A Note From The Editors

We all have a story to tell.

We tell stories about our past, future, and what we see. We tell stories about fantasies, harsh realities, and connections. Stories put a pen to what we think, giving others the ability to get a sense of our ideas and a balance between an ideal life and human flaws.

This year our focus is the stories we tell together. We spent the majority of this year coming together, sharing, and encouraging each other to be creative. The Creative Writing Club has worked hard this year to make sure everyone's voice is heard through their writing and that everyone is given the opportunity to contribute their ideas to the magazine.

Stories come from the ideas we tell.

“Listen, and you will realize that we are made not from cells or from atoms. We are made from stories.”

— Mia Couto
Submission Policy

*The Crossroads* welcomes submissions from any member of the Middle School student body from August through March 30th. Teachers are also encouraged to submit work for their students. All works are judged anonymously.

Editorial Policy

*The Crossroads* editorial staff reserves the right to edit minor errors such as grammatical and spelling problems while other submissions may be returned to the author for other requested corrections or approval for editorial decisions.

Editor

Camille Hurd

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In the beginning, there was one god named Eartho and one goddess named Eartha. Other than that, there was just emptiness. Since the beginning of time, they had been floating in darkness. They felt trapped, and no matter how many times they tried to escape, they couldn’t. However, they came up with a plan to escape, one that would finally work. Their plan was that they were going to create something that would change the future in the best way possible; at least that was what they hoped.

With their combined forces, they created a sphere. Then, they put water on one side and grass on the other side. After that, they went into the world. When they got there, they were so happy. They felt like they were in a dream. Everything they saw was too good to be true. They didn’t want to wake up, because they didn’t want to go back to the darkness. This was heaven, and they were finally free from the darkness; at least they thought.

Suddenly, the sky started to get darker. They had a feeling that something was about to go wrong, and that they were in serious danger. They were afraid that their creation was breaking, and they were going back to the dark, inescapable darkness. Then, they saw a tornado. It came closer and closer to them, until it was almost bigger than them. The ground started to shake. It shook faster and faster, and they were going up and down like they were on a trampoline. The ground started breaking into pieces. Their creation was cracking but remained whole at the same time. Their hearts were breaking because of that. All of their power had been destroyed.

Suddenly, everything stopped. Silence and emptiness filled the massive space. They walked around, examining each and every crack. They looked at the sand, then they looked at themselves, and decided that they wanted help to help fix the broken, but they knew it would take forever if it were just them doing it. They created people out of the sand that they were surrounded by. The god and goddess granted them power to let them have the ability to build, speak, and most importantly, move around.

Everyone huddled up and formed a plan. The god and goddess built some trees and made them into clothes for all of the humans to wear. The god and goddess then built some more trees for people to look at and grow food from. The god and goddess used their power to create rivers, oceans, and lakes. However, it wasn’t easy to complete this task. It took hours and hours of hard work and dedication. There was no time for anyone to get rest, even though they were extremely tired. Everyone was building constantly and doing all that they could to help the god and goddess’s request. The humans thought that doing this was the least that they could do for them.
Both the humans and the deities walked around observing their creations. They felt very proud about themselves. The god and goddess even wondered if this was the same place that it was when they first built it. They huddled up and congratulated everybody for all of their hard work. The god and goddess then gave all of the people a huge house to live in, and gave them pillows, food, blankets, and much more. There was happiness in the world and to everyone, that was all that mattered. Even though the world was not how the god and goddess wanted it to be, they knew that it is better the way it is now and knew that the earthquake was a sign.
GARDENS
Aayan Junaidi, F8

To get to the garden of my home,
you follow a path of rocks;
all different types, round, flat, and uncut,
all keep your feet out of the mud.

Walk around trees, all different types:
Oak, pine, cedar, plum.
Notice their shapes, sizes, and ages,
All their different colors, leaf types-
pointed, round, heart-shaped.
All give oxygen; all need water.

Smell the flowers.
Notice their colors, rich in hue.
See their size, all distinct.
The bees love them all.

Examine the cactus,
prickly on the outside,
But on the inside,
they are all soft.

A garden without variety
would be bland and lack character.
I want all gardens filled
with all types of life.
FADED MEMORY  
*Camila Bolner, F6*

[Verse 1]
Old photo in the box  
a memory untold  
in black and white.  
Your smile is caught in the fold.  
How the months have passed  
like sand through our hands,  
but this photograph,  
it still helps me understand.

[Verse 2]
Your eyes shimmered bright  
like stars in the night.  
We held each other close.  
Everything felt alright.  
But time has a cruel way of changing the  
tides,  
and now all that's left are these faded  
memories inside.

[Bridge]
Through the months, we've changed,  
grown apart in our ways,  
but this photograph remains  
a testament to brighter days.  
And though time may steal  
all that we once knew  
This faded photo reminds me  
of the love we once drew.

[Chorus]
This faded photo  
a window to the past,  
a love so pure  
a love that couldn't last.  
It hurts to remember.  
It's painful to forget.  
But this faded memory.  
it's all that I have left

[Verse 3]
Each crease and each line  
tells a story so true  
of laughter and tears  
shared between me and you.  
Though the ink may fade,  
and the edges may crumble,  
the love captured here is one to remember.

[Verse 4]
In the quiet of night,  
I hold this image tight,  
recalling the moments  
when everything felt right.  
But time's a curse and a blessing,  
leaves no one untouched,  
and now this photograph  
seems like it's all that's left to clutch.

[Bridge]
Through the months, I've changed.  
Things have been different in their ways  
But this photograph remains  
a testament to brighter days.  
And though time may steal  
all that we once knew,  
is this faded photo reminds me  
of the love we once drew.

[Chorus]
This faded photo,  
a window to the past,  
a love so pure,  
a love that will forever last.  
It hurts to remember.  
It's painful to forget.  
But this faded memory  
it's all that I have left

(For this faded memory  
it's all that I have left).
I TOO SING, AMERICA

Calypso Fox, F8

I too sing, America
My song that I cry,
Though I try, (and I try)
Will never yet ring through the church
Still, I heave and I lurch,
I want to be heard!
But never worthy,
Is the squawk of a bird
I too sing, America
But the protests I shout,
And the yells that roll out,
Will never reach the ears of my country
Though they travel far,
All that's left is a scar,
Only there to soon fade away
I too, sing: “America!”
And sing I will still,
My voice won’t rest till I’m gone.
SLOWLY
Camille Hurd, F8

I take a few breaths into the uncertain air
as I bathe in the joy that comes when my name is sung
with a face that holds so many smiles,
though hers has not yet come.

A touch of skin
knowing someone who holds warmth
takes weighted thoughts off my weary shoulders.
A smile from within,
she laughed with just her eyes.

Dirt dangling from the curls of my hair,
soil around me shapes itself around our heads,
with no care,
surrounding trees find comfort to grow between our heads.
I have never felt so grateful for a person.

Pouring my heart out, fear falls from her shadow,
her footstep path disappears from the drops of my eyes,
placing more and more of my beating heart in her hand each time,
her palm shakes.

A familiar face that shouldn’t fly away
is in the air
As I feel discarded in every way,
the longing for a connection loses its grasp
the trees wallow into the earth
now left muddy and bare.
Bri Scott, F8

Lela Tabatai, F8
I can hear him outside, throwing the football against the wall. He is in his Chiefs jersey, catching and throwing the ball. The ball bounces against the wall: he catches it and puts it away as he walks inside. He checks his phone while he walks upstairs to see if the Chiefs game is on. It is 7:30 on a Sunday afternoon; the sun is starting to disappear through the trees. He walks toward the living room as my dog happily greets him. He sits on the couch, turns on the T.V, straightens out the pillows beside him, sets his phone down beside him, and smiles.

The smile: it looks calm and relaxed. It is possible that he is only smiling because the Chiefs are winning their game. It is the spirit of the smile that counts: the happiness in it, the calmness of being able to enjoy a Sunday afternoon; of having done all your homework without being asked, of having your dog laying at your feet, of having your favorite team winning their game.

My brother smiles, calmly, happily. He doesn’t say anything, but he doesn’t need to. Smiling at 7:30 on a Sunday afternoon; it is quite enough.
I can see her now. Brushing her favorite sorrel and white stallion with her turquoise curry brush going around and around over his soft coat. After she tacks her horse, she tries to get the sand out of her tall black riding boots in the shade of a giant walnut tree. She picks the packed mud from his hoofs and then tightens the strap on her glossy black helmet. Saturday is the only morning she could sleep in, but she is up early with the sun to get in a relaxing ride and quiet her mind before it gets too hot.

The pair walk gazing into the bright sky, the clouds weaving in front of and behind the sun. As my mom leads her horse to the sandy arena surrounded by big beautiful sunflowers, he turns and tries to run away from the smallest puddle. She comforts Cisco, and then leads him through the puddle and through the metal gate. Calming Cisco calms my mom. On the way to the arena, they pass the old red barn with holes in the side where the sun peeks through.

There are many reasons why my mom finds horseback riding peaceful. The repetitive motion of brushing a horse and detangling the mane is relaxing to her. In addition, the amount of focus required to think about her heels, knees, hands, and preparing to jump leaves room for no other stray thoughts. It is a form of meditation. And then there is the trail ride, where she sits back and takes in the natural beauty around her. She does all of this on her favorite horse. There is something still a little wild in the mustang, which is what she likes best about him.

She adjusts her shiny, dark brown, leather saddle on his back and checks the girth one last time. There is so much to do that she has no time to be stressed. She grabs the reins and takes a seat atop her stubborn throne. Cisco tries to run around everywhere, but my mom pulls him back to the old rusty green railing. They walk, trot, canter, and jump a few barrels around the arena. Cisco’s blonde mane appears to be flying and my mom holds a serious look on her face. Her eyes are focused between his ears past the jump that Cisco just cleared. Then there is a big smile on my mom’s face as she leans forward and rubs Cisco’s neck back and forth with her hand. She is telling him that he has done a great job.

After she finishes her ride, my mom walks Cisco proudly out of the arena to a grassy area. Here she removes the saddle, saddle pad, and bridle. Cisco’s coat is sweaty and salty from his workout, so my mom uses a water hose to rinse him off. She then squeegees the water out of his coat, while Cisco munches on the green grass. My mom then gives Cisco his favorite treat, a few Mrs. Pastures’ cookies, and then releases him back into the field. They are both ready for a well-earned nap.
I DID EVERYTHING RIGHT
Esha Ashwath, F6

I did everything right- 
didn’t speak unless spoken to, 
turned in my work before it was due, 
filled the shoes I was given, 
and followed the path that was paved for me.

Never colored outside the lines  
or spoke with my mouth full 
never got less than an A 
and always wore a smile

Never thought outside the box  
always wore the right things 
never talked back 
and always got 1st place

Always the golden child-  
never the wild one  
always the follower-  
but never the trailblazer

I did everything right,  
so why does it feel  
like I lived life wrong?
We head home in our black Range Rover, my legs dead and my face red from several exhausting hours of fencing. My dad rolls us into the stone tiled driveway, the humid air encompassing everything in its muggy embrace. I stagger up to the shaded entrance and wait to be let in, for someone to open the wooden doors to the cool, comforting feeling of home. A blast of air conditioning hits me when the doors do finally open. Suddenly, sweet paws tug at me, little claws digging gently into my legs. My day is immediately improved.

Abby stares up at me, her pink tongue peeking out of her red rimmed mouth. Her kind, dark brown eyes look up into my own hazel ones. She huffs and sneezes, pawing again at my ankles with her bleached-white paws. Her wild charcoal black fur makes her look like a rabid creature, which had just scampered out of the forest and into our home. She could be mistaken for a rumbling ball of wild fluff if she didn’t have her bright, red collar on. Her barks are loud and throaty, and she rumbles and barks like a motorcycle about to run me over as I enter through the wooden doors. Her familiar throaty calls are a constant, like the cawing of an old crow. One could consider her to be rough and unkempt. She’s shrouded in midnight black fur and speckled with small, white snowflakes of old fluff.

Abby makes me feel as if I have a rainbow of bright, joyous butterflies which flutter around my heart. She improves how I feel in an instant, and makes everything that once appeared to be a towering wall of problems seem like the least of my worries. She makes me carefree as a bird, soaring high above anything bad happening, a simple distraction from the ups and downs of life. She can make anything better. I crouch down to lay on the floor with her and run my fingers through her fur.

Even as she lays upon the floor, rumbles and sneezes, I know Abby is a hunter at heart. She roams the garden, and like lioness on her hunt, she runs. Abby hunts and isn’t picky. She’ll run headfirst into the sharp claws of danger and return unscathed. She goes as far as to grab snakes by the neck, and her strong jaws sever the head from its body, and she leaves her prey for us to find the next day. She chases rabbits and barks at squirrels up in trees overlooking our yard; and after a tiring day she goes back to rest in her lair.

Abby, the snappy but sweet, better part of me. One of the things I look forward to at the end of every day. She’s the one thing that I can snuggle up with. My favorite ragged little creature which needs attention every other second. Nothing could ever be the same as my sweet little dog.
YOUR LOVE IS A WILLOW TREE
*Abigail Conlee, F7*

Your love is a willow tree, tranquil and enchanting.
It brings me safety on dreary, tempestuous nights.
Its branches, like a blanket, create a snug sanctuary that I call home,
Shading me from distress and danger, it is my guard.
It’s oh-so breathtaking,
the kingdom of my dreams.
Its sun-kissed branches pull me in like a hug.
Your love is more powerful than any drug.
I’m filled with joy every time we meet.
With silent serenity, it holds me so sweet.
It bends with the wind, taking every blow,
yet it always bounces back, helping me grow.
It towers over me with its indestructible trunk,
while some may call it weeping, it is the strongest tree I love.
**SOKATRA AND SHER**

*Adam Rapoport, F7*

In the beginning of the universe, there was nothing. There were no trees, no water, and no people. However, there were two animals with magical powers. Sokatra, who was an old, wise giant turtle. The other creature, Sher, was a lion with huge paws who was very impatient. They were each from different planets.

Sokatra was from a planet with no color, and no matter how far he traveled, he never saw anything that was not white. The planet seemed to stretch on forever. Sher was from a planet with lots of colors and buildings. There, everything was a different color. Each animal traveled weekly to a planet called Gyaol to do their market trading. At the market, they traded for food and other necessities.

One day while at the market, Sokatra overheard Sher talking about how he was bored of his planet and wished he could create an entirely new planet. Sokatra agreed and they started to brainstorm on their new planet's possibilities. They found a quiet space in the crowded, noisy market to discuss their plan for their flawless planet. With their common goal, their friendship became deep and everlasting.

Over the years of perfecting their new planet, they became best friends. They decided on a planet mostly filled with water and some land so Sokatra could live in the water and Sher could live on land. They also decided to create people on their new planet and named it Earth.

The animals met weekly and over time, their plans for their planet became more detailed and each animal started to have strong opinions. During one of their meetings, Sher gave an order, “I want to create people with huge paws like me.”

Sokatra, knowing not to get in a fight said, “Ok, but, I want to pick the next quality.” Sokatra continued, “I want to make people with scaly skin.”

Sher said, “No, that will not look good on people.”

Sokatra was angry, and yelled at Sher, “I don’t need you to tell me what to do!”

As they fought, their voices kept getting louder and louder and the ground began to shake. Gasses erupted beneath their feet and Sokatra and Sher could not breathe. Sher tried to run but did not get very far and with one last breath died in her tracks. Sokatra thought of going into the water to save himself. He hoped the gasses could rise out of the new planet and into space. He tried to hold his breath for as long as he could.

A few minutes later Sokatra rose from the murky water, took a deep breath in, and exhaled. His plan had worked! He scoured the land and found Sher who lay on the ground. With Sher’s last bit of strength, he mumbled his last words, “Remember Me.”

Sher now lay still and lifeless. Sokatra started to cry. The moisture from his tears traveled to the clouds and made rain. As the rain poured, a new creature began to appear on Earth. After one full day of rain, a head appeared on a hillside. On the second day, a body appeared, and on the third and last day, a new creature was born. It had black feathers and was very light with a yellow beak. Sokatra decided to name this creature “crow”. He decided it would be a symbol of death.
Sokatra felt guilty and angry with himself. He believed he should have told Sher to follow him into the water so they would both be safe. Sokatra took a breath, remembered what Sher had said, and immediately got to work to make a statue for his best friend. He threw a small pebble as far into space as he could. He amplified the pebble to create a miniature planet. With his magical powers, he encrypted Sher’s last words, “Remember Me,” into the face of the moon so the turtle people could see it trillions of years later. He decided to make craters on the moon to symbolize a hole in his heart from Sher’s death. Suddenly there was a loud boom and Sokatra felt the ground shake. He raced into the water, fearful of what was to come.

“This must be another earthquake,” he said.

Sokatra started getting nervous and tried to hold his breath for as long as he could. He was so scared he would not be able to breathe at the surface because of the same toxic gasses that killed Sher, that he never came up for air and drowned.

Steaming magma exploded and as it piled up it made mountains. The gasses mixed to make air. The cracks in the earth made canyons. Many billions of years later, the water turned blue to symbolize the wisdom Sokatra had. The land turned green which started a new beginning of life.

As Sokatra started to decay, many other turtles grew from her remains and settled in many different parts of the world. The years passed quickly, and the turtle people evolved into new animals called humans. The personalities of the turtle and the lion were given to these new mammals. When they were young, they were impatient, just like the lion and when they grew old, they became wise, with lots of knowledge just like the turtle.

Sokatra and Sher spawned back into their faraway planets, and to this day, they are still trying to return to the perfect planet they created, Earth. So when you look at the moon tonight, look a little harder and you just might see Sher’s last words encrypted into the face of the moon; “Remember Me.”
A DAY AT THE BEACH
Eesha Tipirneni, F6

As I bounce up and down with a wide smile on my face, I feel the joy and excitement bubble up inside me. South Padre has this magical ability to make all my worries disappear, leaving only happiness and excitement. The day outside is stunning, with the salty smell of the sea almost as if I could stick my tongue out and taste it. The sun's warm rays reflect on the ocean's surface, creating a shimmering reflection.

My family and I finally leave our small hotel room, making our way to the lobby. The walls filled with paintings of seashells that give the plain white walls more pop. These paintings, with their mix of soft and vibrant colors, seem to tell stories of their own, adding a touch of color to the surroundings. We quickly gather the last-minute essentials, extra towels and sunscreen preparing for the adventures awaiting us.

Down at the beach, we are greeted by the refreshing scent of the ocean and the familiar calls of seagulls, annoying yet strangely comforting. We eagerly search for the perfect spot on the shore, eventually settling on a bright blue beach mat with light pink stripes, a contrast against the tan sand. I pull out my trusty Banana Boat sunscreen, relaxing under the shade of our umbrella, shielded from the early morning sun. My gaze is caught by the deep blue waves crashing against one another, a beautiful sight. The sound of laughter and shouts fill the air.

Stepping into the water, I feel the sharp rocks and seashells pinch my feet as the waves crash around me. Dark green seaweed floats around my ankles, along with white foam that looks like toothpaste squeezed from a tube. With each rise and fall of the waves, I am lifted and carried, the feeling as if I'm floating in the sky soaring right through the clouds. As the waves quiet down, I find myself lying back, basking in the warmth of the sun and the gentle morning breeze.

The sand beneath me, made of billions of tiny rocks yet so soft and shimmery. I gather some in a bright yellow bucket with a green sea turtle imprinted on it; its dark blue handle reminds me of the ocean's deep blue water. With each handful of sand, I create a pretty sandcastle, decorated with tiny white seashells of all shapes and sizes. The other sandcastles decorating the beach are all different, each one unique, full of creativity and imagination.

My surroundings are full of beautiful moments: the pretty water, the bright sun shining down at me, and the sand castles decorating the beach. These precious memories always have a place in my heart and will never be forgotten, my favorite place, my safe place, a home I never had.
Reigan Davis, F7
LET US CELEBRATE NEW YORK
Ella Winterbotham, F6

Let us celebrate New York.
Let us dress her in a shawl of silken stars,
take in her bustling avenues and bright nights.
Let us gawk at the pastries displayed
in the delicate glass windows and inhale the mouthwatering
smells of fresh baked bread
until her bakeries close.
Let us hear her bittersweet calls and play her golden music.
Let us frolic in Times Square, watch the time as it flies by,
and dance in the spring breeze.
Let us waltz in her arms,
holding her close
in our hands and our hearts.
The oddest thing about Today is that Yesterday is always looming right behind, threatening to take Today into its shadowy clutches.

Or maybe the oddest thing about Today is that the Time Turner always seemed to be three minutes late to the Clock Tower. The citizens of Today were always woken three minutes late, but they never knew that. They woke to the time the Time Turner adjusted the fine golden cogs in the Clock Tower, moving the great, giant hand in the clockface of the Clock Tower.

The citizens of Today relied on the Time Turner to turn the cogs to make the great clock hand turn.

If he didn’t do his job, the Bird Maker would be late to his flying appointments; the Leaf Tracker would never be able to tell which leaves should be distributed during Autumn and which should be distributed in spring, as the leaves would leave before she got up.

No one knows if Today could ever function correctly without the Time Turner and the Clock Tower. If the Time Turner never turned the technological contraption that is the cogs, the stories of Today may have never been told.

However, no one seemed to acknowledge the Cog Cleaner, who carefully cleaned the cogs every morning, even before the Time Turner got up to turn the golden cogs. The Cog Cleaner often had trouble waking up due to the fact that he had to wake up before the *clang, clang, clang* of the Clock Tower.

The Cog Cleaner was tasked with the strenuous job of cleaning every one of the golden cogs in the Clock Tower, making sure none of them ever rusted and replacing the ones that did with finer, newer golden cogs.

This morning, the Cog Cleaner woke and got up out of his bed and exited his small home, which was reminiscent of a small janitor’s closet with just enough room for a bed and a wooden nightstand, along with several cleaning supplies he’d collected over years of cleaning cogs in the Clock Tower. The Cog Cleaner made his way to the Clock Tower for the morning’s cleaning.

Today was rather quiet, as a fresh batch of birds had just been made in Yesterday and shipped to Today but had not been taught to sing or tweet just yet. It seemed that the Wind Whistler had already shipped the whistling winds to Tomorrow, as the wind in Today was fresh and quiet. So the morning remained silent, with the exception of the Cog Cleaner’s footsteps and the rare rumble of the darkening clouds above.
The Cog Cleaner continued on, his steps echoing throughout the emptied streets of Today. Finally, the Cog Cleaner was at the entrance to the Clock Tower, a large stone structure, and he opened the door.

Stairs upon stairs upon stairs greeted the Cog Cleaner, their wooden creaking a familiar greeting to him. Climbing carefully up the rickety wooden stairs to the higher levels of the grand tower, the Cog Cleaner went to his work. Cleaning a cog here, polishing one there, and occasionally replacing a rusted cog as he worked his way up the tower.

Finally, nearing the end of his work, the now exhausted Cog Cleaner decided to sit down and rest for a while. After all, cleaning, polishing, and replacing each and every one of the golden cogs would be tiring work for anyone in Today. Resting his head on the stone walls of the Clock Tower, the Cog Cleaner let out a small, relieved sigh. The gentle silence of the Clock Tower calmed the weary man, allowing him to finally rest…

Suddenly, the Cog Cleaner’s eyes jolted open, panic surfacing to his chest. It was impossible to think that seconds ago it had been quiet.

The Cog Cleaner was used to hearing the subtle clang of the Clock Tower, not such an explosion of ear splitting noise. He sat up, feeling the stairs shaking beneath him as the clocktower exploded. Grasping the wall to support himself, the Cog Cleaner made his way up the stairs in a frenzy.

Had he finished cleansing the cogs? If one was rusted or broken, it would ruin the entirety of the towering tower. In fact, a slight deformity in a cog would cause the tower to fail.

CRACK…

His eyes widened. A small, bronzed cog fell down from its place along the walls with a click and a clatter.

CRACK…

Another cog fell to the stairs, shaking as the clanging of the tower continued. More cracking and falling, but the Cog Cleaner could only stand, petrified on the wooden stairs. It was his life’s work, failing because he had failed to clean the cogs.

Like a sailor on his sinking ship, he stayed, until the floorboards at his feet gave out, and he fell.

Down, down, down…
…until there was nowhere left to fall. He landed hard on his back on stone floor. If only it was coated in feathers, like the Bird Maker’s workshop, maybe then he would have been able to get up. He felt sparks of pain, igniting his entire body. The Cog Cleaner closed his weary eyes to a dark, empty void.

This had to be an attack from Yesterday, there was no other possibility. The confused civilians of Today gathered around the fallen Clock Tower, shaken by the cataclysmic catastrophe. Lucky, the Time Turner, had made it out of the tower in time. Such a valuable asset to Today couldn’t be lost to his own tower. Nobody in the mass noticed the Cog Cleaner in the mountain of rubble and fallen wood…

The oddest thing about Today is that Yesterday is always looming right behind, threatening to take the Today into its shadowy clutches. Or maybe, it was the sudden feeling of dread that hung in the air…
Gracie Johnson, F8

Guillermo Kypuros, F8

George Smiley, F8

Calypso Fox, F8
Under my bed is a box full of dolls, with houses of cloth and cardboard walls.

Some of my dolls are straight from the fifties with black A-line dresses like Breakfast at Tiffany’s,

But the girl all the kids want to choose is the doll in the poodle skirt and matching saddle shoes.

It isn't hard to tell when my mother arrived some of my dolls look like Madonna revived.

They’re all decked out in their neon and fringe. One has roller skates and hair that’s all singed.

Along with her, many have fallen. Their hair comes off in clumps like cedar oak pollen.

Maybe it was the bleach or excessive trimming; perhaps it was that one time I took them all swimming…

The dolls I always thought were fantastic were a new kind from the store made with cool hard plastic.

A box of dolls lays under my bed, the one with a canopy some of my own and some from my family.
I am thrilled for the afternoon. It's after school, and the sunlight glimmers on the grass. The leaves fall and eventually glide their way to the rugged ground. The birds chirp all around me. I walk and think about how the day was and what’s next for the day ahead of me. I stroll to the park, like all my worries were just thrown out of a window. My troubled thoughts gone.

The walk to the park is always relaxing. The sidewalk seems worn and aged, large cracks peeking out of the cement. Placed half a mile next to my house, it's close to a river that flows for miles. This happens because of the absence of any preservation of the road. The environment is wrapping around its unpolished street. Mother nature's roots strangle the road to the point where it could collapse at any point. It’s just me, my dogs, and that old sidewalk. This is a moment that seems like it will last forever.

Flowers grab the roots of the mountain like trees. The trees seem to reach to the tip of the sky and then beyond. The roots of the trees hold the ground with all their might. The buzzing of the bees are all around me. They have no awareness of the world around them, just flying around without any worries. The vibrant flowers blossom to their fullest, their colors emerging from the rich soil. The ants march to the next fallen berry. I observe my dogs running and rolling around in the muddy grass. The squirrels taunt my dogs, as they run up the elongated trees. My dogs scratch the tree as if they could jostle the squirrels from the tree limbs. This forest makes me feel like anything could happen, even the unthinkable.

As I run down through the park, the wind blows against my face. I feel as if it is just me and that field. Just me and the grass. The squirrels hop from tree branch to tree branch, weighing the flimsy twigs down. Soccer games are being played everywhere I look. The scratchy, dried grass dances in the wind.

I look to where I was before and reflect on how far I have come and on the wonders I saw. My dogs prance around the grass, sneezing every so often. They chase each other through the grass as if they are wind-up toys let loose. They stop every now and then, and try to hypothesize what animal was here before them. They stop, and look around and slowly start to bathe in the glittering sunlight. I think this could fuel the whole world with joy.

I sit and reflect, petting my dogs in the grass. This place makes me feel as if it is the most wonderful park in a country of great parks, and I feel more at home here than anywhere else.
ODE TO SCOUT

Harper Robbins, F6

He is like a bear
waking up from hibernation
when he gets up
early in the morning.
I look down from my squeaky top bunk
and see him sitting there
waiting for me to come down.
His eyes shine like Christmas lights
when I climb down the ladder.
As I walk down the dim hallway,
he follows me.
On this chill Saturday morning,
we walk into the cluttered
family room to see what is playing on TV. I sit on the gray
worn-out couch, and
Scout hops up next to me.
He licks me rapidly and smoothly
as if I was his ice cream cone.
He is with me almost every minute of the day.
If Scout was Michelangelo,
I would be his Sistine Chapel.
People don’t lie on the dirt enough
and let the bugs crawl up their hair,
bask their tense shoulders in the sun’s apricity,
play with a narrow twig they felt under their palm,
press their bones into sharp pebbles,
and think,
I am at peace.

People don’t sit in a dark closet enough
and get acquainted with the rhythm of their heartbeat,
smell mustiness left behind by clothes their parents haven't worn in years,
antangle a box of hopeless Christmas lights,
squint at interesting shapes in the corner,
and think,
I am at peace.

People don’t open old shoeboxes enough
and run their fingers over the dusty labels,
finger though letters family thought important to keep,
pull out a picture of their grandmother with blond, waist length hair,
worry that their moments will one day be kept in a box,
and think,
I am at peace.

People don’t gaze at old portraits enough
and speculate what the look in the muse’s eyes meant,
drink tea in the same china the woman hanging above did,
get jealous because her future is known,
feel the bumpy texture of the canvas scratch tips of their fingers,
and think,
I am at peace.

People don’t dine by themselves enough
and set the table with the sharp side of the knife facing in,
empty a juice box into a fancy cup,
watch the sun sink into hills while cutting into half-frozen tv dinners,
leave the mess on the table to be tomorrow's problem,
and think,
I am at peace.
People don’t snoop enough
and use what they find to forgive their family,
open a round box to find a blond wig made out of real, waist length hair,
pocket a wheat penny that was dropped between two floorboards,
read diaries eight years after the second World War ended,
and think,
I am at peace.
IN THE NEGATIVES

Turin Bradley, F7

I was half awake by the time I had finished working. I walked out of my office and
down the hall to the elevator. Getting in, I noticed a button I had never seen before. It matched all
the others, but it was labeled -1. I had never seen something this bizarre, but I was curious so I
had pressed it expecting to see a basement. The lights flickered and I felt as though I was free
falling. All of a sudden, it slowed down and I was met with a dimly lit complex of what seemed
to be a never-ending basement littered with metal scraps and pipes exceeding from this labyrinth.
I stepped out to get another look. There was a flicker of red behind the pipes and I turned to step
back into the elevator, only the elevator was not there.

Panic struck me. I dove behind a pipe. There was a humanoid figure with elongated
arms and legs and a head that split open as it breathed. I held back a scream as it approached the
spot where I had once been. I did not know if it was hostile or not, I did not dare find out. Its
malformed head opened up and it let out a wail that echoed through the corridors. I carefully laid
down, feeling the wave of exhaustion hit me after the panic wore off. I closed my eyes.

I awoke and stretched but my hand hit a piece of metal and I felt the fierce memories
of that horrible monster. The creature was no longer in sight, I was thirsty and there was no
longer a reason to stay hidden. Carefully, I stood up and looked around. I saw the wall where the
elevator once had been. I stroked the piece of concrete wall, puzzled. Something caught my eye.
I looked over and saw light reflect off of a piece of metal. The metal was sharp, and I picked up a
pipe and wire to fit the pieces together. I felt slightly safer with his makeshift knife. I suddenly
felt a burst of hunger and thirst. I started wandering through the labyrinth of copper pipes and
concrete walls in search of eat or drink.

I walked for what felt like miles. I do not know how long it took because I had lost all
sense of time. My thirst and hunger had drastically intensified. I spotted a crate on the floor.
Frantically, I grabbed my knife and pried open the crate. There was a vest, around ten small cans
of tuna, an empty water bottle, and some small orange rocks. I immediately tore into the tuna
without hesitation and ate four tins of it before stopping myself to ration it. Unfortunately, after
my hunger left, the most prominent feeling was thirst. Grabbing the water bottle, I heard a faint
drop of water. I walked towards it and headed down a row of stairs to a slightly darker area. The
area narrowed down to a worn out couple of rooms and a sign saying: FLOOR -2.

I ignored it and focused on the sound. I found a small stream of water leaking from a
pipe. As I opened my water bottle, a mildly disgusting scent emerged, and I rinsed it in the water.
The water looked safe to drink and clean. I cleaned my water bottle, and once I was done, I filled
it to the brim and drank out of it. It had a slightly metallic taste, making me question whether
drinking it was a good choice. I walked up to find the stairs but they were no were to be found. I
sighed and took in this new environment.

Looking around, I noticed that there was an out-of-place door. I was hesitant at first, but I
opened it. There was a small sealed box with small text written in a language that was unlike
anything I had ever seen. Struggling to puzzle together this unknown language, I had lost
thought about the contents of the box. I looked at the box wondering what it contained before
discovering the ground was soaked in a black liquid. More of the black liquid was pouring from
the box. To my terror, the liquid formed another humanoid shape, but pitch black and no facial features. I bolted out of there as fast as I could. My lungs struggled for every breath and my legs were starting to give out. My mouth ran dry. After running for what felt like miles, I got to a new point. This point was a door. A rotating door with a view to the outside. I noticed a car and a parking lot. There was an eerie fog hanging around but I wasted no time.

I sprinted and pushed the rotating door so hard it almost broke I stood in the dark parking lot. I felt ridiculously cold in this bare and uninviting place. I turned back to the doors seeking warmth to hopelessly face the freezing, vast, and empty lot.
THE CREEK
Josie Mewborne, F6

It’s a cool summer morning walk, my dogs trot beside me down the road to the creek. The clicking of their claws on the street echo in the empty neighborhood, while my parents stay behind me. Everything is quiet in the early morning, that's why we walk then. We approach the steep, skinny, dirt path leading down to a grassy meadow of tall ferns.

The trail directing us down a small hill threatens us with its No Trespassing signs. The cactus and thistles that scratch at my legs like an angry cat make the dead grass look like a desert despite there being two small, dried-up ponds just ahead of us. The grass looks more overgrown than when I had last seen it. It reaches midway up my calf which is almost double the last time I’ve been here. The trees are just dark enough to see all the bugs. Mosquitos and gnats dart across the treeline.

As I reach the small forest, there are little rocks and fossils lining the trail into the woods. I can see tire marks in the mud from an unlucky biker. The trees make a soothing rustle as if they are trying to lull me back to sleep. They form low branchy arches above the path, while dry yellow-green vines long withered, run across them and let rays of sunlight pass through their leaves.

I look up at the sky and see four redtail hawks circling above me. One sways from the others and glides towards a nearby branch with its bright yellow claws and latches on. The path eventually ends at a concrete road with a yellow line running down the middle, to the right is a bridge and underneath are a few arches; because of the recent flood I can't get to that part as it is all covered with a foot of murky water. The left goes to Los Patios which is where we walk to get Cookies n’ Cream ice cream before we start walking back home.

I think about nothing at all as bikers pass beside me. Squirrels' feet click and clack across the arch shaped branches, while I walk slowly with my dogs. Back to my house, back to the real world.
FOEVER SECOND
Lucy Muhlig, F8

What would you do if you were the second man
who went to the moon?

Engraved in history as the second best?

Your only fault being you existed last.

Would you make them remember or would you succumb?

“I was there too! you’d say.

But you took a smaller step.

Your giant leap was no great feat
as it had already been done
by the great number one.

You helped in your own special way,

but no one remembers unless you’re obsessed.

The man who is remembered as second best.
Colt Kleberg, F8

Meggie Blecher, F8
Embracing culinary exploration expands our personal horizons. Delving into a variety of foods introduces us to a captivating world of flavors and experiences, offering a fresh perspective that goes outside our comfort zone. Although welcoming the unknown may pose initial challenges, opening ourselves to cultures and their customs allows us to savor and appreciate the world.

On a family trip to Mexico, we visited many locations, including an underground cave-like restaurant hidden near the Teotihuacan Pyramids. As soon as we were seated I noticed the vibrant tapestries on the wall, after we ordered our plates, they came out one by one. Our plates arrived with extreme attention to detail. My dad's steak arrived first, bursting with flavor. My mom's chicken enchiladas came next drenched in delicious sauce. For me, I chose the simple but complex quesadilla.

My eyes fixated on four simple tacos in the middle of the table. I noticed a little guacamole seeping out of the edges of the tacos. I noticed my dad grab one of them and take a bite out of it. After taking a bite, he revealed that the tacos had grasshoppers. I held back my initial reaction. I tried to ignore the tacos and instead, focused on finishing my quesadillas. The cheese, gooey goodness, was melting, while the tortilla had the perfect amount of crispiness.

Before I knew it I looked down at my empty plate and had already eaten it all. I was still hungry. I glanced at the grasshoppers. Once again my mom took a taco for herself. Now there were only two tacos left. I thought of asking for another creamy and crunchy quesadilla, but couldn’t help but look at the tacos again.

Conflicting feelings filled my brain. Should I risk it? What if the grasshopper ruins the moment? I stared at the tacos; each passing second amplifying the drumming of my heart. My family's chatter became distant as I grappled with a surge of conflicting emotions — curiosity tugging at me, caution holding me back, eventually, after what felt like an eternity of decision-making. I picked up one of the tacos, held it up to my mouth for a split second of hesitation, and took a bite.

The taste evolved from an initial shock to a sense of acceptance and accomplishment as I chewed. Each reluctant bite felt like conquering a tiny fear, a step into uncharted territories. My family's surprise mirrored my own, and in that moment, I wasn't just eating a grasshopper; I was challenging my own boundaries, and accepting something new.

I eventually finished the taco; reached straight for the pitcher of lemonade and poured myself a full — and I mean a full — glass of lemonade. The glass met my lips, and with each gulp, a wave of satisfaction was washed over me. A burst of citrusy freshness transported me to the warmth of a summer's day.

After we finished our meal, I found myself carrying not just the lingering taste of grasshoppers, but also a newfound appreciation for embracing the unfamiliar. In the form of exotic dishes or unexpected challenges. The experience extended beyond the
flavors on the dinner table, transforming into a broader lesson. Each dish on the menu became a testament to the creativity and heritage of a community proud to share its flavors with the world. In doing so, they invited us to unlock a world of diverse tastes, experiences, and understanding, breaking free from the constraints of the known and enjoying the thrill of the unknown.
**THIS IS ME!**

Saanvi Goyal, F6

They see dark skin.

I see an Indian kid who grew up speaking Hindi saying “jaldi karo” and “Ek minute Mumma!”

They see a sixth grader.

I see someone who grew up in the tipis group, the five families who have known me since I was six. Now I’m in eleven, and they’re still my best friends.

They see a ponytail.

I see hair damaged from tight braids in Bharatnatyam and watching my sister do her amazing arangetram and the thoom, thoom, thoom of her strong feet on the Carver stage.

They see a smile

I see the smile of satisfaction when my family and I nail a complex flavor when we cook together.

They see a familiar face.

I see my grandparents, Nani and Nanu, my Maasis, Didis, and Bhayas who made me who I am today.

They see big ears.

I see my chunky black headphones. Billie Eilish, Broadway, and Bollywood playing into them

They see hunched over posture.

I see the gingerbread dough in our Kitchenaid mixing away. Chh chh chh. Waiting for them to come out of the oven, hunched over, annoyed they take so long.

They see the outside.

I see the people who built me. Family, friends, teachers. I see everything. The inside, the outside, and everything in between. I know me. I see Saanvi.
MY KINDNESS IS A SUNRISE
Sofia Hernandez, F7

My kindness is a sunrise, slow and peaceful.
Above the cool earth, it glows with its yellow eyes, radiantly.
The shining fills my heart;
glory and truth, together we share the memories.

Beautiful and big, its bright beams glow far-
a splatter of colors, like a beautiful painting.
With warming heat, the sun’s “Sizzle” reflects on the Earth,
kind people, together we share their experiences.

Each rise marks a new day, with ideas bigger than a castle.
More memories we make; they shine through, lovely.
My kindness is a sunrise, a thing so great,
in its deepest sparkle, together we share your beauty.
Glasses, either oversized or fractured, and unusually formal or obscure wear are caricatures our media knows well. Take Harry Potter (pre-Hogwarts), Lisa Loud, and Poindexter, for example. Even outside of America, every country usually has some trope of a loner loser whom none can stand. Nerds in the media I consumed in elementary school were always just that, so when I had to start wearing glasses, having braces, and gaining special interests, I worried. I wanted the very human desire of friends, and this seemed to be a horrid dead stop in that plan, but through the years, I’ve realized that, for me, the term “nerd” fits me like a glove: a fanatic of a subject.

“Nerd” started out as a substitute for square or drip, akin to ‘geek’ or ‘vanilla’, in the 1950s. It was targeted toward people who had particular interests, sometimes coming across as over-engrossed in them to an annoying degree. Even now, the word is still used with that definition, but through the rise of interest groups, especially through the internet, nerd culture has become much more publicly accessible, recognized, and respected. Through this development, the word “nerd” has taken on a meaning more similar to someone with vast knowledge about a subject(s), and is often an enthusiast of said thing(s).

Many have been led to believe that nerd culture consists of lepers and pariahs indulging in the disturbing and odd. Through mentalities like these, nerds are shunned. They are told their interests are strange or taboo, or that relating to hobbies are frivolous and fruitless. Any subject that checks standard moral and legal standards is welcome to be indulged in, and there are many careers: content creation, archive officials, and artists among them.

All this is to say that a nerd is not inherently someone at the bottom of society. There are very successful people in all fields that fancy themselves nerds, and even the nerds that aren’t as fortunate are often not because of the term. For anyone that needs to hear this, I say be whatever your legal and moral self entails. You’ll end up much happier in the end if you follow it.
ODE TO LACROSSE
Santos Vargas, F6

On the field, I hear
the stomping of the cleats on the green turf grass.
The calls for the ball come from all directions.
The “chh” of catching the ball,
while it lands in the armor-looking pocket of my lacrosse stick
while the ball accelerates through the air.

I snag it with my stick like Jerry Rice,
catching it over three people.
Then I shoot it like my life depends on it.
The ball reminds me of a missile:
fast, speedy, explosive, and dangerous
while it soars through the air.
The adrenaline courses through me.

My heart pounds as if Mike Tyson is punching it; then,
silent like they just saw a ghost.
It feels like an eon before I hear the sacred sound.
And then, “ding!” the ball hits the pipe and goes in the goal!
The crowd rumbles like we had just won the NBA championship.
I have never felt better in my life.
And then I realize the game has just started.
Bo Miller, F8

Creed Childs, F8
FOUR TARTS
Diya Nair, F7

Lucky was greeted by an envelope of heat and steam as she opened the steel oven. She smelled the sweetness of the tarts as she placed them on the counter, followed by a thump. She hummed happily as her finger traced the golden-brown crusts with a sweet desire. The light peeked through her silky blue curtains falling on her tarts, making them shine. The grains of sugar slowly slid off her hands as they fell on the tart with a quiver. She lifted each tart with such pride and admiration, examining each crevice, each intricate detail, before setting each one down and was satisfied.

As she walked through the kitchen, the light made a halo around her face, her emerald green eyes glowing. She felt the smoothness of the doorknob as she opened it to a click. She stepped outside, feeling the sunshine on her pale skin, dropping her knees to see the lush green that was spread before her. She lifted her plastic, pale pink watering can and spread the gift of water to each plant.

The plants seemed to squeal with joy as they reached their leaves out, followed by a cry of pain. Lucky felt her forehead with her hand. Her hand was covered in warm blood. She looked up and noticed that just outside, four boys with stones were running away.

"Witch!" the boys called, just as they were out of her view. She slowly smiled, stood up and walked inside her house. She closed the door softly, and took a small slip of paper. She grabbed a red pen and wrote:

Reminder - Time to make a new batch of tarts

She grabbed her black cloak, her favorite black hat, and left her house.

*   *   *

The next morning when Lucky woke up, she still had her apron on, stained with red. She unfolded her newspaper and saw the headline: Four boys missing from the village. She smirked and walked into her kitchen. She opened her oven to find four golden tarts and took them out. She sprinkled them with her favorite chocolate balls, her green eyes glowing as she happily hummed and took a small bite.

2023-2024
THE HOLIDAY BREAK
Sharzeh Jafferali, F7

As the final school day draws to a close, a palpable sense of liberation permeates the air. Stepping outside of school, your cold breath mingles with the sweet strains of Christmas music, creating an atmosphere of undeniable comfort. This winter break unfolds like a cherished gift, a welcomed pause button in the relentless rhythm of our everyday lives, giving us an exceptional hiatus.

The first morning of this vacation is a symphony of relief. The persistent chime of the alarm clock is replaced by the gentle rustle of curtains stirred by the wintry breeze outside. Time becomes a luxurious commodity, with each moment akin to a blank canvas awaiting the vibrant hues of leisure.

Synonymous with coziness, the winter break invites the embrace of warm blankets, the indulgence in hot chocolate, and the enjoyment of the crackling warmth emanating from a fireplace. It heralds the season of fuzzy socks and oversized sweatshirts, a time for sinking into a comfortable armchair and indulging in the guilt-free pleasure of binge-watching favorite series, liberated from the nagging voice of responsibility.

The holiday season, with its twinkling lights and festive decorations, adds an extra layer of magic to this respite. It becomes a time for gatherings, a period for creating memories destined to be revisited with a fond smile for years to come. As winter break unfolds, it is not merely a break from routine; it is a celebration of joy, warmth, and the simple pleasures that make this season so special.