



THE EAST HARLEM SCHOOL

POETRY SLAM

GUEST MC TINA FEY

11.19.19

AT SONY HALL

EVENING PROGRAM

EHS VIDEO

WELCOME FROM STUDENT MCS AND TINA FEY

POETS GROUP 1

Andrea, Treece, Troy, Vanessa, Corelie, Yuritzi, Catherine

POETS GROUP 2

Sarai, Geraldine, Laylanie, Mateo, Kardene, Jeremiah, Daniel

JUDGES' NOTES

REMARKS FROM SUYSEL dePEDRO CUNNINGHAM

EHS Trustee

POETS GROUP 3

Alyson, Chris, Kelsi, Delanie, Xitlally, Miguel, Zelzin

POETS GROUP 4

Leshly, Jelene, Natasha, Marlon, Corey, Xochiquetzalyt, Valerie

REMARKS FROM IVAN HAGEMAN

Head of School

CLOSING REMARKS FROM TINA FEY

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GUEST MC TINA FEY

Tina Fey is an award-winning writer, actress, and producer who is best known as Liz Lemon on her three-time Emmy Award-winning comedy series “30 Rock.” Prior to creating “30 Rock,” Ms. Fey completed nine seasons as a writer and cast member on “Saturday Night Live.” Ms. Fey’s film projects include Sisters, Whiskey Tango Foxtrot, Date Night and Mean Girls (which she wrote). In April 2011, Ms. Fey released her first book, Bossypants, which topped the New York Times bestseller list for over 36 consecutive weeks. Most recently, Tina wrote the book for the Tony nominated hit Broadway musical “Mean Girls”, based on the film of the same title.

STUDENT MCS

DEAN ARMSTRONG
XOCHIQUETZALYT CISNEROS
MICHAEL MARTINEZ
VALERIE RUIZ

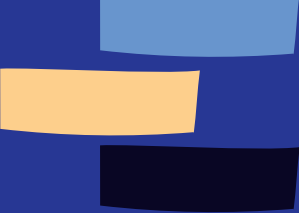
OTHER STUDENT PERFORMERS

“HARLEM”
BY LANGSTON HUGHES

T’ana Cozier
Charlie Merino
Ruth Ighodaro
Danna Garcia
Breanna Burgess
Adriana Alatorre
Carlos Miguel
Elijah Greene
Eder Loera

“HOPE IS THE THING
WITH FEATHERS”
BY EMILY DICKINSON

Adalberto Flores
Ari’ana Davis
Dean Armstrong
Zanai Concepcion
Katherine Leon
Lennyn Diaz
Andre Albert
Tiana Scott
Samantha Santiago



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MEET THE JUDGES

JANE FOLEY FRIED

Jane Foley Fried has served as Head of the Brearley School, a K-12 school for girls in New York City, since 2012. Prior to Brearley, Jane held leadership positions for 21 years at Phillips Academy in Andover, MA., most recently as Dean of Admission and Assistant Head for Enrollment, Research, and Planning. A graduate of Bowdoin College, which honored her with the Bowdoin Alumni Council's 2013 Distinguished Educator Award, Jane holds a master's degree from Tufts University with a thesis on girls' perceptions of leadership. Jane is President of the Board for the New York State Association of Independent Schools.



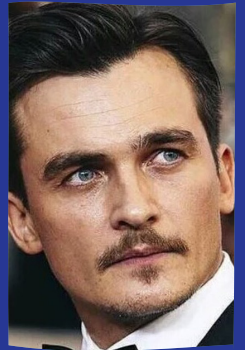
AIMEE MULLINS

As the first double amputee in history to compete in Division 1 NCAA track and field, Aimee set world records in the 100 meters, 200 meters and long jump events, and represented Team USA in the 1996 Paralympic Games. In 2012, Mullins was named Chef de Mission for the USA at the Summer Olympics and Paralympics in London and appointed by then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to the Council to Empower Women and Girls Through Sports. She then became a lauded runway and editorial fashion model and was named a global brand ambassador for L'Oréal Paris. She started her professional acting career in the films of Matthew Barney. Over the past decade, she has acted in many films and television shows, including the Netflix hit *Stranger Things* and the upcoming *DEVS* on FX. She has multiple films in development as a producer. Her decades of work with non-profit organizations mirror her passion for topics related to the human body, sport, identity, design, and innovation. Her famous TED talks have been translated into 42 languages. In 2017, she became one of the youngest-ever inductees into the United States' National Women's Hall of Fame.



RUPERT FRIEND

Rupert Friend is best known for his role as "Peter Quinn" on Showtime's *HOMELAND*. He played the role for five seasons and was nominated for an Emmy. Rupert recently filmed Tim Kirkby's *WALDO* opposite Charlie Hunnam and Mel Gibson, and also wrapped Wes Anderson's upcoming *THE FRENCH DISPATCH*. Rupert will next be seen starring in William Brent Bell's *SEPARATION*, and Antoine Fuqua's *INFINITE*. In addition, he can be seen in *A SIMPLE FAVOR* starring opposite Anna Kendrick and Blake Lively, *AT ETERNITY'S GATE* opposite Willem Dafoe, and *THE DEATH OF STALIN* opposite Steve Buscemi. His lengthy film credits include *THE YOUNG VICTORIA*, *THE BOY IN THE STRIPED PAJAMAS*, *CHERI*, *STARRED UP*, *PRIDE & PREJUDICE*, *HITMAN: AGENT 47* among many others. Friend can currently be seen leading the CBS All Access series *STRANGE ANGEL*, now in its second season.



NATALIE PAUL

Natalie can most recently be seen in a leading role opposite Bill Pullman in *The Sinner* on USA. Natalie also stars in the short film *SUICIDE BY SUNLIGHT* which premiered at the 2019 Sundance Film Festival and *EVELYN x EVELYN* which was a finalist in the HBO Short Film Competition at the 2019 American Black Film Festival. Natalie earned critical acclaim for playing Doreen Henderson on HBO's *Show Me a Hero*, and she was nominated for an NAACP Image Award for Best Actress in a Motion Picture for her portrayal of Antoinette Warner in the independent film *Crown Heights*. This season, Natalie recurs as Sarah Pace on the Audience Network's *Mr. Mercedes* and as Frankie Campbell on Season 7 of NBC's *Blacklist*. She also recurs on Netflix's *You* and HBO's *Random Acts of Flyness*. A daughter of Haitian-Immigrants, a Brooklyn girl, and a boarding school survivor, Natalie graduated from Yale University and was trained at the NYU Graduate Acting Program. Natalie serves on the Artistic Advisory Board of the Epic Theater Ensemble, an organization that provides after school and summer programming for NYC public high school students.





ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT TOLULOLA

Tolulola grew up in the Bronx with her mother who is originally from Lagos, Nigeria, and her older brother. At The East Harlem School, Tolulola was an athlete, a poet, a singer in the school choir, and an eighth grade leader.

After graduating from The East Harlem School, Tolulola attended The Young Women's Leadership School in East Harlem where she excelled academically and pursued many extracurricular opportunities. In addition to being her class's student government representative for two consecutive years, Tolulola was also a New Visions Scholarship recipient, a tutor, and a volunteer. In the summer of 2018, Tolulola was chosen as an East Harlem School Brooks Fellow and interned at The Sarah Burke House.

She is now in the fall term of her sophomore year at Dartmouth College where she sings in an acapella group and plans on majoring in psychology with a minor in global health.

STUDENT POETRY



POETS GROUP 1

WATCHING MY THOUGHTS ANDREA GOMEZ, GRADE 8

When I meditate, I am focused, determined,
Watching my breath like I watch my balance
When I skateboard down the East River on weekends.
When I meditate, I listen to the sounds of nature,
The birds resting upon the tree.
As if looking through the lens of my camera,
I can clearly see the leaves swaying and rustling against one another,
The little blades of grass
Against the brown carpet of the Earth.

But sometimes, I see other things.
The thoughts that flow into my mind,
Even if I wish they'd stay away.
Thoughts of a world where promises aren't kept,
Where lies are told,
Where if you cry too much, you are vulnerable,
Where if you care too much, you get taken advantage of.
A world where the person you relied on
And could be safe with
Vanished like the wind,
And my mother was left to carry the load on her own,
And I was left with so many questions and doubts

That wracked my brain.
The thoughts overwhelm me
To the point where
I no longer notice my breath.

The sound of the singing bowl brings me back.
A sharp ring that echoes in waves
Like ripples of gentle water.
I let my thoughts blow by like the wind,
Releasing them without judgement.
I remember that I'm breathing.
I feel my posture.
And one, two, three,
I gently open my eyes –
Focused, determined,
Ready to face the world.

*Andrea Gomez's family is originally from Puebla, Mexico. Her favorite book is *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho. On weekends, when she's not out on her skateboard, playing lacrosse, or taking photos, she enjoys spending time with her family. She also loves to meditate, a practice that she learned at EHS. Meditation helps her notice her thoughts and feel a sense of calm.*



LOOK UP! TREECE DOLMO, GRADE 7

Did you take a moment to look at the sun today?
Did you know it's a star that keeps us alive?
Yellows and oranges and reds and pinks fill the sky when it sets.
Did you notice?
Or did you only notice the glowing light
That you hold in your hand?
The one powered by batteries and the push of a button?

Did you try something new today?
Did you dance or sing or practice an instrument?
Did you imagine taking a trip to Japan?
Did you open an actual book and read it?
Greet any strangers? Pet any dogs?
Or did you just stare into the black hole,
Sucking in your thoughts and emotions.

Did you take a moment to notice your breath?
The way your lungs and limbs work together
Perfectly, like a clock?
Did you smell the air?
Did you notice that bus that just drove by?
(The blue and yellow on the outside is actually quite pretty!)
Or were you just one of those people
Whose eyes I can never meet
Because they're always looking down,
Gazing into the virtual abyss..

Treece's family is from Honduras, but she was born and raised in New York City. Some of her favorite books are Wonder, The Land of Stories, and The Giver. Treece has one sister, Keala. Her favorite sports are basketball and softball. Treece's poem was inspired by the people she sees on the train who are glued to their phones. She hopes her poem will inspire people to look up!

BREAKFAST CONVERSATIONS TROY ALLEN, GRADE 7

They say breakfast is the most important meal of the day.
I agree, because it's when I get to talk to my mom.
We call them Breakfast Conversations.
When life feels like a Jenga tower about to fall,
Our morning talks are the blocks that stabilize it.

I'm dressed for school,
And she is in her blue and white scrubs,
After a night as an ER nurse.

Scrambled eggs and fruit,
And every worry we have is released.

They say that if you put your sadness into words,
Then it has less power over you.

I don't want to put my sadness into this poem,
Because I am a happy person.
It's not that I don't feel sad sometimes.
I feel sad about a lot of things.
I worry about all the mistakes I have made.
And sometimes I even feel lonely.
But at breakfast, I let it out. I share it.
And that's why I'm a happy dude.

So take my advice.
Find someone you trust,
Cook up some eggs, peel an orange,
And have a conversation.
It makes the Jenga tower of life
A whole lot less wobbly.

Troy lives in West Harlem with his mom and his uncle. His mother's family is from the South, and his father's family is Jamaican. Troy's favorite sport is squash, and he plays on a squash team through the program StreetSquash. Troy likes to read comics and ride his bike on the weekends. Troy's poem is about the power of opening up and talking to others.

REAL LOVE VANESSA CASTRO, GRADE 5

Valentine's Day is the international day of love.
Chocolate, greeting cards, fancy dinners,
But that is not real love.

Real love is my mom tucking me in tight,
Telling bedtime stories of her childhood.

Real love is my dad waking up before the sun
To construct signs for shops across the city.

Real love is the sharing of secrets between sisters,
Promising to never tell.

Real love is my grandmother surprising me with knitted
Sweaters made from her own hands.

Real love is my neighbor dropping off leftovers
At my apartment after his shift cooking at his restaurant.

Real love is my turtle crawling over
My feet as we play in my bedroom.

Real love is me looking in the mirror and
Smiling at the person staring back at me.

I see real love everyday, and
Real love doesn't cost a penny.

Vanessa lives in the Bronx with her mom, who is originally from Veracruz, Mexico, and her dad, who is originally from Puebla, Mexico, and her sister, a turtle, and a fish. Her favorite classes in school are science and math. In her free time, Vanessa likes to play soccer and tennis, read, and practice ballet. Her poem is inspired by her family and how they show love in unique and meaningful ways.

DREAMING NORTH AND SOUTH CORELIE URGILES, GRADE 8

Ecuador,
El país de mis sueños,
As my mom would refer to it when I was growing up.
Eight-year-old me would look at her so confused,
“So then, why do we live here?” I would ask.
“Ay, mijita,” was her only response.

Then, I would look up into her beautiful hazelnut eyes,
And it was only then I realized
That she was still full of dreams,
Those same dreams she left in Ecuador when she came here
To pursue the “American Dream.”

That dream that really is just a dream
In reality.
It makes you work long, hard hours,
Cleaning other people's houses,
Taking care of children who aren't your own,
Hearing the clock tick-tock.

Then she would go on to tell me about life in Ecuador.
About the beautiful groncella trees,
And the Chimborazo that seems to be so tall it touches the sun,
About the fun afternoons they spent bathing en los ríos,
And the long, hard days of picking cacao off the trees.

My memories of this place soon came running back to me.
Those times where I would run around playing tag under the rain,
Or when we would hide at the tops of trees when we played hide and seek,
And those hot days when we would go to la playita,
Which isn't really a playa, just a big river with sand on the side.

Ecuador,
That country that seemed so distant,

That country my mom yearned for.
El país de sus sueños
Soon became
El país de mis sueños, too.

Corelie enjoys reading and writing in both English and Spanish. Her favorite subject is humanities. She was born in New York, but her parents are from Azogues and La Troncal, Ecuador. Corelie has two younger sisters, and on the weekends, she likes to spend time with them. Her poetry is inspired by her family, her culture, and current events.



HER HAPPILY EVER AFTER YURITZI FLORES, GRADE 7

“Te quiero decir una historia.”
And the story she tells me is like a fairytale.
Her mother in Mexico tried to marry her
To a man whose family would pay my grandmother for her.
So she ran away,
Walked and ran and swam and sweat
Until she reached New York,
Where she fell in love with
My papa.
He was like her prince.
He was her happily ever after,
And that’s why I’m here.

But there’s another side to this story.
My mother has never forgiven
Her mother.
And so I’ve never met my grandmother,
And I wonder about her.
How did she raise nine children?
What does she do with her three grandchildren that she knows?
Why did she do this to her beloved oldest daughter?
Does she want to meet me?
Why can’t she just say sorry?

I wonder about forgiveness.
How do you say “it’s okay” to someone who tried to sell you off?
How should she forgive someone who told her who she could love?
I wonder how long it will take before
“Sorry” will come out of their mouths?
Will I ever meet her, my grandmother?

This is a fairytale.
But, this is no ordinary fairytale.
This is complicated.

Because that brave Mexican-American woman – my mother,
Did find her happily ever after,
My father – and me!
But she also left so much behind.

Yuritzi's family is from Guerrero, Mexico. She loves reading, and her favorite author is Maya Angelou. Yuritzi has been a student at EHS for three years and loves all her classes, but especially Advisory with Ivan. Her favorite sport is volleyball. Yuritzi became a big sister on Valentine's Day, and on the weekends, she likes to play with her eight-month-old baby sister.



I, TOO, HAVE A VOICE CATHERINE CARRION, GRADE 8

Being quiet makes people think you're shy.
And although this is a fact for some,
It was not for me.
Being quiet was a form of hiding,
Hiding from the problems I faced.
I wished and wished my trauma would turn into nothing,
Like a child who closes her eyes and thinks she's invisible.
I thought if I didn't speak out
Maybe it never happened.

For a long time, I thought that my mom was the only mom
Who had these long-lasting lectures
About what could happen to girls
If they're not careful
About how they sit when they're wearing a skirt.
I felt like I was the only one
Who hadn't been careful enough.
But now I, too –
Me, too –
I am part of an army of strong women
Who fight with their words.
And yes, it might make you feel uncomfortable,
But that is what I want –
For you to feel uncomfortable.
Not to feel uncomfortable that I'm speaking up about what's
happening,
But to feel uncomfortable that these things are happening
To mothers, daughters, friends, strangers, and me, too.
I want to make you aware,
That I am going to fight back
And that I, too, have a voice.

Catherine lives in the Bronx with her parents, who moved to New York from Guerrero and Morelos, Mexico to raise her and her four siblings. Her favorite book is I Lived on Butterfly Hill by Marjorie Agosín because it reminds her of pure adventure. Catherine has always enjoyed writing poetry to express herself, and she was inspired to write this poem after hearing the words of another brave girl.

POETS GROUP 2

BELOW THE SURFACE SARAI CARRETO, GRADE 8

I love the feeling of swimming
Like I am a sea creature in the cold ocean.
My head swiftly sliding through the water
The drops on my cap falling like tears of joy.

Below the surface of the best pool in the city,
I can almost forget
That I'm the only one there on a scholarship,
That no one on my team looks like me,
That my mother's not a doctor and my father's not a lawyer,
That I don't live in a luxury apartment,
That in rain or shine, I walk there,
And I walk home with my wet hair.
Below the surface, the weight of those differences
Feels just a little bit lighter.
Below the surface, opportunities seem limitless.

My parents have taught me that race and class should never limit my opportunities.
No matter where I am, they're rooting for me.
And when I turn my head to breathe during my meets,
I always see them,

Cheering in the stands.
My mother, a housekeeper,
Who walks me to the pool no matter how tired she is,
And who watches my practice and always offers advice,
Even though she doesn't know how to swim.
My father, a taxi driver,
Who celebrates my every stroke.
I know that no matter where I go, I'll hear them
And be reminded to be proud of who I am.

My parents work hard, with honor, and never complain.
I practice hard and never give up.
I don't let the challenge of being different stop me from swimming.
I like swimming because I can escape to where things are limitless.

Sarai lives in East Harlem. Her mother is from Mexico City and her father is from Puebla, Mexico. She is passionate about sports and is on the girls' soccer team at EHS. She also loves swimming at Asphalt Green, which inspired her poem.



WHEN I SING GERALDINE BARRAZA, GRADE 7

My voice in my ears is as bright as
The yellow sun on a summer day.

My voice in my ears is as smooth
As a shell on the beach.

My voice in my ears is as sweet as
Strawberry puffs.

My voice in my ears smells as clean
As freshly folded laundry.

When I sing,
My voice in my ears sounds like
Hay que escuchar en silencio.
I sing to find my destiny.

Every song I sing takes me somewhere new:
To the moon, to the mountains,
To San Andres, Colombia,
A coral island in the Caribbean Sea.

My voice in my ears
Is the magic of music come to life.
It starts with my breath:
Inhale,
Exhale,
And I sing.

Geraldine's family is from Mexico and Colombia. At EHS, her favorite classes are Drama and Humanities, and she loves swimming at Asphalt Green. Geraldine's favorite genres of music are K-Pop and Pop, and she currently sings in the EHS choir. Geraldine's poem is inspired by her passion for music.

AGUADILLA LAYLANIE HUERTAS, GRADE 6

The sea is calm tonight.
The tide is full.
The moon lies fair upon the straits of Aguadilla.
The light gleams and then is gone as the waves recede.
The cliffs of Puerto Rico stand above the long line of ocean spray where
The sea meets the soggy sand.
The waves roar and begin, then cease, then begin again.

The sea was once too full for the round earth's curves.
So the sea withdrew, retreating with its breath,
Giving life and space and beach and sand to mothers, like mine,
Who were young once and walked along the shore.

Now, my mother brings me back to the beach
And we lay on the soft sand of Crash Boat.
As we head home to my grandparents' house
Among the mosquitoes and lizards and the fishermen, too,
The ocean spray is beneath us in the glowing agua de los fluorescentes.
Yellow rice and pernil is warm in our bellies.
The waves dip back into the ocean, like water slipping back into a pitcher
that is half full.
The sea is calm tonight.

Laylanie lives in East Harlem with her mom, dad, and three pets: a gecko, a chinchilla, and a puppy. She just started at EHS this year, and she loves it! Laylanie had never written poetry before coming to EHS, and she has enjoyed developing her own voice as a poet this fall. She is proud to share this poem about her grandparents' home in Aguadilla, Puerto Rico.

PROTECTING THE CREASE MATEO CORNEJO, GRADE 6

I am ready in the crease.
My knees are slightly bent,
Goalie gloves on, fingers extended,
Ready to block the black and white ball.

I am strong with the net behind me.
I yell instructions upfield.
Light on my feet, bigger than my body,
Ready to help my team.

But sometimes, off the soccer pitch,
I feel stuck in another crease:
Like a piece of paper folded in two,
Like the space between the pages
Of the books we read in class,
I am somewhere in those in-betweens,
Somewhere between Ecuador and East Harlem.

In this other crease,
I am more quiet. I feel tired.
In this other crease,
I miss my friends, but I make news ones.
I twist some words on my tongue, but I think in two languages.
I long for my home field, but the fields in New York are bigger.

And in this other crease that divides me,
Like Central Park folds Manhattan in two,
I find the best part of me.
I'll protect this crease, too.

Mateo moved to New York from La Troncal, Ecuador when he was eight years old. Mateo is the only sixth grader who was pulled up to be on the 7th and 8th grade boys' soccer team. As goalie, he led his team to the championships this fall! He wrote this poem to highlight his love of soccer and to explain how he identifies as Ecuadorian and American at the same time. Even though it is hard sometimes, his two cultures make him unique and special.

TWENTY-EIGHT SECONDS KARDENE ANDERSON, GRADE 6

In twenty-eight seconds, the race will be over.
My right leg is in front of me, and I'm on my toes.
I lean my body forward.

In twenty-eight seconds, I will run two hundred meters, which doesn't seem that far at all.
Bang! Here in Queens, the starting gun goes off,
I'm running all the way from Kingston.

There, in the land of wood and wata,
Grandma's house is blue with a gated door on the veranda.
We fan ourselves when it is too hot inside.
We eat tuna and fried dumplin' cooked in canola oil,
Devour oxtail and rice and peas and lick our fingers in the heat.

Life in Jamaica feels complete.
I am sad to leave breadfruit with ackee and salt fish.
I'll miss the KFC in Kingston where Grandma took me every month for a treat.
On the plane, I am all alone, just an airline attendant to look out for me,
But I know the finish line is getting close.

When I arrive in New York,
I am a little bit scared, a little bit excited,
Kind of like how you feel before a race.
At my parents' house, where I have never been,
I unpack the things I brought from Jamaica:
Peppermints and beef patties.

Back in Queens, on the track,
I hear cheers, and I feel the spikes on the rubber track.
I cross the finish line.
I am finally home in New York.
And it only took twenty-eight seconds.

Kardene lived with her grandmother in St. Catherine, Jamaica, until she was nine years old. An avid runner, Kardene wanted to write a poem about adjusting to life in New York, where things move almost as fast as she does! On the weekends, she enjoys reading, talking on the phone to her sister who is away at college, and catching up on sleep. She is a new student at EHS this year, and she is very happy to be here.



BEATS ARE LOUDER THAN WORDS JEREMIAH CAMACHO, GRADE 7

Beats are louder than words.
They carry joy, they carry anger.
Some are light, some are dark.

Loud or low,
They make hearts palpitate,
Echoing the rhythm of your heart,
As it pumps through your veins.

In music,
The beat is the basic
Unit of time,
A pulse which has different rhythms.

My beats
Flutter like a bird's wings,
As they scatter around the room,
Flapping through the air above the city's roofs.

Beatboxing
Makes me feel strong.
I beat, I achieve, I dominate,
I succeed at something I strive to do.

Some beats are strong,
Others are weak.
But to me, every beat is important.
It's a sound I can create with my voice and my pen.

Beats are louder than words.
Can you feel yours?

Jeremiah's family is originally from Puerto Rico. His favorite subject is humanities because he loves reading. On the weekends, he likes to go to the movies with his family and play soccer. Jeremiah was inspired to write this poem after performing his beatboxing in front of the whole school, something he now does every day at Circle.

HAVE YOU HEARD THE ONE? DANIEL ESPAÑA, GRADE 8

Have you heard the one about the kid who liked to tell jokes?

I used to go to speech class for my stutter.
I'd bring my Harry Potter book to the small room on the fifth floor
And read the same page aloud,
Over and over,
And over and over,
Until I said it right.
Thankfully, I really like Harry Potter,
So I thought it was fun.

Now, I try my hardest to say the words right
When I entertain the whole school
With the "Joke of the Day."
And sometimes it's hard,
But I wouldn't trade it for the world.

They're mostly corny jokes,
Like the ones my dad tells my brothers and me.
They're funny,
But at the same time, you're like,
"Oh my God, he just told me that joke."

What did the plate say to the other plate?
Dinner's on me.

Why was the cat scared of the tree?
Because of its bark.

If you have a bad day,
You can tell a joke.
A hard time at work or school?
Well, a joke can help you.
It makes you feel energized.

Laughter is the best medicine.
Up in front of the school,
I feel like a doctor.
But instead of pills,
I bring jokes.

So now you've heard the one about the kid who tells jokes.
The one who overcame his stutter to bring laughter to the whole entire school.
But this isn't a joke,
And there's no punchline this time.
Turns out, laughter is a very serious thing..

Daniel's family is originally from Heroica, Matamoros, Mexico. His favorite subject at EHS is science because he loves to ask "Why?" His favorite sport is swimming. He loves to make people laugh, and he hopes you like the jokes in his poem! His favorite part of being at the Poetry Slam is hearing his classmates' poems and seeing how different each one is.



POETS GROUP 3

ODE TO A BIG BROTHER ALYSON ALVARADO, GRADE 5

I could not ask for anything more.
I have everything I need: Food, shelter, water,
And my big brother.

I love the big, messy teenager
I get to call my brother.
He has a special place in my heart,
Even if he is the messiest person in the world,
With all of his jumbled cables
And his volcano of clothes just waiting to go
BOOM! SPLAT! CRASH!

My brother lives with me,
And I know when he is near
Because I can smell his Prada cologne
Fill the living room like cool ice
And golden flowers.

My brother gives me the best advice,
Patiently going over directions on
Tricky science worksheets. So I know he loves me.

Sometimes, my brother buys us pizza.
I always order plain, but I usually regret it

Because plain is BORING.
But when I steal a piece of his pepperoni,
He looks the other way. So I know he loves me.

My brother doesn't give me hugs and kisses.
And he sometimes yells, "GO AWAY!"
When I sneak into his room. But I know he loves me.
I'm so happy to have a brother like mine.

Alyson lives with her mom, dad, and her older brother Jason, who graduated from EHS. Her parents grew up in Tepango, Mexico before moving to New York. Alyson's family inspires many of her poems. In her free time, Alyson likes to dance and read books from the Babysitters Club series.



THE SWEATER

CHRIS TORRES, GRADE 6

I remember when my brother
Got dressed to go to EHS.
He would always change fast.
He would have packed his bag
The night before
With all his books and binders.
Now he is different than he was
When he used to put on his EHS sweater.
His voice is deep like a motor,
He looks as strong as a rock.

Now I put on his sweater,
And I change quickly, too.
I'm excited to get to EHS,
With all my books and binders.
One day, I will have a motor-voice
And muscles like rocks, too.
And I will give my sweater
To our nephew, the next little boy
Who will be just as excited to come to school
With all his books and binders.

Chris is the third child in his family to attend EHS. He is honored to carry on his older brother and sister's legacies, and he looks forward to passing it on to the next generation. Chris's family is originally from San Francisco, Tepango, and Puebla, Mexico. On the weekends, Chris likes to play soccer in Jefferson Park and read Harry Potter.

A RIDE AROUND MANHATTAN

KELSI MARTINEZ, GRADE 6

I stand in the line sweating,
Drip drop.

Finally, we are first in line.
My dad pays for a whole boat ride down Manhattan.
We start walking towards the shade.
My dad smiles a lot.

He smiles as we sit down and wait for the boat.
It's summer, and I am happy because I get to see him more than usual.
Ten minutes later the boat arrives.
It is white, with lines of blue in it.
It says "New York Boat Tours" on the side.

My dad works at an Italian restaurant.
Most days he gets home late, sleeps for a few hours, and then goes back to work.
It's a treat that he's taking me out to the boat tour.
We go inside the boat, workers make us feel at home.
My dad and I greet them back with big smiles on our faces.
My dad smiles a lot.

We go upstairs and find seats in the shade.
When the boat starts moving,
My dad and I are excited to see the cool buildings.
My dad has spiky hair,
And wears a blue shirt and jeans.
He tells me that he wants to match the ocean water.

I laugh loudly in excitement,
and we start looking through the windows all around the boat.
I take a quick picture.
My dad smiles a lot.
Snap.

I stand up and go near the water,
And feel the wind going through my face,
Like a dog sticking my head out of the window.

When we get back to the city,
The sun is shining like a diamond and the water is glistening like stars.
My dad is still smiling, and I am happy to spend the day with him.

Kelsi was born in Manhattan, and she moved to the Bronx when she was nine years old. Kelsi's family is from Morelos, Mexico. She has three brothers, one of whom already graduated from EHS and another who is in the fifth grade. Kelsi likes to play cards with her mom on the weekends and writes stories in her journal in her free time.



HOME AWAY FROM HOME DELANIE RIVERA, GRADE 6

I rode the subway to the zoo, and it was silent.
So silent, that people saw it.
The rhombus of silence bounced
Between faces normally tilted toward screens
Or hidden under headphones; people looked up.

That silence reminded me of the backseat of my father's car
Where the black polyester lining of the seat
Sticks to the back of my goosebumpy thighs.
It is silent where we are going, too.

The window is halfway down,
Its glass cuts my view like the ocean,
So I can see my reflection within the green outdoors.
The sun on my face tastes like marshmallows,
Sweet and sticky, soft and heavy all at the same time.
We are driving away from the city.

It seems to me that we shouldn't have to go somewhere far
To find something beautiful –
That our apartments shouldn't be as crowded,
That the streets shouldn't be so dirty,
And everyone shouldn't be so grumpy and glued to their phones.
It shouldn't be strange that the subway was so silent.
Why can't the Bronx be just as peaceful as the 'burbs?

Still, I wish the subway would take me to Vermont.
And I could ride the six train all the way
To maple syrup and honey sticks,
To the Green Mountain silence,
To the place that feels like a quiet, silent home,
Even when home is very far away.

Delanie is so excited to be a new student at EHS! She lives in East Harlem with her family and is inspired by her parents, who always believe in her. Her favorite subject is drama and her favorite sport is swimming. She wrote this poem after spending time in Vermont this summer and realizing just how different it is from the loud, bustling city.

ONLY GOD KNOWS XITLALLY RAMON, GRADE 7

My wheels turn around and around,
Deep into the void of wonders.
I float in a stream of questions.
When I can't think any longer,
I swim back to reality.

"What happens after you die?"
My mom, not looking at me, responds,
"Sólo Dios sabe."
Only God knows?
What is that supposed to mean?

Does God really know?
Does God know why women "must" act a certain way?
Or why immigrants must sit in silence,
As our president denigrates us?
Or why so many do nothing
To stop the destruction of our Earth?

Only God knows.
I walk away, not satisfied with
That answer.
I'm still swimming in those questions,
Working to keep afloat
In that big wave that keeps trying to swallow me.

Some answers seem like they don't exist.
Some questions even stump my mom.
I may not ever be satisfied
With the answers this world can give.

So I turn to art.
And as long as I keep my hand close to the page,
Feeling the contours of each shape,

Ink running in every direction,
Coloring outside the lines,
I feel I am drawing my way closer
To the answers.

*Xitlally is Mexican-American. She was born in Harlem, and her parents are from Puebla, Mexico. Xitlally likes drawing and writing stories on the weekends. Her favorite book is *Divergent*, and her favorite subject in school is math. She has an older sister who also attended EHS, and Xitlally really looks up to her. She is looking forward to trying out for the lacrosse team this spring.*



I WILL NEVER BE LIKE HIM

MIGUEL HIDALGO, GRADE 7

The phone rang, and
My sister picked up.
She said it was for me.

He sounded different than I expected,
A deep, worried voice,
Like he was trying to apologize,
But couldn't get the words out.

I had asked him for a blue or green scooter,
And he said he would bring it to me.
I'm still waiting.

If and when I raise a little human,
I won't leave him behind
Like he did to me,
Like a pencil you forget in class,
Or a commitment you made
But never fulfilled,
Like the worry that you try to forget about
But it still clings to your mind.

If and when I raise a little human,
I will be there for all of his birthdays.
I will hear his first words
And attend his graduations.

Congratulate him
When he succeeds.
Hug him
When he needs support.
Help him
When he struggles.

If and when I raise a little human,
I will see him grow up
And become a man.

Miguel and his family are from Guerrero, Mexico. His favorite subject in school is math, and his favorite sport is lacrosse. On the weekends, Miguel likes to play with his seven-year-old brother. His favorite books are The Diary of a Wimpy Kid series because his older sister, who also went to EHS, read them to him when he was first learning how to read. Whenever he reads them, he thinks of her!



THE NECKLACE IN THE DRAWER

ZELZIN AYALA, GRADE 8

In the only drawer of the desk in my room,
I keep my memories from Mexico:
The old peso coins, all different sizes,
The small, handmade flowers.

I look at them when I want to remember
The time I lived there.
The Christmas celebration,
The men who dressed as Los Reyes Magos
To bring gifts to the children,
Because their parents couldn't buy them toys.
I look at them when I want to remember
My abuela,
Who visits once a year.
She came this summer to see us and buy medicine.
She can't come for Christmas.
It's too cold in New York – it hurts her bones.

But she brought me a gift,
A necklace from the craft fair.
She was carefully picking out the Mexican candy
We missed from home,
The scent of the sticky Alegria which fills with joy,
The sweet, spicy paletas of mango.

The shiny silver grabbed her attention.
It's unique, bumpy in the middle,
With Jesus on one side, La Virgen de Guadalupe on the other.
When she gave it to me, I smiled.
It shined with the warmth of the sun's rays,
And I put it in my drawer
With my memories of Mexico.

I wish my abuela could stay with me,

Like the flowers in the drawer.
But she had to go back,
A long plane ride and a seven hour bus.
But when I look at my necklace,
I feel like she is still here with me,
Watching over me.

Zelzin's family is from Guerrero, Mexico. Her favorite sport is wrestling. On the weekends, Zelzin enjoys reading and drawing. Her poem was inspired by an art project in which she was asked to paint a self-portrait while holding a meaningful object, and she chose her necklace.



POETS GROUP 4

MY MOTHER'S COPPER-COLORED CHAIN LESHLY MARTINEZ

She wears her family on her wrist,
The clasp locking us together,
Bound for eternity.
She wears her family
On her old, copper-colored chain
Given to her by her father
When she was 18.
Not for a birthday, but for a goodbye.

She wears her family on her wrist.
When she cooks
In the warm kitchen,
When she cheers for us in soccer,
Watches our dance performances,
Goes to school meetings,
Tucks us in at night,
She keeps us latched together
Through her warm embrace.

Her parents are far, far away.
Her children will not know them.
But she wears them on her wrist.

Once I saw her cry on the subway,
Because a man playing his guitar
Looked like her father.
She touched her bracelet,
A key opening her memories of home.

But for now, we are here, and they are there.
She wears her family
On her wrist.
Her fingers wander to it in times of need,
In the times a person would wish for their parent.
The old copper-colored chain
On her honeycomb wrist
Is pretty,
But it is not enough.

Leshly's family is from Zacatecas and Veracruz, Mexico. Her favorite book is The Giver, and her favorite subject in school is science. On the weekends, she likes to explore the city with her family, and in the fall, she loves to look at all the colorful leaves on the trees. Her poem is important to her because her mom is the most important person in her life.



STITCHING OUR STORIES

JELENE GRAHAM, GRADE 8

“Careful,” my great-grandma tells me.

“Don’t poke your finger.”

We are choosing needles and thread for mending clothes together.

We sit in straight back chairs.

She is eighty. I am thirteen.

We repair the holes in shirts and pants that have been worn through,

And we share stories of our lives.

My great grandmother, Eleanor Hugyhes, was born and raised in St. Thomas,

Where the water is crystal blue,

Where you can feel the tiny fish brush against your feet,

Where the sun never stops shining.

She came to the mainland when she was sixteen.

Tenement buildings all around.

You could see the Macy’s all the way downtown,

And the air was thick with endless noise.

Here, she began to stitch her new home and her old home together.

Every day she would carefully, precisely put the thread through the needle,

Hemming dresses and making shirts to sell.

Providing for her and her aunt,

Moving the soft, stretchy fabric against her young, smooth black hands.

Now her hands aren’t so smooth,

And aren’t so young.

They’ve stitched and sewn her life

With some bad knots and some perfect threads.

Now, they teach me how to sew.

Precisely, I thread the needle.

“Be steady,” she softly says,

But my hands tremble.

As I lay the rough fabric across the old brown sewing machine,

Which she uses for serious sewing situations,

And which is worn from years and years of use.

The threads dance,

In and out, in and out

And the smile grows on her face as she sees me work.

Together, we are stitching our family’s story.

When I was younger, I would watch her.

Now she watches me.

Jelene’s family is originally from Saint Thomas. She loves writing poetry and staying active at EHS. She is the captain of the soccer team, and she enjoys studying science to help further her dream of becoming an astronomer or astronaut. Jelene hopes that when she performs her poetry, she will motivate others to share their stories and find comfort in writing like she does.



MY MOTHER USED TO CLIMB TREES NATASHA PEÑA, GRADE 6

My mother sits cross legged
Under a plum tree in Mexico.
Her brothers splash in nearby water
Behind the concrete house
With the blue tin roof.

Her sister clambers up the tree,
Embarking on its trunk
Like a moving splinter on its angular shape,
Snatching swollen plums
In her soft, chubby hands as she climbs.

Her sister grazes a shimmering web
That has stretched over the pocked bark.
Her sister thinks it is pretty:
The gossamer is like her silky hair
That my mother braided for her that morning.

My mother used to climb trees,
She used to find magic in spiderwebs.
But now she waits at the bottom,
Ready to catch us when we fall
Or boost us to the highest plum of all.

She waits at the bottom,
Letting me, like her sister, bounce between branches,
Hoping I will tell her about the view
When I get up there.

Natasha lives in East Harlem where she loves to draw and read. Her parents are from Oaxaca and San Luis Potosí, Mexico, and her mother used to tell Natasha bedtime stories about climbing trees as tall as skyscrapers when she was a little girl in Mexico. Inspired by her mother's memories, Natasha reflected on how far her mother has come—literally and figuratively—from the little girl who used to climb trees.

FORCED TO GROW FAST MARLON BRAVO, GRADE 7

My dad works in the night time,
And my mom is in Mexico,
Far, far away from our
Home on 103rd Street.

Sometimes, I wish I could have
My whole family together,
But since my sister went to boarding school
In the mountains of Massachusetts,
I've been forced to grow fast.

My sister used to take care of me
When my dad was working all night.
She used to buy me food,
Do the laundry, fold the clothes,
Wash the dishes,
And take me places on the train.

But now she's gone.
And I've been forced to grow fast.
I try to be independent.

Now I buy my food.
Now I do my laundry and fold my clothes.
Now I wash my dishes,
And I take myself to school.

I had to learn how to use the subway
To get to soccer practice
On the southern shore of Manhattan.
Practice is over after the sun goes down,
And I get home at 10 p.m., do homework,
Then go to sleep to do the same thing tomorrow.

On the weekends,
I ride my bike to the Bronx.
Crossing the bridge, air from cars swooshing by.
I reflect and think to myself.
I get some relief from being at home alone,
Where it can be as quiet as a cemetery.

I'm turning thirteen two days after Christmas.
My sister says I act older than I really am.
I'm stronger and smarter and braver
Than I ever was before.
I've been forced to grow fast.

Marlon's family is from Puebla, Mexico. Marlon's favorite subject in school is art, because drawing helps him feel relaxed and calm. Marlon is passionate about soccer and he plays on two different teams. Marlon was inspired to write his slam poem after a discussion during Advisory with Ivan when he talked about the change in his family after his sister graduated from EHS and started attending the Berkshire School.



MY WINDOW, MY MIRROR COREY BOYCE, GRADE 7

The top bunk in my room is empty.
My lifelong roommate has a new roommate,
A college roommate.
I miss my sister.
My window to the world,
My mirror showing the reflection of all I can become.

My sister tried to shape me.
She tried to show me her world.
She took me to the mountains.
“Feel the fresh air,” she said.
She took me to her job,
Taught me to be brave.
She said it is important to have a plan.
She has one.
She is living it in Virginia, so far away from here.
I worry because she's not here.
She has always shown me her way.

How can I look in the mirror without her?
My window to the world,
My mirror of my best self.
Our mom told us to reach for the stars.
My sister's touching them now, I think.
And I am alone on the quiet bottom bunk,
Waiting for my light to be found.

Corey lives in Harlem, where his parents were born and raised. He loves to write poetry! He also likes basketball, but recently has been exposed to other sports at EHS including soccer, lacrosse, and even wrestling. After going to the downtown Poetry Slam in 5th grade, it was Corey's dream to perform at the Poetry Slam again. He is so excited to share his story about his sister, an EHS alum and current college student.

I AM FROM

(INSPIRED BY "WHERE I'M FROM" BY GEORGE ELLA LYON)

XOCHIQUETZALYT CISNEROS, GRADE 7

I am from the fields of Guerrero,
From mangos and mamey.
I am from a small, blue house,
Worn, dirty, and old.
I am from Alpayeca and Tlalquetzala.
I am from la flor de azucena,
A tall flower with white, delicate petals.
I from las posadas and posole at Christmastime
And green grapes when we countdown to midnight on New Year's.
I am from karaoke, from a loud family that doesn't know how to sing,
From tienes que comer más and échale ganas en la escuela.
I am from Yohalyth and Yolzint.

And I am also from the boy whose mother crossed the border
And came back for him
Nineteen years ago.
It took my mother and her son one week to make the journey
From Guerrero to the border,
Surviving on
Expired canned beans,
Dried meats and,
Tuna fish.

I am from Luis, my brother,
Who wore a raincoat made of garbage bags,
As he climbed mountains as tall as skyscrapers.

I am from Yadira, my mother,
Who cried for my brother
Through the rain and the storms.

I am Xochiquetzalyt.
I am from New York City,

From Mexico,
From a long name, a long braid,
From a long story of those who paved the way for me.

Xochiquetzalyt and her family are from Guerrero, Mexico. She has three siblings, and her poem alludes to her oldest brother's journey across the border. Xochiquetzalyt's favorite book is I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter by Erika L. Sánchez. Her favorite sports are swimming and soccer. She loves attending her little brother's soccer games.



WHAT MAKES AN AMERICAN?

VALERIE RUIZ, GRADE 8

What makes an American an American?
Is it the fact that we were born here? You and I both?
Does Americanness come from blonde hair and white skin?
Or does it come from loyalty to this country?

What about my father and mother?
Can they be Americans?
Like you, like me?

My father has built the city's buildings.
He has worked until the last second of every shift,
Creating places for people to work, live, and play,
So that his American children can have a better life than he did.

My mother has washed the city's clothes,
Carrying the heavy laundry bags in tired arms that once carried me,
Day in, day out.
The room freezing in the winter and humid in the summer,
So your clothes can be clean,
So we, her children, can have a better future.

They dreamt of a place where the Statue of Liberty would watch over them.
They found a place where discrimination followed them at every corner.
But still, they dare to dream,
And we, their children, dare to question.

What makes you an American?
And me an American?
But not my parents, and so many others like them?
They, who have built this country –
Will they be allowed to live in it?

Valerie loves playing sports. Her favorite subject is math because it challenges and stretches her brain. She also enjoys spending time with her family because she knows how hard they work and that every moment together matters. Valerie's parents are originally from Tlaxcala, Mexico, and her poem is inspired by current events and the big questions she wonders about.



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EHS VOW:

I vow to be aware of the world and all I think, say, and do. With this awareness of the world and all I think say and do, I promise to honor and protect myself, my family, and all others.



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