

INK 2016



The East Harlem School
AT EXODUS HOUSE

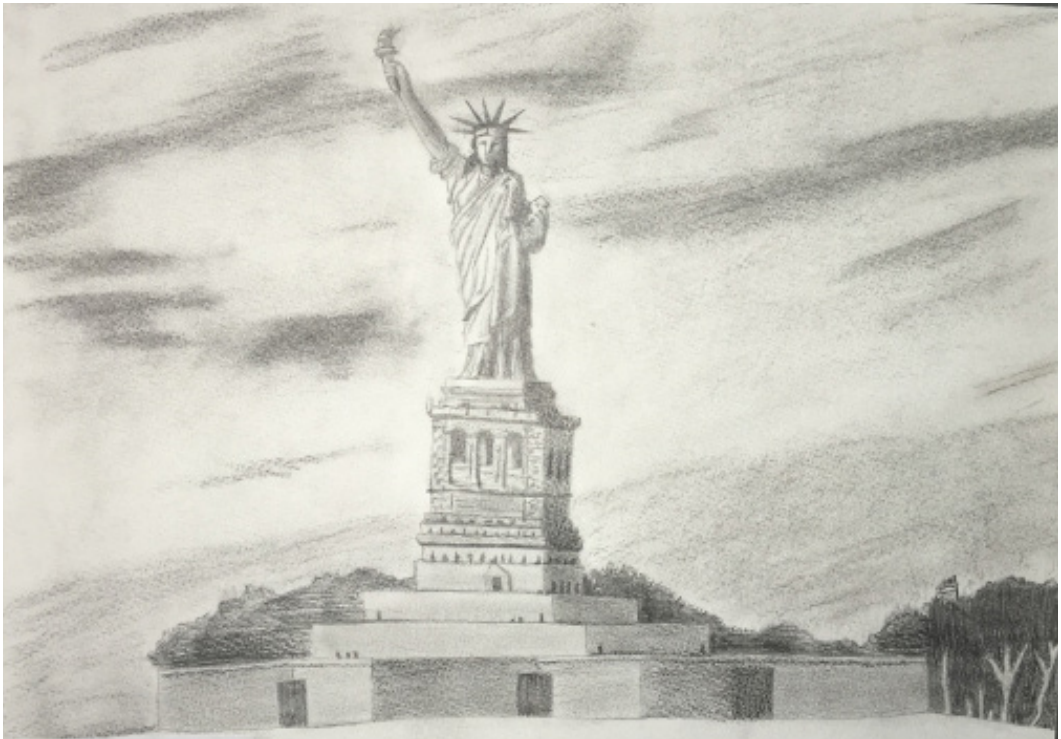
Artwork featured in this magazine was created in the 2015-2016 Visual Arts course. The Art curriculum is designed to have students see the world as it is – the play of light against shadow, the spectrums of color and shape - and then with the formal techniques of drawing - to render them on paper.



Cover Art: Mina, Grade 8
Back Cover: Cinthia, Grade 8

INK 2016

A Student Literary Arts Magazine



By Ashley, Grade 7

Our mission: The East Harlem School challenges students to develop a balanced physical, moral, and intellectual strength that they will use to adapt to change - and for the final purpose of creating and sharing lives of deep meaning, dynamic actions, and transcendent joy. We are a middle school (grades 4-8) that recruits children from families with low income and the highest values, and we give preference to those who keep to the traditional belief that creative flight can only be sustained by grounded discipline.

Our history: Exodus House has been an anchoring and iconic institution in Harlem since its founding in 1963 by Reverend Dr. Lynn and Mrs. Leola Hageman as a drug rehabilitation center. Due to a heightened concern for the welfare and well-being of the community's many underserved, at-risk children, Exodus House was converted in 1984 to an after-school and summer program facility. Then, in the fall of 1993, inspired by the steadfast commitment of their parents to the East Harlem community, the couple's sons, Hans and Ivan, opened a year-round independent middle school on the original Exodus House site to better address the critical needs of these children and their families. Today, EHS is chartered by the New York State Department of Education and accredited by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools. The East Harlem School is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.



Alumnae Cherise and Jada, Class of 2015

“Poetry is about manner as much as it is about matter.”

From Armitage’s preface to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

The poetic enterprise on 103rd Street imbues all of our work. Every day we ask our students to engage the world, words, and themselves with the hard gaze of disciplined inquiry – and we demand that hard gaze be softened by a love and awe for what they examine. This process occurs in the mathematics classroom, the science lab, and on the soccer pitch.

With poetry specifically, our students closely observe their own interior and our shared exterior worlds – the **matter**. Then students, while learning the templates and structures of great poetry, carefully craft language and develop dynamic oratory – the **manner** of expression. With matter and manner in balance, students seek to move themselves and others to active empathy, deep understanding, laughter, tears, and hope.

Ivan M. Hageman
Head of School



Jelene (Grade 4), Brianna (Grade 6), and Angel (Grade 7) performing at the 2015 and 2016 Poetry Slams

“The Slam is what we do.”



Student poets with Slam Judges Tony Taylor, Jon Patricof, Addis Fouche-Channer, and Paul Brill at the 2016 Spring Poetry Slam on May 5, 2016 at B.B. King Blues Club & Grill.

Photo Credit: Michael Priest Photography

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An Attempt to Speak

By Abraham, Grade 8

Littered emotion sheathes the ground,
An attempt to speak
From objects fills the spicy air.

The Bible with two names
Engraved in a loud voice shouts,
The passage from mother to daughter.

The gloves and worn rags tiredly murmur:
She works to live and lives to work.

The candles and pictures of family
Whisper her desolation.

The old phone with scratched numbers,
Her struggle to find someone
In this beautiful wasteland.

The scuffled voice tells me
He too feels alone without
The only person he has ever loved.

Next to the phone lay postcards
Scattered with photos of
Bridges and statues.

The cards all read "Welcome to
Paradise."
It is far from perfect.

The cries of toucans and shrill of
rattlesnakes
Echo in the air
Hidden amongst stalks of grass.

It hasn't been long since they left:
The house is abandoned.
The metal plates and cinderblocks
keep it standing.

Sponsored by Thomas Crotty, Bill & Eileen Glaser, Martin Joffe, Daniel Singer, and Tina & Philip Vasan

My Dad

By Ana, Grade 5

My dad sings his waking song
At four in the morning.
Like a sleepy rooster
Dressed in uniform,
A chef's white shirt
And black bandana,
He leaves for work.
Early mornings and long days,
My dad works for us.

My dad rests on Sundays.
Like a lazy lizard
He lounges in the sun,
On a blanket in Central Park.
My dad spends every moment
Of his freedom with us.

My dad is an open book as
He talks about his brother and
Heavy, wet tears fall from his face.
My dad inspires me that it is okay
To share feelings that are hard to deal with.
My dad shares his life with us.

My dad no longer calls me his little girl,
But instead his big girl.
But I will never call him anything different
Because he will always be my dad.

My dad who
I hope these words do their job
And tell him,
I love him.

The Week Ahead

By Angel, Grade 7

The week ahead,
The books, the papers, the pencils,
the lessons.

How tiring at times
But yet so captivating.
The struggles of a
Seventh grader.

The homework, the time,
The organization, the pace
The teachers, the worry
Of doing something wrong.
The struggles of a
Seventh grader.

Nothing compared to my family's struggles
The elders who never saw seventh grade.
Of living in difficult times,
Impoverished towns, the drunken rages,
The work under the raging sun.

*Sponsored by Thomas Crotty, Bill & Eileen Glaser, Charlie Kaplan, Morgan Shepard,
Tanya Uhlmann, and Tina & Philip Vasan*

Scars of Sacrifice

By Ashley, Grade 7

Sometimes at night,
I watch my dad put medicine
on his burns.

Scars of sacrifice
Cover his forearms
Like the stripes on a tiger.

Seven days a week,
My dad cooks in a Bronx bodega.
In the mornings
The line never lets up.
Hungry people,
Desperate for their
Egg and cheese on a roll,
Cream cheese and jelly on a bagel,
Crispy bacon, side of hash browns.
At lunch, one sandwich after the next.
Ham, turkey, cheddar, American.
Pickles, lettuce, tomato, mayonnaise.
He works so fast, I can't believe he has only
two hands.
And dinner hour
Is chicken hour.
Barbeque sauce covers his apron, sticks in
his hair.
He tries to keep up,
He is the only cook.
The griddle sizzles and splatters.
He says he stays greasy all day.
When he comes home, he smells of burning
butter.

When I look at my dad's scars,
New ones showing up every day,
Like the crocuses in the spring.
I feel sad. But proud.
My dad cooks for people,
And he says he likes it.
Delicious food, made with love.
Not love for those people lined up
With their overly complicated orders,
But love for his family.
This job pays well, he says.
Better than so many years in a factory.
So the scars are worth it.
He says they don't hurt.
He says he doesn't care about smooth,
pretty arms.
He cares about caring for us.

*Sponsored by Carol L. Brown, Jordan Catalana,
Thomas Crotty, Charlie Kaplan, Sarah Lopez Low,
Kate Lucas, Eve Stuart, Tanya Uhlmann,
and Tina & Philip Vasan*

May God Bless You

By Ashley, Grade 7

Now I know when I was five why I cried.
Now I know when I was five why I saw
policemen.
Now I know what I did not know then.
Why would they take you away from me?

I missed you coming into
My pink room with bunkbeds.
The oldest on top,
And me, underneath.
And tucking me into bed every night
With a “*Que Dios te bendiga*” and a kiss.

The next day, I went to school with tears in
my eyes.
My yellow uniform shirt.
My navy blue skirt.
My black and white Converse.
And an image of you in handcuffs in my
head.

Three years of jail visits.
Where we sat at a round table.
Where we saw prisoners come out a door,
one by one.
I could bear the three years:
I still got to sit on your lap,
I still got to hug you,
And tell you how much

I missed you back home.
Yet the salty tears
Still flowed down my face like a river
And fell on my pillow every night.

Now here’s a message, from my lips
In New York City.
To your ears in the Dominican Republic.
If you’re reading this, please have
A special place in our parallel hearts for
me.
Que Dios te bendiga.
May God bless you.

*Sponsored by Diana & Michael Brooks, Thomas Crotty, Jessie Dib, Bill & Eileen Glaser,
Amit & Emily Mrig, Rosemary Suh, and Tina & Philip Vasan*

Ar Nuh Came Back

By Brittany, Grade 7

Why him nah call?
Mi nuh know mitbe
Them nuh ave fone
Weh him deh.
Maybe they don't have phone
Where he's at.

Mama lied for me to be calm.
Mama lied about being tired.
Mama lied about being happy.
Mama begged for money.
Mama turned to the pipe.

Grandma gave her money and told her
Clean up yuh self
Ar nuh came back.
Mama showed up 6 months later,
Three days before my birthday.

She told Grandma
She would not take me
Unless she got money in return.
Grandma gave her
A wealthy flush of green
And said,
Be at dinner tonight, she needs to see you.

She showed up again with red flowers
And a Chocolate bar,
In a faint color shirt and shorts.
Mama smelled like nothing.
Thinks like nothing too,
Grandma used to say.

I remember those days
When lies and promises
Did not mean as much.

*Sponsored by Carol L. Brown, Thomas Crotty, Jessie Dib, Bill & Eileen Glaser, Michael Levy,
Amit & Emily Mrig, Morgan Shepard, Rosemary Suh, The Thomas Collective, and Tina & Philip Vasan*

Fortune Cookie Futures

By Bryan, Grade 4

See your future.
What does it hold?
Crack it open,
Then unfold.

Fortune Cookie,
Golden Brown.
Will it make me
Smile or frown?

Eating it is like,
Crack crack crunch.
Cookies for free?
I can eat the whole bunch!

Read my future.
What will it be?
No more glasses?
And I can see?

The paper might tell
What I wish to know.
A lesson or secret
Of how I might grow.

Fortune Cookies,
You only tell lies.
Life's a mystery
I can't wait for the surprise

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Mary Lynn & Bronson van Wyck, Tina & Philip Vasan, and Ingrid Wong & Russell DeLaCour*

It's Better to be Busy

By Carlos, Grade 4

This year,
Lots of things are changing:
A new schedule keeps me busy,
I wake up earlier,
And I'm starting to live without
Certain things in my house,
Like video games,
And junk food,
And my father.

Last March
He left when they were fighting.
He left and I missed him.
Until I realized
That he made my mom stressed.
She'd pace around the house,
Like a frightened fox.
Worrying.
Waiting.

Sundays
Are supposed to be our day,
Our weekly visit time.
I want him to pick us up,
To take us to shop and play
In a park or get food.
But only if what comes out of his mouth
Isn't sour breath
And sharp words.

Some days,
I hope it will get better.
When I won't feel lifeless,
When my mom won't have red eyes,
And the cycle has stopped.

But this new schedule helps.
It's better to be busy,
To do my best,
And help my sister.

This year,
My mom stays the busiest of all.
Two hands doing the work of four,
To take care of us,
To keep us on track.
So for her, I tuck away my tears,
I take on more duties,
And I try to do better
For the part of my home
I could never live without.

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Tanya Uhlmann, and Tina & Philip Vasan*

That Military Man

By Danielle, Grade 5

In Times Square with my uncle,
I see a man in military clothes,
Asking for money.
My uncle has plenty of money.
He had taken me out for dinner.
But he gives nothing to the man.
I feel ashamed.
I wish I had something to give.

My mother, who struggles to earn enough,
Who is afraid to ask the family she babysits
For a raise,
Always gives to people in need.
A dollar here, some change there,
Whatever she has to spare.
I feel happy inside myself when we are
generous.
I feel proud that she is my mom.

Sometimes I stare at the dark night sky.
I see bright pieces of light, called stars.
I wish on those stars
For many, many things.
I wish that my uncle, who has so much,
Would find kindness and generosity
In his heart.
I wish that my mother, who works so
hard,
Who smells like the fresh ocean blue
sea,
Would be paid what is fair for her work.
I wish that the military man, who served
our country,
Wouldn't have to beg.
I look at the stars like diamonds,
I look at the smiling moon,
And I hope my wishes come true.

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Amit & Emily Mrig, Sylvia Stein, Eve Stuart, Rosemary Suh, and Tina & Philip Vasan*

Cloth Napkins

By Denise, Grade 8

My mother assembles napkins from
Fragments of cold white cloth and
Warmly colored yarn.
Hardship and adornment,
Purpose and beauty.

I watch her sewing stitches.
The thin thread spins through the cloth,
Memories of Mexico and her mother woven
through her work.
When eleven, she would sit on her mother's
wooden chair,
Her sisters chatting happily, her mother
stitching
White cloth napkins
For covering tortillas
To trap the warmth inside.

My mother now sews these napkins,
Of soft and clean cloth
Bordered with colors of the sierra.
She covers the warm tortillas
That she has also shaped with her hands.
When the cloth frays and grows bare
She washes them and takes them
downtown
To clean the flat surfaces of another family's
home,
A family that doesn't have tortillas.

I watch her sewing stitches,
The thread in her fingers that pulls
Strength into the cloth.
The thread pierces the fabric,
Each stitch so fine it is barely visible.

Each moment of her life, a stitch in time,
The sewing napkins,
The covering of our tortillas,
The cleaning of other's homes,
Making things whole from fragments and
thread.

*Sponsored by Mara F. Blum, Diana & Michael Brooks, Carol L. Brown, Thomas Crotty,
Cecilia Cunningham, Bill & Eileen Glaser, Martin Joffe, Charlie Kaplan, Nathaniel Keohane,
The Leonhart Family, Michael Levy, The Locus Team, Kate Lucas, Amit & Emily Mrig, Carol T. Ruderman,
Rosemary Suh, The Thomas Collective, Tanya Uhlmann, Tina & Philip Vasan, and Lisa Verdi*

So Many Things By Heart

By Donna, Grade 8

We knew he was different when
His words disappeared.
No more cooing “Mama” or “Milk.”
Things didn’t really fit.

We knew he was different when
He started screaming on the train,
Covering his ears,
Staring at that one Thomas train
For hours at a time.

We knew he was different when
Others thought
He’s just not obedient and that
His language was only delayed.

I had never heard of autism
Until he was two and a half.
The doctor said,
“Low level spectrum autism”
A label for what we long knew was different.

At five, he isn’t eloquent
But can memorize
So many things by heart.
It’s the way he understands the world.

The more I learn about “normal”
I learned that autism is normal, too.
Each child a different color and shape
Many ways of fitting in the world.

No person is the same as another,
And, of course,
Perfection doesn’t exist.
But he is the most beautiful puzzle piece,
And he and I are a perfect fit.

*Sponsored by Darius Atmar, Bridgette Bentele, Mara F. Blum, Thomas Crotty, Lauren D’Angelo,
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Rosemary Suh, The Thomas Collective, and Tina & Philip Vasan*

This Imperfect Sphere

By Ericeliz, Grade 7

The colors together
On this imperfect sphere.

No matter size
Or demeanor,
My cousins and I
Swiftly scramble up the trunks
To strip the trees of their fruit,
As Abuelo taught us,
As Abuelo laughed with us in the sun
As a cousin falls off
A swaying branch.

The fruit fall like the rain
Into our hands,
A perfectly choreographed
Dance of the gods.

Driving over the bumpy,
Unpaved roads
Til we land on the pearly white sand
Of the shore and stare
At the flashes of light iridescent
To the setting sun
And skin the textured
Carcass off the filling fruit.

We sink our teeth into the soft outer layer
Of this imperfect sphere.
The delicate, now broken strands.
Strands that were woven
Perfectly together
Now stuck
Between our teeth.

*Sponsored by Thomas Crotty, Charlie Kaplan,
The Leonhart Family, Kate Lucas, Sylvia Stein, and Tina & Philip Vasan*



Self Portait
By Cinthia, Grade 8



Perspectives Around the World
By Ashley, Grade 7



Dream Catcher
By Soraida, Grade 6



Perspectives Around the World
By Joshua, Grade 7



Self Portrait
By Karla, Grade 6



Perspectives Around the World
By Ericeliz, Grade 7

In The Softness of All Seasons

By Esmeralda, Grade 8

There's one little leaf I know
Stuck on a top branch, battered
By an angry wind.
All of the other leaves below
Between asphalt and feet.
Too weak for winter,
Too light for snow.

There's one little leaf I see,
Holding to the force of the tree,
Afraid to fall with the season,
Afraid to fall into the
Softness of belonging.

One brave leaf,
Living as if
Living shouldn't be lonely.
I'm not too weak for winter, and
I'm not too light for snow.
I'll find my own place with others
In the softness of all seasons.

*Sponsored by Diana & Michael Brooks, Thomas Crotty, Bill & Eileen Glaser,
Michael Levy, Kate Lucas, Amit & Emily Mrig, Mary Lynn & Bronson van Wyck,
Tina & Philip Vasan, Ingrid Wong & Russell DeLaCour, and Yingying Yu*

I Asked My Teacher Once

By Geraldine, Grade 6

I asked my teacher once,
“What does a border look like?”
And she looked at me with a tilted head
And said, “It *shouldn’t* look like anything.”
Oh. I always thought there was a fence.
So they’re supposed to be just plain lines?
Drawn in the sand by someone older than I?

There shouldn’t be walls
Where my people try to climb?
While their fingers ache
From the cold, hard cement?
No fences
Where my people try to ascend
While their fear grows,
Getting scared if they’d miss a step?
Not even a sign full of dust
From ages long ago that sometimes
My people forget?

If there is no border,
Then why is there a battle
Where blood falls from my
People’s souls?
If there is no border,
Then why don’t I see
My people’s soft caramel,
Coffee skin on TV, in children’s books,
On the streets below 96th?
Why is there judgement
About my people’s clothes?
About how rough they can play?
About their broken English that isn’t broken
at all?

If there is no border,
What makes us so much different than
them?

If there is no border,
Why does hate trump love?

And if there is no border,
If it’s just the color of water,
Then why is my bag, handstitched by her,
Filled with her wishes, her strength, her
love,
The only thing that made it over?
Why can’t she and her aching hands
Cross the border, too?

*Sponsored by Carol L. Brown, Minwoo Choi,
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Hali McClelland, Amit & Emily Mrig, Julia Pershan,
Sarah Rebal, Rosemary Suh, Tanya Uhlmann,
Mary Lynn & Bronson van Wyck,
and Tina & Philip Vasan*

Mi Bonita Mama

By Gracia, Grade 5

Mi bonita mama,
Speaks Spanish.
Words fly from her mouth,
Fast like a radio announcer.
Confident, funny,
Calling me her little lagartija,
Because I'm skinny as a lizard.

Mi bonita mama,
No puede hablar ingles,
But she always tries.
Slow, cautious,
Like a student who wants a good grade.
I tell her, "Don't worry, Mami, no te
preocupes,
Muchas personas don't know
How to speak English.
Pero hablando en Español
Is beautiful!"

Mi bonita mama,
Takes me to my brother's meetings.
She says, "You are my secretary,
Dime todo lo que ellos dicen."
Tell me everything they say!
Like a good secretary, I take my notes.
I sip my water and pretend it's coffee,
Like a real secretary would have.
And I help mi bonita mama,
Who is proud that her little lagartija
Puede hablar en ingles y en español.

*Sponsored by Bridgette Bentele, Diana & Michael Brooks, Thomas Crotty, Chaya Crowder,
Bill & Eileen Glaser, Martin Joffe, Sarah Lopez Low, Amit & Emily Mrig,
Rosemary Suh, and Tina & Philip Vasan*

Sometimes He Prays

By Jeffrey, Grade 6

Sometimes my father wakes up early to pray
A prayer for my brother, for me, and for my
sister.

A prayer for my mom and her hands that
work hard,
For her knuckles that swell so big,
And for her knees that ache.
A prayer for the medicine that I see her
take.

Sometimes my father wakes up early to
pray.
He leaves us all in one room, snuggled in
bed,
He bends on his knees and bows his head.
He says thanks for the sons who protect his
daughter.
He says thanks for the breaths of our
laughter,
For the smiles that he'll remember for ever
after.

Sometimes my father wakes up early
to pray.
And sometimes I watch him
With the eyes of my grandfather
Whom I will meet someday.
It's dark, but I remember the words he
taught me to say.

Standing in the doorway I whisper
along,
"Lord, let my dad figure out that I am
awake
And watching him,
And let him whisper to tell me,
'Go rest for school, hijo,'
And let him tuck me back in bed."
It is still warm and silent in the place
Where we rest our heads.

*Sponsored by Darius Atmar, Thomas Crotty, Daryl Diggs, Bill & Eileen Glaser, Barbara Green,
Nathaniel Keohane, Michael Levy, Kate Lucas, Amit & Emily Mrig, Daniel Singer, Eve Stuart,
The Thomas Collective, Rebecca Tweneboah, and Tina & Philip Vasan*

Fourth Grade Superhero

By Jelene, Grade 4

I've always wanted a superpower,
But not just any superpower.
It would have to be
That I could
Fly.
Because
If I am able to
Fly,
I can get to places faster,
And explore the world
More quickly.

Maybe I could start
At the top
Of the Statue of Liberty,
And go overseas to
Barbados, the home of my father,
Then onward to the top of the
Eiffel Tower and
To Syria and Sudan,
To see how people there are treated, and
Why are there wars?

Because if I am not able to fly,
I can't see these things as soon,
And because the world is changing,
And too much is happening,
And other kids need my help.
So that no one else gets hurt,
I need to have that superpower.
When I've finished exploring the world,
I will spread the news on what I've seen,
To help others get what they need to
survive,
To stop horrible things from happening,
To make sure other people are treated
with respect.
Oh, how I wish I could be a fourth grade
superhero,
Who explores the world by flight,
And uses this voice to try to make things
right.

*Sponsored by Jessie Dib, Daryl Diggs, Marisa Floriani & Mike Macrides, Bill & Eileen Glaser, Charlie Kaplan,
Nathaniel Keohane, Michael Levy, Diana McKeage & Tarek Aryani, Amit & Emily Mrig, Rosemary Suh,
The Thomas Collective, Mary Lynn & Bronson van Wyck, and Tina & Philip Vasan*

This Very Thing

By Jonathan, Grade 8

He gets warnings for this very thing,
Staring out the window
While really watching inward.
Seeing him is like passing a movie theater,
On the outside, motionless,
While inside, a limitless adventure is
unfolding.

To the world he sits oblivious,
Aloof and unaware.
Within he waves a wand,
Furious with a paintbrush
Covering a blank canvas.

To the world he is absent,
Eyes cast toward a lifeless page.
Inside he is a wizard, a demi-god, a king
No limit to his station,
Many lives lived within.
But it is this quiet wandering
This very thing.

Strings Attached

By Jose, Grade 8

When I was too small to tie my shoes
She laced them tight to my feet and
Walked me to school.
Later I learned that the plastic on the end of
A shoelace is called an
Aglet, the plastic that keeps it all together.
Tied up, but not tying me down.

I'll tell her now,
Standing on my own two feet.
I'll tell her now,
"Mom, you're my aglet."
And she'll know forever.

My mom keeps me from unraveling,
Like an aglet on the tip of a shoelace.

Without her,
Who would keep me from coming undone
When I can't see the sunshine?
Lost in a sad thought,
She knows the words to say and
Leads me on my way.
Her hopes for me are boundless: college,
travel, true happiness.
She won't have to bind my laces.

One day our relationship may loosen
And slip away a bit.
When the time comes, I will not know what
to say to her,
So I'll walk my own way for her.

*Sponsored by Darius Atmar, Mara F. Blum, Diana & Michael Brooks, Carol L. Brown, Minwoo Choi,
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Only the Sunset

By Kabira, Grade 8

The balmy sunset in Hawaii,
I have only seen it in pictures.
This paradise of color
So beautiful and hallowed
That all else is muted.

When I travel the world
I would like to take one day
To sit and revel in the splendid sunset
And wonder if my Creator created
This beauty just for me.

When I get the money,
I will bring my family to see the view.
I would love for them to experience Hawaii.
They will want to snorkel, hike, and swim.

But I only want
To see the splendid sunset.
To feel the its last rays of warmth,
Before it disappears in the distance,
Like warm breath fading into the cold air.

That is why I want to see the sunset,
The sun that sets beyond the horizon.
Because of the way it moves my heart and
Awakens me to the
Magic and possibility of being
Alive.

Sponsored by Thomas Crotty and Tina & Philip Vasan

My Colombian Mother

By Keyani, Grade 8

When I was just a year old,
The state of New York put me into your care.
An outsider might pity me for
Entering the foster system.
But I got you,
My Columbian Mother.

You carried me on your hip,
Wherever you went.
You spoke to me in Spanish,
Called me *princesa*,
Told me I was beautiful
Just when I needed it the most.
While my parents battled in court,
You gave me a haven.

A foster home full of people.
Full of laughing, chatting, music.
You let me dunk my bread in your
Strong Columbian coffee,
You let me spend the dark nights
In your cozy bed.
My time in foster care brought
No sadness, no loneliness.
It was not scary.
Thanks you to you,
My Columbian Mother.

If people saw us together today,
They would never know we were related.
Different hair, different skin, different eyes,
Even a different language.
But you nurtured me
When no one else could.
When no one else would.
So by love, not by blood,
You are one of my mothers.
And today, I say,
Gracias, Mamacita,
Por todo.
Thank you, My Colombian Mother,
For everything.

Sponsored by Cecilia Cunningham, Bill & Eileen Glaser, Daren Herzberg, Martin Joffe, Michael Levy, Kate Lucas, Amit & Emily Mrig, Carter Simonds, Eve Stuart, Rosemary Suh, and Tina & Philip Vasan

Spinning Yarn

By Kristine, Grade 6

My grandmother is knitting for me,
Carefully crossing each stitch until perfect.
Each tiny knot needs the others, like I need my
grandmother.
Her gentle hands run over the grooves in the
pattern,
The needles casting off,
Like swords swinging and swaying,
Sending off all the shadows surrounding me.
Wool for warmth, cotton for comfort.
Spinning yarns and polishing purls.
Stitch by stitch,
Counting the rows,
Like I count the plants in her garden.

As she knits, her hands roll and tumble
As if she were kneading bread,
As if she were braiding my hair,
Like a cat paddles its bed before it lays down its
head.
Her hands move in quiet circles
On the fulcrum of her ancient wrist,
Churning, spinning, weaving, and waiting.
She hums softly. She whispers delicately.
She sings stories into scarves.
Stitch by stitch,
Counting the rows,
Like I count my fingers.

A long strand stretches all the way from
Peru,
Where the alpaca parade starts and the
goats roam.
The ball of string, pawed by cats, rolls
through
Miles of mountains and plains,

Imbedding her protection in the warmth of
my blanket,
Bringing Peruvian heat to cold city weather.
Her careful, quick, wrinkled fingers
belong to
A younger hand than hers.

Patching stitches together
To tell her story.
Stich by stitch,
Counting the rows,
Like I count my blessings.

*Sponsored by Bridgette Bentele, Diana & Michael Brooks, Thomas Crotty, Bill & Eileen Glaser,
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La Bendición

By Laura, Grade 8

In the paces between the car and her front
door,
I wondered what she'd say.
Would she grab my face and pinch me?
Or stand back and look at me from head
to toe,
And say, "*Se ve como su madre!*"

That day I met my grandmother,
In her dusty backyard in Mexico,
She pulled her shawl around her shoulders,
And there were tears behind her eyes to
Wash away the years of her waiting.
Her old eyes were new today,
In full vision of her *familia*
Who, by a border and twenty years,
Were kept away.

I longed to hug her tight and
Ask her so many things, but
My aunt, who had waited two decades
To be with her mother again,
Said only one thing:
"Piden la bendicion."
So I asked for her blessing
Abue used her tired hands to form a holy
cross
And said "*Que dios te bendiga.*"

I'm grateful for her blessing,
But it's bigger than any hope.
It's an embrace that I will take back
with me,
That can cross borders when many
others can't.

Meeting her was the blessing,
The moment was a prayer.

*Sponsored by Diana & Michael Brooks, Thomas Crotty, Jessie Dib, Bill & Eileen Glaser, Martin Joffe,
Charlie Kaplan, Amit & Emily Mrig, and Tina & Philip Vasan*

The Border

By Luis, Grade 8

A small boy barely breathing in his mother's arms.
The glare in the distance, a crossing,
Staggering happiness upon reaching the States.
And then gone.

Moving often,
Greedy landlords and loving people with extra room.
Small, rambunctious, and unaware of my parents' struggle,
Laboring humbly in whatever work they could find.

You don't cross the border:
You pick it up and tie it to you.
You bring the border with you.

Most don't understand the hardship.
They can make a joke, a political punchline,
Of a mother's embrace, a staggered last mile
A few sips of water left in a plastic container.

Bearing the weight of the crossing
Of bitter barbs and furtive glances,
We carry the border but never look back.

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The Curve of His Guitar

By Madison, Grade 8

That tall man that I could never reach
Like the top of a tree
Hair as dark as the night sky
Sturdy hands, and his guitar,
Soft and brown and worn.
My uncle's guitar sounds
Like the smooth summer
Wind carrying the weight of
Memory and Mexico.

He gently cradled
The curve of his guitar
And I was filled with the wonderful sounds
Made from the plucking of only strings.
I want to be like him,
I thought to myself, that
Cradling curve of a guitar
Hearing music made of strings.
I was only three, and all I wanted was
To sing all day and to be by his side.
I wasn't shy of music
Or singing for my family –
His sturdy hands and the gentle guitar
Inspired me.

Now I am sometimes shy
Without him playing by my side.
He went back to the place where he
learned
To cradle the curve of his guitar so sweetly,
Where his music was born, in Mexico.
But he left me music
And the memory of his notes and chords
The shape of the sound that grows in me.

*Sponsored by Carol L. Brown, Sam Cooke, Thomas Crotty, Bill & Eileen Glaser,
Nicole Chayet Singer, and Tina & Philip Vasan*

If I Could Take the 6 Train to Mexico

By Mirian, Grade 6

When I go to dance practice
On 92nd Street, I take the six train.
The train that dances through the tunnel,
And sashays down the tracks.
The people inside create the music.
They're bobbing their chins with hanging
headphones,
They're shushing babies,
They're singing a tune and shaking a can.
I start to tap my feet.

My teacher is beautiful.
Her long fingers count out the beat,
Her earrings swing like pendulums.
"Con pasión!" she demands.
She plays, "El Jarabe Tapatio."
It sounds like a horse running:
The fast air, the wind,
Burning your checks like fire.

I close my eyes, and when I open them,
You are there, *Abuela*.
It is not my long-fingered teacher,
It is not the New Yorkers on the six train.
It is not the people clapping and taking
Pictures with cameras, clicking like
typewriters.
I'm dancing *para ti*, *Abuela*.

After the show,
When I walk back to the train,
I go out in the shaded night.
Looking up, a lighted star.
Cheeks wet like towels after a day at the
pool.
And I wish for you, *Abuela*, to see me in my
Flowering skirt, in my tight, needle-nailed
shoes,
Spinning as the moon follows me in the sky.

If I could take the six train to Mexico,
I'd fill it with my flowering skirts,
My tight, needle-nailed shoes,
And my teacher's swaying earrings.
I'd pull the moon from the sky,
And I'd give it a seat so it can rest beside
me.
I'd take the six train all the way to Mexico,
And I'd show my grandmother how to
dance.

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My Mother's Superman

By Pedro, Grade 6

They say to be like Superman,
You have to be real strong.
You have to wear a red cape,
And fight those who do wrong.
They say to be like Superman,
Your hair must be perfectly quaffed.
You have to have white skin,
And you can never, ever be soft.
They say to be like Superman,
You have to be extra muscular and tall.
So, I guess you might be thinking that I'm
Not like Superman at all.
But my mother calls me Superman,
And my worn out T-shirt tells me so.

I protect her with my smile,
And only I can see when she's upset.
I litter her with hugs and kisses,
And never break a sweat.
Superman's scared of Kryptonite,
But that stuff doesn't scare me.
So, I lift my mother's spirit while smiles
abound,
Meanwhile, that other guy—
He can only lift buildings right up from the
ground.

Truthfully, my mother makes the world
go round.
She is not a damsel in distress,
She's stronger than she'll ever confess.
So, it's funny that she calls me
Superman,
When she's the one who so often flies to
my rescue.
I know she does more heavy lifting
Than I can ever dream.
But I'll be my mother's Superman
And support her in the ways I know I can
As she gets older, and I get stronger,
I'll be her best man,
Her perfect man,
Her hopeful man,
Her only man,
Her every man.

*Sponsored by Kevin Kelley & Charlene Murray, Michael Levy, Kate Lucas, Amit & Emily Mrig,
Julia Pershan, The Thomas Collective, Tina & Philip Vasan, and Lisa Verdi*

Running With Her

By Ryana, Grade 6

In Jamaica
We used to run in circles
In matching dresses,
Two pink hearts stitched to our chests,
Kicking up dirt.
We would climb trees and jump walls,
But sometimes we would fight.
Her mom would chase after us
And my cousin and I would laugh.
It felt like we did not fight at all that day.

In America
We still run in circles
Around that big red track.
As we run you can hear our feet clanging
Against the hurdles
That always try to trip us up.
We fly over them like we are flying over the
Empire State Building.

As we hear the crack of the pistol
We run in the same race,
But in different lanes.
Those 400 meters feel like 1,000
All the way around that
Big red track.

I'm running away from bad
memories.
I'm running for her.
I'm running against her.
I'm running to make her proud.
Taking corners, each time hoping to
somehow catch up to
To get life the way it was before.

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Each Breath Above the Water

By Viviana, Grade 8

The distance between us is five years.
At home, never more than three feet.

You are a shadow, tugging and teasing.
When I ask for space
Your whine is a small siren.

Yet I would walk 10,000 miles for you.

If along the path, a serpent twisted and
coiled
Snapping at my ankles,
I would limp
The next 1,000 miles.

Should the earth burst upward
Into the highest peak,
I would climb 3,000 miles to its summit
And sprint 3,000 more down its sloping
back.

2,000 miles of swimming,
I wouldn't slow.
Each breath above the water would be for
you.

Should snow begin to fall
I would open my mouth wide
To catch the flakes.

And smile when the sun's rays
Sent sweat down my back.

Each step of the last 1,000 miles to you
Would be a step proudly taken.

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Blue Black Bull

By Yesenia, Grade 6

He had a passion,
A dream, a goal.
Little by little he learned.
He rode and suppressed his fear,
Pushed it down like his boots,
The fear slid off his chaps
Like the sweat on his brow.

“¡Arriba!” they sang.
“¡Hijo!” my grandmother screamed.
The blueblack bull had a suspicious smile.
His skin silvery as the clouds,
Chestnut splashes like my father’s eyes.
Together their muscles flexed and released,
Stretched sinuously against their
Taut skin. Their bodies,
Dancing with one another, touching then
releasing.
The whistle blew with the wind of a mouth.
Smelling like danger,
The hay falling in the air like hail,
His clammy hands released the reins,
My father had won.

I hold every word as he tells me,
Every memory as it spills from his chapped
lips.
As he says,
*“No cuentes los segundos,
has que los segundos cuenten”*
Don’t count the seconds,
make the seconds count.
When he tells me this I can feel the pressure,
The animal beneath me.

I am the rider and the world is the bull
Because it tries to trick and lie to me.
Sometimes I am the fierce bull
And the world is the rider.
Maybe I can be a big part of the world,
Like the bull was monstrous beneath my
father.
He had a passion, a dream, a goal.

Little by little, I will learn
To pull the world the way I want it to go.
Bucking or guiding, steering or riding.

*Sponsored by Diana & Michael Brooks, Carol L. Brown, Thomas Crotty, Cecilia Cunningham, Jessie Dib,
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