

JOSHUA WEINZWEIG  
**REVIEW**  
OF WRITING



Joshua Weinzweig was born in Toronto in 1973 and enrolled at Pickering College in Grade Eight. He spent the next five years as a student at PC. At first he didn't like it here, but—after a time—he began to thrive. He made many friends and soon excelled at his schoolwork. He was Chair of his House, made the Headmaster's List on several occasions, and learned to love Chaucer and Shakespeare. Josh cultivated a love of language, composing short stories and poems that leapt out of his rich imagination.

As ever, Pickering College would like to thank Daniel Weinzweig for his generous support, without whom the Joshua Weinzweig Creative Writing Program would not be possible.

THE JOSHUA WEINZWEIG MEMORIAL LITERARY AWARDS  
&  
*THE REVIEW OF WRITING*

Students whose work is published in Pickering College's *Review of Writing* are eligible to win the Joshua Weinzweig Literary Awards. At the end of each school year, the English Department selects three winners from each grade: one for distinction in prose fiction; one for distinction in poetry; and one for its creative literary merit, regardless of genre. Notably, the winner in each category is acknowledged in this publication, receives a certificate of acknowledgement, and is rewarded a small, cash prize.

The process: all students submit writing to their English classroom teacher who considers its literary merit and degree of creative and critical thinking. After considering the quality of the submission, the English classroom teacher may forward it to the Director of the Joshua Weinzweig Creative Writing Program. The key objective is to provide a forum for Middle and Senior School Pickering College students to publish their writing. Editors try to establish a fair balance between providing opportunity to young writers and a reasonably high degree of quality for readers.

At Commencement, one graduate is chosen to receive the Joshua Weinzweig Memorial Literary Award. This student has demonstrated the highest quality of creative writing among his or her peer group, distinguishing him or herself through his or her dedication to the craft of writing and artful use of language.

This year we couldn't choose just one. The two co-winners of the Joshua Weinzweig Memorial Literary Award for 2018-2019 have both been published many times over the years in the *Review of Writing*. Both are dedicated and—as you'll read for yourself—both are extremely talented.

The first recipient, Celeste Castelino, writes with a unique sense of humour she uses to full advantage. Her satirical voice jars the reader loose from this beautifully fluent prose, then shoe-horns you back in for the next go-around. Three of her pieces have been included: her Harry Potter fanfiction piece "Adventures in the Muggle World: Ronald Weasley and the Man Who Fell Out the Window"; her free-verse homage to the renaissance poem "Isabella"; and her critical review entitled "The Umbrella Academy is Weird... and That's Okay".

Equally impressive is co-winner Leonora "Lili" Strawbridge, who tends to leverage her powers of vivid sensory imagery and strong sense of character. She weaves an imaginary—yet extremely tangible—world around a small collection of individuals who reverberate with authenticity. Included in this anthology are three of her pieces: an excerpt from her creative non-fiction, biographical piece "Coming Home"; the feminist poem "Pandora"; and her personal, satirical essay (heavily laced with identity politics) "Imposter".

TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

**Celeste Castelino**, 2018-2019 co-winner of the Joshua Weinzweig Memorial Literary Award

“Adventures in the Muggle World: Ronald Weasley and the Man  
Who Fell Out the Window” ..... 6

“Isabella” ..... 8

“The Umbrella Academy is Weird... and That’s Okay” ..... 9  
*Winner of the Joshua Weinzweig Literary Merit Award, Grade 12*

**Leonora Strawbridge**, 2018-2019 co-winner of the Joshua Weinzweig Memorial Literary Award

“Coming Home” ..... 11

“Pandora” ..... 13  
*Winner of the Joshua Weinzweig Poetry Contest, Grade 12*

“Imposter” ..... 14

**Sarah Asgari** “IT” ..... 17

**Sasha Au Yong** “Opening the Cage Door” ..... 19

**Phillip Carson** “Clipped Wings Never Recover” ..... 20

**Aidan Cook** “The Gamble” ..... 21  
*Second-Place Winner of the Canadian Federation of University Women Writing Contest*

**Julianna Cook** “The New Recruit” ..... 22  
*Winner of the Joshua Weinzweig Flash Fiction Contest, Grade 10*

**Ugboaja Chizobam Stephany** “My Virtual Reality” ..... 24  
*The Global Leadership Essay Contest: Winning Submission from Nigeria*

**Jenna Farmer** “Hallway Medicine” ..... 26

**Luc Forbes** “The Call” ..... 28  
*Published in the 2019 InCITE Anthology of Student Writing*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

**Luc Forbes** “The Loudest Voices” ..... 29  
*Winner of the Joshua Weinzweig Poetry Contest, Grade 9*

**Vanessa Gardner** “Beyond Boundaries” ..... 30

**Cindy Guo** “Pages 8/8” ..... 31

**Josie Hadden** “What an Embarrassment” ..... 35

**Peter He** “The Journey” ..... 37

**Hajer Hussein** “Neon-Pink Lipstick” ..... 38

**Daniel Jiang** “Piano Man” ..... 39  
*Winner of the Joshua Weinzweig Creative Non-Fiction Contest, Grade 11*

**Jaide Johnson** “Trail Mix” ..... 41

**Justin Kim** “Thrive Through Drought” ..... 43

**Sofiiia Kovtun** “The Taste of France” ..... 44  
*The Global Leadership Essay Contest: Winning Submission from the Ukraine*

**Hillary Krofchak** “Night in the Woods” ..... 45  
*Second-Place Winner of the InCITE Student Writing Contest, Grade 11 and 12 Category*

**Defne Kürüm** “Do They Reflect Reality?” ..... 47  
*The Global Leadership Essay Contest: Winning Submission from Turkey*

**Patrick LeClaire** “The One God, and the Other God” ..... 48  
*Winner of the Joshua Weinzweig Flash Fiction Contest, Grade 12*

**Kyu Hun Lee** “NieR: Automata - Aft[e]r YoRHa” ..... 49

**Ethan Liu** “Blue Monday” ..... 50

**Holly Liu** “The Next Day” ..... 51

**Avery Maclachlan** “Relevé” ..... 53  
*Winner of the Joshua Weinzweig Literary Merit Award, Grade 10*

**Scott McLeod** “Back Then” ..... 55  
*Winner of the Joshua Weinzweig Poetry Contest, Grade 10*

---

 TABLE OF CONTENTS
 

---

<b>Michaela Morra</b> “True Confessions” .....	56
<i>Winner of the Joshua Weinzweig Flash Fiction Contest, Grade 9</i>	
<b>Anastasia Moskaltova</b> “The Children Were Alone” .....	58
<b>Huy Anh Nguyen</b> “The Zone of Alienation” .....	59
<i>The Global Leadership Essay Contest: Winning Submission from Vietnam</i>	
<b>Khoa Nguyen</b> “A Voiceless Odyssey” .....	60
<b>Yagmur Ozturk</b> “It was the Sea that Washed Untold Feelings Ashore” .....	62
<i>Winner of the Joshua Weinzweig Literary Merit Award, Grade 11</i>	
<b>Madeleine Rickman</b> “Diligence Amidst Debris” .....	63
<b>Georgia Saarimaki</b> “Lady Liberty and Her Twins” .....	64
<i>Winner of the Joshua Weinzweig Literary Merit Award, Grade 9</i>	
<b>Maaryah Salyani</b> “International Year of The Periodic Table” .....	65
<i>Winner of the Illustrated Poetry Contest</i>	
<b>Branden Singer</b> “Brothers” .....	66
<b>Rayi Singh</b> “Amira, See for Yourself” .....	68
<i>Winner of the Joshua Weinzweig Poetry Contest, Grade 11</i>	
<b>Nelson Squires</b> “This City is a City of Danger” .....	69
<b>Kathy Wang</b> “Pianist” .....	70
<b>Michael Wang</b> “Fröhliche Weihnachten” .....	71
<b>Kirsten Yip</b> “The Beauty of a Brown-Eyed Doe” .....	73
<b>Tyler Yue</b> “All That Has Happened” .....	74

ADVENTURES IN THE MUGGLE WORLD:  
RONALD WEASLEY AND THE MAN WHO FELL OUT THE WINDOW

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*Excerpt from Fanfiction piece by Celeste Castelino, Grade 12*

"Weasley, Ronald Weasley sir."

"Ah right, Wessssly of course we were expecting you. Shall I show you to your cubicle?"

"Uh it's pronounced Weeesly sir, and I remember being promised an office with a window."

"Yes I believe that's what I said."

Ronald Weasley, a fine young man, all things considered. A loveable human with perhaps a tad too much ginger hair.

"Which exactly were you referring to, sir? The name or the glass pane?"

"Very amusing. Now if you'll just follow me."

Loyal, passionate, generous, caring, underappreciated—his mother wished he was a girl. No defining skills or abilities. Sort of plain. Prefers woolly sweaters and hats that clash with his hair... a fine person altogether, when you look past his trivial efforts to measure up to his family's expectations. But today was going to be different. Today Ronald Bilius Weasley was going to be upgraded from "fine" to an "exemplary" addition to humanity. Today the world would be glad to know of the fine Weasley heritage, and its importance in the world. Today Weasley would be rotating the wheels of the economy. One of the unnoticed but consequential gears that rotated the cogs of capitalism. One greenish-brownish hand-me-down loafer in front of the other. The path to success would open up for the young (not-so-young) man with his pristine corduroy blazer (for he was a new man now and needed to prove it to the world, not just himself) and trousers. There wasn't really anything special about those. They fulfilled their function. They went where he went, and held his musty, mustard coloured shirt in place. Nothing magical or distinct about them.

The supposed hero of this story followed the short man. Well, short is a bit of an understatement. Shall we say... about the height of a goblin? Really, it was as if Ronald wasn't following anyone at all. It was as if he could traverse the path of his corporate future all on his own. Past the fabric, metal blend of cubicle walls, past the infamous coffee machine that made coffee that tastes like coffee, past the photocopier machine that hated everyone (he swore he could almost hear the insults bleeping through the string of error-alerts the machine spat at the technicians, trying to calm it down), past another cubicle, and another, and another, etc., so on and so forth. And onto the climax of his journey, a minimalist show of ownership for Ronald's workstation greeted them. Comic Sans font, size 11, "Roonil Wazlib [enter] Employee," duct taped to the side of one of three grey walls. Identical to all the others in the workspace. His own little cubicle. No window included.

The short human gestured proudly to the confined void of grey and black that would produce Weasley's contributions to society. The table was grey. The chair was grey. Pretty much everything was grey except for a few measly crumbs of earth left over from a potted plant that once belonged to the previous poor soul who inhabited the telemarketer position. Ignoring the

ADVENTURES IN THE MUGGLE WORLD:  
RONALD WEASLEY AND THE MAN WHO FELL OUT THE WINDOW

*Excerpt from Fanfiction piece by Celeste Castelino, Grade 12*

misspelt name, the absence of a window and the sheer lack of life in that little place, Ronald pursued his hopeful disposition. Besides, this was to be a momentous day and anything worth knowing always involved a touch of strife. If this was to be his kingdom, the worst that could be lacking would be a comfy throne. His pants creased as he assumed the charcoal-coloured roly chair behind the lava-coloured desk.

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*artwork by Sydney Uglow, Grade 12*

## ISABELLA

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*by Celeste Castelino, Grade 12*

Harsh lines: taut and unruly,  
 Pith in societal exposition.  
 An un-alabaster-like mineral  
 Fragmented in rouge.

A chameleon secluded in filth,  
 The feces and sickness  
 Fugitive to Rialto.  
 Shackled by broom and apron.

Lords leisure in their apartments.  
 Rivers of red flow down their throats  
 And fallen Isabellas  
 Lay heavy at their feet.

Her swollen breasts throb in silent agony,  
 Her rags slack a voluptuous corpse.  
 "Unhinge thy turbulent ire upon me,  
 For I am a belladonna of sadness."

*A Note from the Author...*

'Isabella' is a free-verse poem that sheds light on the harsh realities and living standards of young prostitutes in the Renaissance Era. Throughout the poem, there are multiple historical allusions to early Renaissance Italy, which relate to various themes affecting a young woman's everyday life. Through mostly a feminist voice, the poem explores the rigid class structure, men's mistreatment of women and the unsanitary living conditions plaguing society. The title itself alludes to one of the most documented courtesans of Renaissance-era Rome. While she had the benefit of a luxurious life, the young woman in this poem is viewed as one society's downtrodden. This time period literally translates to "rebirth"; however, the grittiness of the language and the poem's themes outwardly contradict this notion, targeting the disturbing idea that prostitution shouldn't be "sugar-coated" or embellished, especially in the poorer regions. The first stanza introduces the ragged complexion of a young girl who has most likely lost her virginity. Intuitively, one would think she should be glowing with rebirth, yet it is eventually revealed that her well-being and worth has no value in her partner's eyes. She clearly has been discarded due to her pregnancy or limited beauty. The woman is a "chameleon"; she blends into different parts of society, but beneath all the "rouge", she is an overlooked servant. In comparison, the "lords" are the toast of society and live their lives in the lap of luxury. The poem also suggests that they do not suffer the consequences of impregnating young servant girls and seem to drain their life force or force them to sacrifice their positions in society. Moreover, the vulgar use of the word "feces" awakens the reader from a more lofty prose to signify the filth and grit of the world. "Belladonna" is used as a pun in the very last stanza. While directly translating to "beautiful lady" in Italian, it also pokes at the use of *Atropa belladonna*—or deadly nightshade—which is used as a poison. The ending hints at her supposed suicide, but perhaps it could also represent her unknown future with other men. In essence, this poem presents the perception that woman are still subject to abuse in today's society, and that what they suffered in the past and continue to suffer today is disgusting and inhumane.

## THE UMBRELLA ACADEMY IS WEIRD...AND THAT'S OKAY

*Critical Review by Celeste Castelino, Grade 12*

If *The Umbrella Academy* had a recipe, it would go something like this: One quarter cup of dysfunctional family drama. A pinch of black comedy. Half a pound of young children with superhero abilities, two teaspoons of time travel, one robot mother, one talking ape and the essence of an imminent apocalypse. A lot of drugs, a lot of alcohol, a lot of knives, a lot of dead people, 43 spontaneous and simultaneous pregnancies and a box of donuts to go on the side. Preheat the oven to just 600°C past the meaning of sanity. Bake for about eight years—just enough time for a dance break to Tiffany's *I Think We're Alone Now*. Remove and enjoy.

*The Umbrella Academy* is the “new kid on the block” to the Netflix streaming platform, but instead of taking a left at the street of your more reserved superhero tropes, it goes rocketing down the rabbit hole of plain old strange... and maybe that's why it's so good. The new streaming series strolled onto viewers' screens in mid-February with all the madness and mayhem of *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency*. Similar to its predecessor in downright strange and sometimes loony, the series charms hearts with stellar screenwriting and movie-like visual effects. Its use of black comedy and unconventional characters makes it a welcome break from familiar Marvel and DC comic superhero tropes that are scarce in Gerald Way and Gabriel Bá's original comics. The series creators Steve Blackman and Jeremy Slater, hold nothing back when coming to its unique stylistic nuances and outlandish plot arcs. This show is bold and not afraid to push the boundaries of its genre but despite its refreshing out-of-the-ordinary storytelling, its *watchability* falls short on more than one occasion, due to its utter disregard for pacing.

What is to be the fate of the world when an apocalypse is on the horizon and the only capable people standing in between imminent doom is a broken family with a tad too much melodrama? This exact question hangs over the heads of thousands of viewers following the sardonic tale of the misfit band of brothers and sisters, a part of the Umbrella Academy. Time-travelling and old men in the bodies of young boys, weigh in when the fifth brother of their band of seven falls through a rip in the fabric of space and time after missing for so many years—looking not a day older than when he was first gone. Originally the crime fighting squad were brought together by an eccentric and wealthy entrepreneur who sought to train his young wards to use their abilities for good. However, it's too little too late when Number 5 returns to the present to get help from his other siblings as their personal lives have decayed them into emotional wrecks in skin suits. With a pair of time travelling hitmen on the loose and a death sentence for the world, the “superheroes” must look past their miserable existences and save the world... or something like that.

The *godfathers* of the show, Blackman and Slater, are relatively learned in the realm of strange and abnormal, as they collectively have experience from titles such as *Legion*, *Fantastic Four* (2015), *The Exorcist* (2016), *Fargo*, *Outsiders* and *Altered Carbon*. FX's *Legion* dances along the fine boundaries of the comic book genre, similar to *The Umbrella Academy*, poking questions at the more traditional nature of comic book superheroes such as the X-Men. According to critics, its bout of cynicism and exploration of realistic themes makes for the perfect dose of

## THE UMBRELLA ACADEMY IS WEIRD...AND THAT'S OKAY

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*Critical Review by Celeste Castelino, Grade 12*

approval and originality. Perhaps this unconventional, roundabout way of manufacturing superheroes is exactly what Blackman and Slater sought for in the production of their new show. Not-so-golden boys Klaus, played by Robert Sheehan, and Number 5, played by Aiden Gallagher, take this to heart in their performance, resulting in their ability to steal the soul of every shot they're in. That, their rich source material and grand budget are all the ingredients needed for potential greatness.

On the flip side, the inability of the plot to move forward at certain times twangs at your heart strings. It's sort of like a 10-hour movie...there's an amazing fight scene with stunning visual effects that makes your hair stand on end to the tempo of an upbeat tune, such as They Might Be Giants' *Istanbul* and then a period of lull with the budding romance between Hazel, played by Cameron Britton, and the donut lady, played by Sheila McCarthy. The series might just have gotten a bit too weird here especially with casting choices. No chemistry between the two whatsoever. The only addition their romance brought to the show was viewers' cravings for a donut.

What do characters like Spiderman, Ironman, Batman and Superman have in common? For the answer, feel free to consult a list of popularized superhero tropes. "With great power comes great responsibility," but what if those with power wanted nothing more than to continue down the winding path to self-destruction? How could you fix the world if you can't even fix your own life? If you didn't know already, the world isn't all happy-go-lucky. It's comforting to see in our media and traditional methods of storytelling that everyone is essentially going through the same thing. That's exactly what's at the heart of *The Umbrella Academy*. In all its ridiculousness and comic book lunacy, that's what we get. Marvel and DC's uplifting bouts of hope and perseverance are fine, but sometimes you need just that pinch of cynicism to get through the day. Being weird makes *The Umbrella Academy* original and it's nice to know that it can't get much worse than teleporting yourself fifty years into the future and living out your days as a hitman in a relationship with a shop mannequin.

## COMING HOME

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*Excerpt from a biographical piece by Leonora Strawbridge, Grade 12*

To Katharine Emerson Parsons, France was the aroma of freshly cut bread and pastries emanating from a local *pâtisserie*. It was the uneven cobblestone roads that twisted and turned through bustling streets that split off into back roads. It was aimlessly walking through those back roads that felt like discovering a hidden city, filled with quaint cafés and beautiful clothing stores ideal for window-shopping. It was the luxurious, elegant, yet experimental women's fashion of the 1960s in France. It was her mother's perfume, the smell of women's powder, and her father's navy uniform. It was a place full of romance and beauty that she yearned to return to even after 60 years.

But my mother's childhood years in France were not just about the allure and charm of it all. It was also all of the trouble she got into and mischief she got away with that just happened to take place in a beautiful country. Of course, those make the best stories—but she is also the first to point out a shade of blue on a shirt and say, "this is such a French blue" and reminisce about scents that remind her of France. To her, those reminders are a throwback to times that no longer exist. Times that she can only show me through what is left behind for her.

While her time there was undoubtedly eventful, as she grew up, it became clearer that what really stuck was the beauty that France imparted on her that she would later wish to impart on me. As she began to tell her stories in no particular order—often forgetting to finish her sentences in her enthusiasm—I felt myself being pulled back in time to the streets of Paris to a time that one only learns about in history textbooks. She retold all of the stories of her time then. Among them, I caught brief glimpses of the beauty and simple joys of France through her eyes....

...In the 1960s, Charles de Gaulle became president and his nationalistic intentions for his country came off as very anti-American to the French and to immigrants such as the Parsons family. As a result, Katharine was required to assimilate into French culture quickly and inconspicuously to avoid being ostracized. Oddly, it was because of this fear that she was forced to learn French fluently in mere months.

Her parents, likely knowing the value of education, sent Katharine to "École Internationale de L'Otan"—more commonly known as "Shape International School". As the name suggests, it was meant to "shape" international students, and it did just that. However, for Katharine it wasn't through their education system. The school was strict, almost militaristic, as if "fun" wasn't part of the curriculum whatsoever. Even still, she reminisces about the beauty of the purple ink and the smooth rhythm the dip pens had as they slid over paper when they wrote in class. It seemed to be partially thanks to Shape International that Katharine developed so much pride in being left-handed, which, in the 60s, often resulted in schools forcing children to switch. To this day, she still remembered one poor Dutch boy in her class who suffered the psychological consequences of being unwillingly forced to write only right-handedly. By the end of the year, he was stuttering. Even now, she doesn't know if he ever recovered from it.

Somehow, Katharine had escaped these restraints and never changed her dominant

## COMING HOME

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*Excerpt from a biographical piece by Leonora Strawbridge, Grade 12*

hand, giving her a sense of pride in her (demographically) unique trait and the feeling that she was, in her own way, rebelling against the system.

It was also at Shape International that a couple of French boys broke her arm during recess. As she walked across a long wooden board that was laid down over a ditch, the two boys flipped it over. Katharine fell. This was especially unfortunate timing since she had a calligraphy test afterwards that she could not avoid or escape.

"Parsons," the teacher said in slow, authoritative voice and a slight rasp that the French often put on the "r" to sound especially aggressive. "*S'asseoir.*"

He told her to sit.

In the meantime, her sister Sarah knew that her arm was broken, so she called their father over the phone. It did not take long for him to arrive. He stepped just inside the classroom door wearing his full navy uniform, his badges glinting over his heart and the formidable aura of an army man swallowing the room whole—except Katharine. To this day, she remembers that moment fondly, but to her it was a bittersweet experience. "That was the only time Daddy ever came to my rescue."

Katharine grew up learning how to fend for herself when no one else would. Growing up post-war was both a relief but also an upsurge of consequences. In France, Algerian terrorism was very common along with student and worker riots. Old grudges and prejudices from the war were being passed down to children, causing fights among the post-war generation who saw only the aftermath of war. Katharine was not a stranger to them. As a child with an insatiable curiosity and thirst for adventure, she often found herself in predicaments that she had to figure out on her own—but that was part of the thrill. Even foraging through the forest for hazelnuts with friends would later prove to be dangerous as they happened upon an underground bunker placed out of sight from civilians. As any child would, they approached it, only to be chased away by someone that my mother likes to fondly remember as "being an Algerian terrorist". It was around this time that my mother's streak of mischief began. Whether intentional or not, it was a habit that would stay with her for the rest of her life....

PANDORA

*by Leonora Strawbridge, Grade 12*

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What a pretty box you have there,  
Can I take a peek inside?  
Adorned with gold, lace-like, intertwined  
Along a pure black coat, so pristine  
A single touch would defile it.  
So alluring, so tempting  
Can I force it open?

My pretty box, locked and sealed  
I hold it tightly, tenderly with care;  
It feeds off people's thoughts, more each day,  
But my hands are too small,  
And my arms are too weak,  
So it weighs  
Upon my shoulders.

What a large box you have there,  
What do you hide inside?  
Adorned with tarnished gold, vine-like, choking,  
Growing at relentless speeds, swallowing  
And locking everything inside.  
So mysterious, so puzzling—  
Can you let me in?

My pretty box has begun to crack;  
The golden vines writhing and spreading  
To consume me whole;  
Truly, an amalgamation of sins and sorrows.  
Once again, I am reminded how  
Atlas held the heavens,  
On his shoulders  
Alone, too.

This pretty box of mine ravages and erodes  
Any love that may still remain  
For ourselves and for others,  
Crushing me with the weight  
Of pure loathing and anguish.  
Like a festering wound  
To hide from prying eyes.

What a pretty box you have there,  
May I hold it with you?  
Its vines may cut me, its gold may tarnish me,  
But it cannot be carried alone.  
It is okay to fall, to be  
Delicate, and broken.  
Please, free it all.

So I opened my pretty box to the world  
And the abyssal depths of my burdens  
Flooded out, like crashing waves against rock;  
A darkness so dense it would drown those  
Who stared for too long, a black hole  
In which there was no surface to rise above,  
But finally, I could breathe.

My breath was an explosion,  
A war cry to the heavens,  
To remind the gods—I am a dog that bites.  
And now the whole world would learn  
To bear their own burdens  
That I had been holding on  
My shoulders for so long.

## IMPOSTER

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by Leonora Strawbridge, Grade 12

Ever since I was young, I've shown close to zero interest in my Chinese culture or language. Sure, I took classes when I was three, but I was there for the delicious homemade dumplings, not to learn how to count to ten or recite all the colours of the rainbow. It's embarrassing to admit, but even my American adoptive mother speaks more Chinese than I do, and *I am Chinese*. Of course, I didn't grow up around other Asian kids, so I often felt like an imposter, as if I didn't have a right to call myself Chinese. Other than the fact that I'm ambidextrous with chopsticks and love pork dumplings, I've always been as detached from my heritage as a person can be. For example: I have a Chinese middle name that I can't even pronounce. How ironic is that?

My identity crisis became apparent to me in middle school when I was confronted with an issue: I called it my own personal "Asian Invasion". It felt like, all of a sudden, Chinese people were everywhere and there was no escape for me. I would have to learn how to blend in with them if I wanted to survive as an imposter among 1.4 billion "real" Chinese citizens.

For the most part, I successfully managed to avoid social interactions that led to the inevitable question of "so...are you *really* Chinese?" or, even more directly, just jumping right into Mandarin. It wasn't until Grade 9 or 10 when a new Chinese girl approached me in art class that my horrendous, Chinese-specific social habits began to develop. She watched me draw for a while—which mind you, was already stressing me out enough—and then asked me a question. I can't even begin to describe what she actually said to me because I don't want to sound racist—but I didn't understand a word of it. A few options were available to me:

1. Admit that I didn't understand her because I don't speak Mandarin.
2. Pretend to understand her and risk looking incredibly stupid OR looking like I actually speak the language, which would lead to further issues down the road.
3. Run?

Of course, I chose the second option, as any awkward person would do. This was a lose-lose situation; I was going to look like an ignorant loser either way. My limited, undeveloped logic was telling me that she had asked a question, because I couldn't rationalize why she would be talking to me if it wasn't. My mind had somehow managed to Google-translate her Chinese into "What are you doing?" so I based my answer off an "educated guess". After a long-winded response, she let out a soft "ohhh" with an understanding nod and then walked away. I was left feeling more confused than ever. I started wondering if maybe I had understood her in some messed-up way, like I had just woken up my suppressed, inner Mandarin-speaker.

One could say that I was making situations like these more difficult than they needed to be. People usually go for the "simple solution" and ask, "Why don't you just learn Mandarin, then?" My response is also simple: "I'm lazy."

I mean, have you seen the language? It looks hard to speak, read, and write, plus there's traditional *and* simplified Chinese—whatever that means. It just sounds like a lot of extra work when I already struggle with English. It's not that I hate Mandarin, I just wished

## IMPOSTER

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by Leonora Strawbridge, Grade 12

people would stop assuming I speak it even when I talk to them in English. It was becoming an inescapable reminder that would haunt me no matter where I went. Even my Japanese class was made up of 95% Chinese kids. I'm bad at math, but that only leaves room for, like, one white kid. In this town, if you're a Westerner, you are now a minority. Congratulations.

In this predominantly-Chinese class, one of the first things a girl asked me—even before an introductory greeting—was, “Are you Canto or Mando?”

I thought, “What kind of cryptic question is this? Am I being tested?”

Yes. I was being tested, because now I had another language to deal with: Cantonese. Every time I asked a classmate for help with my Japanese homework, they would try to describe the characters to me in Cantonese. Once again, to avoid looking racist by writing something that is completely wrong, I'll include blanks because that is exactly what my mind does when I hear Chinese: pull blanks.

“You know how \_\_\_ is written in Canto right?” they'd explain by saying it out loud and drawing the character in the air.

I would say, “No, I don't know Cantonese.”

“Okay, so take that character and then add \_\_\_ to it.”

Stage 2: Initiate nervous laughter.

“No, seriously I don't know what that is—”

“Aw come on, you at least have to know \_\_\_”

A lot of my conversations went this way, but my loving friends never gave up on me. They believed I would eventually understand them if they just said it more. But of course, I never would.

Eventually, through my years of being an imposter, I became proficient at actually pretending to understand. In my after-school art classes, I was surrounded by Chinese people only: the teachers, the students, the parents, the little kids, even one of my best friends. At this point, I was convinced some divine force was laughing at my struggle. To this day, one of my classmates still believes that I speak Mandarin all because of one time when I guessed that the umbrella he was holding wasn't his after he told me in Chinese. Other “proof” he has against me is that I laugh along with them whenever they're speaking amongst each other.

“You wouldn't be laughing if you didn't understand,” he would say, looking me dead in the eyes as if trying to pressure the true Chinese in me to reveal itself.

“I'm just laughing because you guys are, seriously.”

“But you understand.”

“No, I don't, trust me. It's called being socially awkward.”

He seemed to relate to that, but decided that I was just hiding my true nature around other Chinese kids. This isn't true. I can assure anyone who meets me that I am socially awkward around *everyone*, regardless of where they're from.

Strangely, while all of these experiences are very uncomfortable for me, over the years I have acquired a *slight* interest in China's culture and language. I've begun to find it almost entertaining to listen to people speaking Chinese even when I don't have a clue what they're saying.

## IMPOSTER

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*by Leonora Strawbridge, Grade 12*

It's like listening to music for someone who knows nothing about the technical aspects of it. You have no idea how or why it sounds the way it does, but you don't care, because it sounds cool and—to a certain extent—you can listen to it while you work without it being too distracting.

My Chinese friends often ask if I find it bothersome when they speak around me even though I'm the only one who doesn't understand. Obviously, this doesn't annoy me since I find it fascinating to listen to, but even non-Chinese people have a difficult time understanding why I wouldn't find this offensive or bothersome.

During a basketball game at our school, some of the Chinese girls called to each other in Mandarin across the court. This was a completely normal occurrence. No one in our school would assume that they were talking trash or gossiping about someone on court, because they could do that just as easily in English. They were simply playing the game. Since I was the scorekeeper that day, I had the chance to talk with the referee.

He asked, "Do those girls speak English? They're Chinese, right?"

I said, "Those two? Yeah, they're Chinese. They go to school here, so they're proficient in English."

"So... doesn't it bother the rest of the team that they speak in Chinese, then? Doesn't it affect your teamwork?"

To me, this seemed like a crazy concept, but it was a good reminder that not everyone sees speaking different languages in an English-speaking country or school as "normal".

I told him, "No, not at all. Our school is used to hearing Chinese being spoken all the time! They speak it in class, in the halls... pretty much everywhere."

"But the rest of the team doesn't know what they're saying."

"That's true, but no one minds because we don't feel the need to know. It's normal."

Experiences like this remind me how fortunate I am to run into Chinese kids all the time. I have friends who—after being adopted from China—live in areas where seeing any trace of East Asian culture is extremely rare, so they are constantly yearning to talk to another Chinese person even if they can't fully relate. I've learned to appreciate my awkward encounters because Chinese kids here are the same way—they just want to connect with another person like them in a country that primarily speaks English. Oddly, Chinese people almost always assume that I'm Chinese too, even though there are many other nationalities I could be. Maybe they have some sort of sixth-sense that I'll develop later in life.

In this way, I'm beginning to connect to my culture—or, at least, the language. I've been slowly learning tidbits through each person I meet, either from listening to them talk about what it's like back home or telling me about their holiday traditions. I still feel like I shouldn't be calling myself Chinese, but no matter what I do, people will always assume I am. If you can't beat 'em, join 'em.

Regardless, I am a Chinese-Canadian at heart. Just not by blood. At the very least, I'm grateful I can still joke about stereotypes—such as being an Asian but being horrendous at math, or making edgy jokes about having small eyes. My own personal benefits of becoming a Chinese imposter.

## IT

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by Sarah Asgari, Grade 10

“Bev? Bev, I think it’s happening again.” Bev was expecting the words, had been for a while now. It was time.

“I know Bill.” Twenty-seven years had passed since the day the both of them witnessed the grotesque clown crawl back into the sewer, his sanctuary. Heading to bed, Beverly slipped her hand into Billy’s. Claspng tightly, Bill squeezed. He didn’t need to say anything; they both knew what was coming.

“Creeeeeaaaaakkkkkk,” Beverly bolted up, alarmed. For the past month-and-a-half, every little sound had been waking her, she practically slept with one eye open. Tiptoeing to the bathroom, Beverly muttered a little mantra on the way. The same mantra she found herself saying quite often nowadays.

“I’m going insane. I’m going insane. I am really going insane.”

Flicking on the switch, she looked at her reflection in the mirror—particularly at the thick, auburn locks that fell just below her chest, a length her father admired. It was time for a cut.

Lights flickering, Beverly froze, fear seeping into her pores. She could have sworn that, for a moment, it wasn’t her form staring back at her from the mirror. She didn’t have luminescent yellow eyes. Hers were a piercing green. As Beverly headed back to bed, she missed the twin, glowing-amber orbs gazing at her retreating form in the dark.

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Ever since Bill returned from Pennsylvania, he seemed... off. He was too... happy. No, that wasn’t the word. He was too bubbly. At one point he wouldn’t stop grinning, it looked painful. It was as if he really *couldn’t* stop.

“Are you okay?” asked Beverly.

Bill’s eyes darted to Bev’s. “Yeah I’m fine! Great!” he replied. “Okay well, ‘night.”

Beverly headed to the room, getting ready for bed. Resting in Bill’s arms that evening, Bev didn’t feel the sense of security she usually did. In fact, she felt terrified.

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“*Click, click, tap. Click, click, tap.*” Beverly once again found herself bolting awake. Too terrified to leave the bed, she lay there, covers up to her nose, and as far away from Bill as possible. Eventually she was lulled back to sleep by the silence.

Bev woke up two hours later, though this time it wasn’t from any sound originating from the blanket of black surrounding the bed, but rather her husband.

“Hickory Dickory Dock, The mouse ran up the clock, The clock struck one, the mouse ran down, Hickory Dickory Dock.” He kept repeating it again. And again. And again.

Bill was never a sleep-talker, Bev recalled. Something was *very* wrong. She needed to get out of this room.

Creeping her way out of bed, Beverly snuck downstairs, the darkness whispering to her along the way. “*Patter, pat. Patter, pat,*” came from the right. “*Crrruuunncchhh,*” came from

IT

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*by Sarah Asgari, Grade 10*

the left. And from behind, twin golden circles watched her every step. Nearly paralyzed with terror, she finally reached the kitchen. Beverly opened the fridge and helped herself to a glass of milk.

Turning around, she was face-to-face with a grinning clown, crudely done makeup, and fiery red hair. She recognized IT instantly. Looking for an escape, she dove backward only to be met with a... wall? No, standing behind Bev was her husband—his face stuck smiling that same, disturbing smile. And while Bill held his wife down at 1 AM, IT brandishing a dull kitchen knife and stalked toward her. The last thing Beverly Marsh saw before being murdered were a pair of glowing, yellow eyes.

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The next morning when Bill woke up, his wife was nowhere to be found. She had come to bed with him, he recalled, and as far as he could remember, laid in his arms all night. But there was no trace of Beverly Marsh in their house, and she was never seen again.

To this day, Billy Denbrough is still grinning.



*artwork by Isabella Tan, Grade 9*

## OPENING THE CAGE DOOR

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*by Sasha Au Yong, Grade 10*

A caged bird hops  
In the confines of his cage  
And gazes outside  
To an unknown world.  
It flaps its wings  
And pecks at the door,  
Until it slowly creaks open.

But the free bird that rests  
Up in his great oak tree  
Did not like the song  
Of the caged bird, now free,  
For his mind is proud  
And his wings are strong,  
So he takes to the sky to shriek.

The caged bird flutters  
With a desperate pace,  
But the gale was steady  
And the free bird gave chase  
As he owned the sky  
And flew with grace—  
For only he, alone, would fly  
And taste freedom.

The caged bird meets another strong blast,  
And the merciless cold wind whipped against him fast.  
His tired, clipped wings were heavy as stone—  
Still, he persists and faces the unknown.

The free bird looks upon a world now shared.  
His wings unleash a gust of rage;  
His beak is sharp and his mind is narrow,  
So he takes to the sky to shriek.

The caged bird flutters  
With a desperate pace,  
But the gale was steady  
And the free bird gave chase  
As he owned the sky  
And flew with grace—  
For only he, alone, would fly  
And taste freedom.

CLIPPED WINGS NEVER RECOVER

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*by Phillip Carson, Grade 10*

A free bird soars  
Throughout the sky,  
Through open doors  
Miles high—  
Parts the clouds  
To feel the sun on his breast  
And see the land of opportunity.

But a bird that trudges  
Through the mud of disparity  
Cannot reach  
The skies of prosperity;  
Years later, the tie that held his feet has snapped  
And his cage has fallen like the King,  
But clipped wings never recover.

The grounded bird cries,  
For it cannot glide  
Through the air  
With wings spread wide;  
His cry is heard  
But none replied,  
So he sits and sighs  
On the tree branch labeled "Adversity"

The free bird builds his quiet nest  
For his eggs to safely rest  
And waits for them to hatch,  
To grow and bloom like the tree on which he resides.

Sixty years have passed,  
And on his soul the horrors of his cage have  
been imprinted—  
But his world is still constricted  
By the Five-O of whom he has been convicted  
and depicted,  
But of whom he never resisted.  
Years later, the tie that held his feet has snapped  
And his cage has fallen like the King—  
But clipped wings never recover.

The grounded bird cries,  
For it cannot glide  
Through the air  
With wings spread wide;  
His cry is heard  
But none replied,  
So he sits and sighs  
On the tree branch labeled "Adversity"

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## THE GAMBLE

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*by Aidan Cook, Grade 12*

The message was clear, he didn't want us in there with him. He specifically told us to stay out here, and stay safe. But how could we sit here and let him risk his life? What kind of men would we be? Sitting here, watching him walk to almost certain death. We both knew full well that going towards that cloud of concrete dust and twisted metal was like calling "Hit me!" with two face cards on the table. I'm not a gambler, I always play it safe.

As we sat, more tremors shook the ground—vibrating our bones like a broken massage chair stuck on its highest setting. The man who had been a stranger to me until this day, brought together by the crumbling of our small town, sat quietly beside me. We both remained there fidgeting, our minds ready to run off after him, our legs absolutely useless underneath us. The man next to me reached out, offering a smoke, his hands shaking uncontrollably. I took it, and nodded a thank you. Our eyes met and in his face I saw the same longing I felt in myself. The want to go. The driving urge to get up and follow him. To not sit here like cowards. But we continued to sit in silence.

Inside our heads it was a different story. The vision of him walking up that path and disappearing into the trees wouldn't leave me, even when I closed my eyes. The vision was glued to the inside of my eyelids. The birds perched in the trees above, taunting us. Their piercing screeches tried to push us from our places, like a dog's bark herding sheep. Seconds felt like minutes, minutes felt like hours.

As we sat, I held the cigarette between my fingers, turning it over and over. I thought back to the day my mother caught that first whiff of burnt tobacco on my clothes. I smiled to myself, remembering that sharp smack to the back of the head—a pain I quickly grew accustomed to after the broken window, the missed curfews, the skipped classes. I also remembered her hug. The hug that made me feel whole, that showed how much she cared, the hug that showed compassion and love like no words ever could. I thought back to the car crash in senior year. She saw me in that hospital bed and the first thing she did was hug me. Nothing she could have said would've made me feel the way that hug did. That car crash should have killed me. The car was crumpled like a tin can run over by a transport truck. If I had've been alone on that road, I'd be dead. My best friend pulled me from my car that night. Kept me alive until help showed up. The man that I just let walk away is the reason I'm even here. He pulled me from that crumpled mess of a car, stayed with me, kept me alive. If I had've been alone on that road, I'd have been dead within minutes.

Now I sit here, letting him walk up his road, alone. A sharp shriek stabs from the birds above as I rise from my place. The man next to me remains, shaking like a leaf, frozen to his spot.

A rush of adrenaline rises within me. My legs solidify underneath me. I begin to walk down the path, following the vision of my friend. I pull a lighter from my pocket and spark the tobacco dangling between my lips. I take a couple slow pulls and toss the smoke to the ground. I begin to move faster down the path, memories rushing passed. The car crash, the vision of him pulling me out of that car. I run faster. The memory of him pulling the brute off me in that small town bar. I run faster. I take the gamble. Hit me.

## THE NEW RECRUIT

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by *Julianna Cook, Grade 10*

The old pine floorboards of the little Ranger cabin creaked softly in the dim morning light.

Maddie's eyes flickered open and she focused intently on the quiet noise from the other side of her bedroom door. She lay still and slowed her breathing until she picked up the sound. It came again, maybe a foot from her door. Barely audible, but the girl's training had taught her to prepare for everything.

Moving silently, Maddie sat up and swung her bare legs over the side of the single cot, slipping her feet into the soft deer-hide boots that sat beside her bed. The leather cushioned her steps and she quickly crossed the room.

Hanging beside her door was a small sheath made of oiled leather, bearing the Ranger insignia. The dagger inside had a long solid blade—sharp enough to cut a piece of meat in two. Maddie felt her shoulders rise slightly and the muscles in her back tighten with anticipation. She stood there in a plain white cotton shirt, the sleeves rolled loosely. Her boots hugged her feet. There was nothing on her legs, except for the white scar running down the length of her thigh. She held the dagger loosely in her left hand, and the other reached out slowly until her fingers wrapped around the cold handle of the door.

Maddie took a deep breath and tried to release the tight knots in her stomach. She gripped the handle tightly and whipped the bedroom door open, stepping to the side to stay behind cover. Nothing moved. Maddie peered around the door out into the dark cabin, and looked down. A small puppy with a brown, black and white coat. Its left eye shone like an emerald; green like the forests behind the cabin. The right eye was a bright, electric blue with white specks hanging like clouds around the iris. It gazed up at her with a happy smile. The puppy's head was cocked to the side, with one ear flopped over.

Maddie's shoulders dropped and the tight ball of tension unravelled in her stomach. She sighed and realized she had been holding her breath. "Ella! You almost gave me a heart attack, did you know that?" Maddie said, but she couldn't stop the grin from crossing her face. "Don't tell me you have to go outside." The puppy's head tilted to the other side, and its tail wagged softly back and forth across the floor.

Maddie came out of the bedroom with her cloak and made her way to the front door. Ella ran outside and down into the grass, enjoying the freedom. It rained last night. The air was moist and there was dew on the grass, causing a mist to flow across the ground. Maddie made her way to the lean-to at the side of the cabin where Bumper stood, drinking water out of a long wooden trough.

When Maddie came up to the little horse, he whinnied happily and started walking towards her.

His head turned suddenly towards the dirt road and he alerted Maddie that someone was coming. She looked to the left and saw a cloaked figure riding up to the cabin on a dappled gray horse, around the same size as Bumper. Maddie's face lit up. She recognized the rider.

## THE NEW RECRUIT

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*by Julianna Cook, Grade 10*

When Halt stepped down from the saddle, Maddie embraced him.

"Alright, alright, enough of that," Halt said gruffly, but as she stepped away she saw a small smile in the corner of his mouth.

Halt was a high-ranking Ranger and one of Maddie's favourite people in Araluen. The Ranger Corps is an elite group of people in charge of gathering information, diffusing threats, and special operations within the Kingdom. Maddie was selected to train two years prior and was the first girl in the history of the Ranger Corps.

Most people in Araluen are timid of Halt. He has a reputation for being tough—some would say impersonal; however, Halt had taken a liking to young Maddie, and genuinely enjoyed her presence, which brought them closer as Maddie got older.

"What brings you here?" Maddie asked curiously.

"Why don't we go inside to talk?" Halt replied, and Maddie noticed a change in tone from the warm greeting a few seconds before. She looked at the old man. His smile was gone now, replaced by a serious look in his eyes. Maddie then noticed a little more sag in his posture, a rougher cut to his beard, and a sense of exhaustion that took over his body. Her eyebrows turned down in a frown and a crease appeared on her forehead.

"Halt. It's 6:30 in the morning, what happened?"

Halt closed his eyes briefly while he gathered himself. "We really should sit for this, Maddie," he said, and she knew that something was wrong.

"Halt. Tell me what's going on."

He looked at her and she saw pity in his eyes. Maddie felt her stomach drop.

"It's your father."

## MY VIRTUAL REALITY

*by Ugboaja Chizobam Stephany, 16 years old*

I am attached to my phone. However detrimental this may be, this is as truthful as it gets. I am grateful for the access to information that Instagram provides. The connection is all very grounding.

If I had a ticket to anywhere in the world, I would visit Canada. Now that I think about it, my desire to visit the second-largest country in the world was born out of the hope that I may experience what is now termed “a glow up” by the “Generation Z” students. I want to “glow up.” Instagram, Snapchat, and good old WhatsApp have painted Canada as the place of beauty—in all senses of the word. It seems to have the perfect scenery for staged “candid” pictures, and everyone I know who has ever gone there for school always comes out more “beautiful”. Of course, this may be a figment of my imagination, but the possibility of perfection is too profound to ignore. Why do I want to visit Canada? Oh yes, I remember. I want to be beautiful—as Instagram has defined it.

In my too-frequent daydreams of what my life would look like when I finally move there, I see a girl I don't recognize. My skin takes on a different sheen that seems to glow from the inside. I can finally be a part of Instagram's #Bioluminescence challenge, without wondering if I look the part.

I see a life of Nike™ tracksuits, Adidas™ superstars, off-white™ hoodies, air pods and glorious iPhones. These are the components of my impending life in Canada. When my brother left for Mississauga, he insisted on getting an iPhone. A month later, he called to tell me of the ease that comes with owning an iPhone—his personal reminder and alarm clock. I pray that if I ever visit Canada, my new, materialistic life will have enough space for a conventional alarm clock and a pair of worn, faded jeans.

Money. I always imagine that when I am much older and living in Canada in my iPenthouse, I will be as wealthy as the “Crazy Rich Asians.” I do not have the will to imagine life otherwise. I have been told by the movies I watch that inhabitants of North America are always hardworking. Thus, in part of my daydream, I am the boss of a Fortune 500 company and on Forbes™ women with some investments in real estate.

“Goals.” Not long-term or short-term. It is a word used by social media fanatics and basic users to describe an ideal situation which is unanimously desirable to other people of the likes. It may be a joint “finsta” (fake Instagram account) or YouTube™ channel of best friends or a couple considered adorable. Couple goals, body goals, university goals, prom goals, family goals—you name it. In truth, Goals are ways of taking our minds off our own insecurities—the ones we pretend do not exist—all while striving for another's definition of perfection. Nevertheless, they are worth sharing with the world on your Instagram and Snapchat story. Bottom line is: Canada is the place to achieve your “goals”.

I do have my doubts. Doubts that are borne out of the fact that these pictures, ideologies and idiosyncrasies of Canadians and “Canadians” have been painted too perfectly to be true. Imagining life otherwise trails with it a hollow feeling of fear, that all that glitters may not be gold. Deep down in the recesses of the dreams I hope will never come true, I fear that I

## MY VIRTUAL REALITY

*by Ugboaja Chizobam Stephany, 16 years old*

will still look the same in the mirror. I may never be beautiful.

If the Canada of my daydreams and my Instagram does not exist in reality when I actually visit Canada, I will be disappointed. I would be sad, because I may never get to know the girl in my daydreams. In the long run, however, it would be a good thing: to never meet the robot girl. I will not be beautiful, too. Instead, I will be confident. I will define what makes me beautiful.

So, the reason I want to visit Canada? I need to know that there is more to the life and culture of its inhabitants than "Sit still, look pretty". I need to know that Canadian people feel insecure once in a while, when scathing comments are hurled at them. I need to know that all those pictures are real.

Even then, there has to be more.



*artwork by Eleanora Dong, Grade 11*

## HALLWAY MEDICINE

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*by Jenna Farmer, Grade 11*

We met on the subway. I just finished classes for the year, and I headed back to my apartment to rid myself of my heavy journalism textbooks. I entered the car and sat down in the nearest seat. A couple of seconds later, a man entered. He was attractive, but most notably, he was drenched with sweat. He rushed over towards me and stuck the crinkled page he was holding in front of me.

"You... dropped... this," he spat out between jagged-sounding breaths. I looked closer at the paper, grabbing it from him.

This complete stranger had just run—from what I could tell by his sweat—quite a distance to return class notes to me that I no longer needed. I didn't want to tell him that, so I decided to lie.

"Oh my gosh! Thank you so much! I need these for my final tomorrow," I said, taking the paper from him.

"No problem," he said awkwardly as he turned away from me, obviously not wanting to stick around and seem like a creep.

"Hey... what's your name?" I asked, causing him to turn back around with a smirk.

"It's Jack."

I later recounted that story as we were driving out to Collingwood for the ski trip we had planned to celebrate four years of dating.

"You lied to me?" Jack questioned me with his eyebrows raised.

"Maybe just a little, but it worked out pretty good for you," I said leaning more towards the driver's side where he sat.

When we arrived in Collingwood, we headed straight out to the slopes for a nighttime ski. As we sat on the chairlift, I rested my head on his shoulder.

"Babe," I said. He looked down at me.

"Yes?"

"Do you promise not to leave me behind? You know, you're much better than I am." I pleaded with him as the chairlift approached the top of the hill.

"Okay Beth, I'll try," he said. But with that, he was already gone. I followed behind him, a lot less gracefully.

Jack was beyond my sightline, so my eyes drifted around the landscape. Suddenly I heard a scream from just around the bend. I went as fast as I could, considering my lack of skill. When I came around the turn, I saw Jack sitting in the ditch, clutching his leg with an expression of pain in his eyes.

"Beth, go get the ski patrol," he screamed.

I skied as fast as I could down the hill, my heart racing. I found the ski patrol, and they went up the hill to fetch Jack.

At the hospital, the doctors found that Jack had broken his femur. I was relieved. I

## HALLWAY MEDICINE

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*by Jenna Farmer, Grade 11*

had known tons of people who had broken their legs and they were fine. There was not an operating room open at the moment and since he was stable, they admitted him to a bed to wait. There was a shortage of rooms, so he would have to be in a bed in the hallway. When they told us that, I was ready to throw a fit, but Jack stopped me.

“That’s fine,” he said, grabbing my hand.

We went up to his bed and I sat there with him for a while before I decided to go back to the hotel and get some of our stuff—maybe some pajamas for him. I went as fast as I could. As I was looking through his bag, I came across a small box sandwiched between two pairs of pants. Inside was an engagement ring.

As I drove back to the hospital, I was shaking, trying to get all of the excitement out of me so that Jack wouldn’t find out that I knew. I practically ran up to be with him.

As soon as I walked into that hallway, though, I knew something was wrong. There were a dozen doctors around his bed and at first, I couldn’t see past them, but then, when one of them came towards me, a sad look on her face, I saw him. The doctor said something about a bad reaction to the sedative.

At the time, I didn’t care about why he died. I could only think about how. He died alone in a hallway, with no privacy or dignity. And of course, I couldn’t stop thinking about that ring.

## THE CALL

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by Luc Forbes, Grade 9

"Everyone! Can I have your attention please!" The office turns to face me. "I have been made aware that I should be expecting a call from my boss, Jan. I'm sure you all know her. Your boss's boss. Yeah, we, uh, kind of have a history... so, uh, yeah. There cannot be any interruptions while I'm on the phone with her. Is that understood?"

"Yes sir, Michael, sir!" Dwight's voice echoes through the room.

"Alright. That's all." I turn to go back to my desk.

"Michael, as Assistant Regional—er—Assistant to *the* Regional Manager," says Dwight, stepping in front of me, "I believe it should be my job to defend your office until you have concluded your call with Jan."

"I don't think that will be necessary."

"I have a purple belt in Goju-Rya Karate and have duelled my cousin Mose on a daily basis since I was an infant. You needn't fear any entry. We Schrutes have strong bones."

"Alright, fine, Dwight. Just- don't do anything stupid. I don't have time for this."

Through my window, I can see the rest of the office busy at work. I look to my door. Where's Dwight? He just said he'd be there. Just then, I see a figure dressed in white exit the breakroom. As it approaches, the purple belt around its waist becomes apparent. My God.

"*Namaste*, Michael." Dwight bows. "I will stand sentry and do my duty to this company."

"Dwight, just- ugh. Well, there's no point in getting you to change now, Jan's gonna be calling any minute. Just... think before you do something you'll regret. Or I'll regret." I hear the phone ring from my office. "Don't do anything stupid!" I yell as I rush to pick up the phone.

"Hey, Jan. How's it goin'?"

"Hello, Michael. I'm calling about your branch's sales. Dunder Mifflin Scranton's profits have been on the decline for some time, and I'm afraid of what may happen if this trend continues."

"Oh, Jan, it's okay, you don't need to try and hide it. I know why you called."

"No, Michael, I'm calling for purely business reasons. If Scranton can't improve its sales, the branch may have to close."

"Mhm, yeah, got that. Now what else—oh for fudge's sake, Dwight!"

I hear a faint "Michael? Michael?" from behind as I drop the phone and leap across my office desk. Crashing through the door, I find Dwight holding that mole, Toby, in a headlock.

"I caught this corporate shill red-handed, attempting to sabotage your meeting!"

"No!" Exclaims Toby, still in a headlock. "No, I was just walking by to get to the break room when Dwight pounced on me!"

"Honestly, Toby, I've come to expect this kind of behaviour from you. But you, Dwight? I expected better. Sort this out. I gotta get back to Jan." I pick up the phone again. "Hey, sorry about that. It was just your little corporate spy Toby trying to undermine our company. You may want to talk to some higher-ups about him."

"Oh, don't worry, I'll be talking to some higher-ups. Probably not about him, though." She hangs up.

There's nothing I love more than a productive day of work.

## THE LOUDEST VOICES

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*by Luc Forbes, Grade 9*

My collection, my home  
My Turnstiles and Neverminds  
Each a world in itself  
Dynamic, yet unchanging

Mercury and May  
Flea and Frusciante  
Like a crashing wave upon the shore,  
Their melodies surround me  
And wash away the world

And I let them take me away  
Nodding off to their soft calls  
To their Bon Ivers  
To their “swampy August dawns”

For as long as I’ve heard,  
And for as long as I can recall,  
The loudest voices have been of those I’ve never met—  
Yet have known forever,  
And will always hold close

BEYOND BOUNDARIES

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*by Vanessa Gardner, Grade 12*

Traverse the snowy land when there is light  
Mind alert, while peacefully we connect  
Look, listen embrace beauty of the night

Move with efficiency, do what is right,  
Inhale and exhale pure air and direct  
Traverse the snowy land when there is light

Blue sky, clouds of white remain in our sight  
Work hard, set up camp, accept, not reject  
Look, listen, embrace beauty of the night

Persevere, move swiftly with all your might  
Seek shelter, nourishment, hydrate, reflect  
Traverse the snowy land when there is light

Animals—hibernating birds—take flight  
A dark icy water plunge to select  
Look, listen embrace beauty of the night

Fire beside, avoided any plight,  
No reason to feel the need to deflect  
Traverse the snowy land when there is light  
Look, listen embrace beauty of the night

PAGES 8/8

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*by Cindy Guo, Grade 12*

Kevin stopped walking. He looked at a white sheet of paper that was stuck to a broken-down, red truck. One of the tires was missing and the windows were all cracked. He took the sheet off the driver's door.

"You were looking for a piece of paper?" Sophie looked puzzled.

"It's not just a piece of paper. It's evidence. Legend has it that a supernatural being lives in the forest. Someone must have seen it and left clues on its existence. It's a scary creature that looks just like a man, but with really long arms and legs. Oh, and he has no face. His skin is as white as paper and he wears a black suit, but he has lots of long tendrils that stick out from his back. It hunts for children in the forest at night and kidnaps them!"

The little girl went dizzy with shock. Her mind played back to the beginning of the night...

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"They don't love me," she thought. Sophie sped straight into the forest with reckless abandon. "Mama and Papa don't care about me."

Her eyes burned with devastation. Her skin was cold from the chilly night. She ran out in only her nightgown, without a coat or even shoes. Specks of wet grass and mud stuck to her bare feet. The sharp stones on the forest floor impaled her skin as she ran. Sophie could feel her heart beating against her chest. It was dark, but the unusual intensity of the moonlight spotted the forest in white. Sabers from the Heavens cut through the canopy of the trees.

"They are always fighting. They always forget about me."

Her mind rewound the scene in that old, crooked house. A small dinner table. The dim light of a lantern. Scratchy voices that pierced the mind. The playback was unpleasant.

"Stay out of this!" her father shouted. "This is between me and your mother!"

Every time, it's the same scene. Every day, her father would blame his wife for everything and her mother would do the same. Over and over. They paid no attention to their daughter. They were only focused on hating each other.

Her legs slowed down. She could no longer bear the burning in her lungs. The howling wind in her ears went silent. White fog escaped her mouth, visible from the frigid autumn air. Sophie leaned on a tree for support, her hands unsteady on its rigid bark.

*\*Crunch\**

Like a frightened animal, her vibrant green eyes darted around the area.

*\*Crunch\**

*\*Crunch\**

The origin of the noise was somewhere behind her. The little girl cautiously peeked behind the tree she was leaning on. The constant rhythm of the crushing leaves: One, Two. One, Two. The sound of light, but careless footsteps. She looked to the left and then to the right. Yellow light caught her retinas.

"Sophie?"

A boy in a striped-blue shirt and oversized coat held an old flashlight in his hand.

## PAGES 8/8

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by Cindy Guo, Grade 12

“Kevin?” She sighed with relief.

“Why are you here?” He noticed the wet lines on her cheeks and puffy eyes. “Were you crying?”

“Kind of...”

She wiped her arm on her face. Sophie didn’t notice when she stopped, but now the rushing waterfall came down from her eyes again.

“Yes,” her voice cracked.

She broke down sobbing on the ground. The boy squatted down with her. He put down his flashlight and patted her back.

“What happened?”

Sophie breathed hard, trying to calm down. The little boy waited patiently until she could speak.

Rubbing her eyes, she cried, “Mama and Papa keep arguing... I couldn’t take it anymore, so I ran away from home... I’m such a bad person.”

Kevin looked at her with sympathy. Before he said anything, a haunting gust of wind swept through the forest. Red and orange leaves flew upwards, swirling in circles. Sophie rubbed her hands and arms, desperate for heat.

“Hey, let me lend you my coat.”

“I can’t. Then you’ll be cold.”

“We can take turns. You use it for a few minutes, then I’ll use it. I don’t think my dad will mind us borrowing his coat.”

“...okay.”

Kevin slipped the garment off his shoulders and handed over the heavy coat. He gave a supportive smile. The little girl meekly took it and threaded her arms through the holes of the sleeves. The fabric was rough on her skin, but it felt very warm.

Kevin stood up and brushed the dirt off his pants. He picked up the flashlight and turned towards Sophie.

“You need to take a break from them,” He held out his small hand. “Since we’re here, how ‘bout we go on an adventure together?”

His eyes shone with eagerness. Sophie took his hand and followed him into the unknown. The *pitter-patter* of bare feet and boots echoed through the weaved maze of trees. The boy led the girl every step of the way, guided by his old flashlight and memory. Like Kevin said, they took turns with the coat and walked together. For a while, they were quiet, but eventually they managed to speak. Kevin would say something silly and Sophie would lighten up. Soon, they were laughing and the woods didn’t seem so scary.

“Hey Kevin, why were you wandering the forest?”

“I wanted to get something I found yesterday. I didn’t get the chance since my dad called me at the wrong time. Right now, he isn’t home. He’s at work. Whenever I have to stay home alone, it gets really boring. I thought this was the perfect time to go exploring—when he

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by *Cindy Guo, Grade 12*

isn't here to stop me."

"Won't he get mad if he finds out that you were in the forest at night?"

"He won't know if we don't tell him. What about you? Why did you run into the forest?"

"The forest was the first place I thought of—where they couldn't find me."

Her hands gripped tightly on her nightgown.

"I just wanted to get away from everything."

"Yeah, I understand," Kevin spoke quietly.

They continued to walk in silence into the eerie night. The forest was seemingly identical in all directions. Their feet began to go sore and Sophie still didn't have any shoes. Eventually though, they found something.

"There it is," Kevin said.

Sophie's skin went icy, and it wasn't because she wasn't wearing a coat. Kevin's flashlight pointed at a desolate building. The roof was falling apart and the paint was fading. There were no windows and the entrance had no door. Straight down the entrance was a hallway lined with cracked tiles.

"I don't think we should go in there."

The little girl grabbed onto the rough fabric of Kevin's sleeve.

"Relax, I've been here before and look," He swatted the remark with his hand. "I'm still alive. We're almost there, okay? It's really close, we just walk through this shortcut. You can trust me."

"Alright, but you have to go in front of me."

They traversed through the hallways. Sophie clung behind Kevin; which made him feel empowered. They could hear the sounds of water drops as they went through hallways and turned corners. They found the exit without any problems.

"See? We made it through just fine," Kevin declared as he walked towards a red truck.

Sophie snapped back into reality.

"Why would you come here if you knew that?! How did you even find this car?!"

Kevin folded the paper into his coat pocket.

"Well, my Dad, for some reason, keeps going out at night trying to find these pages that this guy, Cody, apparently put up—"

"Who cares?! We have to go back!"

The little boy laughed.

"There's no way that thing is real. These pages were probably put up by someone's parents, spreading the rumour and telling their kids to stay out of the forest. It might even be apart of some Halloween game by that guy, Cody. I think my Dad is just being superstitious. He's been losing it ever since Mom left—" Kevin paused for a moment. "Anyways, I've been living here for years, Sophie. Not once has something happ—"

Ear-splitting static ripped through their brains. Blood trickled down the sides of their faces. Sophie was on the ground, holding her head, agonizing in pain. Something smooth

PAGES 8/8

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*by Cindy Guo, Grade 12*

and slippery wrapped around Kevin's neck. His feet dangled in the air as he was lifted off the ground. His vision blurred, stinging with pain while being robbed of oxygen. The creature's faceless head was right in front of his. The boy couldn't see it, but another tendril caught Sophie's leg. In one moment, they all disappeared; without a trace and without a sound.

Somewhere, deep in the forest, was a large yellowed mansion. The owner of the mansion also owned the forest that surrounded it. It stood there for centuries, entrapped with wild greenery and dirt. One room in the mansion had a special purpose. It stored bodies of dead trespassers. The newest additions were a little girl in a nightgown and a little boy with the eighth page in his coat pocket.



*artwork by Lili Strawbridge, Grade 12*

## WHAT AN EMBARRASSMENT

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*by Josie Hadden, Grade 11*

Like any high school freshman, my values consisted of getting drunk on Fridays, socializing and ultimately fitting in. This Friday would be no different. My friend, Sam, convinced me to go with her to meet this senior she had been talking to for a while. So I caved. I've always had a hard time saying no.

We pulled up in Sam's mother's Mercedes at the senior party. After originally stealing the keys, she placed them in my hand. "Lea," she whispered as she brushed my blonde waves off my low-cut shirt, "you're going to have so much fun at this party that you won't even remember if we get caught." I liked that about Sam. She always knew how to send off my goody-two-shoes instincts.

As soon as we got to the party, we split up. She did a room scan and I went to get some drinks. I strolled to the kitchen and looked for the closest beer I could find.

"Hey, I found a couple of Coronas if you want them," a young boy smiled.

"That would be great, do you have two?" I questioned.

"Ya, one second," he answered quickly, turning his back. He ran away to fulfill my request.

When he returned, I put one Corona on the counter beside me and opened the other. He took a seat next to me and we started a conversation right away. A true extrovert. He did most of the talking, and I awkwardly gulped down my Corona. Once empty, he replenished my beer quickly, alongside a couple of shots. Once I glanced down at his full hands, I made up a couple of excuses as to why I shouldn't drink them: a science test on Monday, Sam passed out in the living room. In that case, he suggested drinking up, because it would "give me a break" and earn me a reputation for "trying anything." Doubts racing, I took four shots of vodka and chugged the beer. Wrapping his hand around my shoulder, he kissed me on the cheek, claiming to love every piece of me. At that point, I was so drunk I could hardly remember why anyone ever could love a disaster like me.

He tugged me upstairs and into the master bedroom. Slowly closing the door, he locked us in. I don't remember much after that. Only flashes of the rest of that night. When he forced himself onto my body, I remember the pain was so intense I would've rather been shot. I tried pushing him away, but my arms felt weak. I felt powerless. Afraid.

When he finally let me go, he threatened to expose the event—it would be in my best interest to keep quiet. I believed him. He quietly shut the door and left me crumpled on the carpet. I pieced together my clothing and re-dressed. I descended the stairs and pulled Sam's key out of my pocket before leaving the house. I plugged the keys into the ignition without worry. I didn't care if I crashed; I had already made the decision to do the honors myself. I parked the car close to my home and walked the rest of the way.

Climbing into my window, no one even knew I was up late. No one needed to know about my story—but I felt sure he was going to expose it to the school on Monday. I slid over to my dresser and rolled up my black sleeves. I clenched the knife and took a couple of test lines. I studied myself in the mirror. My blue eyes turned red, like the blood draining down my arms. My blonde waves knotted.

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## WHAT AN EMBARRASSMENT

*by Josie Hadden, Grade 11*

“What an embarrassment!” I screamed into the reflection. It said nothing in reply. I turned away from the antique dresser. I didn’t need approval to say goodbye. In silence and fear, I quickly sorted through a collection of scrunches and bobby pins to find the orange bottle. Or, as I thought of it, my orange ray of sunshine. The only key to open my cage, where I could grow my wings.

*Creative non-fiction piece adapted from:*

“Lea’s Story | RAINN”. Rainn.Org, 2019, <https://www.rainn.org/survivor-stories/lea>. Accessed 2 Feb 2019.

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*artwork by Cynthia Yu, Grade 12*

## THE JOURNEY

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by Peter He, Grade 12

The map ends.

Indecisive and alone, the traveller comes to a stop.  
Unmarked paths stretch in all directions—  
Each identical and untainted by footprints atop—  
Leading to remote lands free from inhabitations.  
Pools of recent rainwater glint in the morning sunlight;  
He could simply turn his back and return home  
But chooses a path and embarks on his flight  
Into the unknown.

The path ends.

Up above, the lush green forest engulfs the traveller with ease;  
Down below, the placidity of the tranquil verdant scene  
And clusters of florid blossoms dancing in the hum of the cooling breeze,  
Like ballerinas, purify his mind with exquisite moves unforeseen.  
Blazing noon sunbeams flood through pinholes between the leaves;  
He could lie down, enjoy the chanting of the bird's dulcet tone,  
But chooses to thrust his feet forward, in spite of his ease,  
Into the unknown.

The land ends.

A raging, roaring river rushes from east to west,  
And desperately he fumbles to cross the writhing moat.  
Yet his conquests are as futile as Sisyphus's quest,  
As the fierce, untamed beast continues to loathe.  
The late afternoon sunset sparkles on the beast's furious raves;  
He could remain on this side and decide to postpone,  
But chooses to struggle 'gainst unrelenting and merciless waves  
Into the unknown.

The idea ends.

Staring out from the border of my knowledge  
Into the darkened and empty abyss of my mind.  
My sweater soaked in sweat, I stand at the ledge.  
*Who would bear the calamity of so long life* when stuck and behind?  
Glancing at the crescent moon, I haven't typed a word today.  
I could change my topic and start anew,  
But I choose to press forward and stumble my way  
Into the unknown.

The journey ends...

Then begins again...

Into the unknown.

## NEON-PINK LIPSTICK

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by Hajer Hussien, Grade 12

A pair of black Converse sneakers and leopard-print high heels flicker beyond my limited vision, the echoes of their footsteps slowly fade. I look up quickly, catching a quick glimpse of him with his arm around her shoulders before they turn the corner of the gloomy alleyway. Reality hits me like a bus: the mindless bliss I was constantly in vanished in seconds. He was mine. And now he's gone, for good, to some younger chick he found at the bar.

I walk backward, gently hitting the brick wall, and my body collapses. The slight breeze sends chills across my entire body and I slowly hug my knees against my chest. One tear turns into a river as steamy drops fall into my lap, staining my light blue jeans. I take out a lighter and watch as the gray smoke shoots out from my rouge lips in perfect circles, disappearing into the dusty air. I look around the dirty alleyway, studying all the graffiti as I breathe in the stench of trash and smoke.

I search the origin of the odour, and a dark green dumpster catches my eye. Rummaging through my Coach purse, I pull out my neon-pink lipstick, my three-month anniversary gift. I get up out of my crouched position and write the words LOVE IS A LIE across the front of the dumpster. Funny. I've heard that line dozens of times as a child, but I wasn't listening then. I was blinded by perfection, of constant bliss. It's crazy what love can do to someone; what one is willing to do for love. I've become a total lunatic. I throw what's left of the lipstick across the alley, smashing it into little pieces on the concrete.

I pull out my phone and go to the camera roll. Scrolling through every picture sends shivers down my spine, painfully remembering the many memories we shared together. I am eager to delete all of the photos of us, hoping each corresponding memory will be deleted from my brain as well. I start from the beginning, and what I'm looking at brings back nostalgia like I've never felt before. Our first date. The carnival filled with colourful lights and loud music, new arcade games, and an endless supply of prizes waiting to be won. We were holding fluffy, light-pink cotton candy, and I was wearing a black and white floral dress. He was wearing dirty jeans and a Justin Bieber t-shirt.

I cough into my sleeve in an attempt to hold back my laughter. He used to be a huge Bieber fan, despite the nasty comments thrown at him. I wonder if he still has the CDs and the posters in his attic. Probably not. I sigh, pondering whether I should delete this or not. That day was amazing, filled with laughter and genuine happiness. We ended the night with a short kiss before he handed me a note. Written in the messiest handwriting were the words *I think I love you*. That note was so stupid, but I loved it anyway. And that was the moment I discovered that I wanted our relationship to last.

Every photo I swipe through longs for those early days. But as I slowly examine the more recent pictures, I notice his smile is more forced and his eyes aren't as bright. He must have been wanting to break it off for a long time, but just mustered up the courage now. My heart hurts for the pain I caused him. He was clearly not happy, but he persisted, attempting to make our relationship work. And maybe he's not in love with me, but that's okay. The message was clear, and he clearly didn't stay true to his stupid love note; he's officially with someone else. I look back to the neon-pink words on the dumpster, and I sigh.

## PIANO MAN

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by Daniel Jiang, Grade 11

“It’s sad and it’s sweet and I knew it complete...”

Billy’s voice rolled over the hills in sorrowful waves. Swells of power rose up in his throat. Amid his voice were music, grace, and yet a subtle feeling of insecurity from pain. His hand went to his heart from the keyboards and his head rose as he belted out the final notes.

Outside the window was an emotionless black crow staring at Billy, like a ravenous monster who was struggling at the edge of starvation. It reminded him of the days waiting for the bullies to get to him, crying in the corner alone during recess, and being teased and ridiculed because he was different—because he was autistic.

The piano shimmered under the streams of sunlight as if it was the moon on a starry night; bright, beautiful and breath-taking. Billy sat with his head thrown back upon the cushion of the comfortable armchair beside the piano, motionless, until a strange voice came up from outside.

“Nice music! What’s your name?”

The voice attracted Billy with a mystical force that haunted his body and reached his fragile soul. He looked down through the transparent window. The white velvet clouds blew away the unwelcomed storm and cast a hollow cover in the calm blue sky. Billy wondered if anyone noticed how pretty the sky was today after the storm, how the blue was bright and soft all at once. Beside the lonely street light, there stood a little girl with an oversized backpack on.

Billy went downstairs and opened the door.

“Oh, hey,” the girl greeted. “I have never heard such wonderful music before.”

“You think so?” Billy replied hesitantly. He had difficulties communicating verbally. Music was the only way for him to express his emotion and feeling.

“Of course,” she said and smiled. “What were you playing?”

“Emmm...” Billy mumbled.

Usually, he would try to avoid any social occasions. When he could not get out of them, he would end up sitting in the corner, lost in a world of his own. This time, however, felt different.

“*Piano Man* by Billy Joel,” said Billy. “But slightly different.”

“How come?” she asked.

Billy hesitated to speak about the truth behind the feeling of insecurity from pain. He felt transfixed at the moment, lost and speechless by her genuineness and patience.

“It’s sad and it’s sweet and I knew it complete...” Billy sang and explained. “That’s how I felt when playing and singing the song.”

“Well, that sounds quite profound.”

“I felt excluded from groups at school, bullied and ridiculed,” he said. “Music is the most complex thing that I know.”

“Here,” she quickly grabbed a pen and a piece of scrap paper from her backpack and wrote down a series of numbers. “This is my uncle’s phone number—Victor Wooten—He runs a music camp in Nashville. I think you should check it out.”

## PIANO MAN

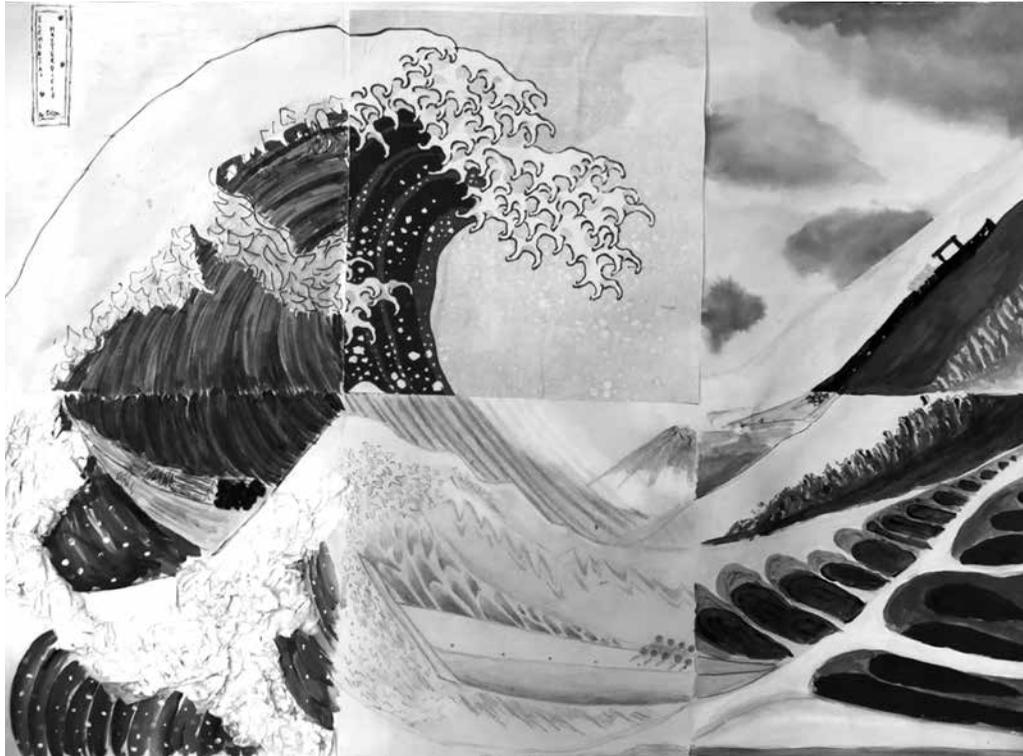
by Daniel Jiang, Grade 11

“Thank you.”

Billy imagined himself, sometime in the future, preparing to take the stage at the Schermerhorn Symphony Center. He heard the *chunk* as the spotlights came on and the squeak of the wheels as the curtain pulled open. The outpouring of emotion from the audience made him feel that he was not so much different from everyone else. He felt engaged in something he loved.

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artwork by Erica Cameron, Grade 9

## TRAIL MIX

*by Jaide Johnson, Grade 12*

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The message was clear. At first, it was foggy—but now I understand. The comedian was trying to say that M&M's are the main ingredient in trail mix. It was cold and dark in the theatre—it was abnormally small. There were only four rows, after all. The seats were as small as decorative pillows. The smell of popcorn brought me back to the trail mix. Personally, I like the raisins. The way they ooze in between your teeth but don't get stuck, they don't feel fake like the chocolate in M&M's. Plus they never get cross-contaminated with the dust from the cashews.

My profound insights were interrupted by the usher.

"Excuse me. But you are going to have to leave. The show's been over for 15 minutes," he said.

"Oh, sorry."

As I started to walk to the door, a different voice interrupted.

"Was it good?" he asked.

I turned around in confusion. All I understood was that it was a man's voice.

"Pardon?" I asked back.

It was the comedian. Still confused, I continued the conversation.

"I was wondering if my jokes were any good, and seeing as though you're the only one here... other than the usher, but he's already heard my routine about ten times."

"Well, I mean, yeah, they were funny. I can see how people relate to them. But I just didn't get the last one about the trail mix," I said honestly.

"That was just a filler joke. I came up with it in the back room. I was actually eating trail mix and thought to myself, I don't really like anything but the M&M's. No one really wants the other stuff, they get it to make themselves feel healthy," he said.

This I chuckled at. Even though I like the raisins, I understood what he was trying to say. Trail mix is the "healthy" option version of a bag of M&M's. The nuts just become obstacles.

"Oh, I get it now," I said.

"They aren't funny unless you understand them right away. They become less funny as you explain them," he said.

I chuckled. Maybe comedians are naturally funny.

"Were you always naturally funny?" I asked.

"No. I just started questioning our habits."

It was an intriguing sentence. I wanted to ask more. The comedian was suddenly interesting.

"When did you begin to question our habits?" I asked. I wanted to move the conversation beyond his performance.

"It was last year. When my dog died. I was wondering why it was bad to have a real funeral for dogs. There's some kind of weird stigma around it. I had one anyway, and invited friends," he said.

TRAIL MIX

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by Jaide Johnson, Grade 12

This struck me. The conversation took a turn for the worse; now he was going to go on about some epiphany and I was stuck on the ride, all because I became curious about that sentence.

"After I sent out invitations, I got texts back saying *Are you really doing this?* and such and such. After all that texting and finding people to attend, only one person showed up. It was my best friend from high school. But he left after ten minutes."

I didn't even remember this comedian's name, and he was telling me the most depressing story. I guess he has to make up for having to be funny all the time.

"I mean, I guess it was nice for him to come. But why not stay longer?" he asked. Before he had a chance to keep going, I interrupted him.

"So, you basically became funny by going through a sad period in your life? Like picking a raisin instead of an M&M?" I said it bluntly, but it was all I could think of to end our conversation faster.

"Sure, I guess, but I think it was my way to cope with it. Now I just judge people, but I say it in a sarcastic way so they think it's a joke. I guess I'm as bad as people judging dog funerals," He concluded.

We stared at each other for a few minutes, in silence.

"Well... have fun having people laugh at your judgements," I said. And it became plain to us both that we finally understood one another.

We walked away in separate directions.

## THRIVE THROUGH DROUGHT

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*Fanfiction piece by Justin Kim, Grade 12*

Journal of Dwight K. Schrute. August 24th 2009.

It's the time of year the whole farm has waited for: the beet harvest. Only second to the annual horse hunt, which is celebrated here at Schrute farms in the spring of every lunar year. Mose has been waiting an exact 11 months and 29 days for this special tradition.

Michael gave me the afternoon off work, due to a necessary mission to discover Holly's favourite music—which he made clear I could not be a part of. He will then create and burn her a playlist onto one of those fancy CDs. I believe Michael overrates Holly; Jan was a much better fit. Strong, tall, and powerful.

I also believe CDs are overrated. I, personally, have used the same cassette player since I was the age of 15. It was handed down to me from my uncle, the father of Mose. Us Schrutes are allowed to listen to music from ages 15 to 50; from that point on, we must hand down our cassette player to the next youngest Schrute in line. After handing over his cassette player, my uncle ran out on us, never to be seen again. Whenever I see Mose run, it is as if he is chasing his father. He seldomly remembers.

Jim, being naive, is probably sitting at work, possibly wondering where his lunch has disappeared to. Little does he know I am using his poorly-constructed ham sandwich to feed my ant estate, located on the underside of his bottom desk drawer. With enough time and fuel, I will be able to form an ant army, strong enough to carry his desk away, and him with it.

Mose is running out in the field, excited to start the festivities. Us Schrutes start the beginning of every harvest with our traditional chant and cheer. We all stand in a row and chant our hopes for a bountiful harvest. From the ripe age of three years old, we begin to lead the chant.

Us Schrutes have very strong lungs and vocal cords from birth, allowing us to speak at frequencies some adults may never reach. The chant is purely in the German language—a pre-industrial, religious-based German, that is. From here, we begin to pull out the beets. I have formed a technique allowing myself to pull 27 beets out of the ground at a time. This technique requires my whole body, but it is highly efficient.

Beets are highly underrated in modern-day western society. Beets are the foundation for all agricultural produce. It is impossible to name one form of nourishment you cannot create with beets. Jams, pies, pickles, loaves, juices—as well as a goat milk and beet-blend protein smoothie, something I drink after every meal. Everything is possible with beets. The only vegetable that comes a close second is celery, but who wants to farm celery? Those farmers do not understand the strength and power in farming beets.

Fact: the best version of *homo sapiens* are primates. Beets are the primates of the agricultural world. Beets are strong, durable and vital to proper human development. Any human that possesses these same traits is a prime example of the human race. Humans that do not carry these qualities—such as Jim, of course—will not be able to survive any type of apocalyptic disaster.

Schrute farms has been through seven droughts. Us Schrutes and our beets have thrived through all seven. Fact. Even Mose.

## THE TASTE OF FRANCE

*by Sofiia Kovtun, 12 years old*

The modern world makes food as a culture, art and pleasure; it is the most important thing in our lives, after water. If we eat the same food, it quickly bothers us. In our world, a lot of cooks devoted their lives to cooking and making new recipes. France, a country I idolize, does this better than any other. In France, there are the largest number of restaurants with Michelin stars. France takes the best pieces from different parts of the world, adding something unique and special. That's what French cuisine is about.

Since I was a little girl I have been interested in discovering different cuisines around the world, and that's when I fell in love with cooking. Everything that I was doing related to food. One night, I had a dream. My parents decided to surprise me with a trip to Paris. I sat in a plane, closing my eyes and imagining lavender fields, tasting the popular lavender honey. Later, I see women in lush dresses, making cheeses according to their special recipes: Raqufor, Brie, Camembert, Emmental. There were spectacular landscapes—the Verdon Gorge on the left, vintage castles on the right. Beautiful countryside.

In my dream I flew on colourful balloons to France, the country of my dreams. Everything that I imagined then is still around me—the amazing landscapes, lavender fields, women who look like they belong in the last century. I'm going to the long-expected Eiffel Tower. It is incredibly beautiful, just as it shows in the movies. It smells of pungent coffee and fresh pastries. I carefully drop the balloons in one of the local coffee shops to try the famous French croissant and a cup of sweet coffee with delicate macaron. After my little break, I decide to go for a small walk around the town, to discover it better.

While I walk through small streets, I decide to visit one of my gurus, French chef Paul Bocuse, who is an owner of the Michelin three-star-rated restaurant *l'Auberge du Pont de Collonges*. He is the most legendary chef in France because of his Truffle Soup. Bocuse and I reminisce about one of the famous chefs in the world—Bernard Loiseau, who ended his life in suicide, because of the gossip that he might lose his Michelin stars. Because of his talent and charisma, he became the most popular chef and representative of French cuisine around the world in the eighties and nineties. As a sign of respect, Pixar studios, in 2007, made the animated film *Ratatouille* and made Bernard the prototype of the chef Auguste Gusteau.

For now, my dream is to open my own restaurant and become one of the best chefs in the world. I have an idea to open a restaurant that will look similar to the theatre. People will come to my restaurant and enjoy the food as a part of my art. In my opinion, a theatre and a restaurant have a lot in common. Depending on the food, it matters which impressions visitors will have after visiting a restaurant, but the most important thing is that it will give some positive emotions—emotions that guests will feel for a long time.

I believe that, one day, I will wake up in a beautiful hotel in Paris, open wide windows, and release balloons that represent all my childhood dreams. I will not care about French social position, the streets that millions of tourists dirty, the flow of immigrants that exceed the local population, nor the terrible traffic in streets, because our thoughts and ours dreams create our future.

## NIGHT IN THE WOODS

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*A Fanfiction Sonnet Sequence by Hillary Krofchak, Grade 11*

### -Possum Springs-

Running away, going from right to left,  
Mae Borowski has come home, dubbed “killer”  
in the middle of a small-town thriller,  
Met with confusion, but no longer cleft.  
The autumn leaves fall, orange in colour,  
painting a stark rust-line across the map.  
The hole at the centre of town—a trap.  
Those who go in can’t come out, passed over  
And forgotten. Attached to the past,  
Unwilling to let go; to change and grow.  
Even the weeds have given up, lay’d down  
It seems that here, nothing is built to last.  
Stuck in the green days, no time to borrow.  
This is Possum Springs—it is a ghost town.

### -The Longest Night-

Though the woods are crowded, they feel empty,  
And though the forest speaks, there is no sound.  
Where the forest spirits have no fealty—  
A place where stars are nowhere to be found—  
Where there were tracks abundant in the snow  
Is now a blank slate, wiped clean by the wind,  
The frozen lake immures all life below.  
Souls of the dead have no words to rescind,  
But sunrise comes to shine upon the hill  
And its warmth thaws through winter’s icy grip.  
Children come to play, despite the awful chill,  
And life persists in spite of Jack Frost’s gyp.  
Though the ice comes to slow things to a halt,  
The sun does rise to melt the frozen vault.

### -Lost Constellations-

Stripped down to bare essentials.  
What are lines and shapes?  
Just shapes—

## NIGHT IN THE WOODS

---

*A Fanfiction Sonnet Sequence by Hillary Krofchak, Grade 11*

No interpreter.  
 The red arcs on the bottom,  
 the white circles on top.  
 In the middle are more circles and circles  
 Shapes oblong and square—  
 No interpreter.  
 The shapes are empty.  
 They mean nothing,  
 But with someone to translate,  
 A summer night sky where  
 the stars make constellations,  
 stories, and feeling  
 A singing angel, a whale with the world on its back,  
 A pope that breathes fire, and a bell that ends the world.  
 The circles in the middle make faces:  
 People looking up,  
 People who interpret,  
 Who build something from nothing,  
 Who take things that are empty and make them full.  
 In a world that doesn't care, there are people who do.

*A Note from the Author...*

My sonnet sequence "Night in the Woods" is about the video game of the same name. The first sonnet, "Possum Springs", is named after the town in the video game. The story is about a college dropout, Mae Borowski, returning home from school to her childhood home Possum Springs, which isn't as she remembers. *Night in the Woods* is a side-scrolling video game; traditionally played from left to right, as that is the way the English and most western languages read; however, *Night in the Woods* is played from right to left. The symbolism of moving right to left is not only about Mae's journey of regressing back from her time at college, but also about the town's fear of the future and its need to stay in the past. In my series of sonnets, we move from the past to the future. *Night in the Woods* takes place in the fall; its partner game, *The Lost Constellation*, takes place in the winter, and the third game in the series, *The Longest Night*, is a prequel that takes place in the summer. As the sonnets move from past to present, they also move from pessimism to optimism. The games focus on many different themes, like mental illness and the economic problems of the Rust Belt, ending with a conclusion of uncertainty for the future. For better or for worse, Mae, the town and the player can only move forward.

## DO THEY REFLECT REALITY?

*by Defne Kürüm, 12 years old*

This generation of students has always attempted to capture their own experiences. We are all in a constantly connected world where we don't have to go out and meet others to socialize, being only one text or call away from our friends and family members. Watching YouTube videos and movies, looking at Instagram posts and Snapchat pictures, playing video games... they have all given us an imaginary view in our heads that make us wonder, "What is life like in another country or on the other side of the world?" These romanticized projections and creations of other cultures and lifestyles get us thinking and daydreaming, but how accurately do they reflect what really happens there?

Everyone has somewhere they might want to go. But how would we all react if, when we got there, the place we always wanted to go was nothing like what we imagined?

I, myself, have always wanted to go to Japan. It may sound a little childish to you, but I enjoy watching anime a lot. In anime, when the streets of Japan are shown, you can see beautiful houses, not-too-high apartments and a little bit of green everywhere. The characters' emotions are—or can be—relatable, and they maybe even experience some of the same things as you do. But anime always has a twist: whether it be magic, science, animal-like creatures or something that keeps it away from the real world. You can also see that the characters used in anime have larger and different-coloured eyes. Females have really long hair, and in both males and females, it is common for the characters to have unnatural or unrealistic hair colours, such as pink, blue, purple, dark green, ombré or even dual-coloured hair.

If I went to Japan, maybe I would expect to see clean and beautiful streets and people with really smooth skin and hair that I would want to touch the second I see it. I could also expect to see thin people. I wouldn't expect unnatural colours in their hair, or unusually large eyes, but when I think of the place, those streets still come to mind. Yet, if I go there and it's nothing like what I expect, I would still be in shock. I would feel betrayed, as if the movies had lied to me.

I think that watching YouTube videos and movies, looking at Instagram posts and Snapchat pictures, playing video games and so on can't reflect reality accurately enough. You can maybe learn about something a little in a video game, but you can't learn where something came from or why it's there. Maybe you can see a little bit of culture in an Instagram post or a YouTube video, but you may not understand what it is for or what it means.

Let me give an example about what most people can relate to: Harry Potter. When you read the Harry Potter books, an image of London is there in your brain. You may think of what the place looks like and close your eyes to think about the setting. Maybe it doesn't look like the real thing—or has no connection at all with it—but you can see a vision of what you fantasize about the thing you just read. This might give you an idea of how it might look, but if you never actually saw the place, it will just remain imaginary. That image or view that comes to your mind shows a good amount of changes from person to person.

Anime could be inspired from an ordinary person's life, but it can't be real. These types of things get inspired from what happens or could happen in reality. Movies. Too. Video games have their own concept, but they also get inspired from real life things. These modes can't always reflect reality, but they are inspired from it.

## THE ONE GOD, AND THE OTHER GOD

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by Patrick LeClaire, Grade 12

Two great gods sat at the beginning of time.

Their might unparalleled and knowledge endless in faculty.

One said to the other, "You must add more information than that! It will sound boring."

"Very well, if you insist," said the other.

"The two lords of time were not existing at the beginning of time, for time had no bearing on them, for in their being, too high to comprehend, they could see every event that would ever happen; despite the fact that they hadn't decided whether or not to—"

"No, no, no don't just say what's actually happening, be a bit more vague and methodical, that'll make it better," said one god.

"Alright," said the other.

"But also make it invoke perfect conception for lesser minds, too."

"Well, how the hell do I do that?"

"Put in details!"

"Why?"

"So that it sounds good."

"Well, I thought it was nice," said the other.

"It wasn't," said one.

The two masters of reality squabbled back and forth—as even the last of the scholars of apotheosis could not exist for more than a brief moment with each other.

"Don't you dare!" shouted one.

"What?!" asked the other.

"Stop breaking the cosmic fourth wall, I told you to get away from the clichés and *that's* what you do instead?"

"You didn't have a problem when I was doing it before."

"I'm overlooking that mistake."

"Well, having holes in your logic is as foolish as having holes in a plot."

"Don't you talk back to me!"

"Whatever! We're getting off track anyway. Just tell me, how do I make a good story?" asked the other, again.

"Hold on, I have my checklist," said one.

"What's on it?"

"Alright, avoid that which has been done before, have exquisite details, identify the characters clearly, have some kind of a theme, describe events—don't simply say them, and convey whatever meaning is entailed just clearly enough to give some hints but still has to be read a few more times to let them figure out what you are trying to say. Make *them* think about it," one explained.

"Why is that?" asked the other, "Why can what needs to be said just be said; why go through a riddle instead?"

"Because."

"Oh, and most importantly, have a good ending. Something powerful and bold. Something that has a deeper meaning than the words themselves... somehow."

"Good point. It would be a travesty to just leave it unfinished after talking about nothing."

## NIER: AUTOMATA - AFT[E]R YORHA

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by Kyu Hun Lee, Grade 10

A drop of black oil ran down the machine's remaining eye, seeming almost human in its last moments as its last remnants of life faded away. Its rusted, round body fell over with a clang that rang out amidst the silence, echoing through the ruined city. The sound of 2B's heels stopped only for a moment as she pulled her blade from the machine.

"More Biped detected. A different course of travel is recommended." Pod 042 hovered near 2B while picking through the insides of the now dead Biped, emitting a near-emotionless hum of satisfaction as he found the machine's heart.

2B continued walking along her path. "This is the quickest route to the Tower. We should recover the data as quickly as we can," she stated, observing the area around her. The *clack* of her heels was heard along the cracked, broken stone path once more. She felt a breeze on her cheek as the grass growing amongst the crevices and rocks rustled in the wind. She brushed aside a vine hanging from a fallen wall, feeling the firm, yet soft texture through her gloves.

"It is important to prioritize safety over speed. Attempts to go to the Tower pertain no use should you die," Pod 042 insisted as he floated along, deftly weaving through the grasping limbs of the vines. "It is advised that you move through a more secure path," he repeated. "At the very least, it is optimal that you briefly perform maintenance on yourself," he said.

Giving a small sigh, 2B stopped and sat down on a shattered slab of stone, her black dress wrinkling against the rock. "Pod, perform basic logic virus diagnostic and structural integrity evaluation." 2B sat down and looked up at the sky that was not unlike the tip of a star sapphire that was dotted with clouds of soft cotton swabs floating upon the surface of the heavens.

"Diagnostic complete. No logic virus found. You are running at 76% integrity. I recommend applying a minor repair salve." Pod 042 hummed through the air as 2B stood up.

"Good. Scan for nearby machines." 2B headed back towards the Tower, brushing her snow-white hair from her eyes. "We've wasted enough time. Let's go." She walked along the path with Pod 042 trailing behind her. Shattered bottles of a time long past dotted the floor, with wave-like ripples that spoke of their age.

She paused for a moment as she observed the increase of dead machines, scoured by an almost inhuman fury, the violent markings of a dark gold blade apparent on their steel bodies. There was scorched, burned wiring like that of a tree struck by lightning laying beside scraps of machines not unlike the discarded cocoons of butterflies. For a moment her breath caught in her throat as she slowly walked through the razed metal beings. The wind seemed to have stopped blowing, the cool breeze no longer brushing against her skin.

"You have arrived at your destination. Course of action to find Ark crystals recommended." Pod 042 hovered, the hum of his engines subdued and quiet. "There is a high chance that no crystals remain. It is advised that you do not increase your expectations," he said.

2B knelt down on the ground. She was aware that Pod 042 was right. But perhaps, just this once, she wanted to believe. She wanted to place her faith in the last slivers of her hope, the final flare of an almost-dead candle sputtering for life.

"Scan for machine data traces. We have work to do."

"Acknowledged."

Th[e] End

## BLUE MONDAY

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*by Ethan Liu, Grade 11*

Tony rarely brushes his yellow, greasy teeth, and hardly ever washes his dirty blackened face. In an empty wardrobe, there is only one jacket, and it's covered in a thick coating of dust. His house is his prison as well as his sanctuary.

Today is an extremely cold Monday; the temperature is going down to minus thirty-one Celsius. It is absolutely freezing outside. White snow blankets everything. The roads corrode under tons of salt. No one wants to go outside except Tony, reluctantly, who is being treated for depression. He suffers from agoraphobia, and has not left his house for seven months.

He is afraid to go outside and socialize, so today is a good day for him. No neighbours are outside—it is too cold. He enjoys his solitude. Although Tony has a car, he needs at least half an hour to defrost it and warm it up—not to mention that it hasn't been started since his panic attack. Subsequently, he decides to go for a walk. He just doesn't want to get lost in his mind again. Tony puts on his shoes, stands up and a sense of dread overcomes him. This is his sixth attempt to go outside. Finally, he musters up the nerve to step across the threshold as his counsellor extends his hand. It is a small step towards his healing; however, it is a giant leap in progress.

The cold, billowing wind is refreshing on his face. He takes a deep breath and clears his mind while wandering around outside his house, holding his therapist's hand. He tries to walk faster, like a regular person, but can't. Tony continues walking slowly. Suddenly, one ray of sunlight shines on his face and he feels a bolt of lightning piercing the fog around his world. He feels the darkness surrounding his mind begin to lose its hold on him—and feels empowered enough to loosen his grip in his therapist's hands. He takes a handful of snow and tries to clean his jacket. The white snow becomes dark; however, his coat is renewed, and he attempts to wipe his face as well. Underneath the snow he disturbed, the grass is still green. The sight gives him an epiphany.

The thought that life is worth living crosses his mind and gives him strength to release his counsellor's hand completely. He finds strength within himself as he returns to the inside of his house. His suicidal tendencies subdued, Tony thinks about communicating with the outside world again. He decides to set a new goal for himself: he makes a point to leave his house everyday, even if only for a short period of time.

## THE NEXT DAY

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*by Holly Liu, Grade 12*

Do you remember when the chilled wind snuck through our humble roof, when  
You shielded me with the only warm coat you had?  
But I burst into tears and blamed you,  
"You said you would get it repaired!"  
You patted me on my back with your shivery hand.  
The next day,  
You climbed on a ladder barely holding your body.

Do you remember I dragged your arms in front of that fancy store, when  
You promised to bake me a sparkling cake?  
But I bawled with frustration and blamed you,  
"You never buy me a present I want!"  
You kneeled down and embraced me tight.  
The next day,  
You handed me a box with dark circles under your eyes.

Do you remember a group of us passed your lemonade stand, when  
You bloomed a bright smile and offered us cold drinks?  
But I showed a disapproving frown and blamed you,  
"Your job made me embarrassed!"  
You gave a sigh and nodded your head.  
The next day,  
You lowered your head to avoid my sight.

Do you remember the day I flew away from home to pursue my future, when  
You gave me as much advice as stars in the sky?  
But I refused to pay heed to any and blamed you,  
"You always treat me like a kid!"  
You lost your words and wandered out.  
The next day,  
You bid me farewell with a hearty meal.

Do you remember the year I searched for a light in my job, when  
You opened your heart and welcomed me for a warm chat?  
But I was weary of answering and blamed you,  
"You cannot help with anything!"  
You appeased my tension with your generous comforts.  
The next day,  
You sent me an enormous parcel of handmade cookies.

THE NEXT DAY

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*by Holly Liu, Grade 12*

I thought I could buy you a new comfortable house.  
I thought I could bake you a stylish birthday cake.  
I thought I could enjoy your lemonade any minute.  
I thought I could have you carry me back home.  
I thought I could teach you to online chat.  
—for the next day, and the next.

The spring has clusters of flowers.  
The summer has a crescent misty moon.  
The fall has refreshing brisk breezes.  
The winter has soft spotless snow.  
I have you no more,  
As a giving tree...

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*artwork by Anna Cumiskey, Grade 12*



RELEVÉ

---

*by Avery Maclachlan, Grade 10*

Being practical  
And knowing its worth

To persevere through this new path

Having comfort in your flaws in failures

Failure leading to success

It has discovered  
with the removal of her shoes  
she can be confident  
With every continued step  
learning continues to grow

To really know yourself

Using dance  
as a code  
in the journey of life

The honest dancer  
with lessons of failure and success  
as do all youth

Unsteady emotions

Who is grateful to their mentors  
Who guide her to success

And reaching this new chapter  
a comfort in knowing who they are  
without the stage

## BACK THEN

*by Scott McLeod, Grade 10*

Back then it was  
     fun  
     and  
     games

Now children in the slums  
 Are getting robbed, simply for their chains.  
 As children, you played TIC-TAC-TOE,  
 Now poor black kids—only—get put on death row  
 While you were able to throw rocks at garage doors.  
 Ten-year-old children now end up in heavenly  
 boxes made of sacred boards;  
 Their culture has become war-torn,  
 Countless families continue to mourn.

Every day a new thug is born  
 Like you, their voices  
     are still not  
             heard.

They scream for attention  
 But their cries fly past the heads of officials  
     as though they were  
     birds.

Bodies litter the streets,  
 Young mothers turn to prostitution,  
 Their babies are starving; they have nothing to eat,  
 Their community is an open wound.  
 These people now sing a song of pain under  
 the ominous light of the moon.

Your world is different, a thing of the past  
 While you were able to drink cold water  
     through  
     hoses  
 and play with  
     roses.

Teenagers overdose  
 by inhaling cheap white powder through their noses  
 While you gave each other nicknames and  
 pretended to be cops.

Boys half your age are now robbing liquor shops  
 and getting shot in the back by racist white cops...  
 This cycle of oppression and murder must,  
 eventually, stop.

You brown boys,  
 Your worst nightmares  
 Are now the current generations' reality?  
 White culture has taken everything from them,  
 Stripped them to their  
     bare bones

Now white suburban kids listen to their culture's music  
     and even try to steal it and  
     make their own.

The rich refuse to acknowledge their suffering  
 because they are too comfortable on their thrones.  
 The powerful took the hip out of hop  
 While kids in the hood scavenge for food.  
 We, privileged, complain about the quality of  
 tuck-shop  
 While they demand racial reform.  
 We, privileged, complain about wearing uniforms.

Like you brown boys  
 They're just trying to make a dent,  
 They're just trying to make it to the top.  
 So many tears have been shed—  
 History books are being written in blood, not lead—  
 While those in power sleep soundly in satin sheets,  
 Many innocent black children awake to the  
 sounds of gunshots:  
     Pop  
     Pop  
     Pop

The wealthy pretend to help,  
 But they lie. Where was there supposed good-  
 will when Martin Luther got shot?  
 This cycle of oppression and murder must,  
 eventually, stop.

## TRUE CONFESSIONS

---

by Michaela Morra, Grade 9

“Don’t let others step back, when you step in. *Sweeter Soles* will keep you together...”  
Phoebe sang.

Chandler rolled his eyes, leaning over to Phoebe. “I can’t believe that foot deodorant jingle won us a trip to Italy. I’m not complaining, but tell me, do the advertisers still have jobs?” he commented sarcastically.

Phoebe, tiring of Chandler’s remarks, wandered off. Rachel and Monica quickly followed her while darting warning looks at Chandler.

“I kinda like it,” said Joey.

“Are you kidding me?” whispered Ross in disbelief.

“Well, yeah, I mean, I like the product. My feet are as fresh as a baby’s butt. Here, smell.” Joey took off his shoe and shoved his foot towards Ross. Ross ducked to the side, leaving Chandler to get a face full of Joey’s sole, right in the nose. Crunch!

“Ah! You idiot, I think you broke my damn nose! Could you *be* more stupid?!”  
Chandler jerked back, holding his nose to stop the bleeding.

“What do you think you’re doing! You’re in church, you don’t swear in church! That’s gonna be at least five Hail Mary’s and two Our Father’s to clear that up!” Joey exclaimed.

Ross, panicking, asked Chandler if he was okay. “Oh yeah, ‘cause I regularly give blood sacrifices at church. What do you think?” he replied.

Seeing the commotion, Phoebe, Monica and Rachel ran over.

“Oh my God! Oh! God! I mean, Oh my Goodness!” Monica cried out.

“See, Monica gets it,” Joey said, looking at Chandler. “Don’t take the Lord’s name in vain.”

“Here, use this to stop the bleeding,” Phoebe said, grabbing Rachel’s kerchief from around her throat, shoving it towards Chandler’s nose.

“Phoebe, that is *vintage* Ralph Lauren!” Rachel cried, as Monica led Chandler to search for a washroom.

“Don’t worry, Rach, we can use some of this Holy Water to clean it.” Phoebe said, rolling her eyes.

“Oh no you don’t, we need to find a fountain outside for that. No more sinning while I’m around!” Joey whispered sternly while dragging Phoebe away.

Worried the nose might actually be broken, Ross and Rachel decided to go searching for Chandler.

Ross and Rachel were wandering for a while before they realized they were lost in another part of the building. They landed in a tiny, dark chapel with a confessional box. Rachel suddenly remembered going to confession when she was younger. She turned to Ross to ask him about it, but found him immersed in the architecture around them, shuffling towards the back of the chapel. Overwhelmed by a wave of sadness, she turned and walked towards the confessional. Entering on the right side, she sat down and began rambling about the unsavoury things she had done, baring her soul and disclosing her true feelings for Ross.

## TRUE CONFESSIONS

*by Michaela Morra, Grade 9*

Ross, having made his way around the room, entered the confessional on the left to peek inside. Startled by the chatter, he leaned towards the small opening reserved for the priest.

Rachel tearfully blubbered, "Father, I've been a fool. I love Ross, and I want to be with him, we've been on and off so many times, but now...I just want to come out and say, 'Ross, I love you forever, will you marry me?'"

Ross was dumbfounded. Before he knew it, he yelled out, "I DO!"

"Ross?!" Rachel yelled, clamouring out of the confessional.

Rachel?! "Ross, now outside, exclaimed. "Do you mean it? You really want to get married... forever?"

Rachel and Ross locked eyes for a few moments, their eyes welling with tears—until, finally, both of them sighed, "I do."



*artwork by Suphia Otegui, Grade 9*

## THE CHILDREN WERE ALONE

by *Anastasia Moskaltcova, Grade 12*

It was an unusually frigid morning. The windows suddenly became Vincent Van Gogh's painting of *The Storm*. Since their father passed, the family experienced the world as a black ocean, overflowing in waves of hardship and misery.

As the mother proceeded to work, the piercing sound of her alarm clock circulated in her head. Despite her distress, she left her two young children, Dylan and Jacob, with an eighteen-year-old acquaintance named Shabina whom she only periodically hired to babysit. The mother could not financially afford to remain at home and jeopardize a dismissal.

After lunch, Shabina tucked the children in for their regular nap. She then received a phone call from her boyfriend who invited Shabina for a ride in his new car. Reckless and naive, Shabina left the children unsupervised. In the afternoon, she thought, Dylan and Jacob never wake up earlier than three o'clock.

Her boyfriend's fresh engine revved in Shabina's ears. She silently snuck into the children's bedroom, checked up on the boys and hastily unplugged the home telephone to prevent disturbances.

Shabina locked their rooms upon exiting and dropped the key into her black leather purse. She didn't want Dylan to go downstairs looking for her if he woke up early. He was only seven—Dylan could easily yawn, stumble and hurt himself. For a brief second, Shabina wondered how she would explain to their mother why she left the children alone? Regardless, she tiptoed to the front door, swiftly zipped up her beige jacket, slipped on her stained sneakers and took off.

What was it?

A short circuit in a running television, or the flickering floor lamp in the hallway? Or was it a spark from the fireplace? Whatever the cause, the ignited linen curtains provoked lethal fumes and rapidly elongated the wooden stairs leading to the bedroom.

The smoke permeated the room from the crack under the door. Dylan gasped for air as he woke. The child impulsively stumbled towards the door, but failed to open it. Had Dylan succeeded, the fire would sweep through the children in seconds. He repeatedly shouted for Shabina at the top of his lungs, but only the roar of flames echoed back. Dylan picked up the phone with his shaking fingers—dead line.

He knew time was running out. Dylan, alone, must save both himself and his one-year-old brother. He tried to open the window, behind which was a cornice, a protective grill which his parents had previously installed for safety purposes. His small, delicate hands were too weak to even open the latch.

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Upon arrival, the firefighters were shocked.

"How could such a small kid break a window and take out the bars with a stool?"

"How'd he manage to place his baby brother in a backpack?"

"How'd they reach the tree from the roof without breaking the eaves?"

"How'd they manage to escape at all?"

The most senior firefighter posited the only theory. "The kid had to figure out an escape plan by himself," he deduced. "There was no one around to tell him he couldn't do it."

## THE ZONE OF ALIENATION

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*by Huy Anh Nguyen, 16 years old*

Cities often represent prosperity, as well as the development and culture of a country. Cities like Tokyo or Singapore are often recognized as examples of a technologically advanced country; however, there are some that symbolize the opposite. One of them is located in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone. The Zone and its city, Pripjat, instead of foreseeing a promising future, shows a glimpse of the past—a past that contains one of the most disastrous manmade events in history.

My first impression of the Exclusion Zone came from a video game series known as S.T.A.L.K.E.R. The game is set in the Zone, where a second explosion at the Chernobyl Nuclear Reactor occurs. Even though the series is fictional, many of the locations are faithfully recreated from their real-life counterparts. The eerily beautiful nature of the game aroused my interest. I began to research its major inspiration: the disaster that left it in the state it is today. It is this survival horror series that ignited my interest in the Zone and its history.

Aside from my interest in its past, the Zone of Alienation offers me a unique experience compared to visiting other places. Visiting it will offer me an insight into the past and an opportunity to capture its eerie nature. All people coming to the Zone are not called “tourists”, but “visitors”. It is not a place to have fun like other tourist destinations, but a place to pay respects and acknowledge the tragedy that happened there. People visiting have to strictly obey the Chernobyl Zone Guest Code. Besides mandatory radiation precautions and safety-related rules, the guest code includes a whole section regarding ethics and appropriate behaviour. No belongings, for example, are allowed to be left in the Zone, as stated in this poetic sentence: “The Zone guest does not leave any traces of his/her visit to the Zone, no artifacts from the early 21st century in the place left forever in 1986” (Chornobyl Zone Guest Code). Moreover, taking any objects from the Zone or causing damage to them is punishable by law (Chornobyl Zone Guest Code).

One of the most famous cities in the world is located in the Zone. The city of Pripjat, formerly the home to 49,400 people and one of the “youngest cities” in the former Soviet Union (the average age in the city was 26 in 1986 (Pripjat.com)). Due to the explosion of Reactor No.4, the entire city’s population was evacuated indefinitely to Slavutyč, leaving Pripjat in its current abandoned state. The city is noted for its “intermodal Soviet modernist architecture”, now frozen forever since 1986 (Walsh, 2018). There is something of a phantasmagorical and eerie feeling to it; the buildings are still there, while its former habitants are gone. It is possible to sense and imagine how life used to be from the buildings now deteriorating by the forces of nature.

In spite of its seeming lifelessness, the Zone is not empty. There are old people still settled there, most of whom are former residents of the place resettling against official orders from the government. They are one of the last remnants of about a thousand people who returned back to the Exclusion Zone post clean-up operation (Thompson & Beeler). The others are workers who are in charge of maintaining the Sarcophagus (a large shield covering the whole exploded Reactor No.4) on a strict basis to “rest” from the radiation surrounding it (Katrin,

## THE ZONE OF ALIENATION

*by Huy Anh Nguyen, 16 years old*

n.d.).

Even though the Zone is the site of the infamous Chernobyl disaster, years later it is, unintentionally, also one of the biggest natural reserves in Europe. The lack of human intervention has caused a surge in natural development despite the existence of fallout. An example of a species that has benefited in this context are wolves, which enjoy large numbers of prey due to the aforementioned reason (Deryabina, et al., 2015). There are also their domesticated counterparts in the Exclusion Zone, who are still capable of affection towards people. These canines are the descendants of the pets abandoned after the clean-up operation—again, on official orders. (McDowall, 2018).

I want to visit the Zone, not for the sake of adventure, but for the sake of curiosity and an interest in the history of the place. If the Zone in reality were completely opposite to what I expect of it, I would, honestly, be shocked—for all the truths about it would be false, and truth is completely unalterable. Especially for something as heavily researched as the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone.

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## A VOICELESS ODYSSEY

---

*by Khoa Nguyen, Grade 11*

Why adore if there is never desire?  
A mouth for melody: a lip to close,  
Another to open, A Romeo  
To my burning passion, calm my crier.

The path is never kind, each push catches fire,  
Yet sings the timeless grace of a meadow.  
Still, we must pay such joy with pain. Although  
The ache makes drugs, fear the time they require.

Opening hearts without opening mouths:  
Strings crave a master, strikes like calm snowfall  
Lest the song be Pinocchio in strings.

A song: thumb strums North and the rest go South.  
A story: fingers walk, sure as rainfall,  
Sing the voiceless epic of thousands springs.

### *A Note from the Author...*

The poem portrays my view on playing an instrument, specifically the guitar. I achieved this by explaining my own path to mastery. Throughout the sonnet, there are multiple expressions of the idea that being able to master this instrument would create a beautiful song, even without the voice of the singer; however, this comes with the painful cost of incredible effort. For example, in the second and third line, I wrote: "A mouth for melody, a lip to open/ A lip to close"—"mouth for melody" and "lip" are metaphors for a musical instrument, and the paradox "open" and "close" is used to praise the opening of peoples' hearts and closing their mind to stress. On the same line, I compare the instrument to Romeo, who symbolizes my love for the guitar. Nevertheless, in order to achieve our "loves", we ache during the time it takes to become "drugs". Only when we become masters who play like a "calm snowfall" or "sure as rainfall" can we "(s)ing the voiceless epic of thousands springs". If not, the song will end up like "Pinocchio in strings"—which is an allusion to the famous story with the same name, where he sang "I've got no strings on me" to express his freedom. This implies that the song is no longer free of restrictions, and can no longer be considered a piece of art. Both Romeo and Pinocchio go on agonizing journeys to find what they want. Similarly, the poem itself is a portrayal of my own "Odyssey" to journey master musical perfection, mirroring Odysseus' turbulent journey in Homer's famous poem.

IT WAS THE SEA THAT WASHED UNTOLD FEELINGS ASHORE

---

*by Yagmur Ozturk, Grade 11*

-The Sea-

Miranda yearned to be Prospero's light—  
He would make skies thunder, her old father;  
Old papa's wisdom was like no other,  
In the deafening silence of the night.

There were shadows she had to help him fight  
If that meant sailing along her father,  
In his raging sea of despair farther,  
She'd let ruthless fate tie her weak hands tight.

But how could this beast rip the light apart  
From the wise kind soul who once touched her heart?  
Gusty winds would leave agony beside

By the hurrying water, papa's art  
Gave strength to the young light's soft, beating heart,  
But it hurt, falling for the warm, kind tide.

-The Tide-

The alluring flow of the warm, kind tide,  
The wish she made upon a star for reign;  
As soft sea filled light's young heart deep inside,  
Made papa's pain follow her in the rain.

She had always dreamed of learning to fly  
In the rain, she and her love sailed away—  
It was as if they owned the endless sky;  
They would write their stories from far away.

But now the gusty winds pushed her too far,  
Even with the warm tide, unknown felt cold.  
It was too late to blame that twinkling star  
As she watched their hideous fate unfold.

How warm old Prospero's hugs were, how sweet  
His absence shook the ground under her feet.

-Salty Tears-

It was the sea that washed untold feelings ashore  
As her dear papa's death sat on her shoulder.

Salty tears of the sea ran down her eyes,  
They burned their way down her heart.

This was a pain she had never felt before, but  
Only the tired waves knew how time flies.

She wished, in her foolish youth, she was wise—  
Because now she couldn't bear the draught she  
felt inside.

The light watched the deep sea she once loathed  
Vanish like an untold story,  
Into the loneliness of the night.

## DILIGENCE AMIDST DEBRIS

by *Madeleine Rickman, Grade 11*

The sound of morning raindrops lightly tap the steel roof above Joanna's bed. The ocean quietly unfolds waves onto the shore, the fall of each crest sending calming ripples down her spine. As she listens more closely, however, the rattle of glass bottles and plastic debris crashing into the sand wake her out of her serenity. Paper cups, plastic bags, cardboard parts and everything in between line the coast as far as the eye can see. A small bird scurries around the garbage-coated sands, which were once home to the most beautiful beach in Metro Manila. The coastal city that Joanna adored for the entire sixteen years of her life quickly succumbed to the pressures of an industrial economy. In the Philippines, this economy spares little regard for the environment.

The damp dirt roads cover at each forceful stomp of Joanna's feet as she powerfully strides into town, a large sheet of cardboard under her arm. A crowd of people await her. Squeezing in between bodies, she makes it to the front where she stands inches away from the stage Marco Gomez has yet to share at Okapi Square. The people quiet as glossy-black dress shoes approach right in front of Joanna's head, a crisp click with each step.

"Good morning, Metro Manilla!" he says with a grin as the crowd erupts with cheering. "Now as we know, the landfill project—"

Before Marco can utter another word, Joanna jumps on stage, holding a sign above her head that reads "LANDFILLS EXCUSE LAZINESS!"

"Dump now, dread later! They don't care! Dump now, dread later! It's not fair!" she chants at the top of her lungs.

Bodyguards rush onto the stage and carry her off as she thrashes in their grasp. There is a murmur in the crowd as Marco rushes down the steps to follow.

"Let go of me!" she shrieks to the security and they release their firm hold on her arms. They step back as Marco approaches.

"I've seen you before at a few of my rallies. You sure aren't a big fan of my work are you?" Marco says, smiling.

"How can anyone admire a man who leaves his pregnant wife? A man who abandons his infant daughter? What about Belinda Reid, huh?"

"She wasn't... I didn't... look, I don't know what digging you've done into my past... what did you even say your name was again?"

"Joanna. Reid." She says before storming off.

With hot tears streaming down her face, Joanna flails and pushes through the crowd, then races back home. Was Marco as bad as she thought? Did she really hate him for political problems—or personal reasons?

The next morning, Joanna awoke to the waves once again. Looking out onto the beach, her gaze catches a small bird struggling amongst the garbage. A brown speckled gull who likely wants nothing more than to fly away from the pollution at her feet.

*Creative non-fiction piece adapted from:*

Sarmiento, Bong. "Philippines Central Government on Solving Plastic Trash Problem: 'We've Done All We Can'." *Eco-Business*, [www.eco-business.com/news/philippines-central-government-on-solving-plastic-trash-problem-weve-done-all-we-can/](http://www.eco-business.com/news/philippines-central-government-on-solving-plastic-trash-problem-weve-done-all-we-can/).

## LADY LIBERTY AND HER TWINS

---

*by Georgia Saarimaki, Grade 9*

**I**

You may think that I am just metal,  
But behind the copper, steel, and gold  
I have witnessed what some may call absurd  
From the safety of the green, treed island on which I settle.  
I've watched my beautiful city as it's grown and thrived,  
Witnessed skyscrapers constructed in waves,  
Seen beautiful planes reflect the warm sun as they fly by.  
My favourite day was when the twins arrived;  
It took a while for them to go up  
But once they were there, were they ever gorgeous—  
Unlike anything the world had ever seen before.  
Finally, New York was all grown up.  
My city is now blossoming like a fragrant, red rose.  
I love watching the bustling downtown  
People with either briefcases or cameras, all with places to be,  
The way the cars fade in and out of the building's shadows.

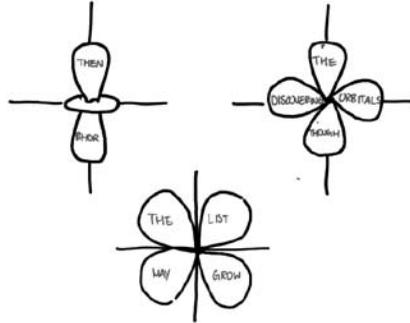
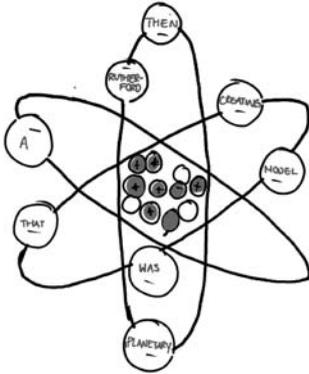
**II**

There was not one thing I could do.  
Inside my metal cage, I kicked and screamed.  
I watched and sobbed as they collapsed along with my heart—  
For my dear twins, were no longer in my view.  
The days that followed were the worst of my life:  
I was forced to watch their remains be taken away.  
It was days upon days of heartbreak and pain,  
I felt as though I was being stabbed with a rusty, jagged knife.  
I am, now, again, the beauty of my city;  
No more mesmerizing towers to look at,  
Just that old green statue on her own island.  
No longer did the statue and her twins share the fame, mutually.  
You may think that I am just metal,  
But you couldn't possibly be more wrong.  
I, too, have feelings of love, hate, and sadness—  
But you will never know this, for all you see is metal.

INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE PERIODIC TABLE

by Maaryah Salyani, Grade 12

F 1.01	I 4.00	R 8.94	S 4.01	T 10.8				
C 12.0	O 16.0	M 16.0	E 14.0	S 20.2				
M 24.3	E 27.0	N 28.1	D 21.0	E 23.1	L 55.5	E 40.1	E 49.0	V 47.9
F 52.0	A 54.9	N 50.9	C 58.9	Y 58.7	I 83.8	N 85.5	G 87.6	
A 88.9	T 91.2	O 92.9	M 98.9	I 99	C 101			
M 103	A 106	S 131	S 133					



LASTLY	SEABORG	IDENTIFYING	THE	LANTHANIDES	WE	LU
	PA	IGNORE	BELOW	MD	NO	LR

## BROTHERS

---

*by Branden Singer, Grade 9*

In Grade Three it was you and me,  
Brothers from the first time we'd meet.  
Running on the playground and climbing on trees,  
That's what Grade Three was for me.

In Grade Four, there was a lot more—  
More work, more laughing, more fun, more sports.  
Whenever we played hockey you would always score,  
We read *A Wrinkle in Time* and oh man, were we bored.

Yeah, from the moment we met,  
Yeah, everything was set—  
We were brothers for life,  
But now it cuts like a knife  
When I think back to those days,  
And how everything was fun—in a way  
It always makes me feel  
Like everything is gonna turn out ok.  
Yeah, everything will be ok.

In Grade Five, yeah man, we thrived—  
School became harder, but we still tried  
To get good grades and be good guys,  
Never guessing that we'd have to say goodbye.

In Grade Six, oh man, life was sick.  
It's surprising how it went by so quick.  
I remember during recess we used to play handball,  
And even though I'd rarely win, I always stood tall.

Yeah, from the moment we met,  
Yeah, everything was set—  
We were brothers for life,  
But now it cuts like a knife  
When I think back to those days,  
And how everything was fun—in a way  
It always makes me feel  
Like everything is gonna turn out ok.  
Yeah, everything will be ok.

## BROTHERS

---

*by Branden Singer, Grade 9*

In Grade Seven, it was like heaven  
When we all hung out at the Seven-Eleven.  
When I look at these photos, it's a blast from the past,  
And man, I wish I could've found a way to make it last.

So we're in Grade Eight, and let me tell you it was great—  
For class you always used to show up late.  
My favourite memory will always be formal,  
And how, that night, we were anything but normal.

Yeah, from the moment we met,  
Yeah, everything was set—  
We were brothers for life,  
But now it cuts like a knife  
When I think back to those days,  
And how everything was fun—in a way  
It always makes me feel  
Like everything is gonna turn out okay.  
Yeah, everything will be okay.

Well now I'm in Grade Nine—and to be honest, it's fine.  
There's a lot more freedom, but that comes with a price.  
The teachers here are great, and the students here are nice,  
But you will always be a big part of my life.

AMIRA, SEE FOR YOURSELF

*by Rayi Singh, Grade 11*

Amira.

Dive into the passions of her faint life  
Dipped in her honey gold desires,  
Yet her love will cut your rose heart like a knife  
Drown into her ocean of burning fires.

Her eyes, yielding an emerald fortune  
As if you have an unquenched pale thirst.  
Her truth that sits on your lips and your chin—  
Being without her is living a curse.

Our youthful yearning was bound for steep heights,  
Reminding me of a life I could not live.  
Faint, mystic eyes that illuminate lights  
Her worn-out hands that catch me and revive.

Disregarding that we were made from glass;  
And glass carves and wounds those that cannot last.

See.

And glass carves and wounds those that cannot last—  
The love you prowl may not be firm at all;  
Hence, serve yourself by being left, aghast,  
Your heart bleeds every night is the next call.

Let the moonlight spill on your withdrawn soul:  
The somber, teal skies wait for you only.  
The heart you sew merely shaped from coal—  
Grasping your fragmented pieces boldly.

The pieces we acquired are all gone;  
Underneath us sprawl a million demons.  
The curtains we once left open are drawn,  
Stern cuts within our veins now screaming.

Blaze out the glows and free yourself from this—  
Unconscious of ordeal is a sound bliss.

For Yourself.

Unconscious of ordeal is a sound bliss;  
I was the same, amaurotic to my own annihilation,  
Waiting for the identical expiration—only this  
time, it was hers.

I screamed and swallowed my spit to feed my clarity,  
The scent of her skin will immortally possess my sins.  
Shapes and walls that inherit the smile  
Of someone that left, but never came back.

I thought love covetable—her fingertips remain  
On the side of my lips that were never stirred, alas!

I kept floating in an ocean suffused with doom;  
The colours she enforced upon me to wear,  
immersed underwater within my bones...  
I glint at the sky, cognizant it's too late.

So I commit, again to seek to see no lie, and again  
Dive into the passions of her faint life.

## THIS CITY IS A CITY OF DANGERS

---

*by Nelson Squires, Grade 11*

This city is a city of danger.  
This city needs a hero that will fight.  
This city needs a strong, tough avenger—  
Our city needs a green arrow tonight.

There is pain and darkness in this world;  
I am the darkness's one deadly fear.  
People are now living in a dreamworld—  
I want to make the city shine all clear.

My arrow pierces the heart of evil,  
Sounds of my bow scream and yell for justice.  
I am the one, main force that's lethal,  
I shoot my arrow like a sharp-point needle.

This city needs a powerful hero,  
This city needs someone, a green arrow.

\*\*\*

This city needs someone, a green arrow—  
My heart is dull and, simply, full of stone.  
I am as silent as a young sparrow,  
All that's left of me is a pile of bones.

I am serving my long, painful sentence,  
I do not deserve to redeem myself.  
I want to step foot and make an entrance,  
But I feel like a dark, empty bookshelf.

I know I have done so much wrong—  
My soul is damaged based on my choices.  
I need to make myself feel strong;  
There are eerie sounds of voices.

I let my city down with a large frown;  
My two sides are having a great showdown.

\*\*\*

My two sides are having a great showdown;  
I have begun to be double-sided.  
I am always both brought up and brought down  
In life, it is what I have decided.

I am the great silent wind in the air.  
I am what needs to be feared during night.  
I leave behind a trail of bright light—  
I want to fight for my city tonight.

I am my city's one, true guiding light.  
I am what this crazy, frightened world needs.  
I am the one, ferocious noble knight  
Who only wants to accomplish good deeds.

I need to make the right and strong wagers—  
This city is a city of danger.

PIANIST

---

*by Kathy Wang, Grade 10*

When I first found your graciousness,  
I felt like the pianist that was on Willoughby  
That all neglect and somehow beat  
By the piano burglars.

That may seem to appear I am forlorn  
Or castoff, or misfortuned. While searching  
Through the waste and brown leaves, in the alley  
Of the forsaken, I try to find  
My piano through heartbreak of loss, grief and mourning.

That was an image of my persona.  
Through tickling your keys, I handle your  
Warm rays of sunshine-sound in my head.

How do you sense and feel my fingers more,  
With ivory that sync with the thread?

## FRÖHLICHE WEIHNACHTEN

---

by Michael Wang, Grade 12

His sergeant's smack on his shoulder told him it was time to get up. Private George Fitzpatrick of the British Royal Welsh Fusiliers groaned and groggily rubbed his eyes. It was hard to believe it was already four a.m. "Today is going to be my worst Christmas," he thought. He instinctively reached out for the metal bucket he kept beside his bed.

This bucket was precious to him. It contained his battalion's final litre of water. George took a mouthful and swallowed slowly, savouring the cool liquid. Weak candlelight dimly illuminated the corner of his tent and allowed him to find his muddied and patched uniform. He moved slowly and wearily, looking much older than his twenty years. His sleeping comrades looked even older. Their hands were bony, veins sticking out of their pale skin. He had only been on the front for three months, but the suffering he endured had caused him to lose faith in this war that would end all wars. As a newly enlisted man, he was in charge of fetching the water for his battalion—an extremely dangerous job the more experienced soldiers refused to do. To get water, George had to cross no man's land and walk five miles to get to the nearest well.

"The enemy was quiet last night," his sergeant said.

George nodded and slowly stretched his stiff, trembling legs. He extinguished his cigarette, and positioned the straps of the bucket securely over his shoulders.

"You need a new coat," said the sergeant, glancing at no man's land. "I'll give you mine for Christmas if you're lucky enough to come back." He smiled, and George tried to hide his fear with a forced smile in return.

"Remember to bring your rifle with you, but don't shoot until you see Hans close enough. Otherwise, you'll probably die. They're good shots, even though it's still dark."

"For God's sake, just leave me alone," said George.

He turned and hurried toward the half-burned town where the nearest well was located. Several comrades stared at him as he walked past the bedraggled Christmas tree anchored in the mud. He climbed out of the trench and rolled over the parapet quickly so as not to be noticed by the enemy.

"It'll be a miracle if this poor kid sees sunrise," murmured the soldiers.

George crawled through the rolls of barbed wire and zigzagged expertly. The sky was black; only the hoots of owls and the booming of distant guns broke the calm of the black night sky. His muscles clenched, knowing he might die at any moment. He focused on crawling slowly and carefully along the muddy field for a few hundred yards and passed the half-split oak tree which marked the frontier of the German trench. For half an hour, George lay there and listened. He heard his heart pound. He smelled his sweat and the stink of rotting corpses.

"Why me?" he hissed. "Jesus Christ, I can feel someone pointing his rifle right at me." Even tiny noises were significant. It seemed like the enemy could hear his breath. He continued crawling, and came to a point where he could hear the faint singing from the German trenches.

"That sounds like *Silent Night*," he thought.

It was time to make a left turn to reach the well.

## FRÖHLICHE WEIHNACHTEN

---

by Michael Wang, Grade 12

"Hans is a smart guy," George thought. "The Germans built their trenches closer to the well than ours."

The journey to the well now became easier for George as he moved farther away from the enemy.

"Thank God I didn't get shot," he murmured and made the sign of the cross.

The eastern horizon was faintly smudged pale red. George sighed and began to walk toward the well.

"*Halt, leg die Hände hoch!*" A German soldier with a Mauser pointing at him stepped out from behind a stand of trees.

George lifted his hands and closed his eyes, waiting for the bullet. But when the German soldier saw the water bucket, he asked, "*Wasser?*"

"Water," George nodded, he said, pointing to the bucket.

"*Ich werde niemanden töten, der nach Wasser sucht,*" the German soldier said. He lowered his rifle and clicked on the safety.

"Please don't kill me on Christmas Eve!" George cried out desperately, shaking his head and holding up his hands.

The German soldier lowered his rifle and smiled. With a wave of his hand, he motioned for George to continue to the well. Smiling, George said, "Merry Christmas."

"*Fröhliche Weihnachten,*" the soldier answered.

Half a mile away, behind the two soldiers' back, the sound of *Silent Night* sang aloud in a mixture of two different languages—a peaceful chorus resounding over the muddy battlefield.

## THE BEAUTY OF A BROWN-EYED DOE

---

*by Kirsten Yip, Grade 12*

You've loathed and cursed the colour of your eyes,  
Described them as dirty, dim, even dull;  
Their allure is what you'd never realize.

You wished to have the vivid hues of skies,  
So you'd never view it as a glass half-full.  
Even a hint of lime would be a prize.

But, your eyes hold depth which can mesmerize,  
Like gold which people desperately pull,  
Layers of an espresso synthesized.

They're the warmth endured while roasting fireside,  
Sunlight entwined with a whiskey bottle;  
Hazelnuts, gingerbread... a sweet surprise.

If you'd see how they twinkle like fireflies,  
If you'd see how they embody earth's tulle,  
If you'd see how they absorb the sunrise

You'd see the beauty of those big brown eyes.  
I hope you're convinced after this earful  
That you surely don't need those ocean eyes.  
Your gaze *is* what makes my stomach capsize.

## ALL THAT HAS HAPPENED

---

*by Tyler Yue, Grade 9*

### I

Early that day,  
Before the birds were a-play,  
You stand still, perched on top of a boulder  
Staring up in awe to see the expansive mountains towering over you.  
As the shimmering sun rises just above the peak of the mountains,  
The rays hit the surface of the lake—  
The water like a mirror, illuminating all in sight—  
Birds dance across the sky, chirping tunes of delight.  
The murmur of leaves in the wind, followed by the gentle sound of stillness,  
As you close your eyes you let yourself embrace the world around you;  
Become one with the world around you.  
As free as a bird.

### II

Many years later, atop the boulder  
Lays a place with a fetid odour:  
Negligence, ignorance, belligerence and peoples' selfishness have wreaked  
terror on the world.  
While you searched for wealth and greed,  
The world around you withered away  
As you used it like a buffet.  
You stare upon the view in horror and disgust;  
The land encroached with garbage,  
Polluted, so much so that not one single animal could survive.  
The sky, filled with smog, suffocating you as if someone had clenched their fists  
around your neck.  
Now, you stand still, perched on top of a boulder,  
Wishing that if you opened your eyes you could have made a difference  
Before it was too late.



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