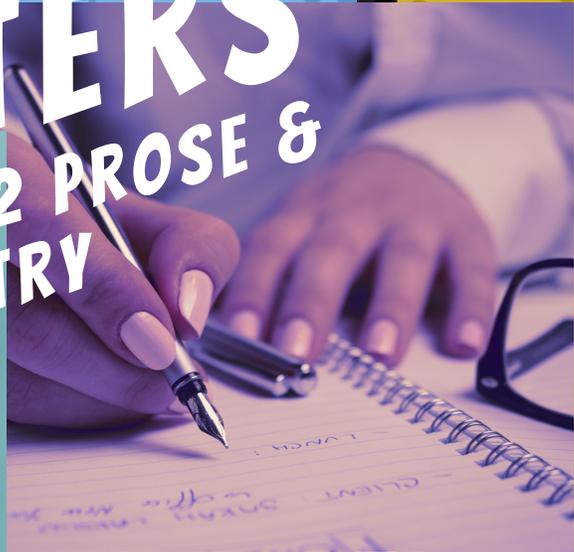
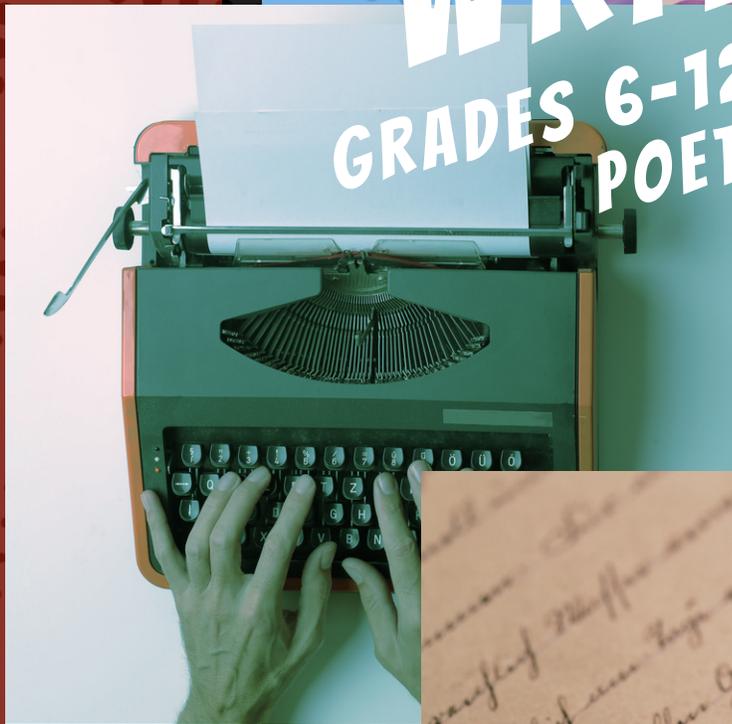


S P R I N G 2 0 2 4

YOUNG SOUTHERN STUDENT WRITERS

GRADES 6-12 PROSE &
POETRY



EDITED BY: LUIS A., UTC SENIOR

CREATED BY THE UTC ENGLISH DEPARTMENT IN
PARTNERSHIP WITH SOLIT

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INTRODUCTION

IT IS AN ABSOLUTE PLEASURE TO BE PART OF THE SOLIT CONTEST. THIS ANNUAL CELEBRATION OF CREATIVE WRITING IN HAMILTON COUNTY IS MY FAVORITE PART OF THE ACADEMIC YEAR. IT IS A JOY TO SEE SO MANY MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY COME TOGETHER, PROMOTING LITERACY AND THE CREATIVE ENERGY OF EMERGING WRITERS. THE SUBMISSIONS THAT FOLLOW DEMONSTRATE EXCEPTIONALLY STRONG WRITING WHILE ALSO PROVIDING GLIMPSES INTO THE WILD IMAGINATION OF YOUNG MINDS. THANK YOU TO THIS YEAR'S WRITERS AND THEIR TEACHERS. YOU'VE GIVEN US MUCH TO THINK ABOUT, ENJOY, AND APPRECIATE.

MANY THANKS TO CHELSEA RISLEY, SOLIT EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, WHOSE GENEROSITY AND SUPPORT OF OUR AREA'S OUTSTANDING YOUNG WRITERS IS INTEGRAL TO THE CONTEST'S SUCCESS. THE PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN SOLIT AND THE UTC ENGLISH DEPARTMENT EFFECTIVELY PROMOTES AND CELEBRATES THE REGION'S LITERARY ARTS. I LOOK FORWARD TO AN EXCITING FUTURE AS WE GROW THIS CONTEST AND ELEVATE EVEN MORE YOUNG WRITERS!

I ALSO WANT TO THANK THE REGION'S DEDICATED K-12 TEACHERS WHO WORK TIRELESSLY TO INSTILL THE VALUE OF LITERATURE AND CREATIVE WRITING IN YOUNG HEARTS AND MINDS. I AM GRATEFUL FOR THEIR EFFORTS AS THEY TEACH STUDENTS TO ENJOY THE ART AND CRAFT OF WRITING. WITHOUT ELEMENTARY, MIDDLE GRADE, AND HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS TEACHERS, WE WOULD NOT HAVE SUCH FINE WORK TO CELEBRATE.

AS WE ACKNOWLEDGE THESE YOUNG PEOPLE, LET'S ALSO THANK THE GROWNUPS IN



THEIR LIVES WHO INSTILLED A LOVE OF LITERACY BY LISTENING TO BREATHLESS ACCOUNTS OF ADVENTURES, MADE COUNTLESS TRIPS TO THE LIBRARY, OR READ A FAVORITE BEDTIME STORY "JUST ONE MORE TIME."

THANKS ARE ALSO DUE TO THIS YEAR'S CONTEST JUDGES. EACH SUBMISSION IS CAREFULLY READ BY A FACULTY MEMBER FROM THE UTC ENGLISH DEPARTMENT. OUR FACULTY VOLUNTEER TO SERVE IN THIS CAPACITY WITH PLEASURE. IN FACT, IT IS NOT UNCOMMON TO HEAR FACULTY SHARING SUBMISSIONS THAT ARE ESPECIALLY FUNNY, CREATIVE, OR INSPIRING. IT IS ANOTHER WAY WE CONTRIBUTE TO THIS WONDERFUL CITY AND REGION.

THANK YOU TO LUIS ALEJANDRO, AN OUTSTANDING UTC UNDERGRADUATE ENGLISH MAJOR, WHO SERVED AS THIS YEAR'S MANAGING EDITOR. LUIS WORKED TIRELESSLY TO FACILITATE JUDGING, COMPILE WINNING SUBMISSIONS, AND CREATE THIS YEAR'S DIGITAL BOOKLET. HE HAS SPENT COUNTLESS HOURS MANAGING THE CONTEST AND HAS DONE SO WITH PATIENCE, GRACE, AND MATURITY. LAST, BUT NOT LEAST, THANK YOU TO DR. JESSICA MCCARTHY, THE CONTEST'S FACULTY EDITOR, WHOSE WIZARDRY WITH EXCEL SPREADSHEETS KEPT THIS CONTEST ORGANIZED AND ON TRACK.

NOW, WITHOUT FURTHER ADO, I HOPE YOU'LL READ AND ENJOY!

**ANDREW D. MCCARTHY
UC FOUNDATION ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR
UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE-CHATTANOOGA
CHAIR, YOUNG SOUTHERN STUDENT WRITERS**



SIXTH GRADE PROSE

6th Grade Prose - Untitled

Yellow is the color of sunflowers, daffodils, and happy faces that even the grumpiest people can't help but smile. It has positive emotions and optimism.

Speaking of happiness I live with my sister who is the best roommate of all. One day after school, I could smell the mouth-watering turkey, sweet bread rolls, and lemon meringue pie. That night I brushed my teeth and went into bed.

The next day, I was surprised to see that everything was yellow in my room and bathroom, even the bathtub, toilet, shower curtains, and soap. Maybe some one is playing a prank, or this is just a dream. I went down the stairs to the door and was in awe of the yellow world. All the people looked like yellow minions.

Feeling disoriented, I rubbed my eyes and pinched myself to make sure I wasn't dreaming. But everything remained yellow, and the people still looked like minions. I realized that something strange was definitely happening, and I needed to figure out what it was.

As I walked around the yellow world, I noticed that everything seemed happier and more vibrant. The sun was shining brighter, the birds were chirping louder, and even the flowers seemed to be blooming more brilliantly. It was like the color yellow had brought a newfound joy to the world.

After wandering around for a while, I came across a wise old man who told me that I had been chosen by the yellow spirits to bring happiness and positivity to the world. He handed me a magical yellow crystal and told me that it was up to me to use its power wisely.

Feeling both excited and nervous, I took the crystal and decided to embrace my new role as the bringer of happiness. I went around the town spreading joy and positivity wherever I went, and soon enough, the entire world was filled with happiness and laughter. And as for the yellow color, it remained a symbol of hope and optimism, reminding everyone that even in the darkest of times, there is always a bright, sunny side to things.

Manvi Peesari

Chattanooga High Center for Creative Arts

Bella Paris
Monahan
English 6 Honors
8 November 2023

Speeding on Standifer Gap Road Should be Stopped for the Safety of Ourselves and Others

Speeding is a problem all over the world. I would like to talk about one road in particular that I have noticed people speeding. I have noticed people speeding because I live there. This road is called Standifer Gap Road and it is located in Ooltewah. It is the road I live on and my grandparents live on it too. This is a road I think needs to fix one serious problem: speeding. Our community should stop speeding on Standifer Gap Road.

First, we should stop speeding because it is very dangerous for the people with us, and around us. According to Chattanooga.com, one very bad accident happened on Sunday, February 24, 2008. A man was killed in a one-car accident. This was a crash caused by speeding (“Man”). This was a very, very serious incident that was a speeding problem! This shows how serious the problem of speeding is. Another example would be Wednesday, March 8, 2023. Three people were sent to the hospital; one of which was airlifted to the hospital because of a wreck. “Several people were trapped inside one of the vehicles following the crash, the Tri-Community Volunteer Fire Department said, and had to be extricated by firefighters.” These people were in danger on Standifer Gap Road in yet another car crash (“UPDATE”). This is just two incidents out of many to show us why we really need to stop speeding to protect each other.

Second, we should stop speeding because the Bible tells us to take care of one another. Matthew 22: 37-39 says, “37 And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (“Matthew”). The Lord tells us to love each other. To love each other we must care for each other. Caring enough for each other to go slow and keep people safe. This is a major reason to stop speeding.

Third, by not speeding we respect people. The law says we should

not speed. The bible says we should not harm people or their things. These two things go hand in hand for what I am about to say. I live on Standifer Gap Road. There is a small hill by my house. My mailbox borders the road; when I go to get the mail there is always someone coming down this hill. I always have to be paying attention very, very closely because someone is always coming down that hill faster than they should be coming. Innocent people need to be able to get their mail without having to worry about a car coming down the road way faster than they should be coming and causing a problem. According to the Chattanooga Times Free Press “We don’t realize the impact that speeding really has. It could kill someone” (Sessoms). Someone coming down that hill might not realize they could seriously injure someone or something because of how fast they are going. If we stop speeding we could help so many people, and so many accidents that could be very serious will be nonexistent.

In conclusion, Standifer Gap Road has people that speed every day. As God's children we need to take care of the community and be careful when we drive. This is why our community should stop speeding on Standifer Gap Road. By not speeding we follow the word of the Bible, take care of ourselves and others, we lower the chances of wrecks, and we follow the law.

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Student's Name: Bella Paris

School or Homeschool Program: Chattanooga Christian School

“The Report Card Rush”

Lloyd Kanis leaned against the hard brick wall. He hated P.E., but he found watching his classmates quarrel over a silly ball quite amusing. He kept his eyes fixed on a young boy with dark brown eyes, his twin brother Joshua Kanis. Joshua turned to Lloyd and beckoned him to come play baseball, Lloyd sank deeper into the shadows, of all sports baseball was his least favorite. He'd much rather sit in the velvet chair at the library and read till dusk. While he daydreamed, Joshua jogged up to him.

“Why won't you play?” he asked.

Lloyd sighed, “You know I'm not good at sports.”

“So? Nadia Moontrimmer is playing and she's not that good. you've gotta at least try Lloyd, for me?” Joshua pressed.

Before Lloyd could answer, the bell resonated through the field like a bat screeching in its cave. Lloyd stifled a grin, he knew if Joshua saw his relief he would be enraged. He picked up the book he had been reading earlier and nodded toward the road back to school.

“C'mon, let's get out of here before the grounds keeper sees us standing here.”

Lloyd and Joshua marched down the plain dirt road. The two usually had a contest to see how long they could march without breaking their stance. They came upon the towering school building, Timberwolf Middle School. They pushed the doors open just before the principal walked out from his office.

“Joshua Kanis!” he boomed, “My office, now!”

“Why? What'd I do?” Joshua retorted.

“You dare question me?” the principal's sharp, sallow face reddening. Joshua's eyes widened.

“Yes sir.” he mumbled as he trailed behind the principal.

Lloyd sighed, almost once a week Joshua was blamed for something he didn't do. The next few classes would be dreadfully boring without Joshua's ever present snarky remarks. He braced himself. It was the last day of school and today would be when he got his report card. He knew his grades would be decent, but he wasn't so sure about Joshua's. No. He would wait for his brother. After all, he was the older twin. He had to look out for his brother.

It was about two hours until Joshua finally exited the principal's office. He fidgeted, which usually meant something was wrong.

"Well, what did you do this time?" Lloyd asked sarcastically, though it was no use trying to bring humor to something like this. Joshua resumed fidgeting.

"He thinks I stuck pins in his seat." He muttered something else under his breath.

"Well, did you?" The words somehow slipped out of Lloyd's mouth.

Joshua shot him an icy glare. But Lloyd could tell Joshua was hiding something, it was written all over his face.

"Well if you're not going to tell me what's wrong, I'll tell Dad you went to the principal's again," Lloyd threatened.

"Don't!- I mean, I'm not hiding anything." Joshua said nervously. Lloyd hid a laugh with a cough.

"Whatever you say." Joshua attempted to change the subject, and failed almost every time.

"Have you got your report card yet?" he asked.

"No, I've been waiting here for you." Lloyd replied casually. Joshua rolled his eyes,

"You didn't have to do that."

"Yeah, I did." Lloyd countered.

The boys continued repeating "No, you didn't." and "Yeah, I did." for about five minutes until their eyes fell upon the clock. It was 3:00, only half an hour until school ends for summer, only half an hour until their report cards would be handed out.

They wasted no more time, running into classmates, they dashed down the hall to their classroom. Just before Mrs. Willis finished handing out report cards, Lloyd and Joshua burst through the door.

"Did we make it?" Lloyd wheezed. Mrs. Willis laughed, the wrinkles around her eyes and mouth deepening.

"Yes," she said kindly, "You two just made it."

The boys let out sighs of relief as their teacher handed them their report cards.

"Here you go boys, have a nice summer."

"That was a close one." Joshua said as he and Lloyd headed for the bus.

"Sure was," Lloyd agreed. They would probably laugh about this when they were at summer camp.

"Not so fast." It was the principal's assistant, Ms. Karen. Lloyd and Joshua gulped.

“You two were out of class for two hours!” Karen shoved colossal piles of homework into the boys’ hands.

“Have a nice summer, boys.” Ms.Karen smirked. Lloyd and Joshua groaned.

“Well, we almost got away with it.” Lloyd sighed. They burst into fits of laughter and headed towards the bus for the last time.

Student's Name: Nora Rector

School or Home School Program: Signal Mountain Christian Cooperative

The Orange and White Cat

The orange and white cat lurks around the corner of an alley. In the middle of the alley lies a gray mouse. On one side of the alley lies a quiet office building. People come and go without paying attention to the orange and white cat or the mouse. On the other side of the alley, there is a loud restaurant. That is why the mouse is here. In the blue dumpster around the back of the building, in the alley, the mouse will find food. In the dumpster, he can eat as much as he wants. Little does the mouse know that his hunt for food will take a bad turn as he goes from the hunter to the hunted.

A cat likes to stalk his prey before he strikes. In the shadows of an alley are the perfect places to hide. Watching the mouse's every move, analyzing his every action before... POUNCE! The cat flies through the air being able to make split-second reactions. The cat's paws grab the mouse. The mouse manages to escape the grasp of the cat's claws. It did not escape the cat yet though. While fleeing, the mouse was scratched. The mouse was running as fast as he could, but the hurt mouse could not match the speed of a cat. The cat catches up to the mouse and grabs it in his sharp teeth. As the cat gets ready to deliver the final blow, a door opens startling the cat as he drops the mouse. "SHOO, SHOO, get out of here" yells an angry chef.

The cat quickly looks for his capture, but the mouse has escaped. The cat is disappointed, but his hunt is not over. For an alley cat like him, hunting is how he eats. This alley cat is different, because this orange and white cat does not hunt for the meal. This orange and white cat loves to lurk in the shadows and analyze his prey before he catches it. The orange and white cat does not hunt to live... he lives to hunt.

Student's name: Jordan Wolfe

School: Hilger Higher Learning



SIXTH GRADE POETRY

In summer I usually walk to my treehouse.
The humidity makes me feel sticky, so I sit on the cool and smooth rock
under my treehouse with my legs and arms spread apart.
I get up and feel better after the cool breeze hit my neck.
I love that feeling.

In fall I go up the ladder in my treehouse and admire the sheer amount of leaves.
The crackling of the leaves satisfies me.
I love it whenever I hear the wind chimes in a beautiful morning.

In winter when I was walking to my treehouse
I felt the crispy steps on my feet. When I look out into the backyard,
everything has a tint of white.
I hate the annoying sound of my coat swishing under my arm.

In spring when I look at my surroundings, I love all of the weedy white flowers.
In my opinion this is when I think that gardens are at their peak.
The worst part is the smell of pollen.

My treehouse has always been a wonderful
place to look over yard and admire
all the changes that happen over time whether
the changes being big or small.

Phoenix Ayala
Chattanooga Christian School

The sun is shining
The birds are singing
The sky is the color of sadness

But one day
the sky will fall
One day
The birds will die
One day
the sun will turn into a black hole

This day
The earth is filled with beautiful people
And ugly hearts

They don't know that living is a miracle
They don't know that reality is not a lie
They don't seem to know that they are human and
They could die

They seem to forget that life is beautiful
And never stop to appreciate
The beauty of nature
And when they see it
It is much too late

Fatemeh Kassaee
Hunter Middle School

Two Creeks

The white, powdery snow covers the world
around me like a blanket as my skies fly down the mountain
and the cold air bites at my rose-colored cheeks.

I glide to a stop as fast and graceful as an arrow in the wind.
Click-click, my boots are burdensome. I take ponderous steps
across the fresh snow to run into a burst of warm air.

I melt into my chair like the puffy marshmallows
in my steaming hot chocolate.

Flowers of bright red and dark blue dance around me
with orange dotted sparsely. The cool breeze
wisps past my face lightly at a soft whistle.

I smell the pollen of a thousand flowers
as I walk the familiar ski trail, this time the snow
looked like a moth-eaten blanket, only on the higher up places on the mountain.
The sun shines through the bright green aspen leaves
reminding me of summers dawn.

Tall, jagged mountains cut the sky's horizon like knives
and Penny, my puppy, chases a stick with her happy skip-like run.
Libby, my other dog, bounds as she hunts for critters
in the tall grass and weeds. I imagine myself in the same place
only months ago, standing in a winter wonderland version of this spot.
Today I open my eyes to a different kind of beauty. The sky's
electric blue while the sun burns intensely. I listen to the rustling of bushes
and see a young fox roaming in its beauty.

I wear a light jacket now walking
the same sidewalk, same trail, same beauty.
The ground and trees are specked with cold frost.
The grass crunches beneath my steps as I walk
and my breath floats in front of me signaling winter

is to come once more. The aspen leaves glisten colors of bright reds, golden yellows, and vivid oranges. The leaves floating to the ground soon will be blanketed by snow.

Knowing that it's been another year of excitement,
I realize I have new traditions. I also have a new family member to share it with.
I can't wait to find out what new adventures we'll go on.
This place will be here no matter the season.

Gunnar Boggs
Baylor School

My bed is crisp with the freezing air of my air vent.
My fluffy, faux fur covers keep me warm as I sleep on my frigid bed sheet.
I feel my cozy puppy laying against my legs while I watch Netflix on my iPad.
My mind is filled with the faint caroling music coming from my Alexa,
waiting eagerly for Christmas to come.

As I lay down in my comfy bed, I feel the chilly new spring air.
My ears are filled with the high-pitched chirps of baby birds,
coming from the dogwood tree outside my window.
That first popsicle of the season is so delightful.
I see the tiny orange blossoms of my mom's tulips out of my window.

I constantly hear my brothers playing and screaming outside with their friends.
The sweet taste of the red, white,
and blue "Bomb pops" drips from my chin,
onto my white summertime covers.
I finally feel the cool breeze from my window on my arms and legs,
now that I can relax in t-shirts and shorts.
The sun shines through my window and makes me so hot,
I kick off my covers and lay under my soft, thin pineapple blanket.

Halloween decorations on my shelf frighten me at night when I try to sleep.
I see the sweaters on my floor just waiting to be worn.
My faux fur covers have been brought back out for the chilly season!
I plop down on my bed with a hot mug of apple cider which will probably spill.
I sit in my bed drinking my cider,
and eagerly waiting for Christmas to come once again.

My bed is my safe place.
It gives me the comfort of love.
It is my own home,
full of emotions.

Aurelia Saggio
Baylor School

Imagine

Imagine a cat
As big as a bat,
Imagine a snail
As big as a jail,
Imagine a worm
As big as a germ,
Imagine a rabbit
As big as a racket,
Imagine a dog
As fat as a hog,
Imagine a human
As big as someones passion,
Imagine a bee
As big as me

Student's Name: Olive Mabry

School or Homeschool Program: Chattanooga Christian School

Redwoods at Dusk

Needles sink down into the dark soil
as a breeze whistles through the vast forest.

A steller's jay flies up above,
taunting the creatures below.

The flora across the land has faded to silence,
and everything has muted its tone.

In the canopy above,
the moon continues to bleed upon the vegetation,
and the world has come to rest once more.

Nicholas Herring
Chattanooga High Center for Creative Arts

The Last Poem

The quiet shadows
turn around the room,
and chain my pencil to paper
As I write you one last poem,
now I think of you.

Student name: Pippa McKenney

School: Hilger Higher Learning

New York

Bustling streets of bundled up people
The water is frozen without a ripple
Snowflakes fall down from the sky
The breeze moving leaves frosty and dry
Hot cocoa being sold on the streets
Melted snow running off roofs of sleet
30-foot tree towering in the night
Hundreds of ornaments large and bright
Kids running around in the snow with joy
Children unwrapping gifts with a toy
Choirs singing a Christmas carol
People buying warm winter apparel
A Christmas movie playing in the park
Stars gleaming in the pure, black dark
A fat man flying through the air
Flying reindeer, a sight so rare

Nolan Hagan
Baylor School

“Hidden Secrets”

The smell of dead fish invades my nostrils,
as I relish in the hot July sun that threatens
to burn my skin if I stay in its gaze for too long.

I wade into the water that is calling to me,
the ripples across the surface
asking me to come.

I plunge underneath the blue liquid joy,
and the dirty water gets into my mouth,
the foul taste of mud greeting me.

I pop back up to the surface,
The humid air filling my lungs.

Dogs are barking in the distance,
I realize that summer is the season of chaos,
but the river, as much as it changes throughout the year,
stays the same, a calm and peaceful haven for people who long to feel
the water’s icy touch
And discover what it hides in the deep reaches of its arms.

Thin, papery leaves fall like angels to the ground,
shining in all their glory as if to say, “I am the most beautiful”.
The foul taste of smoke touches my tongue,
while individual grains of dust stick to the roof of my mouth.
The leaves get into my boots, and rub against my skin, flaky and hard.
In the distance, a leaf blower ferociously attacks innocent angels the color of the sun.
The unique taste of fire tickles my nose, making me close my eyes,
as I watch the smoke make the air shimmer.

Everything around me seems dead,
the optical illusion that the world has ended,
a dirty trick that the life around me is playing,

as if only they know that they will soon return to the world beautiful as ever.
The wind screams at me, telling me to go away, but I hold my ground.
The frigid cold bites my skin,
the same burning sensation the sun had given me all those months ago
My skin is taking on a red tint, and soon it will be the color of beets.
The cold air gets into my lungs, and every breath I take is icy
I raise a s'more to my lips, and taste the sticky, sweet goodness.
The cold somehow invades my nostrils,
as if somehow, it has taken all five of my senses,
but I also smell a faint whiff of smoke,
the welcoming warmth of fire, and the remedy to beet colored skin.

The life has returned to Earth,
stretching itself out, greeting the world.
The trees have buds on them once again,
and the soft grass underneath my bare feet waves hello,
the beginning of a new, fresh start.
The river has begun to return, and out of excitement I rush in,
The cold jolting me, the river's way of greeting me.
The clean river water fills my mouth,
a fresh beginning from the muddy dirt that the summer will soon hold.
The smell of flowers overpowers me,
and far away, a lawn mower is jolted awake from its long hibernation,
and once again begins to shave the Earth's head,
making sure the newly born bugs, and the lice of Earth, stay away.
The birds fly again, and begin to sing, telling everyone that it is a fresh start,
and a new beginning.

Mary Elizabeth Hicks
Baylor School

“Seasons”

I sit on the grass
gazing at the striped insects
landing silently
on bright yellow sunflowers
blending in
with their surroundings.
The perfect camouflage
there's quick a gust of wind
that is hitting the apple tree;
which won't budge
hosting its lone apple being eaten by a squirrel.

The crisp scent
of the leaves
invades my nose,
as they fall
slowly giving way
to the wind
as they majestically glide
down, down, down to the pavement below.
The wilting flowers
seem to match, as
they slowly transform the area
into a neglected landscape.
I know that it'll all return next year,
but it seems as it can't.
As these beings won't be able to come back the same.

Bright, big evergreens pop
amongst the barren landscape
of whites, browns and grays

they're telling me that this time will end.
their pine aroma is standing out
just as much as the trees do.
I feel the cold of the snow
in the palm of my hand.
I just sit there
while they come down onto me
my tongue is stuck out
looking for just one snowflake
something to drink
when one hits my tongue
there for a moment
but then melted away forever;
as the salt and shovels scrape away
at the snowflakes' neighbors,
mercilessly.
As if they don't care at all.

Delicate zinnias dance
in their orange and purple hues
covered in neon green pollen.
The blaring scent of the manure
is all that I can sense.
The sun heats my back
I hear a cardinal's chirping and see
the bright red flash out of the corner of my eye.
As the world returns to normal
once again.

Bexley Wiegand
Baylor School

“Sorrows”

Days fly by
As I stare out the window
Wanting my wish
The dream that will fill my life
With joy and glee
And as I stare out the window
I wish
Breaking the silence of night
‘Someone set my soul free’

Mary Elizabeth Hicks
Baylor School

“The Ocean”

The ocean waves crashing down on the shore.
I look out into the distance
and see diamonds sparkling as if a sailor's lost treasure.
Wind softly blows through the oat grasses.
The water is warm and clear as glass.
The salty air fills your mouth and dries your throat.
And, if you stop and listen,
the faint sound of whales in the distance fills the air.

The ocean waves role like thunder,
accumulating everything in its path.
I feel the cold reminder that fall is here.
The smell of fire fills my throat and stings my eyes.
I see the clouds hanging low over the sea.

The cold, crisp wind chills me to the bone.
The oceans water is calm and still.
The clouds are low in the horizon
and run together with the water.
I smell and taste smoke from fires made on the shore
I hear the wind roaring up and down the beaches.

I hear the loud waves crash down on the shore.
The baby sea creatures remind me that spring is here.
The water is as cold as ice.
The smell of salt fills the air.
The Earth has just begun to thaw out,
and is ready for a new beginning.

Lillyann Elie
Baylor School

Thank You Malt Vinegar

We went to Captain D's
I wanted to I said 'please'
I tried the fish
My mom said 'try malt vinegar'
so I added a little
My life changed
The fish was so good
so I added more
even better
if thanked my mom and said
'This is so perfect'
It was salty, crispy, soft
and most of all,
delicious
But with all good things,
it came to an end
I came again and ate more fish
but the more I ate,
the worse it became
now it is no longer perfect,
instead it has flaws,
but I still have to say,
thank you malt vinegar

Student's Name: James Sutton

School: Brown Middle School



SEVENTH GRADE PROSE

The Joy of Knoxville

Even if you are not a Tennessee Vols fan, Knoxville is a delightful place to visit. My two older siblings go to UTK and my friends and I get to stay in their condo when they are not there. This past summer I went with some of my close friends, and it was an amazing trip. I wish we could have stayed longer, but we will be going back. Knoxville is such a great place to visit because of all the fun activities, fabulous dining options, and picturesque surroundings.

The campus and its lovely landscape and buildings are a really neat place to take a walk, but Knoxville is home to so much more than the university. The Navitat ropes course is one of my favorite activities in Knoxville. The course is high above the forest floor but offers a route for everyone from beginners to the most adventurous climbers. I have done the course with my siblings and friends and can't wait to go again. Nestled within the city limits, are two or more beautiful quarries. The quarries are rich in history as they used to provide marble and limestone to Knoxville, but now they serve as a beautiful spot for everyone to cool off from the summer heat. My friends and I went paddle boarding and swimming. There are so many other activities we were unable to do, but we are already planning our next trip.

After a day of adventure, there are seemingly endless dining options in Market Square. Market Square is well over 150 years old; it was built in 1854 before the Civil War but is now the hub of the city. The fried pickles at Stock and Barrel are my favorite appetizer and the tomato pie at Myrtle's Chicken and Beer is probably the best main dish I have ever eaten. After eating at one of the many restaurants in Market Square you can stop by Rocket Fizz for candy or walk over to Gay Street for your sweet tooth. There are soda shops and chocolate shops, but I love the Dole Whip at Cruze Farm Ice Cream most. My friends and I were exhausted one night so we just grabbed a chicken alfredo pizza from Uncle Sam's and ate on the condo porch. The pizza was great, but the view and sunset were even better.

Everywhere you look, Knoxville has beautiful views. One of the most noticeable views is the Tennessee River, the river is surrounded by greenery, framed by rock walls, and adorned with well-built and charming bridges. Nature trails are lined with beautiful rock formations and lovely peaks for city views, and the turquoise

quarry waters are surrounded by towering rock walls. Lastly, just walking around the city streets is also lovely. The houses are unique and often colorful, the skyline is decorated with distant mountains, tall buildings, and the sun sphere, and the streets of downtown glow in the evening. Just start walking and you are sure to discover the beauty of Knoxville.

Knoxville offers days filled with adventure, endless dining delights, and unforgettable sights. I have only visited Knoxville in the summer, but I eagerly await exploring Knoxville in the winter. Navitat offers a night course for Christmas, the icicles around the quarry are sure to be stunning, and enjoying more of the indoor attractions is a must. Knoxville is a great place to visit and is also located less than an hour from the nation's most visited national park, The Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Student's Name: Claire Martz

School: Hilger Higher Learning

“Purity”

Catherine. My name is Catherine. In Greek, it means pure. It means to not be contaminated. I don't think it means that. I think it means to be filled with something. To be pure with laughter. You can be pure with a lot of emotions. Anger, sadness, happiness. fear. I can be pure with fear. My name is pure with happiness though. My name is running in a sprinkling rain with a smile from ear to ear. Catherine is like dancing in a small pond with many graceful, white swans. It's like looking at the stars on a dark morning, like the smell of single raindrops hitting a light blue flower on a fresh spring morning. My name is pure.

My parents chose my name to honor my family. They choose a name from a past relative. My great-great grandmother, Catherine. She lived in Germany before World War II. She lived there when Germany was in a depression. She decided to take her 13-year-old daughter to America. They didn't know anything about America. They didn't speak the language. I wonder if she was pure with fear? I wonder if her daughter was? I wish I could ask her, and I wish I could talk to her. I bet it was bitter, harsh, and yet they were hopeful. I wonder if she was pure with hope? I wonder what she looked like. Did she look like me? Did she know about her name? Did she get her name from someone else? I wonder.

According to the Chinese calendar, I am a rabbit. I am calm, peaceful, reserved, thoughtful, and polite. When I see a rabbit, they run. They are probably pure with fear. The rabbit is calm, but rabbits are jumpy. They get excited. Like me. Rabbits are jumpy. I do think I am like a rabbit. A mix between the Chinese and real ones. My Zodiac sign is a Taurus. They are quiet and capable. I think I am capable. I think other people would agree. I hope they would. The Taurus is also trustworthy. People tell me that they can trust me. I'm always happy to hear that. It makes me feel dependable.

I've always had a love-hate relationship with my name. On one hand it's like tiny ballerinas dancing to soft music. On the other hand, it's like a virus. One with 17 arms, spikes, and many eyes. A very contagious one. So contagious almost everyone has it or knows someone that does. I want a rare name.

One that people will call pretty. They might say it's unique. I would love to change my name, but I just can't. My name is special to me, and I can't picture anyone else calling me something different. I can't imagine someone calling me Olive or Georgia. My name is Catherine, and it means pure.

Catherine Hemphill
Baylor School

“My Name”

My name is a bridge connecting two worlds. My name buckles and bends under the weight of history and culture. It is a faint, gentle curve, lining from one tip of a tongue to the other. I stand still with my name like rain in the summer. It is known and seen but leaves without notice.

In Chinese, my name means crystal abundance of light. It is an ember which is alive. I greet it every day, and it returns to me as a purr just skimming the top of my mouth. But In English, my name appears to be a mess on the floor waiting to be mopped up. It is a puzzle unsolved. It is an echo lost. My name is a lost wanderer trapped in a cave, walking in circles.

According to the legend of the horoscope, I am a Taurus. My name is like a bull. My legs are set firmly in the ground, but my soul is in the clouds. My body is strong and sturdy, yet I can crumble by fire. I hear a call beckoning me to work, and in work I am determined. My soul follows the planet of Venus, which connects me to home. I crave the peace of comfort and nestle in the warm bed of love. I am loyal to those around me and always follow them with loyalty. My name is like a bull. I embody patience and honesty. I may move slowly, but I always follow through.

As a myth, my name was made by the stars and the wind, by a poet who studied a dream. The dream started in a grass field, aligned with rolling hills. In this field, a young girl carried the memory of her grandparents and their homeland with the hearts of her family of past and future. She placed her millions of tears of water away in her heart as she dove into the ocean, bringing with her centuries of stories. On the other side of the world, a young boy lived in his dream of breaking out of life farther from the hunger, which trailed him like a monster. The boy would bust the metal door, which anchored him to the bottom of the ocean floor, and he would escape by meeting the young girl who dove into the ocean to discover a new world. Together they merged water and fire to create light. Their light would always shine upon the world around them.

Though the thought has never quite dawned on me, I have made a decision. I will forever stand by my name like the night stands next to the day. My name was made as a promise, a promise to the world. A promise to

my ancestors and a promise to my homeland. My name is a messenger of victory and peace. I will uphold my name like a shiny plaque, and together we will be the message of love, light, and liberty.

Pei-Ying Olsen
Baylor School

If nothing much has ever gone wrong in your life, you might take each day for granted. Just going through the motions, letting life take you places. Truth be told, that's not how I live my life. Not anymore. Because one day in the far distant past, I learned to enjoy life while it lasts. Sit back, relax, and *please. Drink some water.*

Let me take you back. Circa 2019. I was eight, and my family and I were on a Disney World Trip. I woke up that morning at the condo we were staying in. The beds were like sleeping on a rectangular rock. I didn't get much sleep the night prior. *That was the first straw on the camel's back.* My siblings and I quickly ate breakfast, eager to start our magical day at the "Happiest Place on Earth."

A fifteen-minute drive took place. Finally, we arrived. I spotted a *huge* castle in the distance, which sent a feeling of excitement and euphoria up my spine. I was truly captivated by it all. We took a short ferry to the Magic Kingdom and spent the day riding nostalgic rides and eating gourmet treats.

A few, maybe four hours later, I was starting to get a headache. Nothing huge, *yet.* I quickly shook it off. We went on a few more rides. *That* didn't help my headache. It shook me around like a rag doll and before a little while, my head was pounding. It was like someone had hit it with a hammer, but I kept pushing through. It was now the end of the day, dusk had caught up with the daylight and was now covering the earth in a blanket of stars.

Now, when someone has a headache, they want to get out of the place they've been in and get home as soon as possible. Lucky me, that night was the most *packed* night of the month. It was an hour past closing time already, and I was really tired. Like, on the verge of collapsing. My parents were really worried about me. My little sister, who could walk, was in a stroller. So what did I decide to do? I sat in the stroller, my little eight-year-old self being wheeled around in a serious condition. I honestly didn't know where I was at this point. I woke up on the monorail to our car. Finally, we were free from the gates of this mouse's prison.

I'm fine now, but my mom later told me that I had suffered from heat stroke and dehydration that night. If we hadn't gotten out and gotten back home soon enough, I would have had to be rushed to the emergency room. This

could happen to any one of us, but usually, we just play it off as a simple migraine. Enjoy life while it lasts and take care of yourself. I learned to live in the moment because I don't know when I'll die.

Afton Forsythe
Silverdale Baptist Academy

Are you or someone you know neurodivergent? Well, I have autism. Autism is a broad range of conditions characterized by challenges with social skills, repetitive behaviors, speech, and nonverbal communication. This story is about me and how I faced and still face autism. This event is significant to me because it taught me that you can grow or learn from any problem or situation.

It all started when my mom was in college and she chose to study autism in one of her classes for one of her assignments. When I was two I never talked, played, and hated loud noises. My mom realized those were symptoms of autism and wanted to take me to see the doctor. My dad never thought I had it but with lots of convincing my dad and mom finally took me to see a doctor. Every visit the doctor denied my parents that I had autism until one doctor finally diagnosed me with autism.

Once we found out that I had autism my parents were stressed that their kid had been diagnosed with something they knew little about. What were they supposed to do to help their kid and what was the future gonna be like for me? They did the only thing they could do and took me to all sorts of therapies to help with my autism. I remember entering different therapies, seeing different kids of all kinds, and also other worried parents just trying to comfort and take care of their kids. I even remember this one therapist who would come to my house to show me pictures of all sorts of topics like animals, food items, etc. just to teach me words and help me speak. Lastly, my family never went out into public areas other than therapies because if I heard all the noise people would make I would start to cry and scream.

After years of therapy, I finally began to talk better, be able to play with friends, and even was able to go out into public places without crying and screaming! I started not going to as many therapies and started behaving more normally, but still had some flaws. However, since the 3rd grade, I haven't had to go to any therapies for my autism. Even though I don't go to therapies that doesn't mean I don't have autism for there is no cure to autism. For example, I still am quiet and very introverted, hate loud noises, have trouble speaking, am socially awkward, and have repetitive behavior. That means I am not fully cured but I do behave better than most autistic kids.

I hope this story can teach you that no matter how big the problem is you can grow from it and also overcome it. Having autism is for sure a struggle but thankfully with all the help of other people and all

the therapies and therapists, I was able to grow from it. Even though I can't fully solve this problem I am still overcoming it. So whenever you're facing a problem just know there's a way to solve it or help it. Thank you for reading my story.

Copelyn Levitt
Silverdale Baptist Academy

Have you ever faced a challenge that was so hard you didn't know where to start and then couldn't go any further? That was how I felt when I hiked down to the bottom and then back out of the Grand Canyon. This is a story of how to never give up and keep enduring.

My family loves to explore and do all sorts of adventurous things. One afternoon it was a cold winter day and my dad jumped up and said, "I did it!" Presumably, I got up and was curious. We had just scored permits to go to the bottom of the Grand Canyon and camp for two nights! This was the best news ever. I had always wanted to go and now I was going to get my chance. I realized the journey ahead would be long. Training for this was not easy, and neither was packing for such a journey, but after trekking countless hiking trails I was ready. When we got there on a cool crisp spring day, the canyon was magnificent. The views were perfect and it almost didn't feel real. Seeing the trail I was going to hike on was scary and astonishing. Then we stayed at a hotel that night before the big day the next morning.

That morning we woke up very early, got our gear, and went on a long bus ride to the South Rim. When we got there it was stunning, shocking, and I felt very anxious. The first mile down was beautiful and I felt like I was in a palace full of artwork. After a couple of hours, we stopped for lunch. The view was breathtaking and we could see the Colorado River. The last couple of hours were so hard and technical. It was straight downhill with multitudes and multitudes of sharp stairs. We passed a train of mules coming up from the bottom. They were majestic but completely exhausted from their journey up the steep trail. When we got there we set up camp and I was shocked that there was a steak restaurant, flushing toilets, and also running water. Phantom Ranch was a beautiful oasis amid the wilderness. The first night's sleep was not very luxurious, but when I woke up we explored and hiked inside the canyon.

That night we ate dinner at Phantom Ranch. We had steak, baked potatoes, broccoli, rolls, lemonade, and hot fudge brownies. It was amazing, and so fresh after not having a lot of fresh food resources. When we woke up we immediately broke camp and started hiking. It was one of the hardest hikes I have ever done and when we got halfway to the top we stopped for lunch. Toward the top, we had to put on our boot crampons to make the journey the rest of the way, which was covered with thick ice and mud. About half a mile to the top students were playing around

slipping on the ice. They were trying to grab onto us so they didn't fall off. They were careless. We almost slid down the ice with them, but the tall spikes on our crampons cut into the ice and stopped us. Finally, when we got to the top we felt amazing and accomplished. The next day we drove to the airport and finally got home.

The event made me strong and taught me to always endure and never give up on my dreams. Without doing this I would not know all these things and I would have given up on my dreams. A life lesson is never to give up on anything. If I can do something scary and challenging you can too.

Catherine Womack
Silverdale Baptist Academy

As a kid, life wasn't so “easy”. It was around 2014-2016 and my Birth Mother had some issues. She hit me and lied to me and upset me sometimes and many more bad things. It's sad how this happens to people but things get better sometimes and some ways. Just remember though; everything happens for a reason.

When I was about 4 my Mother hit me in my eye and ended up getting arrested and that's when things got crazy after she got out, my dad went to pick me up and my biological mom kept me in the house and blocked the doors with couches and chairs. My dad and my bonus mom fought so hard to get full custody and went through some tough times such as court and personal matters with my Biological mom. My dad would sometimes go to pick me up and my Biological mom would keep me away. In the end, my dad got full custody of me and I am now safe with him and my bonus mom and I don't have to worry about getting hurt.

When I started living with my dad and bonus mom, we went to church occasionally and started praying. I didn't quite understand it all but knew there was only one god and that was God. I ended up giving my life to him and getting baptized at school. My dad always supported me and so did my bonus mom. He always helps me study and helps me get through things. He is one of those people that I feel safe talking to. In early 2021, My bonus mom adopted me and is now legally my Mom we do fun stuff and she does an amazing job at taking care of me. This is an example of how things get better and things come back to you.

I can speak from experience that things do get better and God can save you but you just have to ask for it. Praying and having faith in God is the best and only way. The Lord is great and he forgives even people who have done bad like my Biological Mom. When I was officially with my dad forever I was very relieved and was happy I didn't have to feel scared anymore. I wouldn't get hit or anything and it was very relieving.

The moral of my story is to never give up and stay strong. There are ways to get help such as counseling (like I did) and talking with people you feel safe with. It isn't good to keep these feelings bottled up and keep them to yourself. That can lead to depression and when that happens that isn't good. The goodness of God is truly amazing and like I've said, he can save you from your depths and from

anything bad you have done but you just have to ask and repent from your sins and I promise things can change and get better.

Wyatt Cochran
Silverdale Baptist Academy

Someone once said a dog is a man's best friend. Well, let me tell you my dog is my very best friend and on top of that she was my first ever friend once I entered this world. She was always there for me when I needed her and I did the same. She is and will forever be my best friend and my first friend no matter where we are in life.

My dog Addison would comfort me when I was feeling down or anxious. Ever since I was about 4 I could not control my emotions very well. My parents would always fight and it would scare me, but Addison would always be right by my side every time I felt hopeless or scared She was always there. I will always remember how when my father and mother would fight I would hide in my room with Addison. I also remember when I would put my face up against her warm, soft, caramel fur and I would hug her until I calmed down and she would lick the salty tears from my eyes. Her eyes always showed affection and bravery within them and I felt safe with her. Her hazel eyes looking into mine made me feel happy and like if she was by my side I could go through anything that came my way.

Knowing that she was by my side helped me get through so much like when my parents got divorced. She was always with me when I had to transition from house to house, and when I didn't feel safe with one of my parents she was right there by my side. I would always feel scared because I thought I didn't have a real home I could feel safe at and since I would lose control of my emotions easily, especially anger it was hard for me to get along with my family. The divorce made my dad act differently towards me and my sister and he would yell at me and make me feel bad about myself, but Addison made me feel braver and I could stand up to him without losing control of my emotions. Once the divorce was over, Addison had gotten diagnosed with kidney cancer and had only 2-3 years left of her life. During the last year of her life, her once bright, cheerful, hazel eyes became dull and sad. This made me want to be there for her.

After Addison had passed away I made a promise to her and myself to become braver even without Addison by my side because I could only feel my bravery within her. It was very hard for me to fulfill the promise that I made to her. After all, I never have had to try and find my way to be brave because I always had her. But that was not going to stop me from trying to fulfill my promise to her, so I kept trying and trying. The promise I made to her was that I would become brave for her and I would learn to control my emotions for her. I knew she had heard me because I could feel her presence right beside me and I knew she would be there making sure I fully fulfilled my promise to her.

One day I fulfilled my promise to Addison, but she didn't go away. Instead, I could still feel her presence with me and I knew that even though I couldn't see her now I could feel her. I now know that she will always be here for me and I don't have to worry that I will not ever see her again because she is always with me. Her presence feels like a tight hug that she will never let go. She will always be here for me no matter what situation I am in. Now, whenever things are hard, I always think back on how bravery is found in myself. Back then, I found my bravery and comfort in Addison, but now I find it in myself through her.

Kaylee Beth Smith
Silverdale Baptist Academy

On September 21, 2009, my brother Luke was born. His birth was not as perfect as my parents had hoped for. He had a tragic stroke soon after he was born. This caused him to have severe brain damage. Nobody knew what was going to happen, or if he was going to make it. For many years my parents tried everything they could to help Luke stay alive and live his best life. Luke is a fighter and his journey is a truly inspiring story.

The stroke my brother had caused him brain damage resulting in cerebral palsy. With this, he cannot walk or talk and sometimes he can't move exactly how he tries. We use a wheelchair and a stroller to help get Luke around. He does physical therapy frequently to keep his body moving. Luke still understands and thinks about everything people say to him, but he communicates in a different way than most people do by answering questions on his iPad. Luke has a unique personality, loves to play like any kid, and laughs and dances to his favorite music.

Despite Luke's disability, he is still so joyful throughout all situations. Joyful does not mean that he is perfectly happy or that everything is always fine, but he has hope even through hard times. He works so hard every day, doing things that I take for granted. I rarely think about how to brush your teeth or take a shower. However, Luke can not do those things on his own. He needs help with all of his daily tasks. He works so hard learning to do for himself the things I take for granted, and he does it with a smile and a hilarious sense of humor.

Luke's disability has brought so many invaluable and encouraging people into our lives. Sometimes my parents had to be away with Luke in the hospital and there were always great people who were quick to help us in those hard moments. They didn't care about money or time, they were just so happy to help. My grandmother and our close family friend, Angela, especially were like second parents to me and helped teach me different life skills. I think growing up with so many spectacular, loving, and selfless people has made me who I am now. They have helped all of us to become better people. They did not see Luke as a burden. Like our family, they saw past Luke's problems and saw him as the blessing that he is.

Seeing my brother have joy in very difficult circumstances has taught me to always be looking for blessings in disguise when times are tough. Luke's charisma and attitude as he works through challenges have encouraged me to do my very best even

when things are hard. The people who have become like family because of Luke have made all of us better people as well. My brother has taught me that so much good can come from something that seems imperfect.

Anna Sherwood
Silverdale Baptist Academy

Have you ever felt lonely and didn't think you could get out of it alone, so you turned to someone? Well, for me, I turned to my sister Anna. Recently at school, it was getting harder to focus and just getting pretty boring. One day she picked me up from school, and I was completely distraught. I told her all about how I was struggling in school. She continued to ask questions about my day, and over time she helped me learn to focus in a matter of one week.

It was just a normal day of school in the sixth grade. I was hungry and bored, and I heard my name get called to leave, it was my sister Anna who was picking me up, which was unusual. I told her how my day had gone, how I had felt lonely, and how I thought no one could get me out of it. It was the worst time of my life. She turns the seat heater on. Little did she know I had also done it to her, and we both laughed, which made me feel a whole lot better. We began to talk and just got to see how each other's day had been. I told her how I'd recently been struggling in school and asked if she knew what to do, and like any sister, she did.

She continued bombarding me with question after question, and it didn't stop till she finally said she felt like that. She told me her story and how middle school was a new playing field and challenge. She had been so caught up in school that it was just a lot, and how she got through it. She explained that God can help you, how you can talk to your friends, and how middle school didn't really affect you in the long run, so don't get caught up in all the bad and look at the good in life, and you will see a whole new world. She said to release that all the good in the world can far outweigh the bad, and the bad is just the devil trying to get to your head. I felt more confident than ever like I could overcome school challenges with no problem.

Then we got the bad news that my grandpa had fallen, was badly injured, and would need a lot of love and care before he got any better. And what we were sad about was that it was my last grandpa that I had, and we didn't want to lose him like that. So we knew that if we wanted to see the good in all, we would have to help each other out and tell how we felt about overcoming it. Over the years, I have gotten closer and closer to my sister, and I'm no longer scared to tell her anything.

This was the point at which my sister Anna became closer, like best friends. We have, and even in the lowest of times, we could help

each other out of it, and we could help each other see the good in the bad. We would not let each other see the bad cause, as she taught me how I can see the good in all things thick and thin, good and bad.

Carson Eischeid
Silverdale baptist academy

7th Grade Prose - Untitled

Hot sun shone down onto plants, grass and a world that spins in it's favor. Two girls played on that world, that Earth in which billions of people seemed irrelevant and childish, oblivious, bliss. Those two girls, I and another with lighter hair that the same sun bounced off, giving it streaks of highlighted dirty blonde light.

That's when the motion picture my own head created to screw with me came to a ripped stop. I met myself in the mirror again. I met a stranger in the mirror, once again.

Azrael. Fourteen. Me.

Not the disheveled figure in the damp mirror.

Me.

There was no use in wiping the warm water from my cheek. It would dry in the cold air as I stepped out into a world that was scented of...trees and trash of course, but also of spirit. A spirit that had no soul. Well, assuming that is what a spirit was, but nonetheless, feeling alone was impossible in such a place as we tiny people call home.

Even in space, no one is alone. Alone is a place it seems. I assume it is bunched up with Atlantis, somewhere deep beyond human reach, or any reach for that matter. A place everyone searches for but can't find. Then people ask why. But there's a simple answer they simply choose to ignore.

Alone doesn't exist. Making things up is only a delusion that lasts to play pretend. So why do so many adults do it? Why do I do it? I could not answer that question.

Sometimes I could answer everything and sometimes I could answer nothing.

When that happens, the world still spins.

Faster though, so fast it's slow.

The world continues but it won't let go of a walking, breathing dead girl, a girl who it would be laughable to call a functioning human amongst her peers. I was that girl and I resented Earth each day for that. It kept me on a leash that, to be fair, I held onto.

I watched others daily who fell off the leash, slipped out to freedom, or pulled it off themselves. Mine always seemed tighter, like it choked me into succumbing to its presence. I would tug and scratch and scream but the rips never mended, though they never ripped further. I made more and more tears, scratch marks, and bite marks on it though it always stayed in place. It's too much effort to replace though.

I was dazing out again. Once I realized that, I almost felt too tired to break back into reality. Though screeching wheels clawed at the insides of my ears as the large yellow vehicle road up to meet my driveway, the number fifteen in black on the side. That is where my day would start. That is where it always seemed to start.

Pyper VanAkkeren
Hunter Middle School

One day, I was working in the audio lab at my school when I came across something strange. There was a file on the computer titled “Eternity Loop”. It wasn’t an audio file either. It was a PDF document. I decided to look, as no one had opened it in six years. The document was interesting. It was a writing piece about how the internet goes on forever. It was an odd story because it talked about how the internet is always evolving for better or worse and how this person was changed by one thing—a single line of text. “You will loop forever.” They looked into it. Searching everywhere, every website with something about looping reality. They started to get obsessed with it. It was interesting, and I wanted to keep reading, but the document just ended.

Later that day, I came back to the lab during my free period. I opened up the music software and went to the “premade loops” section. I searched around in the different categories until I found it: “My loops”. I scrolled through the different tracks: several beautiful orchestral pieces, some interesting 8-bit songs, and even a few lo-fi tracks. Then I found one titled “Eternity Loop”. I hit play. There was no sound. Only static. Then it started to play circus music. Only it sounded wrong. There was muttering in the background. Then the audio cut out. After a few seconds, it played another. An acoustic song, there was muttering in the background again. It cut out. Then it played a punk rock song, which cut out. It kept playing different songs and cutting out in between them. And there was always muttering in the background.

“It must be a glitch,” I said to myself.

“Someone probably left a track running in the background.” I closed the loops tab and saved my project.

That night, I went to bed thinking what that “Eternity Loop” piece had meant. When I finally fell asleep, I had a weird dream. I was trapped in a recording studio and there was music coming out of my mouth. But my mouth was closed. And it wasn’t singing, it was instrumental music. Then it flashed to a black void. I screamed for help, but nothing came out of my mouth except for an animation of a soundwave. Then it flashed back to the recording studio. I noticed something different this time, though. There was a producer in the room. It looked like a human, but its head was a speaker. It turned to look at me and one word came out of the speaker. *Help*. Then it emitted static and turned its head back to the sound equipment. Then my vision turned into a computer glitch and I immediately started having a different dream.

At school the next morning, everything was fine, until I went to the bathroom. I noticed something wrong with my eye when I was looking in the mirror. My right eye was gone—no, it was black. And soundwave animations were running over it. I asked a friend of mine if she saw anything, but she said that she didn't. I went back to class worried that I was having hallucinations.

When I had some free time that afternoon, I went back down to the audio lab. While I was making a track, I saw something on my hand. It was covered in the same soundwave animations that were on my eye. And there was music coming from it. I was starting to panic. I had no idea what was going on. I decided that I was seeing things and should probably just ignore it. As I worked, I kept seeing the music producer from my dream and hearing the same word: Help. A few minutes later, my vision became fuzzy and I started to hear loud music. Then I passed out.

When I woke up, I was in a room. There was a fiberglass wall in front of me and I was sitting on a stool. Then I realized. I was in the recording studio from my dream. The person with the speaker for a head was “looking” straight at me. My entire body was made of soundwave animations. I stood up. I could walk around, but it felt wrong. It was like hovering. I couldn't feel my steps. I walked, or rather, floated, to the door at the other side of the room. I put my hand on the doorknob. I was expecting it to go right through, but it stayed in place. I turned the doorknob. The door swung open. I headed towards the speaker-headed person.

“H-hi,” I said nervously.

“My name is—” Then I started shaking and emitting static.

“I have no name. My only purpose is to create sound.”

I started to walk away when a hand grabbed me by the shoulder. It was the speaker person.

“Help me,” It said. Its voice sounded distorted.

“Let me leave, please!” Then it stopped.

“We are sorry for the inconvenience. Please wait while we change the program.” There was a quiet hum for a few seconds.

“Welcome to the Studio, your new home. Would you like to have a funeral for your physical body, or shall we disintegrate it?” Said the speaker.

“What?” I said.

“Would you like to have a funeral for your physical body, or

would you like it disintegrated? Either way, you'll never be returning to it. You're here forever."

Name: Elijah Bunting

School: Chattanooga High Center for Creative Arts

The Invasion of Keros

It was a clear, bright day. The tall grasses waved gently in the breeze, and the *thunk* *thunk* of an archer's arrows sailing into the target carried to my spot under the oak tree. I'd been drawing myself slaying a monster. I was a little startled by the final image, it was very vivid and the picture seemed to move when I held it in the light. The journal I was drawing in was one I had always hidden, it held my worst nightmares and my sudden inspirations. Today's drawing was not the first of its kind. Lately, I'd been having very real pictures in my mind of me doing some kind of deed. Whether it was saving a small girl from wolves or slaying a dragon. No matter how they made me feel, I always drew them all. I was just putting the finishing touches on my armor, which I had seriously considered asking the armorer to make for me, when a shadow fell across my pages. I looked up into the face of my friend Ema, the Princess of Rythen. She looked rather out of breath.

“Are you ready for the feast?” she asked, then she caught sight of my journal, “is that you killing a dragon?”

I hurriedly closed the journal, “what feast? And why are you wearing a dress?” I asked.

“My dad's monthly feast, all castle personnel are required to come.” She said hauling me to my feet, “I'll find you something to wear.”

We arrived in the Great Hall a few moments later. It was full of castle staff, bustling about setting up tables and bringing out great platters of food. Ema pulled me to a door on the far side of the room. On the way to her quarters I tried to find an excuse to not wear a dress. I preferred to wear dark greens, browns, and my soft leather boots. I despised frills and didn't really care for the dozens of rules in the castle. The woods better suited me, as did archery and hunting. Just as Ema opened her wardrobe to select a dress, the door flew open and her maid, Jasper, told us the feast was starting. Jasper and I got along great, she was like me in the opinion of frills and the outdoors. We hung out when Ema was busy with whatever princesses do.

“I guess this outfit will have to do.” I said, relieved to find a way out.

“I guess so” Ema sighed.

We slid into our seats at the royal table, just before King Rhone stood to make his welcome speech. While he was talking I studied the food. There were great turkeys roasted to perfection, sprinkled with spices, and stuffed with dried bread cubes, diced vegetables, sausage, all made creamy by being mixed with chicken broth. There were

fish skewers still crackling and oozing juice. A multitude of meat pies took up a quarter of one of the long wooden tables. Roaring fires decorated each end of the hall, along with tapestries of many colors and weavings. Platters of juicy apples, pomegranates, grapes, plums, oranges, and strawberries dominated the centers of each of the six tables. The smell of all the delicious food had floated up to the rafters, creating a mouthwatering scenario. The king resumed his seat and the feast began. I dropped my first helping of turkey, having forgotten to applaud as was supposedly ‘good manners.’ Ema stifled a snicker as she clapped primly with the rest of the hall. I stuck out my tongue at her and continued to help myself to some fruit that had caught my eye. After the last course when the guests started trickling out, King Rhone leaned back in his chair and let out a very unkinglike belch.

“Ah, that was a most excellent feast. Do you agree?” he asked.

I nodded emphatically, “Master Kent’s best work yet.” Master Kent was the head chef.

King Rhone stood up to leave, but the Great Hall shook and threw him to the floor. A spout of flame shot through the door, I looked up and stared into the eyes of Keros, the dragon from my journal. Ema gasped,

“That’s the dragon from your journal!” she cried.

King Rhone called for his royal guard and told Ema to get to safety.

“No, I’m not leaving!” she said.

“Ema, come on, I know a way out” I said meaningfully. The king didn’t notice, so I grabbed Ema’s hand and led her out a side door.

“What are you thinking?” she asked.

“While Keros is distracted...”

“You named it!?” Ema interrupted.

“No the name appeared. While he’s distracted we can get behind him, or above him,” I added as we exited the passage and saw a huge tail thrashing about through the air. I looked for a way onto the narrow catwalk above the dragon. Spotting one, I began to make my way across, dodging the swishing tail. I had nearly reached the other side when Ema called my name, I turned to look and was caught by what felt like a brick wall. I was slammed onto the ground, my ribs screaming in pain and the sword I’d grabbed from the armory poking my ribs further. I felt myself blacking out and shook my head. I tried to stand but collapsed. Keros must have felt his tail hit me, turning he focused not on me but on Ema. King Rhone rushed in yelling, trying to divert the dragon’s attention to no avail. Keros blew a great fireball at Ema. She jumped behind a

pillar just in time. I willed myself to ignore the pain as I started climbing. I reached the catwalk and edged out over Keros. I was hardly five feet above him. I took a deep breath, wincing as I remembered my ribs, and jumped. My sword was sharp and falling with force, I drove it straight through the dragon's head burying it up to the hilt.

Student Name: Maya Grauman
Homeschooled, Home Life Academy

7th Grade Prose - Untitled

The sea, full of majesty and beauty. From the tiniest little pieces of plankton to the huge blue whale, to the creatures that roam in the deep. So mysterious and yet so lovely. The blue green sea. The sea is full of creatures with mystery and majesty. The ones that roam in the deep; using bioluminescence to try to stay alive. The green sea turtles swimming in the current as they watch their world fly by in a rush of color. The tiny fish that refract the light of the rainbow to every dark corner. The sharks that prey on the helpless, meek fish. The seagulls and the moonfish complete the cycle of symbiosis. The whole ocean is in a perfect balance. That's when the sun began to rise above the sea and the orange brought back life in the world where there was darkness. Then, the sun breached the horizon, the wonderful, marvelous light shone everywhere. Even to the mysterious, unexplored sea.

Student's Name: Nathan Eriksen

School or Homeschool Program: Chattanooga Christian School



SEVENTH GRADE POETRY

The Poem Writing Prompts Poem

Writing prompts

Let's put this simply; they suck

“Write about a circus”

“Write about a time you had to say goodbye”

“Write about a science experiment gone wrong”

“Write about yourself in a different universe”

“Write a love story in 2nd person”

And quoted

If i'm being honest, none of the above seem even remotely interesting

If you try looking for something deeper,

You get

“Write about something you hate about yourself”

Um no,

I'm good,

I hurt my own feelings enough already.

“Write about political views and how they impact society”

I'd rather not,

But thank you for the offer.

“Write about your life experiences”

Um sir,

I'm 12.

“Write about what it feels like to feel nothing; being numb”

Oh, okay

I think I can do that,

Let's see;

‘You plunge me into cold water,

In the back of my mind I know I should be freezing,

But I'm not,

You try your best to hurt me,

I act like you do,

Because crying feels like it should be normal,
Crocodile tears.’
Okay so that kind of sucks,
I would just ‘control A’, ‘delete’,
But people always tell me to keep my work
To “learn” and “reflect” later in life,
And though I disagree, I suppose it can't hurt to comply
So I keep it,
And go back to my list of prompts,
“Write in the perspective of a fugitive”
You know what, never mind.
Writing prompt aren’t very helpful,
I guess I’ll just write about them instead.
Oh wait,
I suppose I succeeded.

Aria Gravley
Chattanooga High Center for Creative Arts

No Coal

As the crisp air sets in,
It freezes my face to a subtle grip.
The smell of the holidays and seasons:
Coco a-brewin', little kids minds a-stewin'
On what they want for the holidays this year.
A toy truck! A barbie doll!
But for me,
I have more anticipation for what I don't want.
As Christmas morning arises,
So do I from bed.
I rush downstairs to see my family waiting.
I instantly peer into my stocking,
As a sigh of relief comes from my mouth.
And a shout of joy!
YES! This year, NO COAL!!

Student Name: Ian Davidson

School: Hilger Higher Learning

The Peasant

I have seen,

What others have not.

I walk the path of danger,

So that you do not.

I am that man,

Who limps for what you have done.

Who has risked everything,

For your safety?

Who has been wounded,

So that you may not?

I have.

That was me,

The mud on the ground,

That you trample,

Time, and time again.

I am not who you think I am.

I deserve better,
And yet you smash my hopes,
With your selfish desires,
And dreams.
And I no longer think,
Of what hope means.
I am old now,
Frail and brittle.
And the only thing,
That I can help you with,
Is helping you realize,
What I did for you,
And what you didn't do for me

Student's Name: Bennett Dawson

School or Homeschool Program: Chattanooga Christian School

Lying here
Sill here

Lying here still
As if I wasn't even here
not being able to move but
i could still hear
I could still hear
laughing
giggling

Everyone was near
Still trying to figure out if it was even real
I tried to reach for my eyes but
i couldn't even feel

Still slipping away, thinking about this day
as if it's on replay
So weak and unaware
Wires were all in my hair
Not wanting to ever show my face
Hurting in the inside
I still had to act like everything was okay

Going back to that place
Still having people laugh in my face
And still having to embrace each and everyday
A game that no one wants to play

So I wear a colorful costume
To consume comfort
Calmness
And still seek a crew.

Speaking loudly and holding my chin up high
Still trying to fit in
In the end I never win

I seek my truth faith
Waking up in a daze
Everyone was standing
Over my face
Worried

Not knowing if i was ok
Lying here
Still here
Not knowing what to say

Student's Name: Mia Wiley

School or Homeschool Program: Chattanooga Charter School of Excellence Middle



EIGHTH GRADE PROSE

“Oh my god, my entire life is a lie.”

Willow tilted her head, one of her eyebrows cocked up in an irritated way. “This is why I told Mike I shouldn’t have told you. Now you’re just upset. *Fragile.*” She shook her head.

Ruby reached up to her face, grazing her own cheek gently as she frowned. “I can’t believe I’m just a...a program! Everything I’ve ever done or experienced...has all been fake? For...nothing?”

“Yes, I’m sorry,” Willow murmured. She wasn’t sure how else to break it to her. How was she supposed to feel empathy for this...*robot*? Yet, she felt a hypocritic feeling creeping into her head as she watched the girl begin to weep.

“My whole world...my...my family, my friends, you! You...Why did you...even create me, anyway?”

“I just...wanted someone to talk to,” she shied away from Ruby’s gaze, her own selfishness bleeding into her tone regretfully.

“You...just created me so you weren’t lonely?”

“That’s...” she cleared her throat. “An odd way of putting it, but sure.”

“So I’m just a toy? A plaything for your entertainment?!” Her voice shook with sadness slowly melting into anger.

“No! Not like that!” Willow fought back, though in the back of her mind she wondered if Ruby was right. Did she really create these three just because she could? So she could have something to control? Some kind of emotional power, so she wasn’t a nobody who felt helpless knowing she’d never see her brother again. She pushed the thought away. Far.

“Then how am I supposed to take it? I thought I was a real person, but I’m just some robot you created to satisfy your need for social interaction.”

Anger bubbled inside Willow, but she tried to stay calmer. “Why are you taking it so negatively?! We can still be friends, yeah?”

“It’s just a lot to process right now. I’m trying to come to terms with the fact that I don’t even exist outside the parameters of your world, and I don’t know if I can handle it,” she answered honestly, getting up from her perch on the white pedestal and beginning to walk around. “This is a lot, y’know..?”

“See? I *told* Mike I shouldn’t tell you, and look what happened!”

“Stop yelling...why did you even tell Mike in the first place?”

“He asked if he was the only one I created. Was I supposed to lie?” Willow instinctively got up as well, leaning on her own pedestal as she narrowed her eyes at Ruby, who was inching away from her.

“You could’ve phrased it in a less devastating way.”

“Well sorry I’m not that sympathetic,” she felt like choking on her own words. Was what she said even her anymore? But rage continued piling up.

“See, now you’re just being a jerk!” Ruby accused. “How could you just create me for your own content, and not even care how I feel?”

Willow clenched her hands, the empty coffee mug’s handle snapping off as the cup shattered on the floor. “Because your feelings aren’t real!”

The robot looked taken aback, her lip quivering as though tears could really fall down her cheeks, her gaze shifted to the ground before lifting back up to face Willow, her expression different.

“My feelings are as real as yours, Willow. I may just be your creation, but I’m allowed to be upset.”

Willow sighed. “Sure.” Seeing Ruby’s insulted face, she continued. “Because I could easily just refresh you and it would be a brand new day. Your ‘feelings’ would never return because it’s not how you really feel, is it?”

“You have no heart, you know that? Can’t you at least see that you’ve hurt my feelings? Acknowledge it! Admit your mistake! You did a bad thing! At least you told the truth sure, but...but at what cost? You’re still the jerk you were yesterday, and the jerk you will be tomorrow if you don’t change. You’re our creator, you should at least have a shred of care for us...right?”

“Look, I tried to tell you as carefully as I could. There’s still one more I haven’t told yet; I don’t even know how I’m supposed to be handling this.”

“You have *another* one? Just how many did you create?”

“Just you, Mike, and Azal.”

“Why did you tell me first? Why did you use me as the guinea pig to see how I’d react? Are you trying to make me feel even more like nothing? You’re the worst, you know that?”

“So I’ve been told.”

“You probably don’t even care that I’m sad, do you?”

Willow took a deep breath, not sure if the sympathy in her heart was real or imitation. “I do. You just don’t see it the way I do.”

“Then prove it. Say something that will make me feel better.” They sat back down on the pedestals, Ruby crossing her arms.

“I’m sorry.”

She tilted her head, her eyes narrowing. “Are you kidding, that’s it? You really are heartless.”

Heartless. Her voice echoed in Willow’s head. That’s not the word she would’ve ever imagined someone would describe her as. Her eyes finally gave in, her breath hitched as she felt tears drip down. Why was *she* crying? Why was she crying *now*? This was her fault. It all was. She knew what she was saying all along, and she knew she was in the wrong.

“Here come the waterworks.” Ruby mumbled.

Willow continued to cry, her back hunched as she covered her face with her hands. “I’m sorry, okay? I shouldn’t...have kept it from you, and I should’ve treated you better. S-should’ve been nicer. I’m sorry, Ruby.”

The robot slowly shook her head, but put a hand on Willow’s back without a word.

They sat in silence. Suddenly, Willow spoke up.

“What do I do about Azal?”

“Tell him the truth, but gently, like...actually gently,” Ruby murmured.

Student's Name: Sophie Stovall

School or Homeschool Program: Chattanooga High Center for Creative Arts

“Say Freeze!”

Cassie and her friends Vicky and Sarah went to their local mall. They had walked around the mall for hours shopping and just overall having fun. Little did they know how their day would take an unexpected twist. They get tired of shopping and sit down on a bench near the foodcourt. Across the mall they spot a photobooth.

Cassie says excitedly, “We should all go and take pictures at the photobooth!” Her friends are thrilled with the idea and they all walk over to the booth. They open the curtain, step inside and sit down.

“Is everybody ready?” says Vicky. The girls all nod in agreement. Vicky reaches out to press the button on the screen, all girls smiling and saying cheese. Then Vicky clicks the button and all the girls try to return to their original face but **THEY CAN’T!** Their faces are stuck in a wide grin from cheek to cheek and they can’t get rid of it.

“What has happened to our faces?” Sarah says in shock. “Why won’t it move?” The girls all frantically pull at their faces to try to get them back to their original state, but nothing happens. They continue to walk around the mall asking strangers for help on what to do, but it’s no use nobody believes them. So they leave the mall and walk home, when they arrive they ask their parents for help but they just laugh in disbelief.

“What are we going to do about our faces?” Cassie asks. No one answers because honestly, no one has the slightest idea. They go back to the mall hoping to find something that will help them. They try to take another picture to see if it will reverse the effect but it does nothing. They begin to lose hope, when a lady wearing all black comes over to them.

“Are you looking to unfreeze your face?” says the mysterious lady.

“Yes we are” Vicky says, “Can you help us?”

The lady nods her head and pulls out a magic wand. She waves it over the girls heads and says, “They said cheese now let them unfreeze!” The girls grab their face and realize it can move. They turn around to thank the lady but she disappears. The girls are extremely excited and hurry home where they will never return to the photobooth again.

Student Name: Ava Akers

School: East Hamilton Middle School

Excerpt from my novella, "The Woods":

The Broken Human was alone. She lived in the woods, a tiny, fall-down shack licked with trailing tendrils of English ivy. It had a door with a crooked hinge and a mattress with peony sheets, and dusty floors that she kicked at sometimes to rearrange the dust, with her good foot, of course. In the corner she had stacked cans, sodas, half-empty Lunchables. She had no money, but she had quick fingers and a quick wit.

But not a quick leg.

So this was the biggest mystery of her life. Why ever would she be born with a leg that didn't work right? One that bent at the knee and swooped like a bow, one that was weaker than marinara spaghetti. And she must assume that she was born with it, for why else could she have acquired it? Although, looking back, she couldn't quite remember her earliest years.

Looking back, the first thing she remembered was hands.

Hands that weren't like hers, soft as a tufted sofa. Hands that were like tree bark, hands the color of ashy skies and still water.

But when she thought about them hard, it turned out she couldn't quite remember them, either.

She sighed. Her walking stick was leaning against the wall. It was her favorite possession. (After all, how else could she walk?) After crawling snakishly across the forest floor, the Broken Human had found a stick. It was approximately her height and knobby as an old woman, all knees and elbows and wrinkles. She stuck it in the ground and pulled herself to her feet, leg wobbling like a top on a tilting table.

With the stick, the Broken Human had the extraordinary power of locomotion.

Yet she still wasn't quite that good at it yet.

She'd gotten good at it, and then her body started revolting. Her good leg started getting erratic spasms, tighter than the knots in her mighty staff. She got layers of meat at her hips and on her chest, tiny buds with stone-hard centers. Her face started growing little, conical blooms, the color of Lunchable bologna. Usually they sprouted on her forehead and the lower part of her cheeks, but sometimes they crowned her nose like the silver rings clerks at grocery marts sometimes had. And her mind didn't work quite right. She'd get wet-eyed for no reason, like the day she left the rain pot too far under an oak tree and it didn't catch water. Or when she almost stepped on a run-over squirrel on the side of the road. She thought of the bones crunching and the tail fuzz grazing her bare

heel, and she shivered like a robin in winter. All of this made walking weird. Her arms didn't lay straight at her sides any more, and her good leg kept pulling and pulsing like a rubber band. She felt like she was a waddling icicle, like the ones that dripped like Spanish moss from the wood plank roof in the cold season.

But, anyways, she was hungry. She leaned over and snatched up a Lunchable. The world was getting frostier, her hands got stiffer each time she tried to light a match, and she most certainly did not want to sift a fork through cool, slimy green beans. Besides, they were her least favorites, and wasn't the Lunchable already open? Yes, that made sense. She nodded to solidify the obvious logic.

Usually, the Broken Human saved the crackers for last because they were her favorites. She liked to lick the salt from their edges and then soak the cracker in her saliva until it dissipated, savoring every last soggy morsel. But today she had two cheddar cubes, dusting with winter weather. They came off dry in her teeth, and she sucked them, too, until her body heat seeped into them. Then she ate the crackers, bite by bite on the mattress. When she spilled crumbs, she did not waste. She ate them dirt and all.

She ran a finger over her walking stick. She had long ago smashed a hole in it with a piece of sharp asphalt, cracked it and then pried open the hole and stripped off the bark. Now all that was left were a few thin brown lines where the bark was attached, the rest of it as smooth and white as a peeled paper birch.

As the cracker became increasingly sodden, she pondered her existence like she had a million times before. Did she have a maker? Or a woman? One of those ones with the long, glossy hair curled into bangs in the front, a bird's nest perched on their heads. Who held the hands of the children as they crossed the road. Who clucked when the children pointed to shiny things on the shelves. And if she had a maker, who was it? The Broken Human chewed her lip as the cracker dissolved. Stuck a dirty fingernail between her teeth and pulled out a grain of salt. It was savory on her tongue. Her finger tasted like spring, when the rain made puddles of clover patches and dripped dew on dandelions.

Time was not a concept to the Broken Human. Change was. She did not know what a clock was (or did she just not remember?) But she knew that she'd soon find the glistening green-blue shells of jewel beetles after the cicadas came and went, and that her hands got less springy with each new tree. She knew that things started small and then got bigger and then went away and then came back small again. Like the moon, and the baby chipmunks that erupted from the holes of the forest right when the air started to sweat.

She knew that with each passing navy and sky, she got another layer of muscle on her bones, stretching out like a green bean and then widening like a meatball.

Aine Coffey
Normal Park Museum Magnet School

Annie Oakley

I chose to read a book about Annie Oakley because she changed history and ushered in a lot of female shooters behind her, myself being one of them. Annie's father died young, so Annie had no choice but to teach herself how to shoot and keep food on the table for her family. This book taught me that just because someone says you can't do, doesn't mean you give up. Annie was told by her mother that she could not shoot because she was a girl, but she proved her mother wrong and shot. She proved that just because you're a girl doesn't mean that you can't hunt for your family.

Phoebe Ann Moses (Annie Oakley) was born August 13, 1860, in Ohio to her parents Jacob and Susan Moses. Her family was not rich but they managed to get by. Annie loved to go hunting with her father. When Annie was only six years old her beloved father died, and her mother Susan was left with six children to care for. Susan was a hard-working nurse, but her wages were only \$1.25 a week. Annie's mother wanted Annie to be a proper lady and did not want to harm anyone so she forbid Annie to touch Jacob's rifle which hung over the fireplace. Annie had never shot a gun before but had seen her father do it several times. One day, disobeying her mother, Annie was able to load, fire the big rifle, and hit a squirrel. She knew what she did was disobeying her mother but she and her siblings were nearly sick from hunger, her mother was happy to have food but was not happy about Annie's growing interest in guns. Annie also went through many jobs and eventually ending up in another household to make sure she was taken care of. At one point ended up in a house with people who didn't treat her the best, so she ran away and went back home to help her mother with the farm.

Annie needed money so she started to hunt for hotel dining rooms' usually the hunter would have to take several shots at its game, and they would have to serve it with the bullets. Annie was unique, she only needed to take one shoot at the bird and so they were able to remove the bullet before it was served to the customers. Annie started to become well known and went to a shooting competition where she did not expect to shoot against one of the best riflemen in the country. He was shocked to be shooting against a fifteen-year-old girl. His name was Frank Butler, they were both shooting the flying targets perfectly. Frank missed his last target, it was Annie's turn, "My knees were shaking" she said. She hit that target, not only did she win the competition, she also won Frank's heart. Within the year, Frank and Annie were married. Annie started with throwing targets for Frank during his acts, but then they started shooting together. People

started to see how great Annie was. Frank and Annie then joined the circus, Buffalo Bills Circus to be exact. She was the most famous act of his show for years. Annie and Frank both were some of the best shooters to ever live.

Annie not only showed the world that she can be one of the best shooters, she showed women that they can shoot as well as men. She taught 15,000 to shoot and all for free! Wow, I can't believe that she did it all for free! Annie is a great shooter and a great teacher as well. I don't think that Annie is recognized enough for all she did. Annie died November 3, 1926, 18 days before her husband Frank, she will always be recognized for the impact she made on the world.

- Spinner, Stephanie. Who Was Annie Oakley? New York: Penguin Workshop, 2002

Student's name: Peyton Erhard

School: Hilger Higher learning

(The light bulb that changed everything)

I woke up one dark, foggy morning and I noticed the abandoned house down the street. Everyone always talked about how haunted it was, but I never believed it. There was always a light on in the attic and I thought that was weird, but I just went on with my day. I got out of bed and went downstairs to make myself some coffee, I then sat on the couch to watch the morning news. Thirty minutes later I finished my coffee and was ready to go on with my day. I walked to the kitchen to put my glass away and I noticed the light in the old house had gone off. I thought it was odd, but I decided to go on to work. I got out of my car and I noticed the rain getting heavier and heavier, and I remembered the news saying a bad storm was coming. I ran inside to seek shelter, but when I walked inside the lights were off and there was nobody there. I realized it was Saturday and we did not have work, so I ran back to the car. It was still dark outside because of the weather, so I zoomed home and walked back into the house. After sitting there all day watching tv, nightfall had come. I started to go to bed, but as I walked up the stairs I heard something outside. I looked out the window and did not see anything, but I realized the old abandoned house still did not have the light on. I got curious, and walked over to see what was wrong.

I knocked on the door, but no one answered. I decided to try and open the door, and it creaked as it opened. It was so dark in the house, so I got my phone light out and walked inside. I climbed up the stairs and found the attic, I pulled the hatch down and the ladder fell. I climbed up and saw it was so dark, but in the middle of the room there layed a lightbulb. I walked over to it, and I looked up to see where it fell from. I picked it up and tried to screw it back in, but suddenly I felt something go down my arm. I started to feel strange and I looked down to see my skin was glowing neon green. I did not know what to do, so I started to scream and panic. Then I remembered all the stories that people told about what would happen in the house. No one ever came out of it the same.

As the days went on I realized that I had certain powers. I could relight lights with the touch of my fingers, and everything I touched would glow. I needed to figure out how to get rid of the powers, so I decided to go back to the old abandoned house. I made my way up the stairs and stood underneath the attic door trying to decide if I wanted to go up. I knew I had to go inside. I walked up the stairs and went to the lightbulb, I felt the same weird feeling in my arm as I unscrewed it. I ran outside and made

my way home, I started to feel normal and realized my powers were gone. I was relieved, but when I turned around I saw someone else going into the house. I knew there was nothing I could do, so I went in the house and watched out the window as the lightbulb turned on.

Student's Name: Tyler Marler
Sale Creek Middle School

Happy Birthday!

“Happy Birthday,” Madi said. It was my birthday. I really wanted to get a new room makeover because I have had my room the same since I was 4. I am 13 now! So I ordered a new bed and my grandma ordered me a new chair that hangs. The attic is above my room and to hang my chair you have to go in the attic to find a stud!

Me and my Dad were the only ones home. My sister, Madi and my Mom were out shopping. But sense they weren't home and my Dad waited for them to come home to go up in the attic to find a stud. They came home, so we all decided to go into the attic to see where I should hang it. We haven't been up there in a very long time so that's why we all decided to go up there. Madi climbed up, then me, Mom next, and then my Dad.

Then when we climbed up Madi said she found something glowing while we were exploring. It looked really cool so me and Madi decided to check it out. It looked like a time traveling machine. But we weren't sure so we asked Mom and Dad but they didn't know either. Me and Madi asked if we would check it out. Mom and Dad said yes. We ran over and we saw that it had a green light coming out. We were so amazed so I asked why not go in it? Madi was shocked because she didn't think it was a good idea.

But my dog came up the stairs and wanted to check everything out. I found an old dog toy so I was playing with it. I threw it up a couple of times and my dog accidentally ran into the time machine and turned it on! Madi and I were trying to turn it off but my dog ran in!!

We told my parents and they said my dog would come back in. Me and Madi didn't think so. But we told our parents we were going in. They tried running after us but they accidentally came with us.

We immediately didn't know what to do or where we were. We saw a bunch of tall buildings and assumed we were in New York city. We asked so many people what the date was and they were so confused. We saw the Twin Towers so we knew it was probably before 2001. We went inside a donut shop and asked what's the date and what is the time. The cashier said, “It's September 11, 2001 and it's 6:41 A.M” We said thank you and left

We were all wondering what we were gonna do and we're gonna save these people or let them find out themselves. We talked and decided to help save the people. My Dad is a firefighter so he knew how to work everything.

But we decided to look up when the flight was and where it was. We decided to look up when the flight was and where it was. All we know is we have

about two hours to fix it. It leaves soon, but thankfully we are only 5 minutes away from the airport. We rush over and walk inside.

It seems like a normal airport but they don't know it's about to be bad. We figured out what the number was. We ran into the airport and ran to the front desk. We yelled, "DON'T LET PLANE 11 LEAVE!" They were super confused but we begged and begged! They called over the manager and we said, "Please don't let plane 11 go please you have to stop it!" They didn't know what happened but we explained to them what was about to happen. We still had our belongings like our iPhones, so we showed a picture of the men so they could find them. We searched the whole airport but our last spot was to look in a coffee spot called Starbucks.

It wasn't popular back then but it definitely is now. We saw them and thought of an idea to get them out nicely so they don't get suspicious. The airport men came up to them and said, "I like your shoes, where did you get them?" "The man said, "Finish line, a shoe store." The man basically told them Starbucks is shutting down and no planes will be going at the moment because they thought someone would rob the place. They asked them politely to leave the airport. They strangely said yes so they walked out.

We figured they had a plan so we called the police right after we got their license plate number. We told the police that they needed to track them down as quickly as they could and arrest them. We quickly explained to them that the twin towers are going to get torn down if they don't find them.

We got the phone numbers from the police so we could stay up to date. Meanwhile we told everyone to be safe and don't go near the twin towers. Everyone listened and there was barely anyone around. Soon later we got a call from the police. They told us they also had another reason to arrest them. They said they had stolen a car, and had no license.

We were relieved knowing it would never happen. We saved 9/11. We saved thousands of people with just a time travel machine. We found a tree where we had landed because we put it in our phones to come back to. We found the machine, but my Dad remembered the code so he put it in. Soon enough we were back in the attic. Our dog was just sitting there like it never happened. Turns out pets can't go in the machine. But it doesn't matter we saved 9/11! I searched it up on my phone and there were no results at all.

We all went out of the attic and never saw that time machine again. I guess you could say we saved the day but it didn't seem like that to us. We just felt normal. We went on with our day as normal and never told a soul. "Happy birthday, hope it was the best." Madi said.

"It was." I said.

Student's Name: Tinsley Newby
Sale Creek Middle School

Liam was at the beach one day after school with his best friend Jesse Brown, thinking about a school project. He was thinking about how to start writing a story, saying his thoughts aloud. “Maybe the main character could be named Harriet Jackson, and work for Russia as a spy.”

“Nah, that’s a very average storyline” Jesse cautioned.

Liam looked up at the sky trying to think harder and gasped in surprise when he saw clouds moving in from the north, so fast that he could see them moving. These clouds weren’t white though, they were almost black but tinted purple. Liam stared up at the clouds in confusion and fear. As the clouds got closer, he saw what looked like normal rain falling from them, but he looked at the ground and saw that where the rain touched the ground, the ground fell away, seeming to melt instantly. He turned around and started running to his house. Jesse ran after him, confused and worried.

When they were in the house, they caught their breaths. “Why did you start running!?” Jesse gasped, out of breath.

Liam panted “Didn’t you see it!?”

Jesse replied, “See what? What did you see that made you start running?”

“The black clouds...The ground was melting...It was moving towards us!”, Liam said frantically “I swear! It was!”.

Jesse, although confused said, “I saw clouds, but they weren’t black. They were normal storm clouds. And they weren’t moving that fast” Liam looked out the window, but the beach was still there, and there were no black clouds. “Liam, we could’ve walked and made it. I didn’t see any black clouds or the ground getting melted. I don’t know about you, but that sounds crazy!” Jesse exclaimed, still out of breath. Liam said that he needed time to think and sent him home.

When he woke up, he got ready to go to school, and left, thinking that what had happened was just a nightmare.

When he got to school, Jesse asked him “Have you figured out what you saw last night?” Liam looked surprised, and said, “You remember that? I thought that it was a nightmare!” As Liam walked to his first class, he thought about it and decided it was not real—just a figment of his imagination.

But in his math class, he looked out the window, and saw the black cloud again, it seemed to be bigger than before, stretching to the horizon, but

there was no acid rain this time. Instead, there was what looked like a tornado that was forming. It was tinted a deep blue.

He suddenly heard Ms. Powell say, “Earth to Liam... earth to Liam.” He heard the class laugh as he focused again on Ms. Powell. He felt his cheeks getting red. Ms. Powell said, “I asked what the GCF of $25x^2y^2$ and $35x^3y^4$ is.” Liam said, “Oh, that is $5x^2y^2$,” And looked at the window again as Ms. Powell continued, but the clouds were gone.

After math class, Jesse, who was also in that class, came to his locker and said, “What is going on? You haven’t been acting like yourself lately. First the acid rain, and now what?!” “It was the clouds again, but it was different, it looked like a half-formed tornado in the sky,” Liam replied.

“That sounds crazier than acid rain. There was never a tornado or acid rain!” Jesse exclaimed in astonishment. “Is that just your story? If not, then what is it? You must have a reason for not acting like yourself.”

Liam says in frustration, “It isn’t about my story. I just see these things. When I look away though, they disappear, and I don’t know why.” He went through the rest of school thinking about the tornado and the acid rain.

Later that day, he had to work and had no time to think about the strange events. He worked on his homework, got ready for work, put on his Subway apron, left, and went to work, still trying to puzzle out why he was seeing things that other people weren’t.

When he arrived at work 5 minutes late, Vanessa, his manager, questioned, “Why are you late?”

“I’ve had a lot on my mind, and lost track of time,” he said.

“Don’t let it happen again” Vanessa scolded.

Later at work, a customer walked in, an old man, dressed for something fancy. Liam looked behind him, through the window and saw to his astonishment, what looked like one of the biggest fires he’d ever seen raging toward the Subway. The black cloud was low-hanging and looked like the smoke from the fire. It was tinted green this time. He knew that it would disappear if he looked away, but he was unable to look away. But he heard a voice, probably the old man’s, saying “Uhh, Hello? Are you going to take my order?” Liam snapped out of his trance and said, “Yeah, one second though, I need some fresh air, I’m sorry”, and went outside.

He went back in to tell Vanessa that he had to clock out for the day because he was feeling sick. When he was back home, he took a quick nap, then woke up, to Luke, his little brother, and Jane, his older sister, arguing. He told his parents that he would be at the beach for a little while because he needed some alone time to think. When he was around the place where he saw the acid rain, he looked up at the sky but saw nothing. When he looked back down, he saw a door in the middle of the beach. He gasped and paused, looking around to see if he could find any clues as to what it could be. He couldn't figure anything out, it looked like an average door. He decided to walk through it. As he did so, he got a weird feeling, kind of as if the atmosphere had changed.

Alex Gold

East Hamilton Middle School

Christmas Imprisonment

“It’s time for bed, Billy. Goodnight,” Mom told me. I didn’t listen, as this year I would be catching Santa; I would capture him, and force him to give me the presents I deserve. Tomorrow, I will have a brand new PS5, as Mr. Claus will be sure to give me one. I will force him to. As of now, it is 9 o’clock. Tim and I are going to wait until the jolly man himself appears in my living room, with his sack full of gifts. Once he arrives, Tim will let our pitbull, named Terminator, out of his crate to devour Santa. He will be so distracted by Terminator that he won’t be watching his gift bag, which will allow Tim and me to rummage through it and steal all the gifts we desire.

“Come on!” I quietly whispered to Tim. “It is time to start the plan.”

“Are you sure? Maybe we were on the nice list, and maybe we will get the presents we asked for.”

Tim truly is delusional. Santa has never given me what I ask for, even if I was the nicest little lad ever. Because of this sad truth, I told Tim, “Keep dreaming, and I will have a PS5 and you’ll have a pet rock.” Moving forward, my dear brother Tim never made any outbursts like that again.

After a while, time started passing faster. Eventually, it was 11:30 PM, and we had to set up the trap. We went to the restroom, grabbed our unused floss, and made a wire that covered the opening of the fireplace, where Santa would enter. This would trip him, and at the same time ring a bell. The bell would notify us of the intruder, and allow Tim to unlock Terminator’s crate. I was now hidden behind the Christmas tree, patiently waiting for that large jolly man to enter, and trip.

“Clink, Clang, Clop,” we heard on the ceiling. Mr. Claus had finally arrived, so I signaled for my brother to prepare. Tim was now hunched over at the crate, as we heard Santa sliding down the chimney.

“Hello boys,” a mysterious voice spoke to us from the fireplace. “Santa said you were on the naughty list.”

I was horrified, as goat legs appeared on the fire. It was not Santa. This thing was huge, its legs filling up the fireplace. I was yet to see his terrible face. Slowly, the hairy hoove stepped out of the chimney, revealing more of this monster. My hands were shaking, which likely revealed my location. The hoove cut threw the floss wire and didn’t ring the bell.

“Now!” I ushered my brother. “Let Terminator out!”

Terminator charged, his saliva hanging from his teeth. He

barked, which would have woken our parents, but it didn't. He disappeared just as quickly as that pitbull appeared in my vision.

“Come out Billy, I must deliver your presents.” The goat-like creature was now in full view, with a frightening face. His teeth were cracked and broken, like a mirror that was dropped. The eyes were yellow and red, glowing. There was an odor coming, and I couldn't identify where. I had the fear of God in me, and I prayed that the monster didn't find me.

“WHOOM!” My hiding spot was revealed. The tree flew across the room, knocking over everything, and breaking on impact. I felt a warm liquid going down my leg, as I looked this goat in its eyes. “Who are you?” I asked desperately.

“I am Krampus.” It growled.

“Where-” I couldn't form a sentence before Krampus grabbed me, and held me in the air.

“You don't deserve Santa. You never have, and you never will. Come with me, boy.” Krampus spoke, “Let me show you something.”

He set me down and walked into the fireplace. I was hesitant, still scared to move, but I listened to him. I thought he would hurt me if I didn't. I walked into the fireplace, and instead of being burned, I was immediately freezing, disoriented, and trembling. I looked around, astounded by this new location. The ground, trees, and buildings were all covered in snow. I wasn't anywhere near my little home. I quickly realized I was at Santa's palace. I saw the elves, who were all giving me a nasty look. I saw their homes and viewed wanted posters of me. Lastly, I realized I was now wearing an Orange and black jumpsuit.

“Welcome to the North Pole, Billy,” Krampus grumbled. I was lost, I had no clues on what was going on. I was scared, cold, and surrounded by elves. Krampus inched forward, and reluctantly I followed. He led me towards a hotter area, with no snow. Eventually, in my vision was a cage, likely the dirtiest thing I had ever seen.

“Get in. This is where people like you belong.” Krampus ordered. I got in, and the door was shut. It was almost pitch black in there, with very ominous noise all around me. “How long will I be in here? When will I see light again?” I wondered. It would indeed be a long time before I returned to the real world.

8th Grade Prose - Untitled

This journal was found on **January 7th, 2023**. The author is unknown...

The journal reads,

Entry One,

I didn't know it would end like this. I don't like being trapped down here alone with them. Everything started on October 13, my 14th Birthday. Timidly, I entered the house and swore it was haunted when the door shut behind me. My mom yelled at me to stop and told me if I was going to be so dramatic I should go on Broadway. We started walking through our new house and when we reached the 2nd floor I needed to use the restroom. I didn't like the house so I told my family to wait on me while I used the restroom because I didn't want to be alone. After using the restroom I went to the room where I told them to wait, but... they were gone. I yelled for them, but it only echoed around the empty house. "Y'all aren't funny!" I yelled. Still, I was answered with silence. I was so aware of my surroundings now, that I noticed a light was flickering and then it slowly died down.

One by one all the lights in the house flickered off, along with the air conditioning shutting down. Silence filled the house, except for the creaking under my feet. I slowly crept down the hallway and to the stairs, which is when I saw the front door unlock and a dark shadowy figure tip-toe through the foyer. Terrified, I ran to the other side of the house, as far away from the steps as possible. Finding what seemed to be a bathroom I ran in and hid behind the door. I heard it come in and turn the sink on which made an eerily dripping sound. After it left the bathroom I carefully tip-toed down to the front door, it was locked. I tried the back door and the garage next, locked. It got to the point where I was running upstairs to check the balcony, but to my surprise, it was also locked. The odd thing about all the doors is that I could turn the handle but the doors wouldn't move an inch. Then I saw it coming towards me, it didn't have feet but somehow there were footsteps, they were quick and they were loud. I ran as far as I could but it caught up with me. All I remember was the light shining through the windows showing me an oddly familiar face as it dragged me away. I slowly blinked awake and as I came to, cold and icy hands thrashed down on me. Even if I wanted to, I couldn't move. My body was throbbing like I had just gotten thousands of shots at the doctor. I lay there breathing heavily cautiously looking around me. It seemed like I was strapped to a chair but my brain

couldn't comprehend that. I felt something drip into my mouth that tasted like iron. That's when I noticed the blood dripping down my shirt. The hands were still holding me to the chair, and then they untied me and gave me a towel. In a deep, hushed, and quick voice, it told me to wipe the blood off but if I moved an inch after that I would be tied up again. Then, I heard thrashing and I looked to my left to see my little brother in the same situation as me. It was a confusing thought to comprehend because the dark figure still stood over me and one was next to him as well. There were more. We were given instructions never to leave this room, and even if we tried we wouldn't be able to. To this day, me and my brother have been in this room doing nothing but staring at the walls. It was a dark and clammy room, and a bit claustrophobic as well. Three times a day the dark figures would come and bring us food, each time it was a bowl of grits and a cup of water or a piece of stale bread and a cup of water. After four years we haven't been able to leave. Not yet I reminded myself. Happy 18th birthday to me.

October 13th, 1999.

Entry Two,

This has to be quick. They are after us. We escaped! I am not sure how it happened but we woke up outside of the house with the screams of a child. We sat up and the child looked horrified. We ran and ran until we couldn't anymore. Never in the past four years have I moved this much. As we made our way through the town I looked around me and found a place to rest for the night. We just got settled and it's 11:11 Pm. Hold on, I hear something down the alleyway. It's coming towards me... Not again...

Student's Name: Kayden Mounce

School or Homeschool Program: Chattanooga Christian School

Infantry Man. Journal entry - June 6, 1944

I awoke at the sound of waves crashing on my boat's side. I was the first one awake. I stayed in my bunk thinking about what will go down in a matter of hours. I Got up with my other men who had awoken. We got dressed in our heavy gear. Then it was time we gathered our weapons and our troops and marched down to the Higgins boats. We were terrified. We had climbed in and were off. We did not know but we were headed to a warzone of blood and tears. The waves crashed and men were yelling left and right. Till we saw the beach of Normandy. The weather was horrible waves crashed and bullets were flying everywhere I was terrified. Then we landed. I slowly saw the beach of Normandy. The door of the boat was slowly lowered. Bullets were flying everywhere I could see my fellow soldiers falling on their knees with a smile of mercy. I rushed to the beach and saw many of my fallen soldiers. There were so many thoughts going through my mind. But I knew I had to push on and I did. I was so nervous. Me and the miniature army pressed on we had climbed the monstrous hill and we had passed the line. We had taken down the bunkers that were lying heavy fire down. We made a passage for my fellow soldiers to get through. And we had broken through. I have avenged my brothers. But as I was walking down I saw an airborne trooper but a hole through a German. He asked to link up I was so down we had no friends left.

Then we saw a German and followed a man and did not shoot after our battle. Then we just ran.

Airborne Trooper. Journal entry - June 6, 1944

We were on the plane we were in. We had woken up 8 hours early. We had to make sure we were all awake. I was nervous I had no choice I knew what I had to do. I had jumped at the sound of planes and bullets shooting down my friends I knew that I had to press in. I had landed. The sound of the rifles and the guns busted my head

but I had to break the beach. I had my rifle with my hand on the trigger. I had shot and the bullet whizzed through the air straight to the chest of my enemy. I saw what I had done I had taken the life of a man but he took the life of my friends so I had no regret. As I shot him I saw a ground trooper and we linked up to take them down. I saw a German running away I chased him with my friend. And we battled but when he was left I just stopped and did not fire. Then we ran away.

German trooper. Journal entry - June 6, 1944

I was in a bunker when I saw a bunch of these boats approaching. I turned to the door and ran. There were multiple beaches that the great NAZIS were protecting. I was running to the other beach the sound of the planes and the whistling sounds of the bullets. Crushing the air I was horrified. I was covered in mud. I was finally there and I saw my friend trying to fight off the ugly Americans but I was too late. There was a bullet lodged in my friend's chest. I was so mad. Then I saw a single man holding a rifle. HE looked nervous he looked so mad. I turned and sprinted I was not stooping and I was not looking back. I was alone I had no one left. I only had my rifle and a dream. I had to do something. I got on the front lines. And I saw the amount of bloodshed I was causing. But then I saw two men And one looked familiar. They just stopped and looked at me and ran away.

Nolan Finley

East Hamilton Middle school

To Stay Or To Go

The day I was born he was holding my siblings standing right next to the door hoping to hear me cry. My siblings told me the moment he heard me cry he had the biggest, brightest smile of all. He held me in his arms the first time smiling at me with joy, he kissed my forehead light and softly. Although I could not see, I had stories and pictures to know it was true. We spent my birthdays together every christmas together and more. The first day I finally remembered memories with him was my 2nd birthday. He got me a doll that I still have to this day. He got me a tiny little green dress that still hangs up in my closet. I remember one hot and sunny day we rushed outside to the swing he made me, I quickly changed into my bathingsuit, he got the hose and sprayed me down as I swung back and forth with so much laughter I was weak so weak i decided to let go and land straight on my arm. He quickly stopped and rushed over to me. Even though I was in so much pain he knew exactly what to do. He brought me inside, changed me into my clothes, got in his crimson colored truck and rode to the nearest dairy queen. We got two large ice screm sundaes with extra fudge and scurried home.

It's funny how memories like those can change. March 11, 2022 I remember the day deliberateliy,me and my dad were gonna go down to Georgia to see him and my grandmother and my mom. My mom was already down there due to the very little health he had. Last minute we decided not to go. Since we werent going I decided to hang out with my friend. We decided to have a sleepover so we headed to my house to let me pack. We were talking to my dad when he got a call from my mom. My dad jumped out of his chair and quickly reached for me and told me the news. I screamed so hard my chest hurt, my tears were rolling down my face. It was like a waterfall. It's true what they say, you really never know how much you love someone until they are gone.....

The day after the funeral we had to go home. We needed a new sceneray. I guess. When you get home by that time everyone knows. If it wasn't for what my brother told me I don't think i would have been okay anymore. "I know it hurts now but just think, now he's in Heaven not hurting anymore. He's healthy and probally stuffing his face with hot fudge sundaes and watching Alabama football" that's what he told me. That's why whenever I think of him now I know he's in good health. Better than ever, having the best seat in the house.

Talbot Stewart

East Hamilton Middle School

Take Responsibility

Interview your parents about a personal experience from your parent's life. What did you learn from it?

My mom's dad told her that if he bought her a car that she would have to pay for all the expenses and if she didn't he would take the car to a field and put a lit match in the gas tank. This taught my mom responsibility. She told me if I also don't pay for my stuff when I'm older and she's the one who buys it that she would do the exact thing to me. My mom said she was scared at the time because she played a sport, she had school and she had a job. She didn't think she would handle it all so she would have to quit softball.

The thing was, my mom loved softballs so she was just gonna tell her dad to get rid of the car. In her heart she didn't want that but she knew she had to. The next day she went and asked her dad if he could take back the car and he said "no, because I bought it for you so you're gonna use it and if you can't keep up with what you are doing then you will have to quit softball.

My mom knew she had to listen to her dad but she really didn't want to. My mom finally woke up the next day and went to school. The first thing she did was go to her softball coach and told her that she would have to quit softball. Her coach was kinda sad because she really liked having her on the team. My mom also didn't want to leave because she had an awesome time on the team. After my mom left school and came back home she told her dad what she did.

He was proud of her making that decision and said that she had really matured by making that decision. My mom started working more and more hours so she could pay for her car. She worked her butt off every single day just to do what she had to do even though she didn't want to do it. This taught me that even though I might not want to do something, I still have to do it. Even if you had a terrible day and had to quit your favorite team in the world.

You have to push yourself through. Life's decisions keep getting harder and harder and if you don't try to accomplish them or do the complete opposite of that your car or something might just explode. Who knows. All jokes aside, I learned a lot of things from my mom. Some might not be better than the others but it's still good to know some of these things. If she didn't tell me her story about her getting a new car and having to quit something she wanted to do for something she needed to do.

I would've never thought that you would have to make those big choses like that in this awful world.

Student's Name: Kloyie Hart
Sale Creek Middle School

Sympathy and Empathy

Sympathy and empathy has always been something that I can feel for someone, no matter who it is or whether I know them or not. Though this specific time, the sympathy I had brought out a bit of rage.

In July of 2022, my youth group and I were going on a missionary trip to Puerto Rico for a week. We left at four AM and made it to the island by about six PM. Once we made it to the airport, about three cars pulled up to take us to where we were staying and where we were going to get help while working and spreading the gospel. The drive back was really pretty despite the fact it had just rained, the scenery was filled with different shades of bright greens and other colors of trees, plants, and houses. We eventually made it to where we were staying, which I had expected something like dorms but in the style of the houses within the island, but it was just three very modern buildings built together. We all got to pick who we were sharing rooms with, and I got to stay with people who I had known for a few years. I set my stuff down and chose a bed before leaving with my friends to go get dinner and to talk with the staff of where we were staying, Send Relief.

A few days went by of painting houses, fixing fences, cleaning rooftops, and scraping old paint. About two days before we left, my friends and I had agreed that we would share testimonies that night. I was sort of dreading it, because most of mine revolved around family life and mental abuse, so I was worried that if I told my friends they would not want to be around certain people at my house and would not want to go to my house again.

Soon enough, the time rolled around where we would be sharing testimonies. Lucky enough for me, I was going to go last so I had some time to think about how to word stuff and not stutter a lot. We got to the third testimony, which was being shared by a close friend of mine, and nearly all of the people in that room, including myself, were absolutely traumatized. I had never felt so much rage and sadness in my life and I felt so bad for what my friend had to go through, which I will not be sharing because it's her private life and it's a little too freaky and horrible.

Then we moved on after crying a bit. We did not have time for the rest of us to share that night so we all went to bed. The next night, the rest of us, which was two other people and myself, shared testimonies. Once the person who was in front of me went, I learned a lot of things about her that I did not know. I had been friends with her since I was in third grade, but we had always had an on/off relationship with each other.

But this night made me feel more drawn to her in a way because she had gone through a lot of the same things I had: love-bombing, manipulation, not being able to tell right from wrong, and mental abuse from who should be a parental figure. I felt really bad for her because we went through the same things, but luckily she was able to cut off all contact with those who had been hurting her. I was still a little anxious that it might start all over again with her because that is what had been happening with me, and I did not want her to keep going through that because all it ever did was start for me was the constant cycle of anxiety throughout the day. Though I'm not able to cut off that contact but she did, I'm more concerned that there might be a day where whoever was hurting her finds contact again, and it honestly just ticked me off. When one of my friends is getting hurt and it's by someone I know, especially in the case that it was nearly the same situation I have always lived with, it just made me want to find the guy and do more than just put him in jail.

I do not necessarily like having all kinds of anger when I have empathy for someone, but that's just how it works for me and at least I do not just put up with that kind of stuff. Heck, even when it's going on in my situation it normally ends up with me insulting someone or telling them off in a not so friendly way. But I am glad that I do have empathy for people, because for most of my friends I've always been a good person they can vent to which is what they said.

Student's Name: Olivia Land
Sale Creek Middle School

Low Batteries

In a world where time was limited, everyone carried on their wrist a digital battery that showed their remaining battery percentage. The lower the percentage, the closer they were to death. Those with a low percentage didn't have long to live and were therefore forced to live in an charging asylum, a place where they spent the majority of their lives keeping up with their batteries.

Tord was one of those with a low percentage. He had been trapped in the asylum for quite some time and was used to living around the other people with dying batteries. The asylum provided comfort and care for those with low batteries, but it was always a gloomy and sad place to be.

One afternoon, while Tord was in the asylum's chill out lobby reading a small book, he looked up and noticed a guy who had caught his eye. The man's name was Tom. He was an artist who spent most of his time drawing and painting on the rooftop at night. Tord was drawn to him and decided to introduce himself.

The two men became fast friends, and soon Tord found himself spending all his free time with Tom on the roof. They talked, laughed, and enjoyed each other's company. Tord felt happier and more alive than he had in a long time. The two would even sneak out to the rooftop together almost every night after curfew.

However, all good things come to an end. After a few weeks, Tom had gotten the news that his battery percentage stopped increasing and there was nothing more that could have been done. He began to face the fact that his time on earth was coming to an end. He was very upset about the matter, but he decided that he would spend his last moments with Tord.

Despite being sad, Tom didn't want to ruin Tord's last moments with him. He kept the news a secret and continued to spend time with Tord on the roof, drawing and painting like they had always done.

A week had passed and Tom was now 1%. That noon, he decided that it would be best to tell Tord everything that had been going on. Tord was on the roof by himself at the time, painting a beautiful blue rose for Tom. Once Tom had come up to the roof as well, he broke the news to Tord.

Seeing the look on Tord's face as tears swelled up in his gray eyes, Tom's heart broke tremendously. As the hours passed and the sun began setting, Tord

never left Tom's side. Tom was now on the death bed looking up at Tord, staring at the tear stains that made a runway down his cheeks. He felt guilty about leaving Tord, but he knew he had no control over what was happening, and would have stayed if he had an option.

Minutes later before the nurse walked in, Tom had passed away, leaving Tord crying on his lifeless body.

Tom's death took a turn on Tord, and he found it difficult to get up and recharge his battery. He felt like he had nothing to live for and spent most of his days in bed, reading or sleeping off his emotions.

It wasn't until his friend's funeral that Tord realized that his time was running out too. He knew that he needed to live his remaining moments to the fullest and make the most of the time he had left.

So with the help of the asylum's staff, Tord was able to accept Tom's passing and start to move forward with his own life. He realized that he had the power to make each day count and that every moment was precious.

Despite Tord's new view on life, he still struggled with the loss of Tom and the fact his battery began to worsen day by day. As he charged his battery daily, he watched his friends and neighbors disappear one by one. Their batteries reaching zero and their time on earth coming to an end. Tord's own battery continued to drop, but he refused to let the fear of his own death hold him back from finding joy in the moments he had now, and the future.

Each day, Tord made a goal to make the most of his time in the asylum. He spent hours on the roof, enjoying the sunshine and listening to the sounds of the city below. He took up painting, something that Tom loved to do. Tord found peace in creating beautiful works of art even though he knew he would never get to keep them. He made new friends, some of whom also had low battery percentages, but others who still had many years left on earth. Together, they shared stories, laughed, and found peace in the simple parts of life.

Despite his best efforts, Tord's heart still ached for Tom and the time they spent together on the roof. He visited his grave occasionally, bringing flowers and spending time alone in reflection. He missed Tom's foolery, tenderness, and more, but knew that Tom would have wanted him to make the best of the time he had left.

As Tord's own battery percentage continued to decline, he found himself thinking about what he had accomplished with his life and what he had left behind.

He had lived a life full of hard emotions, but had learned to enjoy the simple pleasures of life. He didn't care about spending life in the asylum anymore. He just wanted to make sure that he was putting his life to the best use possible. In the end, Tord's time in the asylum was one of both sadness and joy. He had suffered the loss of a friend, but had also found new purpose and meaning in the time he had left. Once with hatred in his heart, but now, he looks up to it with nothing but happiness.

Samiaaya Musgray
Chattanooga Charter School of Excellence Middle



EIGHTH GRADE POETRY

My phone is broken

My phone is broken
But that's the least of my concerns
because every day
I get to sit back and watch the world crumble as it burns
All the Earth has ever done is provide
But it's taken for granted
None of these politicians care to look outside
Because they know when they do
They'll see a bleeding country
that they constantly force feed lies to
But that's been known
That's what we can clearly see from our home
But at this very moment
holy land is a broken war zone
Kids are being raised amongst endless distress
bombs caving in nursery roofs
they're trying their best
how long can they keep living in this mess
when the others spit out propaganda
saying that they're the ones getting oppressed
But they can bomb a mosque
The target was HAMAS
Not kids who just learned to walk and talk
They're taking out families with drones
I just want to go home
But for now I'll just stay upset about my broken phone

Anders Porth

Chattanooga High Center for Creative Arts

Home

Home, waking up to the birds,
“Caw, Caw”,
Gently lifting the lids on my eyes,
My pillow, hugging my head
I sit, contemplating what my day might entail,

Home, my cares leave me,
I feel my dogs soft head in my lap,
The silence provides clarity in my thoughts,
All of my stress flows away,

Home, I sit in the grass
Looking upon the sun’s gentle gaze,
Hearing the occasional flutter of the birds,
Slowly, I recall the memories that brought me to this moment.

Student's Name: Joey McArdle

School or Homeschool Program: Chattanooga Christian School

A Woman's Life Before the 1920's

A woman is scarred by the trials she endures
The men around her are assured
Made to be idols in the light of their knowledge
Accomplishments and astonishing perfections
But the woman is left with an unloved feeling
Knowing that she is seen as an object
An object to be swept away then left.
Left to accept she is unneeded and step back
The woman needs to be a mother
She needs to be a wife
A cleaner
And a pleaser
That is the job of a woman.

Student's Name: Eleanor Johnston

School: Hilger Higher Learning

Color Poem

My heart is a garden,
With memories as flowers.
Some bloom in the light,
Others wilt after hours.

The soil is my soul,
Nurturing each tender seed.
The sun, my hope,
Gives them all they need.

The rain is my tears,
That fall and feed the earth.
The wind is my fear,
That shakes their fragile worth.

But through every season,
My garden remains.
A testament to love,
And all its joys and pains.

Student Name: Anthony Pascarella
School: East Hamilton Middle School

I Hate Poems

In the realm of words, I take my stand,
A poet's quest, I can't understand.
Lines and verses, a tangled art,
I hate writing poems, from the very start.
Rhymes and rhythms, elusive pair,
Escape my grasp, in the open air.
Metaphors dance, just out of reach,
I sigh in frustration, the poetic breach.
Staring at blank pages, a daunting sea,
Each word a struggle, fighting to be free.
Syntax and stanzas, a puzzling game,
I despise the challenge, the poet's claim.

Meters and measures, a rhythmic cage,
My thoughts rebel on the poetic stage.
The ink on paper, a cruel decree,
Oh, how I hate the poet's glee.
Yet, here I am, in this verse-bound strife,
Expressing disdain for the poet's life.
For amidst my grumbles and rhyming woes,
A paradox blooms – a reluctant prose.
So hate it I may, this poetic endeavor,
Yet, I find solace in words, now and forever.
In this paradoxical dance of disdain,
A poem emerges, against the grain.

Student Name: Declan Turpin

School: East Hamilton Middle School

The Spider's Trap

The world revolves around the web of creation
This web is made from an infectious spider
Spinning all its silk and all of its 8 legs to build a web that will spread through the world
As the spider gets the insects hooked on the web
The insect is infected by the spider
The insects become envious of each other
Envious of each other's looks
Envious of each other's wealth
Envious of each other's popularity
Envious of each other's talents
This envy takes over their bodies interiorly
As Envy takes over so does wrath
The wrath spark of rage and anger takes over them uncontrollably
The insects become wrathful towards itself and each other
Wanting nothing more but to hurt one another
Wanting to see the person suffer
The insect also gets overcome by greed wanting more
More likes
More followers
More Smarts
More of everything
The insect becomes slothful
Laying down for hours at a time scrolling
Sleeping all day
Wondering when they'll be just like someone but their self
As Sloth takes over so does Gluttony
Feeling the stress
Using eating as a coping mechanism
All that's flowing in their brain is self hate
Hating themselves in the process even more than before
But also hurting themselves in the process with their scars never healing

The insect is now bound to the spider's infection for life
But until that hatred decedes and the kindness blooms
The flower of life will never heal the scars of the past until that's done
The spider has completely ate those insects to the core
They die and rot away
As their family and friends cries away their hearts
Sometimes having the same faith as them
The spider continues to lives off their highs and lows
And the cycle repeats itself endlessly
But there is still hope for some insects
But a slim to no chance of anybody reaching out to help them
sometimes it takes one kind thing to kill the spider that eats them alive from the inside out
Whenever that happens the insect will regrow and flourish.
And the cycle of life of the world's family trees continues
Sometimes it takes one kind thing for a whole garden of happiness to grow.

Khloe/Sammie Danner
Loftis Middle School

Amidst the rolling hills and verdant plains,
Where the sun rises and the moon wanes,
A world of wonder and magic unfolds,
Where stories are told and legends are told.

From the depths of the ocean to the heights of the sky,
From the frozen tundras to the deserts dry,
There's a beauty that's found in every place,
A grace that's etched in every face.

The world is a canvas, a work of art,
A masterpiece that's close to the heart,
Of all who wander and all who dream,
Of all who marvel at every scene.

The birds that soar and the beasts that roam,
The flowers that bloom and the trees that grow,
Are all part of a symphony grand,
A symphony that's played by nature's hand.

In the stillness of the night, when all is calm,
And the stars twinkle like a cosmic bomb,
The mind is free to wander and dream,
To explore the vastness of this cosmic scheme.

The universe is a mystery, a puzzle to solve,
A question that's waiting to be resolved,
But in the midst of this vast expanse,
There's a beauty that's waiting to entrance.

The warmth of the sun and the cool of the breeze,
The whispers of the wind and rustle of the trees,
Are all part of a natural rhythm divine,
A rhythm that's felt in every heartbeat and every rhyme.

Life is a journey, a path to be tread,
A story that's waiting to be read,
And in the midst of this journey we find,
A wealth of experience that's one of a kind.

The joys and sorrows, the triumphs and defeats,
The laughter and tears, the heartbreaks and heartbeats,
Are all part of a tapestry grand,
A tapestry that's woven by life's hand.

So let us cherish this world that we call home,
And let us never feel alone,
For in the midst of this vast expanse,
There's a beauty that's waiting to entrance.

Ava Woods
Loftis Middle School

Alzheimer's Affliction

Once a blooming tree
Dissipates to bear limbs
Once a beautiful smile
Fades to uncertainty
Once a face that lit up a room
Now dissolves into a wearisome crowd
Time continues, and memories fade like leaves on a tree
Time continues, and someone you know is long gone
They didn't leave, just what was remembered
All the memories, all the times shatter like broken glass
Try placing the blocks together
Nothing helps
Nothing helps
Fear overtakes what will become
Will a machine control the brightness of a life?
What will come
What will come
How much longer will the leaves stay on the tree?
Will the wind rage harder and snow cover the light
Or will the light shine through and leaves grow once more
Only time will tell how long memories have
Only time will tell if there's any hope to undergo

Madison Kilgore
Loftis Middle School

Flavors

Vengeance tastes metallic,
Anger is accompanied with piping hot soup,
Life's taste has vanished.
Enjoyment tastes of cotton candy
sweet but quick to dissolve.
Sorrow tastes of ocean water
bitter to taste by pretty to see.
Life's taste has vanished.
Excitement tastes of freshly made cookies,
Anxiety tastes of pop-rocks,
Loyalty tastes of a home cooked meal,
Life's taste has vanished.

Libbie Reed
Loftis Middle School

HARMONY IN CONTRAST

In a city of dance two ballerinas grace the stage
One dressed in white the other in a darkness cage
The white swan pirouettes with grace and light
A vision of beauty pure and shining bright.
Beside her the black swan with a sinister air
Enchants the audience with an evil flair
A ballets tale of contrast of good and ill
Their dance reveals the power of skill and will.

Julia Blenden
Silverdale Baptist Academy

Grandpa Lou

The war is over, I'm home.
As we celebrate I remember
death and sorrow.
My friends that are gone,
I remember.

I am expected to forget and
to live like nothing happened,
but I will always remember.

No one understands my pain,
or the unforgivable atrocities I've committed.
I don't want to remember them.
So I bury my memories like the dead,
their ghosts will haunt me forever.

Their faces flash.
Short freaky films play in my mind.

Like a volcano I want to erupt with a boom
So like a rock I express myself.

I am a deceiving book.
My cover does not tell my stories.
I desperately want someone to read me and empathize.

My family sees past my cover.
They want me to unload,
I shouldn't have to agonize alone.

I try to swallow the pill of expression with a gulp
to cure, to heal, to release.
Taking the pill offered by my family
is too difficult.
I don't want to remember.

I live my way alone
but my own mind tortures me.
Each memory is like a stab.
I will forever be burdened
unwilling to take the cure.

Lucas Hammond
Silverdale Baptist Academy

From the Depths to the Heights

From the bottom down below.
There are few animals that move all grim and slow.
Millions of miles below the ocean's surface.
You can find a world that almost seems empty, but not worthless.

A little bit farther up we go.
To where the boats go on and row. Here all of the water seems glad.
But watch out because it could get mad.

Up and up and over and over.
To a land with many grassy plains.
Up and up and over and over.
To where you can see the horses' manes.

Now we fly up like a bird.
Come on now, don't be concerned.
Here we have some pretty and pleasant plateaus.
Don't leave now, there is more to undergo.

Now we reach the very top.
Here my friend, I'm afraid we must stop.
I am glad I had you with me on the journey.
Exploring all the depths and heights in a flurry.

Paxton Morgan
Silverdale Baptist Academy

Time

Time flies by when you're having fun,

But where is it when you aren't?

Is it crawling, jumping, walking by? Maybe thinking, wondering, pondering things? Even though it is unlimited

It can run out as quick as a snap.

Time is as slow as a snail, or is it a fast flash? Can it actually fly or does it swim or run?

Is it an hourglass, a clock, or a sundial? Can it dance, flip, or build things?

Even though it is limited

It can be as long as a road.

Will Rogers

Silverdale Baptist Academy

Black Cat

Hes unlike any other when he roams the night,
Don't be afraid, he won't put up a fight.
A prideful stride, it moves at a swift pace,
Leaving behind a mysterious trace.

Its fur as dark as the starless sky,
He's not hard to identify.
In its presence, magic seems to follow,
Something sinister or lovely,
Maybe we'll know by tomorrow.

He's bad luck but it's worth a try,
Don't fear, he tells no lie.
He's a mystical friend, it's true.
So embrace the enchantment, let it be,
For the black cat brings peace, not deceit.

Student's Name: Joy Summerrow

School Name: Silverdale Baptist Academy

Baking Dreams

Amidst the scent of flour and sugar, dreams arise,
In a kitchen adorned with a sweet surprise.
The oven whispers promises in its warm embrace,
As I embark on this baking journey, I take pace.

A job sought, but passion discovered anew,
Each cake I create tells a story, vivid and true.
Layer by layer, ambition starts to rise,
With every whisk and stir, dreams materialize.

From humble beginnings, ingredients unite,
Like aspirations soaring to sky-high heights.
Creaming butter with sugar, a mixture of delight,
In this culinary dance, my spirit takes flight.

I fold in dreams of success, gently with care,
As the aroma wafts through the air.
Amidst measuring cups and spatulas of gold,
Visions emerge, vivid and bold.

A dollop of hope was added to the batter,
And dreams begin to climb their shining ladder.
With each cake that rises to golden perfection,
My aspirations grow stronger, without objection.

The timer chimes at last,
As I witness the culmination of my baking repast.
Golden crusts and cream-filled layers are divine,
Each creation is a testament to the dreams intertwined.

With every bite savored, joy comes alive,
Delight dances on taste buds, there is no need to strive.
Within these sweet masterpieces made with care,
I find fulfillment as abundant as I dare.

Taste my creations, baked with love and mirth,
Witness the dreams that found their rebirth.
For in the realm of cooking's delightful art,
I am reminded of the passion that fuels my heart.

Jude Tibble-Boettcher
East Hamilton Middle School

Poem about life

In the vast symphony of existence we dwell,
A masterpiece painted on life's vibrant canvas,
With each passing day, an intricate tale we tell,
A journey woven with moments, joy and sadness.

Life, like a river, flows in majestic streams,
Beneath sunshine's caress and moonlight's gleams,
Through trials and triumphs, it serenades our heart,
A melodic dance where each moment plays its part.

In the embrace of dawn, hope gently awakes,
As dreams take flight, with endless possibilities they make,
The morning whispers secrets, inviting us to explore,
With open arms, we chase what our souls adore.

But life, as we know it, can be a bittersweet ride,
A path adorned with challenges we cannot hide,
Through stormy nights and shadows that befall,
We learn to rise, resilient, standing tall.

For in every struggle, a lesson hidden deep,
A chance to grow, to learn and to weep,
Through tears shed like petals, we find strength anew,
And rise from the ashes, our spirits reborn, tried and true.

Life beckons us to cherish moments that swiftly pass,
To savor love's sweet nectar, and laughter's vibrant mass,
To be present, here and now, with hearts wide open,
And embrace the beauty life's kaleidoscope has woven.

For as the sun sets, painting skies in hues of gold,
We reflect on this tapestry, our stories unfold,
In each breath we take, a gift of precious time,
To dance, to love, to shine—this life, truly sublime.

Jericho White
East Hamilton Middle School

Sit through all the tears
make all the meals
be caring and loving
handle all the fights and shoving
pick them up after they fall
walk through the school's halls
holding their hand
greet the husband when he comes home from work
clean up after the mess
you will never regret
tell your kids to never think less
Your family is the whole world to you
And what is more, you have become a mom,
the stronger person out there

**Yeva Skrypkat,
East Hamilton Middle School,**

Thank You

Thank you
For laying with me in the sun
On hot summer days
With our melting popsicles in hand
Thank you
For being there with me
On every single one of my birthdays.
And decorating my face with cake.

And 50 years from now
I hope you never forget me
And the memories we've lived through
Remember the late nights
When we would laugh till our stomachs hurt
Remember our sleepovers
When we would sneak downstairs for more snacks
And remember all the trouble we made

Thank you
For showing me my worth
And who I am
And never judging me
Thank you
For sitting with me as the days got long
When the tears kept flowing
But you told me everything would be okay

I hope you remember the hard days,
When you would help me in my struggle
Days that cut deep into my soul,
And you patched up my wounds
But most of all,
I hope you remember
You are my best friend
And forever will be

Diksha Patel
East Hamilton Middle School

Too Good Not to Tip

I walk in
The smell hits
Like a powerful wave in the ocean
Drawing all people into the light but constant
Comfort of your scent
Filling the shop space up to the windows
You smell like how it would feel
To find water in the middle of the desert

So inviting on the hot days
With the clicking machine
Whirring back up to provide cold air
Freshness like cool white sun
Eating as fast as we can
Before you drip down our hands
Onto already dirty sneakers
In the sticky heat of summer

You're just as good in the cold
An icy, hospitable hug
Worth the chill and nip
As cold as we feel
On the winter days
Pink noses and sparkling laughter
“Why’d we get this?”
No regrets

You're satin soft
A bouquet of velvet sweetness
Pinky promises and unkissed faces
Sunkissed faces
Coins clatter as they're dropped into jars
For the flavors on the tip of our tongues
Are too good not to tip

Haelee Harris
Baylor School

Aroma of Serenity

Your smooth smoke
Captivates me.
Dance delicately,
My ballerina of vapor.
You rise towards the sky,
Knowing your soothing fragrance
Surpasses any other.
You are the aroma of serenity.

Your scent is reminiscent
Of lying in bed late at night,
Buried in blankets,
In a pleasant plush shelter.
A smell not dissimilar to the feeling
When one has just woken up,
Still halfway in a dream,
And they feel that
Nothing in the world can hurt them.
You are the aroma of serenity.

A scent that softly sticks on my shirt,
Clings to my side and hugs me tight.
You hold me close,
Grasp on to me,
And promises not to leave
Until I'm ready.
You are the aroma of serenity.

Your smoke leisurely
Fills my home,
Gentle and unhurried.
A friend who visits so often,

They might as well be a roommate.
One who accompanies me
At any time of day,
No schedule can hold us back.
You console me when I'm feeling worried,
Tell me everything will be alright.
You are the aroma of serenity.

You make the edges of things become blurred,
And eventually the world seems
To be made up of colors and shapes.
Life fades into something
Undemanding and uninvolved,
Simpler and stress free.
You help me see that life
In the long run,
Isn't always so complicated.
Soon, it feels as if my soul
Is clouded by your sweet-smelling smoke.
You are the aroma of serenity.

Ava Heaton
Baylor School

Faith

In the depths of doubt, faith takes flight,
Jesus, our beacon, shining so bright.
With open arms and a love so pure,
He offers peace, forever secure.

Through trials and storms, our faith holds strong,
Jesus, our rock, where we belong.
With every step, He's by our side,
In Him, our faith and hope abide.

Through valleys low and mountains high,
Jesus, our guide, will never deny.
In His embrace, we find our peace,
Our faith in Him will never cease.

Bailey Dye
East Hamilton Middle School

Slip away.

I've always wanted to make my parents proud

-

The feeling of seeing their disappointed faces in my mind
Every single time i do something that they resent.

-

The feeling of wanting to be just like them
But they are just too different from each other and myself.

-

My mother, how i love her but resent her for being so quiet and reserved,
I try my best to be that around her, but it hurts my soul to see the loud part of me slip
away.

-

My father, so loud and likes to stand up for himself, he makes jokes and the others laugh,
I try so hard to be that around him, but it hurts my soul to see the quiet part of me slip
away.

-

I do this for my parents because they don't quite like each other,
I understand that but it hurts because i know they will always see the other in me.

-

So i tried my best for them but all they saw was me break down,
Screaming that i didn't want that life anymore and for me to be myself.

-

They held me tight and said they would love me no matter what i do or who i am,
But my thoughts tell me that's not true and that they do care.

-

So still when im with my mother or when im with my father i shape myself to be just like
them

And it hurts my soul to see that part of me slip away.

Name: Jillian Sarr

School: East Hamilton Middle School



NINTH GRADE PROSE

The House

If the house were a face, the boarded-up windows would be its eyes. They seemed to stare at you with the hate they held in the darkest depths of their shadows. Most people feared those eyes. But Elizabeth wasn't scared. She knew the house was just jealous, in a way, that it wasn't a home. Elizabeth had been walking past the house for years, but today she stopped in front of it. She walked towards the front door as if she were in a trance, stopping once her hand was on the doorknob. She opened it slowly, looking about the dusty room with a faint smile on her face. Elizabeth walked through each room, fingering the broken furniture, but she stopped when she got to the living room. She stood in the center of it, looking around in the faint light the boarded windows gave. Elizabeth closed her eyes for a brief second, and when she opened them, the house had changed. Now it was clean and bright, but Elizabeth was not startled by the change. She looked excited, especially when she saw the people on the sofa. A man and a woman sat there, cradling a baby between them. Elizabeth walked towards them slowly, but they didn't notice her, so she hesitantly extended her hand. Her trembling fingers passed through them as if they were ghosts. Or maybe she was. Elizabeth sank into an armchair, watching the family as time went by. The baby grew into a dark-haired girl, and Elizabeth watched as time went by. Birthdays, Christmases, and celebrations rushed by, marking the years as they changed, but Elizabeth didn't notice. She kept her eyes on the dark-haired girl. One day, the girl hugged her parents tight, then picked up a bag and walked out the door. The house seemed quieter without the girl as if it had lost its joy, and time moved faster and faster. Then the girl came back. The house was full of laughter once more, but now the girl was not. She seemed sad, as if whatever she had seen had broken her ever-present enthusiastic spirit. She stayed that way for a long time. One day, someone appeared in the doorway of the living room. He stood there in his military uniform, and Elizabeth looked on as the girl ran into his arms. They were married soon after, and Elizabeth watched still as their lives went on. They had children, and their children had children. People came and went. The house was filled with love, people, and noise. Then everything was quiet again. The girl, whose hair was no longer dark but gray, stood hand in hand with the boy in the doorway of the living room. He only had eyes for her, but she looked around the room as if taking it all in. Elizabeth could have sworn that the girl smiled at her before walking away. Elizabeth sat in the empty house for a while, then she opened the

locket around her neck. She looked at the picture of the dark-haired girl and the boy in uniform. Light came down from above, and when Elizabeth looked, she saw someone above her. They were draped in white robes and bathed in golden light. They didn't say a word but extended their hand, and Elizabeth took it.

Student's Name: Ella Guice
School: Hilger Higher Learning

Just a Thought

I love musicals, but I think that there are not enough hip-hop musicals. Not including hip-hop is discluding a whole culture. African Americans and those of Hispanic heritage often find comfort in this genre of music because of the connection between their heritage and hip-hop. Hamilton is one of the only Broadway musicals that is rap centered. I would like to create a film company that centers around rap musicals. There are so many different movies that could be created. I have an idea notebook full of different musicals I would like to make. I would like to share my best one yet. I saw a b-boy crew and was amazed by the dance moves they did. I researched about breakdancing and that is what started my idea for this musical. I thought about what the plot could be and after a lot of brainstorming I finally came to a conclusion. The plot would surround a group of kids who lived in the slums of the Bronx. These kids would be from vast racial backgrounds, from Latino to African American to Caucasian. I chose the setting and characters because Breakdancing is huge in the Bronx and I wanted to emphasize the importance of racial diversity. The kids would be in their late teens and meet each other at school due to being sent to detention under false accusations. The kids got to know each other and connected and bonded through their love of breakdancing. The crew signs up for a breakdancing competition with a cash prize of 1 million dollars. The kids knew this would help out all the kids in the slums and practiced hard to win. They have to go up against more elite kids who have the money for expensive costumes, and a crazy set. The kids are funded by the community and are able to afford costumes and gas for the drive down. The kids end up winning the whole competition after facing bullying and harassment from the other teams.

Student's Name: Jaron Edmonds

School or Homeschool Program: Hilger Higher Learning

A Summer in Castle Combe

He groggily arose with heavy eyes from his quick nap against the car window. The low humming of the car was peaceful, and the beautiful sunshine coming through the window made Rodger feel very comfortable. “Good afternoon,” said Grandmother Canda, “You knocked a whole.. thirteen minutes off of the trip.” She smiled triumphantly at her own sass. “Hhm mhm” Rodger hummed in response. He wanted very badly to go back to sleep in the warm sunshine of the car window, but there was now a sore spot on his head from having it there too long. “How much longer until we get there?” He mumbled in a sleepy slur. “You’ll know we’re close when you stop seeing cars,” Grandmother announced. “She sure has a lot of energy for such a small old lady,” he thought.

Their house was in a small, beautiful, town in England called Castle Combe. Only after a long while of driving through pot-holed roads, curving through tree lined valleys, they arrived. A smile seized Rodger’s face to see his grandparents house again; it was his favorite place in the world. The quaint house was one story, and periwinkle blue. It rested in the middle of a huge, two-hundred-acre, flower-filled, valley in the middle of literally nowhere. There was a red, not yellow, brick path to their house, and the bricks were crooked and had moss growing on them. The sun was showcasing its most spectacular glory on the whole place. A fragrant smell was evoked from the flowers, and the house sat there with its many windows, which were decorated on the inside with lace curtains from the 70’s. The roof was made of silver tin. To the left of the house was a large garden in the side yard.

That night at dinner as Rodger was slowly chewing his spaghetti, he began to recall the events of the summer. He remembered his friends, as well as his non-friends. Rodger had not been very popular at Lodenwood High. He was not as tall as other boys his age, he had had his braces on for four years, and he was not very socially talented. On the contrary to this he loved being around people, but just never knew what to say or how to act. “What are you thinking about?” Grandma demanded quietly. You see, most grandmothers are slow, kind, sweet, and loving. Grandma Canda was not this way. She’d rather be dead than seen idle, and she merely wants what she wants, when she wants it. Nobody argues with her; we’ve learned that by now. She is by no means cruel or unkind, she’s just herself. “I’m thinking about the school year that just passed.” Roder sighed. “Was it a good year?” Grandma Canda asked thoughtfully.

“Yeah, I guess.” Grandma smiled, got up from her chair, and kissed him lovingly on the head. “Good night.” She whispered, and with that she walked very sturdily away to her room. They had eaten dinner at eight o’clock after all.

The next morning Rodger woke up in their guest room, and walked out of it into the living room. He took a right into the small kitchen. Nobody else was awake. His feet were hurting faintly due to being forced to function suddenly, and with good reason too! It was six-thirty in the morning! “Oughoooh what?!” He mumbled, “Why..am I.....I don’t even...” Roder hobbled back to his room and laid down again. However, he couldn’t sleep now that he was awake. That sure was annoying. He took a nice long breath through his nose, got up, put on his shoes, and decided to explore the property in his pajamas. He walked back through the living room, back into the kitchen, and straight out the door into the faint sunshine. Rodger took another big breath of air, this time of the beautiful aroma that came from the valley. He looked to his left and saw the road leading back into town about 200 yards away. He looked to his right and saw the oak forest nearby that his grandparents owned, but never entered. Rodger knew full well that the other six years of exploring already done on this property left nothing new to find or see. Except for the forest..... He marched, almost ran, toward the forest. He could hear birds singing and squawking energetically.

The minute he entered the forest the shielding branches of the trees made it automatically darker. The forest floor was covered with moss, leaves, and flowers as well as just grass. He danced his way through the branches and squeezed his way past the sequoias fifty times thicker than he was. “You guys are loud for six-thirty in the morning!” He shouted, proclaiming his frustration at the immense amount of loud cawing and squawking when he was still not fully awake. To this, a bird somewhere up in a tall tree to his right said “Chirpchirpchirpchirpchieierphiiiiuhiiu!” Suddenly, Rodger stumbled upon the most magnificent oak tree he could have ever possibly imagined. All of the other trees around it had distanced themselves reverently away from this mother of trees. It was at least two-hundred feet tall with colossal, thick branches twisting beautifully away from it. Rodger stood gaping at this extraordinary tree. “Woooooow!” he breathed, walking around the tree, running his hands gently around its torso, therefore observing its circumference. There was a gorgeous knot at the front of the tree, and beside it was a heart carved into the tree with the initials, “CH + RC.” inside.” “This must have been

written a very long time ago.” He said because the carving was faint and slightly dolloped with old sap.

Student’s Name: Olivia Hudson
School: Hilger Higher Learning

The Last Song

“Death is a privilege, one I have yet to earn.” Henry Wingrove scoffed as his fingers traced over the words. Usually, Henry would find comfort in poetry, but it seemed as though today, he was destined to experience the opposite, as this quote was one of many things going wrong with his day. Today marked what would have been the 20th anniversary of Henry and his late wife, Olive Wingrove’s, anniversary if not for the car accident they experienced three years ago that took Olive’s life. Normally, Henry kept to himself, but on days like today, he found it necessary to get out of his home and venture out into town. When Henry would decide to leave his house, you could always find him inside the local bookshop, and that’s exactly where he is today. However, he was not prepared for the first book he picked up to be a reminder of his wife’s death. Closing the poetry book, he laughed under his breath, “Well, I am certainly no stranger to death. Does that make me privileged?” All of a sudden, Henry heard a small voice behind him reply, “I think that only applies to people who actually die.” “Oh yeah?” Henry challenged. “What would you know about death?” Henry rolled his eyes as he turned around to meet the voice, and his eyes were met with those of a sickly young girl. He immediately felt guilty and replied, “Oh, I’m terribly sorry. Forgive me, it’s my late wife and I’s 20th anniversary. I’m not myself today.” The young girl smiled softly and said, “It’s okay, I shouldn’t have eavesdropped. I was just wondering if you knew anything about violins.” Henry looked down and saw the stack of violin books the girl was carrying. Henry’s face instantly dropped as he realized that he probably would’ve been better off staying at home. “I do, actually. It was my wife’s favorite instrument. She has a real gift, I mean, she had a real gift.” The young girl’s face dropped as well. “Oh, I’m sorry. I’ll just go find someone else,” she replied. Henry examined the bookstore, he knew every worker well enough to know that they didn’t know anything about music, and he and the young girl were the only customers in the store. As the young girl turned on her heel, Henry stopped her and said, “I may know a few things.” The young girl’s face instantly lit up. She led Henry to a table piled high with violin books and said, “My name is Iris Dalton.”

Henry surprisingly enjoyed his time with Iris that day in the bookstore. Iris made Henry forget his troubles and gave him something he desperately needed in his life: friendship. Iris was eager to learn violin, but Henry knew her knowledge could only go so far from reading books. He agreed to meet with her every Wednesday to teach her how to play violin and would bring his dearly loved wife’s violin for her

to practice with. Months had passed since they had first met. Henry and Iris were becoming the best of friends. When they weren't practicing, they would share stories of their lives. Iris told Henry that she was a cancer patient at the children's hospital that was right next to the bookstore. Iris's mom would allow her to make a trip down to the bookstore every week after her chemotherapy treatments.

One day, Henry walked into the bookstore eager for another lesson. The last time they had met, he had promised to play his wife's favorite song on the violin for Iris: "I'll be Home for Christmas." However, Iris never showed up. Henry was disappointed but concluded she must have had other plans as the holiday season was quickly approaching. Before leaving, he walked up to one of the bookstore workers and said, "Hello, my name is Henry. I come here every Wednesday to teach a young girl named Iris to play violin. I'm taking a holiday vacation with my brother for the next few weeks, and I was hoping you could tell her where I was next Wednesday, so she wouldn't be confused." The worker smiled at him and said, "Of course I will! Have a great trip."

A few weeks had gone by, and Henry was back from his holiday trip with his brother. The following Wednesday, Henry entered the bookstore, but Iris was still nowhere to be found. When he approached the same bookstore worker and asked about Iris, the worker said that Iris hadn't shown up at all in the past few weeks. He worried that he would never play his wife's favorite song for Iris.

Soon enough, Henry was able to play the calming the song for Iris. The audience couldn't help but sob as he played the song. Tears started to form in his eyes as well as he played the last note. The audience clapped respectfully and there was not a dry eye to be found. They could no longer contain their emotions, and now neither could Henry. Turning away from the crowd, he pulled out a tiny white handkerchief from the left pocket of his silk black jacket and wiped his eyes. He had managed to compose himself for a few seconds but didn't turn to face the crowd. Instead, he turned to Iris. Clutching onto his wife's violin tightly, he sighed as he looked over the coffin where she lay. She had lost her battle with cancer. After Iris never

showed up to their weekly meeting, Henry waited outside the hospital in hopes of catching Iris's mom. It was she who had told him about Iris's passing. Looking down at Iris, he forced a smile. At that moment, he chose only to remember the good that Iris brought to his life. Taking a deep breath, Henry took his wife's violin and gently placed it next to Iris, and whispered, "Thank you."

Freedom From Corruption

I am Akira, and I was once a loyal samurai of the village of Kasai. But that was before I discovered the terrible secrets that hid my village in darkness. It all began on a fateful night, when I decided to abandon my home and flee, hunted by the very people I had sworn to protect.

The moon hung low in the sky, casting eerie shadows that seemed to whisper secrets only the night could hear. I had a heavy heart as I left behind the village that had been my home, a place of beauty with cherry blossoms that painted the landscape in delicate shades of pink. But those blossoms hid the ugliness that hid beneath their beauty.

As I moved silently through the forest, I could hear the faint echoes of footsteps trailing behind me. My fellow samurai, my brothers, were now my pursuers. They believed that I was a traitor, and they would stop at nothing to bring me back to face punishment. I took refuge in a grove of ancient trees, the rough bushes offering shelter and concealment. The night was my ally, and I knew that I had to remain stealthy. I crouched low, my hand resting in the hilt of my kodachi, ready for the inevitable confrontation. They were highly skilled samurai after all.

“Find him,” I heard a hushed voice say. It was Hiroshi, one of my closest friends among the samurai. He has once been my confidant, but now he was my hunter. His words sent a chill down my spine, as if ice cold water had been poured down my spine.

The search continued through the night, the moon’s pale light guiding my pursuers like ghosts in the darkness. They were relentless, determined to bring me back and uphold the village’s twisted sense of honor.

Hours turned into a relentless night, and I grew tired, my eyes heavy with exhaustion. My determination, however, remained unbroken. As dawn approached, I found myself at the edge of a calm pond, its surface as still as glass. It was here that I heard the approach of my father, Daichi.

“Akira,” he called out, his voice laced with sorrow. “Please, my son, come back. This path leads only to death.”

My heart ached at the sound of his voice, but I knew I could not return. I had seen the atrocities committed by those in power in Kasai. My father, a trusted council member, was entwined with their horrific actions. I had to stand for justice, even if it meant defying my own blood.

I stepped out from the shadows, my katana gleaming in

the dim light. “Father,” I said, my voice steady, “I cannot return. The village is tainted, and I will not be a part of its corruption.”

My father’s eyes were filled with sorrow and desperation. “You do not understand, Akira. The village must survive, and we must do what is necessary to protect it.”

A heavy silence hung between us, and I could see the struggle in my father’s eyes, torn between his loyalty to the village and his love for his son.

“Please,” he whispered, “do not force me to make a choice.”

But I could not waver. I took a step closer, my katana pointed at my father. “I will not let you or the village continue down this path of darkness.”

With a heavy heart, my father drew his own sword, the pitch black blade quivering in his hand. The standoff between father and son was a heartbreaking moment, a clash of loyalty and ideals. The moon hung low, the only witness to our conflict.

Our blades met, clashing in a dance of steel that mirrored the turmoil within our souls. My father was skilled, and I could feel the weight of his experience in every strike. He fought to subdue me, not to kill. However, I fought to avenge the lives of all that had been ended by my father.

The battle raged on, our movements quick and precise. Until I saw an opening that was far too obvious, especially for a skilled samurai. But I took it regardless, and pierced right through the heart...

“I love you, Akira,” he said as he bled out, tears glistening in his eyes, “but you must go. You must go and never come back.” Life drained from his body, and his head dropped down and he fell to the ground... he was dead.

As dawn broke over the battlefield, I retrieved my blade and wiped the blood off of it. I looked over at the rising sun, and saw my new future away from Kasai. A future where I can live freely and help those in need. As I sheathed my blade, and began my journey to a new land. Free of this horrid place, I was free at last.

Nocturnal Terror: A Tale of Old London

There I was, October 15, 1923, on a dark and stormy night on the East Side of London. The rain tapped in a rhythmic melody against the concrete pavement, hammering down on me. “Rat-a-tat-tat, Rat-a-tat-tat.” The street was dead and dark on this particular night with a heavy silence ensuing, everyone resting, oblivious to what was about to happen. In this rain-soaked, dimly lit street there were just the two of us, both with our own lives, our own regrets, and our own secrets. I was, however, holding the deadliest secret of all, with my first victim of the twilight being clueless and helpless. I approached him slowly, knowing only one of us would see the dawn of morning. The rain was pouring down harder than before. “Rat-a-tat-tat, Rat-a-tat-tat.” I snuck behind him ready to pounce, like a lion pursuing his prey. “Rat-a-tat-tat, Rat-a-tat-tat.” I was merely meters away from the poor boy. I then pulled out my knife and stuck it deep into his chest. Once I plunged the knife in, I turned him around looking directly in his eyes. I wanted to see his pain and fear, as I watched the life drain out of his body.

Mere hours later, after the gruesome murder, the policemen and Detective Jagger arrived on the scene. They had been attempting to catch the “Nocturnal Terror,” my known alias, but had been fraught with frustration and despair. They had been searching for clues about me. I was careful to never leave a trace of evidence, but I intentionally left letters for them. The letters contained sinister riddles, details of where my victims lie, and mention of victims they haven’t found. The burning question that haunted Detective Jagger’s mind was, “What was my motive?” He couldn’t help but wonder why I did this. He thought maybe my mind had succumbed to madness, or maybe I was seeking vengeance. Maybe I did it for fame or internal glory, but I didn't. I did it for fun.

I laid in the shadows for a week, maintaining my normal job at the Central London radio station. Ever since I had worked there, I had mastered the art of picking up police radio frequencies, unveiling where they’re at, at all times. It let me always be one step ahead of them, evading them.

Late one night, I sat alone, my ears attuned to the radio, as most were slumbering, and I learned that no policemen were in the area. I decided to indulge some “fun,” so I ventured down a dark street ready to pounce on my next victim. Tonight was quiet, almost unusually quiet. There were no sirens, no chirping of crickets, no drunken men stumbling around the pavement. I searched for my next unsuspecting victim, and then I saw a figure wearing an oversized trench coat, a shadow within shadows. I

trailed behind him in the darkness slowly. I kept following him, but something felt off. He seemed to sense my presence and escaped. I pursued my prey and unsheathed my knife. As I started to catch up, he ran into an alleyway. In a heart stopping moment, he unveiled a handgun, a sinister twist in our game of life and death. I then whispered, "How is this possible? A civilian can't possess a handgun." He took off his trenchcoat and said, "I'm Detective John Jagger and you are under arrest." I then heard sirens behind me. To my own demise, it was a trap. I accepted defeat or so they thought. As he put his gun away and approached me, I ran toward him and slashed him with my knife. He was incapacitated and could not move. I ran to the back of the alleyway and found a narrow opening and tried to evade the policemen. One policeman stayed with Jagger and one pursued me. I ran to the end of the other alley and waited beside a wall, waiting for the policemen to run by. I heard him coming, so I unsheathed my knife and slashed his ankles. As he pummeled to the ground, I pounced and cut his throat.

After I killed the policemen, I thought that I was home free. Oh, how dreadfully I was mistaken. I assumed I made it back to my residence safely, but I had made a grave mistake. I didn't check to see if I was being followed. I was fast asleep, when sirens interrupted my slumber. Policemen burst into the building, like fireworks on the 4th of July. I ran to the roof, where I knew a ladder led down to the streets. I slid down and ran by the police cars. I saw Detective Jagger injured, but slightly mobile. He saw me run by and hopped into the driver's seat and chased me. I ran down the streets of London with him right behind me. I came upon a road that had a very abrupt turn. He was driving at high speeds and when he turned, he crashed, flipping the car. Detective Jagger was now fully immobile. I dragged him out of the car and brought him into an alleyway once again. He asked me, "Who are you?" I said, "I am the embodiment of your darkest fears, the darkness you can't escape, the bringer of your demise" and proceeded to cut his throat, watching his life slip away from him, staring into his eyes.

In the end, as the streets of London whispered their secrets, I slipped through the grip of the law, a phantom fading into the shadows of the night. My sinister legacy continued to haunt the city's shadows, a chilling reminder that some shadows were meant to endure, lurking just out of reach, forever eluding justice.

Rhett Colter
Silverdale Baptist Academy

Juan and the Garden

Once upon a time, there was a gardener named Juan. Juan was an exquisite and efficient gardener. He would always get his work done nicely and neatly. After work, he would celebrate by eating spaghetti. One day Juan was doing his everyday job and was going to get paid 25 dollars! His usual payment was only 15 dollars. Juan was excited about getting paid, so he started to get to work. During his work, he got thirsty so the owners of the garden got him some water. He was about two hours into the job and promised the owner that he would get the garden done in less than four hours. About three hours in, he was still working, when all of a sudden Juan's rake broke. He only had an hour left to finish the job, and he wanted to be true to his word about being finished in four hours.

Juan went to his car to get some duct tape. He used it to tape his rake back together, but it broke immediately. Juan was devastated, he didn't know what to do! All of a sudden he had an idea. So he went to the local Ace, and as he was walking in, he saw that there was a new tape. It was called James tape. He liked the name of the tape because it was named after his friend. This tape was supposed to be the strongest tape ever, and they had just come out with new colors, white and tan. Juan was excited to try this new product so he hurried back to the garden as fast as possible. When he got there he immediately got the tape and taped his rake back together. After he taped it, he immediately got to work. He had about 30 minutes to spare, and 28 minutes later he was finished.

The owner walked outside to inspect his work, and Juan noticed that one of the bushes he planted was as crooked as a snake. Thank goodness the owner had yet to notice it. When the owner turned around he ran as fast as he could and fixed the flower. As the owner was turning around Juan rushed back and the owner didn't even notice. As Juan was standing there the owner paid him the 25 dollars. Juan was excited to have a delicious flavored dinner with his friend James who mows lawns, and his other friend Timothy Jr. the 3rd Dennit. It was a Tuesday so they went out and got some Tuesday taco special at their favorite restaurant and celebrated. The tacos were so good it was like they came straight out of heaven. When they were done eating Juan had eaten so many tacos that he fell asleep in the car.

Juan's friends decided to play a prank with the new James tape he got, and when he woke up he was taped to the roof of his house. What his friends didn't know was that the tape was permanent, and would never come off. When Juan woke up

he was furious, but it took him a second to realize that the tape would never come off. He couldn't do anything because he was stuck to the roof. So his friends went and got the package the James tape came in and they read how to get it unstuck. There was only one way to get it off, and that was the one and only, Cranberry Sprite. The only problem was that this drink was sold out everywhere and nobody had it in stock.

His friends looked in every store and still couldn't find it, so they decided to look online and only one website had it, eBay. The problem though was that the sprite cost exactly 25 dollars and nobody had any money besides Juan's earnings he made during his work. Juan had no chance of being freed unless he used his precious money. Juan was super angry, but he gave up his cash anyway and ordered the special Cranberry Sprite. There was a problem though, It would take 3 to 5 business days for the Sprite to arrive. So for three days, Juan was stuck to the roof of his house. His friends did bring him food and water and entertained him, so it wasn't as bad as it it could have been.

When the order arrived, Juan's friends had unboxed the box and found a solid case to prevent this rare sprite from leaking. The case was too strong to open with their hands, so they got a hammer and a chisel and started chipping away at the box. After an hour of trying to open the box, James realized there was a secret button on the bottom. He pressed the button and the box magically opened, and they got the sprite out and opened the can. They poured it on the tape and the tape instantly melted, and Juan was free! Juan wasn't mad. Juan had learned a lesson about friendship and how his friends wouldn't let him down and would go through a lot just to help him. They all went to the movies and watched Despicable Me 4. He knew they would be friends for life.

The End.

Waltz of the Wolfsbane

Red. Red is a color of many things: apples, roses, cardinals, and blood. White. White is the color of many things: clouds, swans, whitecaps, and snow. Red and white do not go together. At least that's what she told herself. Who knew blood could coat the snow so vibrantly and disturbingly...and who knew a red cape could drape around the shoulder bones of a large white and gray dire wolf so easily? She sure didn't.

A young lady with a red cape and hood draped across her dainty shoulders walked out the door of her large house, carrying a basket in her arms. She walked swiftly, in fact so swiftly one would need to run to keep up with her. She kept her pace steady but graceful as she tread towards the forest. She walked through the mighty Torii gates that separate the forest from the village. As she entered the forest it was clear she was looking for something.

Wolfsbane...where are those horrid flowers she thought to herself. She made her way through the forest searching for the poisonous purple flowers. As she tread through the forest with her head down she didn't notice the storm clouds gathering. Not finding any flowers she was searching for. But then, something caught her attention, a patch of purple scattered among the forest ground.

“Wolfsbane!”

The girl with the red hood exclaimed in a soft whisper. She stepped forward to pick it while she slipped on her gloves over her delicate hands to protect herself from its poison. She reached out to pick one but she paused. On the sleeve of her dress a soft white speck landed. Soon the white speck gained its own companions.

Snow had begun to fall. A shiver of icy fear shot through the girl's body. She felt ignorant that she hadn't paid closer attention to the sky...

“Hello? Little Red Hood?”

She turned swifty at the voice, in the close distance stood a form. A tall male with grayish white hair...but he was not old. In fact, he looked quite young. He looked around twenty years old, just like the girl in the red hood. There he stood, his strong form hardly protected from the cold world, but his strong physique never seemed to waver. The distinct thing about him was his eyes. Piercing golden eyes. Much too golden and bright to be natural.

“Hello...” she responded hesitantly. Looking at him with curiosity and confusion.

“Are you lost Little Red?”

“Please don’t call me Little Red, I simply despise the color red. Much to my dismay it is my family's trademark.” She responded bluntly, unsure of the man in front of her. The man nodded respectfully, honoring her request. Then he softly spoke,

“What's your name so that I may respect your wishes?”

She looked at him before once again she tentatively responded; “Moriko, Moriko Kobayashi. What’s your name?” The male smiled at this softly.

“Alphonse Loup at your service.” Loup..? Such an odd last name... She thought to herself. Then she looked into his golden eyes...such inhumane eyes. Then it hit her. It hit her harder than a punch to the face. Her heart sank as terror shot through her whole body. Even more so than when the snow touched her sleeves. The second the realization came through her body it seemed as though the snow began to fall ever more violently.

“Are you alright Moriko?”

Her body trembled. Before she swiftly gripped the poisonous wolfsbane and ripped it from the ground before throwing it in the face of the werewolf in front of her. She expected Alphonse to retaliate in pain from this horrid killing flower. But he simply allowed it to fall to the forest floor that was beginning to be coated in pure white snow.

“Your smart Red. But allowing me to smell such horrendous flowers? That was idiotic. But I can’t be mad at you. You didn’t know.”

He should have cowered away in fear. He should have ran. And what is he saying when he says I didn't know? She questioned herself with fear.

“I know your frightened but I don’t want you to be, just please listen to me—”

“No! How come you—”

“How come I wasn’t bothered by wolfsbane? Simply because I’m immune. Please just listen for a moment. I promise I won't harm you!”

Moriko grew pale. She felt sick. A werewolf...immune. She then in that moment decided. She decided to trust her instincts. Like a deer, she turned and ran from the wolf who was hunting her.

The now howling winds didn’t hold Morkio back as she went astray from the path at a disturbingly fast speed. She ran like a fawn, gracefully leaping over fallen logs and practically gliding as the snow turned into a horrible blizzard.

“Hey! Stop running! You could slip—” Alphonse called out in worry. The cold set in too quickly. Her body began to give out. She started to get light headed due to the cold weather settling in, then what she feared more than anything

happened. Her legs gave out as her body went limp; due to the acceleration of her running, the sudden stop caused her practically be thrown forward. Nothing could stop her fall until well... something did.

She hit a tree hard. Her body came to a violent stop as her back and head hit the tree. Then, red. Red on white. The last thing she saw was the Red on white before losing consciousness...

A large dire wolf carried a limp body on its back. But it looked as though the wolf had a red cape on. The wolf gently set the red-caped girl on the ground in between the middle of the Torii gates. The large wolf licked her face softly before hesitantly retreating into the woods...

Red is the color of blood. White is the color of snow. Who knew blood could coat the snow so disturbingly...and who knew a red cape could drape around the shoulder bones of a large white dire wolf so easily? She sure didn't...but I suppose she did now. After all, purple is the color that failed her that fateful night...but maybe, just maybe. It didn't fail her. Because a new infatuation sparked in the heart of a large dire wolf that protected a red hooded girl in the forest. He just hoped that one day, she'd waltz with him and the wolfsbane again.

Ali Varen

Silverdale Baptist Academy

In Our City We Photosynthesize

We gather in crowds every Sunday to watch the sun die. The mayor speaks of perseverance and hope, and a guest scientist presents a new theory the team has been working on “day and night”. We’ve got a friend in the team—all they do is stare through the windows, mindlessly scan through lab tests, and whisper of the sun with pagan reverence. Nothing is achieved by them, oh no, but they pesticide away a thimble of panic with their “research” and “progress”.

If aliens came they’d think we were plant crossbreeds, but we’re just people. The sun sings our retinas because we let it—some day the flashes could serve as a reminder of life, like a nostalgic tattoo you get at eighteen. The people who told us not to stare at the sun are the ones who transported their couches onto the sidewalk just to watch its last breaths.

This Sunday a priest, a government official, and a scientist all told us to have hope in these dark times. But we don’t listen to them; we listen to the birds, and the man with the eagle eyes and feathery eyebrows. He begins with the bold, “What would you do to survive?” Policemen exchange glances; the mayor’s eye twitches; the priest crosses himself.

“What would you like during these troubling times, fellow metropolitans?” the eagle-man pronounces.

A chance, something more solid than a hymn or a metaphor... we reply.

“How far would you go to get this?”

Far, far, far...

“So listen. You take the heart bone of a stag...”

The next few days roadkill becomes a weather phenomenon. Months ago it would’ve been a conspiracy theory—perhaps it was demons, feral wolves, someone go get an exorcist, but the news says nothing of the absurdity at a time such as this. Stags die, yes, stags die, and it’s oh-so tragic, but what else could we do? The eagle-man is a novelty, we aren’t tired of him yet.

The next Sunday we gather in the same crowd, and a woman with flashy hair convinces us that we can create a new sun and launch it into space. Another novelty, huh, and no stags have to die. Scientists jump to the task, and not just scientists: sandwich shop owners attempt nuclear physics in their kitchens, schoolchildren break into the science lab at night and combine whatever chemicals they could find. Doll heads, Christmas ornaments, truffles all could be stars if you try hard enough.

And now the poets arrive with their sestinas about the string of stars that would replace dear old Sun. And now the theoretical physicists with their talk of gravity. And now the architects who begin to remodel the sky before the furniture even arrives.

We the crowd are restless and think of photosynthesis. Are the plants mourning just as we are? We certainly hope so. A group of us syringes basil into our veins so we can experience what it's like to feed on the sun. Some swear that it's working, that their mind's eye is greenish, that the sunlight is filling them.

A little girl sends a helium balloon up into the sky with the message, "Dear Sun, please don't die. Sincerely, Sally." Sincerely, the crowd.

Still no word from the scientists.

At dusk we all clutch our hands together, thousands of us metropolitans, and raise them to the sun. We're a circle. We're a star. We begin to sing, all to a different rhythm and tune. Some hum a funeral march, some hum a musical theater tune, and some remain silent.

Maybe a scientist will run out onto the street screaming "Eureka!". Maybe a rocket will fly out in the morning and resurrect the sun. Maybe the sun read the little balloon message from Sally, laughed at the absurdity of the culty stag heart bones, or decided to pass its throne to the new star that will surely arise in its place the moment it dies.

Or maybe this is the last dusk we the crowd, we the metropolitans, we the homo sapiens, we the earthlings will see. Only dawn will tell.

Student's Name: Anastasiya Sankevich

School or Homeschool Program: Chattanooga High Center for Creative Arts



NINTH GRADE POETRY

Cloud, the Dreamer

A cloud adrift, in skies up high
Painter of sunsets, a silent rover
Gently whispers, a quiet guide
Guardian of the night, cloud, the dreamer

Casey Gouge
Silverdale Baptist Academy

Try Again

Yesterday, I fell.

My eyes burned as much as my hands, and I gave in.
I sat in a puddle filled with my pain, fearing what's next.

To try again is preposterous.

The puddle grew, drenching my clothes.
The colors darkened, the fabric grew cold,
And the puddle continued to grow,
Yesterday, I fell.

Today, I got up.

The puddle began to dry, and so did my clothes.
The colors lightened, the fabric grew warmer.

To try again is preposterous,

But I stood up regardless.

And as I brushed myself off,
I saw a glimmer of hope in the colors of the fabric.

Today, I got up.

Tomorrow, I'll try again.

I really don't want to.

To try again is preposterous.
But so is staying on the ground,
So I will relent,

Because even if I land back in the puddle,
I'll be one step closer to success.

Tomorrow, I'll try again.

Creek at night

The wind stirs, blowing softly as the sun goes and sets
Water rushes against the rocks, making its final trek
You hear the sounds of crickets creaking with a sudden beat
You see the frogs jumping in the water, about to go to sleep

With all these things, it is clear to see where you have arrived
It is nighttime at the creek, and at this time, it thrives

The fish stopped zooming in the water and ate their final bite
Owls are heard in the sky singing their song tonight
The sound of sticks breaking has finally ceased
And the deer around have begun their deep sleep

The creek at night is quite a pleasant place
Now you can fall to sleep with green at every trace

Charles Martin
Silverdale Baptist Academy

In The Eye Of The Collector

Cassiopeia will always be prettier than I am,
She will always refract lightyears away
Twinkling, winking,
With white smile and soul.

My eyes would drift out there
Farther than her stars,
My lungs summit their balloon dreams,
Rising; and fall short of Cassiopeia.
Still, I would not hesitate
To reach, wish on
Her brightest sun,
And scalpel away a fragment of
Beauty.

I would jar it between my
Anthology of apprehension and
My menagerie of misery.
Ferment it in disillusion;
Persecute it under the microscope.
Queen of Hearts
I.

In my mortar of mind,
I would grind her star
Remnants to dust,
Coat my skin 'til I shine

Blue, gold silver.
With my anointed finger
I point to Cassiopeia
And wish, in her boastful eye,
She looks at her own image
And admits me beautiful.
And had she deemed me Good,
I would ascend on
Silken wings, in pursuit
Of Taurus.

Student's Name: Sarah Moss

School or Homeschool Program: Chattanooga High Center for Creative Arts

Winter is Here!

The cold wind whips past our pale faces and
Reverent silence is evoked from the tall, naked trees
Big elegant coats hug our anxious bodies and
Sparkling lights of varying colors shine forth from the rooftops
While plans are being made for every festive and joyous occasion
Natural colors and lovely, shining jewelry are not uncommon to see
Drinking warm chocolate beverages with friends while
Huddled together in a tremulous fashion is favorable too
Fire roars in the furnaces of homes
And hope sparkles in the hearts of the weary
Spring, summer, and fall are perfectly fine
But the cold, quiet, joyful, beautiful wintertime- is divine.

Student's Name: Olivia Hudson

School: Hilger Higher Learning

Me

My friends call me a riot
They say I make them smile
I struggle to be quiet
It's just part of my lifestyle

I like to think I'm brave
That I've got a sense of justice
But sometimes I behave
Like I don't know what enough is

I'm a leader and a son
A brother and a friend
I love to make things fun
And I'm loyal to the end

My friends say I'm smart
Sure I skipped a grade
But what sets me apart
Is my maturity's delayed

My mom calls me dramatic
And too competitive
She says I act erratic
And I'm argumentative

Yeah, I've got ADHD
But don't call me dumb
Focusing's just hard for me
Impulsive more than some

I like to play a lot of sports
But wrestling's the best
I've done athletics of all sorts
But it's better than the rest

This Poem is unique
None is quite its twin
But it's just like me
A lot is packed within

Student's Name: Jaron Edmonds
School: Hilger Higher Learning

Sunsets

Purple, pink, blue and orange,
These are my favorite sunset colors,
Sunsets are when the world is tired and needs a rest,
The sun falls away as a beautiful aura of colors fill the sky,
It only last minutes but isn't it wonderful,
Oh how I do love sunsets, don't you?

Student's Name: Analiese Seymour

School: Hilger Higher Learning

Beauties of Nature

This seed is ravishing, a new story
In Each passing day it slowly emerges
Each day and night, unforeseen with glory
And its scents are always one to adore

The thorns come with beauty of vivid red
Each plush petal, are like brush strokes of paint
Differentiating shades, look undead
Symbol of devotion, but misguiding

A sight sublime, its blissful presence glows
thorns counterbalance its velvet petals
The entirety of beauty comes in pain though
something so divine but also unsettle

Against time, red petals wither away
everything beautiful has its end one day

Name: Anagha Rajesh

School: Chattanooga High Center for Creative Arts

The Vitality of Cooking

To cook is to create something to your taste
Ingredients you choose making your own flavors
Creating your portions to ensure there's no waste
Cooking your meals is doing yourself favors
Cooking eases my stresses from day to day
Engineering my own calmness with each dish
My solution to all life's disarray
Creating my own soup or seasoning fish
I could not live a life without cooking
I strive to perfect it eventually
To make a good dish also good looking
And so, I practice the skill ritually
For me cooking is essential for each day
Because I can do it in my own way

Name: Rae Kennedy

Chattanooga High Center for Creative Arts

Yo I Love crab broil it's pretty royal
Butter's Lemons pitalions of Scallions
Bruv lovin on dem shrimp toil whilst at a boil
Shut up you seafood hating RapsCALLION
Talking all your critique oriented smack
Bouta grill ya on a rack like a plankton
I'mma chalk yo bubble-gump speak up to wack
Now you know you been had, down in the bajam's whatcha think you shaking
You know I'm just playing playa still hanging
Pay attention though did you season it
Well I'm still gonna be eatin it, Crabs crab that ain't changing
Even if the spice gotta be rearranged in it, Imma still have a bit
Licking my finger's off that was scrumptious
Sitin pot-bellied not a crumb, my belly abuzz

Alexander Jamison
Chattanooga High Center for Creative Arts

Watercolors

Rainbow colors swirling across the page
The artist has left their creative mark.
Naturistic colors depict the sage
In the artist's room, dimly lit but dark.
Paintbrushes and water cups are the tools
Of a creator's drawn masterpieces.
Contrasting colors fight battles and duels
All around the magnificent thesis.
Enjoy the trials and tribulations of now.
Soon they'll be over, but you need to pass
The struggles of late, you must make a vow
To endure the troubles of today, lass.
Finish your painting and watch it transform
Find clear blue skies from the sorrowful storm.

Name: Roman Albu

School: Chattanooga High Center for Creative Arts

Forbidden Game

The divine game that they always squander,
The arena that they use is barren.
Still leaving the deities to wonder.
Their love catches the wind like a heron; Love
as forbidden as a violent storm.
Century-old enemies that were drawn,
The doomed companionship left to mourn.
Prevailing, wishing not to be a pawn;
They wish not to part, though it would be pure. Their
regions knowing well, it will end sour.
They must not be lovers, see no allure. Their
long love seen as a wilted flower;
Hopefully one might see love prevails slow,
But for now, their love is always their foe.

Name: Colette Bischof

School: Chattanooga High Center for Creative Arts

Snowy Emotions

As time flies by the snow piles up and grows It
fills your heart and can bring joy or pain
The sun sets down and trees get filled by crows As
darkness creeps, I see there is no gain
Time is gone as I stand still and frozen Snow
turns me cold and I sit in regret
The snowflakes fall and they become broken
People are happy but some people fret
Each snowflake has its own future and fate
But you are in control of your own life You
can live with some happiness or hate Your
bad decisions can leave you in strife And
good decisions can leave you silly
As your snowflake falls on a white lily

Name: Colin Mun

School: Chattanooga High Center for Creative Arts

Slowly, Patiently, The World Becomes A Kaleidoscope, And We With It

Some poet decided beneath a starry night that the space weaving-human is no animal because it can grow its dreams like lambs for slaughter and cry tea-colored tears over it. The human leaves its past at the altar and wishbones the days it spent below ground, shelled in innocence (now broken inside a kaleidoscope). I can't wait for our moon-imprinted footsteps to cover with moss and for non-human poets to think we were as alone as a clock

striking at midnight. They'd be wrong, of course, about the lonely midnight clock and the lonely reality and about us, as no animal or "non-animal" paces the moon alone. We will find tapestries in the moss that covers our remains and ponder their meaning over mint-moss-mint tea like the two marionette philosophers we are. The older I grow, the deeper into my kaleidoscope of a mind, I learn over and over again that I know nothing. It might be time for a wishbone,

as to understand how we met, what strings the gods (or God) had to wishbone in order to connect two people who don't know the way of the clock nor the night. We met in a greenhouse without plants, as odd as a kaleidoscope without any mirrors, but who are we to question our fate? To face the animal hunger of time together seems to be a clever, non-human game some teary, sentimental deities are playing on us. The chess pieces are covered with moss

but we keep playing, though only one of us knows the way of the moss-covered bishops. On a Tuesday a week ago I found the wishbone of a nightingale and thought of the crescent moon in a tea-cup, the ink permeated into my fingertips, and the mournful (not lonely) chime of the clock.

Just me that day, no conversation to fragment the night that animals pace in packs. On days like that one, I want to fill a kaleidoscope

with our conjoined thoughts, with our reflective words. That kaleidoscope would be treasured by non-human poets as a relic as great as the moon itself (moss covered it may be) of the art that their “lonely”, strange, “non-animal” counterparts felt. Yes, art is felt, I believe, and I hope, wish, bones feel the same way as breaths do. I will purchase a silver clock from a surrealist plain of clocks, and we will converse as the tea-

pot reflects us precisely when the universe tells us to. Our time will be teal-colored, because deus ex machina is gold and a kaleidoscope is ultramarine—these are simply thoughts in my mad, melting-clock mind as I deteriorate. But we will both (together) see moss crawl over our eyes, and feathers will overtake us. Our wishbones will watch time collapse in on itself, onto every human animal.

You and I will break apart a clock and brew it into tea.

You will talk of animal instincts, and I of mirrorless words and kaleidoscopes.

Moss will never partake in our (love), but when it does, it will be time to wish on a wishbone.

Student's Name: Anastasiya Sankevich

School: Chattanooga High Center for Creative Arts



TENTH GRADE PROSE

The Home

Sometimes when I close my eyes, I see a home.

I'll simply be living my everyday life, and all of a sudden, I'm at the front door. I don't understand why it happens. All I know is that the house is the place where all the parts of my life come together.

I remember the first time it happened. I was a little kid at the time. When I went into the home, my parents were there to welcome me and all the familiar toys I loved were on the floor. Light streamed through the windows as I played for hours. When I came back to the everyday reality, I told my parents that I had had the most beautiful dream.

I kept seeing the home from then on.

The home changed in accordance to the way I lived. As I grew older, friends of mine replaced the loving adults who accompanied my early childhood. The toys were replaced by everything from gaming systems to books. Often, I would simply use the time in the home to think and talk things over with the people I loved. The home provided a valuable place to reflect instead of worry.

As I aged, I began to notice slight issues with the home. The light didn't seem to shine through the windows quite as brightly as it had before. Every now and then, a crack in the foundations could be seen. The people around me didn't seem to smile as much. I thought that it didn't really matter. Childhood, after all, had to die at some point.

The home took on major changes once I became a teenager. The chaotic mess of those I knew appeared in the home as I tried to sort out their place in my life. Along with sorting them out, I was trying to find my own place in life. The home gradually became more barren of entertainment since all I requested was a place to think. I paced rooms as I tried to answer the questions that I couldn't get out of my mind. What was my purpose? How do I know what to trust? As I kept asking these questions, my childish beliefs died one by one, leaving me with little to replace them.

The more that I asked, the less it felt like I could answer. My reason was breaking down and giving way to an incomprehensible chaos. I took notice as people appeared in the home less and less. The sun seemed to always be setting whenever I was there. Large cracks lined the walls, and some of them even had foliage jutting out from them. Eventually, no one appeared in the home. The time of day was permanently set to night, and the whole construction was reduced to something akin to a shack. The home was holding a mirror up to what I was.

The miserable condition continued to repeat itself. The home seemed to almost increase in silence. I tried to keep thinking things through, but it never seemed to avail. I eventually came to simply sit and stare at the walls without any guidance in thought. After about a year had passed, however, I noticed that a wind was blowing up against the home. Although the wind was small at first, it increased with each visit until it became almost deafening. The whole house would shake on its indefinite foundations with each gust. Finally, one night, the whole construction began falling to the ground. All I was left with was rubble and a room with only two walls.

It was that night that I made a choice. I could either watch my life continue in chaos, or I could choose to rebuild. I could make the basic proclamation that my life needed to be meaningful, and from that proclamation I could rebuild myself. I got to work. When the home appeared to me, I started putting pieces back together. I spent my early adulthood trying to reach what I had possessed in childhood.

Soon after starting this process, I realized that I could build a home like my childish one, but it could not be founded on the same concepts. When I was a child, the people around me sought to build a safe and comfortable world around me. My new home couldn't be insulated by the people around me. I had to instead carry the weight of responsibility of putting my world in order.

When I came to have a wife and kids, I would not seek for my time in the home with them to be focused around myself. I instead prioritized making every moment meaningful. As a result, the home became more beautiful than it was in childhood, and the light shone through the windows with a brightness that told of the stoic joy with which I approached my life.

Now that I am older, perhaps I can look back on my questions and answer a few. What is my purpose? It is the same purpose of any man. In the mere blip of time in which I am allotted, I have to bring the chaos of my existence into order. Through this, I can be capable of reaching the best form I can, and deep down, that's what we all want.

Now that I know this, I am ready to accept the sleep that we must all come to one day. I can accept it with peace, knowing that it was better that I was than if I was not.

Student's name: Andrew Hyberger

School: Hilger Higher Learning

Home Again

My brothers and I had been living in the Green Isle Ireland in a group to escape the Battle of Britain for going on five years now, along with about twenty other children, and since peace had been declared in Europe month ago, and we were all going home. I was excited to be united with my parents: my father, Charles Edwards, a Spitfire pilot, my mother, Virginia, seamstress: and so were my two brothers: tall fifteen-year-old John, the oldest, and Fredrick, also called Teddy, the annoying youngest at nine. I, Clarence Stewart Edwards, am the middle child at twelve, but almost thirteen.

London had never looked more beautiful to me as we clattered down the tracks through the suburbs of London. I saw several places where bombs had struck during the air raids, but nothing too serious, but other than that, everything looked the same as it did. After screeching to a stop in Paddington Station, I excitedly exited the red liveried coach that my brothers and the other children were riding in, carrying a suitcase of my belongings. I took in a lungful of air on the platform, savoring the smell of familiar, musky coal smoke that filled the air around us.

"Ah, the sweet scent of home!" John exclaimed, obviously enjoying the sooty odor as well. "I thought I wouldn't smell it again!"

We stood there for a while in silence, taking deep breaths, full of contentment, all the while looking for our parents until Teddy broke the silence.

"Where are Mother and Father?" Teddy inquired, "I thought they were supposed to meet us here."

John and I shared a look. Why couldn't he just savor the moment?

John beat me to it. "Have a bit of patience, lad! Can't you just appreciate the fact that we are in London," John scolded. "They'll be here soon."

All of the other children had dispersed into the smokey air to meet their parents, so we walked to circulating area of the station and sat down. I was attacked by a brigade of memories. I was well acquainted with Paddington, for our home was only a few blocks away, so John and I would come here frequently to watch the trains.

An hour went by, then two, the darkness growing, and finally the only thing to break the silence was the janitor sweeping.

Teddy was getting restless. "Can't we just walk home. It's less than a ten minute walk from here. Maybe they forgot we were arriving today."

John and I looked at each other, doubtful. We both knew this couldn't be it. Something was wrong. "Why not? We can surprise them, and I'm tired of waiting anyway. Hungry, too!" John exclaimed, not wanting to voice his fears.

"I'm game to leave too." I said for I was hungry as well. Oh, how I have craved a good English supper of Sunday Roast with potatoes and gravy, and some pudding the past five years!

As we walked out through the hotel, out into Pared Street, we noticed the lack of people, but as we turned the corner onto Eastbourne Terrace, we saw why. The once beautiful brick shopfronts and the businessmen who walked up and down this street in their finery was gone, replaced with burnt out hulls of houses and businesses, dark and uninhabited, with hole pocketed streets. We stopped stunned, the three of us gazing in horror, for we had only expected slight damage, or an occasional house burnt down perhaps, but a whole row of them uninhabitable, and so close to our home! With a vile expression of shock, Teddy took off running across the street for home, John and I both on his heels.

Visions of the beautiful parks and busy roads and red brick houses that once made up these now desolate, dark, bomb-pocketed streets flashed in my mind as we ran helter skelter home. Down Chilworth we went two blocks, feet pounding loudly in the quiet streets. A slight turn onto Cleveland, a few hundred feet and we stopped, each with one hand on his knee and the other grasping his suitcase, gasping for air in front of home. As I raised my eyes I gasped. Teddy burst into tears and sat down heavily, and John was muttering angrily under his breath. Our house was gone, a pile of brick, blown apart by some bomb of the Jerries. We stood like that for a minute, gasping for air, faces red from our dash, eyes locked on what had been our home. "Why did this have to happen to us? God, couldn't You have picked to blow up someone else's house!" I cried angrily to the Lord aloud.

Then, I heard a slight noise behind me, a hand lay on my shoulder, firm and warm, and a familiar voice spoke. "This house can be built again, but our family cannot." I turned and rushed into my father's arms, tears releasing in a torrent into his scratchy wool overcoat. After a minute, I stopped and looked into his bearded face.

"How did you find us?" I asked, wiping my eyes.

"We saw you three take off towards home as we were walking to the station, so we followed you. The car broke down." He smiled as he looked

around. Mother was comforting Teddy. John was standing off to himself, trying to hold back tears as well. "It's ok to cry, you know," he gently told John. That broke him. I stood back, making a clear path as he rushed to Father. A tear slipped down Father's face as he comforted him. United again, we left our past, walking toward our new life. And I'll always remember and cherish the words my father spoke that night in his deep rich voice: "A house can be built again, but our family cannot."

Student's Name: Landon Earhart

School: Hilger Higher Learning

Mental

“I’m not good enough and I never will be.” “Why do I exist?” “It would be so much easier if I wasn’t alive.” “Everyone hates me.” “Why should I keep going?”

These are but a few of the derogatory thoughts that would run through Phillip’s head on a daily basis. For as long as Phillip could remember, he had struggled with his mental health. Despite that, he had a peaceful, comfortable life. He had loving parents that were always there for him, close friends that were almost like brothers to him, and pets that he loved dearly. His family had a nice home, he did well in school, and he had an outstanding work ethic. He had the whole world ahead of him, and yet he rarely experienced any kind of hope or joy.

One day after school, Phillip and his friends were trying to make plans for the rest of their day. “Do you guys want to hang out at all this evening?” one of them asked. “Yeah, that works for me,” replied another. “Phillip, does that work for you?”

Phillip looked up at his friends with a pained look and said “Sorry guys, I can’t hang out tonight. I have a lot on my mind and I need to try and clear my head.”

“Alright, if that’s what you need, we’ll leave you to it. Keep in mind that we’re here for you if you need anything.”

The conversation came to a conclusion and they all headed home. As Phillip was walking down the sidewalk, he looked into the woods across the street. It almost felt as if the trees were calling to him; begging him to enter their domain. “Well, I wanted to clear my head,” he muttered to himself. Looking both ways, he crossed the street and walked into the leafy, shaded land. While he was starting out, he took in the natural beauty of the nature around him. The little squirrels and chipmunks that were scurrying along the ground, the different shades of green in the trees and shrubs, the peaceful, flowing streams, and the birds chirping in the treetops. All of it served as a wondrous distraction from what was really on his mind, but it was unfortunately short-lived.

The thoughts started creeping back in, and within minutes everything was drowned out by them. He continued to walk, deep in thought, until he suddenly stopped. A certain feeling started rising up inside him; a feeling he was quite familiar with. A mental breakdown was coming. He fell to his knees and held his head in his hands. The world started shaking around him, and tears started to slowly fall down his face. He knelt there for a good fifteen minutes or so until pulled himself back up. The mental breakdown wasn’t over, but he decided to keep going. He continued on for around thirty minutes until he was met with a cliff.

As he approached the edge, he looked down and saw the city. It looked so small and insignificant from where he stood. After the initial feeling of wonder and amazement from the view faded, his mind started going back to the dark thoughts. “Am I really as unimportant as this city feels from here?” “Would it really be a big deal if I just jumped off right now?”

These thoughts continued to race through his mind as he looked down the cliffside. Would it really matter if he ended it? Would everyone be better off? Would anyone even care? The rational side of his brain knew the answers to these questions, but it didn’t stop the thoughts. It would be such an easy way out. No more suffering. No more pain. All of it could be over if he just jumped. And yet, he couldn’t bring himself to do it. The rational side of his brain was fighting with everything it had. It would matter if he jumped. Nobody would be better off if he jumped. So many people would care if he ended it. So he just sat there, paralyzed by the combat that his own brain was engaged in.

Then Phillip took a step back. Then another. Then a few more. Before he knew it, he was sprinting back the way he came. He never broke his sprint, even after his legs started hurting, until he was back at the road. He took a minute to catch his breath, then headed home. By the time he reached his front door, the sun was setting, casting long shadows across his yard and driveway. He went around to the back door and grabbed the key from its hiding spot, unlocked the door, and walked into the kitchen.

As he walked through the door, he saw his parents sitting at the table with worried expressions on their faces. As soon as they turned to look at him, any sign of worry was replaced with signs of joy and relief. They rushed over to him and hugged him tightly, so tightly to the point where he couldn’t breathe. After they let him go, their expressions changed once again, this time to looks of concern. “Where were you?” his dad demanded, “we thought you may have been hit by a car or something!”

Phillip looked up at his parents. They weren’t angry, just concerned for his safety. He knew they cared about him. He knew that if he had jumped, they would’ve been devastated. He felt a twisting pain in his heart just thinking about how’d they would’ve taken the news if he had done it. Tears started welling up in his eyes.

“Mom, Dad? There’s something I need to tell you....”

Student's Name: Cason Jones

School: Hilger Higher Learning

“Easter Night”

Inspired by the true story of April 12th, 2020.

It was the morning of Easter Sunday, April 12th, 2020. This Easter was different from past ones. 2020 was the year of an upcoming pandemic called Coronavirus and my mother was also 8 months pregnant at the time. As soon as I woke up, rain was pouring creating a melancholic and upsetting mood, but this was normal in Chattanooga since it was tornado season. I didn't have a plan that day since we had to start social distancing.

Nothing happened until later that night, at around 8 PM when my parents called my brother, sister, and me downstairs to watch some TV shows. We mostly watched the news about my parents' home country, Lebanon. At around 11 PM, we all decided to call it a day and go to bed. We all go to our rooms and not even 15 minutes later, we hear clicking noises.

“Come downstairs,” my parents yelled as loud as they could.

We all rushed downstairs. There wasn't a Tornado warning, but the noises were a big signal. My 13 year-old-sister, 16-year-old brother, parents, and I crammed up into a packed storage closet below the stairs. We were all scared as the noises were starting to get louder. The noises were not just the clicking from before but the wind harshly blowing, glass breaking, and our heavy breaths. We waited until the noises started to calm down.

“I need to go to the garage to get our shoes because the floor is going to be all glass,” my dad said.

We all yelled at him and told him to stay but he decided to go. We all feared for his safety, but he finally returned. As soon as we were wearing our shoes, my dad's phone rang. It was his best friend, who lived 30 minutes away. Thankfully, his house was not damaged, and he hurried to our house. However, the broken fences and trees on the concrete, as well as the police in the way, made it impossible to be in our neighborhood. A couple of minutes go by and we hear footsteps.

“Is everyone safe?” my neighbor questioned.

“Yes,” my dad answered.

“Come outside, the tornado has stopped,” my neighbor told us.

We went outside in the pitch-black night, not able to see anything. I held my mother's hand as we went into our neighbor's house and stayed the night.

It was April 13th, 2020. As soon as the sun rose, we went to

check on our house. We never could have predicted what we saw. The roof had fallen on the floor, glass was all over, and pieces of our furniture were scattered everywhere. Life had officially changed.

Weeks passed, and I was sitting in a hotel room, which was now our new home. My newborn brother was due in a few days. So many things happened all at once.

Name: Majdi Alameddine

School: Boyd Buchanan School

“The Student”

It all began in August of 2023. That was when we went to the airport and picked her up. Her being Marta, the foreign exchange student from Spain, who was coming to live with us for ten months. I was overwhelmed with emotions while waiting for her to walk through the exit at the airport, but I could only imagine how she was feeling. Leaving your family for almost a year and moving to a whole different country is no easy task for anyone, let alone a sixteen-year-old girl.

My parents and I stood there waiting in anticipation for a girl with curly brown hair to appear. After waiting for a while we finally saw Marta appear and we all started waving and smiling like crazy people. We ran up to her and exchanged hugs and welcomed her to the United States. Marta squeaked out a small hello and continued to stare at us with a face that screamed exhaustion and nervousness all in one. Once we gathered all of her luggage we headed back to our house.

Once we arrived home my parents went outside and Marta and I sat at the kitchen table and enjoyed some chocolate peanut butter ice cream. I tried to use this as a way to get to know her and make her feel more comfortable. When I was talking I could tell she could comprehend what I was saying. She was just struggling to find the right words to respond with.

In the beginning we would all talk and Marta just listened. She was getting used to our accents and of course just getting more comfortable with us. Slowly Marta became more confident in her English and started to talk more and more with us. She would talk about her school days and all of her new friends she had made. Eventually we got to the point where she would joke around with us and she and I would poke fun at each other like good friends.

Sadly, it eventually got to the point where all of the rainbows disappeared, at least for me. Bucky, our dog, would sleep with her every night and hang out with her all afternoon. He was attached at her hip and wouldn't even greet me when I arrived home. It was like I didn't exist. This led to me getting very frustrated, which I expressed to my mom. I would go to my mom crying very often over this issue, and she said, “Channing, Marta is having to adjust to a whole new world, and Bucky can sense that. He is just giving her the extra love to help her adjust.”

“But I need love too! Life isn't going the best for me either, shouldn't he be able to sense that too!” I would exclaim.

This was a constant argument we were having at least once a week, and nothing seemed to change. Bucky was my comfort animal. School was going horrible, friendships were being challenged, and he was the only thing that would make me feel better. This went on for the rest of the time she was with us. I resented her for something she had and I didn't. I would get mad at myself for feeling this way because I was still with my family everyday and was still living in my own home. The closest she could get to her family was a facetime call or maybe a text, and even then she wasn't able to communicate with them a lot due to the six hour time difference.

Luckily, I was able to forget about all of the Bucky drama so that we could enjoy each other's company. We would truly have the best times together just being girls. We would talk about boys, all of the tea from school, and would laugh so hard we ended up crying. We had become best friends. Yes, we still argued and sometimes I was actually mad, but we always found a way to come back together.

After what felt like an eternity and just a few days at the same time, it was finally time to see her off at the airport so that she could return back to her family and friends in Spain. The airport was different this time though. There were so many memories and jokes that had been created in the time she had been with us. I thought I would've been happier to see her off because of all the unhappiness I had experienced while she was here, and yet, I found myself reminiscing back on everything we had experienced together. My eyes began to fill with tears as I watched Marta and my mom waiting in the security line, inching closer and closer to the metal detectors. Marta and I kept making eye contact and each time she seemed to sob more and more.

I hadn't realized how close we had gotten. We had become sisters over the time she was with us. We argued, fought, laughed until we cried, and everything in between. I was really going to miss her. Marta really challenged me to become a better person, even if she didn't know it. That year was one of the hardest years of my life so far, but at least I got a new sister for life, even if she is living in Spain.

Name: Channing Edmonds

School: Boyd Buchanan School

“Untitled”

It was raining hard. Ounces, liters, gallons came down and soaked me as if all the lord's angels were weeping over me. Warm summer showers. They washed the sweat from my brow as I went in for another layup. Dribble, shoot, dribble, shoot, dribble, shoot, dribble. I played like my life depended on it. I'd been playing for so long my arms were nearly numb and my legs heavy. My socks drenched and squished into my shoes. I'd been playing for so long, out in that rain, out under those dark gray clouds, that I didn't know why I was playing anymore. I sat in a puddle on the driveway under the hoop. Just under my eyes, salt mixed with the water as something other than rain dripped around my nose, down my cheeks, past the corners of my mouth and off my chin. I was so tired I couldn't play for another minute, even if my life depended on it. A single thought, a single, and yet constantly recurring thought, came to mind. *I want to be done.* So, then, I decided that I would be done.

I stepped back into the silent, dimly lit house. I knew it would be that way. Everyone else had left. “We'll be gone awhile,” they said, “all afternoon.”

I told them, “I'll be fine by myself.” I swore I'd be fine on my own. That I'd be fine alone. Well, now I was all alone. All alone in the dim, quiet house. All alone going up the dim, quiet stairwell. All alone walking through the dim, quiet hallway to my bedroom door.

I stood in the doorway looking around. The fan spun slowly, hanging from the ceiling over the center of the room. Under the unmade bed was an assorted mess of whatever useless things I couldn't find a proper place for: a rubik's cube, a skateboard, a rope. A strong, sturdy rope. In the corner sat a desk, and tucked under the desk was a chair. A small, flimsy chair. My sleepy eyes kept wandering around the room. Ceiling, bed, desk. Fan, rope, chair. Ceiling, bed, desk. Fan, rope, chair. I pulled out the chair and put it in the middle of the room, just under the fan. That's when I noticed a dull pencil and notebook of mine on the desk.

I sat down on the bed, exhausted with the notebook and pencil in hand, and thought about what to write. I could've written about the people I loved or the things I hated. I could've written about how tired I was. I could've written about the tear I found myself dripping on the page, but my mind was foggy. I closed my eyes and thought. *What to write?* I kept on thinking, weary, with my eyes closed, sitting on my bed in that dim quiet room all alone.

It was a sound that woke me up. Someone calling for me to come downstairs. *Something something...* “help with groceries!” I sat up, still on my bed, wiped the drool from my chin and rubbed my watery eyes. My notebook had fallen off the bed and onto the floor with nothing but a single drop on the page and my pencil on top of it. The room felt lighter as streaks of sunlight, orange, yellow and pink, slipped in the room through the blinds. Through the window, I could see that the rain and clouds had cleared to make way for a warm summer’s sunset. When I stood up, I felt drowsy and a little lightheaded, but not tired. I wasn’t really that tired anymore. With that, I pulled the chair from under the fan and pushed it back into the desk. Then, I left the room, went down the stairwell and into the first floor of the house which was dim and quiet no more.

Name: Lance Ndungi Wamaitha

School: Boyd Buchanan School

“Studying”

Tap, tap, Tap, tap. I was tapping my pencil while I was studying my notes for an upcoming science test. My pencil and I were getting exhausted from the constant, dreadful stare of my notes which I had put off until the night before to study. The old ink on the crumbled paper gave off an intimidating aura as I was trying to read the information. The intimidation made me uneasy and only made it harder for me to stay focused. My fear for the upcoming test was building up more and more and was disturbing my mind. *I knew I shouldn't have wanted this long,* I told myself as I was trying to cram more and more information into my distracted brain.

“You can do this!” my brain said unenthusiastically as it kicked up its feet for an undeserved break.

“You can't study all of this,” my notes blurted out, “just throw me out already since you can't even focus.”

“Hey man,” I replied unsurely, “that's mean and besides you are not even real. You are just my imagination trying to distract me.”

“Please stop tapping me!” my pencil exclaimed, begging to take a deserved break on like my brain at the moment which should be working.

I put my pencil down and stared at my wall. The blue colored walls stared back at me with disappointment in their eyes. My notes, my pencil, and even myself looked at me with disgust as well because of my procrastination for this test. They all knew I should've started studying when my teacher had announced the test the week before. My fear was building up again to not disappoint them, but I then realized that walls and other inanimate objects can't stare at me and I got back to work. Even after I shut out my distractions from my head, I was still struggling to study. The words on the paper seem to transform into a different language in front of me that I couldn't understand. The odor of the old ink began to clog my nose with unpleasant smells of ink and aged that side tracked me to think *Why did I choose to have blue walls when I had green carpet that didn't match?* I then stopped. I stopped thinking about my worry and grabbed my pencil.

“Not again!” my pencil exclaimed knowing what was about to happen.

I started tapping my pencil again. *Tap, tap, Tap.* The rhythmic tapping helped me focus a little bit longer until my uncle came into my room.

“Hey buddy what's happening over here?” my uncle asked with a huge smile across his face.

“I’m just trying to study for this test that’s tomorrow.” I replied, trying not to lose my focus again.

My uncle then stared at me then at my notes then back to me. He knew that I was struggling with studying and decided to help me.

He said, “I’ll help you study, man, but you have to promise me at the end that we’ll both have a huge smile on our faces.”

“Okay?” I responded unsure on how my uncle was going to help me. *I’ve already tried everything, I told myself.*

My uncle then grabbed my notes and started quizzing me over the material I had circled. It was a struggle to answer the questions he was asking when his cologne was mixing with the odor of the old ink. The combination of the two smells gave off a peculiar smell that was sweet and disgusting at the same time. After what seemed like a lifetime going through my notes we finished. I didn’t get all the questions correct and had become ashamed of myself. However, this feeling didn’t last long because my uncle would come up with an idea that could help me study.

“I have an idea!” he said with another smile. He then left my room and came back with some notecards. He then handed them to me and told me the questions I had missed and I wrote them down. I also wrote down the correct answers on the other side.

“Are you sure this is going to work because flashcards are usually for vocabulary tests?” I asked him.

My uncle replied with, “Just trust me, man, this should help you with this stuff.”

No it won’t. I told myself. *This won’t help me study. I’ve already tried everything.* I was going to not study the flashcards I had made with my uncle until I heard something.

“Come on, man, just study the notecards,” my pencil said.

I replied, “You are not even really talking to me. You are just my imagination trying to distract me from studying.”

“Just try it. It might work.” my pencil said.

I was confused at first whether to trust my imagination or not. All it had done to help me study was creating speaking inanimate objects that only distracted me more. *I really messed up,* I told myself. *I should’ve studied more and not procrastinated on this test.* The feeling of disgust was creeping in on me again and telling me to stop studying. I was ready to accept my defeat until my uncle said something that motivated me.

“Hey, buddy, just try it once and if it doesn’t work then we can take a break.”

Hearing the words *we can take a break* motivated me to go through the flashcards and study them. After what seemed like ages, I had finished studying. My uncle then grabbed the notecards and asked me the first question. I replied nonchalantly because I was eager to take a break from this.

“That’s correct!” my uncle said cheerfully

I was astonished at this because I was struggling with that same question a few moments ago. He then continued on through all the cards and asked every single question on them. He would get even more joyful after every question because I was answering them correctly now. I was finally able to answer the questions that I was struggling with for so long with just having a little help.

“I never knew something so simple could help me so much!” I told my uncle with a smile across my face.

“Not bad for a middle schooler and look at us, we both have a smile now!” my uncle said proudly.

I then told him, “Thank you! I finally finished studying.”

Name: D.J. Diaz

School: Boyd Buchanan School

“What a School Sees”

It’s a new morning. Monday. I can see the sun bursting through the sky over me. Students and teachers come walking into me after a long break. There are many varieties of students that attend here. Those who are genuinely happy. Those who are broken and sad, those who are hurt and angry, those who are doing things that they don’t want to do, those who are hiding their true feelings, and those who have overcome these things.

There is one girl who visits my handicap stall every morning. She silently cries till her tears flood the bathroom and walks out smiling to her friends. I know she is suffering inside. All the pressure from her parents to achieve good grades has built up on her shoulders and has pushed her down to the core of the earth. She sulks around in her little head and dreams of being valedictorian. During her test, she is struggling. She battles her conscience on whether or not to cheat. In the end, she stays an honest person, doing her very best and sacrificing her grades for her integrity. At the end of the school day, she leaves for her disappointed mother’s car.

“Hurry up already!” her mom shouted angrily.

“I’m coming,” whispers the girl.

“Please tell me you did well on your test.”

“I don’t know.” She lied with fear that felt excruciatingly numb.

I can hear the silent arguing as they drive off and slowly zoom out of my gates that close behind them.

The class clown is amusing. I can hear the laughter of his classmates down my hallway.

“GET OFF FROM THE DESK!” yelled the math teacher.

“WoOoOoAh!” yelled the boy, pretending to lose balance.

“GO TO THE OFFICE NOW!” exclaimed the teacher.

“Sure thing!” the boy happily says.

He walks out of the room. I can feel the tapping of his footsteps as he walks down the stairs. He lets out a heavy sigh, full of emptiness. I’m sure of it. People used to not talk to him. No one liked him until he got himself in trouble for the laughter of others. I know what it’s like to be alone.

Ever since the day I was built, I have noticed that people have pressures put on by others and burden themselves to do things or be someone they do not want to do in order to feel accepted or loved by others. All these kids are struggling with something. They have all types of insecurities. I would tell them to relax and enjoy themselves. If only I could.

Name: Paul Tran

School: Boyd Buchanan School

“Handies Peak”

When I was thirteen my family went on our third trip to Colorado, and we got to spend a week in one of our favorite towns to visit, Silverton. It's small and secluded but full of restaurants and cute little tourist shops. But the best part of Silverton isn't the actual town; it's the land surrounding it. Silverton is located high in the Rocky Mountains. Further up in the mountains are abandoned mining towns and dozens of hiking and Jeep trails. One of these trails is Handies Peak.

Unlike the rest of my family, my mom loves to hike. The previous summer she had got the idea in her head to reach the peak of one of Colorado's famous 14ers while we were there. She chose Handies Peak since it's near Silverton and we would be there anyway. It's a 5.3-mile hike to the 14,058-foot summit and back. However, even in July it snows in the mountains, and we were forced to abandon our first attempt due to a sleet storm. To my mom's joy, we returned the following year to attempt the hike again.

We left a little early to avoid the rain in the afternoon, but we were still running late. About two miles from the trailhead we spotted a Volkswagon Jetta on the side of the road, with no one near it. We were confused at first, but we were soon glad for our bright green Jeep once the road started getting a little rougher. By the time we reached the trailhead the other hikers were beginning to return to their cars, but we started up the rocky path anyway.

The views were breathtaking. On either side of the rocky path, there was green grass and flowers mixed in with the snow that remained on the ground. Grayish green mountains rose up on all sides of us, and every so often a little stream would dance across our path, causing us to have to balance across stones to avoid getting our socks wet. It smelled like melting snow, and the air was thin and crisp. It was an extremely uncomfortable temperature. We would get hot and sweaty with our sweatshirts on, but as quickly as we removed them the cold wind would force us to put them on again. The air was hard to breathe and we were it wasn't long until we were out of breath. My sister, Ada, isn't exactly well known for her love of athletic activities. It wasn't long before she began to whine and complain. Soon she was crying.

I was embarrassed. Ada was thirteen years old, much too old to be crying over a hike. Besides, we had hiked longer trails before and she had always been fine. There were a ton of people passing us on the way down, and concern would fill their faces when they saw Ada bawling. “Is she hurt?” they'd ask. Or they'd just look down at their feet as the power walked by, obviously full of second-hand embarrassment.

We passed an elderly woman with a little plastic crown on. We soon learned her name was Ruby and she was celebrating her 85th birthday. She looked at Ada. “Your hair is so beautiful, some of my grandchildren are redheaded.” Ada sniffled and told her thank you, but I rolled my eyes. I looked at my dad, hoping he would put his foot down and get her to shut up. Once we were a little past Ruby, he finally did.

“Ada Grace, if you don’t stop crying you can sit on this rock and wait for us to come back, I don’t care if you finish this hike, but I’m not listening to you gripe anymore! If an eighty-five-year-old can do this without complaining, so can you!” His forehead was creased and he was waving his hand around while he talked, so we knew he was mad. My mom argued a little, and eventually, we reached a compromise. My mom would stay with Ada while my dad and I went ahead.

After a little while my dad and I got to a little ridge that led to the summit. On the other side, there was a little valley with a lake nestled in it. The ground was rocky so there weren’t any trees, but there were yellow flowers on the ground and the water was bright turquoise. All around the rim of the lake, there was snow, which my dad and I compacted into snowballs and threw at each other. I remember thinking that it was the most beautiful little lake I’d ever seen, and it made the hike up worth it. But the threat of rain was still approaching, so we didn’t wait long before we continued upwards.

At the top of the mountain, we could see for what seemed like forever. While we were waiting for Ada and my mom to catch up, we met a man who seemed to be the only other person still on the trail. His name was Travis, and he told us he was in school for Physical Therapy. His dad had died the year before, but during his life, he was on a mission to climb all fifty-eight 14ers in Colorado. He was still lacking 13 when he died, so Travis’ goal was to spread his ashes on each of the remaining summits.

Once my mom caught up we headed back down to the trailhead, Travis in tow. On the way down it started pouring rain, and Ada and I were shivering by the time we could see our car. However, when we got to the trailhead our Jeep was the only car there. The Jetta we had passed belonged to Travis. It wasn’t able to make the steep road up to the beginning of the trail, but Travis was prepared to add four extra miles to his hike to honor his dad. We gave him a ride back to his car, and then we said goodbye, saying how nice it was to meet him and wishing him luck in college and life.

I learned a lot from that trip. Ruby showed us that age isn’t an excuse to give up, and Travis provided an example of how important family is. I even think

I gained a little patience from having to listen to Ada cry for so long, and it motivated me to have a good attitude, even if it was just to make her look bad. I'm glad I experienced this adventure with my family, but I hope I never have to do it again.

Name: Madison Holloway

School: Boyd Buchanan School

“My Compact World”

Inspired by real security footage at Boyd Buchanan School

I’m congenitally anosmic (inability to smell), hypoesthetic (inability to feel), and ageusic (inability to taste). Wow big words alert! Basically, I can see and listen, but can’t do all that other stuff. Please excuse my poor manners; my name is Swann-Master Security System #4. I see from the courtyard staircase through the drafty downstairs hall to the bottom two stairs on the opposing staircase. Tall students, loud students, nerdy students, and held-back students all manage to crawl to class. Boy! I’m set up to see so many things you might as well call me Argus Panoptes, the Greek guy with eyes all over. Except that nothing happens. It’s a simple life and a boring one. I watch the same three hundred zombies for years. I see the cliques, the attempts to fight them, and watch teachers grey through the battle.

These bland halls have stayed consistent. They’re a pair of shoes two sizes too small, and it’s a wonder two new students manage to wedge themselves into the mix. Two new students? I didn’t know such a thing was possible. Yes, people have come and gone, but two at once! Things are gettin’ crazy down here in Tennessee. Next thing you know cameras will talk back with some long-awaited attitude. Anyways back to these students—the tall lanky boy needs a haircut, but the short brunette girl seems well kept—are clearly not from here. What teenage boy from the south actually wears a jacket and pants in the winter? And I’ve heard northern girls aren’t into the platinum blonde albino look. Let’s take a vote. The final votes are in: “They’re from the north” won with a dashing vote of one. I think you’re starting to understand my troubles here. I am going crazy having to watch these students do the same things every single day. Now, I better sit back and relax while I wear out these newbies before they transform into the sleepwalkers.

The boy is called Max. He’s relatively tall, quiet, and brunette. His look is religious: dusty shoes, khaki pants, and an old tshirt. The girl is named Lucy or Lu. She’s loud, but looks almost identical to the boy; she lives in a crewneck and khaki pleated skirts. They seem closer than most siblings. The stereotypes roll off them like a sponge refusing to absorb. This makes them fascinating to watch. The other day I watched them talking in front of the bathroom door. “...so then I started walking back to class when I looked over and he was literally outside in the cold...” Lu was yapping.

“Hold on real quick I gotta go pee,” Max dashed through the

bathroom door, then seconds later he appeared again. He poked his eyes out from his hair, saw Lucy standing and waiting for him, then promptly shut the door before she caught a glance. Max then repeated this multiple times until Lu walked away to class. He opened the door and started running the opposite direction, speaking to himself, “I love her, but she needs to be kept miles from caffeine. This yapping is on my last nerve.” Maybe this school isn’t so boring after all.

That was a turning point in school. Max and Lucy didn’t change themselves to fit in. Instead their true personalities were a breath of fresh air to the school. As the twins made friends, students began to show their true identities, too. That nerd started as a linebacker; a jock started a service club. Sponge after sponge, zombies and sleepwalkers, all woke up and refused absorption. A girl strolling in the corridor ran to her boyfriend with open arms, a wide smile and a happy heart. His flushed cheeks and prey-squeezed arms begin pointing to all the cameras around. Camera’s #5, #6, and I make a great team. People act like I’m a recording box who forgets to record. How funny is that? More than just a box on the ceiling, I am Swann-Master Security System #4 with feelings and wonderful humor. They must have that lesson senior year because the seniors usually point at me the most.

It has been two months since Max and Lucy joined our campus. Things here are great. The halls feel warmer and relaxed. Everyday is a time to be excited about life because you’re only in high school once. As for me, I watch the entertainment. Occasionally, I’m searched for teenagers being teenagers. The growing up and learning to balance life. The comings and goings. How everything is meaningful with some extra character. The students learn to be their own: independent from parents. Relationships start and end. Learning the value of friendships. For the most part, I watch the journeys taking place. I am a security camera who’s congenitally anosmic, hypoesthetic, and ageusic; I couldn’t be happier.

Name: Avery Sharpe

School: Boyd Buchanan School

Reading and Fleeing

I was moving along slower than everyone else, and I was getting behind. I remember when my brothers learned how to read, then everyone in my class, and next thing I knew everyone except me knew how to read. I was one of the last kids to finally be able to read, but I did not really care. I could sort of read for a while. I would try to read books by Dr. Seuss, like “Yertle the Turtle”, but the words just did not make sense. This all started when I first learned how to read. I learned how to read the wrong way. Instead of looking at the letters and sounding out words, I would look at the shape of the word and assume what the word was based on the shape. I might see “dog” and say it spelled “hop” because of how the word was shaped. I, like Odysseus, had to roll this stone out of my way to get to freedom. In the end, we both conquered our problems and made it home, or at least a form of home.

On Odysseus’ journey home, he reached the Island of the Cyclopes. He and some of his men decided to enter one of the Cyclops’ caves. There was a big stone that was rolled in the way of the entrance by a Cyclops that blocked me and also blocked Odysseus and his men from escape. With the help of others, both of us realized that we were “too weak to move the mighty stone he set in the high doorway. So we stayed there in misery till dawn” (Wilson 249). I was stuck in my inability to read and could not roll that stone away. Odysseus was stuck in his inability to roll the stone away from the lack of physical strength. I still remember when I would always think as a kid in second or third grade that I would not have to read. I believed that I was good at math and that is all that I would need. I did not care about reading or English in general. So, when I learned how to read, I did not really try and just figured out a way that sort of worked. I remember going home and telling my Mom that I did not have to read; I wanted to be a football player or some other job where I had to do nothing related to school. I told her that I would just pay someone to read things for me. If Odysseus, like me, had tried to continue stumbling his way through hardships on his journey home, but every so often stop and hang out with a goddess or two, he never would have reached home. So, we both had to change our mind sets and have some strong people with us to help and change our previous ways.

Luckily, for me and Odysseus, we were able to blind the Cyclops and the problem that was halting our escape. My help came from the librarian at my school. She knew how to help kids like me learn how to read, just like the Cyclopes knowing just how to roll the stone away to let his sheep out to pasture.

I still remember to this day when my mother was talking to the librarian about me not being able to read. I remember being really bored then being asked what word the librarian was writing on the board. I remember my mother was really worried because I could not tell if the word was cat, dog, or can. I remember everyday staying after school to work with the librarian and I was starting to understand I had to sound out the words. Just like Odysseus had to blind the Cyclops, the librarian had to figure out the problem so that she could free me from my inability to read. Odysseus used a spear while the librarian used a whiteboard and expo markers. Just like the librarian diagnosing my problem and teaching me how to read, the blinded Cyclops, “felt with blind hands and took the door-stone out” (Wilson 253). This opened both of us to freedom, and let us have a chance of reaching home.

After Odysseus' wise machination was carried out, Odysseus got onto his ship and sailed home. Learning how to read and began a desire to read more and more and eventually I became really good at reading. Odysseus and I eventually reached home and, “In joy he kissed the fertile earth of his own country, then lifted high his arms and prayed” (Wilson 328). Just like Odysseus made it home from a long journey I made it home, or learned how to read, from a long journey of working and learning, and I actually won an award for English. But, just like Odysseus, I still had many more problems to face and much more work to do at home. And also, much more things to accomplish, and for both of us, our work did eventually pay off.

Student's Name: Riley Cook

School: Chattanooga Christian School



TENTH GRADE POETRY

Emotions

I have many emotions ranging big to small,
Yet joy has never been the fiercest of them all,
She seems pretty bashful hiding in my brain,
But out of all emotions it is her I want to gain,

Sorrow is the vexing one causing much disdain,
She comes and goes haphazardly and never stays the same, She seldom shows herself in
public flowing out in streams, She loves it most when we're alone and she'll start bursting
at the seams,

Anger's the most obstreperous, annoying, and defiant,
The more I try to quell her the less she is compliant,
She burns with rage and passion as she bubbles up inside,
She demands and she harasses until she cannot be denied,

Fear, she tends to panic and proclaim she's my assassin,
She plants terrors in my brain that spread like wild bracken,
Her beliefs become my own as I adopt all of her delusions,
Moments pass, all terror filled, as she reaches her conclusion,

I have many emotions ranging big to small,
They're all fighting in a feud to be the fiercest of them all,
I know that joy provides me with a deeper sense of peace,
Until I face all of my emotions I know this fight will never cease.

Students name: Averi Smith

School: Hilger Higher Learning

Through The Eyes of a Verbally Abused Child

There is a lock on my door
That shall remain closed forevermore.

It must stay this way
For I cannot come out to play.

There are fears in my mind
Even those I cannot find.

There are things I can't let go
Yes, the things I can't control.

Yet, I must say to my dismay
One day I will fade away.

Student's name: Mallorie Dixon

School: Hilger Higher Learning

The complexity of loss

Loss, a cruel master in disguise,
Leads us down a path of ironic lies.
For when we lose, we often gain,
A deeper understanding of life's refrain.
In losing love, we find ourselves,
A chance to grow and mend our shattered shelves.
In losing hope, we find the strength,
To rise again, to go the extra length.
And when we lose, we learn to treasure,
The moments that bring us joy and pleasure.
For irony, my friend, is a teacher stern,
Guiding us towards lessons we must learn.
So embrace the loss, embrace the pain,
For in its wake, a wiser soul remains.
And remember, dear friend, in life's grand design,
Loss and irony intertwine.

Student's name: Alex Garrett

School: Hilger Higher Learning

“What Used to Be”

A little girl with dolls.
To an older one with keys.
She used to wear a sweater and jeans.
Now only shorts and a big t.
A girl that used to be energetic.
Is now tired, not empathetic.
Excited to go to school.
Turns to drag out of bed.
A girl who would jump up.
Now wakes up feeling dead.
One that would color for fun.
Is now just wanting to be done.
Done with the stress and the worry.
Why can't I go back to when I wasn't in a hurry?
When I wasn't worried about being cool.
And just about getting to school.
Parents expect greatness.
When they used to not care.
When I could sleep in late.
Now, wake up early to curl my hair.
Boys had cooties and they were gross.
Now girls are doing the most.
Attention from others is all that matters.
Their opinions and their thoughts shatter.
Wanting to go to the park.
To learning how to park.
Having field day at school.
Is now exam day, fools.
What happened to being a kid?
In a day, it all changes.
They all say “You're too big.”
They assign pages on pages.

When everyone was full of curiosity
Suddenly stopped wondering.
I miss being a kid.
I miss running and jumping around the house.
I miss playing with toys all day.
Now I study, I eat, I sleep.
Repeat, every day.
I miss getting stickers when you get it right.
Now it's just expected.
We watch fights.
We used to all be friends.
We listen to people talk behind other's backs.
We used to all laugh.
Growing up is scary.
You think about all the freedom you'll have, but where?
There's no more dreaming about princesses and fairies.
Growing up, life is not fair.
What used to be. (Lines: 50)

Name: Allison Johnson
School: Boyd Buchanan School

Narcissus' Doubts

On days such as these, I see a face in the pond.
Prefaced by a bone chill and goose flesh, it digs into me with the slightest glance.
A twisted rendition of the skin I wear, he laughs at my waking moments,
Crawling towards me with each step I take away.
They say God molded all things in his image,
But the boy in the water has hair not of gold but of thin straw,
And his skin stretches like a loom pulled too tight.

The face in the ripples mimics none of my beauty,
Lest the cheeks suck themselves in a protest of life itself.
Sunken eyes, malleable below the flesh they inhabit, rolling loose in their sockets.
Teeth the shade of yolks made of fallen glass shine through the smile
A nose like molten clay adorns the gap between the two,
Nostrils slowly melting
until the holes tear from the meat, flailing over his lips.

I stare into the ghostly sockets and feel them bore into me.
Each angle of myself torn and reconstructed in its view,
Like a broken bird I cannot flee,
For my bones are seeping through my blood like melted gold,
And I am bound to his mournful gaze.
I stare until he speaks to me, grating my ears until I feel them bleed, he speaks to me.
Horrible whispers worming their way through the open wounds,
Tracking their dirt through my ears,
Squirming blindly for a way into my brain.

The water will close around me with gentle hands,
A regretful embrace for a long memory clogged with weeds.
The straw I sprout holds no beauty,
And my wrists will crumble like stone under the gentle pull of the waves.
I lay here in rot, and as my stink flows through the surface, I will spread my spores.

A fungus with legs I will infest, creep, and force my way through the ripples,
Grasping my first glimpse of the face up above.

Student's Name: Griffin Grymes

School or Homeschool Program: Chattanooga High Center for Creative Arts

Hell is your elementary playground,
And you were the one kid who was pushing a tetherball by yourself

Until your elementary PE coach came over,
And yelled at you for not participating

And she ushers you to the back half of the blacktop,
Where the pretty girls who do gymnastics are double dutching

And placed into the back of the line
With all of the cool girls waiting for their turn

Waiting for their turn
To show off their roping skills

Crossing their legs, doing turns
And shouting out the silly songs

With a tune to match the sound of the plastic rope
Hitting the ground, over and over

And I am standing there, still in the back
Admiring the girl who has been jumping since I've arrived.

The one who's outlasted
36 doctors and 17 boyfriends with a cherry on top

And watching her hair bows,
(that her mom had time to do because she wasn't passed out asleep awoken only by bad coffee I attempted to make myself)

Go up and down and up and down
Until she is forced out by a bad move by the rope swinger

(distracted by her elementary crush in the foursquare court)

And then the next girl goes

And then the next girl goes

And then the nex-

No wait it's my turn

I didn't notice, I was too busy looking at the hairbows

Oh wait no I don't know how to jump in

Oh no, all the girls are looking at me.

Oh no, I had to ask them to slow it down

Oh no, I didn't even make it past the first ice cream

Oh no, they asked me to do it again

Oh no, I tripped on the rope

Oh no, I fell

Oh no, my knee is bleeding

Oh no, The coach is coming over

Oh no, now I'm at the nurses' office

Oh no, now I'm crying

And now I'm back on the blacktop because the coach told me to "Get back out there champ!"

And now I'm back to pushing ant hills with a stick and playing tetherball with myself
Because I have just experienced the ultimate embarrassment

Or, you know, hell is like the fire and demons or whatnot
But THIS, this is my own personal hell

That and like... that and like probably riding a scooter and like getting hit in the ankles.

Student's Name: Ava Cutchins

School or Homeschool Program: Chattanooga High Center for Creative Arts

"Was It Ever?"

Was this house ever a home?

Did we ever have the foundation of concrete before jackhammers of insults broke it to nothing but rubble?

Was there ever a glimpse of a future?

Was there a spec of memory of tire swing backyards and daddy-daughter dates?

I can't be mad.

You can only build on what you have and if you have nothing, then.

But in my mind, I've tricked myself into dreams.

Pretended I was Tiana, not for a prince but for a father to hold.

Every Disney story starts with a broken man because he has no wife but what if the man was broken because he has no home?

Does that still make me a princess?

The queen taught and raised me but the queen couldn't teach me the tales of the beasts she never heard.

Especially the beast who shared my face.

She wore two crowns, each pricked with thorns.

It wasn't easy to wear one but she forced two on for the princess.

So was there ever?

Was there ever hope?

Ever a spark of him who wants to build the walls of the home in my heart?

Any chance he'd lay the tile for my relationships?

I guess not.

All homes start with a blueprint and he was ripped from the start, no matter how much tape he had.

I wish they had a history.

Wish the home he built had neighbors to borrow sugar from.

I'd change the walls but they're the only trace of you.

The only thing that remembers what you look like is my plaster.

A burden I have to be content holding.

If your memory only holds in my demolition, the wrecking ball will swing.

But was it ever?

Were the blueprints ever drawn out to map my existence?

Was my sketch ever accounted for when you destroyed the base of the construction?

I guess they weren't.

I guess my stones were pre-broken down.

It doesn't matter.

I will build myself brick by brick.

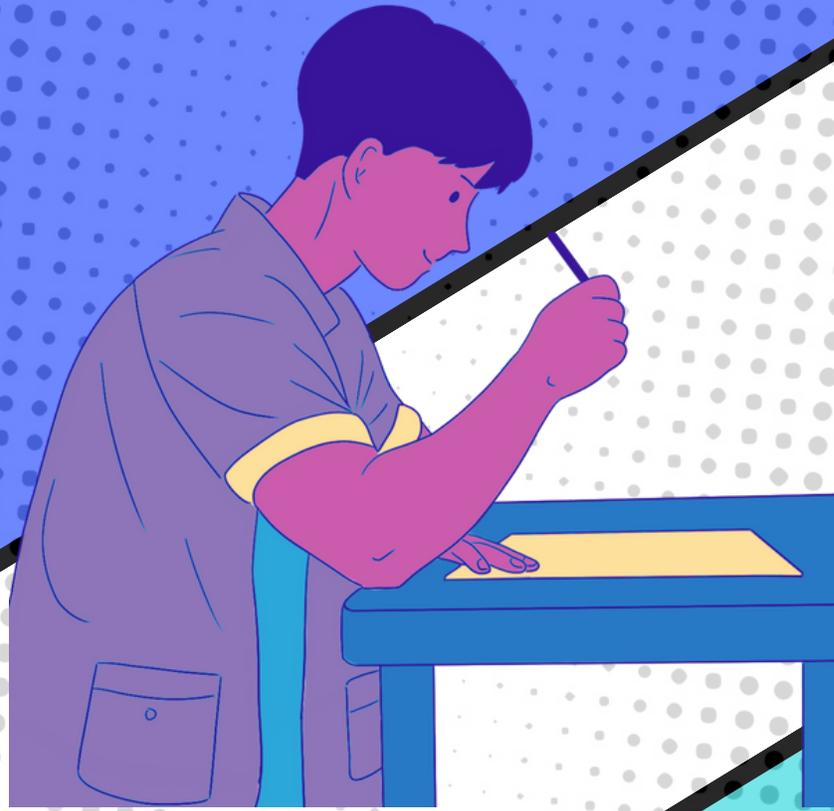
No matter the weight of the mortar or the burn of the tar.

I will construct the home I want.

No matter what your blueprints say.

Student's Name: MiKayla Sanders

School or Homeschool Program: Chattanooga High Center for Creative Arts



ELEVENTH GRADE PROSE

Gates of the Arctic

I think that was a day in the month of June. The crisp, mid-morning sky encapsulated the brown, shrubby, rolling hills of tundra that my feet were planted on. Several miles ahead the hills reached up into sharp, blue mountains donning snowcaps. I pointed to the highest peak and proceeded to hike there on a whim.

After a short while I sat beside a few of the sparse red flowers and took from my bag a small plastic container containing a mixture of peanut butter and wildberries. Seeing as the wind was gusty and cold -- even howling as it attempted to converse with me -- I heated some nearby snow in a well-used kettle so the warm steam would soothe the numbing pain in my nose. As I brought myself back on my feet, I resumed my unprompted trek. Stepping through low slopes of alternating grass and snow, I noticed that the increasing number of snow patches looked as if someone was progressively wiping out more and more of the world with a pencil eraser. *Even in this land*, I thought, *snow doesn't usually persist in great quantities this far into the year...* I paused. I looked at the ground, before raising my head and walking onward without remark. Some time later -- perhaps a few hours -- I pressed my hand against a cold, stony wall in exhaustion, relieved to have made it to the base of the chosen mountain with enough food to spare. The sun was still pinned to the sky and keeping me awake, so I patted together a hasty, hollow dome of snow to sleep in; the darkness was something you had to work for in those warmer months, after all. Fumbling my way in, I set down my bag, rested my head on it, and slipped into a dream.

I woke up, unable to feel my face. My muscles entered a game of tug of war with gravity as I struggled to pull myself out of my snow dome, but I managed, and with shaking hands I was able to drag my kettle out and ignite some snow. Although the resulting steam seemed to bring my face back into existence, the situation more or less frightened me, as the feeling -- or absence of feeling -- was all I could think of when spooning out some of my peanut butter-wildberry concoction. Even still, there was something in me that somehow began to override those mortal anxieties and pushed me to begin ascending the mountain. Such anxiety eventually petered out, as although it was a particularly cold day, the ascension quickly made me break a sweat and warmed me up as a whole.

After some time, I thanked myself for bringing a pair of snowshoes all this way, as the mountain's icy toboggan above appeared to be silently mocking my current footwear. The sun continued to ruthlessly beat on my back as I trudged through

the surprisingly deep snow. *I wonder how long some of this has been here...since it doesn't precipitate often on mountaintops*, I pondered. I can only assume some more hours passed, because I was eventually gasping for breath out of fatigue. Sitting down wasn't preferred, as my pants weren't exactly some of those magic waterproof ones I've heard about, but I would've most certainly collapsed if I had taken another step, so I sat on my bag. I thought about why I was going here again. I sneered in a pained sort of way, because I couldn't find a reason. I looked at my hands, and then at my feet. There was something hollow in myself that I discovered in that moment, but I couldn't articulate what it was precisely. Jerking my mind back into my current situation, I then realized my face and limbs were stinging and that I was hungry, but the peak wasn't that far above, so I decided to eat when I got to the top.

The peak was some two-hundred paces away, and I can only assume that anticipation drew out the adrenaline needed to keep me going for that much longer. Eventually though, the steep incline sloped to a relatively flat surface. I collapsed on the flat ground and shut my eyes without any hesitation. All I could think about was that recessed, ugly question of what was so empty within me. When I opened my eyes, my heart skipped. From the base of the other side of the mountain onwards was a flat, completely empty white expanse that poured into the horizon behind it, like a massive sheet of blank paper. The sun was raised high above the flat plane, as if it were burning into my retinas that it was all I would ever see there. I broke into a cold sweat and made a smile, which momentarily bled into a grin before I began to snicker through my teeth. "It's like me." I blurted with a sharp voice that killed the silence, "There's nothing there. There's nothing in me." I stood there for a moment, before something seemed to fracture my injured soul. There might've been tears running down my face, but I couldn't feel them. My head began to spin, my chest hurt, and in my blind terror, I bounded down towards the End of the World.

Student's Name: Penelope Suffern

School: Hilger Higher Learning

The Courtyard Conquest

Sweat dripped down her brow, the fall sun shining down on her. Arwyn swung her sword in cutting motions at her imaginary attacker. For all her life, she had trained in the art of combat, and had grown to be one of the most skilled in her kingdom. She had fought alongside her trainer, Mora, until the summer before, when she left to pursue her quest set by the Prince. Now, alone in the garden, Arwyn continued to train herself to keep from losing her title, and her skill. She felt the need to be trained in the art of combat to protect those she was sent to protect, and her father pushed her harder into that calling.

“One day, sunshine, the Prince will use you to educate those who do not know how to defend themselves, and their faith.” He would say.

Now, having excelled in her skill of the sword, she felt the burden even heavier. She trained everyday, for hours, however, it was a little harder now that her trainer was gone. Suddenly, the maiden spun around, reacting to the slightest sound that came from behind the concrete garden entrance.

“I am armed, show yourself” she says, holding her training sword towards the direction of the noise. Darius slowly walks out from the cover of the archway, with his hands in the air, a slight smile on his face, his eyes sparkling with mischief. Arwyn lowered her sword, as he stepped forward.

“Men like me need to be warned before coming across you. They could get themselves killed!”

“What do you mean, ‘men like me’?”

“Men as handsome as I, of course! Darius exclaims, teasing her.

“Well then!” She states, rolling her eyes with a slight smug smile flashing across her face.

“But then again,” he says “men like me can’t fight like I do”

“Oh, is that so?” Arwyn questions, while her ocean eyes inspect the training sword held heavily in her hands. Being a competitive elf by nature, she challenged him to a duel.

“You will be doing me a favor by helping me practice.” She said, sensing his withdrawal from the challenge. Arwyn knew he didn’t want to hurt her, so she reassured him he wouldn’t. The young man drew his sword, handcrafted by the blacksmiths of the Prince. Both stood in ready position, waiting for the other to lunge.

“Ladies first.” Darius states, holding out his sword in a defensive position. Arwyn gives a quick nod and lets out a little, satisfied laugh. She swings into

pursuit, making cutting motions at the young man, who blocks each one with ease. They continue to spar, with the contents of the garden surrounding them.

“He has skill” the maiden thought, “But does he have endurance for the fight?”

She continues her combat, but grows harsher by each step. Darius backs off in defense, not wanting to hurt Arwyn by trying to overpower her. Arwyn’s pursuit pushes him down a path in the garden. The clashing of the swords echo in the garden, filling the space with intensity. Darius begins to tire, and she takes the opportunity. Arwyn brings her sword down with a heavy force, to which he barely blocks with his sword. However, the blow sends him staggering backwards into a large marble statue. Arwyn immediately pins him against it with her sword, his face just inches away from hers. Both breathing heavily, she notices a shine in his eye, and his face slightly flustered.

“Pretty; they sparkle like the sun reflecting off of the ocean,” he says. Arwyn snaps out of her gaze, processing what he just said.

“What do you mean?” She asks, still holding her opponent against the cool marble.

“Your eyes.” He replies. She raises an eyebrow, trying not to let her face turn red.

“So, I guess you can fight like the men like you.” She smirks. He looks deep into her eyes, making her face betray her. Arwyn lowers her sword, and takes a slow step back, shaking the hard pounding from her heart.

“You fight well, for a little girl.” Darius says, returning his sword to its sheath.

“Ha!” She laughs loudly, “little girl. I am no more of a little girl then you are a court jester!” He laughs, slowly shaking his head while strolling around the garden. He walks over to a patch of daisies, bending down and picking one from the damp ground.

“You remind me of this flower.” He says, looking at the white and yellow plant in his hand.

“How so?” She asks, sitting down on the base of another marble statue.

“Because it’s delicate, and its beauty brightens up even the darkest of nights.” He states, spinning the flower in between his finger and thumb. Arwyn's face turns a darker shade of pink, turning her head to the ground beside her so he may not see.

“I am not delicate!” She states, turning back to him. “I am more like this rock,” bending down and picking up a stone from one of the flowerbeds, “tough and firm, standing strong on the ground of truth.” She says, tossing the stone back onto the dirt ground.

“To me,” he says, “you are a little daisy.” A soft smile spread across his face. Arwyn rolls her eyes, getting up to leave the garden.

“I have Scripts to study, I must be off. Thank you for helping me train.”

“You're welcome! Anytime.” Darius says, catching up to her to match her stride. They reach the garden entrance, he turns to her and places the daisy behind her ear. Then with a twinkle in his eye, Darius turns and walks down the path to town, as Arwyn watches him disappear in the distance.

Student's Name: Emma Brown

School: Hilger Higher Learning

The Invisible Heartache

“It is estimated that between 75-80% of newly arriving unaccompanied migrant children are victims of human trafficking” (National Library), and 72% of the total number of human trafficking victims in the United States are immigrants (York). These radical statistics are due to the number of children who have suffered forced family separation at the U.S. border and the improper care and recognition provided for migrant children without guardians. Brittany Faith is an Immigration attorney and director of the Grant Konvalinka & Harrison immigration practice in Chattanooga. When she's not at home with her two children, she represents the children of others who have come to the U.S. unaccompanied.

Faith originally planned to work on political campaigns and have a political career. One day she ran into an old classmate from highschool who inspired her to redirect her path towards working with immigrants. Faith was volunteering at a pro bono clinic when her old classmate and his fiance came in seeking care. She discovered they were scared to apply for a marriage license since his fiance was a dreamer, a child who was brought to the U.S. without documents. Since she was an unlawful citizen, even though she had made a life for herself in the U.S. and was in nursing school, she feared she would get deported if they got married. Faith began to help them alongside an immigration attorney who had been at the clinic.

In addition to being aware of their rights, many immigrants avoid reporting things to police because they fear imprisonment or deportation for “crimes they were forced to commit while being trafficked” (Human Trafficking Institute). It’s a tragic reality that these immigrants who have no control over what they’ve experienced, fear seeking help because they don't understand they qualify for trafficking visas and support. Faith worked with a young girl who was brought to the States by her uncle. In exchange for staying with him, he forced her to perform sexual favors. The girl eventually told a teacher, was removed from the home, and Faith was able to get a trafficking visa for her. This is the only sexual exploitation case Faith has worked on; she said it may be due to the fear of reporting to authorities along with feeling there is nowhere to safely report.

Immigrants may come to the U.S. by way of human trafficking, but there are many cases of children who have tried to come legally and the government has failed to properly protect them. For many of the children, it was their

parents' decision to send them away from what they knew as home. “As a parent I think about how awful it must be for me to even consider sending either one of my kids without me anywhere,” Faith adds. “If they're gonna go somewhere, this has to be so terrible that I send them to this foreign country where I won't be able to see them for potentially decades.” Children and families who come to the U.S. are often trying to flee to somewhere they can find safety, but unfortunately they aren't always greeted with it at the U.S. border.

Back in 2017-2021 under Trump's administration, the lives of many immigrants were drastically disrupted. During Trump's presidency they were very public about the ways they were handling immigration. If a mother came into the U.S. with her child they would separate them and believed it was a favor, because the child could qualify for more benefits; then they would send the mother away.

When families were separated, they would often take the children away so quickly that the families would still have all the documents and identification that the U.S. has no record of. While discussing the number of children coming into the States or going into foster care with no records, Faith commented “for me this is the U.S. government engaging in human trafficking.” If there's no record of a child entering the U.S., and little support to acclimate them, that opens a variety of doors for the child to be exploited considering there is no record of the child even existing in the country.

While the window of forced family separation during Trump's administration has ceased, the results of it are that families who were seeking safety or sending children away in order to give them a better shot, are now lost. Thousands of families are dealing with the traumatic separation process, mothers grieving for their children ripped from their arms, and children yearning for the family they only vaguely remember. These people have no way to contact each other, no way to know if their loved ones are safe, and unfortunately not all are.

For the unlucky ones who were unable to find safety, Faith has dedicated herself to providing for them in the ways they need, in the areas they need, at a price they can afford. Faith works on individual cases focused on getting clients visas, spreads awareness through her many social media platforms, writes articles, and works on defense cases providing immigrants with their basic rights—such as access to medication.

While Faith's career helping immigrants began over a decade ago in a clinic, she has since turned herself into a highly respected immigration attorney. Faith sums up her job by saying “people pay me to worry for them”. So whatever individual

needs someone has, Faith is there to advocate and provide for them in the best way she can. Faith says, “My favorite part of what I do is I like representing children who are unaccompanied...because I have two kids, and I like working with kids, and I really enjoy that part. I like seeing them get older. There's just something about it.” As a mother, Faith understands the value each client has and truly has a heart for those she helps, driving her every day to be the passionate advocate for unaccompanied minors that she's become.

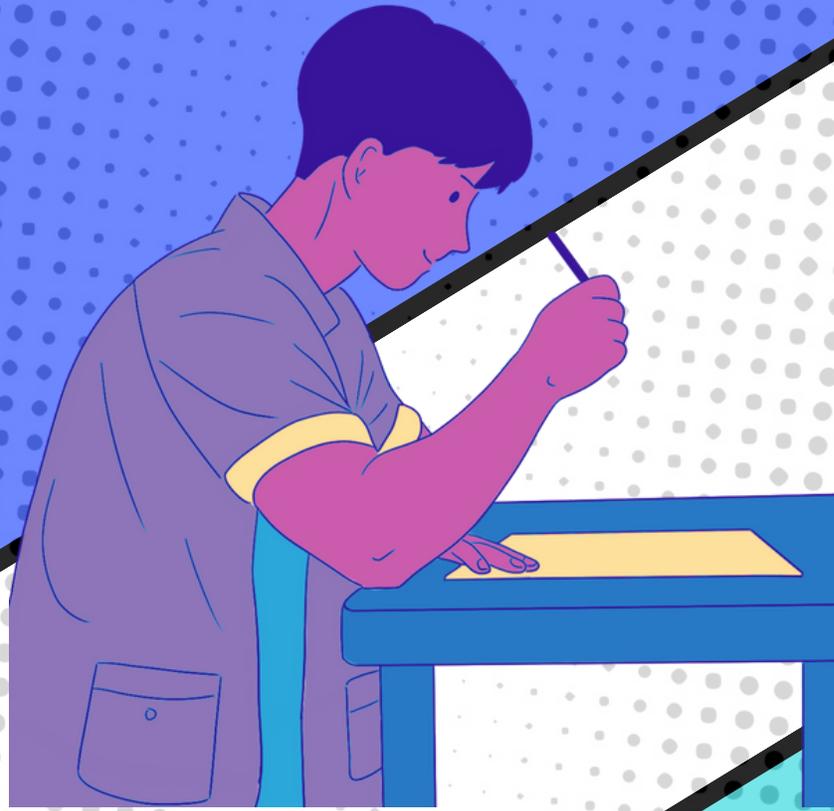
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Student's Name: Mackenzie Gula

School: Chattanooga Christian School



ELEVENTH GRADE POETRY

“Mary Collins”

They say that I studied for self-improvement.
That I should be left to moral matters, mankind and soft facts.
My life was an exemplar of poor pedigree, a caricature of hermits.
But I could have had a different storey.

I secluded myself to write letters.
To escape the silliness of my sisters.
I studied Wollstonecraft and Cowper,
Burned candles for correspondence.

Feminist was a word too formidable.
Philosophy whispered faux pas:
Rights in marriage, women in the workplace.
Not to be talked of,
Words rustling through hallways and parlours,
Silent thoughts soon to be shouted.

I studied to discover.
To explain my family.
The concoction of circumstances that place a person in a time,
Two ridiculous, one witty, one sweet, and one me.

I worked to aid my sisters.
To make them look more.
More pretty, more talented, more charming
They're not the odd Bennet, they're not Mary.

Tirelessly, learning more.
Devouring books and journals.
The monotony of country life made delightful with knowledge.

I played to impress myself.

Like Charlotte, I was plain.
My love was profound as it was pragmatic and ignored.
Fordyce's sermons kept me company.
A dreadful replacement for sardonic laughter.
And yet,
My jealousy seeped through the pages of my sisters' storeys.

A stone in my stomach, a sinking vexation.
It's not inconceivable that I wanted Charlotte's place,
It's possible I would've loved Rosings
Discussions with Collins and Lady Catherine,
Maybe I just wanted a friend.

Student's Name: Aoife Davis

School or Home School Program: Signal Mountain Middle-High School

Dementia

Once, I forgot my name
Awoke, sat up in bed and
Laughed at the blank space,
Waiting for gears to start turning and
It to fill up.
Troubled dreams
Fading memories
There is no time like the present
There is no time but now.

Shadows of people I knew come and visit me often
They don't seem to care about the time the clocks keep, but then,
Neither do I.
Always blurry, always asking for help
Then they disappear, and
It feels like a dream.
A troubled dream of a faded memory.

I heard the neighbors talking once, when
I walked the dog
“Dementia”, said one quietly, and
I started to remember and then
Lost it all again.
I don't remember yesterday;
Tomorrow will take care of itself.
There is no time like the present
There is no time but now.

Student Name: Ari Payne

School: Hilger Higher Learning

Great and Terrible Things

I have a life of great and terrible things ahead of me
I'm going to laugh until my ribs burst
I am going to sing high and clear
And shaky and uncertain
I am going to weep until the world around me shakes
As I quake under my blankets of hurt
I am going to run as free as a bird
And I am going to trip
And stumble
And get back up again smiling
I am going to drift into seas of melancholy
And spoon cold cereal to my numb lips
I am going to attend funerals
Mourn with and for dear friends
I am going to mutter jokes under my breath
And watch the shocked and laughing faces around me
I am going to work while exhaustion overtakes me
And I collapse
I'm going to forgive when it hurts
I am going to seize the day
And I am going to shirk away
I am going to dance in youth
And sigh in old age
I am going to analyze everything
And throw caution to the wind

I am going to shake in embarrassment
And silently beg for someone to say something
I am going to feel anger and love and pain and peace
I am going to pray
I am going to live a life of great and terrible things.

Student's name: Angelina McDaniel

School: Hilger Higher Learning

“Hate”

Hatred is a poison like no other,
It infiltrates all that it touches,
It grows, and grows, and grows,
Turning innocent blue eyes green with envy,
That then fades into a dull black,
Like a biting chill on a sunny day,
It turns black and white lines of morality into gray.
Boom! It is the sudden biting cold day in spring,
Unexpected and unwelcome,
Affecting your mood nonetheless.
It is a thanksgiving turned sour,
By fighting relatives and years of words unsaid,
It is like christmas with endless presents,
Given without love and by obligation,
It is indifference.

Falon Rogers
Silverdale Baptist Academy

“Hot Percy’s Tale”

Old Joe and I, weary from the dread
Of Perry’s men in coats of red.
Hearing British drums sing their beats
And taking our stance as we’re about to meet.
Footsteps of British soldiers coming near
And like a mountain lion, Old Joe had little fear.
The first shot was fired
Then confusion, corruption, and chaos transpired.
Bullets, dust, smoke, and screams filled the air.
Not one moment was left to spare.
Gunfire, grunts, groans, claps, clings, and clatter
To Old Joe it didn’t matter
Fighting for freedom and liberty,
He was a wild horse against British tyranny.
The Concord Battle took the life of Old Joe,
But the British defeat makes him a Revolutionary Hero.

Graylen Scoggins
Silverdale Baptist Academy

“Songs of Spring”

As the leaves completely Fade away,
the grass is fully dead,
and the sky is always grey,
This means that the year can finally rest its head.
The earth starts to look like its final words draw close.
The snow piles in covering the former beauty of a flower,
And everything else surrounding those,
And every moment feels like an hour.
Then when the year is finally done,
The Spring gets to come.
Then with glee rises the sun,
Goodbye to the Winter where the sorrow came from.
The golden flowers rise to sing,
And so do the leaves.
No more sorrow is left to bring.
An endless Spring if one believes.

Ethan McLaughen
Silverdale Baptist Academy

“Cacoethes Scribendi Continued”

But the scribes gazed upon the vacant sea of ink,
Upon barren land, not knowing what to think;
The once vibrant forest now held a blank canvas
That had stretched from Wyoming to Kansas;
A resourceful earth now only dust, abandoned like a quarry
They gathered their novels, fiction, non-fiction, and short stories,
Tearing the pages away from the bind of the books,
Crushing the foolscap in their palms, here they took
Their written imaginations, planting them in the ground,
Covering them with dirt, leaving a mound;
The sky rained ink, filling the sea and watering the fields,
The scribes sat patiently for what was soon to be revealed;
From the dust and dirt arose forests of paper,
The pastures grew wildflowers of pens, the fruits of their labor;
The scribes sat atop a mountain
Overlooking the sea of ink which flowed like a great fountain,
Watching as new life arose from each end of the world,
On their rock they continued to twirl;
Dipping their grass in the sea, the scribes went back to work
As literature’s doom no longer lurked.

Patti Brannan
Silverdale Baptist Academy

“Desk”

Why does one desk
seem to stretch
for miles?

A vast no man’s land
riddled with burning scraps of friendship
corpses of memories best forgotten
deep craters bombed with rejection.

I am unable to cross
the span of a
single
desk.

Sarah Beth Underwood
Silverdale Baptist Academy

“Before You Left”

I wish I had told you before you left...

We ran out of toothpaste

I want a Diet Coke, we should go to Sonic

You're walking too fast

I can't keep up

I'm tired

Sometimes I slip on suds in our shower

I need you to brush my hair

I wish I had told you before you left...

I want to drive this time

Dinner needs more salt

I bought you a present

I need you to read my poetry project

Can I sleep in your bed?

Roxie always yaps and yips

I miss Ampa so much it physically hurts

I wish I had told you before you left...

I don't know how to make your sourdough,

Or cornbread,

Or muffins,

Or cookies,

Or chicken fried steak,

And I don't know what I'm doing

I miss you

I wish I had told you before you left...

I want to inherit your fiesta wear

I sleep in socks like you

I need you to lay out my vitamins
I'm afraid to leave
I'm gonna be a Doctor
Your perfume lingers, it makes me cry
I love you

Mallory Shelton
Silverdale Baptist Academy

“He Came and Went”

Like the vanity of day fading to night
So the time with my father left me discontent
A flash in the sky, lightning so bright
I only know that he came and went.
There was nothing we could do
The sickness was death itself, come to torment
The last words I heard were “I love you”
I only know that he came and went.
A thief in the night, time snatched him away
Oh, that over me he wouldn't lament
I see the stars of heaven, a dazzling display
I only know that he came and went.
Took for granted, a short five years
Walking the golden jeweled streets to their extent
I remembered his face, and shed a few tears
Only to think he came and went.

Liam Runkle
Silverdale Baptist Academy

Red is not a color.
Yes, it is a hue of a rose or a dyed cloth.
However, red cannot be called a color.
Nor can it be described as a rose itself,
As Red is much too bold for that.

Instead, Red is the steady thump of a heart.
It is strength,
A surge of passion and determination,
An enveloping force.
It is the weight of the pounding of a hammer,
The rough texture of bricks,
The assured beat of a drum,
And is the certainty of a storm ready to break.
By summer sun and fire and bark, Red is there.
At least, this is what Red is to me.

You can taste Red,
Through the popping tang of wild raspberries,
And the crunch of ripe strawberries.
By the stoutness of lipstick on your teeth
By the metallic taste of blood
And the feel of wet clay in your hands.
At least, this is what Red is to me.

Can you see it yet?
No? Then humor me.

At times, you can smell Red.
In the intensity of summer, when the sun
Beats against the dry grass at 95*.
And when a can of fresh paint is opened
And by waft of a child's new crayons
And the smears of smashed cranberries.
At least, this is what Red is to me.

You can hear red, too.
Close your eyes, listen.

The crinkling of paper and the crackle of fire.
The footsteps and clamor of a busy street.
Some could argue Red is the tone of a leader.
Commanding, certain, distinct.
Trumpets sing Red with hawks,
Twigs break and lightning strikes.
I am sure you have cut an onion
It is so incredibly Red, with its intrusive, intense stink.
At least, this is what Red is to me.

See it now, clear before your eyes.
Red is no rose, it cannot be called a color.
Where the hue is vacant, Red is there.
It thrives in large lashes, you will be able to notice it now.
But I alone do not define Red nor the other colors
Oh, if I was to talk of them, you'd be sick of me.
So tell me
What calls Red to you?

Student's Name: Koa Harrell

School or Homeschool Program: Chattanooga High Center for Creative Arts

I Too Sing America

I too sing America
I work so hard
I wake every morning
to go to school and study
And have good grades
And I study hard

I live in a beautiful house
That my parents bought
They worked hard
To buy their dream house
They wake every morning
To go to work

I love the flowers
I plant at my house
I like my room
It is all pink,
My favorite color
I Too Sing America

Lucia Diego Gonzalez
The Howard School



TWELFTH GRADE PROSE

Conducting at Symphony Hall

Silence is the best composer. Driving to Symphony Hall at eight in the morning, he could have put on Beethoven, Wagner, Chopin, Mussorgsky; instead, Silence rang in his ears. He believed it was a distraction from all the loud noises of the world: the fast tempo, the ears listening carefully for mistakes. It will rain soon enough, he thought; he was grateful for rain, for in Palestine, the rain would never come in colors of orange and white. Ever since the War escalated, the conductor had been going deaf; deaf to all the beautiful cacophonies that made it easy to appreciate life; deaf to the audience's clapping after a performance—their appreciation. Gratitude, he needed to be grateful for maybe then will the War finally be over and he could unsee everything seen and forget everything unforgettable. Parking at Symphony Hall and taking the baton out of his car, he was embarking on yet another journey.

The conductor was to be conformed to his office, watching the rain fall softly outside; the first rain he remembers in Palestine did not fall so soft; he had eaten dates with his brother when the rain came; he felt the stiffness, the anxiety that *something* lurked; the rain was powerful; the rain threw the conductor up against the wall; the rain made his little brother's head explode; and ever since then his ears evolved to listen to every small tune of stiff anxiety; it had led him to conduct like there was some tangible power he could seize; he would conduct his planned set of pieces until Spring. What pieces should he plan for the summer? perhaps he should plan for them to play Silence; force the audience to sit for three or four hours, wanting them to experience the feeling of death; the sound of dark sea wrapping around them and the peacefulness of it all; orchestrating it all until they all fell to ash. Practice was meant to start at ten—what time was it now? it didn't matter; he would set up early, wait patiently for the players to file in, for patience was his entire life now.

At a quarter until ten, they began to file in—the oboists, the flutes, the cellos; he might have said a word or two, but it didn't matter. It was ten now, and what's this? an empty chair on the left—a missing violinist; he knew exactly who was missing. Ever since the new orchestral season started, he noticed her face, her last name; she was young and Israeli, he was sure; ever since she had come he felt his power diminish; she was one of his best violin players; it was her dream to be in the orchestra and his nightmare, and now she was late—yes, she was late; it was a deadly sin she had committed against the conductor; but the conductor was not upset; no, he was quite content she was late. Tomorrow,

he would bring her into his office and yell at her; he would threaten her position in the orchestra or, perhaps he would kick her out altogether; he would throw her into the merciless sea and make her life feel insignificant; it would be a thrill! if only tomorrow came quicker! It was five minutes past ten when she entered Symphony Hall running to the stage, the conductor smiling; and so rehearsal began; tomorrow he would start a War; tomorrow, he would finally be in complete power once again.

After rehearsal, the players left swiftly but he lingered on the stage; it was Silence he was hearing again; cruel, beautiful Silence who hung over him like clouds at sea; he would leave to change into all-black for the concert; but as he entered his office, he froze. He wore all-black at his brother's funeral; he remembers it all quite too well. He remembers the sound of everything, his mother's crying; he remembers hearing a fly buzz when his brother's head exploded; now, it was his head that was exploding, for the pounding headache made it hard to breathe; he had left his brother's body, his parents, all to come perform every few months. And then—then came the sudden realization that he was undeserving of life after all; tears welled up in his eyes as he looked out into the rainy day; he saw his brother out there in the wild and was talking to him yet again; I am sorry I had to leave; I am sorry, I am sorry, I am forever sorry; “don't kill yourself, the rain is beautiful—look at the rain”; the rain, the rain, repentance, repentance; he grew up but his brother lay undeveloped, empty. Don't leave, please don't leave me; but his little brother's facial features reduced until he could not remember what he looked like anymore; now the sobs were echoing out, did the Israeli violinist ever feel this way? did she fear for her family living thousands of miles away or regret leaving? for then came the other realization that, with all his disdain, he truly loved the violinist; the War had driven deep divisions but the Iron Wall had crumbled; he loved the violinist, he loved his little brother, he loved his parents. He then wore all-black for the concert.

The conductor noticed that deafness still rang in his ears—no matter now, they would start coming in soon to hear the music for music evoked all emotions; it made hidden feelings come into plain sight. In its own way, War was a form of music, but it was trivial—he couldn't hear it anyway. At a

half-hour past six, he faced the shadows, announced some quick words before returning to his players; he looked at the Israeli violinist; perhaps he would call the violinist into his office tomorrow, perhaps he would not; for they were merely human after all. As the violinist played the first note, he realized that he was no longer deaf.

Student's Name: Mark Nashi

School or Homeschool Program: Signal Mountain Middle-High School

12th Grade Prose - Untitled

Most people consider Death to show up unexpectedly. To arrive and depart with a soul within a minute. However, Death has been following me for months, and has yet to take mine.

He stands in the corner of every room. Watching, taunting. His malicious smile of jagged, yellowing teeth burns into the back of my eyelids so that even in sleep, he haunts me. His arctic gaze watching my every move.

I am not sure when it started. When the torment shadowed my every thought. When I began needing to pretend him away when with my friends and family. They do not see him, for he is my burden and mine alone. After weeks of this, I could not simply act like Death was not looming in the corner of every room in my childhood home. I stopped seeing my parents, and haven't seen them for months. They ask me what's wrong, and I cannot find the words to tell them. But I silently will them to listen to the pleas in between my lines; to believe that Death was sitting next to me, watching me with a warning glare in his eyes that froze my every thought. I grew isolated, for Death was my only companion.

Some days are worse than others, and the reek of decay breathes down my neck. His shadow bleeds into the corners of my vision. But although he watches me, smiles at me, and hovers just out of view, I had never heard his voice- neither male nor female, screaming with the souls of the damned, the souls he'd taken, the souls soon to be my peers- until today.

It had started no different than any other in my new, solitary life. I woke, ate, dressed, and pretended away the Death in the mirror. He was closer today. Had been ever since I'd completely given up on leaving my house. The only sounds I knew were the creaking of the building settling as well as my own weak, breaking voice in my ears as I begged Death to leave.

I sat on the couch, working on my laptop, trying my best to ignore him. He perched on the chair with one knee crossed over the other. Just watching me, with that same smile he always had. He tapped his fingers on the wooden arm, the sound of his long, broken nails digging into my mind and distracting me entirely.

We continued like this. Me gritting my teeth against the noise, him lazily, absently continuing despite my obvious discomfort. My annoyance turned to fury, and I pounded my fist. "What do you want!"

He did not respond.

“Please! Tell me! Why follow me! Why watch me! What’s the point! Just take me if you’re going to take me!”

He did not respond.

“Please! Just leave me alone!” Tears welled in my eyes, they burned with the effort to hold them back.

It was only then that he opened his mouth to speak through the voices of those he’d taken. “You are not long for this world. Your soul will be mine when the time is right.” With those ominous words, he resumed his tapping. His grin only widened at the sight of my anger.

A chill went down my spine at the realization, leaving me numb with fear. It was then that I resolved to beg. I knelt on the ground, the hard wood groaning under my weight. I clasped my hands in front of me, letting my tears fall as I lifted my face to meet his malicious stare. “Please. Please, spare me. Give me another chance. Another year, month, week, I don’t care. Just let me live. I beg of you.”

“Why? What have you done that makes you worth the effort?” The whispers of the dead rang in my ears.

It was then that my speech failed me. No words came to my mind. I had cut off everyone I loved. I had ignored the concerned calls from my parents. I had left. I had been preparing for my death for the past few months. Isolating myself so I would not be missed. “Nothing. I am not worthy. I have no lasting value to this world. But if you only give me another chance, I will make myself worthy. I will be a better person. I will enjoy every second I get back. I will savor the very fact that I am still alive and when you take me, I will be ready. I will take your hand and give you my soul without regret. Just do not allow my soul to drown in isolation. Let me live.”

I was again met with silence. The creaking of the house was the only thing that cut through the living quiet.

Death leaned forward in his chair. The house grew louder and louder. I could barely hear Death’s quiet voices when he said, “Run.”

I didn’t hesitate. I got to my feet and took off, out the front door, down the driveway, and through the street. I don’t know how far away I got when I tripped, twisted my ankle on a pothole, and fell. My palms and knees burned, my ankle radiated pain throughout my leg.

That was when a loud crash sounded from behind me. A wave of dust and debris clouded my senses. Pain exploded through my back as it

rained down on me. I couldn't breathe, the air clouding my lungs. Something hit the back of my head and I lost consciousness before I could feel anything more.

When I woke, everything had settled around me. I couldn't find the strength in my knees to stand. My house was gone, replaced by a pile of rubble. And yet, I couldn't find it within me to be sad, to fear. For I was alone. Completely, utterly alone. Death was nowhere in sight. A sob tore through me as I fumbled for my phone.

I called my parents.

Olivia Sharp
Soddy Daisy High School

Training Wheels

I sat on my bike at the top of what felt like a colossal mountain. When I was too young to ride on big-boy roller coasters, but too old to still believe in Santa Claus. Really, the “mountain” was just the biggest hill in my little neighborhood. The one we moved to after mom left.

My sister, the bravest of us, had sped down it moments ago. Her hollering and cheers of enjoyment traveling to the rest of my siblings and I where we stood in awe. After reaching the bottom she regarded us above her, wearing an infectious smile that was missing more than a few teeth. Of course she wasn't scared, she'd ridden down the hill hundreds of times. I still remember the first instance, when she came home crying with scraped knees and scars that would never leave. I was the one that patched her up. Since then, she'd learned how to defeat the challenge and escape without a scratch on her.

I, on the other hand, had never even ridden my bike without training wheels. I was perfectly fine with keeping them on forever. I told my father as much when he screwed them off early that morning saying that real men ride real bikes. I wanted to explain to him that I'm not a man, just a boy, but that was when I still had the urge to make my father proud. So later when my sister informed me that all of us were going to ride down the hill by the neighbors house I made no objections. I just trailed behind my brothers and sisters, walking my bike while they rode theirs.

Seeing my younger brother ride down the hill after my sister should have given me courage. The whole “if they can do it, then so can I” mentality. It didn't. The closer it got to being my turn, the more nervous I became. My hands hurt from gripping the handles of my bike so hard; it didn't help that they were dripping with sweat. Soon enough everyone but my older brother was staring up at me expectantly. The only reason he was there instead of at the bottom with them was to make sure I didn't chicken out. Which was highly likely. He gripped my shoulder and whispered in my ear. Not words of encouragement, but ones that provoked fear.

“Imagine how disappointed dad will be if you come home without doing this.”

Student's Name: Abigail Jessen

School or Homeschool Program: Chattanooga High Center for Creative Arts



TWELFTH GRADE POETRY

When Dorothy Leaves Kansas

1. What happens when Dorothy leaves Kansas?
2. When “home” becomes just a syllable,
3. Closed, held by tongue—
4. When playing in beautiful spring flowers
5. And counting to 1000 become obsolete figures,
6. Keep temporarily by memory?

7. What happens when trips to Atlanta,
8. Driving fast by the yellow “JESUS IS COMING, REPENT” signs
9. To visit worlds never seen before: bakeries, museums, libraries
10. All morph into empty void—
11. What happens when Atlanta dies?

12. What happens when Sunday trips to vast and open playgrounds,
13. And Monday chess practices and Wednesday taekwondo lessons
14. Become dull, closed. Boring—
15. When large books of extraordinary adventures
16. Begin to seem small, and the community library is
17. Suddenly a tight space, struggling to breathe?

18. What happens when grade Christmas parties,
19. Giving gifts to grateful strangers turn tiring—
20. When watching bright and vibrant movies playing loud in rooms
21. Sounds soft and no longer entertains—
22. When Christmas cookies preserved
23. Are eaten, all that remains is an empty plate?

24. What happens when expansive balloons, filled with magic

25. Become filled with helium, just air—
26. When all the singing that was on pitch and in rhythm,
27. Gathered around a cake with a countable number of candles
28. Consolidates into a single text message?

29. What happens when “worlds” becomes singular,
30. “Tennessee” becomes easy to spell and “Chattanooga” is
31. Easy to pronounce—
32. When big words are no longer hard to incorporate in
33. Everyday dialogue—

34. What happens when Dorothy leaves Kansas?
35. When she waves goodbye and suddenly, for a second,
36. “Home” is not held, 1000 is counted again,
37. Atlanta is alive, books seem large again,
38. Christmas parties are vibrant, balloons rise higher,
39. “Worlds” becomes plural, “Tennessee” becomes hard to spell,
40. “Chattanooga” is not so easy to pronounce—
41. “Home”, only one syllable, is looked on with fondness.

Mark Nashi

Signal Mountain Middle High School

Fearful Love

Love is patient
But I'm getting tired of waiting
Love is kind
But you're not
Love does not envy
But I get jealous when I see you with her
Love does not boast
But there's nothing to boast about anyways
Love keeps no record of wrong
But I can't keep forgiving you
Love is not proud
But there's not much to be proud of
Love does not lie
But you don't believe the truth
Love is not self-seeking
But I at least want SOME attention
Love is not easily angered
But it's bottled up and will eventually explode

Student's Name: Emma Perkins

School: Hilger Higher Learning

Ocean

Vast, immeasurable, breathtaking
Sapphire, turquoise, jade, aqua.
Moments of peace are deceiving.
What lies below the surface
Haunting, eerie, ferocious
Respect is given to the abysmal, vast water.
At times mysterious and yet often serene
A perfect combination of soothing yet ominous.

Steven Bruno
Silverdale Baptist Academy

Water

In love, as water flows without restraint,
Its currents mirror love's unyielding grace,
A force that molds, in passion's sweet embrace,
A union where two souls become acquaint.
Like water, love can surge with fervent might,
Or gently trickle in a tender stream,
It nourishes the heart, a vibrant gleam,
A source of joy that fills the darkest night.
In storms, love echoes nature's tempest wild,
Yet in its calm, soothing, tranquil sea,
Through every ebb and flow, it still abides,
An endless depth, where hearts can wander free.
So let our love be like the ocean-wide,
Forever deep, its waves in constant stride.

Caleb Beavers

Silverdale Baptist Academy

Beneath the open sky, on roads they roam,
Metal horses speeding, finding home.
Engines hum with power, strong and free,
A symphony of motion, melody.

Coats of paint, a colorful parade,
Reflecting dreams on roads that never fade.
From city streets to highways, clear and wide,
Each car, a vessel on this endless ride.

Oh, tires on asphalt, turning round,
Gears shift and dance, a rhythmic sound.
In simple balance of mechanics and grace,
Cars tell stories as they find their space.

With every rev, a heartbeat on the street,
In simple verses, journeys are sweet.

Spencer Myren
Silverdale Baptist Academy

Snowfall

We are snowflakes
Born in a frigid cloud
Loved at first sight

Delicate
Drifting through the wind
Never stopping
Never getting a break

Passing by other icy flakes
Saying hello
Time passes
We forget their existence

Falling to our inevitable demise
Faster and faster
Unable to stop
Unable to say goodbye

We hit the ground eventually
Melting in an instant
Loved for a moment, now forgotten
Consolidated with all the other snowflakes
Seen as one, when we are actually unique

We disappear
No longer special

Children wait for the next snowflakes
They start their journey
Not knowing who we are
The new delicate snowflakes fall
Not knowing what the inescapable future holds

Caroline Fraker
Silverdale Baptist Academy

In masquerade of smiles, the heart complies,
Concealing voids of sorrow, veiled in light,
A puppeteer, with strings of stained lies,
I dance on stage, on a relentless night.

Beneath the pretense of a cheerful face,
Lies a script of joy, meticulously penned,
Yet, in the shadows of this staged embrace,
A scripted tale of happiness must end.

Behind the laughter, echoes a silent,
A fractured soul in a charade of glee,
We play the role, the world will never know,
The act, a masterpiece, yet tragedy.

So, in this sonnet, truth finds its address,
Where smiles are worn, but hearts confess.

Trevor Walliser
Silverdale Baptist Academy

In the Swamps

The green-tinted water lulls the trees down.
Whispers of refreshment and revival
swarm through the leaves.
Hypnotized, they comply.
Falling prey to those
who taunt their needs.
Suffocated by engravings
barely healed,
from whips sharp enough
to draw blood.

But,
as soon as the pain numbs
they escape.
From boats and fields
of perspiration, blood, tears
and into the water.
The sun reflects their peace:
long limbs glistening as
heavy chains pull them down.
Peace, sweet peace.

Student's Name: Savannah Burney

School or Homeschool Program: Chattanooga High Center for Creative Arts

Poking Fun

An Imitation of "On listening to Your Teacher Take Attendance"

Breathe deep even if it means you
encase your lungs in silica dust

from the particles floating down onto the
floor. The curves and edges being

made more pronounced. Your teacher
means well, even if he teases your painting

like he does to his hair. Dark curls consume
his head. As everyone turns their faces to

gauge your reaction, no need to glance at
the floor and laugh it off. Just picture all

their heads as one big game of Whac-A-Mole
and you will remember that stormy night when

your family decided to go to the arcade.
And when you look up at the neon lights,

their brightness will pierce your eyes. Try not
to forget that someone purged the clay from the

ground, once covered in rocks and plastic. They
filtered out any imperfections, while making their

own hands look more out of place. Think of the truck
bed, the dried clay falling through the cracks.
Think of their sweat and their bottle, dry to the touch.

Student's Name: Lauren Sims

School Program: Chattanooga Christian School

The Locs Fella

I Too Sing America
I am the locs fella
They judge me immediately
When I come around
You can feel the change

The Atmosphere
The Environment
Their Expressions

Anyways, one day
They'll see how pure my soul is
And be very regretful
I, Too Sing America

AhSani Fontenot
The Howard School

Soul Searcher

Soul Searcher

That's what I am

Trying to find who I am

Yes, I'm Ebonae

But that's just my name

Life is like a game that brings pain

Confusion on what's my purpose and why I'm here

Or why the thought of the future brings some fear.

I know I'm not alone

I have a house but it aint a home

I have a head but it's not all the way screwed on.

Why is life hard

Maybe it's not but I feel behind bars

But like Buzz Lightyear Ima reach for the stars.

Yes a soul searcher, that's who I am

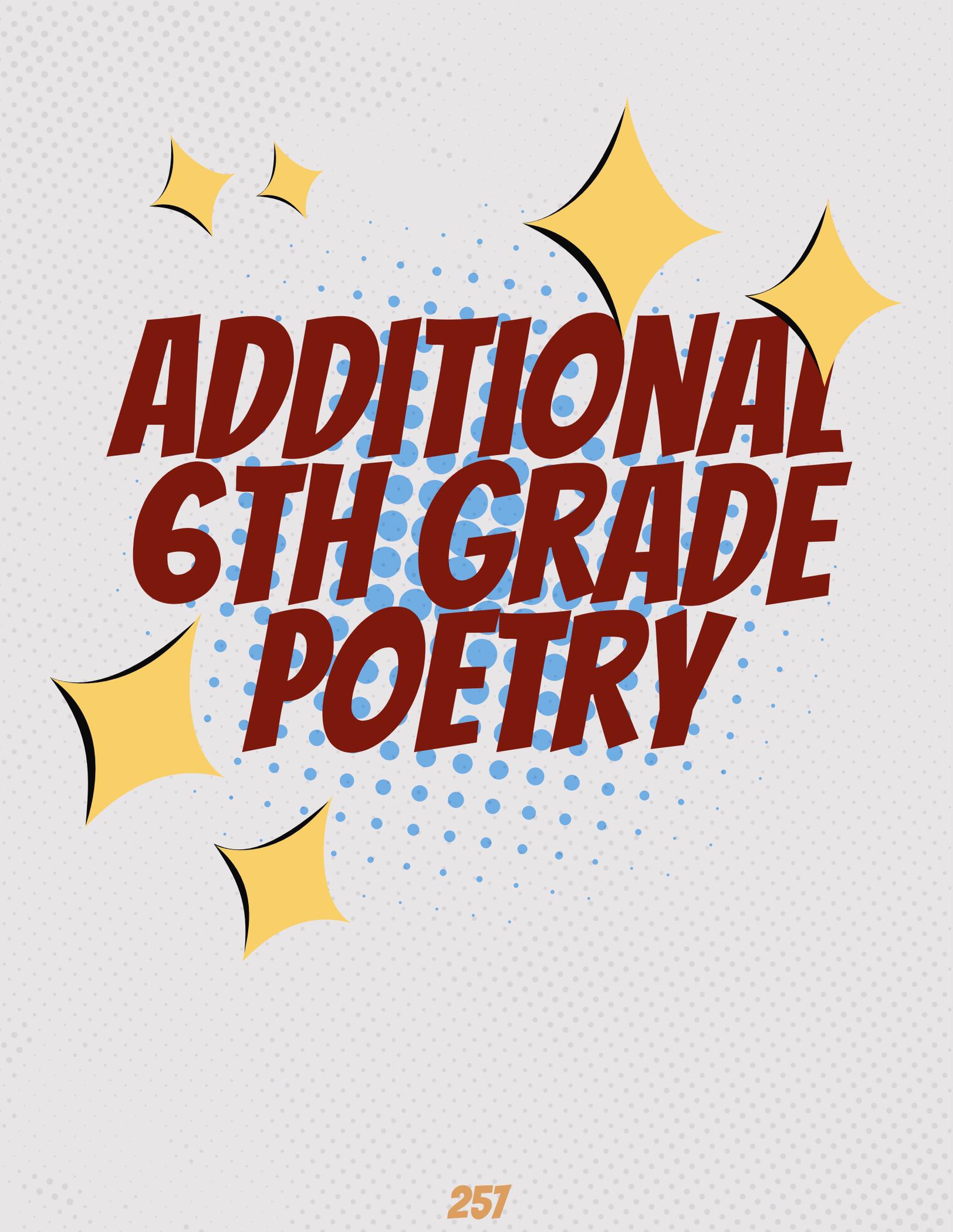
A soul search I will now take my stand.

Student's Name: Ebonae Sanford

School: The Chattanooga Girls Leadership Academy



APPENDIX



**ADDITIONAL
6TH GRADE
POETRY**

The crisp winter air
surrounds you
and you smell the gingerbread
house you made the night before.

you put on your pajamas
and walk down the stairs.

Then you see the cookie's and
milk you left out and the trees
beautiful lights.

The manager scene lit up
and the winter wonderland that is your
living room.

Then you sit down and open your gifts
and eat cookies
that's Christmas morning.

Landon Downey
Silverdale Baptist Academy

Oh what a squirrel!

Squirrel Squirrel
Tall as a feather
Loves acorns in
The warm weather

Eats during the
Day and sleeps
During the night
Oh what a squirrel!

A fluffy tail
Furry and brown
See them in the
Trees or on the ground

They're so fast
That you can't
See them run past
Oh what a squirrel!

Katelyn Jackson
Silverdale Baptist Academy

The Sunny Shore

As we walked to the sunny shore
The waves crashed and glistened
I wanted to swim more and more
As we grew closer to the shore

The seagulls cried
As they reached for the sky
And swooped to the sea
Then landed on a tree

I hear the whoosh of the crashing waves
As I looked to the sun on these beautiful days

The sun rose higher in the sky
As I saw a bird flying by

We left the beach with a sad goodbye
As I looked to the sun in the beautiful sky
The waves crashed and sunk into the shore
And I wanted to go back more and more

Emma Keiser
Silverdale Baptist Academy

FireFox

fur of fire eyes
of lava tail of flame as cute as a fairy,
glowing like a
lantern
he lays on tree
he sleeps with the fall
he eats the bugs
as old as a fossil the
smell of sap in the air
as he takes a sip from the lake his
fur glowing in the air
his beauty making him easy to see from miles
This animal is low in numbers
as his kind dies out but he still lives on
This animals name is
**THE
RED
PANDA!**

**Owen Puglise
Silverdale Baptist Academy**

The Lunch Poem

The bell goes off,
I leap out of my chair,
My water was open,
and it spilled everywhere,
I put my stuff in my locker,
Sprinted down the hall,
I passed by a teacher,
And she wanted to have a talk,
She grabbed my shoulders,
Pulled me aside,
Before you know it,
Five minutes go by,
I realized I was running out of time,
So I happened to say, “Goodbye,”
Finally, I’ve reached home plate,
And luckily I didn’t arrive late.

Reed Schultz
Silverdale Baptist Academy

Thunder and Lightning

Pitter patter drip drop bang
There's a storm coming about 20 minutes away
Thunder, lightning, wind
Bang, flash, woosh
Away from the windows, go downstairs
Hurry a tornado is coming soon
Dribble drop crash boom bang
The storm is over, but let's play it safe
Go back to bed now, it's all ok
Drip drip drip drop
It's terrible, it's horrible, it's really sad
But don't worry it's not all that bad
The storm is gone the damage is done
Now we can start to repair
Our communities come together
Both the pain and the love we share

Emma Grace Swindall
Silverdale Baptist Academy

Volleyball Court

I hear the whistles
I hear the crowd
I hear the yelling
All around

I see the scoreboard
Blinking red and green
Like a Christmas tree
On Christmas Eve

I see the volleyball
Bouncing up and down
Wearing red and white stripes
Like a flashy ball gown

The ball is hit
“Over!” They screamed
As they dived on the floor
“Got it!” they gleamed

The game goes on
Bump set spike
The ball flies up
Over the net it takes flight

The game is tight
The scoreboard blinks:
24-25
Hold on to your seats!

Our team is winning
The last serve is hit
Get it! Get it! They yelled
Over and over again

It's a long rally
But our teams is ready
Just a few more hits!
Stay steady!

I hear the ball hit
That's it! We scored!
Our team has always
Dominated the court

Kennedy Walker
Silverdale Baptist Academy

The background features a light gray grid of small dots. Scattered throughout are several yellow, four-pointed starburst shapes with black outlines. A central cluster of larger, semi-transparent blue dots is positioned behind the main text.

**ADDITIONAL
10TH GRADE
POETRY**

Chronically III

My childhood was stolen
By doctors offices
I was at the scene of the crime
but I was too busy being hooked up with lines
I'm immune to the hurt
I've adjusted to the pain
And that the doctors will always know me by name
I may not be a celebrity but in the hospital I have my own special kind of fame
My teenage years are slipping from the little lines imprinted on my fingers
But my deductibles are hit each year
I've casualized cruelty
I've familiarized myself with truancy
While kids my age are under the influence
All I'm under is anesthesia

Bentley Pearson
Silverdale Baptist Academy

Spring Closing In

Crashing of the ocean waves
Spilling over the white sand
Foaming tides touching my toes
Slight salty breeze pulling my hair

Splashing around in the cool water
Searching for seashells
Seagulls soaring in the wind
Spring days closing in

Sand castles built on the shore
Reaching for the skies
With mighty rulers sitting high
Whose crafted by tiny hands

A yellow flag waving hello
The sun's shimmering glow
Leaving soft kisses with a blow
Spring days closing in

Lydia Downs
Silverdale Baptist Academy

Poet's True Love

In Ink-stained chambers where my verses flow,
A poet's heart, with passion deeply sown,
Each line, a testament to the love I've known
yet, in this art, no tender feelings grow.

The quill, my loyal companion true,
A silent witness to my fervent plea,
In ink and parchment, love's complexity,
But oh, the poet's heart, alone it strews

So in this realm where words and paper part,
The poet loves, though art can't love his heart.

Josiah Ellington
Silverdale Baptist Academy

Once a year
You can be anything
A costume must be chosen
Spooky ghouls or funny clowns
Paint your face gleaming white
It's the night the scarecrows come alive

Parents sit on their piles of candy
Doling out one or two prizes
Greeting friendly superheroes
Pretending to fear the man with the chainsaw
Time goes backwards
The parents are like children again

Tick tick tick, the clock clicks five
The street slowly fills
Little babies in red wagons dressed as dragons
Toddlers trip and cry
The parents coax them, say hello
Say your lines and then we will go

As it gets darker
The little monsters go away
Out come the big monsters to play
Racing, screaming, teasing
Tornados through the streets
They tear through the peaceful neighborhood

The loot is collected
Sorted
Eaten
Traded
Pumpkins are melting
It is done

Landen Walcott
Silverdale Baptist Academy

Sadness

Sadness is the rain that falls in the night
Cold, icy droplets that hurtle through the air
Forever unknown in the inky darkness
Sadness is the wind that never ceases
Blowing endlessly against the soul
Pressing down upon the weary heart
Sadness is the great moon above it all
Restless in the wee hours of the morning, forever searching
Enduring her hopeless trial of solitude.

Kate Tucker
Silverdale Baptist Academy

Backstage Flutters

Whispers want to speak
Leather slippers try to squeak
Doors that open quietly creak
Dancers backstage try to perfect their technique

Microphones start to sing
Stagecrew stays in the wing
Instruments get strung by their string
Dancers start their exiting

The lights are warm
The stage pops from steps
The audience claps from entrance
The music begins

The rhythm flows
The music slows
The crowd crows
The performers all go

Taylor Killingsworth
Silverdale Baptist Academy

I'm Bad At Writing Poetry

I'm bad at writing poetry
It's just a skill I lack you see
To pen eloquent sonnets
Or sing about bees in bonnets
I can't make someone laugh with a limerick of rabbits
Or compose an elegy on my bad habits
I can't compile a narrative on a man named Dory
Or draft an ode of a soldier in glory
I can't write one poem with the knowledge I've accrued
And to be quite frank, I really am screwed.



CONGRATS, WINNERS.

**REMEMBER... IN TIMES OF LIT,
CALL SOLIT!!!**