

# INK 2015





Cover Art: Karla, Grade 7  
Back Cover: Manuela, Grade 8



Artwork featured in this edition of INK was inspired by  
The East Harlem School's 2014 Benefit  
entitled "Creation."

# INK

A Student Literary Arts Magazine



# “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





# The East Harlem School at Exodus House

## Small school. BIG impact.

**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.



# “The Slam is what we do.”



Student poets with Slam Judges Aimee Mullins, Jane Foley Fried, Rupert Friend, and Charlotte Glynn at the 2015 Spring Poetry Slam on May 7, 2015 at B.B. King Blues Club & Grill.

Photo Credit: Michael Priest Photography



## Table of Contents: Student Poetry

Abraham	Portrait of my Father	5
Ana	The Lovely Woman Looks Forward	6
Antonio	Master Builder	7
Arturo	Life and Legos	8
Ashley	Domino Country	9
Ashley M.	Dancing in Happiness	10
Atzhary	Secret Agents	11
Axel	The Man Who Made Coffee Out of Mud	12
Brandon	One Drop Changes Everything	13
Brianna	Level 4AP	14
Cherise	My Sanctuary	15
Devin	Lake Winnepesaukee	16
Art Work	Various Artists	17- 20
Eram	Homesick	21
Erik	Pizza Sky	22
Fatima	She Sits	23
Geraldine	Wondering in the Window	24
Itzel	No Training Wheels	25
Jada	The Drive	26
Janielle	My Invisible Uncle	27
Jayleen	Backyardigans	28
Jennifer	Train Lullaby	29
Karla	From Behind the Red Curtains	30
Katelyn	My Mom Who Cries in the Corner	31
Kelly	There Was a Day	32
Keyani	Three Bears	33
Latoya	Daddy's Little Girl	34
Lesli	Stuck in Mexico	35
Luis	The Weight of Brotherhood	36
Madison	My Protector	37
Ryana	Is America Worth It?	38
Soraida	Bravery in Her Blood	39
Skylar	108 Years	40
Tonatiu	Electric Night	41

## Portrait of my Father

By Abraham, Grade 7

Every night at 11:30  
My father reaches up  
And into the dark cabinet  
To find his yellowed, faithful  
Spanish-English dictionary,  
Which is as worn out as he is.

He stares into the blue book  
That crackles as its yellow pages unfold.  
I watch as the light engulfs his still frame.  
I watch as he takes in the bolded words,  
Admiring them, studying them,  
As if they were Rembrandt's brush strokes.

He becomes lost in the maze of foreign words.  
As hours pass, the curtains shield me his light.  
He remains peering into the crusted pages,  
Occasionally glancing up at the family picture  
Which hangs like the steady heartbeat in his  
chest.  
I watch as his eyes grow weary.

I see wrinkles surface around his eyes.  
The red clock 1:00 AM.  
He shelves the book  
Knowing he will return to it the next day.  
Same time, new pages.

My dad settles into his bed  
And looks at the cracked ceiling,  
Cracked like his worn hands.  
He stares up at the ceiling  
That is pieced together  
Like the life that he's created.

And I look up at my cracked ceiling,  
And think of our family picture,  
And imagine that next to it

I will hang a portrait of my father  
Reading his Spanish-English dictionary  
Page after page  
Night after night.

*Sponsored by Timothy Chow, Kim Frank, Carol Gluck, Rebekah McCabe, Robert Meringolo,  
Michael Ryan, The Seidel Family, and Carter Simonds*



## **The Lovely Woman Looks Forward**

By Ana, Grade 4

My mother dreams of the future.

She watches the rain  
As it drops to the ground.

She watches the river  
As it flows towards the ocean.

She watches me run  
As I chase after the soccer ball.

She watches the train  
As it speeds out of sight.

She watches my brother  
As he explores new toys.

And every night  
She kisses me goodnight  
And watches me grow up.

My mother dreams of the future.



*By Ixchel, Grade 7*

*Sponsored by Jon & Abby Moses and Joy Singer*

## Master Builder

By Antonio, Grade 8

We spread the gray clay-like compound on  
The walls dented and peeling from years of  
history.

He shows me how to hold the towel  
And push the putty until the rough edges  
are smooth.

We lay smooth, polished, heavy tile on top  
of  
Cold, hard concrete, covered in saw dust.

He shows me how to set the tile down  
slowly,  
Keeping a straight line.

We force nails into wood that becomes  
a wall,  
Making upright what was falling down.

We paint layers of white over  
The dried compound and abandoned  
memories.

He tells me to keep a pattern,  
Paint in the same direction every stroke.

We fill the house with work, talk, and  
Mexican music.  
My father, uncles, and cousins.

They bring this old house back to life,  
My father is the foreman.

We watch him measure and plan,  
And we follow his instructions.

He wants it done correctly the first time.  
The second time is always harder, he says.

When he's not working,  
We go fishing in Long Island.

He taught me to tie a tight knot  
To connect the hook and the cane.

And he taught me to wait for a striped  
bass,  
A big, fighting fish who doesn't want to be  
caught.

*Sponsored by Andrew Chapman, Robert Meringolo, and Carter Simonds*



## Life and Legos

By Arturo, Grade 4

To build a Lego structure,  
It's easy.  
No matter how big your dream,  
You do it piece by piece  
And you'll get it all done.

If a piece isn't where it belongs  
Ask the instructions,  
"Where does this go?"  
It's okay to ask for help.

If it does not answer,  
Just ask again  
(make sure to say please).  
It's going to talk.

Don't be sad.  
And if you're going to be mad,  
Just be a little mad.  
You'll get it right.  
It just takes some time.

Building with Legos is a lot like life:  
Slow down,  
Have fun,  
Keep calm,  
And just relax!  
No matter how big your dream,  
Each piece will fall into place.



*Sponsored by Anonymous, Kristen & Boris Arabadjiev,  
Cassandra Berger, Michael Bingle,  
Diana Brooks, Timothy Chow,  
Lucia Engstrom Davidson, Jon Ein, Lynette Engel,  
Liz Figel, Kim Frank, Peter Hildebrand,  
Kristin Johnson, Claire Kiefer,  
Christina Kwak, Jamie Leonhart, Bethia Liu,  
Christopher Lynch, Winifred Mabley,  
Jon & Aby Moses, Laurie Gene Mygatt,  
Robert Meringolo, Anne & Tom Robinson,  
Michael Ryan, Dee Moses Schwab, The Seidel Family  
Dan Singer & Catherine Havemeyer, and Ingrid Wong*

## Domino Country

By Ashley, Grade 6

I come from a  
Place called *San Francisco de Macoris*  
Where all my people are.  
Where all *puro* Dominicans are.  
But then there's *El Barrio, La Capital*,  
Where all the Dominicans dance  
    *bachata* with  
Smooth flowing hips.  
One, two, three, tap:  
"¡Wepa! ¡Esa si sabe bailar!"  
They shout.

Where I come from they  
Play dominos,  
    "*El juego ta trancao*," they say.  
People slamming the dominos on the table  
Get competitive, forgetting that it's a game.  
When I go where I come from,  
I play dominos with my grandma.  
Even though she's 74 years old,  
She has those domino moves  
That make you want to mess with her a  
little.

When I go where I come from,  
The hot sun beams on my face,  
And I ride a calm white horse  
On my uncle's farm.  
    "*No te ponga eso muchacha, que ta  
    caliente*,"  
My mom shouts, and the sweet, salty  
Sweat drips down behind my knees.

I am proud  
Of where I come from.  
I come from a hot, horse-riding, dancing,  
domino country.  
And, like dominos, the country falls into my  
    life  
In the city, pushing me  
Ever so slightly  
Towards home.

*Sponsored by Anonymous, Eryn & Mike Bingle, Claire Kiefer, Robert Meringolo, and Julia Pershan*

## **Dancing in Happiness**

By Ashley M., Grade 6

While I walked to the theater,  
My legs shook like a cymbal,  
Vibrating like  
The rhythm of the fast, upbeat music.

When I came to the theater,  
I felt the heat burning my feet.  
I felt an eruption of eagerness.

I heard the clapping of the audience  
Behind the long, red, rough curtain.  
It was dark, and I couldn't see  
The people in the audience,  
Only flashes for their loved ones.  
But my parents, like the real stars,  
Waited patiently for me to shine.

As I walked onto the stage,  
I recognized my mom's  
Long almond hair  
And my dad's hands  
Clapping excitedly.  
I felt the music in my body.  
God's eyes from the rafters  
Shone down on me and heated my cheeks.

The crowd was flying.  
I felt a war drop like  
Syrup sliding down my neck.  
I heard the beat of my heart pounding.  
The aroma of roses sustained me.  
The metal shoes hit the floor like  
Horses galloping on stage.  
I could see my reflection in the shiny  
black shoes.  
My top was white glowing vines,  
Hanging down into a mysterious  
blackness.

The jazzy music had begun,  
And so I danced.  
Danced like those who have come  
before me  
On this venerated stage.  
Danced like the  
Hot metal on the bottom of my shoe  
was  
Burning like a star in the night sky.

*Sponsored by Diana Brooks, Rita & Robert Crotty, Robert Meringolo,  
Julia Pershan, Dee Moses Schwab, and The Seidel Family*



## Secret Agents

By Atzhary, Grade 5

My sister and I had bunk beds,  
But we put all our toys,  
All our clothes,  
All the extra blankets and pillows,  
On the top.

We shared the bottom.  
Snuggled like two koala bears,  
Warm as fresh baked bread.  
I have never wanted my own bed.

Ana, who would wake me up talking on the  
phone all night,  
Laughing with her friends right there beside  
me,

So inconsiderate,  
Wants to be an FBI Agent.  
I do, too.

We have to go to college first,  
And then one day, we'll be;  
Agent Ana and Agent Atzhary.  
Keeping America safe.

She went first, my big sister.  
And now I sleep alone.  
Cold in my bed like a cat left outside in the  
night.  
I miss how she was always laughing,  
Always talking,

Even when we were supposed to be  
sleeping.  
Sometimes we snuck out of bed to play  
Operation,  
Diving under the covers when our mom  
came to the door.  
Practicing for our days as secret agents.

When my sister comes home to visit,  
The bed turns warm again and my heart  
turns full.

Agent Ana and Agent Atzhary,  
Together under the covers,  
Like koala bears.

*Sponsored by Carol Brown Hageman and Robert Meringolo*

## The Man Who Made Coffee Out of Mud

By Axel, Grade 6

My mom showed me a picture,  
And I nodded like I knew.  
She told me it was my *abuelo*,  
The man who made coffee out of mud.

In Mexico where they lived,  
There were no toys,  
But there was dirt.  
There was not always enough food,  
But there was dirt.  
There were last year's dresses and hand-me  
down shoes,  
And there was dirt.  
So my grandfather made coffee out of mud.

With broken tea cups and empty cans,  
My mother ran her *café*.  
She poured water into dirt  
And she made coffee out of mud.  
Oh what fun they had, pinkies up,  
Pretending to drink *café*.

"Buy what you need, not what you want,"  
He pointed out.  
"Start where you are. Use what you have.  
Do what you can,"  
Said another brave man,  
But he never made coffee out of mud.

*Abuelo's* voice is all I know,  
On the other end of the line,  
The man who eats *tortas*,  
The man whose dog is as tall as a door,  
The man who cared enough for my mom  
To help her make coffee out of mud.

And now my mom walks past  
The fancy dresses, dismisses the high  
Heeled shoes, and  
She buys me what I need.  
We might not have to make coffee out of  
mud,  
But the lesson sticks in our soil.

I see his face in her.  
As she speaks, I hear him talk,  
*"Ese es mi niño."*  
*"That's my boy."*

## **One Drop Changes Everything**

By Brandon, Grade 5

Some mornings, when I just don't want to get out of bed,  
My mother says, "Life is like a drop of water that falls.  
It splashes."

When she says that, she cries  
And the drops fall on me.

Ma, I sometimes call her,  
Who cleans other people's houses,  
Who cares for other people's babies.

"La vida se va rapido," she says.  
Life goes by fast  
One drop changes everything.

Ma, who teaches me lessons.  
When you're little  
You want to grow up so quickly.  
"But you don't how hard life is," she says.  
Drops of work  
Drops of rent  
Drops of bills  
Sometimes there are just too many drops,  
They become tears of sadness.

Ma, who wants me to have more than she did.  
Who wants me to enjoy every minute of life.  
For her I will soak up every drop  
And dance in the sun  
Before the rainstorm begins.

*Sponsored by Boris & Kristen Arabadjiev, Michael Bingle, Liz Figel, Winifred Mabley, and Tiana Stephens*



## Level 4AP

By Brianna, Grade 6

My feet.

My skin colored shoes,

Caramel just like me.

The wind from the vent,

Blows the dust from the floor

Under my feet.

Red with pain, blisters,

Skin peeling off,

Aching and pounding

From the ball to the heel.

There are no flowers to touch

Or smell.

“Point your feet.”

My legs.

My scratchy, skin colored tights,

Rubbing against my camel colored skin.

Muscles pop up everywhere as I

Relevé to demi pointe.

The holes in my tights

Expose the flesh,

I try not to pick at them.

“Pull your legs up.”

My stomach.

My stomach gently caressing the blue,

Soft, cottony crisp leotard that

stretches and

Pulls as my lungs expand and contract.

Abdominals growing like seeds into a plant

As I jump into a grande jeté in the air.

“Pull your stomach in, I can see everything  
you ate for lunch.”

My arms.

My arms rounded like a beach ball on a

sunny day,

But ache from holding them up for eternity.

Sharp pains,

Exploding pains through my triceps,

Squeezing, pleading, screaming and crying,

for relief.

“Hold your arms!”

My hair.

My warm, smooth, brownish black hair,

That my parents used to tie.

Now I plant the bun myself, and

Strands slip as I do

Supressós in the air.

My face.

My tight expression and clenched

Jaw holding pinball beads of sweat.

My glasses fall from

My nose.

But I don't care

“Lift your chin up.”

I hear the rumble of the

Piano's vibration on the floor

And the gentle hover of slippers

In the studio.

5, 6, 7, 8.

Now, I'm ready to start my magic.

## My Sanctuary

By Cherise, Grade 8

Lying on the lush gracious green grass  
I look up into infinity,  
Watching clumps of white wispy dreams  
float by.

My body patiently pressing into the ground  
I block out all sound:

The passersby and their rickety bikes,  
Their overly obnoxious conversations.  
Silence is all I hear,  
And slowly time begins to stop.

The sweet smell of grass bombards my  
nose.

The soft blades caressing my still body.  
I open my eyes to this newborn world.  
The small un-noticeable details growing  
salient,  
Every particle making its debut.

I observe the beautiful green gale,  
Admiring its vibrant colors.  
How it stands still and doesn't move,  
Aware of all around it.  
I watch the trees and how they blow in the  
wind,  
Letting their leaves fly away,  
Yet standing strong, standing tall  
Almost touching infinity  
I lay down and watch,

Wishing I could stay  
But this is not my place.

My mind begins to fill with thoughts,  
My body waking from its slumber,  
Coming back into our fast paced world.  
I walk slowly away,  
Leaving behind my sweet silent sanctuary.  
Knowing I will return.



*Sponsored by Robert Meringolo and Julio Rodriguez*

## **Lake Winnepesaukee**

By Devin, Grade 6

All winter, I wait.  
Wait for that feeling  
When the puff of air  
Comes from afar and  
You grab the main sheet so tight.  
You hold on for dear life.

Squall hits the canvas,  
You glide through water.  
Now nothing can make you go into irons,  
Now nothing can make you face the wind.

The opportunity lies in the sails.  
They unfurl like buds peeking  
Through frost in April.

Back from Lake Winnepesaukee,  
Knots I have tied  
Crossed and combined.

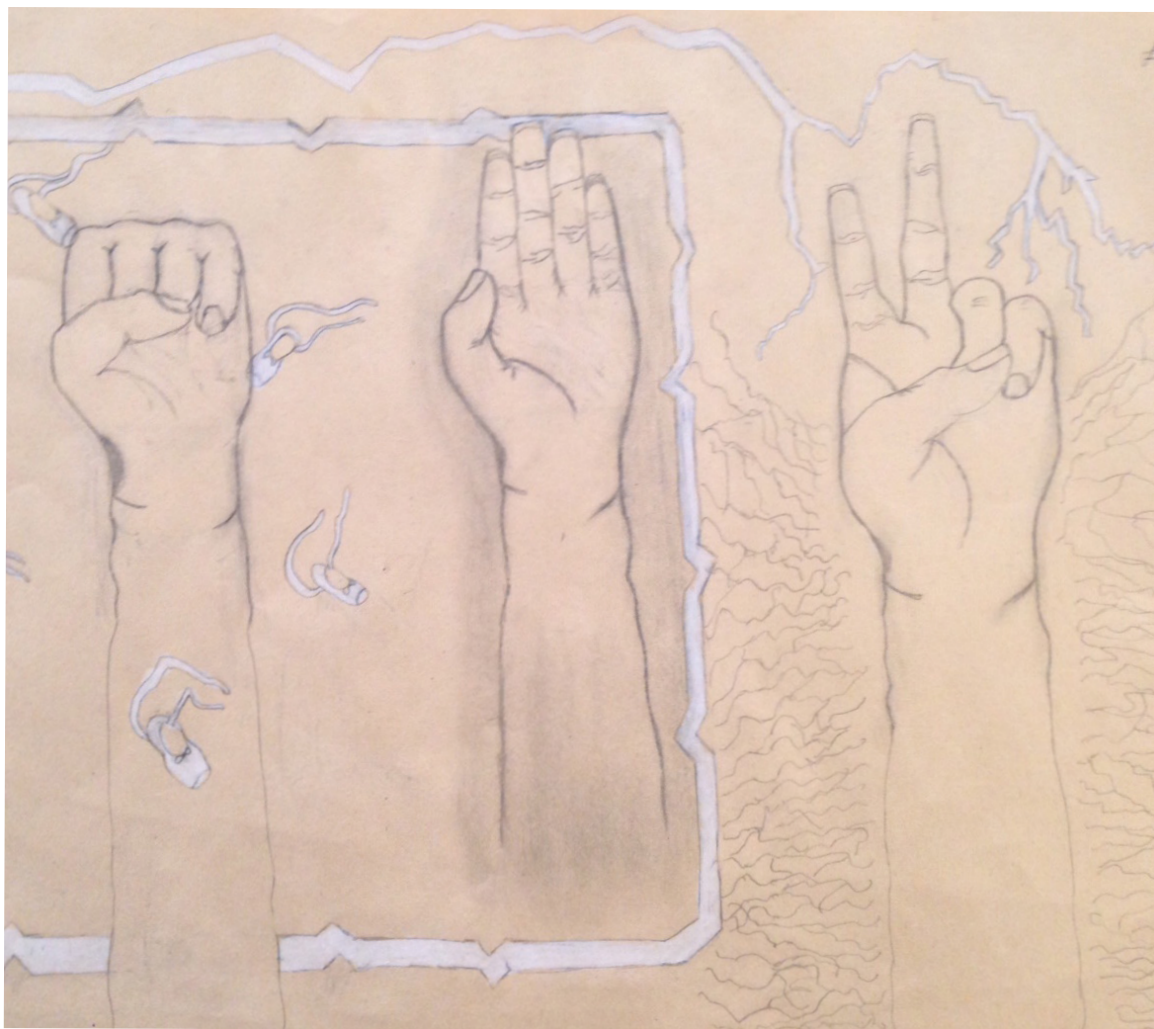
Mooring my boat to the slip.  
The shoulders of the tiller  
Beneath the sails,  
I watch the buoy bob on the horizon.

*Sponsored by Anthony Acosta, Cynthia Acosta, Diana Brooks, Joan Levy, and Rebecca Levy*





Self Portait Study  
By Manuela, Grade 8



Hand Study  
By Brittany, Grade 6



**“Portrait from Life”**  
By Ashley, Grade 6





Hand Study  
By Camille, Grade 6

## Homesick

By Eram, Grade 5

I wanted to love Bangladesh.  
The place my parents met,  
The place my brother was born.  
I pictured the farm my mom grew up on,  
Picking potatoes, fresh from the dirt,  
Soft and easy to mash.  
I thought I'd be milking cows,  
Like my father did when he was my age.  
I was excited to meet so many cousins,  
To cook broccoli with my grandmother,  
To read the Koran with my grandfather.  
There was so much about the country that I  
did not know.  
The country of my roots.

I wanted to love Bangladesh,  
But the heat was horrible,  
A fire-breathing dragon torturing me,  
Every time I left the house.  
It was the sweatiest month of my life.  
And the air, the food, the water  
—something—  
Made me sick,  
So I stayed in bed for almost a week.  
When I went out, the streets were packed  
with people.  
If I didn't hold my mother's hand I  
would've been lost,  
A little boy in a sea of stomachs.  
I had too many cousins to count.  
It was all just overwhelming.

I wanted to love Bangladesh,  
But it wasn't my home.  
I wanted toast for breakfast, not rice.  
I wanted to hear English, hop on a subway,  
And I wanted to toss around a football.  
Cricket was fine, but I wanted a Seahawks  
game on TV!  
I had never been as American  
As I was when I was in Bangladesh.

I wanted to love Bangladesh,  
And I am glad I went.  
It is, after all, the country of my roots.  
But one day, when I play in the FIFA World  
Cup,  
I am proud to say,  
I plan to play for Team USA.

*Sponsored by Anonymous,  
Kristen & Boris Arabadjiev, Brian Babst,  
Diana Brooks, Timothy Chow,  
Mary Ann & Peter Clarke,  
Lucia Engstrom Davidson, Liz Figel, Kim Frank,  
Claire Kiefer, Lisa & Oliver Knowlton,  
Marissa Kolodny, Jamie & Michael Leonhart,  
Winifred Mabley, Rebekah McCabe,  
Hali McClelland, Robert Meringolo, Julia Pershan,  
Winnie & Bill Post, Justin Riedell,  
Michael Ryan, The Seidel Family,  
Julia & Rusty Shepard,  
Dan Singer & Catherine Havemeyer, Eve Stuart,  
Stephanie Tseng, and Ingrid Wong*

## Pizza Sky

By Erick, Grade 5

Sometimes in the city,  
There is not enough sky.  
But outside my window,  
I can see a small piece of it.  
I have to lie on my bed,  
And tilt my head just the right way  
To get a glimpse of it,  
Shaped like a little slice of pizza.  
I look at it,  
It gazes back at me.

I find my piece of sky when I am exhausted  
From long subway rides,  
From my ears full of explosive sounds.  
It makes me feel that even though  
We are so crowded down here on earth,  
There is room up there, out there,  
For people to gaze up and relax.  
Sometimes in the city,  
There is not enough sky.



*Sponsored by Diana Brooks, Andrew Chapman, Mary Ann & Peter Clarke,  
James & Lisa Freedman, Claire Kiefer, Christina Kwak, Hali McClelland, William Papain, and Julia Pershan*

## **She Sits**

By Fatima, Grade 8

My mother sat silently,

At 13, selling those lollipops,  
Perfectly coated with the  
Adored colors of the Mexican flag.

She sat submissively underneath the  
Sizzling, scorching sun.  
Behind a beaten, broken stand  
On the edge of the  
Steep, sandpapered street of Guerrero.

She sat tolerantly, drowsily  
Waiting for the children who would  
Cheerfully come out of school;  
Carrying dense textbooks  
Eager to buy her lollipops.

She wanted to keep her distance from this  
hope.  
She couldn't finish the 6th grade,  
My grandparents didn't have enough  
money  
To cover her education.

And now she sits submissively  
Underneath a gleaming white roof in  
America,  
Behind a cushioned desk  
Where women lay their  
Extended fingers,

Pointing precisely in front of her.  
They know that my mother will do  
Her job silently.

She waits tolerantly as the laughing  
women  
Cheerfully choose shades of color  
For their perfect nails.

She coats continuously,  
Hands after hands,  
Layer after layer,  
Day after day with  
Dazzling colors.

They sit unconscious,  
Unaware of the coated lollipops and  
The sandpapered streets  
That brought her here to the Nail Salon  
and Spa.

I will not sit submissively,  
Or silently,  
Selling sugar or vanity.  
Someday, I'll stand behind a big wooden  
bench,  
A judge who makes things fair.

*Sponsored by Anonymous, Eryn Bingle, Diana Brooks, Mary Ann & Peter Clarke,  
Locus Analytics, Rebekah McCabe, Jon & Abby Moses, William Papain, Winnie & Bill Post,  
The Seidel Family, Carter Simonds, and Ingrid Wong*

## Wondering in the Window

By Geraldine, Grade 5

When I am home alone,  
I am NOT supposed to look out the window.  
My father says a stranger could see me.  
Or the police.  
And I am too young, to be home  
Alone.  
But my curiosity cannot resist.  
I pull the curtain aside,  
Just a little bit.  
I wipe away the fog,  
My hands melting into the coldness of the  
glass.  
I only show my eyes,  
But still, I am being disobedient.

Everyone out there seems like they have  
somewhere to go.  
I am here stuck inside my apartment,  
By the window like a cat.  
I dream of a house with a yard,  
Not my apartment with walls scarred from  
the fire.  
I dream of a house with a place for the  
trash,  
So I won't have to hear cockroaches,  
Their little feet tapping like breaking  
crackers.  
But outside my window,  
I see my neighborhood, my people.

The Dominican guy at the Deli who says,  
"Aqui esta la niña Mexicana que quiere su  
sandwich."  
The crossing guard who gives me a fist  
bump every morning,  
Tells me to be safe,  
And fixes my gym bag like a mother.  
I think they would miss me if I left.  
I would miss them.

In my room, there is a bag, blue like the  
ocean,  
That is full of my clothes from last year.  
They don't fit me anymore.  
But I like to look through them.  
And when I do, a tear comes for my  
childhood,  
For when I wasn't left alone,  
For when I wasn't sitting by the window  
like a cat,  
Wondering.

*Sponsored by Eryn Bingle, Andrew Chapman, Mary Ann & Peter Clarke,  
Lucia Engstrom Davidson, Jon Ein, Liz Figel, James & Lisa Freedman,  
Rebekah McCabe, Julia Pershan, The Seidel Family, Julia & Rusty Shepard, and Carter Simonds*



## No Training Wheels

By Itzel

“You don’t need training wheels” he said.  
“Today you’re going to learn.”  
I looked at my dad with doubt.

Put your feet  
In their spots  
And pedal!

pedal!  
pedal!

You control your bike  
With concentration  
So look!  
look!  
look!

If you see a person  
In your path  
Just ring!  
ring!  
ring!

When you reach  
A great big hill  
Each leg  
as  
heavy  
as  
a

rock  
It’s okay to hit the breaks  
Just get off and  
Walk!  
Walk!  
Walk!

Today I learned to ride a bike  
Without any training wheels.  
I found that what he said was true,  
And all I really needed to do  
Was see my goal  
And push, push, push  
My doubts left far behind.

*Sponsored by Kristen & Boris Arabadjiev, Diana Brooks, Mary Ann & Peter Clarke,  
Andrew Chapman, Chris Constable, Liz Figel, Carol Brown Hageman,  
Christopher Lynch, Robert Meringolo, Julia Pershan, Carter Simonds, and  
Dan Singer & Catherine Havemeyer*

## The Drive

By Jada, Grade 8

My grandpa tells a story,  
Not told to everyone.  
A story told only to me.

About his childhood routine,  
The morning walk,  
No ride to school.

Alongside his brothers,  
He walked the five mile distance  
Through the forest and across the roads.  
Not the hardest part of their journey.

When the bus passed,  
White children  
Wearing new clothes  
Would throw  
Rocks and sticks  
At my grandfather,  
His brothers, and  
The other Black boys.

Hiding and dodging,  
He started each day.  
The children threw their ignorance and  
My grandpa carried hate and fear,  
To the broken,  
All-Black school and  
Back home again.

When Grandpa tells this story  
With watery eyes and  
Embarrassed cheeks  
Stained by rebellious tears,  
I fully understand.

This is why he brings me to school.  
This is why he buys me books.  
This is why I'm here.

*Sponsored by Eryn Bingle, Diana Brooks, Mary Ann & Peter Clarke, Andrew Chapman,  
Timothy Chow, Liz Figel, Kim Frank, Lucia Engstrom Davidson, James & Lisa Freedman, Kristin Johnson,  
Jamie & Michael Leonhart, Bethia Liu, Locus Analytics, Winifred Mabley, Rebekah McCabe, Pamela Kenny,  
Bill & Winnie Post, Anne Robinson, Michael Ryan, The Seidel Family, and  
Dan Singer & Catherine Havemeyer*

## **My Invisible Uncle**

By Janielle, Grade 4

My uncle light as a cloud  
Almost so light  
That no one could see him  
Almost so light  
That I could lift him up  
Like he used to lift me when I was smaller.

My uncle light as a cloud  
Waits for  
me  
Down the hall  
Out of the florescent lights  
In his lonely room  
His room that is dark like a stormy day  
He waits for me to come  
To tell him “*Hola Tio*, Hi Uncle”  
To tell him about my day.

My uncle light as a cloud  
Tries to tell me about his day  
But I can barely hear him  
His wispy words so soft  
As he whispers “sorry.”

I tell him that it’s okay  
I tell him that it’s not his fault  
I tell him it’s better for him to leave  
It’s better for him to rest.

Today my uncle light as a cloud  
Has gone up with the clouds  
Has gone up with the bright blue sky  
From above his words will rain down to me now  
No longer wispy words too soft to hear.

Favorite uncle who now rests among the clouds,  
I don’t know which cloud to speak to.  
So I’m speaking to all the sky  
Please know that I will never forget you.

*Sponsored by Andrew Chapman, Carol Gluck, Rebekah McCabe, Julia Pershan,  
Michael Ryan, Dee Moses Schwab, and The Seidel Family*

## Backyardigans

By Jayleen, Grade 8

The day the Backyardigans  
Were born  
Was a day like any other.  
Lacrosse,  
Then class,  
And finally frolic.

Neighborhood kids  
Passed the gray gate  
And peered through.  
They must have been jealous of  
Our grand green space,  
The beautiful backyard  
Where the willow shades the sun.

"You look like Backyardigans  
Trapped in a cage!"  
They said.  
I laughed to myself.  
*They don't even know.*  
*I'm so free in my beautiful backyard*  
*Behind the fence*  
*Where the willow shades the sun.*

When I told Ivan, he laughed, too.  
And there was born the nickname for  
My cousin-crew.  
We travel in a pack,  
Matching uniforms and smirky smiles,  
Played together  
In our beautiful backyard.

Those others,  
Trapped outside,  
Will never know the joy of  
Frolicking in our beautiful backyard.  
The joy of being a Backyardigan.



*Sponsored by Brigitte Bentele, Diana Brooks, Eileen De Vito & Bill Glaser,  
Carol Brown Hageman, Anne L. Kaplan, Roger M. Low, and Sandra & Felipe Ventegat*

## Train Lullaby

By Jennifer, Grade 5

I dream of leaving my neighborhood,  
But I don't know how I would sleep,  
Without the sound of the Metro-North.

I know the rhythm by heart,  
The train nearing, passing, departing,  
Drum beats, footsteps, chains clanging,  
Elephants shaking our apartment.

Our first day there,  
The train knocked my dad's special box,  
The one with the hummingbird on it,  
The one he brought all the way  
from Uruguay,  
Right off the shelf.  
But we didn't care, we had a home.  
After six months in a shelter,  
A rumbling train wouldn't stop us,  
From loving, loving our new apartment,  
Even if it was louder than a herd of  
wildebeest,  
Even if it woke us up every twenty  
five minutes  
All night long.  
Lights in our eyes,  
Bees in our ears.  
It was ours, so we were happy.

When the weather is bad,  
The train does not pass.  
Now, I can't sleep on those nights.  
I am without my lullaby.  
Without the company of people heading out  
of the city,  
To quieter places.  
I imagine them falling asleep to owls  
Or the gentle footsteps of deer.

I dream of leaving my neighborhood,  
But I don't know how I would sleep  
Without the sound of the MetroNorth.

*Sponsored by Anonymous, Kristen & Boris Arabadjiev, Eryn Bingle,  
Mary Ann & Peter Clarke, Lucia Engstrom Davidson, Cornelia Ercklentz, Carol Brown Hageman,  
Peter Hildenbrand, Pamela Kenny, Claire Kiefer, Lisa & Oliver Knowlton, Jamie & Michael Leonhart,  
Winifred Mabley, Rebekah McCabe, Robert Meringolo, Jon & Abby Moses, Laurie Gene Mygatt,  
Julia Pershan, Bill & Winnie Post, Ruth Shillingford, Joy Singer, and  
Dan Singer & Catherine Havemeyer,*



## **From Behind the Red Curtains**

By Karla, Grade 7

I used my long hair to hide  
And my meek voice as a mask  
To cover someone  
Who wasn't real.

Down in Times Square  
The girl with the long hair  
Wasn't afraid  
Of what others thought.

I dreamt of a stage  
Red curtains  
And I, the star of the play  
Showing my true self.

But my dream smoldered,  
Trying to become more.  
But the fire burned,  
Motivating my voice.

Some days, I hide  
Behind the red curtains  
Like the meek mouse  
I used to be,

But pushing through the curtains  
Of my hesitation  
I found a way to let go  
Of my quiet charade.

Sometimes it's easier  
To keep the loud girl  
On a stage in Times Square  
Instead of here in East Harlem,

But if I can be loud and strong on stage  
Then one day,  
My performance will follow me here,  
Even if I have to act.

*Sponsored by Eryn Bingle, Diana Brooks, Mary Ann & Peter Clarke, Timothy Chow, John Ein, Carol Gluck,  
Peter Hildenbrand, Kristin Johnson, Rebekah McCabe,  
Robert Meringolo, and Eve Stuart*

## **My Mom Who Cries in the Corner**

By Katelyn, Grade 5

When I was little and I asked for a toy,  
And my mom said,  
We'll buy it next week,  
I believed her.  
Now I know we probably won't buy it.

I try not to ask for things,  
Now that I understand.  
But sometimes, I still do.  
I begged for a hamster.  
I probably shouldn't have.

My mom goes to work every day.  
She works for the city,  
Answering phones  
In the sanitation department.  
But still she struggles.

My mom cries in secret,  
But I know.  
Her body curled small,  
Her eyes red and wet.  
Her voice crumbled,  
Like a piece of paper.

I see her,  
And I think,  
I do not need another thing.

I will not take any more dollars  
To the 99 Cent Store,  
To buy silly stuff  
Like a plastic water gun,  
Or a Rubik's Cube that doesn't even turn.

I will save our money.  
For something important.  
I will save our money.  
To stop my mother's tears.

*Sponsored by Anonymous, Kristen & Boris Arabadjiev, Eryn Bingle, Andrew Chapman,  
Timothy Chow, Mary Ann & Peter Clarke, Jon Ein, Cornelia Ercklentz, Kristin Johnson, Rebekah McCabe,  
Hali McClelland, William Papain, The Seidel Family, Tiana Stephens, and Eve Stuart*

## **There Was a Day**

By Kelly, Grade 5

That day in the stairwell  
That's when I knew.  
When they're holding their breath.  
So many tears  
I thought the stairwell would fill with water.

There was a day  
One day  
That I'll never forget.  
When I understood  
That my parents couldn't be together  
When I knew that my family  
Would break apart.

That day  
I felt my heart  
Getting smaller and smaller  
Until I couldn't hear it beating  
Over the sound of my own thoughts.

There was a day  
When I made a wish  
Bigger than the Empire State Building.  
I wished for my family to stay together  
Forever.  
Now I know  
That my wish will never come true.

But then there were days  
When I felt my heart growing back  
To its normal size.  
I could hear it beating again.  
Hearing the words of mi Papi say  
"Florenxia ven pa'ca."  
Or mi Mami saying "Kelly ven a comer."

There are many days ahead.  
Mami and Papi  
Can't be together.  
But when I hear them say  
"Mija te amamos mucho"  
Daughter we love you  
I know  
I have their love  
Forever.

*Sponsored by Anonymous, Rebekah McCabe, Michael Ryan, and Dan Singer & Catherine Havemeyer*

### Three Bears

By Keyani, Grade 7

Please hear me, dear parents,  
From where I stand  
In the middle  
Between two angry bears  
Who roar at one another  
This cub, 13 now,  
Is lost,  
Is in between two lives.

Please hear me, dear Papa Bear,  
My ears can't take it anymore.  
The words you say about my mama  
Each one a sharp barb  
Building up the wire fence  
I long to crawl under.

Please hear me, dear Mama Bear,  
I fear you do not know  
How much of my life you've missed,  
How many things I have to hide,  
The things I wish to say like  
A piece of mail with no address.

Please hear me, dear parents,  
For here I stand  
Arms open wide  
For a bear hug  
Because isn't loving me the one thing  
On which you can agree?

*Sponsored by Anonymous, Eryn Bingle, Mary Ann & Peter Clarke,  
Rebekah McCabe, and Joy Singer*

## Daddy's Little Girl

By Latoya, Grade 8

We share this sign,  
A birthmark.  
The sign says I'm yours,  
Daddy's little girl.

I look at it and see you.  
I didn't love it at first,  
But now I do.

Looking in the mirror,  
I see that mark on my left,  
Made before birth,  
We both have it.  
The same size, on the same side.

It's how I know you're mine, too.  
We quit our visits when I was ten  
There was nothing good for us with you.

You said you need a test to say I'm yours  
Is this sign we share not good enough?  
In the end, you didn't show  
Didn't take the test.  
You already knew I was yours.

No longer a child anymore,  
No longer yours to claim.  
I'll see this birthmark, and know it's mine  
Not ever yours, or "ours."

I'll be so many things:  
But never daddy's little girl.  
And that's how it will be.

*Sponsored by Kristen & Boris Arabadjiev, Eryn Bingle, Diana Brooks, Julia Chang,  
Chris Constable, Andrew Chapman, Timothy Chow, Mary Ann & Peter Clarke,  
Luca Engstrom Davidson, John Ein, Cornelia Ercklentz, Carol Gluck,  
Kristen Johnson, Hali McClelland, Jon & Abby Moses, Greg Palumbo, Julia Pershan, Anne Robinson,  
Ellen Schneiber, Julia & Rusty Shepard, and Dan Singer & Catherine Havemeyer*



## Stuck in Mexico

By Lesli, Grade 6

I remember the day that  
My mother left for Mexico  
To care for her father who was ill.  
My mother, who can't come home from  
Mexico.

I remember how she waved goodbye  
With soft hands tired  
From cleaning all day.  
My mother, who can't come home from  
Mexico.

I remember how she walked that day,  
Like a hatched turtle reclaiming the sea,  
Padding down the jet bridge away from me.  
My mother, who can't come home from  
Mexico.

My mother, a daughter, herself,  
Left for Mexico to care for her father,  
To change his bed sheets and wipe his brow,  
My mother, who can't come home from  
Mexico.

My mother's first home in Mexico,  
Where her father remained and she  
returned.  
He died even though she was there.  
My mother, who can't come home from  
Mexico.

And now my mother cannot change my  
sheets  
Or hug me sweet. I lost a parent, too  
Because my mother cannot return,  
My mother, who can't come home from  
Mexico.

So I'll do my best  
To study hard and practice well.  
I won't fight with my sister like  
Chickens vying over the last worm.  
I won't because of my mother  
Who can't come home from Mexico.

*Sponsored by Rita & Robert Crotty, Carol Brown Hageman, Christina Kwak, Rebekah McCabe,  
Michael Ryan, The Seidel Family, and Dan Singer & Catherine Havemeyer*

## **The Weight of Brotherhood**

Inspired by *The Things They Carried* by

Tim O'Brien

By Luis, Grade 7

I bear a heavy load,  
A burden, also a gift,  
I am an older brother.

He, a tiny trumpeting earthquake.  
I, a scheming tyrant.  
I call him "tomato man."  
He fumes silently.

I remain a serf to his every need,  
His bodyguard,  
His alarm clock in the morning.  
Before bed I call him immature,  
Yet if the night frightens him,  
And he crawls into my bed,  
I won't utter a sound.

I carry more than my backpack  
On the way to school.  
My parents trust  
That I will set a good example,  
That I'll keep him safe and sound.

Things change as we grow.  
I no longer protect him  
From the dark closet.  
And as he grows heavier,  
The burden I carry lessens.

*Sponsored by Anthony Acosta, Kristen & Boris Arabadjiev, Diana Brooks, Eryn Bingle,  
Timothy Chow, Rachel Coneybeare, Liz Figel, Carol Gluck, Kristin Johnson, Laurie Gene Mygatt,  
Julia Pershan, Michael Ryan, Justin Riedell, Anne Robinson, Carter Simonds,  
Dan Singer & Catherine Havemeyer, Stephanie Tseng, and Ingrid Wong*

## **My Protector**

By Madison, Grade 7

When he first walked through that door,  
He was my hero.  
The one who said in the  
Steady voice of a king,  
“I will never do anything to hurt you.”

The one whose faith in me lifted my chin,  
The one who would always stand  
On my side of an argument,  
My protector from malevolence,  
A shield from the darkness.

Until he shattered this story  
I told myself,  
The one where he was full of virtue.  
He told a lie  
Which I never thought my hero could do.

In the fairy tales I read as a child  
I came to expect happily-ever-afters.  
Despite the curses and deceptions,  
Good always conquered evil  
In the end.

When my fairy tale ended,  
I was about to turn eight.  
A princess poisoned by a sorcerer  
Whose spell transformed my smiles  
Into frowns.

Turns out the fancy  
Scent on his clothes  
Meant he was going out  
Somewhere far away  
But it wasn't until two years later I  
learned the truth.

Life is no fairy tale.  
And now I have  
Started to ride to my own rescue.

*Sponsored by Diana Brooks, Liz Figel, Carol Brown Hageman, Rebekah McCabe, Robert Meringolo,  
Greg Palumbo, The Seidel Family, Eleanor Shakin, and Dan Singer & Catherine Havemeyer*

## Is America Worth It?

By Ryana, Grade 5

I miss my mom most in the mornings.  
In Kingston with her, nothing felt rushed.  
She woke up earlier than the sun,  
Had breakfast waiting on the table.  
While I ate her sweet strawberry pancakes,  
She combed my hair,  
Gave me my ponytail for the day.  
Now I eat without her,  
Imagining her in Jamaica,  
Where it's hot, hot and sometimes the  
rain falls  
Hard as an avalanche.

My mom has never seen snow,  
So I send her pictures.  
On these winter mornings,  
I put on my boots,  
My hat,  
My scarf,  
My gloves,  
Bundled like a person with too  
much luggage.  
I think that if she were here,  
She'd kiss me out the door.

I come to school,  
In snow, in rain, on the crunching leaves.  
I try not to think of my mom,

With her soft hugs that always made me  
feel happy.  
I try not to think of my mom,  
Because I don't want to be crying on my  
math problems.

Sometimes I wake in the middle of the  
night,  
Thinking she will be next to me.  
For ten years, she often was,  
In our air conditioned room in Jamaica.  
And then I see that I am here,  
In New York.  
And I remember that she is there,  
In Kingston.  
And then I can't sleep again.  
And then it is morning.  
I miss my mom most in the mornings.

Some mornings, I wonder,  
Is America worth it?  
And then I go to school,  
Hoping that it is.

*Sponsored by Anonymous, Diana Brooks, Andrew Chapman, Kristin Johnson,  
Pamela Kenny, Marisa Kolodny, Christina Kwak, Rebekah McCabe, Robert Meringolo,  
William Papain, The Seidel Family, Rusty & Julia Shepard, Ruth Shillingford,  
Dan Singer & Catherine Havemeyer, and Ingrid Wong*

## Bravery in Her Blood

By Soraida, Grade 7

She came here  
With bravery in her blood  
And persistence in the pads of her feet.  
She was 17 and naïve.  
There was no one  
To tell her she was better off staying.  
No father  
To steer her in the right direction.

Her teacher led her to the border,  
The teacher she had loved for so long.  
With encouragement and kindness,  
Her teacher put  
Bravery in my mother's blood.

Waiting for the right time to cross the  
border,  
She waited with bravery in her blood.  
When she arrived, she was lost,  
But she didn't want to go back  
To her country alone.  
Back to the  
Fatherless military zone.

She learned with bravery in her blood.  
She studied English and was excited  
To know the language of her new peers,  
The peers who laughed and mocked her.  
They didn't know  
About the bravery in her blood.

She was glad English classes were free,  
No cost for her to speak.  
And the classes set her free,  
Free to choose the career that she didn't  
expect to pick.  
And so my mother is a teacher,  
Like the one she loved so much.  
After all, it was the thorns on her red rose  
That pricked the bravery in her blood.

*Sponsored by Anonymous, Diana Brooks, Andrew Chapman, Mary Ann & Peter Clarke,  
Rita & Roberty Crotty, Carol Gluck, Carol Brown Hageman, Christina Kwak, Maura Lyons,  
Jon & Abby Moses, William Papain, Julia Pershan, Winnie & Bill Post, Michael Ryan,  
Julia & Rusty Shepard, Carter Simonds, Dan Singer & Catherine Havemeyer, Joy Singer,  
and Ingrid Wong*



## 108 Years

By Skylar, Grade 6

Laying at the end of  
The metal rimmed bed  
Facing my side, looking  
At my caramel colored  
Great great grandmother  
Thinking of her life, a year for  
Every wrinkle, for every knob  
In her knuckle on each stubby finger.

Thinking about 1906  
The 26th President of the United States  
Visits “Porto” Rico for the first time  
Where the scenery was wonderful  
He said, and the mountains  
Resembled the peaks of Switzerland’s Alps.  
He suggested that “Porto” Ricans  
Become Americans.

Thinking about 1907  
My great great grandmother is born  
In Puerto Rico, where her people have  
been for years  
Where she is surprised by the suggestion  
Of a white, foreign president  
Her identity, born in the  
Shadow of the stars and stripes.

Thinking about 1960  
The war in Vietnam  
And the people who were lost.  
Were they merely suggestions?

Thinking about 1975  
When my great great grandmother’s  
son died.  
The war ended and so did his life.  
Was he an American then?

Thinking about 2015  
Laying at the end of the metal rimmed bed.  
Do I make my grandmother an American?  
With her blood coursing through my veins?  
Do her 108 years live in  
The dimples on my knees?  
She tells me stories that used to be untold.

*Sponsored by Diana Brooks, Andrew Chapman, Rita & Robert Crotty, Carol Brown Hageman,  
Pamela Kenny, Rebekah McCabe, Robert Meringolo, Jon & Abby Moses, William Papain, and Lorre Snyder*

## Electric Night

By Tonatiu, Grade 8

There is an electricity in the moon.  
A pleasurable pulse,  
A measurable magic,  
An enormous energy.

A bewitching entrancement  
Unlike the sun  
Who illuminates all truth,  
The moon is for things unseen,  
Things done in shadows  
And beneath borrowed cover.  
It's for wild hearts and unconcerned minds.

Where plans are made in dark alleyways,  
Secrets are revealed under the soft  
Haze of lights coming through the  
Crack of closed shutters.  
When fugitives escape  
And when the children run away.  
It's when dreamers fall in love.

That passionate, all-consuming love  
Always looks a little different  
In the light of day.

By night we see our true desires.  
We reflect on our moments of  
discontent  
And those of yearning that are often  
Blinded by the sun.

It's when we become  
Poets and philosophers,  
Those who think best under  
the stars.

*Sponsored by Timothy Chow, Robert Meringolo, and Julia Pershan*



The East Harlem School  
A T E X O D U S H O U S E

309 East 103rd Street | New York, NY 10029  
212-876-8775 | [www.eastharlemschool.org](http://www.eastharlemschool.org)