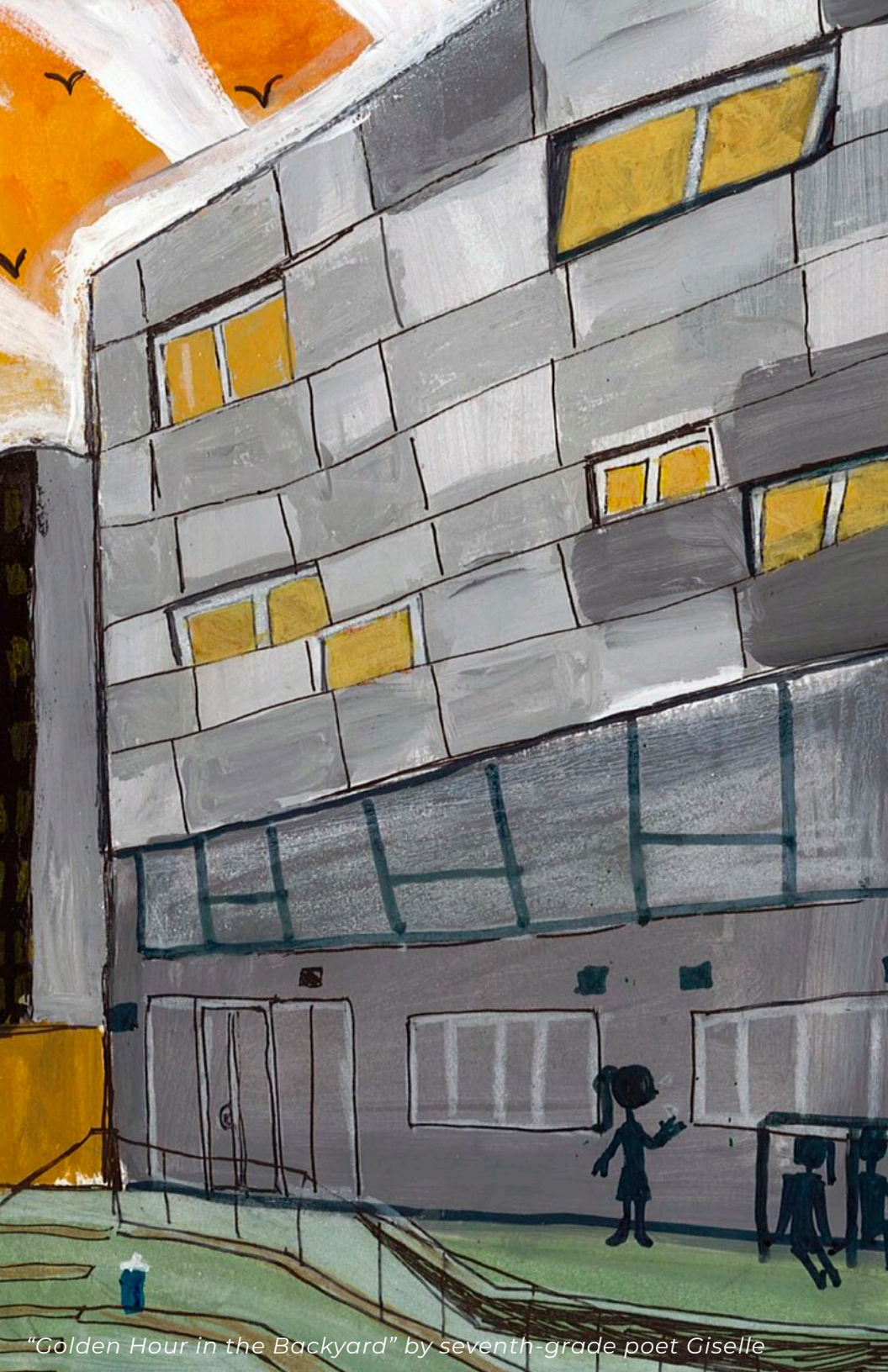


THE EAST HARLEM SCHOOL

2024 POETRY SLAM

05.14.24
at SONY HALL
New York City





EVENING PROGRAM

WELCOME

Trustee Devon Spurgeon, 2024 Poetry Slam Chair

ACT I POEMS

Eden'Ivy, Roslin, Karol, Giselle, Juan

ACT II POEMS

Lyanna, Jeremy, Raquel, Justin, Ailyn,
Joel, Ryleigh, Leah

SHORT FILM: POETRY AT EHS

By Hobson Feltus

ACT III POEMS

Serenity, Sara, Nadia, Joseph, José,
Ramon, Steve, Kaylee, Liana

SHORT FILM: THE HISTORY OF EHS

By Hobson Feltus

GIVING OPPORTUNITY

ACT IV POEMS

Aadrika, Rebeca, Vivianne

CLOSING REMARKS

The 3 R's and some PB&J.

Respiration

In stillness, giving attention to the dynamics of breath and alignment.
In motion, strong and balanced, drawing into play
the full power of the cardiopulmonary system.
Meditation, sports, yoga, and free play are central.
Neurogenesis, courage, collaboration, and serenity happen here.

Relationships

Relationships are fostered based on awareness, courage, generosity,
honor, and temperance.
Lives of deep meaning are built and shared
through all of our work together and with meals prepared and shared,
in an expanse of time, with mindfulness and love.

Realization

The liberal arts - the scientific method, the novel, mathematical
reasoning - are the means to meet our innate drive and sacred end -
to best understand and accept the dictates of the universe
and to work and move honorably within the infinite possibilities.
To locate one's truest self and true north, where virtue and serenity lie.

Play

Allows all of the above to meet full expression.
Play as both means and end.
Poetry and scientific exploration are embodiments of the play spirit here -
that place where tension, uncertainty...
and elegant questions abound.

Beauty

Inspires all of the above. We create it through the visual arts,
and seek it through exploration of the natural world.
Our building's design is seen as a reflection of this value
and an inspiration, as well.
In El Barrio we know that beauty is a gentle hand
pointing at the moon, and not the same celestial body - or its light.

Joy

We daily and actively and joyfully pursue joy, through all of the above.
We are strongly determined to be strong and happy -
in a full Aristotelian mode
first deeply brought forth in the
Great Rift
Valley.

— **IVAN HAGEMAN**
Cofounder & Head of School



ABOUT EHS



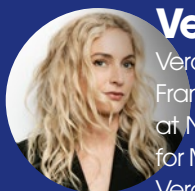
The East Harlem School has brought an elite, elegant education and unique extracurricular opportunities to students from low-income families of East Harlem, the Bronx, and beyond, since 1993. Still led by cofounder Ivan Hageman, who grew up on the site of the school when it was a drug rehabilitation center run by his parents, EHS is an independent middle school serving students in grades four through eight.

- Classes at EHS range in size from 7 to 18 students, and our student-to-faculty ratio is 8:1.
- 87% of EHS students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch based on household income eligibility standards. 88% hail from immigrant families.
- EHS alumni attend top boarding, day, Catholic, and public high schools. 90% of EHS alumni matriculate to college, and 100% of our graduates grow to become stronger, kinder, and wiser citizens. Half of our students will be the first in their family to graduate college.
 - Our 2023 graduates currently attend Milton Academy and Miss Hall's School (MA), Loomis Chaffee School (CT), George School (PA), and Eastside College Preparatory School (CA), among many others.
 - The Class of 2019—the most recent group of EHS graduates to enter college—are studying at Middlebury, Smith, Cornell, NYU's New York and London campuses, and other excellent schools around the world.
- EHS provides an exceptional education at a lower cost than New York City's public and private schools, with our regular session cost per child less than \$17,000/year. (By contrast, the NYC Department of Education spends over \$30,000 per public school student each year.)
- Every EHS student receives substantial tuition support: Average annual tuition is under \$500.



EHS alum Johnny Mitchell '98 addresses a student question during a Speaker Series presentation

PANELISTS



Veronica Swanson Beard

Veronica Swanson Beard grew up on both coasts; between San Francisco, California, and Naples, Florida. Her career in fashion began at Narciso Rodriguez and Alberta Ferretti, in wholesale, and as a buyer for Marissa Collections in Florida. In 2010, Veronica cofounded the brand Veronica Beard with her sister-in-law, Veronica Miele Beard. What began as a rack of dickey jackets has expanded into a full lifestyle collection for the women who make it happen. Their motto: Look good, feel good, do good. Veronica is a mother of three, and if she weren't a fashion designer, she would be flipping real estate and designing interiors.



Barry Clarke

A native of East Harlem, Barry Clarke is the vice president of business development at Authentic Brands Group, helping lead endorsements and licensing for Authentic's portfolio of entertainment IP, ranging from living legends Shaquille O'Neal, David Beckham, Allen Iverson, and Julius "Dr. J" Erving, to the estates of Muhammad Ali, Marilyn Monroe, and Elvis Presley. Prior to Authentic, Barry spent over six years at Creative Artists Agency on the opposite side of the table—as an executive in their brand consulting division. At CAA, Barry advised brands including JPMorgan Chase, SoFi, StubHub, Emirates Airline, Mondelez, and Microsoft Xbox about how to allocate their partnership marketing budgets within the sports and entertainment space. He worked on everything from league and team partnerships, to athlete and celebrity endorsements, to experiential activations and product integrations. After graduating from The East Harlem School in 2004, Barry attended The Taft School in Watertown, Connecticut, and received his bachelor's degree from Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine, in 2012. He now lives in Los Angeles, California..



Zanaï Concepcion

Zanaï is currently a sophomore at The Calhoun School on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. She discovered her passion for poetry as a seventh grader at The East Harlem School, when she performed her poem "Party on Gun Hill" in the 2021 Slam. She went on to perform "Don't Forget to Dream" in the 2022 Slam, and her uplifting experiences with the two events inspired her to try musical theater. Zanaï most recently showcased her talents as a dancer in Calhoun's spring 2024 production of *Pippin*. The daughter of a Nicaraguan mother and Puerto Rican father, Zanaï was born and raised in the Bronx, where she still resides. When she isn't on stage, she loves swimming, studying math, and spending time with her family. Zanaï plans to pursue a career in either law or medicine when she is older.



Rebekah McCabe

Rebekah McCabe is general manager of the fashion division for Chanel in the United States and has been with the company for 19 years. Prior to her role as GM, she was responsible for Image and Communications. Rebekah has an extensive background in luxury fashion. She has held previous roles at Ralph Lauren, Condé Nast, and Giorgio Armani. She has a passion for philanthropic work and currently sits on the boards of The East Harlem School, Memorial Sloan Kettering Hospital, and the MoMA Film Committee. Rebekah, a native New Yorker, attended The Chapin School and is a graduate of Duke University. She currently resides in Manhattan with her husband and two children.



Aimée Mullins

As the first double amputee in history to compete in Division 1 NCAA track and field, Aimée set world records in the 100 meters, 200 meters, and long jump events, and represented Team USA in the 1996 Paralympic Games. In 2012, Aimée was named Chef de Mission for the USA at the Summer Olympics and Paralympics in London, and was appointed by 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 with roles in films by Matthew Barney, and has spent the past decade-plus acting in numerous films and television shows—including Netflix hit *Stranger Things*. She currently has multiple films in development as a producer. Aimée's decades of work with nonprofit organizations reflect 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, Aimée became one of the youngest-ever inductees into the United States' National Women's Hall of Fame.



Tom Scott

is the cofounder and chairman of The Nantucket Project (TNP), the next-generation media company focused on creating a better world by reimagining solutions to pressing challenges through live gatherings, unconventional collaborations, and films. A longtime entrepreneur, Tom cofounded the beverage company Nantucket Nectars with his friend Tom First in 1989, and sold it to Cadbury Schweppes in 2002. Tom launched his career in film in 2002, and has created, directed, and produced feature films and TV shows that have aired on networks including HBO, IFC, and Sundance TV. In 2010, *Daddy Longlegs*, a film he co-produced, was selected by both the Cannes and Sundance Film Festivals. Tom also founded Plum TV, a national cable television network of eight stations, which won 14 Emmy awards. Tom is the chairman of the Nantucket Film Festival and is a board member of the Greenwich Film Festival. An avid pilot, Tom has flown a small plane halfway around the world. He received his BA from Brown University and his MDiv at Yale. Tom lives in Connecticut with his wife and two kids.



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2024 STUDENT POETRY

I WANT TO HEAR A POEM

Eden'Ivy, Grade 7

I want to hear a poem.
I want to hear a poem that tells
me about your life.
That connects me to you,
You to me,
Us to the world.

I want hear a poem about
Your grandma and how she
Sews the holes in
Your socks and patches
Rips in your jeans and
Asks how your day went
In school.
I want to hear how that makes
you feel.
I want to know if you feel warm
and comforted
When you feel connection,
Like I do.

I want to hear a poem
Where I can see the people, hear
the music.
I want to hear a poem
About a father singing
A song to his daughter
As he plays his violin
As she dances
To the harmonious melody
Of the stories of his childhood.

I want to see them connecting
Under the twinkling night sky.
I want to read your poem,
And I want to think about my
father,
And the lifetime of memories we
have together.

I want to hear your poems.
I want to know about the lives of
others.
I want to see how we are the same
And I want to understand how we
are different.
I want to know your stories.
And I want to tell you mine.

Eden'Ivy is a middle child with five brothers, and currently lives with four of them (including O'Ryan, EHS '28), and their mother, in Brooklyn. At home, she loves to bake and cook—especially her favorite food: Jamaican curry chicken—and at school, she likes studying humanities and science. Eden'Ivy is new to EHS this year, and loves how seriously the school takes sports and fitness. She's looking forward to her eighth-grade Delaware Water Gap trip in September, and being immersed in a new environment.

CHILDREN OF THE SEA

Roslin, Grade 7

I used to go to an aquarium with
my mother.
There were beautiful fish
everywhere, though the smell
was pungent.
I saw orcas and seals. Dangerous,
but awfully cute.

One day when I was eight, a
dazzling, glowing aqua creature
caught my eye.
Bobbing in the water, a throbbing
blob that I couldn't stop
watching.
My mother told me it was called a
jellyfish.

Ever since, I've been obsessed.
Jellyfish have organs, but no
brains. They are the oldest
animal to swim off the ocean
floor.
They have been around for 600
million years.
And yet, no one expects much of
them. I relate to that.

Sometimes I feel like I'm alone on
an ocean floor.
I forget that I have potential.
I forget there are others just like me.
I have to remind myself that I can
swim up. I can become known.

I won't be a lonely little girl forever.
I will have a place in this world.
Sometimes I dream that it will
be under the sea studying the
jellyfish.
And people will know my name
because I am a marine biologist.
Sometimes I dream it will be in
England studying the history that
exists there.

A simple animal, moving slowly,
made mostly of water, speaks to
my spirit.
I am captivated by the art of
jellyfish, throbbing like a heart
through the ocean throughout
time.
They are a miracle to me. They
inspire me.

I am not bioluminescent,
But I can shine.

Roslin moved from the Philippines to the US at age two, and has spent the past ten years living in East Harlem with her mother and grandmother. A passionate humanities student, Roslin wants "to discover the overall truth about the world," and feels that her class's recent unit on the Industrial Revolution has helped her in that pursuit. Roslin's mother and uncle both work in medicine, and Roslin hopes to carry on her family's legacy by becoming a doctor.

PLAN A

Karol, Grade 6

My heart beats fast and hard
As a racing car.
My sorrow is like a sickness,
Knowing that we are the problem.

Smoke comes from burning trees
Floods flow through cities.
The Earth yelps
So why don't we help?

Our planet is a volcano warming up.
Fossil fuels are burning
And people are dying because
their homes
Are no longer safe places to live.

The Earth is our mother.
She gives us supplies to survive.
What life do we give back?
But what love do we give back?
No life or love at all
To the soft leaves on trees,
Or the animals living in the seas.
Hasn't the Earth shown us enough
That she has needs?
Haven't we cut down enough
trees?

But we can help her.
Plant plants where you can,
Beautifully leaving seeds to sprout
in fresh muddy land.

Learning about climate change hasn't necessarily scared Karol—but it makes her "feel like we have to start acting." A lover of realistic fiction and a writer of both poetry and prose, Karol starts writing as soon as she gets serious about a topic. When she grows up, she wants to do "something involving literature, and something involving world impact; it might be climate change." For now, Karol picks up litter on the street, and sorts her recycling at home, and encourages us all to do the same.

Ride a bike
Or go on a hike
Instead of taking a ride in a car.

Look at the wonderful world.
Look at the beautiful willow trees.
Look at the birds soaring in the
blue sky.
Appreciate her.
This is our world, our mother.
There is no plan B.



Mixed-media poem illustration by Kaylee, seventh-grade poet

I AM FROM GUERRERO

Giselle, Grade 7

*Tu no eres de Mexico,
Tu eres de Guerrero,
My dad tells me.
Alguien pregunta de dónde eres,
Dice Guerrero.*

I never understood the difference.
For many years,
When people asked where I was from,
I said Mexico.
This is what society has told me,
This is what makes sense to others.
Yet every time I said it,
I felt ashamed.
Every time I said it,
I could feel my ancestors'
Disappointment with me.

Everytime I heard Mixteco
And I couldn't understand a word,
I felt like a disgrace
For being out of place.
Even my Spanish was disintegrating.
Every hour,
Every minute,
Every second,
It worsened.
My knowledge of my "home"
Was fading away
In the shadows called the United States.
And whether it was Guerrero
Or Mexico,
The truth was,
I felt I was neither.

But as I've gotten older
I have started to listen.
Que mi mama me dice,
*Como es Guerrero,
Como es la gente,
Como es su familia,
Como era su vida.*
Talking with her, listening to her,

I connected more to the Spanish language again,
And to where I am actually from.

Still, I am American.
Actually, a New Yorker.
But in the shadows of my life
Es Guerrero.
In those shadows
Es mi pueblo.
In those shadows
Are the stars
That I can never see
In the place called New York City.
But I remember,
Even if I cannot see the stars,
They are still there in the sky;
In the world.
Just like Guerrero.
And when I look up
At the midnight sky once more,
I can recall
The stories my mother has told me
About her pueblo.
About the people celebrating.
About the joy
And the laughter of the people.
La mona bailando
In celebration.

I, the New York City daughter,
Am the joy of Guerrero.
I am the embroidery of the cloths
Every unique design sewn with care.
I am Caldo de Res,
Every little ingredient
Fitting together like a puzzle to make
The beautiful stew.
I am la mona
That dances proud.

I am from Guerrero,
And I am no longer ashamed.

Giselle's feeling of disconnectedness from her heritage inspired her poem—and through writing and performing it, she feels that her bond with her roots has grown stronger. Giselle is an artist through and through, and can often be found crocheting clothing and accessories around school. She hopes to one day work in animation, because "many people with different experiences and opinions ... can together make one beautiful movie or show."

THE LAUNDROMAT

Juan, Grade 5

I miss going to the laundromat with my mom.
We went every Saturday until one of the clunky machines blew up.
That's when the laundromat closed.

Now, my mom travels to another laundromat.
The walk is far, so I stay home.

The old laundromat is still there, on 109th Street.
They never cleaned it from the fire.
I pass it, I see all the mess, and I miss my memories.

I miss when I was four years old, when my mom would hold my hand.

I miss when we talked about the birds and the trees we saw out the front doors
While the machines washed the smells of the fish market
From my hardworking mother's clothes.

There is a video I recorded from many years ago—the old laundromat
Is frozen in film, making marks on my memory.

Donde esta Juan? Says my baby voice. *Donde esta Juan?*

I am using the camera to film the machines and the people and windows.

Estay aquí, I said. I was right there, behind the camera,
Having a happy Saturday with my mother.

At the old laundromat, I was too young to be of any help,
So I just sat and stared at my mom's silky strokes:
Sifting clothes, sorting through our bags,
Stuffing dirty ones into the washer,
Shuffling wet ones into the dryer,
Folding dry ones in perfect squares.

The laundromat was so clean before the fire.
I will always remember the scent of the detergent,
The soapy specks floating through the air like memories
That you can only see when the sun
Shines in and catches them.

Juan loves art class and fitness at EHS, and is an avid soccer player outside of school, too. He was introduced to the sport at age seven by his cousin Edgar (EHS '23), and is a striker or midfielder. Juan is very close with his six cousins who live in New York, four of whom he lives with. Juan is an only child, and his parents both come from Puebla, Mexico. While he misses spending Saturdays at the old laundromat with his mother—the inspiration behind his poem—Juan also cherishes the time he now has to sleep in every weekend, while his mother does the laundry without him.



Self-portrait collage by Juan, fifth-grade poet

MY GRANDPA'S FAMOUS PICKLES

Lyanna, Grade 5

My grandpa makes pickles,
And oh, are they good!
Some are sour and some are
sweet,
Just like people.
I love pickles, and my grandpa's
are the best.
All of my family beg and beg for
more.
It's hard for him to keep up!

One day my grandpa went to a
store.
He tasted their icky, bitter pickles.
Nothing like what he remembered
from Poland!
He wanted to taste his home.
He wanted unlimited pickles to call
his own.
That was the day he decided to
launch Grandpa's Pickles.
Lucky us!

He bought garlic.
He bought vinegar.
He bought cucumbers.
And... he bought something
secret.
He'll never tell.
He found many mason jars to put
the pickles in.
I watched them swim in those jars
for seven whole days.

My family was so impatient!
But it was worth the wait.

My grandpa's pickles—
I can crunch and munch on them
all day long.
Strong, sour, and spicy—all at the
same time.
Once, he made them for everyone
at the hospital where my mother
works.
No one could get enough of
Grandpa's Pickles.
They were gone so fast.

My grandpa—
A veteran of the Polish army,
A father of three, a grandfather of
five,
A lover of games and nature and
laughter,
And most famously in our family,
The founder and chef of the
legendary Grandpa's Pickles.

Lyanna is a proud Leo: She is a brave soul, and she loves math class—especially “when it gets really tricky, so [she] can learn new things”—as well as gymnastics, push-ups, and swimming. She grew up in Brooklyn, and recently moved to the Bronx, where she lives with her mother and younger sister. Half-Dominican and half-Polish American, Lyanna wants to be an author someday, and hopes to help solve homelessness in her lifetime.



Fifth-grade poet Lyanna works on a painting in art class

THIRTEEN

Jeremy, Grade 8

They say thirteen is a wonderful age.
I believed it, but I was far too naïve.
So young, not a care,
Not even worry about the loss of a single hair.

Yet here I am now,
And somehow my mind doesn't feel at ease.
My loose brain moves in my hollow mind,
Uncertain.
I can't find thoughts.
I am stuck in time.

I wished for this moment,
This teenage year.
So why do I feel full of fear?
My heart took things too hard, so it fell apart.
Silly kids doing hurtful things,
Saying I didn't measure up.
I'd been myself
My thirteen-year-old self.
What more could I give?
My body marked with strife,
Their whispers like spiders crawling through my life.

Their words are heavy weights
that drown in my throat.

Their peeking eyes headlights,
coming in close.
Trying to speak, my mouth just chokes.
This so-called dream age is nothing but a hoax.
Yet in the ashes of my former self,
In the cave of memories from before this time,
Lie the broken parts of my ancient shell.

There a light glows, that shines in the void that I feel.
I can be who I am
At thirteen and forever.
A butterfly rises.
My love for others, their love for me.
With it, eternal life.

Jeremy has lived in the Bronx for most of his life, with a stint in Connecticut from age seven to ten. He loves how busy everything is in New York, and he has really enjoyed his two years at EHS—he loves how respectful everyone is to one another. In performing his poem “Thirteen,” Jeremy hopes to raise awareness of the mental health crisis plaguing teens today.

FOR LOVE.

Raquel, Grade 6

Love is dangerous.
Love is powerful.
Love can be thirsting for vengeance
Against the one who tore apart the family.
Love can be every step stoked with animus.
Thanks to love, you can be out for blood.

Love can fill you with wrath.
It can feel like demons are eating you alive.
It can be filled with fury boiling inside you.
Rage and revenge can be your motivation.

You need a different motivation.
You have to fight against the demons with LOVE.
Even in anger, protect and fight for LOVE.

Fuel yourself with the dread of suffering.
If you act in anger,
Even if the anger is connected to love,
You will lose.
If someone hurt the one you love,
Use your will to live
As your motivation
To do what is right.

Your heart gives you vigor,
But don't cross swords.
Don't brawl with all you got
Because it's
All for LOVE.

Dangerous, powerful, thrilling, enduring.
Use it wisely.

Raquel loves studying art and art history at EHS. Learning about the life and work of 20th-century Italian artist Giorgio Morandi, she was struck by the fact that he personally ground pigments to make his own paint colors because nothing else was quite right—this has served as a source of creative inspiration for Raquel all year. Raquel recently moved across the Bronx, from Hunts Point to Riverdale. She lives with her parents and younger brother, Alexander, with whom she (generally) gets along. “We fight a lot, but mostly it's child's play,” says Raquel.

CRIMSON WORLD AWAKENING

Justin Fajardo

Naturally, in the night of day
Opening an entire glimpse of my new world
Came a never-ending stopping point
To where crimson figurines would endlessly grow
On a spot into the showing of unknown depths
Illuminating absolute radiance
On the day of the luminous party
That turned into non-remembrance
At first glance, it was nothing special originally
With the old miniature basement
However, transformed to be glistening
I never noticed the many crimson objects around
Down at the ground
To where it was your entire surroundings
The stairs were lumpy like a hangar
Scattered with action figures
That children were entertained by then
In the used to be play area
The only area, I felt seen
Even though it will never be the same
The creation of those in my life
As noble to wise
Was extraordinary
It was a special marking on where this core memory
Came alive

Justin decided to write his poem about a party that also happened to be the “first time [he] felt seen by others,” and hopes that it also sends a message about the pitfalls of technology: “People used to go to the store and buy new action figures, but now they’re just on their devices, playing on that, touching the screen—instead of really holding something,” he says. Justin lives in East Harlem with his parents, who come from Ecuador, and his older sister, Jessica (EHS ’20).

EL PAÍS DE MIS SUEÑOS

Ailyn, Grade 7

The country named after the
equator,
Where my parents were born,
Where I spent many summers as a
child,
Is el país de mis sueños.

When I was little
I saw the tall emerald mountains
Along the long, long palm trees.
I saw the orquídeas
That always had that rosy tint to
them.
I remember the long, dark nights,
When we played hide and seek
without a worry.
We used to play in the rain.
The smell of a clean mist in
Ecuador
Is a joyful, innocent aroma.

I visited this year
For the first time since before our
world shut down.
Now the air feels poisoned.
The orquídeas don’t bloom,
Or maybe they do.
It doesn’t seem like the place I
remember.
The streets are filled with violence
That poisons anything that wishes
to grow.
The poison holds happiness
hostage

Innocent people feel like they are
the prisoners trying to escape.

When my plane was in the air,
A news station was taken over by
masked men.
I cannot imagine anything more
terrifying.
Gangs. The Lobos and Choneros
wanted power.
Wanted revenge for someone they
call their leader.
All while I flew above, back home.
I was lucky to get out, lucky that
we left before the violence
erupted.

My mother praised God, that I was
out of there
That her daughters were safe.
But we also asked God, why?
And we prayed for the safety of
our family.
And for Ecuador—land of
mountains, palm trees, flowers,
beautiful rain.

What happened to the country
I used to know and love?

What happened to
El país de mis sueños?

Ailyn is a middle child, and was born in East Harlem to parents from Cochancay and Azogues, Ecuador. Ailyn’s older sister, Corelie ’20, wrote and performed the poem “Dreaming North and South” about the home country of their mother’s dreams for the 2019 Slam. With Corelie’s blessing, Ailyn used the same refrain, “el país de mis sueños,” to frame her own 2024 poem. Writing the poem, Ailyn weighed the pain of her family’s unrealized “American dream” against her own dreams of Ecuador in light of the country’s recent civil unrest.

WHERE I AM FROM

Joel, Grade 6

My family is from Mexico.
From a little town called Santana
In the state of Puebla.
Today, the town is like an old person dying.
Earthquakes hit multiple times,
Destroyed buildings.
Dead bodies lie in cracks
On the ground
And all the living have left.

My dad loves food
The most in the family.
In Santana, he had animals
And a small farm.
My parents came north for safety and opportunity.
Now my dad works in a bar.
With his love for food, he cooks burgers and
He comes home at three a.m. every night
And eats fries
Alone at the kitchen table.
He says his dream is to have a farm again.

I am from Manhattan, a small, rotten island.
It is dirty and dangerous.
My mom has an app
That notifies you
Where the crimes are
In this island city called New York
That is not dying like Santana.
New York is alive, very much alive.
But somehow I don't think it is everything they dreamed of,
When they left the place they are from.

Joel has visited his family in Puebla, Mexico, four times, and enjoys spending time in an environment so much more rural than New York. Reflecting on his poem, Joel says that he especially likes the last stanza because it reflects a certain truth about the gap between dreams and reality. Joel joined EHS last year, as a fifth grader, and likes how much he learns in his classes. He particularly loved a recent humanities unit on the Indigenous peoples of the Americas.

WHERE HAS THE TIME GONE?

Ryleigh, Grade 5

I miss the young, pigtailed girl—
The one that thought she was famous.
The one with two missing teeth,
And a heart filled with gold.
I miss the days when life wasn't so busy,
I could pass away hours playing with my dad.

Oh, the days when I thought
Being eleven was so far away.
Oh, the days when I thought
Being eleven meant you were a little adult!
But now, eleven is only months away...

But that little girl would be so proud of who I am today.
I used to be shy
But now I am brave,
Standing up here in front of you.
I used to only worry about myself,
But now I help my mom,
And even take care of my younger siblings.
I used to care a lot about my outfits,
Wearing dresses and skirts and other fancy things.

But today, I have better things to worry about:
My homework, my ballet, my chores.
That little girl would say, *Look at me now!*
Look at how far I've come.

Eleven sounds old,
And it's weird to think
that my little self won't ever be back,
But she lives inside me still.
Our love for pink connects us.
So does our passion for dance.
In pigtails, I loved my parents more than anything
And in my school uniform I feel the same.

I can't avoid growing up and up
So I'm trying to enjoy each day!
Eleven can't be that scary...
And my younger selves will guide me through.

Ryleigh was born and raised in East Harlem, the daughter of two New Yorkers. She grew up kindhearted and caring—"but also very carefree." She loves dancing and visual arts, and enjoys exploring her palette in art class at EHS. A member of the EHS Choir Club, Ryleigh reports that she likes singing as part of a group because "it makes you feel less alone."

PLANETS AND STARS

Leaha, Grade 4

Dark and cloudy, higher than
anything you can see,
I imagine the stars: sparkling,
steaming crystals in the sky.
It is nighttime. With my telescope,
I look past the stars to see Pluto
and Mars.
I suppose I could try to jump, jump,
leap
Off of my bed, and somersault
out the window and into a
rocketship
That stirs up snacks, like cookies
and the milky way.

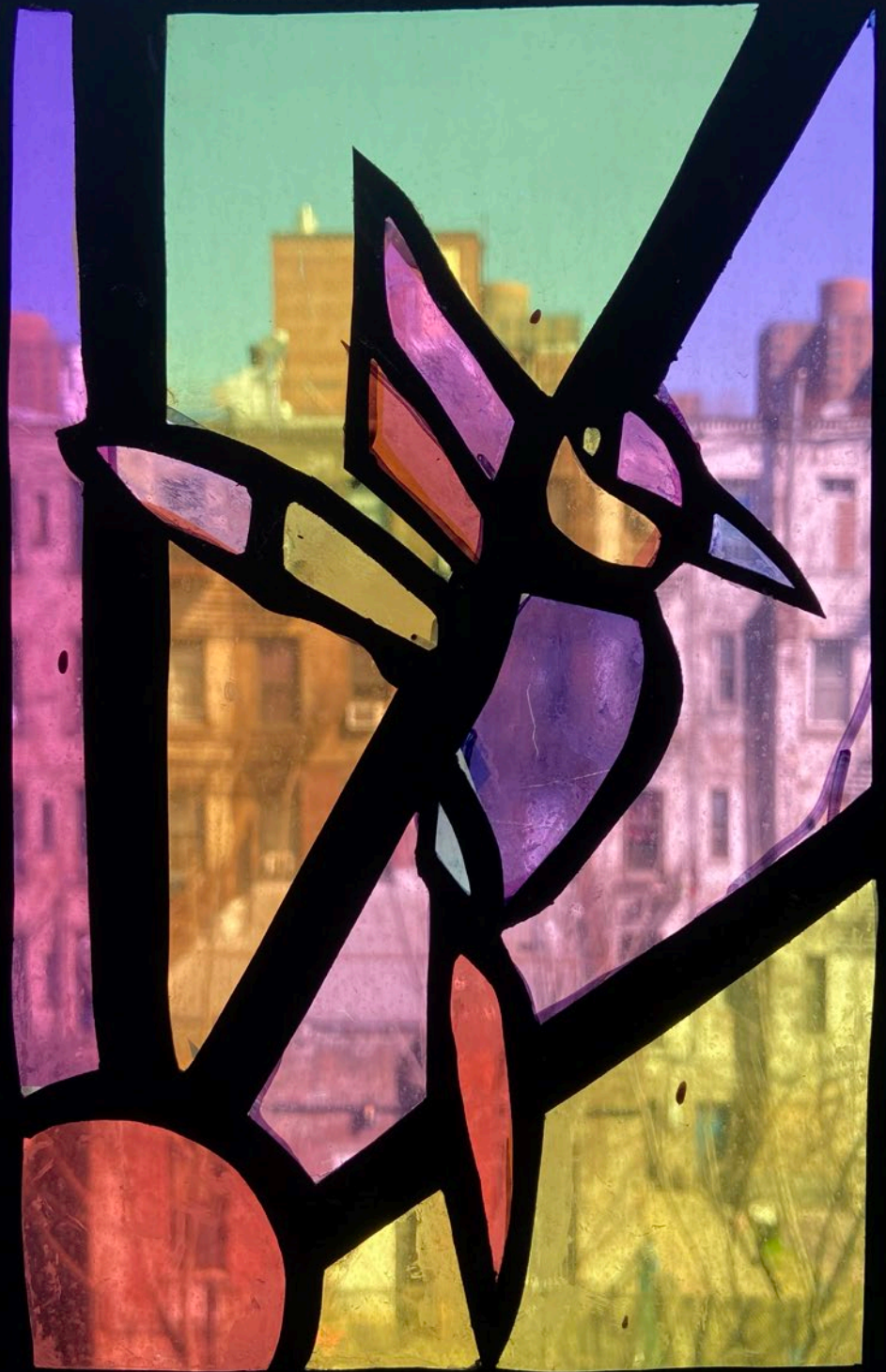
Do you think cows on the moon
make chocolate milk?
Maybe a pit stop there would do,
but not on
Saturn's spaghetti rings or
Neptune's tangy taco shacks.
I couldn't make a home on Jupiter,
It's simply made of gas.
And Venus sounds quite magical,
But it would be too hot for me.

I'd love to see the colors, the stars,
the giant sparkling sky.
I'd love to see the earth from
above
But I worry it might feel too high.
Eventually, I'll take my rocketship
And I'll come back

Down,
Down,
Down,
And emerge from outer space.
Maybe on the way, I'll see a black
hole:
A turning, swirling circle.
I'll wonder what's inside...
But I won't be brave enough to
look.

When my feet are back on solid
ground
And I don't float up and away,
I'll feel relief and joy and thanks
For this place that I call home.
There's nothing like my little old
Earth
Full of trees and grass and animals.
The planet that supports so much
life
Is my home sweet home.

Leaha's favorite things about school are humanities class and playing with her friends. Leaha also loves to write, and especially enjoyed the process of combining two of her main interests—stars and food—through poetry. Her bedroom is decorated with stars, and Leaha is considering a career as an astronaut. Leaha lives with her mother, who is from Puerto Rico, and her playful miniature poodle, Ginger.



A "stained glass" bird by fourth-grade poet Leaha hangs on the art room window at EHS

MY HARDWORKING MOM

Serenity, Grade 7

My mom,
A hardworking woman,
Goes to work all day, every day, to feed four people.

My mom,
A hardworking woman,
Is tired and she still manages to listen to me when she comes home
from work.
I feel excited to share with her what I have learned.

My mom,
A hardworking woman,
Prepares food for everyone, gets everyone ready for school, and
hardly sleeps.
But she is joyful.
She always has a joke.
She can always make you feel happy if you are down.

My mom,
A hardworking woman,
Does the same routine over and over again.
She goes nonstop and she has tired eyes.
But she never gives up and she never forgets to do the things we need.
She makes everything happen.

My mom makes us delicious spaghetti and garlic bread.
She earns the money to buy that food, she cooks it with love, and she
gathers our family for dinner.
I feel safe and peaceful because I know she has things under control.
Because I can be whoever I want to be and she will love me.

My mom is a hardworking woman
And more!

Serenity joined EHS last year, and loves science class—particularly when it comes time to experiment in the lab. A daughter of the Bronx, Serenity hopes to become a judge someday, and spends her free time researching judiciary career paths through books and TV courtroom dramas. Serenity lives with her twin brother, older sister, and their mother, and she enjoyed exploring familial relationships and friendships in this year's poetry unit.

UNA NIÑA DE PELO DORADO

Sara, Grade 8

Un 13 de agosto del 2020
Nació una niña; mi sobrina.
Es la niña de mis ojos cafés,
cuando toco
Su pelo suave de color dorado
Es como tocar tela fina.

Tan inquieta como un conejo,
Saltando, brincando y explorando
Todo lo que encuentre. Ella me
protege
Del mal frío.

Mi amor hacia ella es tan
inmenso
Como las ballenas azules,
Tan colorido como los corales
Y tan profundo como el mar.

Aunque nos separa la distancia
En ella pienso todos los días.
Extraño su alegre voz y ojos claros
Y la sigo amando tal como el
primer día que la vi.

TRANSLATION OF "A GOLDEN- HAired GIRL"

On August 13th, 2020
A girl was born; my niece.
She's the girl of my brown eyes,
when I play with
Her soft golden hair
It's like touching fine fabric.

As restless as a rabbit
Jumping and jumping, exploring,
Whatever she finds. She protects
me
From the bad cold.

My love for her is so immense
Like the blue whales.
As colorful as corals
And as deep as the sea.

Although the distance separates
us
I think about her every day.
I miss her happy voice and clear
eyes.
And I still love her just like the
first day I saw her.

Sara moved to New York from Barranquilla, Colombia, last year, with her parents and younger brother. She says that, despite the language barrier, she's adapted easily to EHS culture and customs, and especially loves art class. Sara's favorite part of living in New York is how close-together everything is, but she misses her friends and family in Colombia. She's excited to conquer her fear of public speaking by performing in the Poetry Slam.

RAÍCES

Nadia, Grade 7

I'm from a place where people aren't astray,
I'm from a place where the sun is scorching all day.
From loud music to hanging plants and crosses in the house.

I am from my abuela Gabi raising my father,
Starting as a seed and blooming vibrant as the mangoes
She grows in her garden in the campo.

I am from my abuela Coco, strong as the cazuelas
Hanging from the ceiling
Of the home en la ciudad where she raised my mother.

These women, living in Mexico,
Who cared for my parents, are a part of me.
I am from their strength.

My father has always told me,
Siempre ten abundancia hija.
Tu eres numero uno.
Words that my father taught me.
Like my abuelita taught him.
Take opportunities, you deserve them.
He did that. My mother did, too.

But what am I if I am not as vibrant?
What if I continue to break with every little mistake I make?
What if I am fragile?
I worry I'm not as powerful as the words
I was raised with.

When I doubt myself,
I remember that
I am from a place where abundance was made,
And that has pervaded all of me.

Nadia is always making art: Whether she's crafting, folding origami, or taking digital photography classes at the Bronx Documentary Center (where her teacher is EHS alum Itzel '19!), she likes to get creative. Nadia also loves spending time with her family, whom she chose to honor with her poem, and especially enjoys family walks around Central Park. Nadia is the youngest of three—her siblings, Donaldo '13 and Dayanara '16, both attended EHS as well.

APARTMENT 2208

Joseph, Grade 5

I loved living in apartment 2208.
It had open space and a beautiful view out the window.
When we had to leave it, my heart split in two.
Mom paid the moving people to lift the TV up and away,
Like my sadness lifted, and turned into rain.

The old place wasn't what you would call elegant,
But to me it was an empty canvas: a space to do anything I wanted.
Or almost anything.
I once drew blue marker all over the floor—that didn't go over so well
with my mother.
Sorry, 2208, I didn't mean to mess you up.
The view there on the twenty-second floor was high and wide, and
It felt like I was living up in space.
Once I stuck my head out the window to breathe in the air up there.
That also didn't go so well with my mother.

My new apartment—apartment 1404—is smaller.
It has less room for my legs to stretch and grow,
But it's cozy, and has a balcony where pigeons perch.
And we have one less person now, so we don't need quite as much
room.
My mom takes pride in 1404.
We clean its windows with a hose.
I try to help her with everything.

I miss you, apartment 2208.
I miss being a family of four.
But also, I'm happy mostly.
I'm learning about new things.
I guess you are, too, 2208, with the new people living in you now.
I hope you will be taken care of.
And because you moved on, I must move on, too.

Joseph lives in his new apartment with his grandmother and mother, both of whom come from the Dominican Republic, as well as with his little brother, Joshua—who is “a little rambunctious, and likes to bite off more than he can chew.” A big fan of EHS science class and lab experiments, Joseph plans to pursue a career in the sciences when he grows up.

THE DEATH OF MY DOG

José, Grade 8

The death I couldn't stop
Happened in Boyaca, Colombia,
While I was here in New York City.

On my farm in Colombia we have
blueberries, potatoes, tree
tomatoes, and curuba.
We have chickens, chicks, and
some cows.
Two dogs and one cat.
Tomas, Mariscal, y Serafin.
I left all of that behind for the
opportunity and education that
people say is here.

The dogs were the hardest to
leave.
With my grandpa, I built them a
beautiful dog house,
But sometimes at night I would
wake up, and they would be in
my bed.
They were treasures.
They helped me when I was sad.

On the day of my seventh-grade
moving-up ceremony,
In the yard at The East Harlem
School,
We got word of the death.
It was Mariscal.
Poisoned by my neighbor.
He barked too much.

But he was scared of everything.
That is why he barked.
He was such a good dog. I should
have protected him.
I felt terrified.
I felt I had abandoned him.

The good dog, we kept saying.
The good, good dog.
He is in all my memories of
Colombia.
When I touched him, I felt calm.
He always knew when I was
crying.
He would find me in the
bathroom,
Hearing my tears, my worry about
my bad grades,
And he would make me go play
with him until I felt better.
And I left him behind,
With his big ears and small eyes,
and brown, dotted fur.

The death I couldn't stop
Happened in Boyaca, Colombia,
While I was here in New York City.
I am trying to forgive myself.

José wants to protect animals by becoming a veterinarian someday. He moved from Boyaca, Colombia, to Queens, in 2021, and found the language barrier to be the hardest part of the experience. Now, José says, "I can express myself better, because [EHS humanities teachers] Ms. Roberts, Mr. Lennon, and others, have helped me." He loves spending time with his friends, and going all out to celebrate birthdays with them.



Eighth-grade poet José rehearses during EHS Violin Club

MY FIRST COMMUNION

Ramon, Grade 6

My friends, teachers, and principal
There with me in St. Joseph's and Michael.
A priest wearing green and
White clothing stands before us.
I was in a new, navy blue suit.
The cantors played guitars and drums.
The strings of the guitar vibrated.

We sang "Take Me To Heaven"
And we were clapping.
Candles with smoke
Glowed on the table
As the priest
Blessed the bread and wine.
A saint in the window
Fought off the devil.
The church smelled
Like candle smoke and
Cardboard boxes.

When I touched the holy
Water, I felt like God
Gave me power to help
People when they are in
Trouble. When I took the body
And blood of Christ,
I felt committed to goodness.
I will bring peace
To my family and to my friends.
I will live a happy life.

Ramon has gone to church every weekend for as long as he can remember, and likes how it empowers him to help those around him. He decided to write about his First Communion as a way to communicate "how forgiveness touches [him]." The youngest of ten siblings, Ramon has one older brother at EHS (Agustin '24), and likes to play soccer in his spare time.

TAMALES

Steve, Grade 5

It's the afternoon.
I just got out of school. I'm craving tamales,
And I'm missing my mother's touch.
I'm missing how she worked her soft hands through
The thick tamale dough. She isn't here anymore,
But every day still comes and goes.

I buy tamales now.
They're not the same.
My mother's tamales were spicy, just as she was fiery.
My mother's tamales were authentic, just as she was always honest.
My mother's tamales were fresh and warm, just as she was caring.

In the kitchen, she used a big pot to brown the meat and combine the
spices.
The smell filled the house with love and happiness.
Her voice called me, Steve, to tell me they were ready.
I miss my mother. I miss her cooking in my kitchen, her voice in our home.
But I think maybe God needed another chef,
And her cooking will be five stars.

I believe she is cooking in heaven.
And when I focus hard enough,
And think of her in my heart,
I can smell her tamales
From all the way down here.

Steve is the youngest of four siblings, two of whom (Kaylee '25 and Briana '23) have also been Slam poets. He likes being the youngest sibling—and he loves building things, playing games, and watching soccer. He enjoys school excursions to Randall's Island when it's warm out.

MOM AND DAD

Kaylee, Grade 7

My dad is as strong as a bull.
He's made it through many tough times,
And he stays brave.

My mom was the blanket
That used to give me warmth during the bad days.
Now my dad is that as well.

For a year after my mother passed
I didn't want to hear my own name
Because inside it was "Santiago,"
My mom's last name, and hearing it always reminded me of
The day she passed.
Something about her name embarrassed me.
Reminded me of everything we had been through.

I couldn't even appreciate
The memory of her last name,
And how our names connected us.
I didn't appreciate her
Even when she was dead.

During that time, I was embarrassed of my dad, too.
And I hate that I was embarrassed.
I'm embarrassed of being embarrassed,
But I didn't like his last name in mine either.
"Cruz."
It's like I didn't want a last name,
Because it was a reminder of too much.

My dad keeps us safe
With his shield
Made up of his own
Skin and bones.

My dad has done so much for me and my siblings
Working so hard to hear us giggle and see us smile again.

I appreciate him.
I thank him over and over again.

I was born in 2011,
And until 2022 I always came home
To my mom with
Food ready for us and for my dad, too.

I feel I didn't appreciate it.
I worry I didn't thank her enough.

It has been almost two years and I am working on embracing my
name.
I'm no longer embarrassed.
I'm only ashamed
It took me so long
To realize how great my parents are.

Kaylee Cruz Santiago
Yo me llamo "Kaylee Cruz Santiago."
Proud to be the daughter of
Eric Cruz Herreda.
Proud to be the daughter
Of Gines Santiago.
And grateful for them both.
Despite all we have endured,
Yo amo mi mama y mi papa.
I love my mom and my dad.

A passionate artist and creative writer, Kaylee enjoys the emotional release that poetry allows, and is excited to show off her growth as a performer by participating in this year's Poetry Slam. Her family comes from Oaxaca, Mexico, and she is one of five siblings, two of whom (Steve '27 and Briana '23) have gone to EHS and participated in the Slam, too. "I'm happy to be in the Slam with Steve this year; his poem made me cry. I really felt a connection with it, because he's talking about our mom," Kaylee says.

THE CHARMANDERS

Liana, Grade 8

An evening breeze showed us the cold air.
At home, we would've been staring at a screen,
Our technology-filled generation.
But in the Delaware Water Gap,
We were watching the sun set over a lake.

My favorite time every day
Was always our last few minutes together at night.
Among the green leaves,
Wind blowing through everyone's hair,
Watching the light change,
From blue and bright to cool orange and yellow before dark.
I could tell in everyone's eyes,
How our minds were intertwined
With new stories of what we'd seen together.
Separate brains, but shared experiences that led to shared memories
That we'll always have.

Summer gaze looked down as we
Showered in its rays.
The stars looked at us from afar.
We danced near the trees in the September breeze.
We didn't realize we were making memories,
We just knew we were having fun.

When night arrived,
We shared stories around the campfire,
Our bonds grew brighter and stronger,
Like the flame.

Liana is a big fan of math and an aspiring architect, and was raised in East Harlem. Liana's mother is from the Dominican Republic, and her father is Italian American. Her twin brother, Anthony, is also in the eighth grade at EHS, and Liana partially credits him with kicking off her poetry journey. "Twin Life," Liana's first poem, was featured in the Slam in 2022, her first year at EHS, and she has been a Slam poet ever since. She feels that her poetry, once rhyme-based, has become more narrative over the past three years.



Liana cooks dinner on her eighth-grade backpacking trip in the Delaware Water Gap in September

I AM GRATEFUL

Aadrika, Grade 7

I was laying on the grass and
looking up high
At the clouds gracefully merging
with the sky
To think about how grateful I am to
have this life.

This life full of fun, joy, happiness,
and stress.
Every day I am still a work in
progress.

I am grateful to my parents for
shaping me as I grow.
They moved here to study from
Kathmandu.
They teach me to be honorable,
to
Let my ancestors
Shine through.

I am grateful to my cousin, Sushmi.
She raised me like the sister I had
never had.
She taught me like a swan
teaching the youngers to fly.
Her inspiration and care,
Something I can never deny.

I am grateful to my younger
brother, Adrian,
Whose innocent, soft words will
always touch my heart.
He keeps me in touch with my silly
side

Especially when this life we're living
in is a bumpy ride.
We may argue and we will fight
over the last chip in the bowl,
But together,
We are a whole.

I am grateful for the teachers and
friends who have supported me
along the way.
They have helped me overcome
the rain clouds
That have sometimes darkened up
the day.
Each person is a gift
And I am grateful for that.
For when dawn goes to day,
Each of us must pave
Our
Way.

The clouds passing by remind me
This is isn't the end:
It is just the beginning.

Aadrika is new to EHS this year, and was excited to learn about the school's commitment to poetry—a seasoned slam poet by the time she joined EHS. Aadrika brought the house down at February's in-school Slam. She also loves sports, and is an enthusiastic first-time lacrosse player this season. Outside of school, Aadrika practices taekwondo and plays pop songs on the acoustic guitar. She is very close to her family, who hail from Nepal, and she visited her parents' hometown, Kathmandu, one time when she was little.

INTERWOVEN

Rebeca, Grade 8

Memories float by, swaying side by
side,
When my mom brushes my hair
With a black wide-tooth comb.
Safety as her caramel brown
hands
Pass through my hair like time.
Me siento como una niña
pequeña de nuevo en sus
manos una vez mas.

Those caramel-colored,
hardworking hands,
With veins as blue as the ocean.
Those dry, cracked, rough hands
Do everything for everyone.
Cooking, cleaning, caring for her
family.
Her hands comfort us when we are
sad.
And while they do so much for
others
They have a life of their own, too.
They have been places I have
never been.

Her hands pass through my hair
like wind,
Making me feel like I am floating.
I see the life inside of them.

When she braids my waist-length,
Melted, rich, dark chocolate hair,
Every strand is treated with care
and love.
Not one left behind.
There is a loud silence, no words.

Just peace.
We feel connected.
A mother and daughter together,
Like the generations before them
and the ones that will come after
them.
Time ticks and ties us together.

We are in the middle of eternity.
This is a bond, these sacred
moments.
Nuestro cabello guarda recuerdos
en los que reímos,
Lloramos y lo superamos juntos.

This is more than hair.
This is timeless.

Rebeca has been at EHS since the fourth grade, and cherishes the close relationships she has made with her classmates over the past five years. "Because we're a smaller school, and a smaller grade," she says, "everybody knows everybody." Rebeca's older sister, Carolyn (EHS '15), recently graduated from college, and has worked at EHS since the fall. While Rebeca will miss her EHS family (figurative and literal), she is very excited to form new friendships and join the soccer team when she starts high school in September.

FIRE ON EARTH

Vivianne, Grade 7

I have been holding my biggest shout,
And though I may have a timid voice,
I stand here today holding myself like a strong mountain.
I have been waiting for an audience
To discuss humanity's sheets of silence and ignorance
At this minute,
At this age,
At this place.
So here I am, on this stage,
And here you are—my audience.
Listen.

I am sick of us spitting out flames of destruction at our dying home.

Now, I have freed my trapped shout.
Allow yourselves, all of you
Ladies and gentlemen, girls and boys,
To feel the rage, too.
And shout with me!

Stop this madness and destruction.
People are buried in the floods.
The poles are disappearing.
There are humans who can't breathe Earth's fresh air
Because of man-made, intimidating, "chocolate factories."
Behind the idea of happiness
(Of treats, or profits)
Is the evil destruction of this planet.
Shout and rage for those who can't reach purified water,
And who are forced to slurp up chemicals.

People talk a lot of talk,
We know a lot of lingo about saving the Earth.
We see a lot of pictures of sad sea turtles.
And we know we can be resourceful.
But what happened to actually enriching our soil with organic waste?
Or using our electronics wisely?

How many times have you forgotten to bring your reusable bag?
That is not a small mistake!
We make so many claims, so many promises, that we are too selfish to
live by.
We have all turned these amazing ideas to dust.

I am sending you a message, my audience.
Listen to your heart.
Listen to me.
Fire is consuming our Garden of Eden.
If we destroy our home,
It will be nearly impossible to rebuild it.
Let our hands be in unity before it's too late.
For it is us who have to tend to and care for this place.
Our children don't have to suffer,
Nor should they inherit our mess.

If we help our home
We help ourselves.
And if I can speak up, so can you.
Because usually I am timid, but if you find what you care about
You too will be brave enough to shout it out.

An East Harlem native and recent Queens transplant, Vivianne is the daughter of parents from Oaxaca and Hidalgo, Mexico. She is interested in studying biology, becoming a zoologist, and eventually helping to rescue and study endangered baby animals. Vivianne was a Slam poet last year—her first year at EHS—and decided to use this year's Slam as an opportunity to make her voice heard on climate change.

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Class of 2019 alumni Ken (left) and Anthony practice lacrosse at Randall's Island as eighth graders

SUPPORT EHS

For well over two decades, the Poetry Slam has been a cherished annual tradition at The East Harlem School. In recent years, it has become our *sole* major annual fundraising event. EHS has been uplifting its students' voices and providing a beautiful and true education to children in East Harlem for over three decades—all thanks to the generosity of donors like you.

If you were inspired by tonight's poets, please support EHS with a donation, and help us educate generations of EHS Warriors to come.

THREE WAYS TO GIVE:

1. Donate online **EASTHARLEMSCHOOL.ORG/GIVE**



2. Donate on Venmo (@eastharlemschool, or scan the QR code), and please mention the Poetry Slam in your caption when you give!

3. Fill out the donation card found in your program, and return it to a volunteer by the doors on your way out tonight



Students, families, alumni, and staff gather for EHS's annual Thanksgiving potluck in November 2023

SPECIAL THANKS

We are so grateful to Hobson Feltus, Courtney Knowlton, Jamie Renwick, and Jordin Ruderman, whose energy and creativity helped make this Poetry Slam possible.

Thank you to EHS trustee Bob Heine for generously donating wine to tonight's Poetry Slam.



EHS MISSION

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

EHS VOW

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



Follow us on Instagram @eastharlemschool to see more from our amazing students!



**Visit our YouTube channel for more poetry content!
youtube.com/eastharlemschool**



Like The East Harlem School on Facebook!