





# *Epiphany*

*The Schuylkill Valley High School Literary Magazine*

*Volume Thirteen*

*2020*

*The Schuylkill Valley High School Literary Magazine.*

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*Volume Thirteen*

*2020*

# Epiphany

To Our Readers, Writers, Artists, Poets:

Within this volume, you will find words that, before translated onto paper and immortalized in ink, were echoes in an empty hallway, writings on a bathroom stall or discarded piece of notebook paper, shouts in a crowded gym and whispers in a library. The volume lying before you gathers these disjointed limbs and molds them into one body, syncing our hearts and lungs as we share the collective experience called high school. *Epiphany* tells the story of adolescence in its purest form—the joy, heartbreak, anxiety, stress, and triumph of it all.

More than anything, I admire the work in this magazine for its emphasis on sincerity, storytelling, and creativity. Once in a while, I will read a poem or short story that coaxes tears from my eyes, draws a laugh from my chest, or infuriates me beyond reason—it is then that I feel the deepest appreciation for creativity. There is something beautiful about the infinite reach of the imagination; it opens up a world of limitless opportunity and fervent expression. Creative writing, artwork, and photography have a certain, magical quality, one that lives in these very pages. *Epiphany* is a celebration of art and emotion, an affirmation of youth and passion. It belongs to all of us.

On behalf of the *Epiphany* editors and staff, I extend our deepest thanks and gratitude to everyone who has breathed life into this volume. Our magazine would not exist without the diligence of our advisor, Mrs. Kramer, as well as the work and expertise of Mr. Cullen and his graphic design team, our English teachers who encourage and inspire their students to write, the dedicated judges who carefully read and select the winning entries, and of course, all those who have composed a poem, shared a story, or submitted artwork and photography. Finally, we would like to thank you, the reader; for without you, our words would just be like those echoes in the empty hallway. Whatever journeys you embark on and whatever challenges you face, remember to keep reading, writing, and most importantly, keep creating.

Sincerely yours,

Layomi Adejo  
'20, Editor-In-Chief

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## Late on a Summer Day

Rowan Angstadt - 12th Grade  
Honorable Mention Poetry

Crickets chirp, unseen in the bushes,  
Wind swiftly through the trees and rushes  
Birds and cicadas sing their song  
While distant dogs bark along.  
Grass ripples under a lawnmower blade;  
Squirrels run through a forested glade;  
Walnut leaves drift to the damp ground;  
Friends light a fire and gather around.  
Fireflies flicker like stars in the sky;  
Children go playing and skipping by.  
Watch as they laugh, then trip and stumble;  
The toiling sky above starts to rumble,  
Fat drops of rain from the bubbling clouds,  
A racketous game and faltering crowds,  
Woodsmoke, smelling of spice in the air,  
Lying in hammocks without any care,  
Late nights spent dreaming 'neath twinkling stars,  
The occasional droning of far-away cars ,  
Flowers in hair and twinkles in eyes,  
Moving fresh fruit away from the flies.  
Open windows up high on the wall,  
Crisp autumn air, the arrival of fall.

Sarah Gilbert - 10th grade



## The Garden

Lily Wiley - 12th grade

bloom  
with Kindness,  
with Beauty,  
with absolute Confidence in  
myself.  
i will not be a weed  
in my own  
garden.



Emily Zaharia - 11th grade  
Honorable Mention

## Corner

*Carissa Palamar - 10th grade*

*He was always alone. In the halls, in the classroom, always.*

*He had nothing. No friends to comfort him when he was hurting, no family to go to, no shoulder to cry on. He was alone with his sorrows that threatened to drown him in an inky darkness.*

*He was the smoke you never thought of catching. He was the shadow you were used to seeing. He was the sunset you never stopped to marvel.*

*And now that he's gone, you regret that. You wish you had stopped to see that sunset, because there will never be another like it. You wish you took the time to appreciate your shadow, because it will never be the same. You wish you had tried catching that smoke, because it was unique and although it was just smoke, it was gone in an instant.*

*You got so used to seeing a spot in the back of the class. You got so used to weaving around him as he slowly wheeled himself to his next destination. You got so used to staring down at him and his face that could rival even the purest angel's.*

*You wish you saw his earthly eyes. You wish you saw his hair of water. You wish you saw his every day, average-kid clothes, with his T-shirt declaring the games he liked and his shorts that stuck true to their name when he wore them.*

*He was 6'7, but the smallest of them all.*

*I was his bodyguard. I was the protector of an unknown legend. I was the one who would beat you if you ever thought about lowering his confidence. I was a mind-reader, ready to invade your mindscape. I was a mirror. I reflected his traits so he could see what he had made me. So he could see what he was.*

*He was smoke. I was glass. We are unable to hurt each other, but unable to heal as well.*



*Addison Angstadt - 11th Grade  
1st place Photography*

## **A Heart of Gold**

*Jonathon Werley - 10th grade*

For I don't hold the hope of being rich,  
However, I do ask  
That of all the wealth that surrounds me  
I may receive a small piece of gold



*Carson Stichter - 12th grade*

Which lives in your heart

## **Eyes Close**

*Delaney Yeakle - 9th Grade*

Eyes close

Drift to sleep

Start to dream

Relaxing thoughts

Yet no thoughts at all

Total darkness

Completely alone

Serene

Suddenly

The feeling of loneliness

Closing in

Strangling

Desperate to escape

Then

Eyes open abruptly

Only a bad dream

An understatement



*Kristian Wolf - 10th grade*

## Endless Possibilities

*Lekaiah Solomon - 10th grade*

Captured, trapped by barriers.

Reality is in view.

Inside, limitations impossible to surpass.

Outside, souls feel free.

Mind over matter,

Thought over situation.

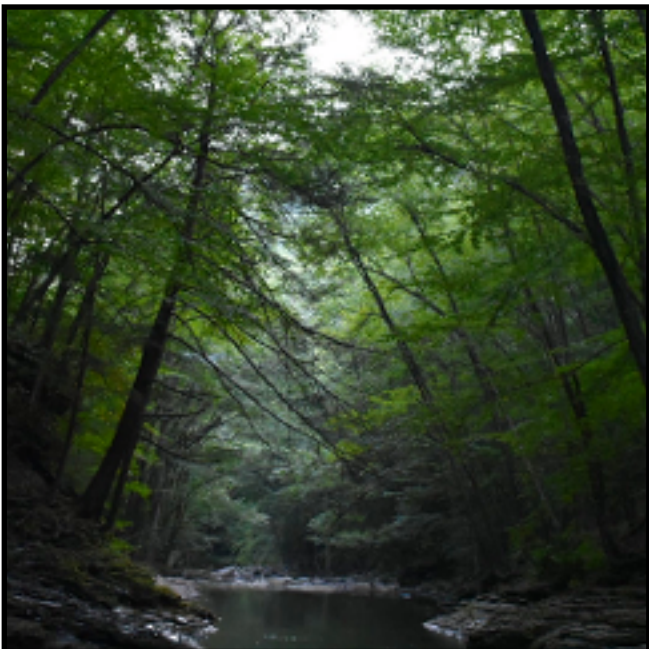
Finding ways out of complications like a comb  
through knotted hair

instead of letting standards enclose personal  
goals.

Escaping, though seeming extremely difficult,  
is still within reach.

Free will to imagination,  
Possibilities are endless.

*Timothy Clive - 12th grade*



## Snowy Night

*Jadon Swain - 9th grade*

A frigid winter night

All get ready for bed

Tired and exhausted

They lay

Wind is pounding against the homes

White flakes drizzle from the sky one by one

Then faster and faster

While the children lay fast asleep

The wind is screaming and snow is creeping

After numerous hours the wind slowly settles down

But the snow stays ravenous

As the sun slowly rises

And the clouds move on

There lies a blanket of snow

As all wake up

And children excitedly scream

All forget the frigid night

And now play in the snow with delight

While the next town gets a snowy night

## Baseball

*Kurt Poland - 10th grade*

*2nd place Nonfiction*

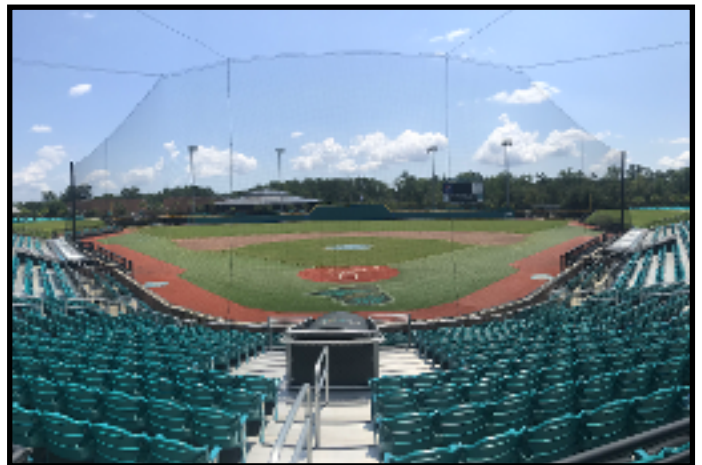
Baseball. Despite being over a century old, the core of the game has stayed the same, its popularity always abundant and important in so many lives. But why is it that everyone is so attached and drawn in by such a silly game? Very simply, the game is as follows: hit, run, throw. After playing baseball throughout my childhood and surrounding myself with so many that love the game, I believe I can record the answer.

A man who is very important to me once told me his explanation, to which I have added more of my own thoughts. At the start of a baseball game, everything is laid out perfectly. The foul lines are perfectly straight and white, unbroken. The field is dragged and the dirt is laid evenly across the field. The grass is cut and there are no holes in the ground. The ball is perfectly white with no dirt, scratches, cuts or bruises in it at all. The seams are clean and woven perfectly into the ball.

But when the game starts, all of this 'perfectness' disappears with the first pitch. The foul lines are run over with metal cleats and the dirt on the field is thrown about, becoming uneven. The grass is dug into by the players' cleats and clumps of grass are thrown into the air, dug into and pressed down. The ball is thrown around. It's hit into the dirt. The white fades into brown and gray. It becomes cut, deformed, and bruised. As the game continues, the field and ball only become beaten harder and harder.

Baseball reflects life. We are the field. We start out perfect, clear, even and unbroken. We get run over, thrown, uneven, and pressed down on. We are the ball. We are thrown, hit, cut, bruised and spit on. And just as in the game, these beatings only get harder and harder. And just as in the game, each of us lives on to become important to so many people's lives.

That same important man showed me two baseballs, a new one and a used one. He told me that, as pretty as it looks and feels, I do not want to be that new ball. He showed me the used ball, water-logged, bruised and gray. I wanted to be that ball, resilient, experienced and full of character.



*Bryce Hill - 10th grade*

## Trust Issues

*Isabella Romig - 11th grade*

Trusting is a difficult thing to do

The "Forever Lasting!" lightbulb in my bathroom  
burned out

My "no-slip" socks seem to slip a lot

I dropped an unbreakable plate, and it broke

Then there are lingering, unanswered questions

Knock knock jokes are supposed to be funny, right?

Birds. Are they real?

Are there any real grammar rules?

Thanksgiving? Why does the date always change?

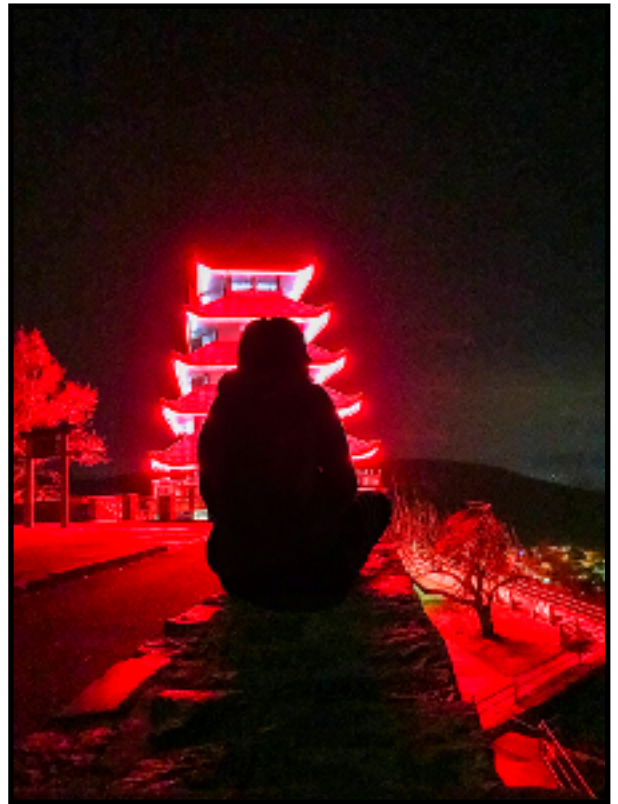
Many things in the world

Lead me to believe it is not easy to trust,

that often everything has a secret,

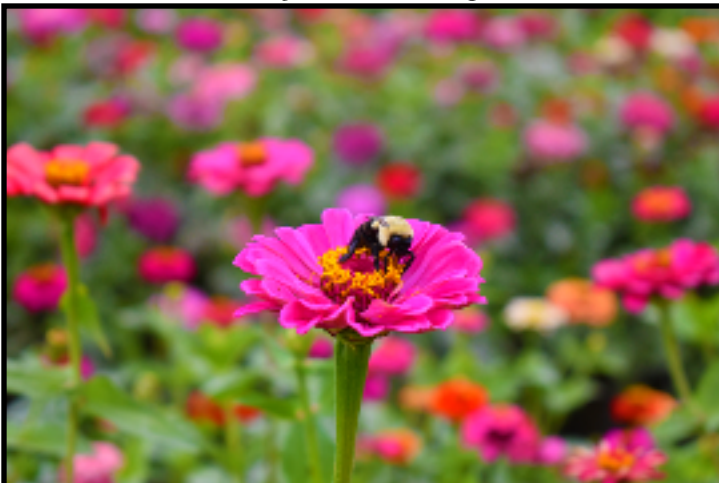
that often most things have two sides.

And I guess you will just have to trust me on that.



*Erianne Fox - 10th grade*  
*Second Place Photography*

*Jaime Moyer - 12th grade*



## Innocent Insect

*Bri Silasavage - 11th grade*

There are moths in my throat,

They fight for exit into the light.

I feel a sinking boat,

I cannot let them out tonight.

It burns and it scratches,

Trying to keep these words inside.

Like a flaming box of matches,

My mouth, it must abide.

Your words are like wild roses,

Beautiful, yet covered in thorns.

Yet, I guess so are you.

Though, I have known that this whole time,  
haven't I

## North Star

*Charlotte Baumgard - 9th grade*

*Honorable Mention Fiction*

I've been hiding in the shadows for so long that I almost forgot the glory of being illuminated by the North Star of life. I've been waiting for the North Star of my life to be a sort of guardian angel of a person. And through countless lonely days, triumphs, and tears, I've discovered that, though my new guardian angel friends are undoubtedly helpful and lovely, the North Star is within me. I've always had the power to overcome turmoil within my soul. I just needed those special people to awaken it within me.

And as we sit here together, I realize I am here. I am alive. I can feel the air on my face, and I can see the relentlessly blue sky. And I can feel the love from my North Star that I now understand I deserve. Right now I can also feel how finite I am. And I absolutely love it. It just makes every single moment so much more special. I am completely cognizant that in a few weeks, months, or years, these specific moments will be mere memories. But they'll be good memories, and that's what really counts. I may not always have these guardian angel friends, but their words and memories will remain within my soul, within my North Star, guiding me to be the best me that I can possibly be.

In the long run I may be finite, but right now, in this glorious moment, I am infinite. As the sky darkens and the sun sets and the moon rises, I feel. I'm smiling; they're smiling. We are living in these moments, and these moments are not yet memories. So right now, in this specific moment, we are undeniably infinite.

*Zachary Heffner - 11th grade*



### Night

*Paige Clayton - 9th grade*

When dusk comes it begins,  
As the moon rises I see its grin,  
Stars twinkling as they shine,  
Calling out to me like they are mine.

As time goes on it becomes real dark,  
The bright gleaming moon now makes its mark,  
As I climb into bed the fear sets in,  
My apprehensive thoughts will soon begin.

I lie in my warm bed in a deep sleep,  
Soon to be awoken by my own weep,  
The petrifying fiend is chasing me around,  
No time to look back or I'll be downed.

Just as I thought I would be gone,  
A new day rolled in and now it's dawn,  
I rise awake ready for the day,  
The sun shines bright like a fiery ray.



*Lily Dang - 11th grade*

*Evan Duda - 10th grade*

*Third Place Photography*



### My Pumpkin

*Anonymous*

Mi Calabaza, Mi Calabaza  
How long shall I wait for you?  
You call and I will come  
For I, you will always undo.

Mi Calabaza, Mi Calabaza  
The skin around your mouth starts to crinkle  
Each morning and night we speak  
For you, my eyes twinkle.

Mi Calabaza, Mi Calabaza  
We talk for hours and days  
Time passes without thought when you're near  
For I, I'm in a daze.

Mi Calabaza, Mi Calabaza  
It sure has been a while  
But still loyal and waiting am I  
For you, I'd travel much more than a mile.

Mi Calabaza, Mi Calabaza  
Why do you now seem distant?  
Could it be that I am in this hazy dream of us  
But you,

You have woken up.

## Waiting For You

*Julia Craft - 12th grade*

You ask me a question. I tell you an answer. You ask how I stand it. I respond with laughter. You glare at my snickers. So, I strike a pose. You ask for the truth. So, I stick up my nose. I pretend to not know. You pretend to get mad. I pretend to pout. So, you pretend to be sad. I send you a smile. You turn away. I fake my laughter. You sprint away faster. Then I'm left alone to wilt away. To wonder and wander throughout my days. 'Will you come back home? Will I die here alone?' Your response is silence. I sit here in quiet, hoping in silence, for you to walk through the door. Here in the quiet, here in the silence. I begin to call, 'Will I ever, ever get to come home?'. No one answers, no one responds. So, I'll wait there all day just wasting away. Happy to sit here all on my own. I'll call this my home, as I sit here alone. Happy to wait here for you to come home, as I feel my heart cry. Crying alone, to a unresponsive phone. Counting the seconds, as the tears slip by. Sitting and waiting for you to return. My eyes start to burn, my heart hurts and yearns. Happy to wait here. Happy to stay, as I waste my days away. Here I sit, waiting and waiting. Waiting and waiting. Waiting and waiting. Waiting and Waiting my life away. Finally a message, finally some news. Finally, something I can do for you. I light up my phone to see your response to me. 'Please just leave me alone. I'm not coming home. I'm blocking your phone.' All I see though is 'Please die alone.' Oh. Good for you. Isn't that cool, the way you played me for a fool. You are so cruel. I'm just a lovesick fool. Happy to stay. Happy to waste away for you. Happy to wait, for you.

## White Winter

*Chris Funez - 12th grade*

Winter snows, sheets of cotton at night.  
I see the stars, the moon, and light breaking through the clouds.  
Snowflakes of ice resemble diamonds in the sky.  
Wind paints snow on the ground like chalk on paper.  
The air plays piano keys to counter the ghostly white noise.  
And rabbits burrow in their cozy burrows.

The outside wonderland always has something going on.

The playful clouds soar like white doves.

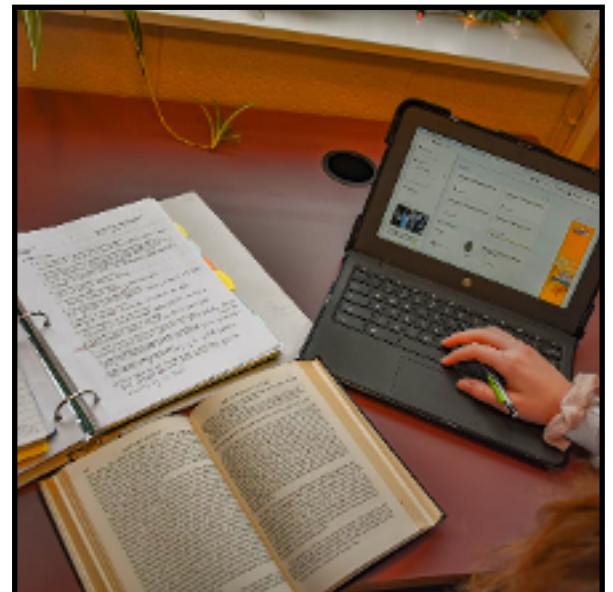
The reflection of the frozen river shines over the moon.

Angels watch over in the sky and drink milk.

I'ma stay comfortable inside my bathtub eating ice cream.

*Anna Kate Gwiazdowski -10th Grade*

*Honorable Mention Photography*



## ***Untitled***

*Julia Winkler - 12th grade*

I remember one day last year when a thick layer of snow fell. It molded over the ground like fondant on a cake. Everything smoothed out and smushed together, creating a foreign landscape in a location I had always known. The sun rose, one sun bouncing off of every surface until it became one hundred. The snowflakes began to soften, meshing together into a layer of slushy water, an ocean on top of the earth. Hills became round scoops of marshmallow creme. The same sweet creme hugged the tree branches and cushioned the road. I watched as a rabbit bounded through it, spraying snowflakes into the air so they could fall again.



*Sandra Goho - 11th grade*

*Honorable Mention  
Photography*

## **Music**

*Charlotte Baumgard - 9th grade*

Songs are catalysts for catharsis  
 We play music when we want to feel  
 We remember memories we didn't know we still held  
 We become cognizant of everything we've ever felt  
 We delve into the deepest parts of our soul  
 Music makes us think  
 Music makes us remember  
 Music makes us feel

## The Winter Bear

*Chad Gangwere - 9th grade*

**W**ith cold days coming  
**I**n the face of a changing world  
**N**ature calls to a brown beast in the dead of night  
**“T**hou must prepare thy body for a long winter”  
**E**’er doubtful, the beast would listen  
**R**ue, it felt, that it would give up old habits  
**B**ut in its disdain, the beast came to a realization  
**E**ven when there is time wasted in hibernation  
**A**fterward, there will be a reward:  
**R**ejuvenation in a new year, with a new story to create.

## Pinecone Poetry

*Aidan Gensure - 11th grade*

Third Place Poetry

Nestled in the branches of a pine,  
 the rocks below buffeted by brine,  
 there hangs a tightly packed cone.

It’s protected by scaly armor.  
 Listen close, you may hear a murmur  
 inside the tightly packed cone.

Needles jab at prying intruders,  
 acting as fierce, loyal excluders,  
 guarding the tightly packed cone.

Fish far under gaze upward in awe;  
 Birds far over peer downward and caw-  
 entranced by the tightly packed cone.

In early morning the ocean mist  
 Leaves the land and plants chilled and  
 dew-kissed,  
 blanketing the tightly packed cone.

In late evening the fiery light  
 from day disappears into the night,  
 dimming the tightly packed cone.

*Madison Hess - 10th grade*

*Honorable Mention Photography*



## **Amusement Park**

*Rowan Angstadt - 12th grade*

Third Place Nonfiction

A long, early car ride brings us to the entrance. It is large, looming, colorful. The smell of gasoline wafts out through the gates. We rush inside, eagerly glancing from ride to ride. My brother pulls me toward one, pointing with a wide grin to the sign. Colorful arrows indicate he is tall enough to ride. We wait in line and then climb on, my knees pressed against the slightly-too-small seat. As we begin flying through the air, the ride whirring and clicking with each rotation, I glance over to look at my brother. Anxiety is evident on his face, and though I smile encouragingly, his fear remains.

Riding other, smaller rides, we watch nervously as dark clouds set in. Faster than a blink, it starts— pouring, drenching rain. We run for cover under a small roof and sit, waiting for the shower to end. After nearly an hour, the drizzle ends and we can resume our day of fun. We line up for the biggest ride there: an old, wooden roller coaster. As we stand in line, my brother shifts around nervously. He asks if we have to ride it, but my father and I convince him that it will be fun.

It isn't fun. The seat is wet and it is bouncy and fast and gives us all a headache. My brother nearly starts crying as we climb out of the ride.

Later, the day draws to a close, a slight drizzle picking up again. Umbrellas begin to appear, bright colors rivaling those of the old rides. We board one last ride, then begin walking toward the exit. As the cold taste of raspberry and cream hits my tongue, I think back on everything that happened that day. I turn to my brother, and, fearing the response to my question, ask, "Did you have fun?"

His beaming face turns to me. "Totally!"

## **Snowflakes**

*Ella Jenkins - 11th grade*

They fall softly from the heavens,  
 Twirling and dipping to the symphony of a perpetually howling wind.  
 In no hurry to reach their final destination,  
 Desultory flakes calmly linger in chilled air.  
 Delicate white bodies catch impossibly bright sunlight,  
 Casting intricate geometric shadows over frosted earth.  
 At long last they brush barren ground,  
 Patiently waiting for their brethren to pile on top,  
 Shrouding the land in a sea of white.

## Procrastination

*Kaylin Loose - 9th grade*

I don't know what to do  
I don't know what to write  
this would be fun  
if it wasn't due tonight.

Procrastination was my end  
my grade lies dead on the floor  
They said I could save it  
But that was just a lore

A lie they told to make me whole  
The truth did come out  
All this nasty little lie did  
Was make me scream and pout

My teacher didn't care  
Not at all  
They said I shouldn't wait  
That it would make me fall

They were right  
In the end  
Now I spend my day  
Asking people to spend

Now I'm homeless  
This is not how life was supposed  
to be  
I procrastinated  
This is all because of me

## Uneasy Dreams

*Nikailyn Madden - 9th grade*

A girl sometimes lies in her bed, unable to sleep  
She doesn't need to walk, or rest, or weep  
Her mind is running, running, running  
Of the boy in class four, who is charming, charming,  
charming

Her brain is running,  
She can't get her mind off of him,  
For he was so cunning,  
So happy, so handsome and slim

He has all her interests,  
She thinks as she keeps losing sleep  
Trying to stop thinking about the one she trusts  
The one she wants so much to keep

Her mind starts drifting,  
Her eyes start to flutter and her lips curl to a smirk  
She hopes to be dreaming  
Of a relationship that just might work.

In her dreams she is with him  
They're happy together for it's as great as things seem  
But all things become dark and grim  
because after all, it's just a dream

A girl sometimes lays in her bed, unable to sleep  
She doesn't need to walk, or rest, or weep  
Her mind is running, running, running  
Of the boy in class four, who is charming, charming,  
charming

## **Cold**

*Katie Eisenhofer - 10th grade*

We hear of winter blossoming into spring,  
like grass peeking through a sheet of snow.  
We hope for a day with long hours of light  
and the sun to bring us back to life.

But we often miss the beauty of the cold  
and the true brilliance of winter.  
It measures warmth not in degrees,  
but in the number of smiles shared.

We overlook the beauty of snow,  
only wishing it off the roads.  
We miss the reflection of the sun  
reflecting off the crystallized rain  
in such a way that makes us grin.

Winter brings us together, a fact that is  
a reason itself to hate the cold a little less.  
Only when we stop and enjoy the season  
will we fully appreciate its worth.

*Jonathon Werley - 10th grade*



## **White Wedding**

*Cloey Fleming - 11th grade*

Snow blanketing the ground like marshmallow fluff.  
Frost coating the tables adorned with white roses.

Moon and stars glowing in the night.  
A castle, hidden in plain sight, towering over the  
celebration.

White lights illuminating the brides way,  
Flower girls scattering lilies and daisies down her path.

Bride walking down the aisle, even angels stop and stare.  
Dark chestnut hair clashing with the falling snowflakes.

The diamond on her finger beaming in the moonlight.  
Her veil flowing down the aisle.

Wedding dress seemingly shimmering in beams of light,  
Wedding cake drizzled in white chocolate and love.

*Emily Zaharia - 11th grade*



## Plants and Mechs

*Elizabeth Valeriano - 12th grade*

### Third Place Fiction

I don't want to seem rude, but I can't help but watch. She's up there again. I can hear her voice clearly. She always sings or talks to those plants on her balcony. I'm many stories below, standing in my repair shop. I know I still have work to do on my mech. I busted her up really bad last run, but I can't keep myself from listening. What I would give to know what she says to those plants. After all, they always turn to her and grow wider to listen. I do know she can't be human; no human could get plants to respond with such joy. Honestly, I'm glad she's so involved with her plants; otherwise, she might notice me down here. The world has to be quiet for her voice to reach me, and when it does, I notice a sense of calm and peace throughout my soul.

She waters and tends to her plants at the same time each day. She's speaking today, but I can't make out her words. Then she's gone. Swallowed up by her apartment once again. Maybe one day I'll talk to her, and she'll know just how in love I am. It seems odd to fall in love like this; it feels so sudden, but I know deep in my soul that it has been occurring since I first heard her voice.

Regardless, I bite back my feelings; if I'm distracted, my mech won't be my top priority, and I need it in tip-top shape. After all, racing at top speeds can really be disastrous with a broken part. I soon fall into a rhythm I know very well, and hours soar by so quickly. I sit up to admire my work, wiping the sweat from my forehead with a rag. All I want is to head back to my apartment to shower off the layer of grime I've acquired; however, it seems the world wasn't ready for me to retire to my home.

I run a shop here, so finding customers knocking on my door isn't strange, but I am currently closed. So I simply assumed it was a person who had no regard for rules and would demand I work at this hour for them, especially since this is the back door to my personal part of the shop. But I am surprised; on the other side of the door is a girl. She's in an overall dress, with star print leggings. Her dress is a pale yellow, and her brown hair is tied up in buns. Her eyes reflect the moonlight perfectly, but they remain fixed on the ground rather than coming up to meet with mine. I'm frozen in shock. I know her. I know her voice, and I know this plant mage that has come to talk to me.

Her voice is soft and shaking, if only she knew how nervous I was.

"Hello, I've seen you from my balcony from time to time. You seem to really like my songs, so I thought I would finally come talk to you. Please, call me Virgo."



*Ann Davila - 10th grade*

## Rain

*Jessica Hummel - 10th grade*

I long for the days when I cherished the rain  
 The pitter patter on the pavement  
 A chilling, yet relaxing time  
 Pondering life and what it had to offer

This serenity interrupted by a familiar buzz

*Please go inside my dear*

Not yet  
 Just a little while longer  
 Thor's anger rumbles in the distance  
 I hear the buzz again

*Please my dear, I need you to be safe*

I reluctantly creep back inside  
 Trudging up the stairs  
 I change out of my clingy, wet clothes  
 And feel a sudden warmth

I'm safely inside now

For you

*My dear*

*Allison Henwood - 12th grade*



**The Great America**  
*Isaiah Martinez - 10th grade*

With a mind of silence  
 They sing soundlessly  
 In a world of violence  
 We wander carelessly

A storm keeps brewing  
 Yet we never take shelter  
 They don't know what they're doing  
 Our world can falter

Take a step, man  
 Make a shout  
 Start a plan  
 And throw them out

They say guns are the solution  
 Fight and we will win  
 Who cares for pollution,  
 The air we breathe in?

Those dogs have no sight  
 Could they solve our plight?  
 I say not

Will anyone take the job,  
 While we're run by a slob?  
 Or will we sit and wait  
 And catch our focus on the wrong bait

These pocket-filled men  
 Have only care for prize  
 It used to be a while ago when  
 They could use their mind; their eyes

I hope soon they realize  
 Our world's nearby demise  
 Look at us, the great America  
 We're capable to help, but won't

*Carson Stichter - 12th grade*

**A Letter Addressed to the Sea**  
*Cassidy Rittenhouse - 12th grade*  
*Honorable Mention Poetry*

A letter addressed to the sea  
 Sealed in silky golden trim  
 And crafted from polished-pearl paper  
 Shimmered like waves in sunlight.

Carried by a soaring Blue Jay  
 under silver skies of starlight,  
 The letter traveled for twelve lonesome days  
 And twelve bitter nights.

Gliding along the frosted riverbeds  
 And dodging fallen icicles,  
 Spiraling through briar bushes  
 As they blossom into beautiful untouched roses.

Aurora skies illuminate its journey  
 In ever-changing colors of lavender, pink, and green.  
 By daylight, the subtle scattered scratches  
 gleamed atop its creamy surface.

Its corners wilted and print faded,  
 And the Blue Jay's grip no longer held strong.  
 Memories do not always endure,  
 Forever and a day.

A letter, which had traveled an insurmountable  
 distance  
 Disappeared  
 without so much as a word,  
 And its contents never revealed.



## Monster in the Closet

Lillian Wiley - 12th grade

*Second place Fiction*

Breathe in, breathe out. I tried desperately, in the cramped metal cabinet, not to make a sound. Yet my heart hammered in my chest, attempting to break free from my ribs. Breathe, *breathe*. My clammy hands quivered. I knew that the beast was not far behind.

I didn't understand what that terrifying beast was or how it came to be. Its grotesque body reeked of rotten and dried blood. Rather than eyes, two soulless, white beacons sat deep in its twisted flesh. Black, grimy drool dripped from its broken mandible between the cracks in its razor-like teeth. But the worst part was its voice, which sang a siren's song. Its voice was not its own, but rather a stolen memory from the victim's mind. Its wailing turned my stomach and forced the vile taste of blood into my mouth.

A large crash sounded from the other side of the empty kitchen. Slowly, I heard its nails click on the cracked linoleum as it crept closer. Every hair on my perspiring skin stood on end. I prayed the closed cabinet doors would be enough to conceal me.

"Daddy," the beast sang, "There's a monster in my closet." I squeezed my hands into fists and bit my tongue to keep my gagging quiet. Tears stung my eyes as rage made me sick. How dare that demon use my late daughter's voice! Her last words hung in the air and pierced my pounding heart.

"Daddy? Don't leave me with the monster." The beast's foul stench reached my senses. I trembled as it crept ever closer. Loud bangs sounded from the other side of the cabinet doors as the beast toppled cabinets and tables in its desperate search.

"Daddy, why is Mommy crying?" I covered my ears in a sad attempt to block out my torment.

"What are you doing? Daddy, why do you have a gun?" My skin boiled with hatred. I didn't mean it, really I didn't. I never wanted to hurt them, but I had to. My nails dug into the sides of my face, drawing blood. No one would understand my mission. Neither God nor Satan would take my side, and I despised them for it. Groaning in agony, I began to pull my hair.

Sudden stillness filled the air as I recognized my fatal mistake. In a futile attempt, I burst out of the cabinet and into the wrecked room. The wretched creature caught sight of me and wailed shrilly, emulating my daughter's screams. Five steps from the door, I felt the beast's claws tear through my flesh and drag me backward into the room. Thrashing, I protested and grabbed whatever I could to fight the vile monster, but I was quickly overcome.

Bones splintered and blood spilled as it tore into my body with its gnashing teeth. White hot pain seared my tattered flesh, and I wished I would die. Suddenly, I felt as though I were falling before I landed on my back in a small children's bedroom. The curtains were lavender, and butterflies graced the walls. A toddler's bed sat comfortably in the center of the room. Sickness bubbled in my gut as I recognized the doll sitting atop the bed: it was my daughter's doll.

Scrambling to my feet, I looked into the dark hallway. A familiar stench filled my nose, and I quickly hid inside the closet of the nursery. As I pressed myself into the furthest reaches of the small space, the smell grew worse. The clothes hanging in the closet stuck to my sweating skin, nearly suffocating me. The clicking of the beast's claws clattered into the bedroom and ceased outside the white closet doors. Absolute stillness settled in the space before a sweet, familiar voice rang out.

"Honey, please go check on Anne, she insists there's a monster in her closet."

### **The Ideal Beauty**

*Reagan Rittenhouse - 10th grade*

Her icy words cut through the air like daggers,  
Hindering any response you could use to  
combat her sharp words

The sinister way she rolls her eyes when you  
try to speak,

Shuts down any self-confidence you can  
muster up

But sweet as cotton candy  
And soft as a down pillow,  
She appears to most  
Why can't they see her for who she truly is?

Silly girl,  
You can never compete with the Ideal Beauty  
For she is the most precious,  
A gold trophy for any friend or suitor

She has fooled everyone  
Playing with her puppets and the desperate  
men that fall at her feet  
The act is so sharp it is absolutely flawless  
And you have fallen for her trap too



### **Burn the Phoenix**

*Elizabeth Valeriano - 12th grade*

Ashes to Dust  
The Phoenix will fly  
the wings how they flicker  
flame gone awry

Dust to Ashes  
a fire alights  
once outstanding  
doused through unstable nights

Death to Life  
a cliffside they face  
The Phoenix spreads it wings  
the pain they will race

Life to Death  
The Phoenix can't fly  
wings crumble away  
this is the time they truly die

*Madison Kubacki - 9th grade*  
*Honorable Mention Photography*

**Footsteps**  
*Emma Stauffer - 9th grade*

Footsteps.  
*Thump. Thump. Thump.*  
 I've been hearing them  
 all my life.

When I open my eyes, it's bright.  
 Bright white.  
 And it's cold.  
 Chilling.

I start to shiver and shake,  
 but through jittery movements  
 Something catches my eye.  
 Snack!

Because I'm starving, I wearily get to my feet  
 And sway slightly.  
 I haven't eaten a meal in a few days.  
 Or weeks. Or months. I don't really know.

I take a few steps toward the squirrel I see.  
 Then I break into a slow run.  
 I hear my footsteps on the blacktop, *thump*  
*thump*  
*Thump.*

I am focused. I will get it.

SCREECH!

I stop, look.  
 A car, inches from me,  
 big and shiny.  
 I want to go back. I almost died.

I turn around, and sprint back the way I came.  
 My feet hurt as I walk up the frozen hill.  
*Crunch Crunch Crunch.*  
 I smell blood but I keep going.

I lay under the holey blanket I found near trash.  
 It's not fancy, but it's all I have.  
 My friend. My home. My life.  
 I'm still shivering.



Snow starts to fall  
 One flake after another.  
 and people pass by  
 Happy as can be.

A girl and her mom walk by  
 Hands held, and I hear her say  
 "Look mom! A doggie!"  
 But walk away.

*Thump Thump Thump*

A boy runs by with some friends.  
 But stop in front of me.  
 They laugh, and throw snow at me.  
 I duck but it still hits me. Normal day.

I hear more footsteps.  
*Thump Thump Thump.*  
 I don't even open my eyes.  
 I hear murmurs through my blanket.

But then the footsteps get even louder  
*Thump Thump Thump.*  
 Then something grabs around my thin belly.  
 And lifts me up. It's really cold.

"Don't worry. We'll get you cleaned up  
 And warm." I hear.  
 And I am taken away from my frozen hill,  
 My blanket, my home.

A building.  
 White. Organized. Big.  
 And smelly.  
 Clean, wet dog, but clean.

Water, bubbles, medicine, repeat.  
 Back in the car and taken to another place.  
 "Welcome home,"  
 Says the girl who picked me up

She sets me on the floor.  
 It's fuzzy and I take a few steps.  
 But I can't hear my footsteps  
 And ahead, there is a blanket with no holes.

*Jonathon Werley - 10th grade*  
*Honorable Mention Photography*

## Why I Run

*Amber Zimmerman - 10th grade*

Honorable Mention Nonfiction

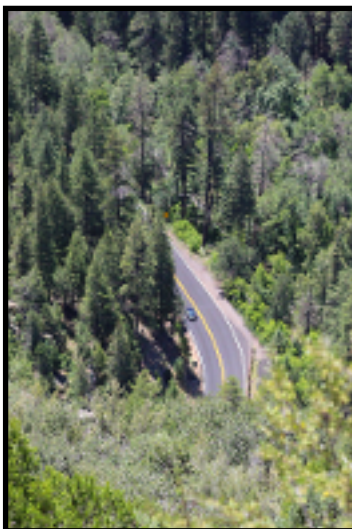
The windows are fogged. I sit in a cold seat, wondering what I was thinking when I signed up for this. I look out at the grass, still shining with morning dew. It is around 7:30 in the morning, and here I am waiting to race. I step out of the bus and onto the grass, which immediately soaks my shoes. Coach A steps out and starts barking orders, but I just stand there staring at the challenge before me. The course, with all its awful miles, lies ahead. I know I must summon my courage, so I turn and talk to my friends. We talk positively about how we will conquer this course and beat the other teams, but in my head doubts and nervousness cloud my thoughts.

The varsity girls run first so we all walk the course and start our warm up shortly after. We talk and joke about where we're going to trip and how bad we're going to do. The mood is tense and stressed, but our conversations are lighthearted. Our cheery words obscure the feelings of self doubt and nervousness. Everyone wants to run a good time, but running is harder than most people think.

Finally, the time has come. We put on our spikes and jog to the start line. Now, the nervousness begins to show. There are so many fast girls from so many different schools on that line. We do our run outs and dynamics, but it is much quieter than when we did our warm up, because now it's real. Now we must choose carefully how we think, because negative thoughts will negatively influence our race. The official steps to the center of the field in his bright orange suit. He tells us the rules and raises his gun and flag. The gun goes off. The flag drops. Hundreds of spiked feet thunder across the grass. I try to get a good place in the crowd while attempting to avoid being stabbed by someone's shoe. Now, it is everyone for themselves and everyone is my enemy. I try to regulate my breathing, because the start is always the worst part.

I struggle through my first mile. I spot my teammate up ahead and I speed up. I can think of nothing other than pain and discomfort at this point. Eventually, after what feels like forever, I can see the finish line. My coaches along with other random people scream at me as I pass, but all I see is that finish line. So beautiful in its simplicity, it signifies the end of my suffering and my achievement. Sweat pours down my face. Every part of my body screams for me to stop and give up, but I defy my urges and start to sprint. I cross the line and immediately go to the water just like every other runner. I feel light and heavy at the same time. I am floating, but my legs are too heavy to move. Slowly, the rest of the world comes into focus and the full magnitude of what I've just done hits me. My teammates crowd around me, laughing and talking about the race. I know why they are so happy. We've accomplished something we once saw as impossible. A weight has been lifted from our shoulders. I still can't explain to myself why I run, but as quickly as the thought of quitting comes into my mind it is crushed by my pride.

*Madison Kubacki - 9th grade*



*Nikailyn Madden - 9th grade*



## When Time Stops

*Elizabeth Valeriano - 12th grade*

She pulled herself behind the bookshelf, trying to steady her breathing. The lightbulb had been broken, plunging the area into unnatural darkness. Everything was coated in a thick layer of dust, including her. The only noise came from the pendulum of the grandfather clock, which had its face smashed in, the hands stuck permanently at 1:46. What she disliked most was that this was in fact her house. One that just a second ago was bright and lively.

A new noise sent her into hiding, a noise she never heard before. It mixed in with the sound of shattering glass and footsteps. However, nothing around her was performing those actions.

Quickly she shook herself free of dust and pulled out her phone. She blew off the dust only to watch as the screen cracked from the center, as someone driving a nail through it. Her breath was caught in her throat as she felt the unseen nail prick her finger. She dropped the phone and looked at the blood beading on her finger.

Before she could deal with that, she got up and bolted for the front door. She wasn't going to stay here if she could help it. The front door was ripped off its hinges, claw marks clearly displayed on the broken pieces of the door.

The outside was eerily gray, and no other house showed any sign of life. So she headed to her car. It roared to life for only a second before she watched the full tank drained to nothing. Then the glass shattered, raining down on her. She was cut and bleeding much more now, but she leapt from the car and ran.

A shadow that wasn't hers followed. She gasped for air and collapsed to the ground, a gash forming on her chest, soaking the front of her shirt.

She closed her eyes and took a shaky breath. She was back in her living room when she opened her eyes, sitting on the couch. It was bright. The clock read 1:47, and ticked on without a damaged face. Yet she was bleeding, a cracked phone lay on the floor behind her, a nail driving through the device, and the footsteps were still present. A large shadow engulfed the room, but before she could understand further, she ceased to breathe.

*Emily Hoffert -  
12th grade  
Honorable  
Mention  
Photography*



## Haunted Places

*Rowan Angstadt - 12th grade*

Lights flicker,  
 bouncing off the cold, uneven stone  
 Silence broken only by water drops  
 and a feeling that I'm not alone.  
 Wind whistles,  
 carving a path through broken walls  
 Ancient bottles lie, already drunk  
 faltering whispers in wood-paneled halls.  
 Must lingers,  
 hinting of moisture and forgotten floors  
 Filling my nose and my mind up with hate  
 as I hastily head towards rust-laden doors.  
 Cool metal cracks,  
 under fingertips bloodied and scratched  
 My neck feels the breeze of remembered breaths  
 but this cold, darkened room holds horror unmatched.  
 Iron tangs,  
 sick from the blood and stumbling blind  
 Ghosts underneath each footstep I take  
 through abandoned tunnels of my own design.  
 Wind dies,  
 Lights go black,  
 and finally I sleep.



*Nikailyn Madden - ,9th grade*

## Winter's Pond

*Alexander Arrendondolopez - 10th grade*

A winter's pond  
 This big bowl of transparency  
 A bowl of crystalline  
 Chalk lines from the early skaters  
 A white blanket wraps around the pond, frilling the water and  
 the land,  
 Evergreen trees covered with white fur from limb to limb.  
 Rabbits come out greeting the frigid morning.  
 Snow near the trees puffy as powder,  
 The snow dances in the air, and bushes shiver as the frosty  
 wind blows.  
 The little misty, ghostly trees in the distance shake.  
 A sign of brightness shines from an aspen tree that was yellow  
 as spring,  
 Chandeliers hung by the evergreen's limbs

*Nikailyn Madden - 9th grade*



## A Snowflake's Path

*Ella Jenkins - 11th grade*

They swoop up and down,  
Quickly turning left and right,  
Effortlessly gliding wherever they choose.  
They dazzle in the sunlight,  
Blinding passersby with their radiance.  
Some descend quickly,  
Making contact with the nearest surface,  
Others waltz eternally in the breeze.  
After a while, all flakes touch down,  
Enveloping frozen ground in a blanket of white.

## Raining Cats

*Elizabeth Valeriano - 12th grade*

There was once a grey cat come from  
Maine,  
Who was really quite fluffy and vain.  
Then she left one fine day  
On a morning in May  
And was drenched in the pouring cold  
rain.



## commitment

*Lily Wiley - 12th grade*

blood!  
blood on the sheets!  
make that man your spouse  
shameless woman,  
quickly —  
don lace and silk  
run down the aisle  
toward a lifetime of  
unconditional  
Regret.

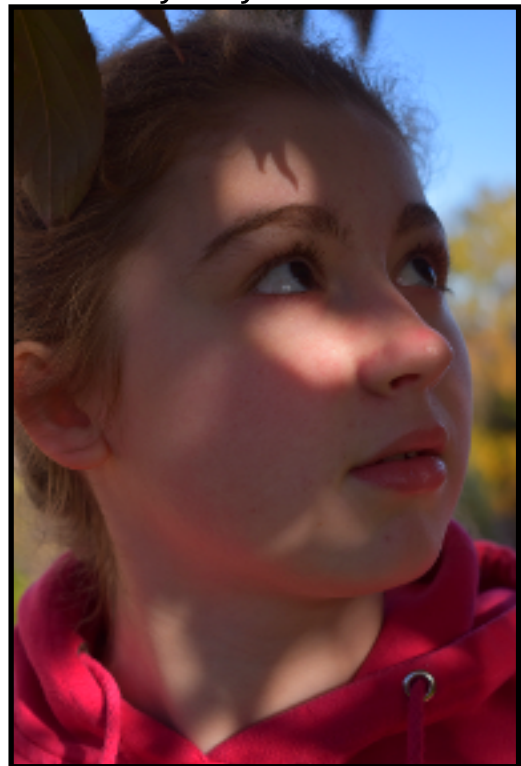
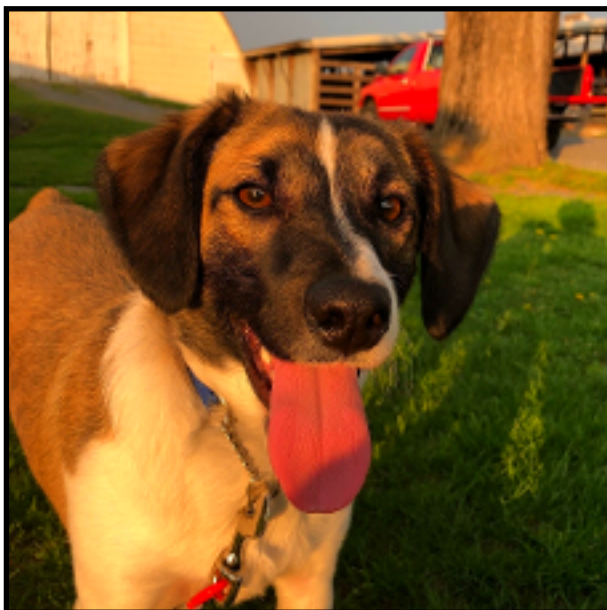
*Madison Kubacki - 9th grade*

## The Mystery

*Charlotte Baumgard - 9th Grade*

The adulated Oscar Wilde once said, "The mystery of love is greater than the mystery of death." That has always puzzled me. I feel like we humans view death as the greatest mystery, for we are all guaranteed the same fate: death. Yet we do not speak of it. Death is something we are all terrified of to an extent, but we remain quite silent about the issue. And we are willing to become servile to health to extend our life. Death is the only surety in life. Love is not in any way guaranteed. Maybe that's why it is such a mystery. For death will come. The only question is how and when. But love may never come. So love will leave us scrambling for more answers and experiences than death ever will. We all remain entrapped within the mystery of love even after we die, for it is the greater force.

*Emily Zaharia - 11th grade*



*Timothy Clive - 12th grade*

### **the night before**

*Jesulayomi Adejo - 12th grade*

heavy eyes and hearts filled with lead,  
tear-stained cheeks, plaintive palms  
seeking out  
another soul to enfold in a lasting hug.

lines blur as tears reappear; our cup  
brims

with vibrant memories that spill onto the  
floor like rain—

drops of midnight rendezvous, red-faced  
laughter,

easy dancing, uphill journeys, tired feet,  
unforgiving Atlanta heat,  
a lifetime of happiness in a week.

a sweet symphony of promises echoes in  
our ears

crescendoing to an overwhelming forte  
reminders to hold on tight, to fight before  
letting go,

to steal a small piece of moon and hide it  
in our pockets

before the night ends.

this is the story of friends acquainted by  
chance:

we converse until dawn, revelling in  
the time we have left,

a moment stretched into hours,  
hoping and wishing and praying that  
we can make it last

just a little bit  
longer.

### **My Sweet Love**

*Isaiah Martinez - 10th grade*

Love, there's a river that flows from your heart.  
Fill me with your love.

Love, there's a song that sings sweetly to me.  
Enchant me with your melody.

Like the sun that fills my room at dawn,  
Remind me, love, that you're not gone.

Like the sound of evening rain,  
Come back again,  
My sweet lover.

Love, there's a word that flows from your  
tongue,

A verse to be sung.

Take all my grace, love. Lord hear this praise.  
Oh, look what He's given us.

Let's hope it won't be long  
Come back and sing me your song.

Like the sound of evening rain,  
Come back again,  
My sweet lover.

When I see you again, my tears will stop in their  
place,

The sight of your beautiful face.

Love, I'll be waiting here, still, crying for you  
For you'll always be my sweet lover.

*Emily Zaharia - 11th grade*



### **Solemnity**

*Emily Zaharia - 11th grade*

#### **Second Place Poetry**

Inhale that sharp cedar,  
 Inhale that tangy acid and  
 Taste it through dry, wire lips.  
 Let your tongue entwine until that deep  
 pine bursts,  
 And let it bloom.  
 Let your tongue writhe across its  
 sandpaper terrain.  
 Love the aftertaste and savor its tender  
 sweetness,  
 Subtle pepper sweetness.  
 Hold it there now, press it even harder  
 And overcome that numbness,  
 that sharp frigidity,  
 And let that blistering sting overwhelm  
 you,  
 And when your tongue tingles,  
 Let it burn you  
 And taste that viscid liquid metal,  
 And let it run over the cliff of your lip,  
 Trickling like a delicate stream,  
 Splattering into the wet snow below,  
 Creeping through the open cracks like  
 honey.  
 Let it paint your wire lips until it is nothing  
 more than  
 A crisp, crimson sundress against the  
 bellowing wind.

### **the poet's dilemma**

*Jesulayomi Adejo - 12th grade*

#### **First Place Poetry**

my heart, without direction from my brain  
 quite loves to love the stranger passing by;  
 and still, without my knowledge or consent,  
 will give itself to souls that know me not.  
 the blue-eyed man who came into my line  
 to buy a can of Coke and cigarettes—  
 he smiled and looked directly in my eyes,  
 and truly hoped i had a blessed night.  
 the boy who sang “Love Is A Laserquest”  
 at summer camp among the fairy lights—  
 he stared at me and whispered words of love,  
 and promises, all empty, wrought from naught  
 the man who locked my buckle and the strap  
 before I took the rollercoaster ride—  
 his careful hands held stories in the lines  
 and told me everything would be all right.  
 to those who hold the door from far away:  
 i adore you like daisies in the spring.  
 and those who pick up fallen books and things  
 will always be the ones for whom i sing.  
 the feelings, which pervade my every sense,  
 they leave me just as quickly as they came.  
 and though it is a trait most bittersweet,  
 i fall in love with everyone i meet.

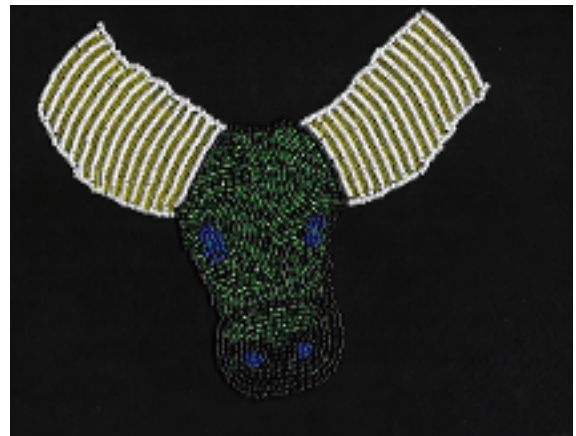
## The Deception of Wyoming

*Riley Smith - 11th grade*

The United States emerged into this world as the most abundantly diverse nation, home to two cerulean seas, lush forests, and serene meadows, all flooding with wildlife. All forty-nine states are uniquely distinct from each other, yet similar enough to unify into a single entity. That's right, all forty-nine states. The undeniable truth is that Wyoming, the unadorned and awkward middle child of the country, simply does not exist. At first glance, it does seem like a far-fetched concept; however, the time has officially come to uncover the lies we have been fed.

For one, have you ever been to Wyoming? For the elusive few that have, what landmarks do you remember? Perhaps it's the weather stained colonial houses, or the gutted gold mines, or the vast, sun-stained beaches, or the luminous crystal skyscrapers that reach beyond the clouds. Of course NOT! Wyoming does not have anything of such significance- or does it? What if we have been fed lies about its bleak and stark character only to suppress our undying curiosities? So what does it house then? It could just be a distortion of space and time, or a government base which imprisons our Martian friends, or maybe Canada took the territory during World War II and we are simply too ashamed to redraw the border. And what ever happened to the cowboys? Did they just disappear due to modern agricultural technologies and a lack of demand for cattle whisperers? Absolutely NOT! The government probably chased them away to Wyoming to help feed the aliens they house. Additionally, are there any personal friends or big-wig celebrities that originate from this fantasy land? To provide a bit of context, the three most famous people from Wyoming are John Colter (an 1800s mountain man), June Downey (who's known for studying the diverse subject of handwriting), and Tom Horn (a cowboy that just so happened to escape Hollywood's grasp), all of whom are sure to be embedded into every history textbook. And is it just a coincidence that Wyoming is the second least densely populated state in the country? Alaska claims the number one spot, but there is a reason we bought it from Russia's bargain bin. Furthermore, when was the last time the government discussed any events in the "state of Wyoming"? The first and last significant time was when it had been absorbed into the country, and the only reason it needed to be addressed in the first place was to remind the population their destiny was still being manifested via kicking out the Natives and some of the Mexicans.

However, I digress. It must simply be a coincidence that Wyoming has no significant landmarks, no famous people that were born there or that live there, the second lowest population density in the nation, and the government's last major address of the state was when it had been annexed into the country. With the clues we have been given, there is no definite conclusion to this enigma; however, as long as we maintain awareness, it may lead to the proof that birds are government devices, or that Canadians are aliens, or the reason we have not been blessed with a fifth *Shrek* film. We live in a world of lies, and the truth lies locked in a forsaken chest, with the only key left to unlocking it being Wyoming. My brave patriots, let us reject the world which has been spoon-fed to us, and construct a mobocracy forged in truth. For that, my dear friends, is the path to unadulterated freedom.



*Rowan Angstadt - 12th grade*

## Somber Snowfall

*Brianna Silasavage - 11th grade*

Watching tranquil snowfall,  
Seeing the flakes sparkle.  
Slipping on ice, laughing as I fall.  
In your eyes, I always see a twinkle.

The weather is absolutely frigid.  
Yet, when you're around I stay feeling warm.  
You're falling with me, colliding so rigid.  
You are the only thing I want in this snowstorm.

Home is where the heart is,  
Home is where I feel at peace.  
But home is not a house for me.  
Home is when the <sup>35</sup>ragtag group of us forget our  
troubles just for a little  
And get together with rosy cheeks and honest  
smiles.

You are my home, I am begging that you don't  
foreclose.  
Stay here, let me watch the flakes falling on your  
nose.

## Ode To Basketball

*Lekaiah Solomon - 10th grade*

A jungle like no other, players run across,  
tigers through tall grass

The sound of the ball a beating drum.

Cheers erupt through the stadium.

The floor quivers with excitement.

Tigers feel nothing but fear.

Anxiety parading through the jungle,

Staying in the lead against ambush,

Every shot, every move, every decision  
matters.

Each one leads to a different ending

Against opposers.

But alone on the court, it's peaceful

Inside or out,

Just holding a world covered in  
goosebumps,

A 'Golden Hour' tint.

The ball floats through the air, a bird in  
slo-mo

Sinking into a nest it is bound to know.

The sound a gentle tear in a paper,

Settling, like a warm blanket in the cold.

My home, my peace.

On the court is where I belong,

In this heaven is who I am, where I am  
me.

## A Doodle a Day

*Abigail Sisco - 10th grade*

A doodle a day,

They say,

Will keep your mind at bay.

If none are done,

The mind will r a c e

And never keep a steady p a c e.

A dreamer will dream,

A writer will write,

A reader will read,

But what shall the doodlers do?

Shall they draw a mighty masterpiece

Or a card to send?

Will their day be full of mystery

Or be marching in order

Without a steady end?

How will they be viewed?

Different from the rest?

. . .

If the mind is clouded,

What will happen to the delicate doodlers?

Will they forget their muse?

Try hard to do the

Usual motions that come naturally?

Get frustrated at the small things?

Will a fire be lit

Within their soul?

To carry out which they do not wish to do?

Will the calm flow away?

Out of the grasp of the drawer?

The mind blank,

Pen in hand,

Ink onto the paper,

A breath in

Then out,

The hand moves naturally,

Creating random items that don't make sense to most.

To the doodler, it is everthing—

A dot there

A line over here

But

There is ALWAYS

Method

In the

Madness.

## **You're Just Not Enough Anymore**

Anonymous

You look up at him,  
 Your hair a perfect greasy mess,  
 Your forehead rubbed with pain,  
 Eyes raking his skin,  
 Memorizing and remembering every  
 detail.  
 Your mouth pierces down,  
 Pink lips quivering,  
 Your stubborn cheeks that always  
 need blush to color  
 Flush and glow on their own.  
 Crystals tumble from your mascara  
 stained eyes.  
 You look so shockingly beautiful,  
 It would make anyone else breathless.  
 But he looks back at you,  
 Shoulders squared, breaths steady,  
 So normal and unassuming and right,  
 Until one corner of his mouth shows  
 just a hint of emotion,  
 And there's a crease between his  
 brows,  
 The one you massaged when he was  
 upset,  
 Because you worried he would wrinkle  
 his broad forehead.  
 And he tells you the truth,  
 Because you always told him not to  
 lie.  
 "You're just not enough anymore."



*Nikailyn Madden - 9th grade*

## **Snow Day**

*Dylan Slusser - 10th grade*

Outside the window, a whiteout.  
 Blankets of snow falling from fluffy clouds,  
 The ground is a ghost.  
 Sheets of ice like crystals,  
 Shining in the light.  
 Bundled up in warm clothes,  
 Kids wear coats as they jump into the frigid banks.  
 The snow feels like lamb's wool.  
 Hair, white from frost,  
 Kids making snow angels,  
 Snowmen, igloos,  
 Snow, cotton-like, cold, crystalized, fun,  
 The snow day,  
 A gift from the sky,  
 Terminating learning.  
 Fun has just begun.

## The Trees Can Touch the Sky Here

*Emily Zaharia - 11th grade*

*First Place Fiction*

"Look at this," he whispered under his breath. Bulbous beads of sweat ran along his jaw, which tensed under the moon's ethereal glow. He paused and absorbed the scene with its crisp, marigold leaves wasting away under the majestic pine trees. The wind hissed quietly, gliding through the spruce and rocking the baby pinecones tenderly. It moved so effortlessly through the curled strands of his tousled hair, that I didn't realize his gaze had shifted toward me.

"Did you hear what I said?" His words lingered in the air like the last note to a melody. I shook my head. "I said, it's beautiful like you, ya know?" His thin lips curved slightly but his eyes still possessed that somberness.

I smiled, tiredly, but kept my face low. He gripped his hat until I could see his knuckles turn yellow. He stifled a cough.

"I haven't been here in so long, ya know?" he asked, but his words again were unsteady, like he could say so much more if he was given the chance. And I was giving him the chance.

"There's pretty pinecones everywhere. The leaves are so many colors. The trees are pretty tall," he paused, taking it all in once again.

He was a weed among a field of flowers, and I knew it the day I met him. He turned to me again. His gaze was ice-cold. I was shivering.

"Are you cold?" he asked, his words tip-toeing up my spine with every breath he took. He nervously started to slide off his flannel. I pushed it away, trying to suppress my tears. Once again, I turned to the shadows. "I would have brought my other one if I knew you would..." his words ventured off to another path, another thought in his disheveled brain.

I bit my lip and looked up. My momma once told me that all your tears slide back into your eyes whenever you look up at the stars. It's never worked, but I keep trying.

"Hey," he whispered. "Are... are you... okay?" He lifted his hand to touch my shoulder but decided not to. Better for both of us. "Listen. I can take you home if you want."

I looked at the trees and how they brushed up against the sky. The marigold leaves looked blood red now that it was getting late. But it was *already* late. And I had to go home.

But I didn't want to leave. I wanted to stay here in this God-forsaken place to dig up old graves just so I could bury them again. I wanted to start fresh in this place, tainted with blood and tears.

But I knew that it wouldn't happen. And I know that he didn't want that to happen. So now we both didn't want it to happen. An absolute conundrum that had been plaguing our youth for so long.

He looked up at me. "You know, I could just leave if you want." He stared earnestly at me. We stayed here long enough. The sun's fingers fluttered behind the horizon while the bluejays mourned the fallen leaves. But even the dead leaves were pretty.

At last, he blinked, fluttering his delicate eyelashes, smudging away the tears that had begun to form. He scooted forward, rather slowly, as if not to startle the baby pinecones in the forest. He wiped his hands across his pants and untied his flannel from around his waist.

"I like it here, too," I muttered.

He placed the flannel down next to me and we looked at the towering evergreen trees. We looked at the bluejays fluttering their wings up high in that tree. We looked at the fallen leaves, crisp, and already disintegrating. We felt the sun's heat paint our cheeks.

We just stared into the abyss of towering trees and marigold leaves. The deep, bittersweet abyss.

## **Remembrance**

*Rowan Angstadt - 12th grade*

My grandparents' farm holds many secrets. The eerie basement full of shadows, the tangled woods full of vines, the crowded rooms full of junk. It's easy to miss things if you don't know where to look. One summer, my sister and I found a small path right at the far end of the yard, past the garden. We walked the path, flanked by honeysuckle and shaded by walnut trees. Lining the path were painted stones, each with a name. Mopsie, Edgar, Lala, Bailey. In the blooming, growing, living summer, we found a grim reminder of winter. I'm not sure who else knows about or remembers that path. I've only revisited it in my mind.

We are the defenders of memory. Objects, events, feelings, must all be preserved in our mind. Another secret I discovered: my grandmother is somewhat of a hoarder. Going through her piles of home-schooling books, decades-old souvenirs, toys, and crafts, I felt connected, as though, if I could only place each item in the right order, I might be able to see her life. I might be able to see again who she was.

My grandmother has dementia. Her memories are slowly being replaced by darkness, confusion, and hallucinations. She sees people who aren't there, and forgets the people who are there. Each time I hug her goodbye, I wonder if she will still know me, the next time I return. They say you die twice—once when your body dies, and again when you are forgotten. I know my grandmother will die, just as I will, and my grandchildren will. But I will not let her die twice. I am a defender of memories. I will remember my grandmother, and I will remember what she was like before this disease. Perhaps one day, my grandmother will lie in the ground along that path, with those forgotten pets. But as long as I live, as long as I can defend her memory, she will not be forgotten.

Ancestry and Greed  
*Aidan Gensure - 11th grade*  
 First Place Nonfiction

From what land do your ancestors hail? Many respond with a definite “Germany” or “Italy” or “Ireland,” but many others respond with an uncertain “Europe” or “Asia” or “Middle East.” Often, this uncertainty results, not from a lack of knowledge, but from an abundance of greed.

Long ago, as society began to form and develop, greedy human nature dominated. Peaceful farming groups gave way to villages, which gave way to kingdoms and then empires. As the empires’ vast armies swept across continents, they plundered and stripped lands of their resources and cultures. Despite this barbarism, distinct groups of people managed to unite and pass on their history and beliefs. Eventually, conquerors realized gentle assimilation was better for their image than total annihilation, and they allowed cultures to survive, although they were forced into colonial servitude. As these cultures strengthened, they rebelled and formed their own fledgling nations.

By the twentieth century, most of the world was separated into these individual nations or colonies. It was those few archaic nations and leaders that held on to their greedy, imperialist ways, which caused the World Wars. And it was that same human greed that remapped Eastern Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, with no consideration for existing peoples, greed focused solely on resources and money, that continues to cause wars around the world. As these new lands struggle to fight and rebuild, they must also find ways to fairly integrate cultures with past millennia of war because distant, ignorant, greedy leaders have forced them to do so.

My ancestors hail from one of these affected lands, but, like many, I do not know exactly which. Nor do I know if its culture remains today. My family loosely accepts that my paternal great-grandfather immigrated to the United States from Czechoslovakia. However, it takes no Sherlock Holmes to realize that “Czechoslovakia” no longer exists.

Prior to World War I, the land was a portion of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, where the people received few rights and most cultural beliefs were hidden. After the war, the Austro-Hungarian Empire collapsed and a Czech politician, Tomáš Masaryk, created a new Democratic nation named Czechoslovakia. The nation united the formerly separate Czech and Slovakian cultures, along with a small portion of Ukrainian land called the Subcarpathian Ruthenia. The nation thrived until parts of it were annexed by Nazi Germany, then Hungary and Poland during World War II. Immediately after the war, Czechoslovakia united again, but the Soviet Union also annexed the Subcarpathian Ruthenia. A brief period of mostly desirable governance followed until the Soviet Union’s greed led it to steal Czechoslovakian independence. The greed for power suppressed and forced to secrecy the rights and cultures of the Czech and Slovakian people once again.

As the Soviet Union collapsed in 1989, the people of Czechoslovakia carried out the nonviolent Velvet Revolution and declared independence, reclaiming the right to practice their own beliefs. Finally, in 1993, Czechoslovakia peacefully split into the current nations of Slovakia and the Czech Republic.

My ancestors came from the former nation of Czechoslovakia, but now three separate nations claim that land. Because of greed, the Czechoslovakia my ancestors knew most certainly no longer exists, and the culture my ancestors fought so hard to protect and preserve may be carelessly scattered across Central and Eastern Europe. Because of greed, I have no connection to any land or culture. Yet, I hope someday I may solve the puzzle and come to know from what land my ancestors hail.

*Emily Zaharia - 11th grade*

