

# InCITE 2016



CITE 2016 “MAKING MEDIA MATTER”:  
A MESSAGE FROM OUR CONFERENCE CHAIR

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It's an exciting and challenging time to be a teacher and student of English, a time when our understanding of literacy has evolved to mean twenty-first century literacies, and when the canon of texts to be explored in our digital age includes multimedia works.

Media literacy and studies became a mandatory and discrete strand in the Ontario Ministry of Education's Secondary English Curriculum in 1998, when Media Studies was also created as an optional grade 11 English course. In 2006, media literacy became a required component of the Elementary Language Arts Curriculum. Since that time, the Internet and digital technologies have become an increasingly pervasive part of our lives. Today we find ourselves living through what Michael Crawford calls "a crisis of attention that is now widely remarked upon, usually in the context of some complaint or other about technology" (*The World Beyond Your Head: On Becoming an Individual in an Age of Distraction* ix). Reading has become more fragmented, and student writing is frequently characterized by the informality and language conventions of social media; however, studies show our students may, in fact, be reading and writing more than previous generations, albeit much of it in shorter and more varied forms. Much of our online life is devoted to entertainment, lacking the depth—but exceeding the allure—of academic pursuits. It is increasingly important, therefore, that students learn to read, engage with, and develop ideas, arguments, and stories in different media.

Jan Campbell, Executive Director of CIS Ontario for supporting CITE Executive projects.

Jen Weening of The Country Day School for her technological support during the creation of this publication.



'Architectonic Elegance' by Jonah Walker-Sherman, grade 10,  
Royal St. George's College.

Digital technologies certainly contribute to this crisis of attention, but they also democratize opinion writing and creative expression, enabling students to grow from passive and uncritical consumers to active, critical, and creative producers of multimedia messages for authentic audiences and purposes beyond our classroom walls.

To make media matter, the CITE 2016 Committee invited author Michael Harris to inspire our student writers and judge their work. His “Machine Vision” prompt urged students to explore the ways our technologies alter us and shape our understanding of the world. We thank the students whose work was selected, their English teachers for guiding them in their craft, and Michael Harris for his generosity in serving as our InCITE judge. Special thanks go to Sarah Hudson, InCITE’s Executive Coordinator and Editor, and to the entire CITE Executive for their guidance and support of the RSGC team hosting this year’s conference.

Trena Evans  
Royal St. George's College  
CITE 2016 Conference Chair



## MESSAGE FROM OUR JUDGE

by Michael Harris

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Our technologies are extensions of ourselves. Whether the extensions are physical (a hammer) or perceptual (a telescope) or social (a Twitter feed) the fact that we pursue them always tells us something crucial about what it means to be human. This is why we love stories about new gadgets, stories about the future, stories about the frontier of our ingenuity. When we read (and write) about the human relationship with technology we're really reading (and writing) about our hopes and fears for the future of our species. Things don't get much more grand.

I'm struck by how trenchant science fiction has become in recent years; perhaps it hasn't reflected our lives so tellingly since the 1940s, when a "golden age" of sci-fi delivered wondrous new visions of our potential. Today, the radically disruptive effects of the Internet, artificial intelligence, drones, big data, and nanotech have lit a new fire. The wonder is still there but also a deep skepticism, as seen in work like Dave Eggers' novel *The Circle* and Spike Jonze's movie *Her*.

That said, the stories we consume about tech aren't usually written by teenagers. They're written by folk old enough to think SnapChat is "creepy" and Instagram is "exhausting." That's why this collection is so extraordinary: these pieces are created by digital natives (grades seven to twelve) who live in the trenches of the future. To them, online life is not "the new thing." It's the air we breathe.

These are the writers we need to listen to next. Their vision of humanity's relationship with technology can tell us something fresh about where we're headed. I consider myself truly lucky to have had the chance to read their work. What a generous and fascinating glimpse into the future.



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# WHIRLWIND

by Jack MacDonald, Grade 8

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A curious boy sets out to explore  
His driving force – the stubborn and frustrated whirlwind inside of him  
A whirlwind that knows not of the world that preceded him  
But only of the modern day

The stairs to the solemn, unused attic creak slightly under the boy's nearly weightless feet  
His shoes slap against the rickety stairs  
They groan with every feather's fall  
Phone in his pocket, pulling him down like a pair of unseen outstretched arms,  
The whirlwind weakens.

The boy's excitement grows as he grabs the cold, stony hatch and enters the attic  
He can smell the age of the room  
dozens of years wasted away, waiting to be stirred,  
the boy has brought that stirring.

He notices something unfamiliar and peculiar, and he smells freedom. A crimson outer-layer wrapped around dust covered pages of paper, he sniffs the cover and his nose is filled with the sensation of what smells like old, drenched wood.

He stares at the foreign item, his eyes, pools of questions.

He drops the book to the ground with a sickening thud.  
He picks up his phone,  
soft and smooth, yet as heavy and searing as a meteorite.  
He leaves,  
exhaling the taste of the stunning words from his mouth.  
The book lies closed on the floor.  
The whirlwind once again,  
consuming him.  
The vortex inside of him shrinks, like a measly servant  
bowing down before his superior master.  
As he investigates the article, a word travels through his mind like a bullet train.  
Book, 'My Grandparents spoke of these things',  
the boy thinks to himself.

He recalls what they said about these ‘books’,  
Engrossing stories, full of imagination and wonderment.  
The best of which can suck you into their flowery valleys and force you to inhale their  
knowledge.

He flips open the cover, and plumes of dust explode  
and fill his mouth and nose with a stale aroma, like aged bread.  
The cracked, creased pages covered in words long forgotten call out to the boy.

As he runs his fingers over the faded letters, he begins to read and falls in love. Hours go by, and the boy becomes more and more distant, lost in the pages. The whirlwind diminishes, looking like David next to the boy's creativity that is Goliath. He slides his finger across the page's coarse edge and draws blood. He licks his finger free of the growing ruby pool and the blood fills his mouth, making his nose crinkle.

A BUZZ in the boy's pocket whips him like the wind on a stormy day,  
He drops the book to the ground with a sickening thud.  
He picks up his phone,  
soft and smooth, yet as heavy and searing as a meteorite.  
He leaves,  
exhaling the taste of the stunning words from his mouth.  
The book lies closed on the floor.  
The whirlwind once again,  
consuming him.

RUDE

by Mia Xing, Grade 9

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Often you awake in the morning a completely different person. Your brain grasps a new wisp of a trick from the day before, a corner of you gets rewired, and you're different.

And even more often, you tend to forget the previous versions of yourself, or you just choose to forget. Who knows?

The first thing you reach for is your phone, always. On the brim of your bed, you grope for it. Your left thumb presses your touch ID to unlock, yes, unlock your world, your toes tuck into your flip-flops, you open “Snapchat” “Instagram” “Facebook”, land into these icons and you are safe.

As usual, you sit on the toilet and reply to all your Snapchat messages. Other days, there would be only twenty items, but today you get more, for it is your birthday, but you just reply with the same smile anyway. It made you feel like, as you put it, a “pro”— put on your signature face (a sticky sweet smile, with eyes looking to your right) and your “sass”, click open a message while not even looking at it, press “reply” and then “send”.

As a little birthday gift, you worship your own Instagram ratio— you are following 156 people, but 507 are following you. You feel like a celebrity, although, really, you are just brushing your teeth in front of your drowsy opaque dorm windows. You imagine paparazzi out there, although in this girls' school you and your roommates don't even close the blinds when you change, even though most of your followers don't know you well and, ha, you don't know them. Made you feel a bit chilly, but thrillingly chilly.

In this new mood, you dance into your room, do a little swirl to take a panorama video of it on Snapchat. Did your roommate just say something? You can't hear her for you had to select all your Snapchat friends! You are busy, you're already dealing with too much stuff at the same time, okay? Okay, you raise your head, chin's up, smile on. This split-second "signature face" should be enough, and "unrude"; at least you heard her. You tell yourself.

You open the door to get water. A fluttering sound of paper.

“Surprise!” your roommates laugh inside. Looking up, decoration paper, photos, and sticky notes cover the door.

You snatch your phone out of your pocket, take a photo, and post it on Instagram. “Lots of love #birthday #BFFs”. 3 laughing emojis on your screen, a poor faint smile on your face.

Then you start looking. The photos are of a girl who is identical to you but whom you don't know, beaming in Minion costumes with one leg up in the air, and making a face in a little black dress, with no guys around, free and... "Brainless!" you think. Ugh. Her dimples and braces! You feel persecuted as if being jeered at by a gargoyle. Someone wrote with a silver Sharpie "JUST BE YOU ZUMA!".

“That’s not me,” you mutter and frown a bit at seeing the letters “Z-U-M-A”. Your brain vomited a gush of forgotten things. You try to swallow them back but they just keep gurgling out.

You remember when you first came to high school, you had to create an account for everything and pretend you already knew these social media, none of which existed in your country, like the back of your hand. You only sent and replied when you wanted to say something, and on Snapchat you made real faces. You took two minutes to take a photo, decorate it and caption it. Ew, dumb.

Then your brain started learning new tricks more fanatically. “Oh you need to reply to people! To everyone!” “Just comment random stuff under my posts. I don’t care what you say,

only want to see the numbers.” “Look at my Insta ratio!”... Everything you heard from others, your brain programs into you. You became Almeta, your new name on social media, “ambitious” in Latin.

But you were Zuma, “peace” in arabic. You were.

“That’s not me,” you say, starting to rip everything off the door.

Riven paper flutters onto the floor.

It's 9 pm. "So weird nobody liked my birthday post!" You charge into the room, trying to shrug a little. No one answers.

How rude, you think.

THE THEIASPHERE

by Madeline Vukovic, Grade 8

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The boy looked back at the farmhouse behind him. The sun beat down hot on his back, and the wasps flew around his face, dripping with sweat. The shovel felt heavy in his hands as he squinted up to the second-storey window. Through the lace curtains he could distinguish the frail figure of his grandfather who had sent him to dig up what was described as “a large box in a garbage bag”. He turned back to the sizeable hole he had dug next to the large rock in the centre of their orchard. Then to the tattered cardboard box wrapped in a black plastic bag torn to shreds, wondering if this could really have been what the old man was referring to.

Bending down, he curled his fingers under the bottom edges of the box and slowly lifted, half expecting it to fall apart. The box held, and he made his way in between the trees, careful not to step on the ripe cherries that had fallen and would stain his shoes pink. He reached the screen door and nudged it open with his elbow, setting the box down to untie his laces and set his shoes neatly at the corner of the mat inside. Wiping sweat from his forehead, he picked up the box once again, crossed the kitchen to the foot of the stairway, and trudged up the carpeted stairs leading to the bedrooms. He reached the top and walked into his grandfather's open room.

Setting the box on the stool next to his grandfather's bed, he gently shook him awake and sat on the end of the bed. The old man's eyes opened slowly and adjusted to the light in the room.

“Felix”, he said in a weak voice, then stopped to take a drink from the table beside him, “Where is it?”

"On the stool", the boy replied, "Would you like me to open it for you?"

"Yes," the old man said, "and just put it on the bed."

Inside the box, there were many moist clumps of soil and a clear plastic bag. Inside the bag, there was a pair of glasses, not unlike the ones the old man wore to read. The boy gingerly pulled the mouth of the bag apart, lifted the glasses from their resting place, and lay them on the lap of his grandfather.

“What do you see here, boy?” the old man asked, his voice coming to life.

"A pair of glasses", Felix answered.

“Yes, but no. This is a good place to start. This is a Gate to the Theiasphere. The Theiasphere is the place of ultimate satisfaction. Or so mankind thought. It knew what you wanted even before you wanted it. It was everything in the entertainment business wrapped up into one. So it should come as no surprise that it was that which suffered first.

“What you see here does look like a pair of glasses. What it does is guide the consciousness through realities that it finds pleasing, a constant stream of stimulation. It does this through waves sent from the arms of the glasses into the brain which correspond with those sent through the lenses of the glasses. The false reality which the brain perceived was called the Theiasphere. Invented in Greece in a time of poor economic stability, it made the country rich and was named the Theiasphere after the goddess of vision, Theia. They did all the manufacturing locally and then transported it to all corners of the world. It spread like an infection.

“Soon, the only people that did not own a Gate were the elderly, such as I who did not trust it, and those who could not afford it. At first, one could enter and exit the Theiasphere without trouble, but as they used it more and more, they found it harder to leave. People would practically starve themselves, not leave for days, just to be on the Theiasphere. The inventors heard this and installed a safety feature. Whatever the body needed, the body would get on it’s own, without disturbing the user’s consciousness. What the programmers did not anticipate, however, was the

need to check whether or not the food being consumed was safe. Many died from food poisoning. You wondered why the department stores we visited were always empty? The body had no need for appliances or clothes. But this was not the least of their worries.

“Most troubling of all, the Theiasphere was a time bomb. After a certain point, the brain would become used to the constant stream of information, and its absence was devastating. The brain would shut down if it were not in the Theiasphere. Quite literally die of boredom.

“Perhaps the most interesting thing about the Theiasphere though, were the rumours. That after the Theiasphere had been in use for long spans of time, it could no longer entertain the brain as efficiently. It wo-”

—Pain—

“uld provide glimpses into the future. Both your paren—”

—Pain. Crying.—

“-ts entered the Theiasphere and died because of it.”

The boy picked up the Gate and held it in front of his eyes. The old man snatched it away.

“Now listen to me,” the old man said fiercely, “don’t you ever put these glasses on. I lost your mother, father, aunts and grandmother to this monstrosity and I refuse to lose you too.”

—Emptiness.—

My eyes open, and I feel myself laid down. This was not how I entered. I lift my hands to my face and pull off my Gate. I then register the stabbing pain and emptiness in my stomach, and the wailing that is splitting my eardrums. I try to sit up, only to fall back in surprise at the sight of blood covering my body and a large wound in my stomach. I look to my left and see Dad with a baby. It then dawns on me, that's my baby, still red and surprised at it's... no, his new surroundings. I yearn to hold him and call out, but my voice is hoarse with misuse and comes out as barely more than a croak.

I realize now that the Theiasphere has ruined the greater part of humanity. We have caused our own downfall and we will not go out with a bang, but with a whimper. My son must know about this and he must not fall into the trap. I shall be there to guide him to be careful and cautious in this new world.

This world though, so boring. I yawn and absentmindedly drop my gate into a bag underneath the table I lie on. The baby seems to wail louder. I close my eyes, and drop off.

The man, clutching the baby turns to gather the bags. His eyes land on the Gate. He looks up at the motionless form of the baby's mother.

"Oh, Carol," he says with a sad smile, "Still the smartest girl I know."



by Mckenna Ryan, Grade 11



My piece of art is called "Overload" because in the society we live in, we are taking huge amounts of new information everyday, which in many ways can be a good thing, but is also bad and confusing because our minds can't possibly process and intake information in such great amounts. People are constantly talking at us more than ever before due to technology we have today. We are getting emails, texts, dms, snapchats, tweets, new pins, quotes/interesting facts of the day being sent to us on the daily. We are watching the news, netflix, movies, tv shows, youtube, and vines. We are also carrying on with regular traditional conversation, but is the information even true? Is any of it valuable? Will it help you? Or will it destroy you? Technology has changed our society a lot. What will be your future?

by Portia Leggatt, Grade 8



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## THE DIVIDE

by Eliose Cervantes, Grade 11

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Tap tap tap, the keys murmur.  
Pause.  
Thumbs hover cautiously over space...  
The cursor blinks scornfully.

I've been here before,  
Yet I've only known this slim keyboard  
For half my life.  
No more.

Once a stranger,  
This cursor is now as familiar as  
The echo  
Of jump ropes on pavement.

Having grown up with a pen in my hand  
(A beloved contrast)  
Paired with markers, pencils—  
Erasers able to quickly expunge the bland

We had three letters: VHS.  
Then three more: DVD, Y2K, LOL.  
Always three more.  
(PS3)

Side A, Side B.  
That's what the cusp is like.  
With "generations" separated by  
Only a few years, estranged.

“Only nineties kids remember.”

Yet the nineties didn't really end until 2005.  
I'm not sure what I believe, though.  
I was born in '98.

To have grown with the palpable and now  
Living with the intangible, a development  
Of technology so wanted, but so obtrusive.  
It passes by too quickly.

Some only know a world of media,  
With information at their fingertips.  
A swipe, a touch,  
A brief encounter with an encyclopedia.

Others are quick to judge.

Side A was  
Flip phones,  
Tamagotchis,  
Nostalgia because

Side B is  
Smartphones,  
Smartwatches,  
Being dumber than what we own.

Permanence is different now,  
I think.  
Yet I still indulge, we all do.  
Our consumption is almost a vow.

A vow, but maybe we don't know  
Who, or  
What  
We're pledging to.

Side A, Side B.  
Is it really fair?  
To divide  
Based on what we grew up with?

Side B, Side A.  
Both so important,  
Necessary.  
We've found connections every time.

We can learn  
Languages,  
Subjects,  
And share  
Stories,  
Messages,  
Across the world.

A balance to be  
Found  
Amongst the uncertain,  
And what has passed.

What's really changed?  
Each side has  
Its light,  
Its shadows.

We're preoccupied  
By what doesn't always  
Apply.  
The hum of circuits sings,

It sings us to sleep.  
It sings us awake.  
Balance...  
May your balance keep.



## THE GRAVEST HUMAN ERROR: A IRONIC LAPSE IN JUDGEMENT

by Jadyn Dragasevich, Grade 12

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“Mr. Watson, come here, I want you,” Alexander Graham Bell uttered into his experimental design for the telephone on March 10, 1876. These historic words marked a watershed moment in our history. The world was forever changed that day, as a new invention would spur an age of connectivity never seen before.

In the coming years, people would relish the opportunity to take part in a global interconnectivity that would allow for unprecedented communication between relatives, associates and friends. With the mid 1980's invention of the World Wide Web, our global community was once again thrown into a new array of communication and dissemination of information. We were enthralled with the ability to communicate seamlessly and for the first time in human history, geographic distance seemed to matter very little in grand scheme of things.

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It was a quiet night in the Thompson residence. Without the light brushes of snow due to the swift and cold January 1892 wind, not a noise could have been heard. Thirteen-year-old Avery Thompson found it haunting, but there was an odd calming factor to the stillness. A shrill ring broke out through the home as the telephone broke the silence.

“Mom!” belted Avery through the three stories of their upper-middle class Manhattan home.

“I’m coming!” yelled Avery’s mother, running down from the top floor with a keen intent on who was on the other line. Her husband, and Avery’s father, was away on business in Europe like he always was, and as tiresome as it was for the family to cope with, the telephone was a method of communication never before seen.

It was an incredible device, yet Avery couldn't help but feel a longing for the human connection with his father that he missed so much over the years. In fact, it was the invention of the telephone which allowed his father to take more liberty in going across seas for greater periods of time, as he felt that he was still connected to his family.

Avery did not know how he felt about this invention. He loved talking to his father, but as he watched his mother laugh and chat on the phone, he felt something missing. All sound zoned out for Avery, and he reminisced on the memories of his father. The old, human memories.

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Ben takes a look at the watch on his computer before going back to his homework assignment. It reads October 8, 2007. It was a boring afternoon for Ben, certainly not helped by the tedious work ahead, but he had to plough through this assignment if he wanted enjoy the rest of his weekend.

He had been tasked with learning of his great grandfather, Avery Thompson, and creating a family tree. A simple “Google” of his name finds a wealth of information, yet Ben is absent minded in this task. He is only focused on the other tab open in his web browser. He is only focused on Facebook.

As notification after notification keeps arising, Ben drifts farther and farther away from his task. Gone is the research into his successful lawyer of a great-grandfather, and in comes the wealth of more popular information.

Although he enjoys talking with his friends, he is saddened in the knowledge that the trace to his ancestors is slowly slipping away as he is taking less of an interest in them. The worst thing is that the very tool which allowed him to see the legacy his ancestors left behind is now bombarding him with a seemingly impenetrable barrier to prevent him from seeing it.

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Exiting the lecture hall, Jodi felt a bizarre sense of fulfillment. Once a bastion of liberal arts intellectualism and the humanities, her school, Harvard University, had almost completely adopted the technological narrative that the world seemed to be eating up. Gone were the previously held values in human connection, and replaced with new implant technology allowing for increased communication.

However, today was different. Today was the cultural day of the year for the university - a time where students could visit lecture halls across the campus and learn about the history and culture of the world. It was a day where learning and communications implants were turned off, and students could relish in the knowledge of the past given by professors who provoked human conversation and interaction.

“How awful was that?” Jodi’s friend, Samantha, blurted out as she ran up from behind Jodi.

“You know, I really didn’t think it was that bad,” Jodi responded, trying to provoke some sort of human discussion about the content with her friend, “What didn’t you like about it?”

“They seem to think that we need to learn this material as if somehow remembering the past and discussing it will have any impact on our future,” Samantha said. “Technology is the way the world will move forward, not learning about past events.”

She certainly did have a point, Jodi thought. New implanted microchips would allow humans to communicate seemingly telepathically, and would allow them to be connected to their computers which would increase efficiency and produce higher quality research and—

It was at that moment that everything seemed to click. This was the first human conversation Jodi had experienced in months, as new technology seemed to void the usefulness of all other technology. In the lecture hall named after her ancient relative Avery Thompson, a valiant legal defender of freedom of speech and humanity, she was being taught micro examples of the current catastrophic failure of society, the inability to communicate as human beings.

“Jodi? Jodi, come on we have to go get our implants turned back on,” Samantha urged. “This is the worst.”

As Jodi followed Samantha back to the main campus office, she felt solemn. As the first one in her family lineage to truly understand the consequences of it, she knew now what science and technology needed to fix: itself. For the problem was not humanity and human connections, but that was exactly what technology was trying to make an ill-fated attempt at fixing.

by Amarah Hasham-Steele, Grade 8

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Why anyone would think this is okay?



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## BURNING SCREENS

by Devin Lee, Grade 10

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Look in the mirror, friends of our fathers  
See the distortions you've made to your visage  
I say mind what you've done, sons and daughters  
Those who made passable pleasures out of privilege

A screen was built, and shall be once more  
Several times over till we be no longer  
Then it shall breathe in legend and lore  
As the light transmitted (we think) makes us stronger

But lies have been planted  
Through nurture they've grown  
For screens have been handed  
To all, third-rate or throne

Each man and woman, boy and girl  
Has been given the power of god  
As those stories of power unfurl  
The corrupt make schemes, a web of fraud

I cannot lie  
Nor would I if I could  
Our machines wiped tears from angels' eyes  
Cleansed the earth, an immeasurable good

They gave vision to a world unknown  
Like a lonely flame in utter darkness  
Once more cold and callous than stone  
Then a friend, sleek silver from starkness

But before, one could not kill with words  
Nor end ten thousand lives at once  
They, the cattle put to death by herds,  
Heard true horror in its silence

So be cautious of the flame  
Which we love to see burn bright  
For if too close, this game  
Shall let loose far worse than a mere bite

## AIRFARE

by Ming Scott, Grade 12

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The tiptopping tracteries, bright  
Brilliant striated, hot lakedeep blue  
and I press stained fingers  
There, ridged human stitches  
In contrail definition, cut -  
Those heavy amphorae,  
Hauled sails rigid, Icarus humming, Pandora pitched  
Look how we soar  
Against the sun.

The view here ascending is something  
Magnificent, dwindling gem-bound – Earth,  
A diorama between plastic panes  
And I watch the walking shells below  
Like hourglass sand. Trickle, fall  
Subsume the thick lack of clouds  
Then the higher ones, the expanse  
Moonstone billowed, unstill.

The sun holds hot conference here,  
Eyes red-filled by light imposed, closed,  
I slumber above all. I am the  
Walking miracle, here I am blinded  
So I freefall on pressure-piled wings,  
Aflight.

I must descend

but,

not yet.

# GENETIC ENGINEERING: THE REVOLUTION

by Noah Caza, Grade 10

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“Government-approved haircut number two, please,” I told A729H, my hairdresser.

“Coming right up!” She shouted. She must have made a mistake adjusting her earpiece that morning, as she was speaking louder than the government-approved maximum volume.

“Keep it down, A729H, unless you want an enforcer showing up,” I whispered.

“Oh right, sorry,” she replied. “So, why the fancy haircut today, J389Z? You usually choose haircut number four.”

“G928K and I have our appointment at the birth clinic this afternoon, and I would like to look nice!”

I merged with G928K ten months and six days ago. We finally received a hologram message from the government, stating that we are now allowed to start the process of creating our very own child. We have been waiting for this day since our government-approved merger.

“How exciting: I am still waiting for the government to accept my application. Consider yourself very lucky,” said A729H, as she worked away at my hair. I could sense the envy in her voice. She had been waiting for her application to be accepted for over three years now, and she was only eleven months away from the age deadline. Her chances were slim, but she stayed hopeful nonetheless.

My biggest concern was whether G928K and I would be selected for a natural and unaltered birth, or a genetically-engineered birth.

After another three minutes, my hair was cut to the government standard, and I was on my way.

\*\*\*

I met with G928K at the clinic. My heart was beating out of my chest, but I tried to stay calm for him.

“Hello my fellow partner in merger,” he mumbled. I could tell that he was also nervous. “Your hair looks satisfactory.”

"Thank you kindly," I said. We waited silently in anticipation.

“U059X and G928K, you’re next!” shouted the doctor from the confines of his office.

We entered anxiously and sat down. His office was uncomfortable at best, and there was an overwhelming smell of government-approved Air Freshener (Number Eleven) in the air.

“First off, I would like to say congratulations to both of you, as your child application was accepted with great speed!” he exclaimed. “My name is N927E, and I will be helping you through the process of genetically engineering your baby. As you should know, in the dark times, this process did not exist. This led to many genetic disorders, and many couples giving birth to children who had less than ideal characteristics. With this process, you will be able to choose the exact traits of your child, using some government standards to help you. How does that sound?”

That sounded awful! Why did we have to be chosen for genetic engineering instead of a natural birth? Essentially, the process was changing nature. I started to question whether I wanted to go ahead with it.

“I have an issue with this!” I declared.

As I was about to express my concerns, the eyes of the genetic engineer glared deep into my soul, and I got cold feet.

“Um... if something was to go wrong, would the government provide a full refund? This is an expensive process, and we wouldn’t want to waste our money,” I asked.

The genetic engineer lifted his glare and said enthusiastically, "Yes, of course! However, this would never happen, as we take great precaution throughout the entirety of the process. Your child will turn out exactly as you wish, and that is a personal guarantee."

The genetic engineer had a sense of confidence that calmed me.

A hologram of a child materialized in front of us.

“Using your genes, I was able to create a virtual image of what your child would look like without any genetic engineering,” said the engineer.

The baby boy was beautiful. Small and plump, with big blue eyes, and a tuft of brown hair on his mostly bald head. He was perfect.

The genetic engineer cut into my thoughts with his raspy voice: “Without any genetic engineering,” said the engineer, “your baby boy would be born with brown hair, which we all know is far less than ideal. With very little engineering, your baby will have light blonde hair, so please do not be alarmed by the brown hair in this image.”

Was he joking? What has our society become? Years ago, all people were different. Each child was unique, both in looks and in personality. Each child had a different spark that distinguished them from millions of other children around the world. Now, in the year 2178, with more technology than ever before, people are becoming too similar, through genetic engineering. All genetically engineered people have blonde hair and blue eyes. They also all have the same dull personality. I want my child to be different.

“Alarmed?! You think I would be alarmed that my son would naturally be born with brown hair?” I shouted.

My partner, G928K, cut in. “Honey, stop it!” he howled.

“I will not ‘stop it.’”

The genetic engineer jumped in, “Please, U059X, calm down... I did not mean to offend you! Genetic engineering is a crucial step to your baby-making process.”

I was starting to realize the entirety of what the government was doing... it is not their place to change the genetic makeup of my child. It is not their place to involve themselves with my family and my matters. Most of all, it is not their place to change nature's route. It is unethical, unnatural, and unreasonable. An influx of outrage pumped through my already hot veins. I took a moment to streamline my thoughts, before speaking calmly.

"We will not be participating in the genetic engineering portion of having our child. Thank you," I stated before bolting out of his office with G928K trailing behind me.

The last words I heard were, “Get security! We have a runner!”

This simple action sparked the beginning of a major revolution, about which my brown-haired son would live to hear.

## TECHNOLOGICAL TRANSCENDENCE

by Michael Antiaoff, Grade 11

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As the creaky, crumbling cart,  
Led by two horses tall and fair,  
Begins to approach the square,  
One turns to the other and says,

“What thinks you of this invention new  
The one they say we will come to rue  
The sleek and shiny silver car  
The one which can outlast us far?”

Now the other turned, chewing on some hay,  
And answered suddenly with a neigh,  
“The automobile may be on its debut  
But only we are the tried, and true.  
Not ever one automobile could replace  
The steady horse, which keeps his pace.”

Two horses again, at a much later day,  
began this issue again to weigh:  
“There’s fewer than us than there are of them!  
With rapid pace, we’ve been overtaken,  
All horses now have been forsaken.”

Machinery was first designed  
To aid and assist humankind  
To give things once impossible  
A new beginning, phenomenal

Technology provides a way  
To solve issues with innovation  
To create a new, a better day,  
A day with total optimization.

At first this was technology's use  
Accessible to only few  
Used to make the most important things:  
From new nautical vessels,  
To even bigger bridge trestles.

But as technology became widespread,  
We embarked upon a Revolution,  
To bring technology to every homestead,  
And to every factory, automation.

Now, technology is recreation,  
Phones, Macs, and PCs abound.  
King of Thieves, Clash of Clans,  
All of this in one lifespan.

Reliance is more common too,  
Using it to find things we knew,  
“Google” now is a given verb,  
Does this not our minds disturb?

No, rather people want it more!  
No longer do they have to go to the store.  
Instead, stay at home and buy online!  
All of this, they believe, is fine!

People complain it's not waterproof  
Do they want to wear it in the shower too?  
Are we past the point of disconnect,  
Destroying our once great intellect?

The Internet is now a shrine,  
Privacy is no concern,  
One's life accessible online  
With the simple press of the return.

The collective intelligence of the human race  
Can be found at an ever increasing pace.  
Can we replicate our own intellect  
Without ourselves becoming wrecked?

We need a backup of our mind  
So that when A.I. has been designed  
We can connect our consciousness too  
Without a worry we will lose 'you'.

Human software needs upgrading,  
So no longer our intelligence seems fading  
Against the speed of the computer,  
“Yet what,” asks the brain, “is this intruder?”

A machine designed to redefine,  
Generating intelligence so artificial  
By connecting all our minds online  
Consciousness is one, humanity and computer.

When does consciousness become  
Connected, transcended, the vector sum  
Of our technological innovation  
To improve upon God's creation?

When it does, what will we be?  
What will we know, what will we see?  
Will this be the new generation?  
Or the final conflagration?

As we approach the end of the universe,  
Can technology the course reverse?





by Charlie Hilberdink, Grade 11

ALWAYS YOURS

by Holly Conway, Grade 11

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My Dear,

When I leave you, I won't leave you alone.  
I'll have left you with the gift of our lives benefited by technology.

It pulled us together on a nine a.m. flight from Marseilles  
Joining my bad balance and your good catch.

It gave half of my heart to you at Customs  
Committing the rest to you at Baggage Claim.

It kept us up until two in the morning talking on the phone  
Erasing the fact that I lay a million hilltops away from you.

It mapped the freckle on my back like a consolation in the black sky  
Whispering through the wind 'everything is not okay'.

It sent us the results online from the lab to your back pocket  
Breaking us down tear by tear to pay for its delivery costs.

It carried us to and from our sterile hospital home  
Comforting us that maybe today will be our last visit.

It shaved all of my hair off, strand by strand  
You reassured me I was beautiful as ever.

It illuminated my bedside table where I stayed up late  
To stare into your luminous eyes, where we spoke silent words.

It emitted one last beep when my eyes closed for the last time  
Setting me free falling into ethereal blankness.

It caught our radiant love story.

A film you and I watch daily from a million hilltops apart  
With wet eyes and soaring hearts, climbing hill by hill.

Until we meet again,

– Always Yours



## AND THEN THE EARTH COLLAPSED

by Ali Dashti, Grade 9

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And then the sky disappeared,  
The oceans and seas were drained,  
And the earth collapsed.

And then the birds tried to fly away but the smoke had poisoned the air,  
The fish tried to swim, tried to breathe, but their livelihoods were consumed by monstrous  
channels,  
And the deer tried to outrun the land itself as it caved in, succumbing to an abyss of  
darkness.

And then the planes and jets, the manufactured birds of man, went crashing down,  
The submarines and cargo ships, the fish of man bred from metal, went sinking down,  
And the automobiles and trains, man's machines of movement, fell helplessly into an inky  
void.

And then everything failed,  
Both the natural and unnatural gave in at the end,  
And nature was again victorious, with its cruel kindness.

And the earth collapsed,  
The oceans and seas were drained,  
And then the sky disappeared.



by Oliver Mahan, Grade 7

## HEAR MY VOICE

by Allison Zhao, Grade 9

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The rushing sound of the subway through the tunnels almost drowns out the song playing through her earphones. A man turns the pages of his newspaper next to where she stands. The doors chime, and she pulls out her earphones. It's her stop.

The light changes. Leaves swirl in the gossamer-soft evening wind, and boot heels click satisfyingly across the pavement of the street. It smells like rain, lingering from the afternoon's drizzles.

It happens in those minutes of limbo, when the streetlights are just turning on and it transitions from light to dark.

Cars exhale patiently, waiting, whispering.

One is still roaring, even though the light is red, just a blur in peripheral vision - too fast and pain

flashing blue and red and white lights

pain

black

Everything is out of focus. The asphalt presses against her skin. It's cold and damp from the rain.

There are faces that swim above, mouths moving silently - saying something? The stars are blurred, and the lights are still flashing at the edge of her vision, they're picking her up -

At least it doesn't hurt anymore. The numbness is better than the pain.

A black sky, white ceiling, fading black again - where are the sirens?

silence

Unresponsive, they say. Conscious but unresponsive. Critical condition. The driver fled the scene. Broken bones, and a concussion. They'll heal. She was lucky – except for one thing.

The silence will never heal.

She watches their mouths move, not hearing a word.

She tries to ask the nurse for water, but no sound comes. The nurse starts, averting her eyes, and glances back down at her work. She tries again, and feels the vibration of noise, and realizes what else she's lost. She makes a drinking motion with her hand, and the nurse understands immediately.

At first, sometimes she forgets. Forgets she's silent now, and she's punished by her mother's tears. Her father bites his lip and says nothing. Nothing can be said, anyways. Soon she stops forgetting.

Someone taps her wrist, indicating her phone. *Incoming call*. She never turned off the ringer. It was her favourite song.

She ignores it. Whoever's calling starts a leaving a voicemail. She waits until it's finished, and deletes it.

She doesn't notice her mother enter her room. Doesn't hear her name being said. Doesn't see her mother realize what she's done, or yet more tears. Doesn't notice the door close behind her. It didn't happen.

Amanda's here to walk her to school. She doesn't need a guide to walk a *block*. She's furious, but she knows her mother doesn't understand what she's trying to say. The hand signs don't mean anything to her. She walks away, upstairs, footfalls just a little too loud on the steps.

And it really wouldn't have mattered if she had gone that day, because a month later she's at a special school. That was the end of the hope the silence would end. Communicating with looks and signs, just like everyone else, sharing a burden only they understand.

Three years later, she's resigned. Everything healed. Just like they said. Except one thing. It's not even muffled - it's just gone, gone, gone.

She's learned to live without it. What else can she do?

Her mother writes out a message, not trusting her shaking fingers to communicate this. Not something like this. She reads it, and she understands why.

This could bring her back. Not whole, perhaps dented, but back. That's something.

It has to be.

Then the doctors.

Checking, operating, and feeding that tiny spark of hope and life. It's all a haze - asleep, awake, silent, silent, silent, rushing headlong towards this one moment.

It could, it could, it could.

She brushes her hair back, and quietly braces herself. A lifetime couldn't possibly end here. The doctor reaches forward, and it's on with only the tiniest bit of pressure.

The room is silent. The doctor, her mother, and her father are all waiting with bated breath. Only a second passes, but it's three years all again.

The room is humming.

*Can you hear me?* The question is passed along three mouths, three people, three *voices*. She hasn't heard her parents' voices in three years.

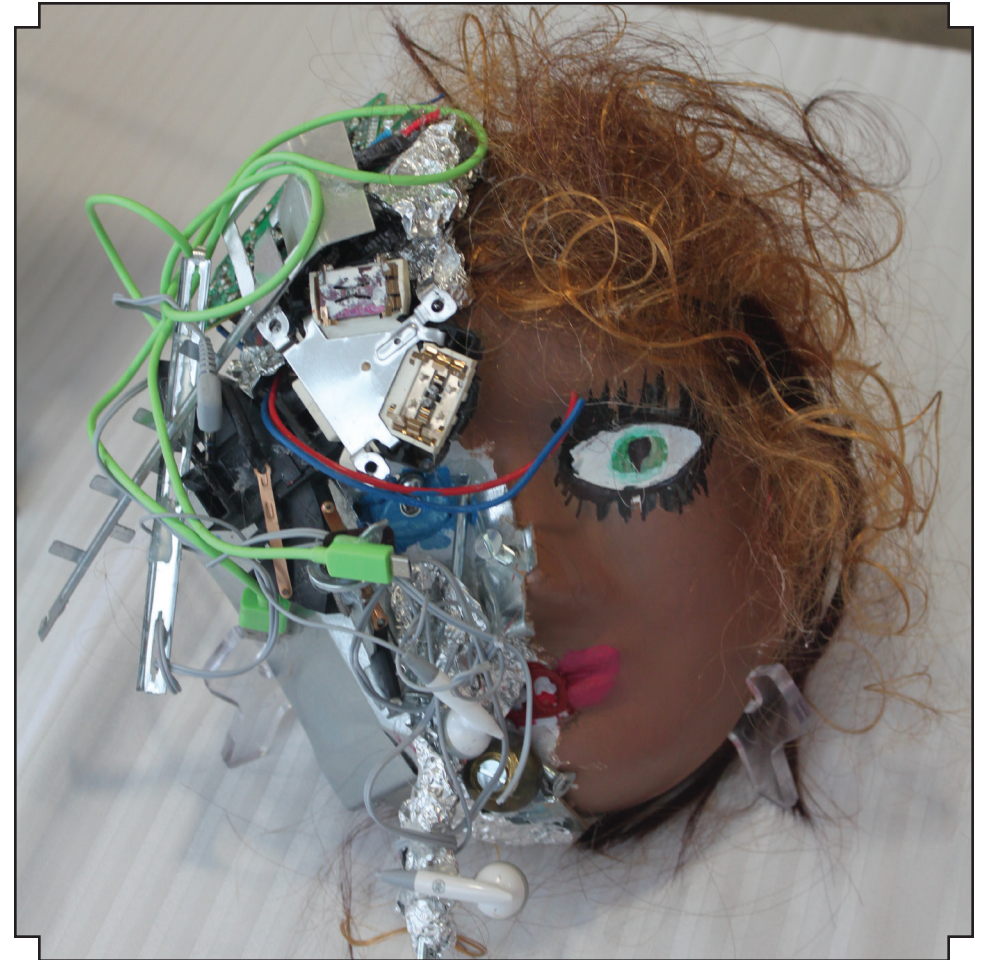
*Can you hear me?*

She's not sure whether to laugh or cry but it doesn't matter; the blurs are clear stars, her world is awake again and she can, yes, yes,

“Yes.”



by Gary Sun, Grade 10



by Jessica Lim, Grade 8



## PERSUASIVE SPEECH

by Zoe Sullivan, Grade 12

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So pretend you're walking through a shopping mall. You look to your left, and what do you see? Let's say you see Victoria's Secret, for example. The first thing you notice as you walk in is the advertisement in the front window. You see models...skinnier than I could possibly EVER be, usually white, with big boobs, small waist, insanely perfect hair, a toned physique, and not a single flaw.

This is when you ask yourself, why am I not like that? Why isn't my waist that small, or why isn't my skin that perfect? Well, the answer, my friends, is because we are normal human beings.

Sifat Azad, an activist in the field, says that the average teenage girl spends about ten hours and forty-five minutes per day absorbing media. This includes browsing Instagram or Facebook, reading a magazine, listening to music, watching TV, or even viewing a billboard you see as you drive to school in the morning...media is everywhere.

Now, I'm not saying that I have an issue with advertising. I think ads are a great way to sell a product when used appropriately. What I am saying is that the use of women in the media and advertisements is not only demeaning, but it also sets unreasonable and impossible standards for women across the globe.

Women are used to sell everything from cars to food. This makes me ask: why is it that in 2015, a woman can launch her own successful company or run for president, yet, in the media she is still being portrayed as a sex symbol?

As women, especially at the impressionable age we are all at right now, we absorb this information and are made to believe that this definition of beauty is the norm. We are set up to think that in order to be considered beautiful we have to look like the women we see in the ads. In reality, every model used in advertising is not only unrealistically skinny, but also Photo Shopped and airbrushed.

As much as we like to think that our exposure is becoming more positive and inclusive of all body types, the truth is that, today, models weigh on average 23% less than the average women and represent a very small portion of our population.

Research shows that the exposure of thin women to teens can be a contributing cause of depression and loss of self-esteem, which correlates with eating disorders being the third most common illness in girls today.

In fact, recent reports from York University show that over three-quarters of female characters in TV are underweight, and only one in twenty are above average in size.

Now, if you still don't think the media has a negative effect on women and girls just like us, then think about this. How often is it that you see a woman in an ad and feel more confident about yourself because of it?

I'm not just speaking for myself when I say that we all feel like our standards aren't high enough for the society we live in. For me personally, I have felt uncomfortable with my body since the age of nine. I used to cry every time I went shopping with my mom, because I didn't look like the kids in the pictures. I didn't look like the model kids with the tiny legs that were advertising the clothes. I think back on this and realize how incredibly sad it is that I was this insecure at the age of nine. Nine year olds should be worrying about what crayon to use, not about their bodies and living up to society's expectations. This may seem extremely young to you, but the truth is that our youth are getting more and more exposure to media in their daily lives, and it's really affecting the way they view themselves.

Just because you're not a stick-thin girl with flawless skin doesn't mean you are worth any less. The women we see everyday offer unrealistic forms of beauty and set standards we should not have to live up to. Girls and women should feel happy with who they are, even if they're not as thin as models. It is important to learn to love and care for ourselves, despite what the media has to say, and to surround ourselves with people who can make us feel like we are worth more than society says we are.

Thank you.

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Pregnancy defines intimate relationships,  
 Primarily as vehicles towards parenthood  
 It is the drive that is the cause of our liveli-  
 hood,  
 And remains the essence of our deprivation  
 Your human experience lies within your  
 ability to shape it,  
 Your ability to make choices that define  
 your future  
 Imagine.  
 Your decision to work,  
 Your decision to learn,  
 Your decision to live,  
 Is determined by your decision to have sex.  
 Pregnancy is like water,  
 Essential to sustain life, yet it can drown  
 you  
 Cast a shadow across a woman's entire  
 future  
 Your body is manipulated by pregnancy,  
 Like a puppet is manipulated by its puppet  
 master,  
 Controlling the direction you want to move  
 in  
 He can walk away.  
 He can deny it's his.  
 He can pretend like it never happened,  
 But it did.  
 He can live freely,  
 He can open up any door he wants,  
 Without fear of closing another.  
 He has a third option.  
 He is guided by desires.  
 I am guided by reality  
 Fulfillment is but a longing,  
 Lost beneath a woman's desire to have sex  
 and her desire to be independent  
 She is a prisoner, held captive within her  
 own body,  
 Sex is the difference between one child and  
 seven  
 Sex is the difference between comfort and  
 poverty

Sex is the difference between education and  
a life without one

Sex is something that as humans, we cannot  
control

We are all sexual beings.

To be held by something to which you cannot  
control.

To be forced into wedlock.

To be lost within a society that only views  
women as maternal beings.

This is the human experience.

Addendum:  
The walls to which up to this point have  
controlled our destiny,  
Are demolished by a substance smaller than  
my fingernail.  
The work field becomes a woman's arena,  
Just as much as it is a man's.  
The playing field is even.  
In a world where men were once the puppet  
masters,  
Women can break through the glass and cut  
the strings.  
My ability to navigate through life,  
Is attainable as long as I am able to swallow  
a pellet,  
That emancipates me from a history that  
controlled my future.  
I ask you,  
What kind of human experience do you  
want?  
Now, you have more roads, more options,  
The path that you choose is different than  
the one chosen for you  
Women are not only safe.  
Women are in control.  
This is the real human experience.



by Jasmine Lau, Grade 7

## THE DEAFENING TRUTH

by Izzy Sternthal, Grade 7

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All I hear are voices.  
Always sounding in their hushed manner, but never having anything to say.  
Voices that sound like washing machines and electric toothbrushes, but not words.  
Not words that can be used to express and explain, not words of relevance,  
only sound.  
Sound that rings in my ears like crystal chandeliers crashing from 50 feet above,  
racing to the ground to be met by the hordes of quivering copper spoons and broken china,  
the china which your grandmother used to keep in the cabinet  
reserved only for the finest of company—  
the company which was never invited to the dinner table.

Sounds that ring through supposedly noise proof headphones, which companies claim in the ads to be able to block out any sound. Trust me, I am the most discerning consumer you can find;

they don't work and I can tell you why. Don't you understand?

It's the silence that's loud—

as loud as a gospel choir of enraged wasps and bitter trumpeting elephants. They told me that the silence would be interrupted soon enough by real voices, but I don't know whether or not to believe that.

It is hard to have faith in anything nowadays because we see as much as we do.

It used to be so simple.  
If you found out that you weren't invited to a party, it would be through a crumpled paper,  
passed on a pink sticky note during a lecture on a superfluous matter in a dull class.  
But how can it be simple now,  
when technology is there to do what it thinks of as "help"?  
Help you see every social media post of fake smiles that look more like acidic orange slices  
than a symbol for happiness.  
Help you see the images of the events that everyone but you were invited to.

Technology's help turns devices that were supposed to allow us to communicate into weapons used against us with a target to push us to our breaking point. Nowadays we see everything, especially what we don't want to see, feeling as isolated as a prisoner of our own making. The fake posts are like car accidents. You don't want to look, but you always do, and you cringe each time you take a glance at them, but you never stop looking, like a crude addiction.

So I sit in the company of the voice of silence,  
which is as perilous as standing beneath a falling California Redwood tree,  
asking myself what is so wrong with me that I am never invited, never acknowledged, never  
heard.

Never heard despite the fact that silence demands to be responded to once for every consonant it utters and twice for each vowel.

The responses make me so tired that I can't sleep because all that I can think about is everyone else. Everyone else who is with people with real voices.

The voices I hear on the phone, though their sound was never intended to be heard by me specifically.

Silence is the most deafening sound that I have ever heard.



by Christina Rosso, Grade 8

We must make that initial jump.



by Kathleen Botha, Grade 7



by Taylor Nagamatsu, Grade 11



by Evan Che, Grade 7

by Anabel Yeung, Grade 11

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When I reach Clover Park, my shirt is damp with sweat. I stop to catch my breath and look around. Stars twinkle faintly in the clear, summer sky; the moon shines brightly like the streetlamps. The air smells of petrichor and feels sticky on my skin. This moment of peace slowly enters and exits my lungs - a warm welcome home and a bittersweet goodbye. Reluctantly, I get off my bike and hide it in a bush. My legs burn from pedalling, so I walk slowly and check the time. It's now 2:49 A.M. - eleven minutes left. Getting here was somewhat therapeutic; crying

"THE RESET HAS ONLY JUST BEGUN."





Mitchell drove all night to Edinburgh, home of the renowned Heart Institute. He approached the reception desk and asked to see Dr. Smith. He informed the receptionist that he was Curtis's brother, and showed a picture of them as children together. When Curtis came, he frowned puzzlingly at Mitchell. "Brother, what are you doing here?"

Mitchell replied, "I needed to speak to you before I die. I am having heart failure."

The two brothers spent that afternoon discussing Mitchell's health as well as catching up on all the years they missed together. Curtis led Mitchell into a laboratory, and showed him an artificial heart. He had been working on this technological marvel for years. Curtis planned Mitchell's surgery with exceptional care. He didn't want to lose his brother once again.

The day of the surgery, Curtis found his pulse racing - it had never done that before. He found his palms sweating - they had never done that before. What was happening? When the surgeon walked into the waiting room and told him his brother's surgery was successful, he leaped up from his chair. He felt an overwhelming sense of... he could not name the emotion.

Curtis walked into the room where his brother lay. Mitchell opened his eyes.

“Curtis, what is that on your cheek?”

Curtis wiped away something clear and wet - a tear?

Mitchell smiled. "I guess we are both half human, half machine now."



by Victoria Brown, Grade 9

## THE GAME

by William Howard-Waddingham, Grade 10

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The children were downstairs in the basement, playing the game. Always playing the game. One could say that the children were addicted to it, but let's be honest. The children weren't addicted to the game. The game was addicted to them.

Melanie and David Slinger had been two ordinary children. Everyday they ate the same thing for breakfast, watched the same ordinary cartoons when they got home from school, and lived in the same ordinary house. Then one day, everything changed when their dad brought home the game. It was revolutionary. A virtual reality experience, the game tailored itself so that it would give the children the challenges they needed to grow up to be the best that they could be. Their dad loved the idea of it. And after a while, it would seem as though the children had come to love it too. But we know the truth. The game was playing them the whole time.

John Slinger, the children's father, had been hearing about the game for ages. He finally bought it, thinking that it would craft his children into being incredible human beings, ready for anything that life could throw at them. As soon as he gave them the game, he instantly began to see the changes. However, these were not the changes advertised. Sure, his kids were acting with a confidence that would seemingly bring them success for the rest of their lives, but something was *too* different. It seemed like a fundamental part of them had been taken away. Some days they hardly knew who John was. The only thing that had changed in their lives was the game, and soon the truth started to open up for John. What nobody had realized was that while his children had been playing the game, the game started to play them.

The children were unsure of the game at first, but eventually, their souls slipped away, and they were powerless against the game's iron fist of control. Melanie, a girl of incredible strength, tried to resist, but David slipped away instantly. Melanie felt her soul slipping away from her mind, being dragged away on all sides by the brawn of the game. She fought for as long as she could, but it was all for naught, as in the end nobody can ever beat the game. Eventually, both children began to forget what the world had ever been like, and slipped further and further away from their bodies, their souls only holding on by a thread. The game replaced lightness with darkness, replaced the game of childhood with the attrition of a war, a perpetual battle to hold on to their earthly selves. People outside thought that the children had finally grasped control of their lives, but they were wrong. The game had finally grasped control of the children, wresting away the innocence of childhood and the right of life from their very hands.

Around the world, the same thing was happening. Millions of parents flocked to buy the game, and their originally sceptical children soon seemed to buy into it. Millions of parents loved the changes they saw in their children, and millions of parents never saw the fundamental differences in their children that no game should have been able to change. Perhaps John Slinger had bought a faulty model, and perhaps the other games never showed evidence of the change that they had made, of the damage that they had wreaked on the kids who played them. For whatever reason, John was the only one to notice, and John was the only one to ever suspect the truth. Nobody else even considered that the games may not have been useful to the children, that the children were only useful to the games.

Melanie Slinger was the first child to feel the change. One of the only children to ever fight back against the raging tide of the game, she was the first to notice the almost imperceptibly small change in its ironclad fist on her body. She attacked the game with new vigour, giving the game everything that it could handle. Finally, she and all of the other children began to notice real changes, and for the first time since they capitulated to the game, it was no longer a constant fight to keep hold on their earthly bodies. The children rejoiced at having finally beaten the game, the entity which had once seemed so immortal. But in reality, the game was never at risk of losing control, the children had won no victory. The game had simply fulfilled its task, and had everything that it needed from the children.

The day that all of the children finally grasped back control of their bodies, exactly 30 years after they were first trapped, the world went crazy. When the children returned to their bodies, they returned to the bodies of adults, and as the game had held the soul of the children in a fixed state of time while it was in control, they had absolutely no idea what they were doing. The world ground to a halt. Doctors in the middle of surgery ceased operating, pilots could no longer fly their planes, reporters on live television had no idea what they were talking about. The game had finally given back control to the children, the children who suddenly had no idea what they were doing in their adult bodies. On the strangest day in the history of the world, the game had gotten exactly what it wanted.

On the same day, amidst all of the chaos, a man named Gregory Wendelstaff started his rapid ascent to power. He was the man who had created the game that everyone thought had helped their children, so people were convinced that he would be the one to cure all of them. He took the lead with vigour, becoming so successful in “curing” the children (while in reality only turning the game back on them), that he became the most beloved person in the world. So great was people’s joy and relief that billions wanted him to lead them all, to take on the role of President of the World. Nobody even suspected him of anything. Nobody except for one man.

It all clicked for John Slinger the day Wendelstaff stepped up to help, more powerful than ever before. He finally knew why his children had never been the same. On the day that the world voted for Wendelstaff to be their collective leader, of the 5 billion people registered to vote, 4,999,999,999 people voted for Wendelstaff. The one person to vote against him was John Slinger, the only man who knew that Gregory Wendelstaff would only help them like he helped their children. Slinger tried to convince people that Wendelstaff was not the saint he was made out to be, pleaded to people that he would only bring the world pain and suffering. Nobody believed him. He did all that he could, but one man can't beat the game.



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# SECRETS IN THE SAND

by Tanaya Vohra, Grade 8

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It was bound to happen. I stared at the piece of papyrus crumpled between my fingers and shook my head. Twenty years of hard work all going to waste. I had devoted the better part of my life to this project, and, now, he was just going to take it away from me?

I understood why this was happening. Who would we use them against? We already had the strongest empire in the world, and if any one of the ministers caught wind of what was going on, we would be in huge trouble as well.

I looked up to the sky, determination burning away all of the anger in my mind and whispered a prayer. It never hurt to have the gods on your side when you were going to disagree with the Pharaoh.

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The sun beat down on the bare backs of the construction workers, slaving away under the watchful eye of their commander. The Pharaoh had commissioned a pyramid to be built in the off chance that his life was cut short. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw one of the slaves being whipped by his commander. He howled in pain, but the lashes didn't stop. I flinched with every crack of the whip, but there was nothing I could do. These were probably the same men who had suffered while bringing my blueprints to life.

I hurried on my way, stopping only to let a herd of camels cross the road. The royal palace, with its turrets and domes, stood a kilometre away. For twenty years, I had called its open, high ceilinged rooms my office, but that was probably about to change. I stood behind the large set of stone doors that was the entrance to the throne room. One of the guards glanced at me and smirked.

“The royal engineer requesting to have a private audience with his majesty.” I spoke slowly but surely, making sure to look directly at the guard’s eyes. He nodded and signaled for his counterpart to help him with the doors. The large slabs of stone shuddered and opened to reveal a purple carpet leading up to the gold and jewel-plated throne. I started down the path, keeping my head bowed as a sign of respect.

“Ah, Nerhotep. I suspected you would come. Please. Look up.” His voice echoed against the intricately carved walls.

I slowly looked up, only to see him nodding his head towards the vizier and his guards, signaling for them to leave.

“I...ah...don’t think...” The words caught in my throat. If he was in a bad mood, I would never see the light of day again. To my relief, he chuckled and alighted the throne.

"I thought the same thing." I could see the lines that years of worrying had etched into his forehead, and in that moment, his eyes looked sad. Before I could say anything, he began to walk towards a balcony attached to the throne room. I followed.

“You see, my job only requires one thing of me: to do what is right for the Egyptian people. The carriages that you created could be used for destruction, to invoke pain and suffering among enemy ranks. Instead, I have chosen the path of peace. I may not live through our next battle, Nerhotep; I am old now.” He rested his hands on the gold railings surrounding the balcony, gazing into the distance. Below us, the central marketplace bustled with excitement as preparations for the Festival of Thoth, God of Knowledge, took place.

“The people just aren’t ready. The ministers aren’t ready. These things, these metal beings that you have created, are extremely advanced. The technology in them is already far

ahead of our time, and if they fell into the wrong hands, life as we know it would cease to exist.” He turned to face me and looked me straight in the eyes. As much as I hated to admit it, I knew he was telling the truth.

“Come. Let us bid farewell to our metal friends.” He gestured for me to follow him, and so we walked in silence to the underground building chamber. The doors swung open, and we entered the room in which the metal giants stood. Naql Alharb<sup>1</sup>. Chariots of war. They were taller than camels and could shoot projectiles out of the tube that protruded from their fronts. The soldiers would sit inside, steering the vehicle into battle. They would have been invincible. I cleared my throat.

“What exactly is going to be done to them?” These automatons were like my children. I had put my heart and soul into each and every one. I walked forward and lay a hand over the inscription carved into the side of the carriage. They were magnificent.

“They will be buried. Next to me. I can promise you this much.” He stepped forward, as well, and placed his hand on the cool, dark metal.

“Never before have metal chariots been created, much less chariots that can shoot. I will forever be indebted to you for your work on this project, Nerhotep. I hope you know that.” His head tilted back as he tried to see the top of the structure.

“Yes, your majesty.” I breathed a sigh of relief. At least they weren’t going to be melted down. Maybe one day our people would find them again and put them to good use. I glanced at him out of the corner of my eye. He was looking straight at the metal.

“Please. We have worked together for long enough. Call me Semerkhet.”

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In the middle of the Valley of the Kings, a team of archaeologists have begun to excavate a new site. Their leader, a tall man in his thirties by the name of Richard Crompton, is called to one of the worksites. The team has already uncovered the remains of what is thought to be the pyramid containing the sarcophagus of Semerkhet, the eleventh Pharaoh of Ancient Egypt. However, the workers have uncovered something much stranger.

Crompton carefully makes his way to the middle of the pit, where archaeologists are hurriedly brushing away the sand.

“Any luck?” he asks, getting down on his hands and knees to see what the commotion is all about, and that’s when he sees it. The sunlight glints off the dark obsidian and into his eye, blinding him momentarily.

“Woah.” Crompton pulls out a pair of excavation gloves and gently brushes away the remaining sand. He runs his fingers over the grooves in the metal.

“Hieroglyphs. These are hieroglyphs. Somebody get me the translator. Now!” Sweat is trickling down his face, but he doesn’t seem to care. A worker hands him a brush, and he begins to swipe away the golden granules around him.

“The translator is here,” a voice calls out. Crompton pulls the man to his knees and points to the hieroglyphs.

“Tell me what they say.” He’s breathing heavily. The translator pulls out a magnifying glass, leans over the metal, and begins to mutter under his breath. Finally, he sits back.

"Chariots of war."

1 English spelling of the Arabic words



by Sara Kyle, Grade 10

## SMART PHONES, DUMB PEOPLE

by Dominic Hanna, Grade 12

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Smart phones, dumb people  
Our devices have touch screens, and yet we've lost touch  
We have iPhones, and yet we don't know ourselves

We login, and stay in  
We waste time watching top ten countdowns, as our time on earth counts down  
Our hearts pump blood into our veins, but our factories pump smoke into the sky

Our headphones block out the sounds of the universe  
Television characters are our only friends  
We are more invested in the lives of the Simpsons than we are in our own

Our hearts grow colder  
The world grows warmer  
They say the world is evolving, so why are we going backwards?

We control video games, but cannot control ourselves  
Our grandmothers play FarmVille, but we are the sheeple  
Our phones are not the only thing that die every day

We save our data in the “cloud,” but we do not see the silver lining  
Our devices’ memory grows, but we forget who we are  
We check Facebook everyday, but when was the last time you picked up a Realbook™

Plants grow around us, but we do not  
When we turn our devices on, we turn our souls off  
The world gets smaller as our screens get bigger

Social media makes us antisocial  
We are connected to the Internet, but not to each other  
We make tweets, but we don't stop to listen to the birds

We produce more smog than we do joy  
As we slowly kill the planet, we slowly kill ourselves  
We drive cars, but what drives us?

It is time to wake up, and shut down  
To log off, and look around  
We are dying  
The planet is crying  
We are blocked off from the universe  
Our minds are slowly turning perverse  
I think you will agree—ah  
Technology is our hamartia





UNTITLED

by Adrian Filice, Grade 12

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In the Garden of Eden we sat under the branches  
of the tree of life  
yearning for the fruit of good and evil  
We now are seated comfortably under the branches  
of a tree of lights  
yearning for the newest fruit of Macintosh  
searching for worldly beauties in a 2x5 inch light box  
and not giving a damn about what's good and what's not.  
Is it the end of communication  
on a face-to-face basis?  
Amongst this new-age sea of light  
We dive into Dark Ages  
And splash about in a misinterpretation  
Of what was supposed to be a good thing  
For our generation  
But we drowned—  
In the same river we use to water our precious tree.  
And the worst part is that we know it.  
We use Twitter to tweet out  
that we were born in the wrong generation  
but we don't do anything because we have an app  
that helps us get off at the right train station  
so we don't mind.  
We don't mind until we can't remember what it's really like—  
to *be* a human, not just *see* a human  
or manipulate a 3D human on a life-sized touchscreen human.

We need excess, we need more  
what's new and what's hotter  
because our end goal  
is to be a thirsty man drinking water.



by Carolyn D'Auria, Grade 9





by Susan Pan, Grade 11



by Avery Benlolo, Grade 7

## GALILEO'S TELESCOPE

by Meghan Kates, Grade 12

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In that moment, he turned his magnifying instrument skyward and gasped at the beauty of the universe. Galileo was the first person to decide to point this new device, the telescope, to the sky and utilize it in the pursuit of finding out what was outside our planet.

Now, here I am, centuries later, staring into the void that Galileo could only imagine and reflecting upon the infinite nature of the universe. Just days previously, myself and my fellow colleagues accomplished a monumental achievement, landing and walking on the moon.

I can still feel the crunch of sand under my boots, the pump of my heart in my chest. Words are inadequate but I will attempt to explain it anyways.

“You ready,” Neil asked, coming over to slap his hands onto my back. His blue eyes were sparkling and it seemed he would burst with enthusiasm at any moment.

I turned to him, a laugh already bubbling up on my lips. “Am I ready?” I questioned incredulously. “You are the one who is going to be out there first.”

If possible, his smile widened and I could just tell that his heart was beating as quickly as mine. “Ready the decoupling sequence,” he ordered with a wink, “The Eagle is about to make a fateful flight.”

Seated in the pilot's chair, I ran through the last checks, muttering to myself. Nothing could go wrong here. Finally, I finished and looked up to see a change in the window in front of me. Instead of the inky void we had been seeing for days, the mottled visage of the moon was looming close. I gasped out loud, breath knocked away by the unspeakable beauty.

I could only imagine Galileo looking through his telescope, wondering at the dips and craters in the surface of the moon. To him, it must have looked far away and unreachable. Now though, it was nearly within our grasp.

"This is it, boys," I suddenly heard Michael declare over my headset.

Neil replied, "Not yet. The others have been this far. We are going all the way." There was a thrum of excitement under his words, importing their significance.

A slight vibration shook me in my seat and I closed my eyes, calling out to whatever deity I could think of to get us through this safely. The irony of the Church rejecting those discoveries that had gotten us here was perhaps lost on me. However, I couldn't stop the slight flick of pride to my thoughts. I had helped make this possible. The countless hours spent, elbows deep in calculations to figure out the coupling and decoupling of spacecrafts were absolutely worth it.

Then, we were drifting, the lunar module free from the rest of the spacecraft.

"Man the engines," Neil called.

I nodded silently to myself, checking the gauges and compensating slightly for our sudden drop as we were pulled in by the moon's gravity.

At that moment, with the adrenaline pumping on high speed, I do not believe that I appreciated all that had led up to our journey. Even the simple action of the rockets firing had been a process years in the making. It was a culmination of effort by Russia, Germany and the United States during the Second World War, decades previously, that had gotten us here. If not for the desperation of all sides during the war to come up with ways to create and launch devastating nuclear weapons, rockets as we know them would never have been created.

However, the tension did not end during the war. As I worked my way through combat

missions in those F86 fighters, the major powers of the world were embroiled in a struggle for dominance: the Space Race. It appeared a cold day in history on October 4, 1957, as the Russian Sputnik rocket was first to lift off, taking the first being higher than any before it. Luckily, America was quick to follow.

I could only watch with envy as Neil performed the last checks on his spacesuit, sombre despite his excitement. The doors opened with a pneumatic hiss of air and he stepped into the space lock. Then, the final doors, and he was drifting free, momentarily weightless before he hit the surface of the moon.

I watched out the window as he took his first lumbering steps, encumbered by his bulky spacesuit despite all the training. There was no possible way to prepare for a terrain upon which no man had ever stepped. He bounced along with only the rasp of his breathing over the headset to indicate this bulky silver and white creature was human.

“Houston, this is Tranquility Base” Neil declared breathlessly. “The Eagle has landed.”

"Confirmed," I heard back.

“One small step for a man. One giant leap for mankind,” Neil pronounced suddenly.

Just four years after the first rocket-propelled spaceflight accomplished by humankind, America had already set her sights beyond our planet and on the moon. On May 26, 1961, the world wondered at President J.F. Kennedy's bold pronouncement: that America would land on the moon within the next decade.

And now, having accomplished this feat President Kennedy spoke of with such strong passion, it seems that our energies have not been wasted. We have conquered the seemingly untameable land and come through not diminished or weakened by the effort but rejuvenated by this new look at our world.

As I stepped outside the lunar module and onto this new alien world, I could not help but be humbled by the experience. First, it was the bounce it took to get from place to place that held my attention. I concentrated on this, at first, willing myself to be able to move around like a creature who belonged in this habitat.

Then, as I turned around to face my colleague, I was stopped. There in front of me was the most magnificent sight I had ever had the fortune to face. Suspended, as if by an invisible string, was the Earth. My first impression was of its size. What had once seemed vast to me as I lived my life, moving from one place to another, now could be cradled in my hands like a babe.

The next thing I noted was the startling blue of it, the overall vibrancy of our oceans. Then, there was green and brown as well as white that swirled around like drawn on by the paint covered fingers of some child. It was surreal. This tiny little globe hanging among the vastness of the stars was home to three billion people. These were people who laughed, cried, loved and lived on this planet that from my vantage point looked insignificant.

My attention finally wavered from the sight of Earth as Neil called my name. I noticed he was holding the medallion from Earth. Engraved upon it were the names of those who had died to make the journey we were on possible.

As we placed it down, we had a moment of silence for those cosmonauts who had died in perfecting rocket powered travel. Also, engraved upon it were the names of those three astronauts

who had perished in the blink of an eye as fire ignited in the first mission of the name ours currently carried. Apollo 1 had not come to a fortunate end.

However, as we stood silently, I also considered the miserable astronauts of Apollo 7 who spent a dreadful few weeks with colds in zero gravity. Then, there were the Apollo 8 astronauts who were the first humans to see the far side of the moon. So many had been a part of the trip landing us here. The list of contributors extended from Hans Lippershey to Galileo to every engineer, designer, mathematician and astronaut who had laboured in the pursuit of space travel.

One small step indeed. I looked down at my footprint on the sandy surface of the moon and wondered just how one footprint could have had so much in the making That one decision of Galileo to look up at the stars with his telescope set off a chain reaction that has culminated in this historic achievement.

Now, I wonder where that footprint will lead. When will this one moment lead to an even greater one? When will we see that giant leap that will lead to footprints on Mars or maybe even farther? For now, I cannot help but imagine Galileo turning his telescope to the sky and wondering about our place among the stars.



by Madelyn Wixson, Grade 9



# THE LAST MAN ON EARTH

by Gabriel Blanc, Grade 9

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The last man on Earth felt alone.

It didn't matter anyway – he wouldn't be alone much longer. Soon he would join his comrades in death, and willingly. The picture of his family on his desk stared at him, beckoning him to join them in the afterlife. The afterlife – the last man wondered if it existed.

“Oh well, don’t get your hopes up.” They were the first words he had spoken since the second-to-last man died. He remembered the second-to-last man very fondly, there they were, two friends. “To quote Billy Joel: we were sharing a drink we call loneliness, but it’s better than drinking alone.” Although now I’m alone, he thought.

Or did he say it? The difference between saying his thoughts out loud and thinking them was insignificant now, and he was starting to have trouble differentiating between the two.

Maybe that's a problem the last man on Earth would inevitably face, he thought/said. He would never find out, as there would never be another last man on Earth.

He looked out the window, his gaze gliding over the desolate plains of cityscape that stared back at him, completely devoid of life. He had the entire Earth to himself; he could do anything he wanted now.

“I am not alone.”

He felt the power of the words as they floated out of his mouth, or bounced around in his mind, he couldn't tell. Everything he said was true, after all who could argue? Not the corpses. The power was intoxicating.

"I am a God." It was true.

“My power is without limit.” It was true.

"I am going to die." It was true.

He decided to take a walk. He climbed down all 49 flights, each step echoing throughout the stairwell. It took a tediously long time to descend so many stairs, and he would've taken the elevator if it were still in operation. Time was no longer a factor when there was no one to wait for you. The shopping mall beneath the building was draped in shadows, none of the lights had been working in years, and it took him some time to locate the exit. Automatic sliding doors were permanently locked without power, and the last man stared at it for a while contemplating what to do. He picked up some momentum and burst through the door, shards of glass slicing his skin as he stood up. He brushed himself off. No one will miss the window, he reminded himself. Don't feel guilty. He picked up one of the shards of glass and placed it in his pocket as he walked away. He stepped out into the world, and the unimpaired sun struck him with its glare. The sun felt oddly personal now; it used to be a ball in the sky, indiscriminately providing light for the world. Now it was a friend providing light only for him.

After what he assumed was ten minutes of walking he sat against a wall, for no reason other than he wanted to. He stared at the horizon, his eyes unwaveringly analyzing the endless blue. When he got bored of that he turned his gaze to his left, where he was surprised to find a corpse. She had been hidden in shadow, quietly falling apart, away, alone, in the corner.

“Before she died, she was a defence lawyer, a single mother with two children and a parrot.” He had not played “Before they Died” since the second to last man passed away, but he couldn’t help but imagine people’s lives and jobs before they were demoted to mere bodies. Well, don’t just stare at her, he thought to himself, talk to her.

“Hi, I’m Hal, What’s your name?” She didn’t respond.

“That’s a pretty name; do you come here often?” He realized that “here” was a corner outside a shopping mall, and furthermore, he couldn’t hear what she was saying, not even in his imagination. This was most likely because he had forgotten what a response sounded like.

“Did you know that I’m the last man on Earth?” He boasted, it was the kind of thing you could only say to a corpse.

"It's time for you to let go, Hal." It was the corpse talking, or rather, his subconscious talking through the corpse's limp mouth.

"I know," he replied solemnly. "I just don't know how to do it." It was true. He had spent much of his walk trying to think about how the last man on earth should die. His subconscious raised the corpse's limp arm, and pointed her finger at his pocket. The last man realized what she was talking about, and reached for the shard of window in his pocket. He looked at the glass, or rather through it, and remembered that he should probably speak his last words.

“Goodbye.” It was simple, understated, yet elegant, the perfect last words for the last man. His entire life was displayed before his eyes, not only his but every human’s who had ever lived. For his death went hand in hand with the death of humanity; when there is no one there to remember, there is nothing left to forget. He dragged the glass across his forearm, revealing the wiring underneath. He dug the glass below one of the wires, the one that connected his primary processing core to his primary power reserve, and with one decisive motion, severed it.

No one wept for him. There was no one left.





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It was the middle of the night and she was lying in bed beside her husband, watching the rise and fall of his breathing. Artificial moonlight shone square-paned patterns on the foot of their bed.

"I don't want to die, Amar," she whispered, relishing the truth of the word in her mouth.

He shifted, turned on his side to face her. His hair was pressed flat to his head by the pillow, sleep-mussed. “Everything ends eventually.”

His eyes were dark and soft. She let them swallow her.

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A high-pitched buzzing interrupted their conversation, and the words that were finally coming easily died on her tongue. She looked at Lachesis. Lachesis looked at the clock. Fear churned in her suddenly like nausea.

Lachesis stood. “This review is now over.”

She tried to school the shock from her features. “Okay,” she said, and stood too, trying to calm the frantic beat of her heart. “Thank you so much for your time.” Her tongue felt leaden and dry.

Lachesis tilted her head. “You’ll receive our official conclusion within seven business days.”

She looked at her, then down at her feet, paused, swallowed thickly. “Could you tell me now?”

“Unfortunately,” Lachesis said, and she already knew the answer. “I can’t.”

Her eyes were glacial, but she met them as evenly as she could.

“Please?”

Lachesis paused, and the silence that followed dripped like cold water down her spine. She watched the ice slip from Lachesis's features, leaving her briefly vulnerable, and then reform.

"Everything ends eventually," she said.



by Frank Lu, Grade 11

# THE AWAKE: A PROSE POEM

by Miki Simkins, Grade 7

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We are all brainwashed. It's sad really. We don't think. We don't speak. We don't see. We don't live any more. There's an app for everything and anything: lives pre-programmed onto a computer.

They shuffle past me, their eyes distracted by the dancing screens, their brains in an infinite loop. Turn it on. Watch. Malls are lanterns drawing in the helpless moths of humanity.

They advertise oblivion. Bulk it up and add a big red price tag. People spew out their life savings for a taste of nothing. They blank their brains until all that is left is a digital abyss seen through frail glowing glass.

Families sit ‘together’ in their rare shared moments, stare at the flat glass in every room—not speaking, not listening, just watching.

Children sit in maple trees, feet dangling, hair blowing, screens in their hands. Their eyes empty of any emotion.

Some of us still have our minds intact, or as intact as they can be in an empty world. They call us the dreamers; the broke and the mentally insane. The ones who can't afford the screens. We call ourselves the Awake; the ones who live without technology, and the ones who strive for freedom. We call them the Zombies; the blank, mindless followers of the enslaving glass in each of their hands.

My name's Josh and I'm an Awake. I don't have much; not a lot of friends. I got no girlfriend or any nice clothes. I've never gone to school. My home is unimpressive, but at least I'm Awake.

I live in an old abandoned amusement park. Sure the smell isn't all that pleasant and it gets pretty cold. Yes, there's not much shelter from bad weather and the broken rides aren't the best beds one could have, but it is home. This is where the younger Awake congregate; the teens and rascals looking for a more interesting home than some old church. Most of us are in our late teens and want to be independent and away from our paranoid families in their safe houses. We have fun here. We tinker with the forgotten junk and all the old rides, sometimes getting them to work for a flicker of a second. I love it here and I live each day with the freedom of being crazy. This is why I'm Awake; to live.

We don't need video games and movies to amuse us. Walking with friends or staying up late to watch the sunrise is better than anything a piece of glass could ever give us. I'd much rather spend a day trying to get the old rides to work, just for an instant, than stare at a screen and swipe my fingers. I don't need digital noise, filtered and auto-tuned until you're left with a lie, when a guitar sits in front of me. I don't want to see videos of peoples' lives when I can be living mine.

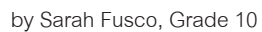
I wish for is a cure. A way to free the Zombies from the liars called technology. A way to turn off everything and show them what they've been missing. I wish for the whole world to finally live. To write and read. To wander and explore. To run and frolic. To see what it's like to be Awake.

I want them to live again.



by Sally O'Keeffee, Grade 12





# I HATE MY SELFIE

by Paige White, Grade 7

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I step out onto my driveway and feel the frigid air hit my face and crawl up my body, making me shiver. I smell the faint aroma of hot chocolate mixed with car exhaust and hear the sound of Christmas carols coming from the neighbour's house. I long for the warmth of my home, to be able to be sipping hot chocolate by the fire. My feet are already starting to freeze with only my white Adidas shoes to keep them warm. I feel the goose bumps start to form on my arms and legs, as I'm only wearing a t-shirt and leggings, but brush it off, knowing that it will all be worth it. I take a big breath in and keep on walking. I look at myself in my phone camera, making sure everything is perfect, my hair, my makeup, and my outfit. I need to look amazing.

I trudge down the snow-covered driveway, across the neighbour's lawn, the dead leaves crunching underneath my feet. I finally arrive at the park, every step, colder than the next. I sit down on frost-covered bench and my backside tingles as the frost seeps into my leggings. I take out my Rose Gold iPhone 6S Plus, and slide up, to reveal the camera. I look at myself one last time, practicing all of the different faces I will make. *The no teeth showing smile? No. Tongue out? No. Winky face? No. Mysterious face? No.* I finally settle on the "classic smile". I open my eyes wide, raise my perfectly done eyebrows just a bit, and smile. "Click" I immediately check my camera roll and gasp. This is a horrendous photo! I take it again, "click", bad again. "Click", "click", "click", "click", this goes on for another twenty minutes until I'm finally satisfied. I get up, brush off the snow on my bottom and walk home.

As I enter my house, a breeze of warm air hits me, and I sigh with relief. My dog, Sadie, comes bounding up to me, tail wagging. I ignore her, and head up to my room. I collapse onto my bed and feel my fuzzy covers against my cold skin. I pull out my phone and open up my most used app, “Facetune”. I erase all of my blemishes, dark circles, and imperfections. Next, “VSCO Cam”, here, I adjust the lighting, so it compliments my face and add a nice but subtle filter. I look at the photo, and I’m not satisfied, I look too real. I pop back onto “Facetune”, smooth out my face and make my eyes look a bit bigger and I’m now happy.

*What should the caption be? I think to myself. How about ;)? No, that's just weird. Maybe some emojis? No, that's too "classic" Oh! I got it, "I love my self(i.e.)" Everyone will love that.*

“Honey! Your father and I are heading out to the neighbour’s Christmas party, are you sure you don’t want to come?” my mom yells.

I ignore her and quickly open Snapchat, take a picture of myself that says, “Snap to be tagged in Insta!” and add it to my story. I get ten Snapchats in a matter of seconds, so I know it’s finally time to post. I open up Instagram, double check to make sure my photo matches my theme, caption it, tag all of my friends, and post. I hear the loud slam of the wooden door as it shuts.

Two minutes pass, and I've only received thirty likes, so I take it down. I wait five minutes and repost. This time, my post has received forty likes and thirty-nine comments. "*Who is that one person who liked but didn't comment?*" I brush it off and look again to see that it has increased to one hundred likes. A sense of pride rushes over me, and I smile. People like me and think I'm pretty, and I have one hundred and fifty comments to prove it.

I walk down the creaky stairs, phone in hand and sense the emptiness of the house. Right, Mom and Dad are at the neighbour's Christmas party that I refused to attend. I peek out of the window, and can practically see the laughter and happiness radiating off of their beautifully decorated home. Maybe I should have gone over, but no, this was worth it. I got a pretty photo, with hundreds of likes and comments, and I feel good about myself.

But was it really worth it?



by Sarah Young, Grade 12



by Tait Gamble, Grade 10

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But she's home now.

“How was your day?”

“Ugh. Retail is dead,” she said.  
 “It is just so much easier  
 To shop  
*Online.*”  
 “Long lines, waiting - testing my patience?!?  
 I just don’t have time for that.”

But, she does.  
For viral videos, for best friend's of the mother's cute boy's, for commenting, condensing  
and updating.

But not for traffic,  
Not for testing her patience,  
And certainly *not* for retail.



RED IS CLEARER

by Grace Hodges, Grade 8

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My eyelids flutter open. My eyes sting but everything is so much...clearer, more colourful. I see every detail, every speck of dust. My arm aches and I stare down at the cut running from the heel of my hand to my elbow. A glint of metal grabs at my newly upgraded eye. A tracker maybe. All the memories of yesterday come back, the sterile needle pricking my skin, the dizzying feeling of the drug. And then the reason I woke up pierces my consciousness.

Today is the day. Today's the day I leave for Ravak, where I fight until I am injured so badly I cannot continue. Death is the limit. It is the ultimate finish line that we all race towards without even noticing it. I notice that my hand aches and I unclasp it to reveal my Pills. They are only for people fighting. There are two of them, a blood coloured one that is a healing, and a black one that is death. It's a way out. Everyone needs a way out.

These thoughts rattle through my mind like a nightmare as I get dressed. It's not hard to see why I was chosen; I'm short and muscled, but lithe and quick on my feet at the same time. I passed the physical easily and I am smart. I'm not striking but since the Sensory Adjustments my eyes have claimed a shiny gold colour, off-setting my black hair. My hair hangs above my shoulders, not masculine, not feminine. Like me, I'm not masculine or feminine. I'm whatever I need to be to fight best. It's part of the deal. I graduate this year, or I was supposed to at least. I slide down the off white stairs towards the smell of breakfast. I find my mother, her back to me, holding a half empty milk carton tight to her chest.

“The eggs are burning.” My voice comes out more harshly than I expected. My mother spins around. She has milk and flour on her shirt and her eyes are red and leaking tears that are dragging themselves along her cheeks. I try to say something but I can’t so I run to her and squeeze her, hard. I breathe in her smell, dirt, and cleaning solution. It’s so comforting that I feel tears oozing out of my eyes too, stinging my already painful eyes.

“I’m so sorry, so so so sorry.” She whispers that against my hair over and over and over again. I let go and sit down, gesturing to the eggs, still unable to speak. The war against the MachineBots has begun.

At the airport, my mother had sat on a bench watching me through a window, silent tears running down her cheeks. I had run out and grasped her, crying into her neck. “Be brave,” she said in a tiny, shaking voice. She then handed me a thin, tattered envelope. With that, she kissed me one more time and turned and walked away, shaking with every step. I walked through the sterile door and never looked back as I loaded onto the plane.

The pack on my knees contains nourishment for two weeks and an extra set of Pills in case we get stranded. I have become emotionless. I notice everything but take in nothing. I remember the sergeant telling us, no reminding us, that we are at war with the MachineBot world. Though we may be the most powerful country we still are at risk from invasion of the MBs. I remember laughing in my head at that. We are going to die out there and I know it. I look around at all the rest of the soldiers' faces. They are all trying to look brave but I know enough to be able to see the fear glinting in their eyes. The entire plane reeks of it.

At base, we enter a white, antiseptic-smelling room that contains twenty beds. We simultaneously lie down. It's dark and we are exhausted. Everyone but me falls into a deep sleep. When the only noises that are heard are the deep breaths of the other soldiers I reach into my pocket and grab the envelope. My hands tingle as I peel up its tattered edge. Inside is a photo. It's a faded photo. The red of the man's shirt has faded to pink and the smile on the woman face has faded, too. It looks fake and exasperated. It's the only human thing in this building. I stare at it for hours until I lose my ever-losing battle with sleep. My machine eyes close.

I wake to sun shining in my face. We run down the hall to meet our director. We are going out to the Field today. This is the last day of our human life. Everything is all sort of blurry.

We move onto the field. In the distance I see people in clashing uniforms and laze-shots ring through my ears. I grab my weaponized arm at the wrist and run, run as fast as I can. I get into the thick of it and everyone is shooting. I glance around me and then start to slow. Everything slows. Everything blurs. People seem out of focus. The blur of people in their red and green slips through the air. People move their legs through the air like it is honey, encased in their red and green hazes. The face of the person I sat beside on the plane folds into a thousand wrinkles as a tracer finds its mark. A bomb throws itself through the air, given momentum by a beast of a machine, ten times the size of a person. The blurriness, I remember now, Sensory Disabling, they had warned us. They said that if it happened we should find General. But I can't, so I run.

I pull my legs through the red-hot sand. I trip and tear open my knee on the shimmering red of an opponent's helmet. I roll it over, wires spiral through the face. My already blurry vision slows. I feel dizzy. I retch. After ten minutes of attempting to purge the image from my mind I start to run again. Faster still, until I collapse. I groan and open my eyes. The skin on my face burns and I touch it, it is blistered and swollen. My throat is scratchy. I peer through my dust-filled eyes as I roll over to I see a man encased in a blurry red.

“Any last words?” His voice is clear enough for me to detect the sneer on his face. I hear the click as I reach for my red Pill. The tracer hits me and I feel my stomach explode. I reach a quaking hand to my chapped lips. I swallow and then it hits me, dizzy, dizzying. The Pills, the war. All lies. Dizzying, world spinning. Red everywhere. The People, dizzying, are the most. Red everywhere. Dangerous machine. It’s who I am, what I am. I am becoming the enemy. And darkness.



by Jackson Empey, Grade 12



by Sophie Thom, Grade 9

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Perhaps you've noticed a trend in most of my points - a lot of what I've said is about development time, elegance of code, and consistency. People often underestimate the importance of these values in any development tool, instead reasoning that it's all about efficiency, getting the fastest code, and "doing whatever works". But in reality, the less time you spend on trivial things

In summary, C++ is as popular a language as it is today simply because it's the best at many of the things for which it's used. It is extremely efficient due to the fact that most of its standard language constructs like classes and templates are processed at compile-time instead of at runtime, it's scope-bound resource management effectively controls memory and the lifetime of objects in a way unlike most languages, and it is (relatively) easy to deploy on a whole host of platforms from embedded systems to PCs. A new language that follows all of these values while making modern design principles easily implemented and unifying conventions and standard libraries could really be something revolutionary.



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Now think about your life. Go on. Do it. You drove to school this morning, probably rocking out to the latest train wreck pop star. You pass a crosswalk and hear the faint beep that lets people with visual impairments know that it is safe to cross the street. Your phone dings with a text, but you don't look at it because you know it's not safe to be on your phone whilst driving. Then your GPS kicks in and you hear that sweet British lady tell you "after 500 meters, turn left onto Moatfield Drive." Everything I just mentioned, everything that we take for granted, wouldn't be possible if we couldn't capture sound. So the next time you hear any noise that isn't being produced at that exact moment, think about Edison and his phonograph and how you owe that guy a lot.



by Beatrice Tam, Grade 10



## THE GUILTY MESSENGER

by Natalie Brown, Grade 10

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“L-O-L”, she typed. After four straight hours of texting, it was almost impossible for me to come to the conclusion that it would end any time soon. Though it seemed sort of routine to me now, I still needed a break once in a while, especially from the girl. We spent every minute of every single day together. I had been there through every secret that she had ever heard, every lie she had ever told, and every heart she had ever broken. Though an impressively long list these days, she was still a person and was subject to both high and low points in life. I just happened to be there for all of them. I guess you could say that I knew more about her life than she did. “It’s getting kinda late”, she typed, more slowly than usual, “I should probably get to bed now”, and just like that, I went into a deep, dark sleep. That was the last I ever heard from her.

One week earlier, as abruptly as I went off, I woke up in the exact same fashion. This was nothing out of the ordinary, though. Life was purely a routine to me, but I didn't really see the point of complaining. Every day, the girl and I would go to school together, and hide from the teachers during classes, where it almost felt as if we were actually talking in real life- but that could never happen. We would take pictures together, cheat on tests together, and even listen to music together. "Meet me by my locker in 5" the girl texted. The girl had only one friend, Daria, whom she texted often. It was relatively unknown to me why this was true, but since I can't ask her this question, I've grown to accept the fact that she does not fit society's definition of popular. Besides, I know she's already accepted this fact and seems to enjoy having a singular true friend as opposed to a bunch of fake ones. "I need to talk to you about him", she preceded to text Daria again.

As usual, we listened to Weezer on the way home. She doesn't participate in any kind of activity or sport after school, so she makes up for it in the time she spends at Starbucks. Though everything was practically a ritual now, I couldn't help but feel like something was different. There was a new contact in the girl's phone. It wasn't the girl's mom, dad, or even Daria- but someone by the name of Travis. The girl seemed to be talking to Travis all day, and when she wasn't talking to him I knew she was thinking about talking to him. Nevertheless, we continued on with our daily routine, finishing homework, and making a few too many late night snacks. Then all of a sudden, without any warning, the girl left and I fell asleep for the night. I couldn't seem to put my finger on what was happening but I knew that something wasn't right. "Are you here yet?", texted Travis five minutes after she left. She hadn't had any means to respond, but I realized that was where she was headed, and that she would probably be there soon. I didn't like the fact that she'd been ignoring me, and I was determined to do whatever it took to make sure her focus was on me. The night went on for what seemed like ages, but finally it was morning.

Today was rather strange. Instead of the usual text or picture of a cat dressed up in cute little outfits from Daria, she got a text from Travis, “Just be cool about it. No one has to know”. I knew that she had already assumed that Daria found out about it, but sooner or later, the girl suspected that the whole school would know. Apart from the fact that Daria wasn’t speaking to her, the girl’s day was surprisingly normal. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to hurt anyone”, the girl texted Daria, “Sometimes I don’t think before I do things”. Daria read the message, but did not reply. Later in the day, the girl got a message from Rachel. Ten minutes later she got one from Mason. Five minutes later she received one from Chase. This went on and on until she was receiving one new message every minute from people she thought had no idea she existed. This was something I had never seen before. Out of nowhere, she slammed me hard on the ground. That was the end of my night.

Today I'm very sad. I missed an entire day of school, and was left to lie on the stand next to the girl's bed. I knew the day had not gone well for her. I could just picture the people in the hallways snickering and calling her names. It seemed kind of odd that the girl who was pretty much oblivious to everyone was getting all of this attention now- but all that attention and focus from students at her school meant that she spent less and less time with me. I didn't like that at all. Throughout the day I couldn't get in a peaceful sleep because people kept texting, and messaging, and I couldn't help but take a quick peek at the things people were saying. "At least I keep to myself sometimes, unlike some people", "If I wanted to be a pathological liar and a tramp, I'd pray to be in your shoes", "Why is this girl even alive anymore? I mean, if she actually paid attention to people and had friends I could see why, but that's not really the case". These were only a few of the messages that popped up. I thought about this throughout the day. Was she a liar? Does she actually want to have meaningful friendships? Am I important to her anymore? Then I realized something. People must be saying these things for a reason. As soon as I thought about that to myself, she barged through the door and slammed it shut. She took one look at me and threw me across the room, screaming like she was a murder victim. She was in pain. I was in pain. I had been abandoned by my friend, and now had a huge gash in the middle on my face. I knew that this wasn't over. I was going to get back at her in any way possible for this, and boy did I ever.

It was kind of weird this morning. Usually I wake up at 8:00, but I guess I must have been in some sort of trance until 12:00. I can't tell you how thankful I was for not having to see that girl for those four morning hours. The texts and tags seemed to have no end, but after seeing every one, I thought to myself, "She deserves it". I was the one that made sure she received every message that was negative, every post on social media that made a mockery of her, and that every time she actually decided to get up and start fresh I would bring her down again. I tore her to pieces. Every slash to my face and body didn't set me back either. It was a constant cycle until she had had enough. She had stayed up an extra four hours, that last night, just texting and talking about life and thinking about the forgiveness she'll never receive. It was I who stayed up with her. "It's getting kinda late", she texted. After deleting all her social media, she had nothing on her phone but messages. I had finally consumed her life. I had become the focus, yet in that very moment I felt guilty. As tears dripped down her cheek and on to my face I kept thinking to myself, she doesn't deserve this. "I should probably get to bed now" she texted in between sobs. Then she smashed my face one last time, and shoved me in a drawer forever.

I don't usually hear things at night, but her screams coming from the bathroom, the cries of her parents when they came home, and the sirens of the ambulance were all sounds that I will never forget. Was this all my fault? Am I the one to blame? Instead of feeling angry, for the first time ever, I felt remorse and shame.

I had been there through every secret that she had ever heard, every lie she had ever told, and every heart she had ever broken. I thought that I knew everything there was to know about her –tragically, I was wrong. But then, what could I do? I am just a messenger.



by Lantian Chen, Grade 12



by Sari Leider, Grade 10

## DOUBLE LIFE

by Nicholas Vassos, Grade 8

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I live a double life. Nobody knows about it. Ever since I got this thing that I can't get off. Countless hours are spent hiding who I really am. My phone is my alter ego. It is my life. I take it everywhere. Pictures show what I want people to think of me. I am different from the others.

\*

Everyone else has a phone. I'm the only one without one. My 13th birthday is coming up, and I want only one thing.

\*

“Happy birthday dear Justin, happy birthday to you!” my parents sing to me.

The candles are lit on the cake in front of me. I look at the flame. I watch it dance around the wax. It starts to melt. I close my eyes and blow. The fan in the room drifts the smoke into my face. I cough. Everything is going well, but this birthday is different from the others.

“Present time!” Mom says.

She takes a picture with her phone. The flash pierces my eyes. I blink. Immediately, she turns away and posts it online. I sigh.

“Son, I’ll be right back. I need to call one of my clients.” Dad walks out of the room with his phone. I look down.

Mom walks over to the table and picks up a box.

"We know you've wanted this for a while now. So here."

She hands the small box to me.

“Happy birthday, Son.”

I wait for Dad to come back in. Ten minutes go by, and he finally walks into the room. “Happy birthday. Come on, open it.”

I peer down at the box. It's small, about the size of my hand. I look at them. They smile.

“Go on,” Mom says.

I put my fingers on the box. It slips open. I look down at the gift before me. I run and give them a hug.

“Thank you,” I say.

“Enjoy.”

From this moment on, I'm not invisible anymore. I run upstairs to my room, the door slams shut behind me. I look down at it. I turn it on. The screen lights, and I can't contain my happiness. I go to the App Store and download every social media platform I can. At school I've been bullied for not having a phone. Every day I've been made fun of for not being cool. That ends today. Now I can show them.

Immediately, my phone starts buzzing. It is shaking in my hand. I get scared and drop it. The phone bounces on the carpet. I look to see what is happening to it. There are notifications from kids in my class adding me. I smile.

At my school, social class is based on how many followers you have. So far I only have four, two of them being my parents. The kid with the most followers in our grade is Derek. I browse to his profile. DIsCoolerThanU has 300 followers. I feel bad. All of his photos are not like who he is at school. I scroll down his page. Pictures go by of him at parties and hanging out with friends. I'm confused. He doesn't seem like that to me.

A year goes by, and I start to get the hang of this social media thing. I now have 100 followers. I'm finally cool.

2

My life hasn't been great lately. Recently my mom committed suicide. I constantly beat myself up, thinking that I was the reason for it. Like I wasn't good enough for her or something. I live with Dad now. But I'm alone. We barely connect together. Social media is my escape. Talking with friends helps me cope with all of the stress and anxiety this has blossomed into. Her death changed my life.

I use it constantly. I can't let her death go. The phone was the last gift she gave to me. She always used to tell me to be myself. She also said getting people to like me is a useful skill to have in the future. This stuck with me. I need to be popular. Social media is my way of communication, so I need people to know me there. This isn't necessary, but I feel like I have to do it. The phone is the only part of her I have left.

2

How do I become cool? I need to hang out with the popular kids! I'm starting with the middle class kids and working my way up the social ladder. I'm slowly gaining popularity. My mom would be so proud. My grades are starting to decline, but who cares? The others won't accept me if I'm smart, duh!

Dad says I should be asleep by 9:00. Parents are so last month! The earliest I went to bed this week was 11:00, the whole time talking on my phone, of course! I take it everywhere with me. All of my pictures are of me with friends partying and hanging out. I couldn't be more popular.

2

I don't feel good. My mom always said to be yourself. This isn't me. I'm letting her down. I'd rather curl up by a fire and read a book than hang out with any of those losers again. That's who I am. This isn't what she would've wanted from me. All of this just to be popular?

From this moment on, I'm invisible again. I run upstairs to my room, the door slams shut behind me. I look down at it. I turn it on. The screen lights and I can't contain my emotions. I delete every social media platform I have. At school I've been bullying kids for not having a phone. That ends today. Immediately, my phone starts buzzing again. The phone is shaking in my hand. I get scared and drop it. The phone bounces on the carpet in my room. I look away. I feel horrible. I walk out.

2

I've had it for a while now. I live a double life. Nobody knows about it. Ever since I got that thing that I can't get off. Countless hours are spent hiding who I really am. My phone is my alter ego. It is my life. I take it everywhere. Pictures show what I want people to think of me. I am different from the others.



by Simona Fiorini, Grade 9

2016 WINNERS

MIDDLE CATEGORY - GRADES 7 AND 8

- First Place: Neel Mathur, Appleby College
- Second Place: Paige White, The Bishop Strachan School
- Third Place: Tanaya Vohra, Havergal College
- Honourable Mention: Grace Hodges, Trinity College School

UPPER CATEGORY - GRADES 9 AND 10

- First Place: Allison Zhao, University of Toronto Schools
- Second Place: Gabriel Blanc, The York School
- Third Place: Miz Xing, Havergal College
- Honourable Mention: Noah Caza, Appleby College

SENIOR CATEGORY - GRADES 11 AND 12

- First Place: Rhea Nickerson, Appleby College
- Second Place: Meghan Kates, Crestwood Preparatory College
- Third Place: Anabel Yeung, The Bissop Strachan School
- Honourable Mention: Jadyn Dragasevich, St. Andrew’s College



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