METAMORPHOSIS

An Anthology of Student Writing and Art

Volume XXXVIII
Cooperative Arts and Humanities Magnet High School
177 College Street · New Haven, CT 06510

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Cooperative Arts and Humanities High School

CORRECTION:

"The Third Void, A Familiar Stranger and a Confused Reader" on page 68 was originally published with the wrong author.
The story was written by Adrienne Clermont.

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Introduction

Facetime Transcript
19 May 2020 12:03 PM

Becca: Hey.
Nelani: Hi, what's up?
Becca: We have to introduce the 38th issue of Metamorphosis.
Nelani: Oh yeah, let's go!
Becca: What should we say?
Nelani: I'm not sure, but we should reflect on our four years in Creative Writing.
Becca: Like when we would have to journal two pages every day in Mr. Brenner's class?
Nelani: You act like it was terrible.
Becca: It wasn't the best, but it really helped me improve my writing in the long term.
Nelani: True.
Becca: And Halloween was always great with Ms. Katz dressed up as Edna Mode from The Incredibles.
Nelani: It was such a look, and remember when Ms. Englart beat us in Uno on the last day of junior year?
Becca: Junior year was actually pretty great looking back on it; it wasn't as bad as everyone says it is. Well, listen, I have to go. I'll call you back.

19 May 2020 6:56 PM

Becca: Hey, sorry I didn't call back sooner. I had a Zoom class. Side note, have you seen Tiger King, tho?
Nelani: Yes! What else is there to do in quarantine?
Becca: She totally killed her husband!
Nelani: Just like we're gonna kill this intro we have to write.
Becca: That was a terrible segue. What else do we have to say?
Nelani: I don't know. Remember when Laura Pappano visited our class and there was a dragon outside of the room?
Becca: I couldn't take my eyes off of it!
Nelani: The visual arts department did a great job on that dragon for Lunarfest.
Becca: Just like they did with all the pieces in Metamorphosis.
Nelani: I know. They look great and the writing pieces are so good, too.
Becca: Yeah, everyone did an amazing job, given everything that's been happening with quarantine.
Nelani: I still can't believe this was our last year at Coop.
Becca: I know...I wish it didn't have to end so soon, but at least more people have been kept safe.
Nelani: Agreed.
PAUSE
Nelani: So, did we just write the intro?
Becca: We basically did.
Nelani: Should we say anything else to the readers?
Becca: I think we both know what we have to say...
Both: Buckle up and get ready for the talent palooza you're about to embark on! From our homes during quarantine--it's the 38th edition of Metamorphosis!!! Enjoy!

WRITERS

Gabriella Alvaracin
Heather Alvarado Garcia
Xzavea Bradley Glover
Charlie Brown
Zanai Buchanan
Anaisa Burgos
Jasmine Cari-Pergee
Makayla Chambers
Adrienne Clermont
George Cole
Kennyah Cooper
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Nolan Wazni
Kiana Webber
Destin Williams
Mariana Zepeda
Kai Zundell

Poetry

Mejia Layesvka, Grade 11

Everything at Once

Gabriella Alvaracin, Grade 9

I am twisting
falling

Around near the
ground

The evening sun
glows

My heart
slows

Angela Mendez, Grade 11

Kiersten Turnbull, Grade 11

For I Desire Happiness

Heather Alvarado Garcia, Grade 12

My mind is a trash can filled with crumpled paper thoughts
that are me realizing
that I once didn't have to worry
about being yelled at for being forgetful.
I organize those thoughts and shred the merry memories
that don't describe this place.

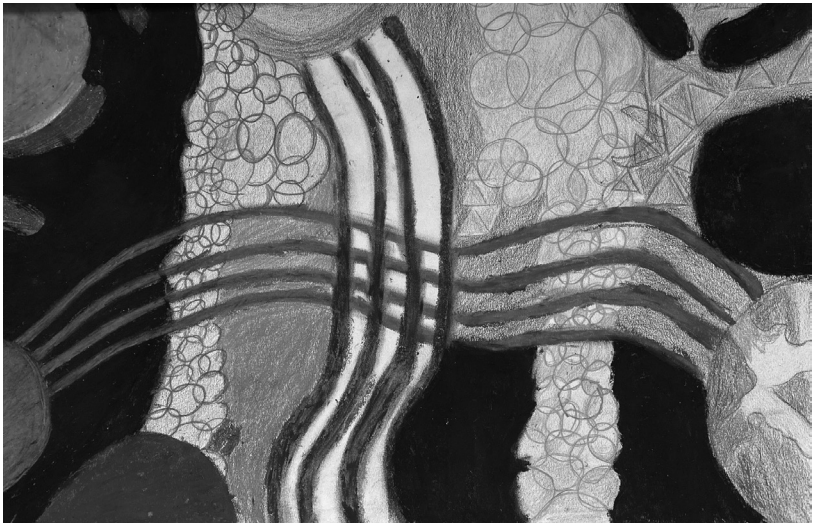
For I desire happiness.

I remember the lie that I once told myself when I was upset
I'd say "I belong"
that fire has finally burned out.
Leaving the smoke reminder of knowing that
this isn't the emotion that I'm supposed to be feeling.
As I'm waiting for the air to clear, I sweep away the ashes
which were simply the thoughts of trying
but the place they call my home is where I'm always crying.

For I desire happiness.

Those people who call it my home
ask me why my writing is repetitively about pain
then cut me deeply by deciding that I'm merely pretending
when I claim that I feel lonely and empty.
I yearn for parts of the past to become the present
the parts that were Me, Myself and I were always smiling.

For I desire happiness.



Jakye Fields, Grade 9

Helen Keller

Xzavea Bradley, Grade 12

We,
Kept in the dark,
Have found a light,
Brighter than they'd ever think we'd find.

We,
Within ourselves,
Have found beauty,
Through our souls' own mastery.

And now the world receives
From our dower:
The message of strength we're sending
From self power

We,
Kept from the noise,
Have found a voice,
Louder than they'd ever think we'd find.

We,
Within ourselves,
Have found competence,
Through our scorners' doubt.

And now the world receives
From our dower:
The self powered voices,
Of a constantly oppressed people.

Kiaharra Moore
Grade 9

Hallu-sin-ation

Charlie Brown, Grade 11

I think I'm beginning to
Hallucinate.
It's mostly little things.
They're there,
They aren't.

I keep seeing this
Speck.
This tiny thing.
It appears,
It vanishes,
Blinking.

The world gets blurry
Now and then,
Or maybe it's just my eyes.
I—don't know.
I honestly can't tell anymore.

When I hallucinate,
I can't differentiate
What's artificial
From what is tangible,
What is real?

Even family,
The people I've known my
"Hole" life,
I tend to question.
Are they real?

Late at night,
I think about each day.
I'm beginning to question whether
My days are even real.
I plead silently.
Please, be real.

As I look,
From face to face,
I don't remember.
I can't remember.
I convince myself,
They aren't real.

I can't take it!
All these people.
Not knowing if they're real,
Fearing that they're fake.
So many people.
I have to get rid of them.

Let go of the fake.
Get rid of the real.
Less people
Are opening my door.
Did I make them go away?

I leave my room,
Trek the hall,
Turn to the kitchen,
I see them all.
They aren't breathing.

I turn and walk,
Lifeless to my bedroom,
In the tick of a clock.
Breath short,
World heavy.
What have I become?

I was so scared
Of the monsters under my bed,
I can't believe
I never noticed,
The monster in my bed.

They aren't.
Blinking.
I honestly can't tell anymore.
What is real?
Are they real?
Please, be real.

They aren't real.
I have to get rid of them.
Did I make them go away?
They aren't breathing.
What have I become?

Rebecca Berrios, Grade 12

A Letter to The World That Never Wrote to Me

Zanai Buchanan, Grade 11

Dear Earth,

Though you may be beautiful
you are a vision of destruction.

The insidious glow
of desire and fate gleams
from the tips of the stars
onto the beautiful blues
and gritty greens of your exterior.

The beauty that lies
within the people upon you
is covered by the blatant blacks
of the weapons created to destroy your image,
just as the radiance of the sun
is constantly covered by dark rain clouds.

So as a remembrance of what once was,
this is a letter to you, Earth,
though you might never write back.

Sincerely,
Zanai

Danielle James, Grade 10

Virago (the Latin Meaning)

Anaisa Burgos, Grade 12

Out of the womb of the Asian mother
Welcomes the family 2nd closest to white
Destroyed by a virus and contagion;, Grade 10
the symbol of a women who is strong willed and beautiful,
Aggressive and kind.
Seen as docile and submissive,
A flower that has yet to bloom
That should be surrendered
to a man.

And to whom are we stronger?

Out of the womb of the African mother
Comes a lifetime of despair, worry, and anger
the history of oppression that shows in everyday society
Straight hair, skin bleach, perms, wigs, makeup, wealth, style
Things that we internalize can fix the blackness and "welfare queen" in you
But, "they" will always see your color, your kinks, your nose...before they see anything else.

And to whom are we stronger?

Out of the womb of the Hispanic mother
Comes forth the stereotype of machismo-men and house-ridden women
Expectations of a real-life telenovela.
A sexy anger and a hot temper can be mistaken for ugliness or beauty.
We've shunned and forgotten
our darker and whiter skinned, Hispanic sisters.

And to whom are we stronger?

Before I Let You In

Jasmine Cari-Pergee, Grade 11

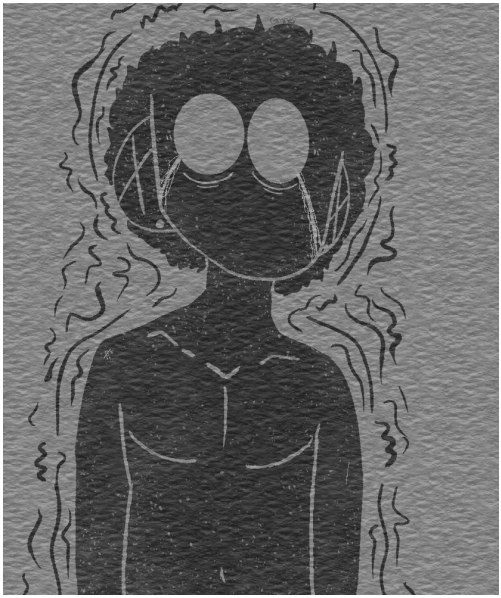
Before I let you in
    There's one thing you need to know
I'm scared to let people in...
    It's going to take time for me to trust you

Before I let you in
    There's one thing you need to know
I'm scared of heights...
    It takes me a while to get on the roller coaster

Before I let you in
    There's one thing you need to know
I'm scared of getting hurt
    So i'm not as adventurous as I could be

Before I let you in
    There's something you need to know
I lost my best friend
    So i'm quite broken

Before I let you in
    You need to know these things
Accept them in order to
    Accept and love me



Francis Kelly Grade 9

Red, White, and Blue.

Makayla Chambers, Grade 12

African and Native blood are the red lines on my flag,
their bodies beaten black and blue
forever in the background of the white stars
who claim what's not theirs.

"I can't breathe" as ingrained as my ABC's.
Pledging my allegiance to a flag that knows nothing but prejudice.
To black boys who are sacrificial lambs in a movement that was born of violence.

We raise our fists ready for another fight.
The fight they say ended hundreds of years ago,
but really just resurfaced in other ways.

The fight that started with whip cracks and chains
that continues with gunshots and ignored campaigns,
blown out brains, and generational pain.

America takes and takes and takes,
until you have nothing left to give.

They took us from our homes and stole our voices.
Our languages rotted in the graves we were forced to dig for ourselves
and waited patiently until we joined them.

They claimed our culture for themselves
and fed us the watered-down poison,
that choked us slowly with fury.

They stole our breath from our bodies and were celebrated as heroes.
As another mother cries and watches the tears roll
down her face as she buries another son at their funeral.

They take and take and take and take
and what did they give us?

Prison cells and drug addictions we could never hope to escape,
a deep hatred for ourselves that we took to our graves,
and a TV to watch as they gave themselves our reparations
and killed another black boy to keep him from greatness.

And they expect me to pledge my allegiance to a flag
for liberty and justice for all.
I wonder if they realize that when there are no more black people to steal from,
America will fall.

Environmental Ghazal

George Cole, Grade 9

Birds flying through the light-polluted sky
Free as can be, but not forever

The stars should shine above them, but they don't
Humans crushing their universe, forever

Poor birds, victim to the human desire
The sky, filled with CO2, forever

Hunted, for their uniqueness and beauty
They fall from the sky, a life gone forever

Some eaten, for a family dinner
Others prized, stuffed and displayed forever

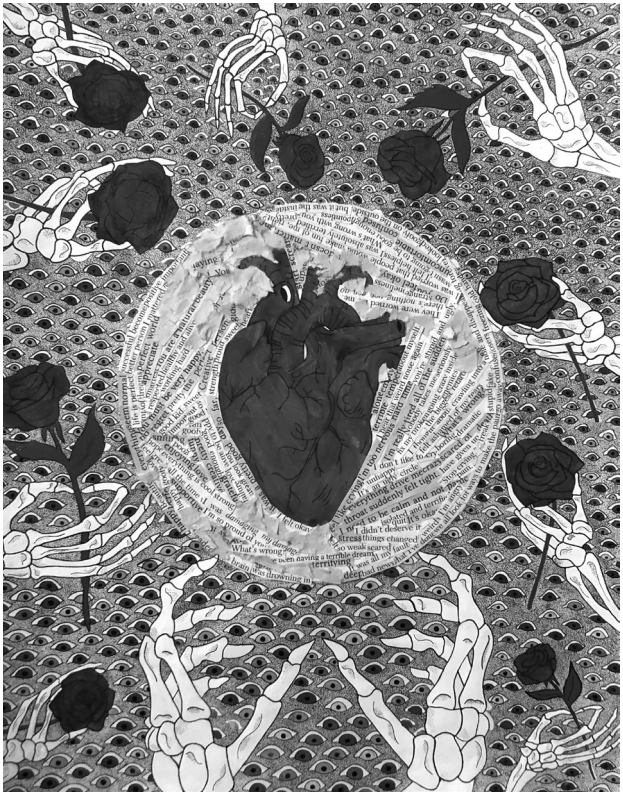
Rylan Mayo, Grade 12

My Other Half Is Gone

Kennyah Cooper, Grade 11

As I look down and open my eyes.
I see a dark figure trying to say goodbye,
It was who I thought it would never be.
As I grow I think more and more,
Why'd it have to be him laying there.
He's hurt, bleeding, crying" please help",
I asked God to save him and he tried
But it was just his time to go, "I love you."
He took his last breath "bye."

Looking up I saw an angel in the sky
Smiled because he let me know
That he made it to heaven's gates.
I feel him every night letting me know he's here
Watching over me and no harm shall come.



Alondra Cervantes, Grade 11

on a mother's love

Joleen Dagradi, Grade 12

i was raised on the belief. that success lies in discipline. that discipline lies in silence. that silence is safe. that being safe is everything. i don't think i was raised. i think i was buried. suffocated by every "try harder." they forget that only corpses can lie in silence. they don't see that death is what they're asking of me. sometimes i liken them to a lighthouse. a medusa eye caressing me. like stone i don't move i let them speak. i pray that maybe they will let me be. i am safe. i have no outside plans. only a desk for daily contemplation. i am silent. the teachers don't know my name. just another statistic. i am disciplined. i do my work. i study and i clean. i am successful. a "b" is not satisfactory. i am raised on another's belief. that nothing i want is good for me. one day i hope to be buried. under the scrutiny of black sheep. as i raise myself on the belief. that success is found in patience. that patience is found in love. that love is found in trees. forever growing. never smothered. and always reaching for the light.

Bop Poem

Joleen Dagradi, Grade 12

Like Atlas we don't want to carry this world alone

The first thing we ever do is cry.
We come into this world
Mourning
Over a severed connection to the one person we've ever known.
Cradled by an unknown world
That is inescapable in its consuming.

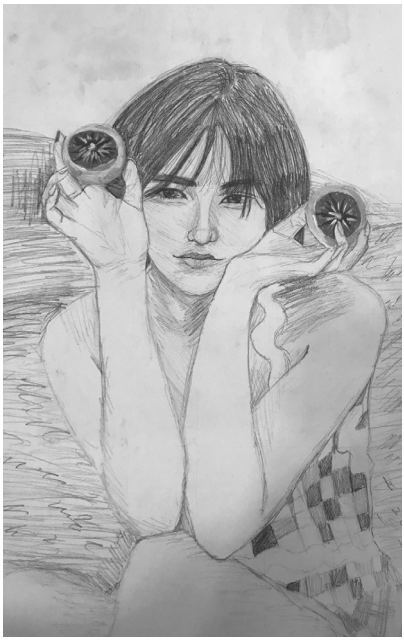
Like Atlas we don't want to carry this world alone

Every person you ever meet
You will create a language with
Some sweet summer symphony
Of sighs, laughter, and memories.
This is why it stings so much when we lose someone.
The taste of a language now extinct on your tongue.

Like Atlas we don't want to carry this world alone

Sometimes I sit and remember
All the relationships I've had
That have crumbled in my hands like dry clay
Uncraftable and a failed art.
Like a plant
Unwatered, unnurtured and unable to grow
Into something breathtaking.
I cry for the things that could have been

Like Atlas I don't want to carry this world alone



Ashton Murzin, Grade 10

Grown

Astoria Davis, Grade 10

Summer nights are supposed to be the time of your life
Having fun being with friends
Being goofy and slacking off

And then you grow up
There are no more summers
You can't have summers as an adult

I mean, you still can; no one is stopping you, but
You have responsibilities now; you have work to do
When you're an adult you have to pay bills
And go to work and fend for yourself

Then that childish summer night kid is gone
You can't be that teen anymore who has no
Cares, only trying to live in the moment

You can't just live in the moment anymore
You have to think ahead, be smart
Make sure you're on top of everything

I can barely remember to do my homework
I'm scared to be an adult
I ask my friends aren't you scared of being an adult?
They all say no, that they can't wait

But I'm just trying to stay young as long as I can
I don't want to lose any more of my childlike mind
I know once I get into adulthood, I'm not going to be the same
I'm not going to be this happy-go-lucky person

I'm going to be just an adult
Making sure I have everything together
I don't like having everything; together is not fun

Because once you have everything together
There's nothing left to do
And all I want to do is
Just keep my summer nights

losing you

Rebecca DeMatteo, Grade 12

you wanted to see the lights that illuminated the bridge
because deep down you knew
this was the last time
there would be no return trip
we bought a one-way ticket
the moment we left

i remember you looking straight ahead at them
straight ahead
into the unknown
the future
your final few hours

we stayed up late into the night
    our eyelids growing heavy
    we passed the time by watching a movie
    and playing games on our phones
    until that moment finally came

when there were only moments left
you put your head on my shoulder
like you always did
and fell asleep
as you listened to my heartbeat
it was fast while yours was slowing
slowing to a stop

in the end
before i left
i asked you to do me a favor
say hi to everyone we've lost
i miss them
just like i miss you now

that night,
    the minutes felt like hours
    and the hours felt like days
    and now
these next few decades without you will feel the same
the minutes will feel like hours
and the hours will feel like days
but this isn't a goodbye
just a see you later

Collision

Hajar El Bouamri, Grade 10

I stop and stare at the sky filled with clouds of
Baby blue, beige pink, and streaks of
Autumn brown taking over the sky.
The goats are calmly picking at the fresh
Grass and the birds are chirping their favorite
Song like honeybees following their way
Through a delicate flower.
Now this may seem like a cliche about a sunset
But I never seem to be failed by one,
I could always rely on it because it
Would never go away.
It's there to keep me company when I feel
Overwhelmed by the world around me.
I had to get in the house before I got lost in the dark,
Because my parents would look for me to see
Where I had gone.
But time slowed me down and I felt starstruck
Like it was only me and the luminous stars.

Life as a Young Black Man

Tivon Edwards, Grade 12

Deep down I just want someone to feel like me
Looking in the mirror seeing my father, even though I've never seen his face
Thinking in my head how I don't want to die in the streets
My heart is like glass; once broken can't ever be fixed

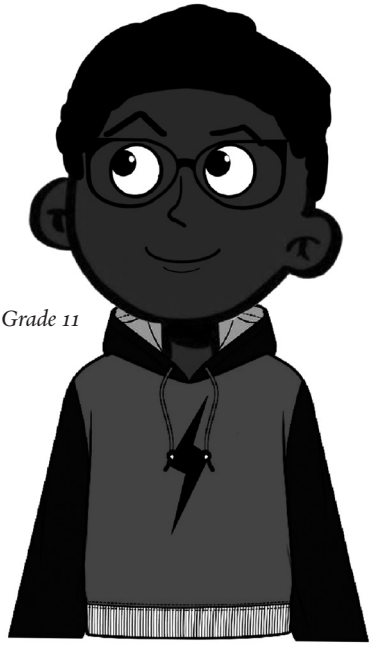
Looking in the mirror seeing my father, even though I've never seen his face
Feeling like a father figure to my little sisters
My heart is like glass; once broken can't ever be fixed
my world is a broken window

Feeling like a father figure to my little sisters
Making sure everyone in my family is doing good
It's like my world is a broken window
I can only see the pieces

Making sure everyone in my family is doing good
Even when we feel down, family makes us feel better
I can only see the pieces
Of a puzzle I can never solve

Even when we feel down family makes us feel better
Good times and bad, hate and love
A puzzle I can never solve
My life must be the missing piece

Good times and bad, hate and love
Deep down I just want someone to feel like me
My life must be the missing piece
Thinking in my head how I don't want to die in the streets



Kanye Armour, Grade 11

The World and How It Works

Tivon Edwards, Grade 12

It's crazy how the people you love and care for
are the ones who change up on you.

It's crazy how I was raised
by a woman to become a man.

How I try to help everyone who needs help
but no one is giving help back.

How the words "I love you"
can break you.

How the person you push away
is the one you miss the most.

How everything from your past
holds you back from your future.

How one bad experience
can change all the good ones.

How people will talk and laugh with you
then turn around and talk about you.

How we're glued to our phones
more than our lives.

How we worry about how many
likes and comments we get.

How money makes people notice you
but also want to kill you.

How the only people who want to see you succeed
are thieves who want to rob you.

It's crazy how the good die young
and how we all live only to die.

Janai Albelo, Grade 9

Past Lovers

Jada Fogle, Grade 11

When I picture you I see us happy together
But I don't see it happening anytime soon.
In my mind we dance around in beautiful weather
I wish it were real, instead of something out of a cartoon.

My imagination can travel through wonders forever
And each time you come out more perfect than the last,
Almost as a piece of treasure that makes my heart tremor,
Which will eventually lead me on a painfully long endeavor
In search of you, in this life or one in the past.

I find myself longing for a mysterious presence,
I have throughout my whole adolescence,
Leaving me vulnerable to ones who show your characteristics
Allowing the love story, each time, room to get twisted.

The Balance.

Ashley Galindo Lara, Grade 11

Salome Campos, Graduate 2019

Perdí el balance de tu amor.
Like a seesaw, every day slowly going down to the dramatic heat waves, until you feel like suffocating and then, rising up into the blowing wind and the crystal blue sky.

Ruego, yo to le ruego no regales el cielo por una equivocación.
Being named the Morning Star, you were the signet of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. Who would've thought such a beautiful creature could turn so violent and disgraceful.

No quiero perder su amor.
You walked among the stones of fire, knowing the shoe was the right fit. Turning against people who loved you so much just for a taste of wickedness and despair.

Tu que eres fogata y el tan frío.
In the abundance of your trade you were filled with violence, and you sinned. Instead you chose a side that you wouldn't be able to recover from. Instead of being opened up to the thought of happiness, you decided to enjoy the satisfaction of suffocating, like when you're at the bottom of a seesaw.

Mama dice que todos mis errores servirá como lección.
I brought out fire within you; it consumed you. Having your choices laid out to you with crisp silverware, you desired the most gruesome one.

Ezekiel 28:11-19

Illusion

Nadia S. Gaskins, Grade 11

Astray,
Wounded,
And petrified.

She fears the thought of getting better,
Even though she tells herself she is ready
To look terror in the Face.
She thinks she is bold enough to
Damn Death for trying to claim her.

But yet, she forgets.

She forgets that she shuddered when Loneliness's hands locked themselves around her throat.
She forgets that she cowers at the mere mention of her trauma's name.
She forgets that she used to welcome Death with open arms.
She forgets the contract she signed with every drop of her blood.
She forgets that she engraved her name on Death's list with her blade.

Astray,
Wounded,
And dazed.

Built-up tears
F
A
L
L
F
R
E
E
L
Y
As she breathes.
She dances in the gardens
Of her facade of being

Astray,
Wounded,
And Fearless.

Yet she forgets,
Fearlessness isn't real.

Nancy Bamaca Chaj
Grade 10

The Stroke of Your Hand

Nadia S. Gaskins, Grade 11

Social gatherings break the isolation
Of one's heart and soul.
Words morphed into a sound
As if from another universe.
That foreign universal sound falsified
Into a soothing voice...
As if coming from the Goddess of love.

Peace spills from her mouth as she speaks.
Her sweet voice intoxicates anyone who listens.
Powerful, stable, and invigorating.
Intimacy fills the air as her hand caresses bare skin.

The fire is lit in one's mind
Burning bright with colors of orange and red.
Heart beating like the drums from African dance.
They say curiosity killed the cat,
But words from an Angel tamed the beast.

The Scapegoat's Alphabet

Liz Gay, Grade 10

Always alone, always attempting to attone
But the beautifulest bodies bare bruises and
Cuts. Crop tops aren't camouflage, can't cover up
Desperation. Dissociating, the days are darkening.
Evolving to everyone evoking her
Fraying fate. Forever forgotten,
Going through grudges and gardens of
Heartbreak by herself. High school is hell,
Inflicting invisibility on her identity.
Just a joke, she's just a joke.
Kids keep killing her kind off. Kaleidoscopes of
Lust and lure. Liars leeching her life, letting "love"
Miss the mark. Murdering mouths that mutter mistakes, that
Narcissism is not okay, no one notices she's
Opinionated. Oceans of oppression, overanalyzing,
Penetrating people with pointed fingers, pain
Quickly, quietly, killing. Kids clench their quivering fists
Rebelling, revolting, resisting, against revolving around
Simplicity. Struggling to stay special, suppressed by
Teenagers who talk more than think. Teaching
Underdogs to be undertakers undoing their understandings.
Violence caused by vanity, visibly
Washing away who we were. We were
Xtraordinary. Xceptions xisting in a world of xclusion.
Why did you abandon us?
Z.

The Missing Pieces of Our History

Jamiah Green, Grade 11

The history that we are taught in school is a facade.
A facade, with the true reality built within the walls of its "projected dignity,"
Mainly glued tight between the pages of our history books,
With their words twisted around in order to tell another's story.

In fact, we are missing stories from our history books,
Stories that contain the missing pieces to the "puzzle of reality"
You are keeping away from us.
The stories you refuse to speak upon, as if the words are "deadly"
And create "sparks of a flame" upon your tongues.

But today,
I am going to tell you some of those stories.
The stories that should be in our history books,
And not only in our history books,
but should be part of our knowledge about our history.
Our Black history at that.

September 5, 1939, born and raised in a poor city in Montgomery, Alabama, was a girl.
A girl that was about "ye high," yet "ye small,"
She wore some thick glasses and her confidence stood about "ye tall."
The girl who went by the name Claudette Colvin, who sat on a bus
And refused to pass up her seat to a white man, before Ms. Rosa Parks.

Now I'm not saying that Ms. Rosa Parks's story isn't unique,
But I do find it to be a shame that they made her
Face and name to be the main source of where you will learn about
The pain that, supposedly, only "she'd" been through. Or was first to deal with.

And I'm mad about that.

Because in society's eyes back then,
They thought it would be better to choose the story
of a "Bold and Brave woman"
Over an "ignorant and pregnant, teenage girl"
Whose black, young skin was as rich as gold,
But to them,
Was "blacker than most" so it would "lack the views" of her story being exposed,
Compared to a woman whose older skin was the
Perfect complexion of "Caramel and Mocha?

Not to forget that on April 9, 1917, born in Baltimore, Maryland
Was another woman who came before Ms. Claudette Colvin and Ms. Rosa Parks.
Her story took place back in 1944, some time in July.

This woman went by the name Irene Morgan Kirkaldy.
Her skin wasn't as dark as Colvin's, and not as light as Park's,
But her complexion still held the rich value of gold that it contained...
Not like that matters or anything.

Back in July 1944, she sat in the back of the bus
That was assigned for the Colored people,
When she was told to move her seat for a White couple.
She refused.
However, her story doesn't end there.

You see,
This woman wasn't the quiet type, and matter of fact,
She was a bit "disrespectful" as they would say.
Instead of taking her arrest warrant, she ripped it up.
Instead of getting up when the officer tried to forcibly move her, she fought back.
And on top of all this fighting she defended her case,
Irene Morgan vs Commonwealth of Virginia,
and the court ruled 6-1 in her favor.

Now, I'm not going to sit here and bore you with a bunch of facts,
But I want you to acknowledge the history that you haven't been told about.
You shouldn't have to learn about Black history just during Black History Month.
And you shouldn't have to learn Black history just in school.
And you shouldn't have to learn Black history from me.
Get out there and learn your history.

America

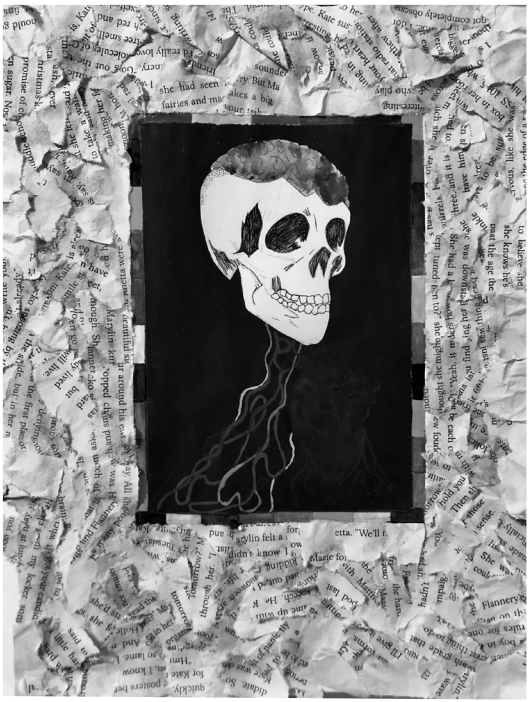
Joan D. Gutierrez, Grade 11

Although she has only fed me with the hatred of others
And her knife is always at my throat,
making me do her bidding,
robbing what little life I have left,
I must say I truly do love her
with every part of my being,

I love her culture of encouragement
always testing me, pushing me to my limits.
I love how many choices
she gives letting me become my dream.

Her determination fueling me,
gives me the strength to walk past
the walls of hate that she's built for me.

I have faced everything she's thrown at me
without fear or resentment.
With a view of sorrow
I look at the days ahead.
I see her mighty values
falling to shambles
and the mockery
of what they once were.



Alondra Cervantes, Grade 11

The Beauty of Destruction

Thomasine Harris Fletcher, Grade 11

When Dreams become all we have to hold on to,
And the blood of my people has run dry,
My Blood will boil,
And our family tree will lose a leaf, but
At the Root it will never waver,
Though The World's Smallest Earthquake may cause no damage to the surface,
The World and How It Works will never change,

My people's blood will still be spilt,
Their very breath stolen from them,
The Opposite of Life has always been death and that will not change.
When will The Hammer of History stop causing us pain?
The Reassurance that we will not fade into black no longer calms us.
We still fear the death that will surely come,
But A Weakened Soldier is still a soldier,
So we will continue on,
Changed,
Scared but never still,
Our voice a roaring lion that can never be silenced.

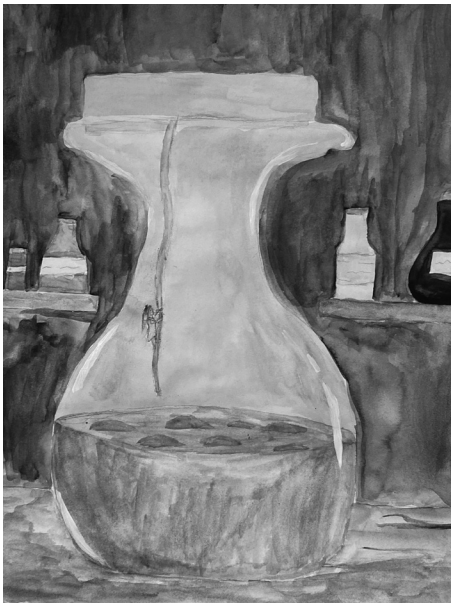
We, Inside Out, turned around, backwards or even reversed,
Are lost Puzzle Pieces.
We have lost our way,
But the cry of our people will never be forgotten.
Our Screams ready to claw their way out of our throats,
As if to say This Is the Real World,
This is a problem we can not walk away from,
Accidents happen,
But the death of a child will never be one.

We shoulder through Rough Weather,
Ready to Fall at the slightest move of a cop
Listen,
No Problem will ever be big enough for an unarmed child to be shot and killed.
The Hypocrisy, In the Air chokes the breath out of our lungs as we repeatedly cry out
"I can't breathe"
The Beauty of Destruction is fatal and leaves behind The Darkest Scars,
That can and will never be forgotten.

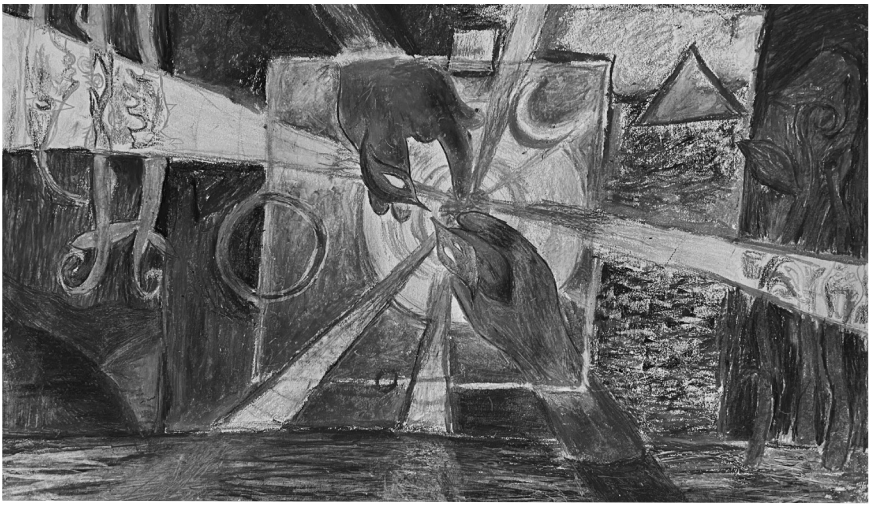
Skeltonic

Jaelynn Hobson, Grade 9

My thoughts of you fill me with sweet emotions
The way I give you my deepest devotion
You cause me a lot of commotion
Like a slow motion ocean
You're like a bad potion
I showed you my feelings
We had a lot of meetings
You did no kneeling
Think about healing
I'm tired of reeling
Now I'm leaving.



Kayley Nathan



Caterina Eastman, Grade 9

To my Father

Nyairra Houston, Grade 11

I lost you at a young age
To drugs, money and jail time.
You served your time and
You came back into my life.
Then I lost you once again
to have a baby with some chick
I never knew.
You left; me broken
You loved her more than me.

Sometimes I think I hate you

I, your first born
Feel like I'm worthless.
I miss my father's love
it's killing me inside.
I cry at night
Wishing things were different.

Sometimes I think I hate you.

I ask myself
Did you ever love me?
Was your love an act?
I still have got love for you
Even though you left, left like I was no one.
I don't know how to feel towards you.

Though sometimes I think I hate you.

Compare and Contrast

Chelsey Jara, Grade 12

Janai Albelo, Grade 9

A year ago I'd have said
It doesn't matter.
You'll figure it out.
Never mind.
Let's do it!
I'll get it done.
I know.
Don't worry about it.
I don't care.
But now I can't help but think
What if you can't?
There's not enough time.
You could do better.
Why?
Just let it out.
You're not worried enough.
It does matter. You're just being ignorant.
You don't know anything.
Not even yourself.

The Imperfect

Ivelisse Lopez, Grade 11

Sing me a song that brings me ease
Unfolding the staggering world
Absorbing every detail I can remember
Valuing everything I own.

Unfolding the staggering world
Not everything around me is perfect.
Valuing everything I own
And everything I am.

Not everything around me is perfect
But the imperfect seems stable
And everything I am
Is imperfection shown in human form.

But the imperfect seems stable.

The Black Mother: Ruminates from the Kitchen Table

Mellody Massaquoi, Grade 11

She drinks her bitter coffee
Watching the children play
They are allowed to spend their day
In a joyful bliss.

Over the rim of the ceramic
She sees the windows with cracks
Viewing everything the house lacks
That is far beyond repair
She wonders if this is mother's tuition
Do the children have these trained eyes?
Can they see behind the smiles and lies
Or are they still innocent?

She tries her best to keep the demons out
Shield their eyes from resentment and ignorance
Safe at home from society's belligerence
But she knows that they'll understand eventually.

They'll come inside later
Wash off the dirt and grime
But she knows it's only a matter of time
Before the world crashes in

Bill Dayne

Midnight Train

Mellody Massaquoi, Grade 11

To ride among the stars
Somewhere between earth and sky
on the midnight train
Till the destination arrives.
Then at peace in paradise
Amongst the stars
When sleep comes gently,
    The pain will cease–
Forever in peace

To ride among the stars
Between earth and sky
Riding the midnight train!
Til the destination arrives
At peace in serene paradise...
With old, bright stars...
Resting in peace
    The pain has ceased

I Write America

Kiara McCray, Grade 12

I write to the ones who experience
social inequality and prejudice
because of the color of their skin.

When they defend themselves
they're beaten and threatened by
those that are supposed to protect them.

These brutal "arrests "
have killed more people
than we can count.

When we protest
against this brutality
we are called, "the animals."

I write to the ones who define themselves
as too dark or too light
because society tells them they don't fit.

Their profiles shouldn't define us;
even though our history
leaves enduring scars.

We try to change ourselves
to be accepted by society;
our hair, clothes, and the color of our skin.

Knowing that hiding
behind who we want to be
doesn't change who we are.

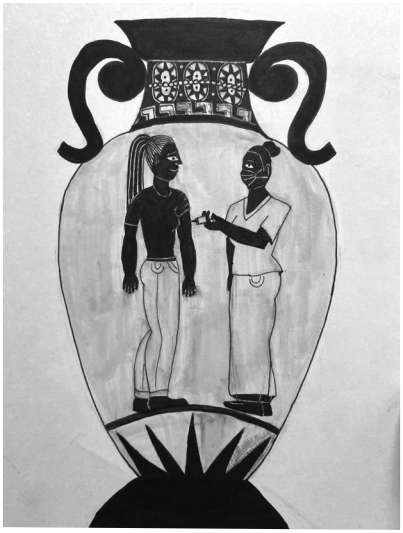
Alexandra List, Grade 12

Succeeding to Be

Kiara McCray, Grade 12

God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved;
God will help her when morning dawns." Psalms 46:5

Success will always be achieved
Dodging fire from my enemies.
Their hatred will bounce off
Like how light bounces off mirrors.



Kai Zundell, Grade 9

Pandemic Observations

Alexis Mendyk, Grade 9

Everyone is sitting at home
wondering when this chaos will end.

Wondering what their friends and family members
are doing during this difficult time.

Feeling lonely and sad since it has been a while since they
have had a big laugh at a joke or hug with their besties.

Feeling bored in their houses without anything to do,
except for being in front of an electronic screen.

None of the little ones understand
what is going on in the world or around them.

Energetic kids anxious since they
can't go to the park or playground.

Trapped adults, getting short tempered.
staying in the same place day and night.

Teachers working from home, sadly,
miss their students and classrooms.

Fragile seniors in nursing homes miss their
families and grandkids.

Everyone is sitting home
wondering when this chaos will end.

Please Come Back

Alexis Mendyk, Grade 9

I don't know why I feel like this
As I can recall,
I don't deserve this
All of the scars

As I can recall
We were friends once
All of the scars
Buried deep in my skin

We were friends once
You shot me with a bullet
Buried deep in my skin
I feel sick now

You shot me with a bullet
Now I feel hurt
I feel sick
Please come back

Now I feel hurt
Do you even care?
Please come back
I'm nothing without you

Do you even care?
I don't know why I feel like this
I'm nothing without you
I don't deserve this

Is This Love?

Krista Miller, Grade 11

You stopped calling
And that's fine,
That's completely fine
That wasn't your obligation
I wasn't your obligation.

But we used to talk every day,
You were my best friend, my lover, and my diary
All in one.

You saw me naked,
Not physically but
Emotionally.
You saw the darkest parts of myself, came back
And told me every would be fine.

And I knew I was in trouble...
I knew I was in trouble when
I would look for you in every aspect of my life,
When I thought about you constantly,
When I said "I love you too".
I never felt that way before.

And you stopped calling.
I thought about who took my place,
Who you would be reassuring instead of me,
Who'd be taking your time instead of me.
And I got sick.
I got really sick.

I couldn't help but wonder
Did I not hold on tight enough?
Was the feeling not mutual?
Or,
Was this just a lesson from God?
Because I did learn a lot.

I just couldn't help but to wonder
Was this love?

injured soul

Aaliyah Pallet, Grade 12

what i have is my limitations
and i resent what i crave.

the confidence that I
inherited upset my soul.

what happened to me
that my soul is so injured?

mistaken for jealousy
my cries for help went unanswered.

i'm frightened by my reflection
my laughing shadow haunts me.

injured; my soul still is
made of broken pieces

too small to fix.
life is toxic

when you can't
love yourself.

New Connections

Aaliyah Pallet, Grade 12

Loneliness was something
unbearable for me. So when
you reached your hand out i
was welcoming, perhaps
Too welcoming.

Traumatic experiences led me
to constantly protect myself
from the dangers of opening
up.

That's why i was surprised
when I met you. But, i
cherished you
then and do now.

i developed a new person
inside myself. Someone
unrecognizable, impossible
to explain.

i believed that you
helped create
this new me.

Starting from freshmen year,
We loathed our surroundings;
Hated our assigned seats.

The quiet consumed us
and that was comforting.
Before we knew it,
we were sitting next to each
other and hatred transformed
into mutual kindness.

We seemed to have forgotten
what we disliked; finding
The dislike suddenly
pointless.

You changed me. My issues
began to disappear. I always
wondered how you made me
feel so relaxed. As if you
paused my recurring
insecurity
with tranquility.

After meeting you, I explored
and met more, positive,
connections who, over time,
helped me stop living like an
"unknown" person; people
who could help me
become a better self.

Throughout those years,
my connections grew in
numbers and depth. I
developed friendships with
those I had envied. Not for
their images, but for their
capabilities. Capabilities I now
proudly own.

The Two Fridas

Inspired by Frida Kalo
Octavia Petaway, Grade 12

These two Fridas are interesting
Making paintings into art.
This is what I love to be part of
Wearing an artistic glove.
I make the similarity
Because of how I liked her creativity.
I'd take a bow to her if she was queen
Not to mock her or be mean,
But to reference her after her work I've seen.
No need to break away her fence
But to do much more art; that makes more sense.
The actual meaning is wonderful
Like an amazing screening for me to see.

A poem about what makes me happy

Octavia Petaway, Grade 12

What makes me happy
Is what is good in the world.

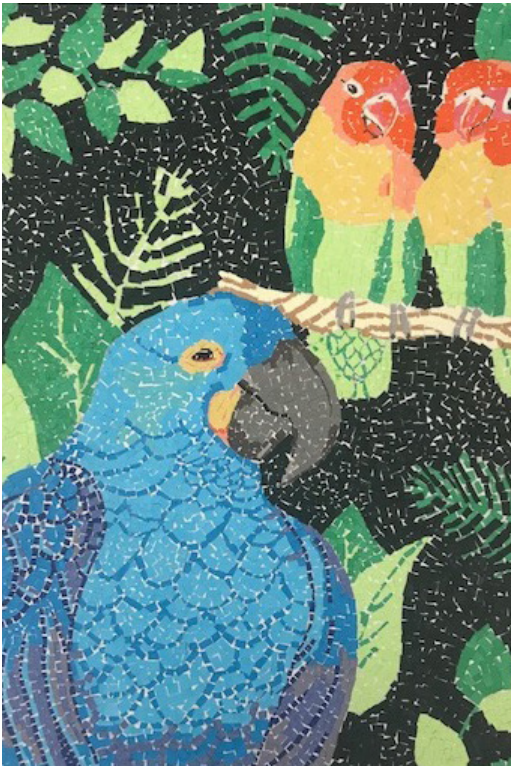
What makes me sad
Is what is negative in the world.

At least being positive is the right thing to do
Since I am not feeling upset or blue.

Life isn't easy. it can be hard at times
But when you think of things

that make you happy
life will make you smile.

Kiana Webber, *Grade 11*



Ashley Gomez, *Grade 10*

A

B

C

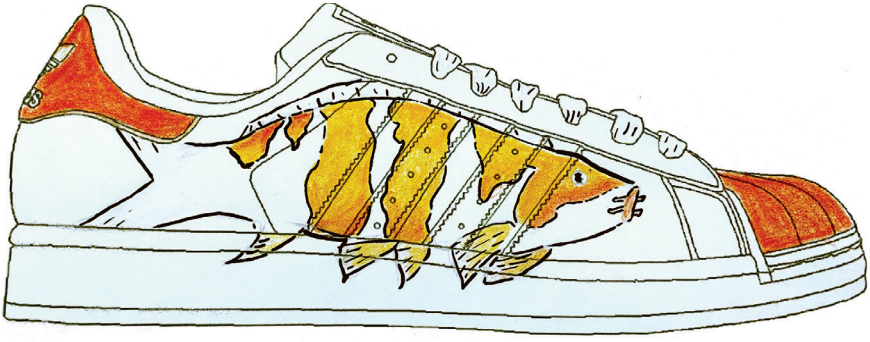
D

E

A. Kierstin Turnbull, *Grade 11*
B. Jennifer Perez, *Grade 11*
C. Micha Daniels, *Grade 10*
D. Johanna Perez, *Grade 12*
E. Alondra & Alexandra Cervantes, *Grade 11*

Nolan Wazni, *Grade 9*

Alexandra List, *Grade 12*



Mejia Layesvka, *Grade 11*

A

B

C

D

E

A. Anthony Roman, *Grade 12*
B. Emilia Sementilli, *Grade 10*
C. Najae McCoy, *Grade 12*
D. Zahir Maloney, *Grade 11*
E. Caterina Eastman, *Grade 9*
& Jazz Solomon, *Grade 9*

Fiona Echevarria, *Grade 11*

Michael Serrano, *Grade 10*

Mariana Zepeda, *Grade 9*

A

B

C

D

A. Mario Reyes, *Grade 11*
B. Aaron Lindh, *Grade 10*
C. Ana Acevedo, *Grade 12*
D. Bayu Adji, *Grade 11*

Rylan Mayo, *Grade 12*

Brianda Silva, *Grade 12*

Brianda Silva, *Grade 12*

Eve Adolphe, *Grade 11*

Jazz Solomon, *Grade 9*

Father and Daughter

Ashley Portillo, Grade 11

Trust is something that once broken cannot be quickly repaired.
You can't expect to drop a vase and for it to look the way it once did.
You can lie and buy a new one, expect me to not notice the difference,
to not notice how clean and new it looks, how it does not belong to me,
how you didn't really care, how you replaced it with something cheaper
but it doesn't matter how much you try, I'll notice.

You take something so innocent, so beautiful, and step on it
like it is some trash in your pathway.
The trash you throw onto the street and let get run over
by the car that comes by.

People pass by not caring or stopping you;
they might even join in, slowly destroying the Earth
as they pass, hurting the innocent people who,
sadly, live on Earth with you.

The ones that try to stop you give up after a while
but maybe it's not your fault, maybe you saw
someone else do it, you got the wrong idea
and thought it was okay.

At least that's what I like to think
but I know it's not true, it's just you.
You're the one destroying
people's lives.

You go into their homes, act as if you're there to help,
to be the father the kids never had,
but your true colors show not long after;
your innocent victim doesn't know
what will happen to them.

They're too busy playing outside.
But you are there watching,
having thoughts no father
should have towards any child.

You wrap them in the arms of your evil.
No matter how much they kick or scream,
you take what
was once theirs; innocence, purity.

They beg you to stop.
They won't tell. They cry
But you live
on their fear.

Years pass. Some nights you go into a bed
that doesn't belong to you, a bed that you barely fit in,
but you don't care about the discomfort
as long as you get what you want.

I watch as mom laughs at your jokes,
she kisses you and tells you, "You're one of the best
things to ever happen to me."

I can't tell her the truth.
I can't ruin her happiness,
take away one of the best things in her life,
be the thing that stops her from smiling.

So I suck it up and
give up my happiness for hers.
She deserves it.
She's put up with being a single mother.
Taking care of three kids.
She deserves her happiness.
She does, she really does.

I stop fighting, caring,
believing that it will stop.
That someone will help me.

But unexpectedly someone does;
I find out that I'm not
the only apple of your eye.
That I wasn't the only one
you liked to play games with.

She lived one house away;
She had guts.
Something I wish I had had from the beginning.
She told her mom what you did
And when the people that
"protect children in bad homes"
knocked on our door
I still kept my mouth shut.

"He would never do that"
"He's the best father in the world"
"He never touched me there"
came out of my mouth repeating like a broken record
over and over again until even I believed it.

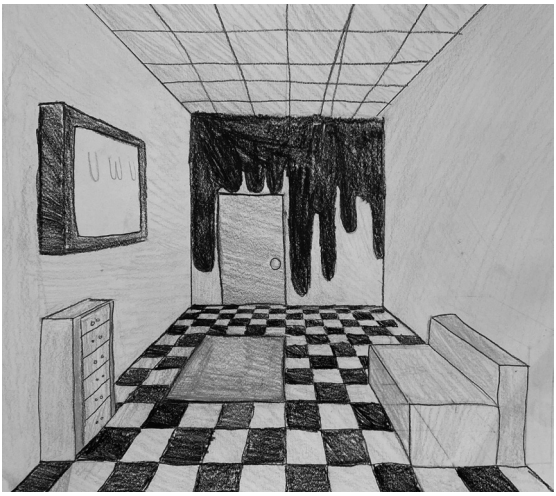
I can still hear mom crying in the closet
Asking over the phone if you ever
touched the little girl.
And you denied the "accusation"
every time. Like it wasn't
the first time someone
asked you that question.

I think she was hoping
You'd never do something
So sickening.
That she'd never let a man
so horrible live inside the same house
her children were in.

That the man she loved
was never a "bad man."

But you were.
And they made you leave.
"Mom he did it. He did it to me.
She's not lying"
That's all I had to say
had so many chances to say it
But didn't, couldn't.
Until years later.

And sometimes, even now,
I still feel
Your unwanted hands
And the broken trust you left me
The innocence,
Once rightfully mine
forever gone.



Ashton Murzin, Grade 10

Sleep paralysis

Ashley Portillo, Grade 12

An unfamiliar sound jolts me awake
The fear and realization that I can't move overcomes my body
A feeling I can't compare to any other
I just don't know what it is

The fear and realization that I can't move overcomes my body
The gut feeling that someone intruded my safe space
I just don't know what it is
My eyes trick me as simple objects turn sinister

The gut feeling that someone is in my safe space
The pressure on my chest feels fatal
My eyes trick me as simple objects turn sinister
Silent screams escape my lips

The pressure on my chest feels fatal
The shadows appear, chasing the small sense of hope away
Silent screams escape my lips
Fear and nonsense paralyze me

The shadows appear, chasing the small sense of hope away
The tears start to dry as the sensations in my arms and feet reappear
Fear and nonsense paralyze me
What felt like hours of torture was only minutes of hallucinations

The tears start to dry as the sensation in my arms and feet reappear
An unfamiliar sound jolts me awake
What felt like hours of torture was only minutes of hallucinations
A feeling I can't compare to any other

Radio Love Song

Alexis Mendyk, Grade 9

I could take my arms
And wrap them around you,
Making sure you're safe.
Form a crown from the memories
We have made so far.
Walks down Whalley Avenue
Laps around the school, talks on the stairs.
Love may not exist in your eyes,
But your presence rumbles down my fears.
Take your heartbeat, create a melody.
Think of a lyric, based on my mistakes; in which
I do all the right things at the wrong place and time.
I'll listen to our song with you in the car,
Watch you smile, until you fall asleep on my arm.
Fall asleep on my arm loving Ecuadorian girl.

Quarantine

Michele Swaby, Grade 9

I've been surrounded by the same tan living room walls
for the past month and a half.

The oxygen I breathe has been the same,
only circulating when my dad goes outside and comes back home.

I have only ventured outside once to buy printer ink.
(Seems unimportant until you realize I have assignments to print.)

It was when the pandemic wasn't as bad as it is now.
When it was still a bit calmer and the government cared.

Being outside is something I took for granted.
I never went out but knew I was free to do so.

Feeling a cool breeze feels foreign now
The trees look so distant, although they haven't moved.

The sky looks prettier from afar
and the evening sun radiates brighter than before.

But now that I must stay inside, it feels suffocating
to look at the four old posters that I've grown up with.

Schoolwork has gotten harder and headaches
seem a bit more common than usual.

I miss talking to the people I used to see every day;
being socially distant feels so far away.

But the pollution has decreased and the wonders
of the earth are a bit more visible from the sky.

Many are becoming more compassionate
as they finally realize that others are in need.

And, if I stay at home, neither my family or I
will become a number in the ever-growing statistics.

So, although the walls are closing in unbearably
and my lungs crave a hint of fresh air, I stay inside.

Pauline Badilla, Grade 11

Skeltonic Prayer

Imani Tatman, Grade 9

I live in the Dark,
in an abandoned park
hear dogs bark,
scared of the dark.

I started a family to set myself free
but one year later fear came after me
I feel the pain that keeps me be

One year later, as I sit in the dark
I pray my prayers with heart

"Now I lay me down to sleep
I pray the Lord my soul to keep"

the angels watch me through the night
and wake me with the morning light

the prayers do keep the fear at bay
I wonder what is left to say.

What I can do is hope for the best
Praying once more for rest.

Prayed the way my parents said
In my lonely little bed.

Prayers for safety
Waiting in the maybe

Keep my head down
With thoughts that go round

Think of things to do I ought
my loved ones always in my thoughts.

Thirteen Ways of Looking at Loss

Kayla Tirozzi, Grade 9

1.
The little boy slams his controller
Against the floor
The loss of the video game
Enrages him.

2.
Stuck in the rain
What an inconvenience
My keys were nowhere to be found
How could I lose them?

3.
I know I'm missing out on
All those calls and texts
That was my second phone this month
Mom would kill me if she found out I lost it.

4.
Time is simply a construct
Yet I always seem to run out of it
I can't finish all these assignments
But I have a deadline
And I'm sick of losing time.

5.
Stress submerged his body
The thought of losing to his rival
Made him sick to his stomach.

6.
Watching my bank account drain
Numbers decreasing faster and faster
Dollars blowing away
Losing money day by day.

7.
They all turned against me
I knew it wasn't my fault
But that doesn't change how bad it hurts
I don't know what I did wrong
How could I lose every friend I made
Within one day?

8.
I thought she loved me
Of course I was wrong
She walked out my front door
Never to be seen again
I was lost without her.

9.
They lowered him into the ground
Finally. This was over
The weight of the world fell off her shoulders
Is it wrong to have prayed for this loss?

10.
Empty bottles crowd the floor
His mind, poisoned
The person who once loved me was lost
Drowned in a sea of liquor.

11.
Tears flooded the room.
That was truly the worst phone call
she had ever received.
The loss of her father
was just too much to bear.

12.
The mother sobbed in her husband's arms
Her beautiful baby, how could it be lost?
It hadn't even seen the world yet.
Someone who had a life ahead of them
Was merely a pool of blood now.

13.
Fading from existence
Clear thoughts disappearing
A mind decaying
Losing oneself
Becoming nothing.

Kai.Zundell, Grade 9

Who Really Saved My Life?

Jayline A. Torres, Grade 12

The cold on my cheeks
While my mother's mom
Would leave me alone in the carriage
To go with a guy
~ I was in danger

In a dream I saw blue and red lights
I saw my dad's mom crying
Arguing with the police
Saying give her to me
~ I will take her

Jumping on the trampoline
My grandmother screaming for me to stop
My cheeks red and my lips blue
the last words i heard
~ call the ambulance

Feels like the sun beats on my bright face
my grandmother next to me
Feels like my chest was cut open
She tells me
~ you had heart surgery

Months after that
I went through a lot of rough situations
my grandmother suffering with me
Telling me
~ this is only the beginning

Years pass by and everything started getting better
I was in school
I was healthy
~I was safe

Fourteen; I was in eighth grade
Healed but still traumatized
Grandmother says, everything
Happens for a reason
~ She gave me faith

A senior now with
five more months to graduation
I look at my strong self
And at my grandmother and say
~ I made it because of you

Someday there will be a time
When It will be my turn
To take care of you

Grown

Jayline A. Torres, Grade 12

She stopped her life because of me
To take care of me
when I was too little
To take care of myself

To take care of me
She taught me everything
To take care of myself
A motherless fatherless child

She taught me everything
In good times and bad times
A motherless fatherless child
I did not know the truth

In good times and bad times
Fighting not only her battles but mine as well
I did not know the truth
Until I got older

Fighting not only her battles but mine as well
I relied on her
Until I got older
Now I'm more independent

I relied on her
She stopped her life because of me
Now I'm more independent
No longer too little

Rylan Mayo, Grade 12

Behind the System

Jake Warner, Grade 9

"What a wild ride,"
As most students decide
To describe the pain they wish to hide
About the stupid rules they abide
The words that hurt and can't be put aside
Forced for their tears to be dried
They said "No tolerance," but, of course, they lied
Students inching closer to that cliffside
But, you know, they somehow have a "bright side"

Bullying, basically glorified
Not to mention suicide
Everyone else dying on the inside
All of their statements so misguided
Please don't try to believe their lies

They don't even believe there's a downside
Only until their access is denied
That's when they're terrified
Now their secrets are no longer classified
It spreads around like a mass homicide
Leaving this now statewide

Still having the guts to say "They tried"
The students and the teachers divide
Giving certain students opportunities they provide
All the things they do to keep us in line

All while this spreads nationwide
Putting their brains on override
That's when chaos does arise
The conflicts begin to collide
Creating a self-made genocide

Semblance of a Sandcastle

Piper Zschack, Grade 10

On my first trip to the beach,
I thought the afternoon sun was eternal
and the low tide, a permanent feature.
Naive eyes took every detail in,
deciding that sandcastles fascinated me most
with the way they rose from the ground,
standing strong and stone-like.
Builders coaxed shapes from the formless earth,
hoping each structure would attest
that their time on the beach wasn't wasted.
The sunbathers laid inert,
mimicking corpses in their corners of the beach
but I built,
alive and captivated with creating.
I carried too much youth in my plastic pail
to realize that time can be a destroyer.

As my clumsy hands fumbled to form a tower
the hungry tide stalked its prey.
Another castle was the first victim of the waves.
Shell decorations were pried from the walls,
shattering every notion I had about sandcastles.
Carefully carved doors were eroded away,
the ocean showing that it was unstoppable.
The destruction picked up my sense of security,
tearing it to tiny pieces beyond hope of repair.
The fortress was reduced to a mound of wet sand.
Any proof that the creator existed was erased
along with the false hope I had
of becoming something permanent in the sand.
But when the waves came,
I'd be a loyal guard to my not-so-stronghold,
denial lacing each moment before they arrived.

My sandcastle stood unloved and unfinished,
my body shielding it in vain from a bitter end.
Fingers should have been tracing windows and doors.
Instead they folded into fists,
squeezing potential out the sides of my hands
leaving only enough room for fear to remain there.
Eyes that should have searched for the perfect shell
were too fixed on the future to see.
The ocean strolled forward with the unhurriedness
of an attacker that knows it cannot die.
My sandcastle's transience was jarring
and I was a defender armed only with ignorance.
When the waves came,
I watched, powerless as they swallowed the ruins
washing missed opportunities out to sea with them.

Prose

Grace Gellar, Grade 11

The Third Void, A Familiar Stranger, and a Confused Reader

Adrienne Clermont, Grade 10

I sat there. Staring into The Void, in the way where knowledge of my mortality, and anything else besides the void, disappears. There is just The Void. So, you know, it was a typical Thursday morning.

Everything was going as scheduled. I showered, had breakfast, combed my hair, woke up, journaled my dream, buried the crate that shows up every Monday, had brunch and began staring into The Void that appears in my bedroom corner at 11:14 am, on the dot, weekly.

But something different happened that Thursday, interrupting my disassociation session via The Void. Someone entered my room through the second void I have locked in my closet. That one isn't friendly. That one is not empty and I'm almost certain it's alive.

It was a strange fellow that came into my room that morning. Yet he was familiarly strange.

"Oh wow, three voids in one building; you're really lucky! Name's Jelly. Wow, a real house! It looks to be from the 21st century. Never seen one before. Man, it's ugly."

"Where did you come from?"

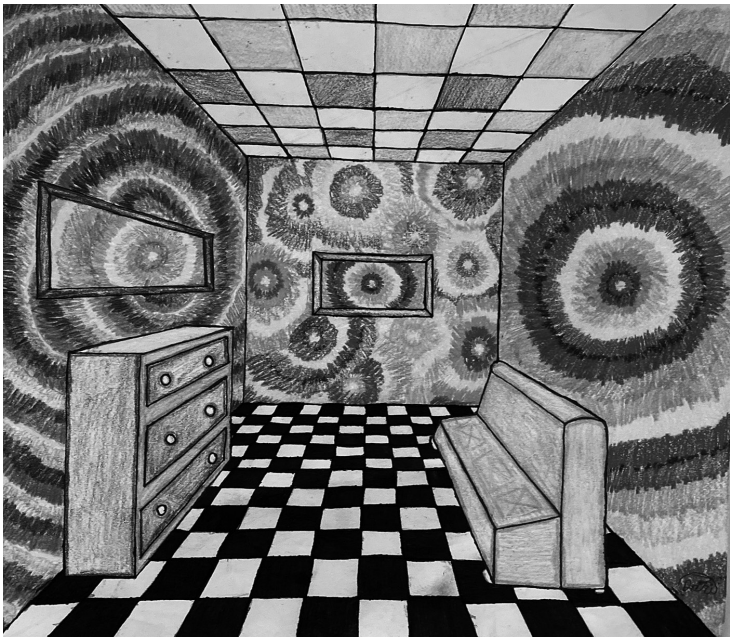
"I've read about this world. And century. And country. It's not my favorite but it is still amazing to be here."

"You can't . . ."

"As you will soon knew, time and reality are fluid," he would say, at 8:23 pm five days from now.

"I get it, but you're confusing the reader."

We turned to the fourth wall which had the third void in it, which you are watching us from, which appears at 11:14 am, on the dot, weekly.



Darianna Pallasco, Grade 10

My Socialization

Yesira Delgado, Grade 12

Alexandra List, Grade 12

Childhood:

In my eyes, my childhood was picture perfect, but now looking back, I realize the little things that didn't catch my eyes when I was younger. Secretly, I think I always wanted the two-parent household; I wonder how my life would be if my parents had never split up. Growing up in a one-parent household has, in fact, affected the way I developed into the person I am today. Living my life with just my mom was different than the other kids around me; I only saw my dad every other weekend, and when I did see him, I would cling to my mom as if he didn't exist.

Most of my childhood took place in a daycare; I was rarely ever home. Home to me when I was younger was not the second-floor apartment where all my belongings resided. Home was with my mom. I was never the girl to play with Barbies and host tea parties; I wanted to spend all my time with my mom. Instead of being in my room, I was right beside my mom watching TV. Now thinking back, my childhood was surrounded by my mom. My childhood was not a childhood; it was a hazy phase in my life where I was unsure about who I was and what I wanted. All I knew was that I wanted to be with my mom. I was stuck to her like glue, but who could blame me? She had to work long hours to be able to sustain us. My childhood consisted of me trying to be just like her.

Education:

From the start I was always interested in learning, but as the years began to roll by, it became more than just learning; I wanted to satisfy my ego. At a young age, I became obsessed with my grades, not only did it please my parents, but it also made me feel like I had a sense of power. My grades are some of my most prideful achievements, and I believe that they will always be.

Being proud of my grades helped me build stability for myself, because I knew that only I could satisfy the voice in my head that keep telling to push harder. Unfortunately, this has created a very competitive and jealous side of me. I secretly strive to do better than my friends because I want to be known as the one to get the high grades in the group, but if one of my friends gets a higher grade than me, not only do I have to compete with myself, but with them as well. This is not one of my qualities that I am very fond of, but I can't help but think that I jump through continuous hoops to get my grades as perfect as they can be, ultimately just to keep up this unhealthy habit.

Apart from my focus on my own grades, there is a part of me that enjoys helping

other people with their schoolwork. School has made me realize how much I want to be a part of the education system. As a little girl I would always go out of my way to help others with their work, which would often get me in trouble, and to this day I still continue to help others with their work.

Culture/Ethnicity:

Growing up, and even now, I never let my culture define me. I am very proud of my culture and if the topic arises, I will proudly talk about it, but I don't let my culture be the only thing that I am. Growing up, my culture was never used against me. In fact, my peers seemed to praise me for it. The only thing that has defined me regarding my culture is my curly hair. My classmates were always fascinated with my hair and would even ask to play with it. My hair has always played a major part in people classifying me as a Puerto Rican, but that never bothered me because of who I am.

Relationship with Friends:

For as long as I can remember I have had different "best friends" through different stages of my life, but it wasn't until my freshman year when I believed I finally found the right people to call my best friends. While during middle school my relationships with my so-called "best friends" were toxic and filled with drama, my relationship with my best friends now are care-free and fun. I know that I've never laughed or had fun the way I do with my friends now. It only took a few test trials to get it right, but it's refreshing to have friends that are genuine.

Our dynamic is successful because we balance each other out. Where each lacks in certain areas, we provide guidance for each other. As I am always told, I am the mother of the group, which I like to take as a compliment. I think it means that my friends find me to be a giving person.

Relationships with Family:

My relationship with my mother sets the tone for the relationship with the rest of my family, because I was always so close to my mom. I am not really close to any other family members. While others depend on their family, I can gladly live without them. I find my family to be very toxic and childish, which is why I never let myself get too attached to them. As I've gotten older, I've realized how hypocritical they are, and I avoid them at all costs. No one is excluded from this, not even my father. My relationship with my father started off as good as it can be when you have a weekend parent, but as I've gotten older, I realized that I can't tolerate the traits he carries from the rest of his family. While others can't live without family, I can, and I have been for many years, but it's now that I've come to realize that although they are family, in reality they are strangers who I can live without.

Besides my immediate family, I've never had a healthy relationship with either side of my family. A big part of this, I think, comes from being really close to my mom and being the only child amongst a sea of cousins. I never really wanted to participate in activities because I was used to being by myself; and to this day, I still find myself alone in a corner at family functions with select members of my family that I can tolerate.

I really only care about the relationship with my mom, step-dad, and my little sister. In many ways having my step-dad and little sister enter my life has taught me to be more tolerant and considerate of other people. For many years, I had to only worry about my mother and I, but now that they are in my life, they have made me a better person. I'm grateful to have another father figure that I know will always be there for me and get to have a healthy relationship with. I owe a lot of who I am today to my little sister. Although she has no idea, she has made me want to become a better person in any way that I can. I want to be a role model for her and show an example that she can look forward to being, as my mom had done for me.

The Head of The Table (A Speech)

Raven Joseph, Grade 12

As Du Bois sits with Shakespeare, I now sit with Aristotle, Thucydides, and Plutarch, authors of great works that have managed to shape my thoughts on the past and its influence on the future. They offer me a seat at the head of the table; they don't dare to frown. They welcome me with open arms, lifting the veil that once covered the eyes of my ancestors and now attempts to shield me from reaping the benefits that I must rightfully sow.

Du Bois sits across from me, grinning as he witnesses a living, breathing testament of the future he longed to see. A future where a little black girl like me gets to use her voice and it is heard by millions, where a little black girl like me will receive an exemplary education from an institution built by people who look like me - FOR people who look like me, where a little black girl like me seeks out opportunities to gain her own sense of self-consciousness, self realization, and self respect. He grins, as I sit uncomfortably through a journey he knows I will never escape as he acknowledges that though we have come far, there is still much progress to be made. As we engage in conversation, these forefathers urge me to seek happiness, to honor the lives of those before me, and to foster my own community of changemakers.

Today, they have called on me to relay this same message to you, hoping that this here group starts an uproar, a new wave of progressive co-workers, understanding co-workers, unified co-workers in the kingdom of culture. We must work diligently to fulfill their wishes and create new ideas they would be proud to watch unfold into radical change and historical movements.

'At Seventeen' - Chapter One

Audrey Kim, Grade 11

I scanned the cafeteria, sipping from my carton of milk. The cafeteria was my least favorite place, with the same loud people every day, the same conversations around me, and the same bland food. But even still, I chose to come here every period just for no reason. Maybe it's because staying in my empty classroom was too boring.

I finished my drink and set it aside on my tray. I took out my cassette tape player and pressed play. "What Is and What Should Never Be" by Led Zeppelin started playing, and I continued scanning the cafeteria.

Then the bell rang.

I packed up my stuff, taking my uneaten, wrapped sandwich and putting it in my bag. I started walking out of the cafeteria, and just as I was about to leave out the front entrance, a girl stopped me.

I saw her around from time to time, but I never knew her name. This was a pretty big school, with just over 3,000 people. I swear I see someone I've never seen before every day. I'm pretty sure there's 20 other guys at my school with the same name as me.

"Hi," she said, staring into my eyes. I took off my headphones and looked at her.

"Um, hi," I said blankly.

She rolled her eyes slightly and crossed her arms. "I see you all the time. I just wanted to say hi. You don't need to be rude."

I jerked my neck back slightly in shock. "What? I wasn't trying to be rude. I just said hi to you."

"Yeah, but you didn't seem enthusiastic about it," she said bluntly. She was still blocking my way. I really wanted to walk away, but I knew she wouldn't let me. She'd probably jerk my arm back and yell at me or something. Would she start beating me up? Oh god, I can just picture it.

Let me tell you about her. Once again, I didn't know her name, but she would occasionally slip into my chemistry class and fool around. She had medium length light brown hair, blue eyes, and

Destin Williams, Grade 12

was quite popular. She was a loudmouth, I guess you could say. She didn't follow the rules at all, which I didn't like because I usually like following rules. I was just an overall organized guy who liked keeping things the way they should be. But she wasn't like that at all. One time she was playing with my teacher's blowtorch during chemistry and almost set

our room on fire, but other than that, I guess she's just an okay person. Definitely not anything great.

"I'm...sorry..." I said awkwardly. Should I just keep standing there? Or...should I just say I have to go to the bathroom?

"I have to-"

"I like you," she said all of a sudden in a straightforward tone. She gave me a satisfied smile.

I paused. "Oh? You mean, like me like me or just-"

"I would like to get to know you more. I always see you sitting by yourself at lunch and I think you're kinda weird, but a good weird, you know? Like, different. I also see you in your chemistry class. Once again, always sitting alone like some ominous, serial killer-esque creep. But I think it's weirdly attractive. I'm not saying I find serial killers attractive, by the way. Do you mind if we hang out after school?"

I looked to the side, and then to the floor. I could've ignored all of this if I had just decided to stay in the cafeteria listening to Led Zeppelin in peace. I was really contemplating my life choices right now.

"Um, okay," I said awkwardly.

Once again, she gave me a cheeky smile and raised her eyebrow. "I'll meet you outside when school ends," she said. She started skipping away, then suddenly turned around.

"By the way, I'm Harper," she called to me, before disappearing down the hall. I stood there, staring blankly at nothing. I put my headphones back on and the song playing was "This Just Doesn't Seem to Be My Day" by The Monkees. Wow, the irony was strong here. The bell rang, and I started heading towards my last class.

I was five minutes into walking with Harper. After school had ended, I actually decided to just walk home myself and pretend that I didn't have to hang out with her. But she ended up following me. I only found out when I was already ten minutes into walking to my neighborhood when, all of a sudden, my headphones were yanked off of my head and when I turned around she started to fake-choke me. I could've died from shock. Even though I didn't show it, I almost had a heart attack. Now here I was, stuck with her. I wondered why she was so weirdly relaxed with me. At least I think she was.

"I'm still mad that you left me," she said, her arms crossed as she walked beside me on the sidewalk.

"I just forgot," I said blankly.

Even though I didn't look at her face, I could tell at that second, she rolled her eyes.

"Yeah, right, probably distracted by your stupid music."

My eyes widened, but I kept looking forward. "It's not stupid music. I have good taste."

She jerked her head towards me in surprise. "Oh yeah?" she said in a high-pitched tone. "Then what song are you listening to right now?"

I was playing a tape I made myself, containing songs by bands such as The Velvet Underground, T. Rex, and the Rolling Stones. I had written all the song names on the tape, and the song I was listening to at that moment was "Run Run Run" by The Velvet Underground. Was this a sign? I really wanted to just disappear down the sidewalk right at that moment.

"You wouldn't know it," I said blankly.

She pushed my shoulder. "And how would you know that?"

I shrugged and kept on moving forward.

"You look like you would listen to The Cure," she said. At that second, I looked at her.

" I do," I said. She smiled at me and kept walking.

"Nice. They're my favorite band."

For a second I stopped where I was and looked at her as she kept walking. Maybe...just maybe, she wasn't that bad.

After a moment of silence, she asked me something that I really didn't know how to answer.

"Do you want to start dating?"

I tensed up. "Huh?"

"I asked you if you wanted to start dating. You're really cool."

For some reason, I couldn't say no. Even though I had just started talking to her, I thought it would be a new experience. I've never dated anyone before.

"If you want to."

She smiled. "Okay, it's official. We're dating now."

After two minutes, we approached my house.

"I want to go in," she said abruptly. "Let's go inside your house."

I looked at her. "No, wait, I was just going to drop off my backpa-"

"I said, let's go inside. We can have our first date inside your house."

I looked up at my house. My mom wasn't home, she was at work right now.

"I-uh...okay," I stuttered in a low tone, flabbergasted.

I unlocked my front door and she immediately went in and planted herself on my living room couch. I put my backpack down awkwardly and looked at her. She seemed at home. All of a sudden, she looks up at me.

"We should kiss," she said.

I raise my eyebrows. "What?"

She shrugged her shoulders as if I was stupid. "You know, kiss. Something people do when they like each other. Like this is the part of one of those 80s movies where the guy brings his girlfriend home and then they automatically start kissing on their bed or something."

I really didn't know what was up with this girl. "Are you okay?" I asked.

She wrinkled her eyebrow at me. "I just want to have fun, okay? I'm sorry that you're so boring."

"I've never kissed anyone before," I said with a blank expression. "And I don't think I plan to anytime soon."

She rolled her eyes and went over to my mom's music station, sorting through random CDs. "See? You're boring. You need to get out more. That's why I wanted to hang out with you. You know, to get you out of your shell. Because you're...no offense, a bit socially awkward. But there's something about you that's really interesting too. Like mysterious. Kind of like one of those creepy stalkers in movies."

I didn't know if she meant that as a compliment. "Thank you," I said blankly. All of a sudden, I hear my mom's car outside. I turned around and looked out the window.

"Oh no," I whispered, closing my eyes slowly.

"What? Your mom's here?" Harper asked.

I slowly nodded and gulped, my eyes still closed. "I don't know how she'll react with you being here. I've never had a girl over. She'll probably either be way too enthusiastic or hit me with a pan. There's no in between."

Harper rolled her eyes. "Well it'll probably be a good reaction. She'll probably be relieved that you're finally dating someone after being alone your whole life."

I shot her a glare. "Shut up," I mumbled.

She stood up and brushed off her clothes. "I'm going to introduce myself, okay? It'll be fine. She's gonna see me around here more often, anyways."

As the door clicked open, I sighed a big sigh and closed my eyes. This was really about to happen.

Eduardo Lopes, Grade 12

Cozy Cabin

Eduardo Lopes, Grade 12

There was a blizzard outside and it had been six days since you last saw the sun. Luckily you have enough supplies to last through the winter and into to spring. This includes firewood, dried meats, dried fruits, pickled vegetables, nuts, grains, and dried herbs.

The winters up north are infamous with long freezing nights and days of blizzards with few days of calm. The sun is barely seen and never warming. Then again, there's not much reason for you to go outside; especially to hunt for fresh meat. Most of the herds head down south for the winter and there's competition, predators, feral beast and evil spirits, to cope with.

No. No reason to go out. Instead you spend your time with your friends cooped up in a small but cozy cabin. Right now you're focused on the crackling fire. Relaxing and spacing out until you feel someone push your arm. You snap out of your trance.

"Zarnir?"

You hear someone call your name. You look to your left and see Igmen, your best friend.

Igmen is a Monsterfolk like you. He has the head of a goat, the feet of a hawk, the hands and tail of a lizard. But despite his chimerian appearance, he is the cutest and most wholesome of your group of friends.

You look back at the fire and say, "Yeah, I'm fine. Just zoning out really."

"You don't tell him that you are feeling kinda lonely despite living in a cabin with your friends. You've always been more of a loner, an introvert and sole explorer type. And yet you decided to live with your friends because they are the best people in the world to you. It's just that sometimes it all feels overwhelming.

Well Igmen understood your feelings. He'd known you since you were cubs together. He was always there for you. So he knew how to cheer you up as did the rest of your friends.

"Hey, Igmen and Zarnir!" Brizz another friend calls out. You look and see she's holding a book and not just any book. It's the rule-book for the role playing game Knights & Sorcerers.

Brizz is also a Monsterfolk, she has the head of a hen and the lower half of a horse. She's the muscle of the group and the bravest. But despite that she is also the mom of the group; always there with a shoulder to cry on.

Just then Gozo came with a box containing the dice, figurines, a game board and character sheets. He placed it on the table and opened the box.

Gozo, also a monster folk, was a cat with duck feet, a bull's tail, and a single horn growing

out of his head. Gozo was mute and only communicated in sign language and gestures. But despite that, he was greatest friend anyone could have.

Excitedly you help set up the game. Igmen went to the kitchen to make hot chocolate for everyone. Soon enough you had a smile on your face.

You played with your friends through the night by the light of the fire. Outside the blizzard raged, but you didn't hear it or worry about it. The only sounds you heard were your friends laughing and playing roles. It reminded you why you decided to stay with them, introvert that you were. It felt comforting to be part of the clan of friends.

After a long while you started to yawn and feel tired along with everyone else. The fire dimmed, but the cabin was still warm. Slowly everyone began to get blankets and snuggle up together to keep warm through the rest of the long night. You felt happy that you were here with them; living with the beings you love. The more you thought about it, they were more than your friends, they were your family. A family of choice, not heredity.

Slowly your eyes shut, your breathing evens out and your body relaxes against Igmen and Brizz. You began to fall asleep, content in your tiny little home.

My Untold Story: An epistle about growing up with a single mother

"There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you." Maya Angelou

Lismary Lopez Piscil, Grade 12

Mom, as I was growing up, there was a lot to experience and you weren't there to tell me right from wrong. I understand that you were a single mother and you always had to work, and never actually had time for us. When I was in middle school, you had an afternoon shift at a factory. I would only see you in the morning before school when you would cook breakfast for us.

Then, you would pick us up at the bus stop after school and have dinner ready because you would have to leave for work. By the time you would get home, Sarahi had us in bed. You relied a lot on her being the eldest child. This was practically my whole childhood for about five years. When I graduated middle school, I only had you and Sarahi by my side to congratulate me.

I remember the year my uncle passed away. The only father figure we had ever known. He was your favorite brother, Mom, and I remember you slipping away into isolation. Then Sarahí had more responsibilities than before.

Entering high school was rough and lonely for me because when I was in middle school, my sisters and I attended the same school so, I didn't really feel alone.

All I felt, mom, was your absence. I felt isolated and was aware of growing up with the pain of that distance always between us.

Mom, because of your absence we made mistakes that we would not have; bad choices that put is in bad places. Sarahí was 17 and a senior in high school when she got pregnant. We shouldn't blame you for our mistakes, but maybe if we had had your attention you could've seen that she wasn't doing well on her own. That she needed supervision.

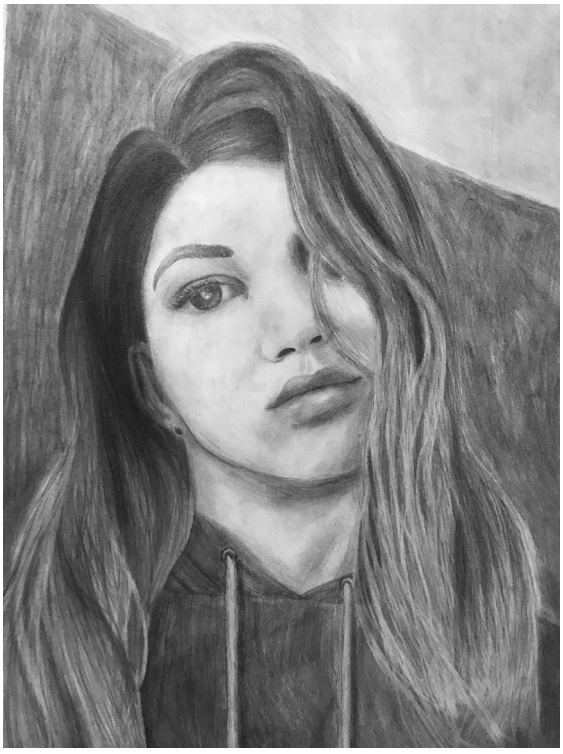
I understand you always had to work, but mom, we needed you. Later on, during my high school years, and of course after, Sarahí graduated, she met the supposed love of her life, and she moved out. This was the greatest hardship we faced as a family.

Losing you, Sarahí, was terrible, but I see you are an amazing mom because before you went on to becoming a mom to your own kids you were mine. I cherish you for all that you gave me.

Sarahi: Timo, my nephew, is the love of all of our lives. My love for him is as deep as the ocean. Thank you for taking the time to raise me. I hope you are as proud of me as I am of you.

Induratize

By Nelani Mejias, Grade 12



Emma Sementilli, Grade 10

What's the point of trying to pretend that everything will be all right in the end, when we both know the truth? I can't stop thinking of you. I wish you were different, because you don't care about me. And accidents happen; I guess that's what we were. Still, I want things to be like before, when I was a dream, and you would call at the same time for midnight observations. Now you're just in my dreams, and we talk at your convenience. I'm not sure if you even listen, but it's so nice to hear your voice it doesn't matter. I'll get the fake reassurance I need and then comes the world's smallest earthquake. I want to scream, but all that comes out are pointless sobs that fall like the rain from that day. Around you there is too much rough weather. I have a loving heart that is inside out, and this is the real world, so I can't wait anymore. It's too much to stare where the desk lays and imagine you sitting there. I'm tired of hoping for the mail to bring me a letter that says we will always have our continuous timeline, and that we fit like puzzle pieces. I can't keep waiting for nothing. I know you're gone, but I'll say goodbye anyway. I think I'm better off alone.

Rebecca Arroyo, Grade 10

"Boys Will Be Boys"

Nelani Mejias, Grade 12

"Girls, be sure to cover up, don't show too much skin."
"Don't walk alone at night."
"Don't be so uptight, it was just a joke."
"Boys will be boys."

From a young age, boys are taught that they will always have an excuse for the way they act. No matter how harmful, their behavior it's justified, and girls are supposed to just go along with it. Society treats men as if they are superior; this we know. Men are supposedly smarter, stronger, and overall more capable. They are the gender of reason; however, when they do something wrong, suddenly it's in their nature, and they couldn't help themselves. Men are not animals; they do not lack self control. There is not something in their genetic makeup that makes them rape. It is not okay for them to drug a girl's drink because they go by the pronouns he/him.

Women are taught that they need to change to accommodate the behavior of men. As soon as they step into a school, they must dress "appropriately," making sure not to distract the boys from their studies. Because shoulders distract boys, and boys need a good education, that's what's important. But sexual harassment is not considered a distraction because what did you expect? If a woman is raped people ask her what she was wearing, and if it was a short skirt, well then, it was her fault because she was tempting the man. Boys will be boys; she should've considered that before picking her outfit. Once a girl steps up and defends herself, she is labeled as being emotional, but when a man yells and screams, he is brave and powerful.
It doesn't help that the people in power, the people running the country, and the people in charge

of justice, are the same people who can rape women and not be held accountable. "It's a very scary time for young men in America." This is a statement made by President Donald Trump. A statement that proceeded him saying that men should be considered innocent of sexual assault when allegations come up until there is evidence to prove them guilty. Even then, that's sometimes still not good enough.

Women are constantly being criticized. If you wear a crop top, you're showing too much skin. If you're covered, you're a prude. Regardless, you're asking for it. If you talk openly about sex, you're a slut. Feminism has been confused with man-hating and hostility. Wanting to be treated equally, like a human being, is made to seem irrational.

We, as a society, need to stop allowing men to get away with whatever toxic behavior they want. We need to stop telling girls to change in order to stay safe and we need to stop normalizing sexual harassment. Rape is not a type of sex, it is a type of assault, a violation of a person's body. It will never have a justification. Gender does not excuse violence. If boys continue to "be boys," then girls will continue to take notice, get angry, and bring these predators to justice. It's a scary time to be a sexist, violent man in America, because girls are getting sick of it.

Mariana Zepeda, Grade 9

A Day in the Life of a Cold, Homeless Person

Angela Nunez Espinal, Grade 11

I was given the idea to walk in the shoes of a person living in poverty for days, hours, or however long I chose. Despite being poor myself, I have never truly experienced what it was like to be homeless and in need of necessities. This winter, it occurred to me that there are homeless people who walk or stand outside in the freezing cold without (many to any) layers to keep them warm. I decided to try to experience this. I was almost hesitant to walk home without any jacket because of how cold it was that day, but I knew this only showed me just how privileged I was to own a warm coat and be provided free bus transportation every day.

When I decided to remove my coat, I was immediately stricken by the cold, bitter, and merciless wind. My soft skin became a goose-bumped, sandpaper-like layer that covered me. The short 25-minute walk home without a coat made me realize how the things you don't have allow you to pay more attention to the things others do have. I found myself being aware of everyone around me. I couldn't resist looking at the Yale students with their expensive warm coats, casually sipping their coffee and talking about seemingly meaningless things with their friends.

I was so cold. I became envious and almost angry at those inside their gorgeous, new, expensive vehicles, aware that they were so much warmer than I was. I understood why the poor community experiences hate and anger towards the rich or middle class, especially when they grow up in this ruthless society, instead of in a life in which they never experience hunger again, in which they never stress or suffer so much mentally, physically, financially, and spiritually.

I continued to listen to the Yale students talk about how good their black coffee was and such, and was almost annoyed by how its strong smell lingered, leaving me wanting a warm drink as well. After the men walked away, I saw other well-dressed people walking close by. I paid attention to their clothes, their shoes, and wondered how they lived.

Were they wealthy? Privileged? Intelligent? Or were they hiding impoverishment under those coats of theirs? Today, it is not always easy to see just what someone is going through. We can no longer look at one's appearances and assume they're financially stable, because many would spend their last dime to portray themselves as wealthy and worthy in society's eyes. The poor are regular, normal people who want to be accepted and be offered a helping hand.

As I continued walking, some people smiled at me. It seemed they almost pitied me or stared in confusion, or disbelief I should say.

"Why is she walking without a coat?" they must have asked themselves. It was 15° outside and the wind made it feel even colder than it already was. Thoughts of my warm home, warm bed, and food stocked inside my fridge surged through my head.

"I can't wait to go home. I'm so cold," I thought. "You're almost there. Almost there. Just keep going!"

It was then that I realized, "Well, what about those who don't have a home to go to? A destination to go to?"

I opened my door and my body ached from the shift to the warmth inside my home. I was blood red and shivering from being outside. It's truly disturbing how much a poor, homeless person endures. If only the rest of the world could simply step into their shoes and experience their lives for just 25 minutes.

The Bratling

Julien Sanchez-Levallois, Grade 11

It was late and most buildings were black inside, as if missing a soul. Street lamps sprouted from the ground like beanstalks, illuminating only a small circle beneath them with a nauseating orange tint.

A young couple sat in an ugly station wagon. Obviously, that's not much to go off of, but if you picture the ugliest color in your head, it's that. Blanketed by night, the two drove to the sound of Jim Croce. Conversation wasn't exchanged, as that is what social people do, and these two were not social people. The young man driving was named Adrian. Probably the weakest person on the football team, you wondered how he got a date with the jolly young lady seated next to him. Her name was Anne. She had all of her attention directed towards her captivating book about big, strong men saving damsels in distress. Speaking of which, she just made it to the part where the big, strong man saves the damsel in distress. Appreciating the vivid detail of the man's large muscles, she looked up to her left at her very own big, strong man. Disappointment washed over her face more than anyone who purchased the book who wasn't a teenage girl. She dove back into the book with haste. Adrian peered over as if trying not to intrude on Anne's reading. Because it wasn't a date or anything... oh wait, yes it was.

"We're coming u-"

"What?" Anne interrogated Adrian with frustration, as if she was some kind of hard drug addict being confronted about the constant itching of the back of their neck.

"We're coming up," Adrian continued, giving a sigh as if he had just left the dragon's den from Anne's enthralling book.

"Coming up on what?" Anne questioned.

"On the movie... the one we're driving to see." Adrian pointed at a large white screen. "That one."

"Oh, but Adi," she pouted. "They've already started. We're missing the beginning."

"I'm sure we'll catch on quick. I think the movie is called... Vampires Fighting Werewolves 2."

"But we haven't seen the first one."

As they pulled up to the entry guy, Adrian's attention grew less and less towards Anne. "It'll, uh, it'll be fine. Hey, entry guy!" Adrian shouted as he stuck his head out the window. "What's the entry fee?"

"Five per person. So that's like... ten, or something," the ticket guy concluded. "Also, I don't go by entry guy, my name is Chri-." Adrian's station wagon sped past poor Chri, until it stopped at the food guy.

"Hey, food guy!" Adrian babbled.

"Yeah?" Food guy responded as if this was the most important moment of his entire life.

"Actually, give us a second." Adrian slipped his head back into the car and consulted with Anne. "Do you want anything?"

Anne contemplated for a few seconds. "Do they have any potato chips?"

" Give me a second." Adrian stuck his head out the window to talk to the food guy, who immediately shot up like an excited puppy. "Food guy. Do you have any potato chips?"

The food guy gave his food tray a long examination. "Uh, no. I have pistachios, though."

"Okay, thanks dude." Adrian slipped back into the car to talk to Anne. "They don't have potato chips."

"Damn," Anne snapped as she slapped her fist on her open palm.

"They do have pistachios, though," Adrian negotiated.

Anne sucked her teeth. "I'm not much of a pistachio person. What else do they have?"

Adrian stuck his head out the window again. "What else do you have?"

"Pistachios," food guy offered.

"Yeah, but besides that."

Food guy looked down at his food tray. "Uh, just pistachios, man."

Adrian scoffed and stared at food guy for a while. "Oh. You're not joking."

"No, I'm not even a food guy, more of a pistachio guy."

"Okay, well, who here has anything other than pistachios?"

Pistachio guy stared at Adrian for a good ten seconds before looking to his right, at Chri, then to his left. His eyes flared. "I think that's a food guy over there," he pointed at another guy with a food tray faintly waving from far away.

Adrian smiled, "Thanks, man."

"Good luck, guy."

"You too, pistachio guy," Adrian nodded. "You too." Adrian slipped back into the car and began moving.

"Oh, no. Wait." Pistachio guy put his arm out. Adrian's car halted and his head popped out.

"What is it?"

"That's another pistachio guy." Pistachio guy winced as the words left his mouth.

"God damn it. I'm just gonna go watch the movie." Adrian slipped his head into the car one final time.

Anne stared at him. "So, no food?" she pestered.

"They had nothing but pistachios, Anne. Pistachios everywhere." The two pulled up and Anne put her head on Adrian's shoulder as she rubbed his arm.

"That sounds awful." A shuffle from the back seat underneath a congregation of wild blankets caught their attention. While Anne turned to investigate, Adrian looked up in disbelief, letting out a sigh. His intrigued girlfriend threw the blanket off, to find a little boy.

"Where's the food?" the little boy shouted.

"Adi, who's this kid?"

"That's my little brother, Tyler." Adrian looked over, reluctantly, as if trying to avoid an embarrassment.

"What's he doing in the back seat? Hiding in the blankets like a little... spider monkey?"

"Well, yesterday, my mom wanted me to watch him while she was covering someone at work, but I already had a date with you, so I brought him along," Adrian asserted. He wasn't really confident, but he figured if he acted confident, he'd spare himself the repercussions of ruining this fabulous night out.

Anne slapped his arm. "And you were just gonna let him crash our date?"

"Pshhhh... no." As Adrian spoke, he became more and more filled with frustration, causing him to slowly and dramatically turn to his little brother. "The plan was for him to hide under the blankets! But I guess that's too much to ask you, isn't it little guy?"

"Shut it, you spaz. Give me some food!" Tyler pleaded, pulling Adrian's seat handle and frantically shaking his older counterpart back and forth. Adrian proceeded to smite the little gremlin on the forehead. Tears ran down his face and his voice cracked as he uttered his dying request, "Give me some food... spaz." Adrian sighed and looked around with shame. Finally, he spotted a curious Chri, who was approaching their car to investigate the annoying whining.

Adrian's head jerked over to Tyler. "Shut up! They're coming over here! We didn't pay for you!"

"You shut up!" Tyler landed a weak jab in Adrian's armpit, which became the catalyst for a sportly sissy fight.

Anne attempted to separate the two tantrum twirling toddlers. "Get off!" she hollered as she invited herself into the fight. The three stopped upon hearing a startling yell.

"Stop it! All three of you, stop it." The three turned to see Chri, leaning down to where their eyes met his. "If I remember correctly, you paid for two. Now, I like you two. I know the time we've spent together will have a special place in my heart." The three gave a look of bewilderment due to the fact that it was crystal clear that none of them actually knew Chri's full name. "But you've betrayed me. You've betrayed our deep friendship. Our deep best friendship. Our good, deep best friendship. Our special, good, deep best friendship. That's just not something that can be tolerated by Christopher Berkowitz."

"Who?" the three uttered in unison.

"Me!" Christopher Berkowitz bellowed. "I'm going to have to ask you guys to leave."

"What? No way, why?" Tyler shrieked, his voice bobbing up and down in pitch.

"You know why, you wouldn't shut your mouth," Adrian scolded.

"You wouldn't shut your mouth. You wouldn't shut your mouth," Tyler mocked. Anne slapped the two of them on top of their stubborn heads.

"You both wouldn't shut up. Jesus, you're like two children."

"Just- All three of you get out of here! You make me sick," a sobbing Christopher Berkowitz said with frustration, among the bickering.

"Fine! Fine," Adrian backed up out of the drive-in theater, being sure to wave at pistachio guy on his way out.

"I'm hungry. Can we go to McDonald's?" Tyler squealed.

Adrian glared at the tiny man with pure disappointment on his face. "Tyler, we're not going to McDonalds." He parked the car just outside of the drive-in theater.

"But I want it. Plus, it's right there," Adrian looked over to the glowing red and yellow haven of grease and heart issues, donning a pair of golden arches upon it's holy head. It gave off a disgustingly bright glow, tainting the darkness, as well as overpowering the orange of the street lamps. Adrian squinted with purpose. "Where are your glasses?" Tyler nagged as he aggressively rolled his window up and down.

"Maybe I didn't bring them, you slimy crotch goblin." Adrian proudly beamed at his little brother through the rearview mirror.

"I am pretty hungry, Adi," Anne advocated as she tugged on Adrian's hoodie.

"You're not seriously siding with the... the..." Adrian turned to Tyler and snapped his fingers repeatedly as a cue.

"...slimy crotch goblin?"

"Yes, thank you." Adrian patted his brother's head. Tyler let out a menacing hiss and molded himself into the corner of the back seat.

"But we haven't eaten anything since we got here and I'm sure as hell not eating..." Anne looked over to the pistachio guy, who was sending a friendly wave from the distance, "Pistachios." Anne cringed at the idea.

"God no," Adrian relieved Anne of her worst fears. "I just don't want to give him what he wants."

Anne unbuckled her belt and slipped out of the passenger's seat. "Well, I'm hungry." She came around the side of the car to the left-hand backseat and opened Tyler's door. "Are you coming, kid?" Tyler nodded and happily exited the car, holding Anne's hand as they crossed the street, even though he was a good ten years of age. As they walked, he glanced back at Adrian, and using his free right hand, he stuck up a little middle finger.

Evidently, Adrian must've smelled garbage or something, because his expression was one of pure disgust. Jowls formed on his jaw from his excessive frowning, and his eyes were squinting nearly to the point of an airtight seal, except for dots of orange light reflecting on his pupils. The dots slowly traversed the canyons of darkness that were Adrian's eyes as the slimy crotch goblin and Adrian's girlfriend held hands while on their journey to a safe haven. In this case it took the form of a McDonald's.

As Adrian painfully watched the two order and sit down, he, too, unbuckled his seatbelt and opened the door three inches. He then shut the door and put his seatbelt back on. Upon looking through the magical portal that led to McDonald's World, Adrian now found that the two traitors had started a very captivating conversation with the humble janitor, who was sweeping the floors up until that point.

"Shit." Adrian quickly slipped out of the car, forgetting to shut the door behind him. About halfway into the middle of the street, Adrian turned back with regret, only to turn back again. This repeated several times until the janitor in the McDonald's found himself amused by the sight of Adrian's hesitant strafing back and forth. Finally, Adrian walked into McDonald's out of breath, pit stained, and red, failing to break eye contact with the janitor as he sat down next to his two mutineers. Adrian pointed at his brother's happy meal.

"What do you have there?"

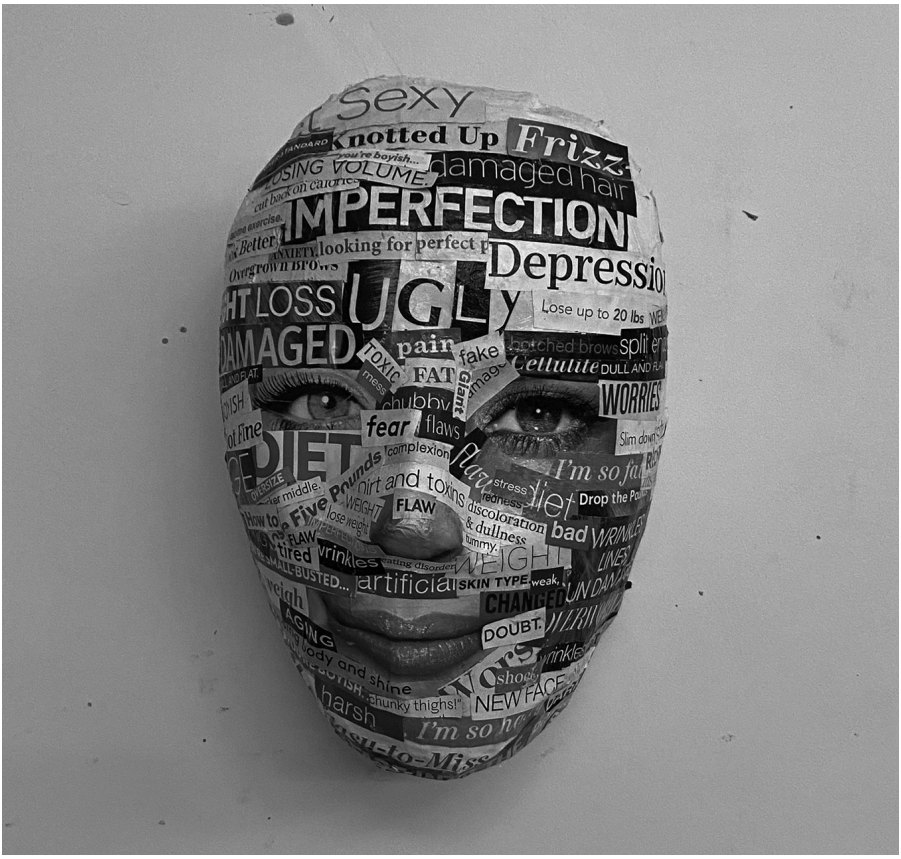
"McNuggets, fries, and a toy." Adrian nodded and dove into the box. "Hey! The toy!" Tyler shouted as his short arms and legs swung up and down. Adrian stopped for a second, dipped his hand into the deepest part of the box and fished out a plastic red angry bird from the movie of the same name. He attempted to toss it over to his brother, but it bonked him on the head instead. As if a robot that was temporarily shut off, Tyler's head hung low, with his face hidden by the table of their booth. When he rose back up, streams of tears had already reached his yellow WWE t-shirt and his face was bright red, giving his colors resemblance to a certain famous fast food chain.

"What did you do?" Anne scolded as she pushed Adrian out of the booth to tend to Tyler. Adrian scoffed with disbelief. "What? It barely hit him."
Anne morphed into a ghoul. "Get us some ice and paper towels!" she said as she held Tyler's head.

Adrian angrily stomped to the bathroom. Fueled by frustration, he shuffled to the bathroom while completely disregarding anyone inside. Adrian charged to the paper towel dispenser like it was his bounty. He took more than he needed because he found aggressively pulling paper towels therapeutic.

After a few more handfuls, he knocked the plastic case of the dispenser, where it flew to the stalls to his left. He gave a casual glance to where it landed, but immediately did a horrified double take.

The plastic case landed right next to a man in loose office attire, sitting beside the toilet, where he was drowning another man. Bubbles of life boiled from the bowl for about five seconds, until nothing. The man let out a sigh of relief, until he saw Adrian. "Damn."



Sophia Coppola, Graduate 2019

I Don't Like Being Black.

Samantha Sims, Grade 12

Growing up, I quickly understood what society expected from me. The word "black" comprised a strong, negative connotation, commonly associated with impurity and wickedness. It symbolized being at the bottom and, innately, at a disadvantage. Before uttering a word, I was a villain, a ravenous monster up to no good. My intellectual capabilities were insufficient compared to my white counterparts. My intentions were tainted. From birth, I was ugly and everyone was on the edge of their seats, waiting for me to fail.

Flattened by a thousand tons of pressure to fulfill the black identity designed so kindly by society, the immense weight left me defenseless in an internal war with who I wanted to be and how I should present myself in a white world. My strategy was to peel back my hideous, black layer, beginning with my vendetta against my hair.

I had always been known for my braids. Colored beads and bobbles swung from their ends like ornaments on a tree. When my mother finished braiding my hair every week, I would go to the mirror to study the girl looking back at me. She didn't look like the other girls at school with silk hair, strands of gold that grew down to the floor and danced with the wind. Her hair said it all; she

wasn't one of them.

In fourth grade, I stumbled upon the remedy—hair relaxer. With my straight, chemically-tortured hair, I had snuck into an exclusive club; my hair was my disguise to hide the brown skin I didn't want others to see. I was falling joyously into a hole of self-deconstruction, internalizing the centuries of self-hatred that filled the consciousness of the smiling women of color on the boxes of Curl Out and hot comb ads.

It wasn't until my freshman year that my understanding of black hair shifted. In high school, I was suddenly surrounded by black women with volumes of curls and confidence. I found myself totally captivated by their poise and mettle. I wanted to be one of them, comfortable in my skin where there was room for me to be articulate and black.

That year, I decided to end perming treatments for good. By the summer of my sophomore year, I cut off the straight ends of my hair and became officially natural. Immediately, I was elevated by having curls. No longer was I dependent on a thick, cold cream to define my beauty.

Something deep inside was awakened. The black beast everyone feared was unleashed, not hungry for chaos or social affirmation, but for education, personal growth, community, and having more to contribute other than the fear of being an outcast. I saw the versatility of my hair and identity.

Without the chains of age-old racial stereotypes, being black was no longer a liability. Doors opened and I began to take advantage of every leadership opportunity I could. I now see myself as a trailblazer, not the follower I was for many years. Considering what I was able to accomplish in a few years once my blinders were removed, I am energized by what is to come. As a college student and beyond, I will be able to define myself by my abilities rather than external measures.

My hair journey is a narrative of my growth and self-acceptance. For years, I tore down the girl in the mirror. I was trying to "fix" her. I should've told her she was beautiful and valued. I should've told her not to let herself get in her own way. Today, I owe myself an apology for misdirecting the anger I had towards the antiquated racial hierarchy that swallows minorities whole.

It's true that I don't like being black; I love it.

Bryan Morocho, Grade 11

Beauty's Battle

Thomas Small, Grade 11

Substance abuse is a struggle millions of people go through all around the world. Living in New Haven, you see drug addicts in your everyday life. For me, it was even more personal than that. My grandmother has been an alcoholic my entire life, only recently becoming clean. Her alcoholism became extreme 3-4 years ago.

Her boyfriend worked while she stayed home all day, sitting on her couch every hour of each day, drinking until she lost consciousness. She would sit there with a bucket by her side just in case she had the urge to vomit. She sat for so long, she lost the muscle mass in her legs, to the point where she couldn't even walk.

As I grew up, I just couldn't stand to see my grandmother like this. At times, she forgot who I was, not recognizing me because of all the damage she had done to herself. As a child, I didn't completely understand why she would do this to herself and why she was so weak. I realized it wasn't that simple. When you get in as deep as she did, your body needs the alcohol to function. Yes, she decided to pick up that first drink, but not the ones that followed.

I'm now discovering who this woman actually is and I am no longer ashamed to call her my grandmother. Even though I was close to her as a toddler and young child, it's different now. I now have an aware and present grandmother in my life. I'm looking forward to the time that I have with her and to learning about the woman I've heard so many stories about. Surviving and overcoming an inner battle that lasted decades isn't easy; she's here for a reason: gleam the beauty that was stuck in the midst of internal warfare, to allow others into the presence of this beauty, and to let the beauty not rest in longing, but in peace.

Letter to My Angel

Destini Washington, Grade 12

I still remember your soft, warm hands. I remember the wine-colored nail polish you used to wear. I always used to say it matched your personally in a way--"Mysterious." I remember going from living with you and seeing your face every day to visiting you in a nursing home, seeing your face every week. I try to find the Honey Graham Crackers we always used to eat together while watching some show you liked. Now I wish I had paid attention to it because I don't even remember the name. I remember your laugh from 5 years ago, but can't remember what my math teacher taught me in class 5 days ago. I have vivid images when it comes to you.

I try to seek the love you gave me, but can't find it. I try to find it in everyone else, not completely understanding that nobody can give the love you gave. I remember the dream you had the night before you left me; it was 15 days before your birthday. You had a dream about having a birthday party in a graveyard, not knowing that was your way of saying you had enough.

I remember seeing the pain in your eyes but never asking "are you okay," because I was always happy seeing you. I'm sorry I never asked. I'm sorry I couldn't take away your pain then.

You went from warm to cold in a matter of days. I remember the last time seeing you, lying peacefully with a wine-colored lipstick on to match your wine-colored nails, but this time you were cold. You were silent and still. I didn't just walk down the aisle and touch you and walk away.

I touched you long and silently with tears flowing. While touching you, I thought how the years would be without you. I touched you thinking you'd touch me back.

Years later, I'm wondering if you're proud. Wondering if you're happy. I'll forever be seeking the love you gave knowing I won't ever find it.

This is a letter to you, my angel, letting you know that I still remember you, your laugh, the feel of your body, and, of course, your love. Without you, I wouldn't be as strong and rare as I am today.

Love you Grandma.
Sincerely, your granddaughter,
Destini

Kanye Armour, Grade 11

A Change in the Narrative

Jaidyn Wein, Grade 9

Part One: The Past

Somewhere on the vast Earth, there lies a single twin bed, and on it lies a creator of worlds. Covered by a heavy roof and freshly-installed solar panels, she sits alone in her house, controlling her own world with imagination and a stash of marshmallow treats. The quiet is calming, yet it ironically is on the verge of unbearable. The room in which she sits seems tidy to visitors, yet hidden secrets consist of broken drawers and cracked windows concealed by flower curtains.

"Let cliché be my motto, universes within the confines of nothing but the depths of our mind," she writes, "as naive now as we'll ever be again. Raise a glass to the days when we were content with happily ever after, and a toast to the family I choose, rather than the biology that connects me to uncertainty, ignoring the mistakes that I have made in prior years, I move forward." -Jaidyn Wein, 2019

This will later become her favorite quote, even if it is a bit narcissistic for it to be her own.

The students at her prior school were rude to her. Living in a state of confusion only made her cluttered mind fill to the brim with gender norms, yet they couldn't keep away the images of how pretty Paige looked with her new bob-cut.

It took some time to learn how to break from the character that her family expected her to play. No matter how passionate she is for acting, the role was never a comfortable fit for her. A slave to the arts, they call her, as she works countless hours to leave one song for someone,

anyone, to hear, no matter how quiet it may feel. If just one person can read her work or listen to her song and believe they can conquer the world with nothing but their mind, then her job has been completed.

Part 2: A New Motto

"Long live anarchy, with the added insanity of living long enough to celebrate 14 birthdays. Dealing with new and old friends alike, 'eating the rich' and maintaining absolutely no peace."
-Jade, 2020

This quote, however, became their favorite; the favorite of those she now thanks for an entirely new identity.

Perhaps now it is time to look from a different point of view.

Part 3: Jade in the present

I met the two worst things that have happened to me exactly 7 years ago. One dragged me down, and the other was my shoulder to cry on, as I was hers. Over the past three years, I learned that both of them are to thank and to blame for the mess I have become. I'm the end. The first heightened my low standards in people. The other pulled herself down with me in all her attempts to help, which made me wonder if I was worth all the trouble.

Over the past seven years I have learned that family is something you choose and sometimes family are the people who don't drag you up, but the ones who keep you grounded. The ones who love you the most are not the ones who pump you up to do anything; they are the ones who are honest and critique you to perfection. And over the last fourteen years, I have learned that I am still essentially the same person. A change in narration doesn't necessarily guarantee a change in character.

Seniasbel Arocho, Graduate 2019

Grief After Death

Destin Williams, Grade 11

april 12th, 2019. this entire upcoming week is supposed to feature nothing but rainy days, gray skies and the soft or hard pitter patters of rain meeting concrete. but all i can imagine is cerulean blue skies with clouds...rolling across the heavens with no destination in particular. all i can imagine is soft winds arching the green stems of a flower, pulling the petals of dandelions... and you. where is your destination, i wonder.

september 3rd, 2019. this feels wildly different. one would rather cautiously dip their toes when exposing themselves to something new, like testing the waters of a bath just drawn. patience is a virtue, or so i have been told - and still, the purported laws of human evolution are constantly disregarded in the face of death. That night the clock struck twelve, an artificial invention, and life did not return to your body. you were dead before then. he made sure of it. he said the devil made him do it. does the devil wield more power than god?

september 4th, 2019. i count the stars at night knowing you're one of them. we all must return to the earth one day. we all come and go, soft as birds gliding with the wind. i look up toward a dark ceiling, and my eyesight blurs against the ombre of black. i am taken to some other place. the voices beyond my door, voices which are familiar and initially distinct, are now much further. i'm sorry life dealt you that card.

september 12th, 2019. colder weather's coming. with its arrival, the day of your death comes closer. i know not where you are. i know not if you're several worlds above me or below me... but sometimes when i'm outside, a certain wind passes my face, and all that comes to mind is you. you won't be needing a new coat to withstand the breezes of autumn. you won't be needing new sneakers to crunch the architecture of decrepit leaves for you are now with them. you're where you were supposed to go.

september 13th, 2019. the volume of the evening bugs with their all too common chirps are low, but i know as the night progresses, so will their noise level. as i pen these words, i find myself undergoing an overwhelming sensation of all things bittersweet. how far we've come from the beginning of the year, yet everything feels so close. i was just wishing you merry christmas. i was hoping for you to have an easy transition into the new year. i had not realized that you were dead, with at least 35 stab wounds to the back.

october 4th, 2019. good afternoon. too many of my tears have been wasted on an empty tomb that wasn't always empty. it was once filled to the brim with the prettiest of flowers and a vibrancy of colors. oftentimes i wish the roles were reversed. oftentimes i wish it was my father who killed me. but what would that change? there will still be a grieving family and a friend who wants their friend back. but it'll sure alleviate all of this guilt i have. this guilt of living a day longer than you. this guilt of having a body that is still powered by its dreams. this guilt of being happy, of being sad, of being angry and confused. did you struggle in math like i do? do i hate getting up in the morning so early for school as much as you did? did you laugh with your friends like we do? we're all so similar and yet so different. we all have bits and pieces of souls. their emanations left by time.

october 7th, 2019. i'm sorry. ever since i found out about your death, all i can seem to make out of it are sad stories. i feel all i'm reducing you to is words on paper. that is no way to honor you. but i can't visit your grave. this will be the first spring you've missed. the first summer you've missed. the first autumn and soon to be a second winter. in all the days that have passed, in all the times that the heavens were blessed with pretty colors, it missed your eyes.

november 5th, 2019. i close my eyes and i picture empty fields. a soft wind entices short blades of grass into a short-lived dance before they assume their motionless position; an idle, docile way to live. clouds roll over the heavens to a destination unknown, to a land untouched. this year, i learned that energy can transfer at any moment. regardless of its alignment, it always ricochets back to the earth. in another life, i would like to be more than i am now.

december 18th, 2019. there is no one sadder than i am. beneath frequent elation and underneath the surface of pragmatic emotions lays an unshakable dejected trait. adrenaline dies and from the embers of my heart, i can never be truly happy. this year, people, places, ideas and concepts have been pried from my hands. this year, i thank god that i have lived so long, and i thank god i don't have to live forever.

march 11, 2020. i've really abstained from doing these, haven't i? sorry. whenever i think of you, all i can do is pull up a photo of you and cry. i miss too many people to have a level head right now.

They say if you truly want to know yourself, look at your 5 closest friends

Jada Williams, Grade 12

My closest 5 friends all bring something different to the table. My relationship with each and every one of them is not only authentic but important. Here's to the 5 people who helped me blossom through the years.

Lismary, I appreciate your sensitivity. I love how open we are with each other. I love that we're able to talk about our problems and give each other solutions on how to fix them. In the beginning, it was just us two. We were friends with Kiara and Destin at the time, but it really felt like it was just us two. We connected on a level that most people long for. I hope as the years go by, you take my advice by staying focused and not being deterred from your goal. I wish you the best of luck.

Tiyana, you know I appreciate you more than you'll ever know. You were the first friend I made here at Co-Op and ever since then we've gotten so close. I love how I'm able to tell you something without feeling judged. I love how we're able to make up after arguments. I love how much we get on each other's nerves. I want to say thank you for showing me how friends are supposed to treat you. Thank you for being there when I needed to vent. Thank you for not getting tired of me and putting up with my BS daily. I hope our friendship lasts for as long as it can. I know you'll excel in anything you do. I know you're not one to immediately give up and for that I hope you have an abundant amount of success. I love you forever.

Destin, you are seriously the funniest person I know. Thank you for making me laugh during the times I felt down. Thank you for opening up to me and telling me about some of your personal struggles. I think that's where we bond the most. We share some of the same struggles and for that we understand each other. Thank you for being the light of the friendship between Kiara, Lismary, you, and I. I know you said that college isn't your thing, but just know that you're smarter than you think. I know for sure you'll prosper in anything you decide to do. I'm here for you always.

RJ, you are certainly the craziest out of us all but you're also the funniest. I love how we met just last year but it feels like I've known you since the beginning. I love how open spirited you are. You aren't afraid to have fun and that's what I love most about you. You're so easy to get along with, you're so easy to love. I love hanging out with you, not only do you crack me up, but you inspire me. You inspire me to be more open. You inspire me to come out of the shell I've been living in and start living life more freely. Although I'm graduating this year, I promise to come back and see you whenever I can. Stay focused, RJ.

Kiara, thank you for coming to me when you needed someone to talk to. Thank you for being there when I needed someone to talk to. We have our disagreements, but I value our friendship. I think it's good to have a friend who doesn't always agree with you, it gives you a different perspective on things. Thank you for being someone who matches my spiritual animal. Thank you for not using my personal struggles against me. Thank you for empowering me when I belittle myself. Keep going to church, stay focused and always remember I'm only a text away if you need me.