ostling, “A Conscious Adventure.” New Canaan High School
Amy Ozga, “Sensations.” Bristol Eastern High School
Wheatley Raabe, “For Vermont.” New Canaan High School
Lauren Silver, “Metronome.” Rockville High School

The Pool of Memories

By Christina Flynn
The Williams School, Grade 12

He was swimming in memories – the pool within the deep folds of his psyche.
Recollections chlorinated by longings. The susurration of water roared in his ears.
Thoughts of the present reduced to murmurs.

~

Russet leaves of autumn clung feebly to their branches.
Shimmering eyes searched his. I’ve missed you.
I’ve missed you too.
Do you really mean it?
Yes.
A smile that made his knees tremble.

~

Mathematic equations in a red notebook. He said, I think the answer is pi over four.
She laughed. You know, the chocolate shop has lots of Valentine’s candy.
I don’t like Valentine’s Day. It’s a silly holiday.
A playful toss of her hair. It’s my favorite aside from Christmas! For the whole month of February in my house we eat on heart shaped plates. There are cupids in the living room. My mother always buys me earrings.
He looked away and drew a deep breath. What did you get for problem six?

~

---
He never fought memories. He let them flow over his body like translucent, tourmaline water. Some remembrances were ripples in the pool. He felt them like a whisper in his ear and lingered beneath the surface with a fleeting sense of nostalgia. Others were waves that engulfed him in surges of rage and fervor. They whirled him into a tumult of frothy regrets. He knew he was not strong enough to stop them. He did not try. He swam breathless laps. He waited for the memories to give way to the present, for the ladder to appear at the edge of the pool, for the hand to pull him out of the water. Even then, he never felt dry. The dampness with which the pool left him was perplexing. He did not know whether to dive back in or shake off the chilling droplets of the past and bask in the uncertain warmth of the present.

I'm disappointed in you, said his father. Report card in hand. Don’t you want to make me proud?

The words stung him like a slap. I tried my best.
No you didn’t. It says here that you earned a B in chemistry, but I know that you’re capable of perfect grades.
The rest are A’s, he mumbled. He looked at the ground. Next to his father, his feet seemed so small.
Don’t make me ashamed of you. It would be one thing if you were stupid, but I know that you’re not. You’re just being lazy. Do you think I got to where I am by being lazy?
No. Angry tears in his eyes. He blinked them away.
I expect no less from you. Can you promise me that you’re going to try your best?
Yes. I’m sorry.
Good. I’m coming to your track meet tomorrow. You’d better impress me to make up for this.
I will, Dad.

I’m disappointed in you, she said. Voice frosted with reproach.

He paused, summoning up all the abhorrence in his being to fortify a barricade of antipathy.
The blush of her doll-like cheeks. Every defense crumbled.
Why do you try to hurt me all the time? You’re my friend. I don’t treat you like that. Her parental tone worse than shouting.

He was shaking with anger. Self-loathing. Sentiments he longed to confess. The desire to kiss her.

Why do you hate me?
Everything you make me feel. His voice broke. I can’t deal with this.

At nighttime, his bedroom was a cathedral to the past. When he finally shut the door behind him, it was safe to dive into the pool of memories. He could experience them without restraint. He didn’t have to explain his smile or his tears to anyone. When he felt that raincloud of a pillow against his cheek, he closed his eyes and remembered.

What did you get on the history test? he asked her.
Ninety-seven. How about you?
Ninety-six. Suddenly embarrassed. Do you want to do the homework now?
Sometimes I have no idea what you think of me. She looked at the ground.
What do you mean?
What do you think of me?
I think… his heart was racing… you’re my best friend.
Her lips smiled, but something in her eyes hinted at dismay.
He winced at his mistake. He should have taken the chance.
I’m glad, she said. Sorry, I can’t do the homework with you now. I’ve got to go.

He mourned the words that died on his lips before they could ever be uttered. His head throbbed for every moment of misplaced prudence. Why couldn’t he ever say what he meant? His body quivered in despair. The pool was overflowing. Tears swelled his eyes. Tears wet his hands. Tears trickled down his neck. Yet some angel of sleep erased his sorrow, leaving behind only tumid half moons beneath his eyes.

When she was next to him, she was a combination of electrifying vitality and all the dreamlike visions he had conjured up of her when they were apart. The pool was refreshing. When she looked at him, the memory of a thousand other glances rushed into his mind. When she laughed, the silvery echoes of a thousand laughs bounced off the water. He could feel the present magnified by the past. He was swimming with his head above water.

I admire you more than anyone, she said.
Do you really mean it?
Yes.
I admire you too.

He was swimming in memories.
Swimming.
Swimming.
Swimming.

Mark’s Collections

By Hannah Gerhard
Rockville High School, Grade 12

My father collected cameras.
Never the pictures
Or even
The moments.
Just the cameras.

In my living room,
We had this
Tea-stained,
Old oak
Chest.
Where he placed his pride,
Glass windows
So we could look at it
Walking by.
So we knew he was worth more
Than spreadsheets,
PowerPoints,
And absence.

One time,
While driving to tap class,
We forced words
From our mouths
To ease the air.
He told me how many humid hours he’d spent,
Around the age of nine,
Standing in his black basement.
It’s use:
A dark room.
His parents would leave him alone,
As he developed film.
Five brothers to argue with
And he chose to
Develop film—
Fiddle with his cameras
In a basement,
With no lights.
Maybe the only time my father ever seemed
Mysterious.

He stopped collecting cameras
The day my mother asked him
To collect her.
And twenty-two years later,
His chest,
The only place he ever stored
His hobbies,
Is out of sight
And therefore
Out of mind.
He hasn’t a hobby anymore,
And I think even he
Forgot he ever had any.

When I was around eight,
I overheard my mother and him exchanging
Yellow sighs.
More breath from her
Since she had more life than him
To give away.

She asked,
“How?
How did you stop?
Where do you keep your sentiments?”
Held her arms out,
Grasping an imaginary recycling bin.
Words, pictures, people, love,
Gifts, tears, children, shame,
Alcohol, cigarettes, diagnoses, disinfectants.
They dripped from her flesh—
Sun block-covered sweat.
Her corneas outlined in purged guilt.
She begged for answers.
Begged for reason—
Amnesia.
Basements of empty light and whispered devotions.
“Tell me how, Mark.
How did you stop collecting?”

He didn’t have her answer,
And, ultimately, never would.
For he did not understand it himself.
And ever since that Tuesday
He seems to walk in a way that implies
He kept the question with him.
Moon-colored angst stings his usual calmness.
Bothered, or rather,
Confused.
Or maybe even
Nostalgic.
I think he even went and bought a new Timex.
Figured that was his way of
Getting his time back.

Maybe it bothers me most
That no one else sees it—
The loss of thought,
What my mother calls passivity,
What I call
Sickening.
Having to wash yourself away
In order to love.

A quarter century ago,
The same time my father chose to collect my mother,
He chose to stop
collecting himself.
Adopted her fractured past,
And called her pain his own—
Separating the man he was raised to be
From the man he needed to become.

It’d take years
But I’ve come to understand
The cameras weren’t meant to take pictures,
Or harvest memories,
Or even fill him up when needed,
Like a half-empty canteen
To soothe dehydration.
They weren’t meant to make him an artist or
Give off an illusory persona,
The way a fast pulse doesn’t immediately
Point to narcissism.

To me, my mother’s question seemed simple.
I held the answer before she even designed the question:
There are no more dark rooms,
No more pulsing chests,
No more sport-car polaroids,
Or ten-dollar film;
There are no more cameras,
Let alone— moments worth developing,
Simply because
There is no more
Mark.

Distance

By Catherine Malcynsky
The Williams School, Grade 12

I stirred at the sound of a crinkling plastic bag, loud and to my left. Peering through my lashes, I saw the pudgy Chinese man beside me fiddling with his bag of peanuts. As the haze of sleep between us faded, I let my eyes wander over him, while his thick fingers chased nuts around his tray.

I gave him a name: Hector. I gave him a hobby; he collected vintage baseball cards. I also gave him my house. He would live in it, and change the sitting room while my daughters fiddle with their grandmother’s dolls into a room for porcelain plates and fancy silverware. Hector would hang a black-and-white picture of Central Park over the mantle in the foyer. Where my husband smokes cigars and takes conference calls, Hector will play billiards. He would finally hang curtains over the wide kitchen window, never feeling the need to stare out from glass each morning until he finished his two cups of coffee.

The cabin air smelled like leather and bubble gum and generic dog shampoo. I gazed around me at the varying shades of grey and blue, and watched the flight attendants’ slick, manicured buns as they bobbed up and down the aisle. As a tall, thin blonde passed, I named her Paige. I gave her a love of fettuccine Alfredo and deep purple nail polish. And I gave her my car—she would like it, the smooth leather interior and knack for speed. She would hang a peach-mango air freshener from the rearview mirror and put her Starbucks cups between the seats. She would take it for long drives down quiet roads, the way I once intended to.

The low, periodic chimes of the plane reminded me of the doorbell, and the way my golden retriever barks at it. I gave her to the lanky teenage boy across the aisle. I named Lennie. He would hear her howling despite the clunky white headphones over his ears; he would call her into his kitchen, smiling when she bounded towards him. She would jump up and put her paws on the knees of his baggy jeans, and Lennie would laugh and take time out of a busy day to kneel down with her. Lennie is not a dog person yet, but she has a way with kids.

I slid my feet out of my shoes and rested them on the bag I had tucked beneath the seat, a smile tempting my lips as I recalled the barefoot freedom of childhood. The sunlight slanted through the inch of window unmasked by the plastic shade, highlighting the ballet of dust above my lap. I watched the flecks, floating and falling, and didn’t think about the tiny, busy world thousands of miles below me.
There was a woman one row ahead and across the aisle, sitting quietly in her seat, flipping through the airplane magazine that nobody ever seems to read. I named her Stella, and I gave her my husband. She was pretty, with high cheekbones and soft brown eyes. She had gentle-looking hands; smooth skin and dainty fingers. She would soften him a bit, and stitch him up well.

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A Sonnet for Silence

By Xhesika Pasholli
The Williams School, Grade 12

Tomorrow I think I won’t say a word.
Every tired vowel that lumbers
from my lips will stop at two pursed borders;
each syllable will pause and roll backward.
While sounds surrounding me run in discord,
they taunt my tongue and leave angry blisters.
Uttered, a swarm, a buzzing fog that renders
me immobile, disgusted, and unheard.
Today my words clot and settle around
me, resigned to black bits that cling on my
skin. If someone passes they’ll float in air
like a hundred little, black gnats. And I
will watch and sigh as they fall to the ground.
And next time I won’t speak them to sink there.

---

Dreamcraft Hill

By Danielle Rini
Rockville High School, Grade 12

Atop the hill in the town of Dreamcraft,
The Carnival opens again.

A wisp of chilly air blows over the muddy fairgrounds below an ash colored sky. Overhead, dark clouds create a thick mask which hides the misty treetops of the outlying forest. The asphalt leading up the steep hill is wet with yesterday’s rainfall and today’s morning dew. Around the area, there is a dense silence. All except for the occasional calling of a crow in the distance, no sound leaks out from the headland above.

A musical silence rises from the gates,
As they quaver in the wind.

~ * ~

People gather around the Carousel,
Mystified by its cast,

Past the swaying wrought iron gates, the red and white Merry-Go-Round lies ahead. A little boy stands peering over the queuing line fenced off by rusting steel beams. His little hands grip the bars tightly, watching the motionless ride with interest. The ornate horses which galloped slowly around their course no longer take pride in their colorful saddles, for now, paint slowly chips and peels away from their wooden structures. Their feathered plumes, now brown from lack of care seem to weep as they
bend towards the ground. Although the carousel sits in a defiled state, the little boy still stares, taking in every detail. But as the wind picks up again and the horses slowly sway on their poles, the boy blinks, releases his hands on the rusted corral, and turns away.

*What once held a parade of dancing beasts,*  
*Their talent shattered and passed.*

---

*Walking under the beams of the coasters,*  
*Had always been a thrill,*

Across the way from the Merry-Go-Round, the sounds of roller-coasters still echo though the dying wind. Chains lifting the wooden cars up their slopes and squealing wheels upon oiled tracks as they fell had created a cacophony of terror and amusement. Today, the cars remain in their stations, retired from their usual drive, their structures too dangerous now to pass on. The very beams holding them in the air have slowly withered away under their own weight. The little boy, wandering now when his eyes catch sight of the magnificent creations standing tall above his head. Gazing upwards, his eyes follow the tracks, trying to figure out all the twists and turns which cars used to fly through. Shifting from the tracks to the framework, coiling wooden girders have slowly loosened, some tearing away from each other and hanging by an invisible seam.

*But by wandering now under its structure,*  
*Wood may splinter and spill.*

---

*The teacup ride was where guest would unwind*  
*As they twirl and whirl and spin.*

Over the asphalt now, liter and scraps of old pieces of paper dot the ground. Empty popcorn cartons and cotton candy cones lay flat, caked with mud. Napkins and forks missing tines scatter the ground, occasionally moving when pushed by a gentle rush of wind. Trash gathered around the teacup ride, abandoned plates finding refuge between the glossy handles and turntables. The gates which protected people from the twisting vehicles swing open and close with a clatter of iron upon iron. The boy still not through with searching the park peers over the control panel of the amusement ride. Every button, every switch on the slate seemed to stare back into the boy’s dull eyes. Lifting a hand and dropping it over the bright green sphere, the ride flickers on for a brief moment before it stops again and lets out its last coughing breath. The teacups still again, its power drained and now gone forever.

*The lights that once flickered in the dark,*  
*Have now been forever dimmed.*

---

*Towards the swings which used to fly,*  
*Their chains always hanging.*

Beside the choking teacup ride, the swings on their binds used to dance in the wind now ripping through the hillside. Their links created a tune of metal grinding together in a chorus with the sound of clashing bells. Now, however, the violent winds whip against the swings without a sound. Still silence except for the crunching of blown leaves across pavement leaks through the area. The sound of hanging chains is no more as their shiny metal sheen now dull with the color of umber. Rust lines each segment preventing movement and constricting into permanent shackles. Stepping over the torn down iron gates, the boy, bored after the teacup ride, sits down on one of the still baskets. Pushing himself forward and back, he manipulates the chains into bending to his desire. Swinging, he looks around the park wondering what to do. There were more places to explore but not enough time in the day. Night was
approaching and he hated to be out past dark. Letting the swing come to a stop, he hopped off the 
ripping woven seat and climbed back over the broken gates.

\begin{quote}
Now rusted tight with lack of flight, 
Finally stilled of swaying,
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
The people who wandered here once would cheer,  
And run towards the colored rides
\end{quote}

Walking back through the amusement park proved a challenging task. The little boy’s legs were 
torn up and tired from his exploration. The cuts etched into his cold skin almost burned now from the 
constant wind ripping through the air. Looking up at the sky, the dark clouds seemed to grow darker 
with every passing second. Rain was going to fall soon. The boy’s white eyes flickered back and forth, 
trying to register how far he had wandering into the carnival. Passing by the dying rides again, his feet 
crunching newly falling leaves, he walked on with no avail, aimlessly through what seemed a maze.
Opening his mouth and tasting the air, he could only detect the scent of rain and his own rotten flesh. 
Yearning for his true desire, there was not a living soul left in the place of abandoned thrills. Closing his 
jaw, he limped forward faster now, feeling like an animal left in a cage to starve. There was no food here 
and his previous detection had been from the past, now a faint memory.

\begin{quote}
Now their faces fresh from decay  
Made the others run and hide.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
So now if you travel to Dreamcraft Hill  
You may have to stop and stare, 
The townsfolk here have become the walking dead, 
Tourist and travelers beware.
\end{quote}

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Forsaken

By Lauren Silver
Rockville High School, Grade 12

Part I.
Her hands clasp the figure and she traces the curves of it. The wood of the cross is dark and dry and 
she can almost see him carry it to the peak of the hill. She closes her eyes to shake the image from her 
mind, hoping to free herself. A strand of hair falls in front of her face. The man sitting next her is quiet. 
In his hand he holds a bible and his fingers curl around it like vines closing it and locking it shut. “If you 
want to be a follower,” the man says, “you must be willing to give it all to Him.” The words mull over in 
her mind and again silence leaks into the sanctuary. Again her eyes close, her eyelashes brushing her 
hands as she leans forward. “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.”

Part II.
As the rain falls past the windowsill she waits for the sound of the door. The heavy inhale of the drag on 
her cigarette fills the echo of nothing in the room. From her apartment she can see the steeple. It's 
cross seems to mock the dust in the corners. She sees people moving below. Families. She wonders 
how many of them have gone to church today. The pearls that line the women’s necks and the silk ties 
wrapped around the men remind her more of escape than salvation. “Come to me, all you who are 
weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” She wishes the people could hear her scorn through the 
holes in the screen. As the door to her apartment opens she cringes with the thought of what the rest of

---
the day may hold. Her stockings catch on the corner of the radiator and the hole threatens to grow with every step. She shifts towards the bedroom, and softly closes the door. Standing in front of the mirror, she wonders if it will ever be worth it to change.

Ode to an Alarm Clock

*By Maia Sacca-Schaefler*

*The Williams School*

With too much optimism,
I set the time for 6 AM,
not caring at night
about the pain
of the morning.

You wink at me,
with fluorescent blue eyes,
shining,
glowing,
protective and alert
while I sleep.
Your square head rests
parallel to mine,
waiting,
watching,
and you never complain,
or take a day off,
from your
tireless vigil.

Then you know
it is almost time.
You suck in
a breath
as the seconds pass,
waiting
some more.
And at 6:00
with a sweet melody
you pull me
from my dream,
lightly tapping
my shoulder,
reminding me
I can escape
from my mind.

You welcome
me back
into reality,
consciousness,
with tiny chirps,
like a chorus of crickets.
Your sounds
bounce around
my ears,
tickling them,
prying open
the dark layers
of my dreams
and digging
through to find me buried deep within.
You emerge
from the swirling shadows,
firmly gripping
my hand
as I stumble after you.

Springing up
I find your eyes
and see them beaming
at me,
reminding me the night is over
and you comfort me,
telling me I can face the day
and anything that awaits me.

I pat your head,
and force a smile,
requesting just
a few more minutes.
And you oblige
without protest,
waiting again.
In seven minutes
you call out to me,
this time with a bit more urging,
and your reassuring voice guides my head from the pillow.
Your light shows me where to put my feet.
I rise up,
looking back
into your eyes,
clicking the button
that gives you freedom,
release until tonight-
when we meet again.
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