




SAN JUAN UNIFIED LITERARY MAGAZINE

IDENTITY 2024 VOLUME 1





Ace Owen is an emerging artist from Sacramento, California, who conveys themes of reflection through experimentation. He works in a variety of mediums such as oils, acrylics, graphite, and more to express himself as much as possible.

Cover Art

Typewriter 44

Oil on Paper

SAN JUAN UNIFIED LITERARY MAGAZINE

Identity

San Juan Unified School District

Volume 1

Spring 2024

Editor

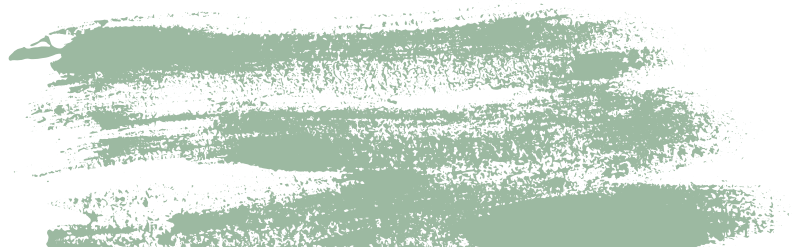
Julia Clauson

**TOSA, Equity
and Student
Achievement**

Amy Day

**TOSA,
Professional
Learning**

Rachel Nguyen



EDITORIAL

I've always believed that writing is one of the most powerful forms of self-expression. Writing broadens our perspectives, empowers both writers and readers, and connects us to one another. The submissions included in our first edition highlight the voices of high schoolers across the San Juan Unified School District as writers, poets, and changemakers. I am so proud of this collection of short stories, poems, essays, and more, and I feel privileged to be able to share them with you.

I was inspired to create this literary magazine because writing has always been my safe space, and I know that countless other high schoolers feel the same. I have been lucky enough to meet so many talented writers and poets across the school district, and I wanted to have an opportunity to celebrate their work. Everyone's voice deserves to be heard and uplifted. This magazine is the culmination of the hard work of writers, volunteer readers, and our incredible leadership team. The theme for this edition is identity, and I picked this theme to explore the diverse perspectives, backgrounds, and experiences of high schoolers in our district. With this publication, we celebrate the incredible range of interpretations of the theme, and the endless talent of the student artists. I feel so fortunate to be able to read the works of my peers and commemorate their artistry.

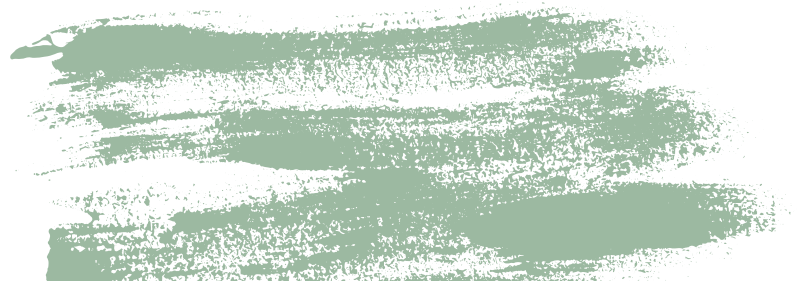
This magazine would never have been possible without the invaluable support of Rachel Nguyen and Amy Day. I met Ms. Nguyen in my sophomore year in the Bella Vista Writing Club, and for the past two years, she has been incredibly kind and encouraging. Her mentorship has allowed me the opportunity to create the district-wide magazine. The rubric, reading panel, and realization of this project wouldn't have been possible without her. Likewise, the magazine wouldn't have been the same without the indispensable help of Amy Day and the Equity & Student Achievement team. Ms. Day has devoted her time, energy, and hard work to making this magazine a reality. She has taken this project further than I ever imagined, and continues to support and inspire myself and student leaders across the district. The contributions of these two amazing women are why the literary magazine exists today.

I would like to thank Superintendent Melissa Bassanelli, who has supported this project from the very beginning. Her leadership and commitment to amplifying student voices empowers me, and her support for this literary magazine impacts writers across the district. Additionally, I am eternally grateful for the kindness and encouragement of Lori Vine, who was the first person I approached with my idea for the magazine. She has always worked to prioritize student voice and leadership, and I am so appreciative for the work she has done to support my endeavors.

Our team has much appreciation for Omar Field-Ridley, Heather Brandt, and Nicole Kukral, whose support of this project made it possible. Additionally, I can't express my gratitude enough to all of the supportive teachers and staff at Bella Vista and the Writing Club. I'd like to acknowledge the Writing Club officers, Mekenze Walden and Gillian Rossi, for their help and hard work. Furthermore, thank you to Principal Irwin, Mrs. Sowa, Mr. Stephen, Ms. Arnold, and Mr. Leach. I appreciate the support of Ms. Mitchell, our incredible Writing Club advisor. To Ace Owens, thank you for making our beautiful cover art. Finally, thank you to the friends and family who are always cheering me on, especially Diane and her family, Carol, Natalia, Simar, Julia H., and Gabriella. Of course, a resounding thank you to my incredible parents, who first instilled a love of reading in me, and always encouraged me to make my dreams a reality.

To the writers who shared their work with us and filled this magazine with their art, thank you. Your voice is important. Your art is valuable. Write on, and dream on.

Sincerely,
Julia Clauson
Founder and Editor
Bella Vista High School
Class of 2025



HELP RESOURCES

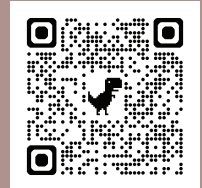
SUPPORT FOR LGBTQ+ INDIVIDUALS

San Juan Unified School District aims to provide school sites the resources and support to meet the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth and families. For questions or additional support, please go to <https://www.sanjuan.edu/lgbtq> or contact LGBTQ@sanjuan.edu.



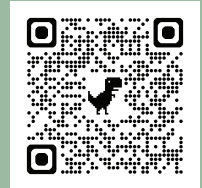
SEXUAL ABUSE OR ASSAULT

RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network) is the nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization. Call their National Sexual Assault Hotline 800.656.HOPE, or visit online.rainn.org.



BODY IMAGE, DISORDERED EATING

ANAD, the National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders, is the leading nonprofit in the U.S. that provides free, peer support services to anyone struggling with an eating disorder, regardless of age, race, gender identity, sexual orientation, or background. Call (888) 375.7767, email hello@anad.org, or visit <https://anad.org/>



CRISIS RESOURCES

If you have thoughts of suicide immediately call or text the Suicide Prevention Hotline at 988.

The Crisis Text Line is here for any crisis, including self harm or thoughts of suicide. Text HOME to 741741 from anywhere in the United States, anytime. A live, trained Crisis Counselor receives the text and responds, all from our secure online platform. The volunteer Crisis Counselor will help you move from a hot moment to a cool moment.



06 **Sea Glass - Created by man
and then refined by nature**
Rayn Allen
Bella Vista, Grade 12

07 **Who Am I?**
Sarah Brooks
Bella Vista, Grade 11

08 **Who Defines a Person?**
Marissa Butak-Woods
Bella Vista, Grade 12

09 **"Get to Know Me" Slide**
Jesica Church
El Sereno, Grade 11

10 **The Mourning of the Moon**
Julia Clauson
Bella Vista, Grade 11

13 **"I will never forive
you for this"**
Julia Clauson
Bella Vista, Grade 11

14 **Tomorrow is Now**
Adiya Clurman
Bella Vista, Grade 12

16 **Identity**
Ava Commandatore
Rio Americano, Grade 9

18 **Look**
Madison Delzer
Casa Roble, Grade 10

19 **i am gay**
Dallen Eubanks
Bella Vista, Grade 11

21 **The End of the Beginning**
Ryan Haider
Bella Vista, Grade 9

24 **My Honest Poem**
Az'Jah Jones
Encina, Grade 10

29 **My Monologue**
Bailey Kauffman
El Camino, Grade 11

30 **Как? (How?)**
Roman Kostiuchenko
San Juan High, Grade 12

31 **люблю (I Love)**
Roman Kostiuchenko
San Juan High, Grade 12

32 **Numero 1**
Roman Kostiuchenko
San Juan High, Grade 12

32 **Identity, Identity**
Alexandria Lembach
Casa Roble, Grade 9

33 **Meaning of Identity**
Alyvia V. Martinez
El Sereno, Grade 11

34 **Fortuna**
Emmalee McCurry
Bella Vista, Grade 9

36 **From Home to Here:
Embracing Identity
and Community**
Fraol Mideksa
Mira Loma, Grade 10

37 **Identity Defined**
Alexandria Mitchell
Del Campo, Grade 9

38 **Identity Ballad**
Atias Moore
Casa Roble, Grade 9

40 **City Shepard**
Ace Owen
Bella Vista, Grade 11

41 **the words we are
afraid to say**
Marina Pierson
Bella Vista, Grade 11

43 **Poem**
Maybella Prunty
San Juan High, Grade 11

44 **Identity's Impact**
Eleanor Pyaro
Casa Roble, Grade 9

45 **Identity**
Eva Raczko
Mesa Verde, Grade 9

47 **My True Identity**
Payton Ruggles
El Camino, Grade 12

49 **Snowy Owls**
Miley Ryan
Bella Vista, Grade 10

50 **Kaleidoscope**
Lyn Samuels
El Sereno, Grade 10

52 **My Gender is Improv**
Alex Thomas
Meraki, Grade 11

54 **Solitudes Silk**
Anonymous

55 **Child**
Leo Wallberg
Bella Vista, Grade 11

57 **Endless Echoes in a
Gray Symphony**
Ryland Wilson
Bella Vista, Grade 9

59 **If You Knew Me Well -
For the Misunderstood**
Benji Workman
Bella Vista, Grade 11

60 **Bodies**
Benji Workman
Bella Vista, Grade 11

62 **En Haut, En Haut, et Loin
(Up, Up and Away)**
Anonymous

64 **What is Identity?**
Mark Yadchuk
Bella Vista, Grade 9



Sea Glass - Created by man and then refined by nature

Rayn Allen
San Juan High, Grade 12

The rubble of the ocean floor scrapes against me,
Poseidon's angry waves forbid the reach of air.
The feeling of being segmented will never be matched.

The sea, although foreboding, is rich;
It's given me what I've yearned for in life.
A once-vintage bottle is now a forgotten piece of litter.

A brand new body, a different face.
With new experiences, I hold my core.
I keep my color, just now with a snowy surface.

I've been weathered, tumbled smooth by the sea.
To be transformed is to be ignited.
Gifted some purpose, I chose to move.

I leave the sea and I find the shore.
I nestle in among the other pieces of upcycled trash.
"Find me now," I pray, "I'm ready."

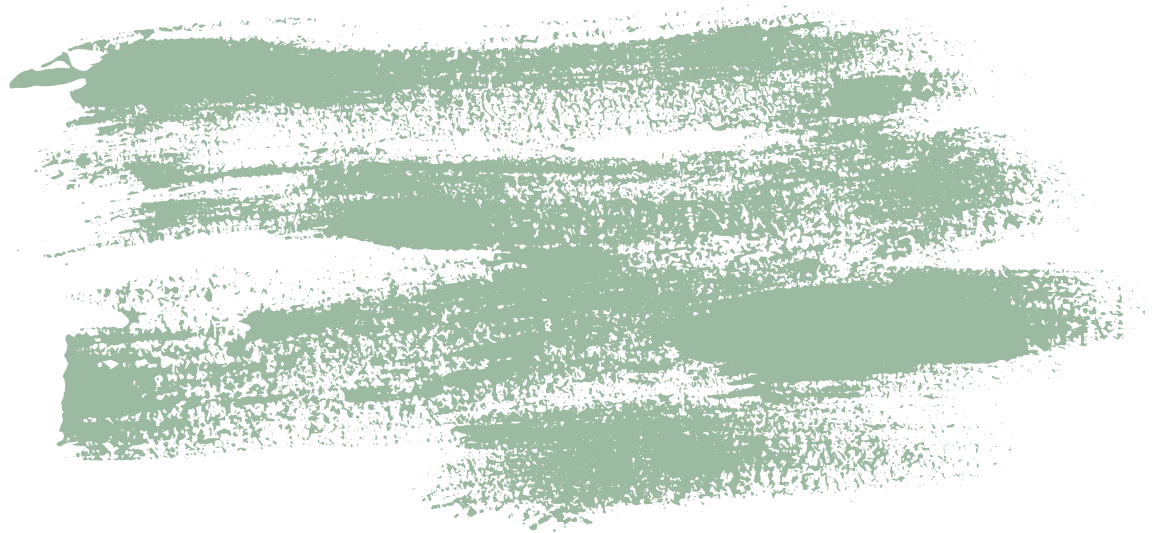
BIOGRAPHY

Rayn Allen, otherwise known as [th1s.us3r.has.pass3d](#) on instagram, is a 17 year old poet who hopes to inspire others with her writing. This poem Sea Glass is about how one's identity changes overtime and what may seem unimportant to someone, is a treasure observed in museums for another.

Who Am I?

Sarah Brooks
Bella Vista, Grade 11

"Who am I, if not a writer!" he bellowed. Who was he, his face was bright red, spit flung from his lips and his crazed eyes were bloodshot. Who was he, a monster? He was a monster without writing and a ghost with it. Silently distant, dismissive of anything but the presence of his pen and paper. Rather than the slamming of cabinets and the flickering of lights there was the scratching of pen on paper and the tapping, typing of keys. I knew distantly that he was still screaming, I knew he was only turning redder, his teeth becoming sharper, if he got any louder I could imagine my ears beginning to ring. A monster was what he was. "Who am I!" he screamed.





What Defines a Person?

Marissa Butak-Woods
Bella Vista, Grade 12

What defines a person? Well there may be many different answers. Depending on who you ask you'll get answers anywhere from faith to the things we leave behind or just our impact. Well I think it's more complicated than that. Identity, who we are, is more. We are so many things, we are complex, and that's the beauty of it. That's what makes someone whole.

"Get to Know Me" Slide

Jesica Church
El Sereno, Grade 11

When writing a "Get to know Me" slide for school,
everything about a person's identity is chosen
Favorite music, school subjects, clothes, friends,
We sit there in a small stuffy classroom deciding
how we want others to perceive us
Sometimes to fit in, sometimes to stand out, be different
Instead identity is who we are as a person

Who are we?
What do we believe?
How are we better than some?
How are we worse than others?
I want people to know me

Not only for what band I like
But why I like that band
Why I have emotionally connected with these lyrics
Why sometimes at night when I lay in my room crying
And the fan is the only constant sound of comfort in my room
And I decide to play this one song
Because someone out there actually gets what it is like to be me

The Mourning of the Moon

Julia Clauson
Bella Vista, Grade 11

For the stranded astronaut, the world spun slowly. She stood on the edge of a ridge, just as the sun began to rise. Moondust was soft beneath her boots, and in her two-hundred fifty-four days on the moon, she had come to appreciate the moon's solemn beauty. There was a stoicism to it, and it was here, standing on this ridge, that the woman had come to accept her inevitable fate.

The year was 1968, and she was the first woman—the first person, she thought to herself—to land on the moon. But no one knew. Her ship had crashed into a crater, destroying her comms and radio. Her crew had been killed before she'd even realized the warm liquid trickling down her neck was blood.

She was the only one left. She didn't know how, or why.

When she'd managed to bandage her wounds, she had slipped into her spacesuit, and with trembling hands, she hauled the two bodies out of her broken ship. She pulled them to the edge of the crater, where there was still a view of the Earth. There was no coffin for her fallen friends, no funeral, only moondust and gray.

She did not linger or attempt to say goodbye, because she feared if she did, she would sink to her knees in grief and be unable to move again.

With a numb feeling creeping through her heart, she returned to her spaceship. She spent almost fifteen hours attempting to fix everything that had been broken in the crash, but to no avail. She was a great engineer, but not even she could piece together the scraps she had left.

She fiddled with her radio for nearly two days. Her chest was tight with desperation. "I'm here," she said into the receiver, her voice shaking. "I am still alive."

She repeated the words over and over — I am still alive. I am still alive. I am still alive.

No one answered.

There was nothing more she could do. She would have to wait. Surely someone from Earth would come for her, even if they could not hear her. They would search for her, for her crew.

Wouldn't they?

She waited patiently for rescue. She rationed her food and water, and spent her time finding pieces of her ship to tinker with. She read a book, and because she'd only brought one, she read it again and again, until she had nearly memorized it. Then, she would reenact the scenes, her lips curving in a small smile as she danced around in her ship, shouting the characters' lines.

But, eventually, the hope inside her heart sharpened into a feeling of betrayal. She had waited two-hundred fifty-four days for help, and with each day that passed, the more her despair grew.

And now, she had no food left, and only one liter of water.

She walked to the edge of the ridge, where she could see Earth. She gazed upon the planet, her former home, and abruptly, with explosive anger, she shouted, "I am here! I am alive!"

The Earth did not answer.

She shouted again, and the sound reverberated through the helmet of her spacesuit.

Finally, when her voice broke, and her chest heaved with sobs, she could only whisper: "I am alive."

The sun began to rise, and the light was so bright that she startled and lifted a hand to shield her eyes. The golden glow washed over the moon, and illuminated the bodies lying less than ten feet away from her. They look so peaceful, the woman thought, a tear slipping down her cheek. They do not share my pain.

Maybe, she realized, it was her time to join them.

On the Earth, nothing stays the same.

Nobody would remember her.

But the moon would.

She lowered herself to the edge of the ridge, and watched the sun rise. "I am alive," she whispered to herself, one last time. Then, with steady hands, she unplugged her oxygen.

When death came for her, she closed her eyes, and smiled. The Earth would keep spinning for eternity, cruel and traitorous, but she did not mind.

The moon would mourn for her.



"I will never forgive you for this"

Julia Clauson
Bella Vista, Grade 11

"I will never forgive you for this"

I think to myself

but I will

and you know it too

when the morning comes you will smile

with sugary words rotting at your core

and I will melt with relief

then it will happen again next week

BIOGRAPHY

Julia is a junior at Bella Vista High School. She is the founder of the San Juan Unified literary magazine, and currently serves as the executive director of The Authors of Tomorrow. At Bella Vista she is the president of the Writing Club. She is currently working on her debut novel.

Tomorrow is Now

Adiya Clurman
Bella Vista, Grade 12

The thing about tomorrow is that it is a word full of potential. It's like a gift card for a JC Penney. The thought of it is always more exciting than the result. When you get the gift card for your birthday you're all like "I'm gonna take this card and when I get to that store I'm gonna buy the most beautiful dress, bag, or hat and then I'm gonna strut out of that store feeling amazing!" and then once you get there you find a top and think "oh this is kinda cute" and you don't like it that much, but you have already been here for an hour and there isn't really anything else you want. So you get it along with some jeans cause you do need another pair of jeans and then the line is super long and one woman has a crying toddler, and after like ten minutes of waiting in that stupid line you finally get to checkout and then there's three dollars left on that gift card so you just grab a pair of earrings that cost five bucks that you don't think you will ever wear, but you were already at the end of the line and you don't want to come back to only spend 3 dollars and the earrings were the closest thing to you.

That was my department store obsessed explanation for what tomorrow feels like to me. You have a full 12 hours of sunlight to do anything. You could go to the park. You could fill out that application for that internship you really want. You could finally schedule that dentist appointment you've been putting off. All these things we want to accomplish, but when the day actually comes around we are almost always too tired to do them. So, what we actually end up using those hours for is rest, binging The Simpsons, and playing candy crush while listening to a podcast. We tell ourselves "oh I'll do all of that stuff tomorrow" and we keep saying that because we can, because tomorrow never technically comes, it's not tomorrow it will never be tomorrow, It can only ever be today. And doing anything at all today sounds absolutely exhausting. "No, no" we say to ourselves "I'm too tired today I'll get around to it tomorrow, I'll have more energy then, I'll be happier then, more inspired, I will be a better me tomorrow."

Every day of our life we want to serve up a better tomorrow for ourselves but that can never happen because we never let tomorrow come, we only ever let ourselves be confined by today, so the best way to serve up a better tomorrow is to let tomorrow be now. Tomorrow is right now. It is not a day to come, it is not a future to look forward to, it is the present. So anything we want to do tomorrow we must do right now. We can not continue to expect ourselves to suddenly become better, more energized, more productive people, because the reality is that no matter how much you expect it to happen, you are never going to backflip out of your bed one morning and then accomplish all the things you've been putting off. Future you, present you, and past you are the same person. They all have the same level of motivation and they all get that same feeling of dread when they think about all the things they feel obligated to do. We need to stop putting everything on the shoulders of future us.

This project of what we want to do with our lives has to be finished, and the truth is that we are giving all the work to someone we know will never actually do it. Future us isn't this incredible, awesome, productive person who has healthy smoothies every day for breakfast or does three sets of burpees after going on a jog at seven in the morning. Future you can not be relied on, they are not trustworthy, they are just as lazy, just as stressed and just as much of a procrastinator as present you. We need to let present us tap in. Yes, they are not the idealized person we want to wake up as, but we need to give them more credit and trust them to handle our dreams, goals and let's be real, mostly our everyday inconveniences. So go to the park, start that internship application, schedule that dentist appointment, for the love of God do your laundry. Don't wear that same 49ers shirt for the fourth time this week trust me. You do smell and people do notice. Because the best tomorrow possible is only ever going to be today.

Identity

Ava Commandatore
Rio Americano, Grade 9



Identity is something that's hard to encapsulate. It means so many different things but yet its meaning never really changes. I decided to focus on what identity means to me and how I see others' identities, how I think others affect it and change it, and how my values and identity are linked together. For me these are important to my identity because of how they affect it.

Identity to me means what we think of ourselves, our personality, and how we express ourselves. That's my core identity, what others think of me creates a separate part. I find it hard to find my true identity because the more that I thought about it the more I realized that it means so much. It's like a gigantic umbrella of things or "definitions". Inside that umbrella is your personality, character, individuality, how you express yourself, and so much more. It's who your friends are and what you wear. These things all are your identity. It's never one thing. Each person makes their own identity and highlights one thing that is their core identity. For me it's sports. My identity is based on what sport I'm in at the time and who I'm friends with. I see other people's identities by what they wear and say. The better I get to know people the more I see their core identities. So to me identity is a lot of different things. It's very complex and always changing.

The biggest thing for me about identities is how others affect it. One of the things that I do a lot and I know others do to is change their identity to seem more confident or cool or better. Even when I'm perfectly happy as I am, I'll find myself worrying about how my identity seems to others and how I can change the "bad" parts to be more likable. Sometimes others will affect my identity in surprising ways. For example a year ago me and my friend were in class and there was this one really mean and judgmental girl. We were walking by her when my friend said, "I like your shirt!" I was surprised she said anything because most of the time we both tried to avoid her and her friends, but the girl smiled back and thanked her.

Nothing really prolific happened but for me that changed how I thought about and acted around those people. I feel like a part of my identity changed when I realized instead of not saying anything to those types of people and being standoffish instead I could show them kindness. My friend had indirectly influenced my identity. After that I tried to make myself seem kinder and that affected my identity. Others affecting my identity don't always have to be in negative ways.

My values and identity are so closely linked together I feel like they're almost the same thing now. I value my friends, family, and sports. Those things I've adapted into my identity. I always prioritize my family over anything else. My friends usually directly influence what I do and sometimes how I act. Sports are also a big part of my life. I'm always doing something and they affect my identity. I value honesty and integrity and being kind to others. They show in my identity when I'm interacting with people.


Identity means so many things like your personality and how you interact with others. It's also heavily affected by others and can change. Everyone's identity is unique and it should be respected. Without our identity we would all be the same. So value your uniqueness and remember you're perfect the way you are.

BIOGRAPHY

Ava Commandatore is a 9th grader at Rio Americano High School. She likes to read and write. In her free time she hangs out with her friends or trains for soccer and running.

Look

Madison Delzer
Casa Roble, Grade 10



I look at myself in the mirror
I'm not sure what I'm looking for
I look at my green eyes, or my purple-colored hair
Perhaps it's my many bracelets
My earrings I never wear
Or the fact my hair is boy-cut short
I never used to look the way I do
But if I didn't change, would I still be teased by you?
I'm just me, and that will stay the same
But the fact I exist just adds to your flame
You point or you laugh like it's all worth the while
I'm sitting there, just trying to smile
But day after day and week after day
I realize that you tease me, not because I'm unique
You tease me and others because you don't quite know yourself
So perhaps you should try to look within
Find your strength, your light
Or your kindness and fright
Figure out who you are, and don't hide it away
Which friends will go, and which of those will stay

BIOGRAPHY

Madison is a sophomore at Casa Roble High School. They enjoy writing about experiences that happen to them throughout their life in poem or song, using it as a way to express their emotion or document the experience.

i am gay

Dallen Eubanks
Bella Vista, Grade 11

i am gay

it means that: i, a man, am attracted to other men

it means that i can't dress masculine enough

it means that i can't dress feminine enough

it means that i can't be at girls sleepovers

it means that i can't be at boys sleepovers

it means that i can't play boys sports

it means that i will be asked "are you sure?"

it means that i will be told "as long as you don't like me"

it means i will never be properly represented by media

it means that people will give me dirty looks

it means that i will never get proper sexual education

it means that i won't have a teenage romance

it means that i can't be public about my relationships

it means that i could get hate crimed

it means that i could get assaulted

it means that i am afraid to go to the bathroom in public

it means that i will be called slurs to my face

it means that not everyone will respect me

it means that i could get evicted

in many cities

in many states

in many countries

it means that i could get fired

in many cities

in many states

in many countries

it means that i could be arrested

in many cities

in many states

in many countries

it means that i could be killed

in many cities

in many states

in many countries

it means that i have to fight for my voice

I am gay

and I am proud, but every waking moment there is someone trying
to rip that pride from my hands.



The End of the Beginning

Ryan Haider
Bella Vista, Grade 9

The speed at which my senior year raced by caught me off guard. Maybe it was my focus on the Shadow Knight that occupied so much of my attention and left less room for me to think about my academic progress.

And now, unexpectedly, June had arrived, marking the time for graduation. I looked back on my achievements and found that I had earned a 3.9 GPA. While it wasn't the highest score, it held the potential to open the doors to a decent university for me.

As I was walking toward the graduation venue, I ran into my friend, Trey. So, I greeted him with a friendly "What's up bro?" We exchanged handshakes, a gesture that seemed to carry a feeling of companionship between us.

Notably, he appeared to be on his own today, without the company of his usual large group of friends. However, that gave our interaction a different dynamic, creating a space for a more personal connection which was always rare with Trey.

Responding casually, I said, "Not too much happening, just pretty excited about finally graduating." Then I asked, "How about you? What's been going on? I noticed you're on your own today. What's up with your buddies?"

He responded with a somewhat lackluster tone, "I ended things with them."
"How come?"

Trey shared, "They're just a bunch of drug addicts. I quit doing that stuff a long time ago, I realized I had to move on." After a momentary pause, he asked, "So, how's things on your end? I heard you and Julia called it quits."

"Oh," I sighed, as my eyes drifted into the distance as the memories came back to my mind, "it just didn't work out. I suppose I was caught up in too many things, you know. Too busy for her, I guess you could say," I explained sadly. Trying to change the subject, I asked, "But what about you, Trey? How have things been going for you lately?"

"Not great, I'm single again, just like you. But at least I've got a job now. I'm working at 7-11. It might not be much, but it's enough to get me through. And I've got plans too. I'm thinking of going to Community College first, and from there, who knows? Maybe I'll get a shot at Sacramento State. It's a chance to really study and build something for myself."

"Good to know," I said, staring into the distance once more. I could see the crowd of people already. "Honestly, I'm a bit overwhelmed with where to start, I have so much to do," I confessed. "I was thinking of applying to a college near San Francisco. You know, I don't really want to leave my mother alone."

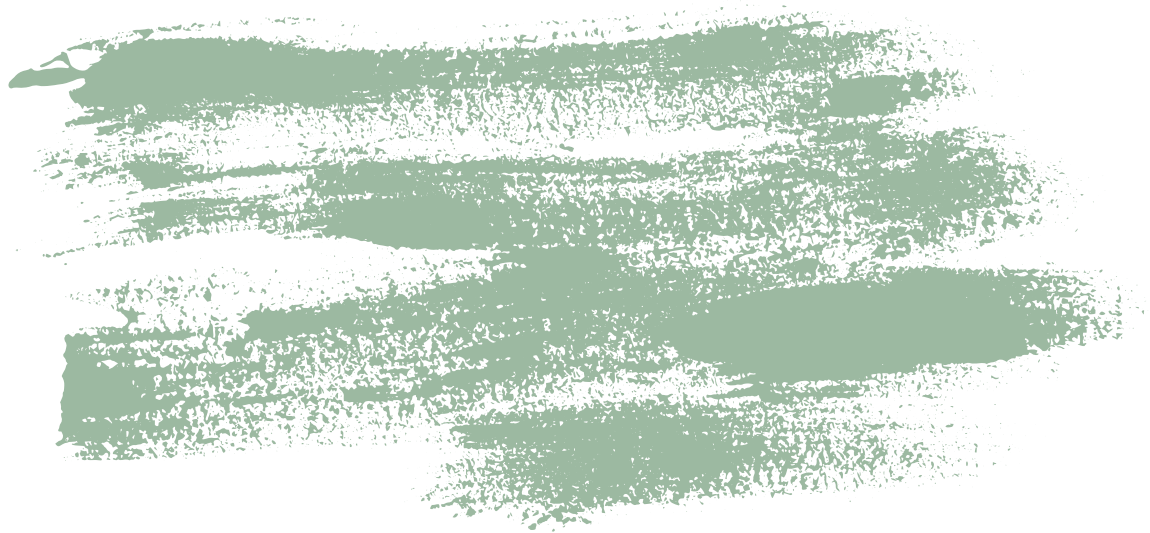
"Oh, that's cool," Trey responded. "Did you end up getting accepted into any college?" A smile spread across my face. "Actually, I received a letter from Stanford just two days ago. Funny thing is, it's the same school my father attended," I added, only to realize afterward that I might have revealed more than I should've. "Very good school," Trey nodded.

Time seemed to slip away unnoticed as we kept walking, and before I realized it, we had arrived at the ceremony venue. I saw my mother and walked over to her. She hugged me and kept repeating how proud she was of me and my accomplishments. I took my seat and the graduation ceremony commenced. After I received my diploma, I was making my way to see my mother when I caught a glimpse of Julia. "Our eyes locked, her dark brown eyes glittering in response. A warm, beautiful smile graced her lips. I smiled back, my heart dancing with a flurry of butterflies that seemed to take flight within me. . .

BIOGRAPHY

Ryan Haider, a 14-year-old freshman at Bella Vista High School, found his passion for writing and reading in 8th grade during his sixth-period creative writing class. Motivated by a spontaneous idea, he ventured into the world of the Shadow Knight and successfully published his debut novel, "The Knight's Shadow I," now accessible on Amazon. The thrill of crafting his first book led Ryan to complete his second book, which is currently in the process of publication.

His writing explores themes of family, plot twists, and action, combined with mystery and suspense into an intriguing blend for readers of all ages to enjoy.



My Honest Poem

Az'Jah Jones
Encina, Grade 10

My name is Az'Jah Jones
I enjoy reading, maybe because I feel as if I'm escaping into a world that is not mine.
I enjoy nature, dancing, music and I am in love with the color green.
I will never tell you more than that.

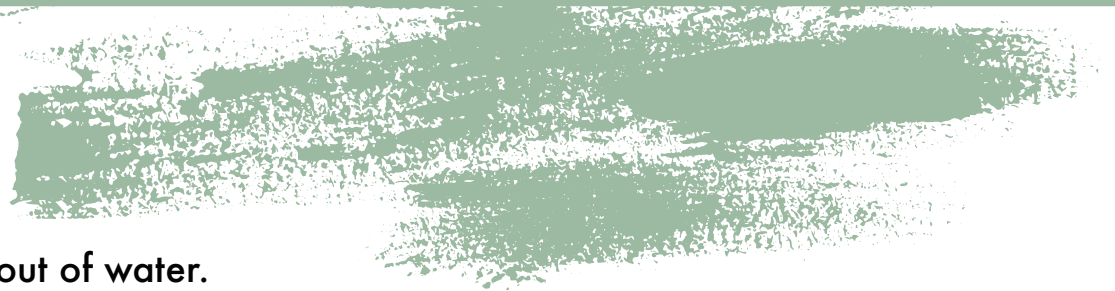
Like my name I'm different in more ways than one.
I have strong points but emotions have never been one.

I hate to be vulnerable.
I don't like to cry,
And I'm scared to get close with anyone.

My smile is my shield.
My laugh is in my control.

And my words are my weapon.
I am a daredevil.
But I don't dare to tell what's deep down.

Sometimes I feel as if the walls are caving down.
I tend to run away from my problems as if they were chasing me.
I enjoy the sounds of the ocean.
It makes me feel as if my worries are washing away with the waves.



Sometimes I feel like a fish out of water.
On the outside I'm smiling and laughing.
Inside I'm begging for help.
I pretend to be as cold and hard as a stone.
But inside I'm as warm and soft as a cloud.

I'm scared to open up.
I'm scared that if I do you will shred me into pieces.
I'm scared that you'll laugh as I cry in pain.

I love others but forget to love myself.
I care so much for those who end up hurting me.
No one will ever know my depression.
It's as if my life is a hole of darkness that I can't escape from.
I sometimes feel like a lost soul without a body to call home.
I find myself calling for someone, for anyone but they never come.

It's funny. I like to be alone but it scares me at the same time.
I'm scared to feel abandoned.
Left alone like I was in the middle of nowhere.
I'm scared to be forgotten,
As if I never existed.

When the pain is too much, I turn numb to my emotions.
It's like I'm there but I'm gone.
Like a ghost with no home I flow with the wind.
I hide my heart scared you'll shatter it to a million pieces.

In my mind I've created a world.
A world without the tears I cry at night.
Without the pain and hurt my heart deals with.
A world filled with happiness.
Without the low self-esteem that has become my friend.

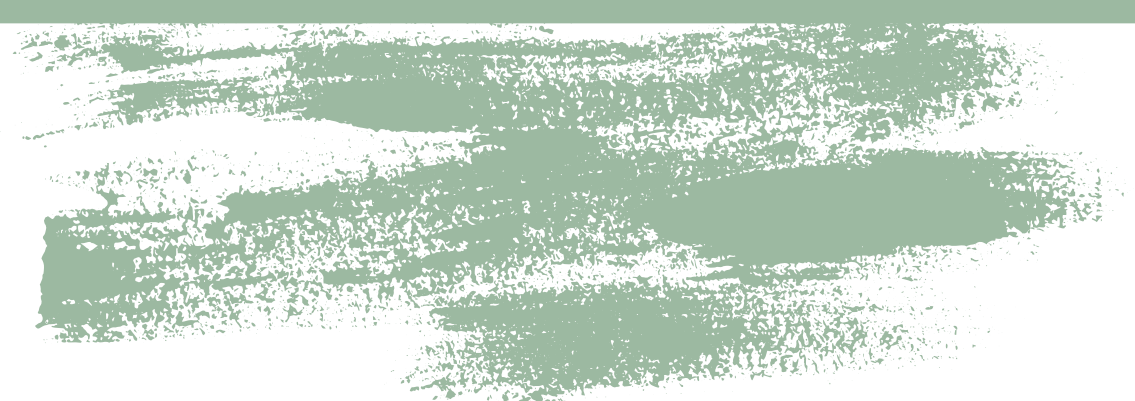
I tend to hide and bottle up my emotions.
Maybe because I don't like to show emotion.
This could be caused by the fact I never felt safe enough to be emotional.

Every inch of me long for the years of love I've missed in my younger days of childhood.
I'm the person who gives things that are never returned.
I give love but it is never returned.
I give happiness but it is never returned.
I give peace but can never seem to feel it myself.

I think of life like the ocean,
It's beautiful but can drown me.
Sometimes life is a maze with twists, turns, and surprises at every corner.

I've always thought of death as an escape from the heartache that follows me around.
Sometimes I feel I'm not even worthy to be followed by that.
For me failure is never an option. I have to be the best at everything.
It's as if I need to be a perfect diamond.

When I was younger I used to have self-hate.
I wondered why I was ever born.
I'd wonder if God made a mistake creating me.
Would anyone care if I just dropped dead?
Would anyone love me enough to look for me if I went missing?



I second guess myself.
Who I am?
Why do I live?
Am I good enough?

Anger. That's my comfort.
I show anger maybe because I feel it.
Maybe because I find it better than showing fear.
Maybe the anger I show is a call for help.
A voice telling you the words I will never tell.
What if it's a sign showing you I am not okay.

I don't trust people.
Until now I have never had someone to trust.
But to be fair, how can anyone trust me .
How can someone trust that my smile is real?
How can they trust that my laugh isn't forced?

I will show you a smile.
But never my tears.
I will let you hear my laughs of joy.
But never my screams of pain.

I enjoy the feeling of nature.
I enjoy the smell of fresh air.
I enjoy listening to the songs of the wind.
And the whistles of the tree.
I enjoy the sights of the beautiful flowers.

I'm sensitive.

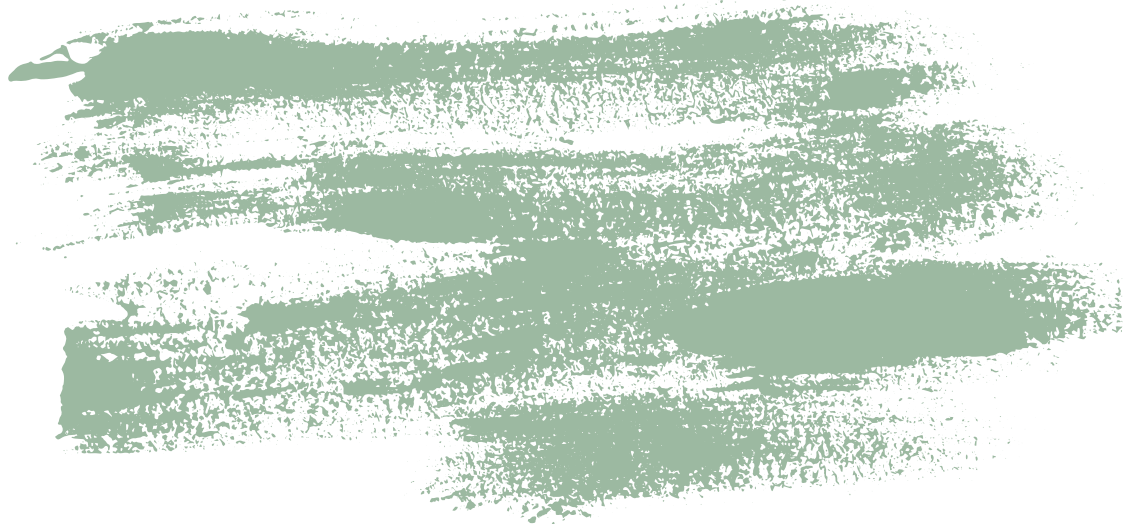
So sensitive I tear myself apart about things I can't control.

I break my heart in pieces over others problems.

And I feel guilty for things that are not my fault.

I'm broken glass that needs to be fixed. I know that to be true.

But what if I'm a beautiful rose that just hasn't fully bloomed.



My Monologue

Bailey Kauffman
El Camino, Grade 11

We've all heard that endings are beginnings. But where do endings end, and beginnings begin? For me, it's a matter of realizing that what was there before was worth living and fighting for, won't be there for you any more. Like in a game of table tennis, a gust of wind arrives and blows the ball so far away you know you won't ever be able to get it back, and then the carefully balanced game of living is over and all of a sudden you're just existing. More often than not, this involves friendship, or love, and when the end begins you feel like nothing. Like you missed something, a chance. Or you know in your heart that you lived it to the fullest, but it was over in a heartbeat. Like when you meet someone you'll only be around for a short time, so you give them your phone number, only to realize later you were so anxious in the moment because you thought they were really cool, so your hands were shaking, so you hit the wrong key and typed the wrong numbers... and then it's over, and you feel nothing. Like you missed something, a chance, and it was over in a heartbeat. Time is the same for everyone. But how we perceive time is incommensurate. We all live in our own little worlds with our own tracks of time, but it's when our worlds collide with others that's worth living for. The cycle goes on, full of endings and beginnings, lows and highs, nights and days, moons and suns, revolving around our ever evolving world until the end. But, maybe, in the moment, we should strive to take a closer look at the stars.

BIOGRAPHY

Bailey is a ruminative junior at El Camino High School. He enjoys writing, reading, the arts, and being in the outdoors. When he's not reflecting upon his personal experiences and the complications of the world, he can be found cooking plant-based dishes, caring for his many house plants, or hanging out with his friends and family.



Как?

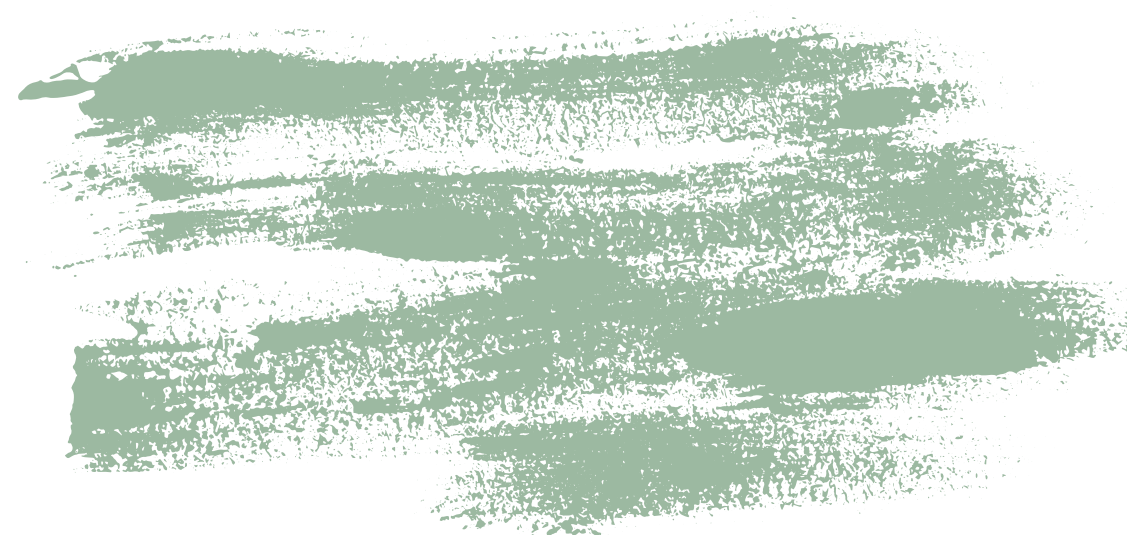
Roman Kostiuhenko
San Juan High, Grade 12

Как может чужое сердце
Быть интересней своего?
Как может быть чужая совесть,
Дороже своей?
Как может чужой разум
Владеть твоей головой?
Как могут быть твои идеалы
Обдуманнми другими?
Как может твоя жизнь во благе,
Отвращать тебя?

How?

Roman Kostiuhenko
San Juan High, Grade 12

How can a stranger's heart
Be more interesting than yours?
How can a stranger's conscience
Out-value your own?
How can a stranger's mind
Control your head?
How can your ideals
Be thought out by others?
How can your life in prosperity
Disgust you?



Люблю

Roman Kostiuchoenko
San Juan High, Grade 12

Никому не нужна чужая грусть,
Как пылинки в небесах исчезаю, пусть...
Разве мука, страдание людей вам слаще,
Чем дружба, тепло, чувство счастья?

Я люблю наблюдать за цветением тюльпанов,
Я люблю лечить, душевные раны.
Пусть я маленькая крупинка, в этом мире,
Но стремлюсь я быть добрым, любить всей силой!

Если грустно тебе-улыбнись,
Если мир потемнел-не грусти, держись!
И неважно кто ты: сварщик, летчик, заправщик,
Если ты человек-достойно им будь.

I love

Roman Kostiuchoenko
San Juan High, Grade 12

No one needs each other's sorrow,
We disappear like dust in the sky, well let it be...
Is the torment, people's suffering sweeter for you,
Than friendship, warmth, feel of happiness?

I love to see the tulips bloom,
I love to heal internal wounds.
And I may be a tiny grain of this world,
But I strive to be kind, to love with all my power!

If you are sad - smile,
If the world got darker - don't be sad, stay strong!
And no matter who you are - pilot, welder, gas station worker,
If you are human - be it with dignity!

Numero 1

Roman Kostiuchenko
San Juan High, Grade 12

Boom!
The life flows in the veins of heart,
The stimulus is noticeably strong,
The overflowing of a thought sets off,
It happens when you start the system of your soul.

Identity, Identity

Alexandra Lembach
Casa Roble, Grade 9

Identity, identity
We all have a special power within
It's the thing that determines how we live our lives
The thing that knows every little detail about your life
It lives on life, it feeds on chance
We never quite know what our future beholds
But if you want a prediction, there is no better way to view, to see what
cards you have chosen, for they are not dealt
You must first look at your identity
The thing that we all hold

Meaning of Identity

Alyvia V. Martinez
El Sereno, Grade 11

"Do your thing & don't care if they like it." –Tina Fey

Identity, what is identity? It is a word that is mistaken–forgotten–and has lost its full meaning. The word identity means who you are as a person, what traits you possess and the characteristics you've made for yourself.

Now, identity has many obstacles in itself, whether there is a struggle or not. I see social media as one; people, places, things, words, it's all there on a little screen, and it helps [whether it be good or bad] make who you are.

Trends, and what the people around you do, all takes a toll on who you identify as. But, what would happen if you took social media away? Would you stay the same or change completely? It's all in you as a person.

I have had the chance to take that opportunity, and truly learn new things about myself, which I would never have known I had.

When stepping away from social media, it opened my eyes to things I once ignored, things I didn't let out because of fear it wouldn't look good on the outside. But now? I know who I am and who I want to be – a writer, a calm person, and, overall, a much better person without the world in my face.

Spend time in solitude; no matter if it is in your room–away from the screen–or a vacation. You should enjoy time away from others. Although I know it is important to have friends, it is also important that you spend time by yourself.

The meaning of identity is truly an individual experience if you understand yourself. For instance, projecting fake selves on social media, or people making light of identity such as saying "I identify as a pickle" creates more obstacles. The word identity means who you are as a person, and the traits (as I mentioned in the beginning) that make you.

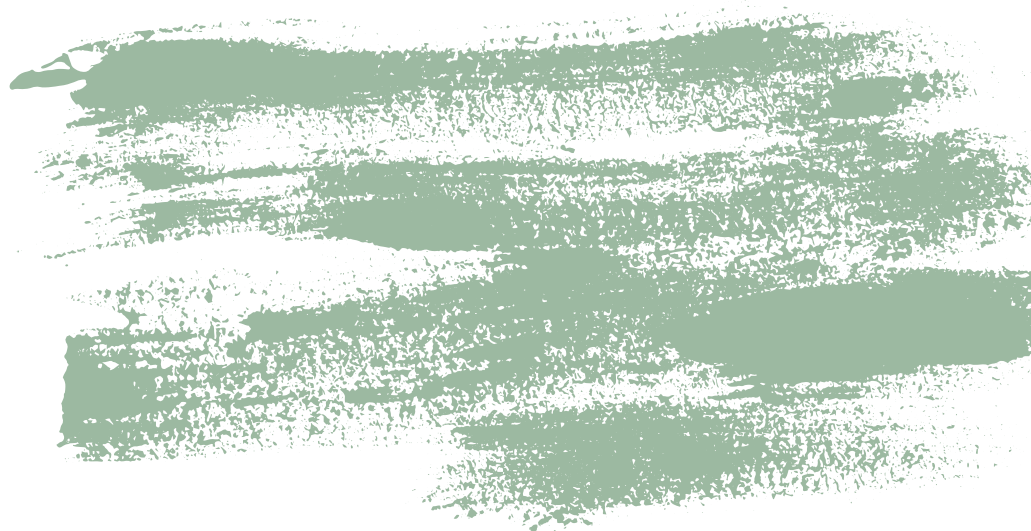
So, who do I identify as? I identify as me, and no one else has helped me achieve that. No matter the obstacles I found while trying to be just as I am. Making it through is a feeling of achievement, knowing you don't need to worry about who you are.

"Meaning is everything." –Alyvia

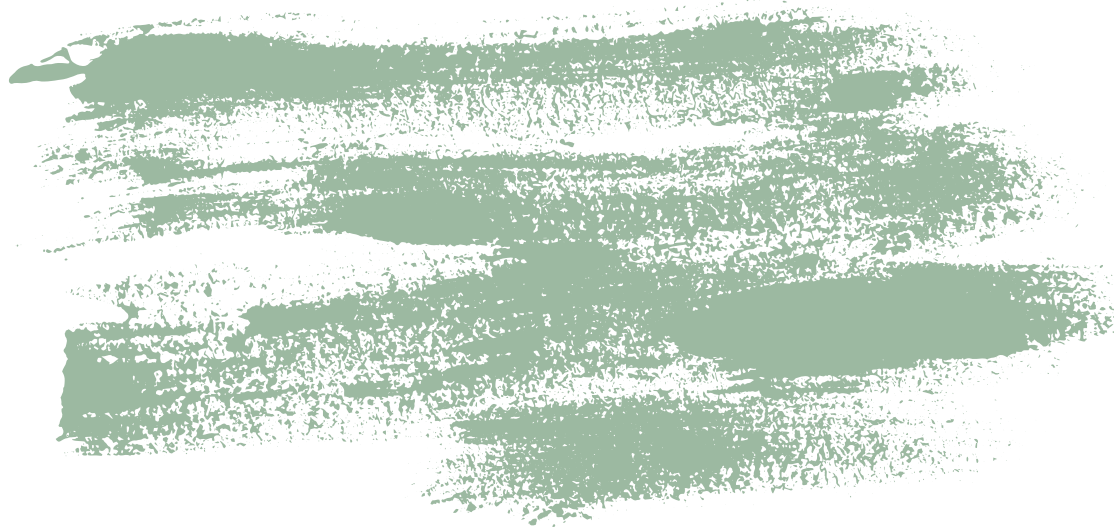
Fortuna

Emmalee McCurry
Bella Vista, Grade 9

Darkness and darkness and darkness
Darkness spinning ever down
Downward and forward and forever
And out of the darkness
A spark
And from the spark
A Thing
And the Thing was lonely
And the Thing wanted to Feel
So the Thing created Language
And with Language, Words
And with Words, a Name
Fortuna
And with a Name, Feeling
And with Feeling, Emotion
And with all these things, IDENTITY
But the Thing, Fortuna, was sad
So, Fortuna created life
A Companion
And the Companion was there
And they were friends



For a while
But the darkness took hold of the Companion
Of the Friend
The Darkness wrenched in the heart of the Friend
And twisted its dark malice its soul
And snuffed out the Light
And turned the Friend onto the other
And created chaos
And anger
And deception
And betrayal
And Fortuna, wounded and hurt, understood
The Companion had been,
Though good for a while, ultimately corruptible
And susceptible
To the Darkness
And so Fortuna destroyed
What it had made
Resolving
To start over
But in Fortuna's haste,
They forgot
That it was destroyable,
Too
And so,
Darkness and darkness and darkness
Darkness spinning ever down
Downward and forward and forever
Fortuna



From Home to Here: Embracing Identity and Community

Fraol Mideksa
Mira Loma, Grade 10

Being born and raised in a relatively small African country, my culture, or more so my ethnicity is the biggest factor that contributes to what I define as my identity. In my words I would define identity as the characteristics and traits that make you the unique individual you are. As previously mentioned I grew up in a culture that, in a way, consumes every part of you. It helped me shape a sense of self, impacted how I perceived others, and influenced the choices I made about my life. A key example of this is the importance placed on community in my culture and it emphasizes the necessity of building deep connections with others over all else. In times of celebration, mourning, or simply day to day life, I look to the other people in my community to talk to and lean on.

This aspect has shaped me in many ways. It has given me a strong sense of belonging in my community, and I'm able to authentically express myself. More importantly I would say that it has made me a person who can blossom in diverse spaces and create a strong sense of community wherever I go. This is clearly present in that, when I moved to America, it was a place that was extremely deviated from my home, but I was able to learn and adapt.

I was able to grow a community that helped me adjust to my new environment and now I can comfortably say that I've made this community my home. This experience reflects not only my ability to adapt but also my capacity to contribute to and shape the communities I become a part of. My culture plays a substantial role in shaping my sense of identity. It goes beyond surface level traits and impacts how I perceive myself at a fundamental level.

Identity Defined

Alexandria Mitchell
Del Campo, Grade 9

Dictionaries say that identity is simply knowing who a person is, or what a thing is. But the dictionary and I must have a much different definition of what it is. My identity is deeper than what you think I am. What you think I should be depicted as. Neither is it the pain I have endured, or the people I have met. It is what I have learned from my own experiences. How I reacted, every moment, everyday. It's the price I choose to pay. I dye my hair time and time again, trying to go back to the girl I had once been. I try to change my identity in hopes that I might feel like me again. But I have learned recently that the color of my hair does not define the incredible things I have done, or the kindness that I reach to grab from my pockets for because believe me, they are fuller than they look. People who have "known" me for years assume that my troubles have sucked me dry of love, of optimism if you will. But I'm starting to believe that I will forever have an infinite amount of love. I see the world in more color everyday, the possibilities of being anything but my pain are a never ending ladder, covered in gold, I try to spread my love everywhere, I pour it into the trees, the flowers, and even in the keys that I use to unlock my front door. However, that is simply just how I perceive myself. Others will see me as quiet, kept to myself, some say I look mean. That is my identity to them but to myself I am very different. My identity is my strength, my passion to do the things I love, and it is the words that I cannot spit out when I need them the most. The ocean floor that I feel I am stuck on just as soon as I need a breath of fresh air. The overwhelming amount of patience I have for everyone but myself.

I believe identity is who we make ourselves to be, out of the traits we earn over time. It's what we make out of nothing.
That is identity.

BIOGRAPHY

Alexandra Mitchell is a freshman attending Del Campo High school. Having written many pieces of literature in her free time, and even winning district wide essay contests in Roseville, Placer County, she has excelled in every aspect of life through her own art. Alexandra resides in Carmichael, California and hopes to pursue her passion in writing.

Identity Ballad

Atlas Moore
Casa Roble, Grade 9

Have you ever felt different than others?
Maybe feeling different than your sisters or brothers.
Like your morals are at a toe-to-toe quarrel?
Don't worry kid, I've sang that ballad.
If you want respect, sometimes you have to be the challenge.

But I won't allow that, not on this stage.
I've learned that acceptance and love takes change,
It won't come from the deranged, or the people you arranged.
But love comes from inside, sure some comments are snide,
That's all a part of the ride.

Just know young one, that you may feel challenged,
But others sing the same ballad.
You may think that you're out of time, not 'till you hear the death
bell's final chime.

For love and acceptance,
they take a while to make their entrance.
Culture is usually one big overture,
but I can see that you aren't worried about that feasting vulture.
There are many things that can happen in life, you could face some strife.
I learned that life, it's more meaningful than you might realize.

Back to our challenge, try to talk about it and not with malice,
If you do, I doubt your brothers or sisters will forgive you.
I also know that time is needed to accept the truth,
So sit down in the photo booth, after all is said.
I want you to enjoy your youth.
It will pass by quicker than you think.

Atlas, my child, do not turn vile.
I promise you that telling them will be worth-while.
If you have a voice saying "No, this will turn you vile." That is the evil
seeping into your head, don't cause yourself the dread.

For that old man has had his hold on me for a long while,
Do not make the evil man smile.

For you and your name may hold up the sky, while others don't bat an eye.
But the man always looks at the strong and powerful with
an idea that is unimaginable.
He strips you of your pride and grace.
Making you into nothing but a trace.
So keep your head high, that will make the old man sigh.
Or he himself will make you cry.
He'll say, "I don't mean to pry." Trust me, that's a lie.

So remember my words child, don't listen to the old man's lie.

BIOGRAPHY

Atlas Moore is a 14 year old, queer writer, lover of the strange, and overall artist. From singing songs in the car to helping others with work, they know what to do. Come sit and explore this poem of empathy, love, acceptance and identity.

City Shepard

Ace Owen
Bella Vista, Grade 11

As time passes I've found the mobile of ideas that spins infinitely around the young poet's head will drift gradually away unless seized upon. The writer or the poet or the painter must be akin to the infant, reaching up from the crib and grasping at the stars and sheep that, fastened by twine, hang above them and below the sky.

Winter claws at me as I walk past the strays, the people and the cats that huddle by fires, under awnings, trying to evade the shadow of cold cast over the city. Men in scarves and gloves hurry to their jobs and I'm suddenly thankful to be unbound by the tediousness of paperwork and clients. In this canyon of noise, lights, and skyscrapers, I can almost pretend to be the mystical shepherd, walking on hardened earth, the wind whistling through my body.

Someone at the bookstore hands me a persimmon and a copy of *Romancero Gitano*. I'm in no rush, so I sit down and eat my persimmon as I read. The skies grow bluer and the clouds part, all is well, the sun has returned and I'm still evolving with the day, I decide to stop by a friend's apartment and grab a coffee.

We quietly discuss the gossip within the clubs and social groups we frequent. We talk of poetry readings and the wall street news. Lazily, we dance to the record that plays Bob Dylan's newest album. Barefoot and off beat, we swing in each other's arms. The heat of the day dissipates at about the length of two albums; the tides roll in gently against the pier.

When I pass the fat man holding bouquets on the corner I inquire: How do you find fresh flowers when there are two feet of snow covering all the fields? The man smiles and offers me a sunflower.

When I return to the shoebox I've been inhabiting these last few months, I remove my coat and begin to paint the sunflower. Dazed winter days pass without record of my existence except for these dusty canvases that line my walls.

BIOGRAPHY

Ace Owen is a writer driven by his passion in art and poetry. In exploring creativity and unconventionality he offers readers a journey through an artist's mind.

~ the words we are afraid to say ~

Marina Pierson
Bella Vista, Grade 11

i once read something poetic...
 i've read many of these "somethings"
 i once fell in love with the art of it
the art of words being delicately placed
 in a reverie of a cathartic state of mind
the art of words
 and how beautiful
 they can truly be
i once fell in love with the feeling
 of writing the words we are all too afraid to ever say
the words that risk way too much
the words that make us overthink
i once fell in love
 with the words that
 make us love too deep
the words that make us afraid
 to hope for a love like those words
 to ever exist so freely in this life
i believe it was t.s. eliot who said —
 "the purpose of literature
 is to turn blood into ink"
as a writer myself
 this is truly something
i can attest to
the words we write in moments of agony
 are truly the blood of our wounds
being poured onto a page

to bring comfort and clarity
to our peace of mind

i've searched the greatest canyons and the highest mountains for something
that gives my soul peace as this art has.

i've come close to finding it but as i realized in all these "close moments" in
time i had a pen and paper at my side filling in the blanks that come in
between every detail of my life.

some say i was written by jane austen
others say william shakespeare
many say taylor swift
and some even say a wild mix of them all
and i've heard many other references to brilliant writers in the feedback i've
received on my writing and the style and depth of it.
one of my greatest accomplishments in life...
always will be being categorized in the same realm as some of the greatest
writers to ever walk this earth
and the writers who have inspired me so deeply since the day i first started
writing and truly falling in love with the words we are all afraid to say.

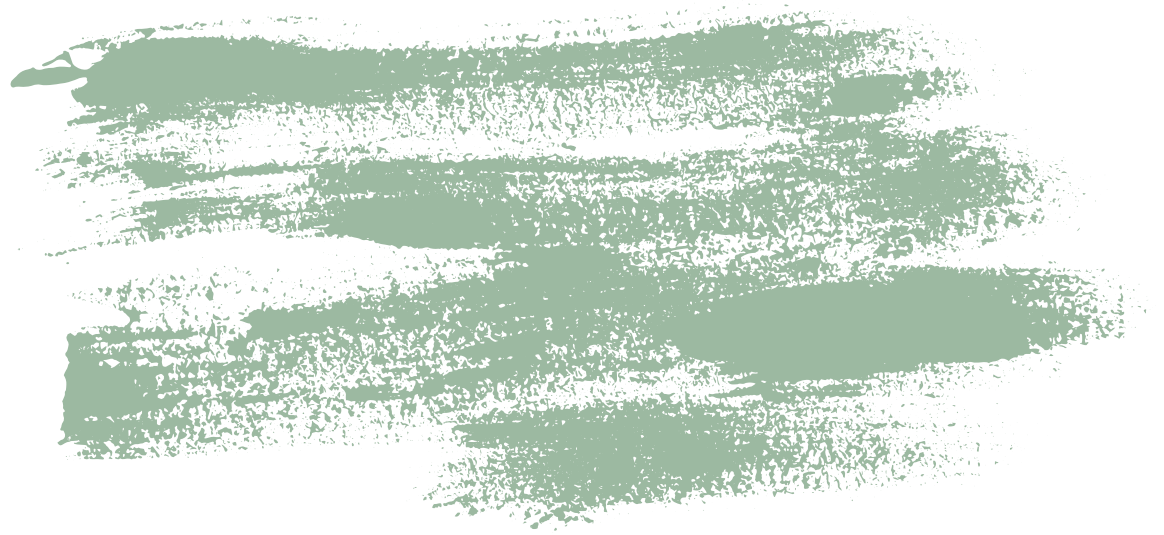
BIOGRAPHY

Marina Pierson is a 16 year old junior at bella vista high school. She has been writing ever since she could remember and she's always had a knack for writing the words that are often left unsaid and she is currently working on writing a book called "unsent love letters" that she is hoping to get published sometime in 2024.

Poem

Maybella Prunty
San Juan High, Grade 11

A cork board replaces a mirror in my bathroom.
Pictures of rotting leaves, sunshine, pages from books.
I try not to look in the corners where others have pinned things.
I look anyway.
The pictures of snow and moss will never triumph over the filthy words
pinned by my mother, the blood and honey left by others.
Glittery nail polish won't cover the purple underneath, jackets won't cover
the bruises.
Who am I?
A storm of events, chemicals, a desperate hand on a sharp ledge?
Are the scars etched into my soul?
Am I just a well contained animal shackled to my ribcage?
Or am I the trainer?
A warm hand on the shoulder of the pained.
Am I both?
Is this world simply the sick healing the sick?



Identity's Impact

Eleanor Pyaro
Casa Roble, Grade 9

Identity means to me being known by a large group of people like the world for instance. The world is big because of the people and things that consist of it. I would also say it is who people are or who I am. Lots of people have different identities like being a middle child, a kid whose parents have divorced, or biracial. My identity has impacted my life a lot. People recognize me on the street as if they are my neighbors. Usually, it happens in the crowded hallways of my high school, where I say hello to a colleague, a teacher, a classmate, or who has been in my life one way or another. They see who I am and if possible they can determine what has changed in my life as well. I don't swear because I am a Christian because of that, I watch what I say- holding my tongue. I don't gossip like the popular girls at school and I don't listen to tea, because it's wrong to spread rumors about people.

My identity empowers me by encouraging me to keep my values, to not change myself for others. I stick to who I am, what I like or dislike. My identity has changed over time. When I was in elementary school, I was sociable. I talked a lot and I had a lot of friends. But, after distance learning, I started talking less to my friends. I think distance learning had an impact on me and kids all over the world.

My identity has been impacted by others, by my friends and my classmates. My friends have been impacted by not swearing around me since they know that I don't like swearing. Also, making good decisions. My friends vibe off of my good decisions like not cheating on an exam, and being respectful to my teachers. In middle school, my teacher screamed cuss words at us. I wrote a letter addressing him explaining that I didn't feel comfortable in his class. The next day, he read it in front of the class. Afterward, he stopped saying cuss words but my classmates weren't happy with me and called me tiny. I was known around the school as the girl who told the teacher to stop saying curse words.

Flash forward to the end of the school year, he signed my yearbook writing that he appreciated that I called him out. He said that I made him a better teacher and he will choose his words much more carefully.

Identity

Eva Raczko
Mesa Verde, Grade 9

Identity; the distinguishing character or personality of an individual.

I don't believe the true definition of 'identity' is actually true. Why, you may ask? It's because who you truly are, is who you are when you're alone. When you're with different people, you reflect off of their body language and how they act, talk, and how they reflect to you. If you surround yourself with people who aren't the greatest decision makers, you can get caught up in that, but then when you go to somebody quiet, you have a personality switch and you be quiet with them. Basically, you have different identities with each person you are with. When you're alone, in your own thoughts, is when you are truly yourself. How you act online is the exact same thing. What 'identity' means to me is that you are who you are, when you are alone or with people you don't have to change yourself to fit in with them. Have you ever met someone and instantly clicked with them? As if they are your other half, the missing piece in your puzzle? Someone you have a deep and meaningful connection with? As if your souls are tied together. It's an ethereal feeling. In my experience, I have met people like that. There's 3 people, 2 boys and a girl. The first boy I met in October 2022. When I first saw him, I instantly clicked with him. His presence made me extremely comfortable and I felt safe with him, and to this day we still talk. The second boy I met this November, me and him clicked as soon as we met and I felt just as comfortable with him as I did with the other. As for the girl, we met almost a whole year ago. Early January is when we met. She knows me better than anyone ever has. I love her with all my heart, she's the best thing that has ever happened to me and I'm extremely grateful to have her in my life. To this day, we've gotten closer and had our ups and downs, but they only strengthened our friendship with one another.

How 'identity' has shaped my values is fairly simple. I believe that everyone deserves a second chance, no matter what. This is everyone's first time living, we all

make mistakes and learn from them. What matters is that we reflect from them and work forward, pushing past doubts and second thoughts that come along the way. I've experienced loss and grief, and I managed to push past it. No matter the burden or stop sign along the way, it didn't stop me from becoming who I am today. I've worked hard and had many doubts, but I picked myself up and did everything on my own. Who I am today has shaped me into the person I always wanted to be. The person who pushed me the most is my mom, I love her so much and I don't know where I'd be if she wasn't there supporting me and helping me. I have many people in my life I look up to, and who I'd dream of being. When I grow up, I want to be successful and prove to everyone that had doubted me along the way that I can, and will be a better person than who they saw me as. In just a year, I went through so much and it only shaped me throughout the way. I yearned for all the affliction to end, and of course it wouldn't have happened within that moment. It takes time to get better, all you have to do is wait for your moment.

My 'identity' empowers me by changing my life's motion and direction. It helps me make the right choices no matter who I'm around, it helps me say "No" without the feeling of guilt lingering. I don't enjoy disappointing people or saying "No" but I will if I have to. My 'identity' hasn't really changed overtime. In elementary school I was pretty outgoing, but as soon as middle school hit, I was at rock bottom. I was very introverted and surrounded myself with extroverted people. It wasn't good for me and I eventually got myself away from them and spent the rest of my middle school experience with one girl. She, by far, is one of my closest friends. We've gone through a lot of drama together and always stuck to one another no matter what happened. Now going into high school, we went our separate ways but still are close friends. My identity impacted others by them feeling comfortable telling me things they wouldn't tell others, they said it themselves. I'm very thankful they feel that way and I love them with everything.

My True Identity

Payton Ruggles
El Camino, Grade 12

IDENTITY

A word so normal but encapsulates so much
Of what we define as me, I, or you.
I shall focus on the I for this story and tell you
All about my identity, my own reality.

I am someone who is overly kind, kind to those
Who may not be so to me.
I am someone who wants others to stick to me
So tightly like a dog and a flea.
I am someone who tries so hard but never feels I have
Done enough.
I am someone who tries, who loves, who cares, who wants,
Who needs, and who longs.

I long for more than I have settled for, more
Then what others tell me as I know I am strong.
I want a life full of adventure, I want to be known as someone
Who lived to her fullest even with all the hardships.

However, as of right now my identity is someone
Who doesn't really know where she will go, who she is,
Or why she is.
Why am I here?
What am I here for?
What will I add to this indescribable universe?
And lastly, most importantly.
What is my purpose?

I am someone who has comprised my identity
To be someone who fits the ideals of others.
I became stupid for those who thought it was
Funny for me to do so.

I became sad for those who needed to feel less low.
I became happy when those I loved needed to smile.
I became angry for those who pushed me and pulled at
My thoughts with their cruel ways.
I became someone I am not, someone I don't truly know in
My own mind.
My identity is something I intend to find.

I want to feel as though I know who I am inside and out.
I want to feel as though others can explain me with their own
Thoughts instead of me being a puzzle they piece together.
I want, I want, I want.
I always want, I always need, it is human nature, this greed.
What else am I allowed to want?
To need?

So I will be selfish for once, I will forget my kindness for others,
I will not only abide by my love for my family.
I will not forget to figure out myself and will not only figure out
The minds of those who will never be explainable.
I will find my own thoughts, my own love, my own happiness.
I will find the identity of me, yo, je, watashi.
In every language, every word, every picture, every single thing,
My identity will only encapsulate me.

Snowy Owls

Miley Ryan
Bella Vista, Grade 10

It was 2:45 AM when I found myself spiraling...it was quite a blur; I couldn't stop going downhill. That's when I turned on the television. The first thing that came on was Nat Geo Wild. I've grown up with Disney Channel, Nickelodeon and fairy tales to the point that when I saw these animals on TV I was mesmerized, the beautiful scenery was breathtaking. I wanted to transport myself there in an instant.

All of a sudden a snowy owl appeared like Hedwig at Harry's house. It was just like a movie.

Its beautiful white feathers glistened in the snowy wind and it got me wondering, does the snowy owl ever get lonely on those cold winter nights?

Do they ever wish to have someone to keep them company or do they enjoy those silent winter nights?

Because, to be honest, if they enjoy the loneliness of those winter nights, I would want to become a snowy owl. I would want to feel at ease in the loneliness of those winter nights, I would do anything not to feel pain every time I remember that person who kept me warm and safe in the winter...I want to just accept they're gone.

I wish you could just accept that they're warmth and safety isn't coming back, I just want to accept myself for who I am and not want or think I need somebody to make me happy.

Because my happiness should not rely on someone else.

Do they find someone new?

Do they just forgive and forget?

Do they catch feelings for another snowy owl?

Because then I want to be considered a snowy owl—they don't seem to be lonely...well, if they really don't seem to be lonely, then I guess I am like a snowy owl, because nobody sees how lonely I am...nobody sees all this pain behind my smile. So just call me a snowy owl and hopefully I can learn how to glide

with

my

own

wings.

I can learn how to accept myself, to be ok in my own head. I spent all my time trying to show people beauty, when in reality I'm just trying to hunt and not get hunted. This is me trying to survive on these giant wings I call my own.

Kaleidoscope

Lyn Samuels
El Sereno, Grade 10

Identity: there are so many words that one can use to explain their identity. It's like a kaleidoscope of different aspects that make us who we are. There's cultural identity, sexuality, sense of self, how you portray yourself on the outside, your name, personality, likes and dislikes, and many more self expressions.

Yet it's not something fixed or set in stone. It can evolve and change as we grow and learn more about ourselves. It's like a journey of self-discovery, where we uncover new layers and embrace different parts of who we are. For me, I don't know my identity; I feel like a racoon, always wearing a mask, masking because I'm afraid of what others will think, hiding myself from my past, scared that I will be shown in a bad light, just like racoons.

I guess I could say that my identity is fluid and always changing. One minute, my hair is blonde, then brown, then pink and purple, or any color that I can match with my

identity in that moment. Just as my hair changes, my clothing style changes daily, reflecting on my mood and how confident I feel. But to me, that's just on the outside.

My identity is lost within my body, burrowing deep down where no one can find it. To be honest, I don't know myself. I know who I was a year ago, but I don't know who I am right now, and I won't until enough time passes. I have no clue what the future holds for me, and I'm scared of that. I try to change things in my favor when feeling hopeless, but it seems to never work. But that's what patience is for. Of course, you'll never know what's in store, but if you're patient, the light at the end of the tunnel will get brighter, showing you a path to success.

I've sadly realized that being impatient doesn't work, and that made me even more stressed out. I'll give you a little story about when I was impatient once: I was baking a cake from scratch, but I was rushing and using frantic techniques because I was late for an event. The cake was too dense and flavorless. If I were to be more patient with myself, it would have been fluffy and gratifying. What I'm saying is that if you change yourself for others, it'll be hard to re-make the original recipe and find the cake's unique flavor.

Always be true to yourself, no matter what, be around those who accept you. I have learned to relish my memories with friends and loved ones. I took everything for granted when my mother passed away, and in a way, I lost part of my identity along with her.

As expressed, I believe that identity is a beautiful and ever-changing tapestry that reflects the uniqueness of each individual on earth. Take some time and think about what identity means to you, because at the end of the day, there is only one you.

BIOGRAPHY

Lyn Samuels, a creative writer, delves into their unique opinion on identity and self expression.

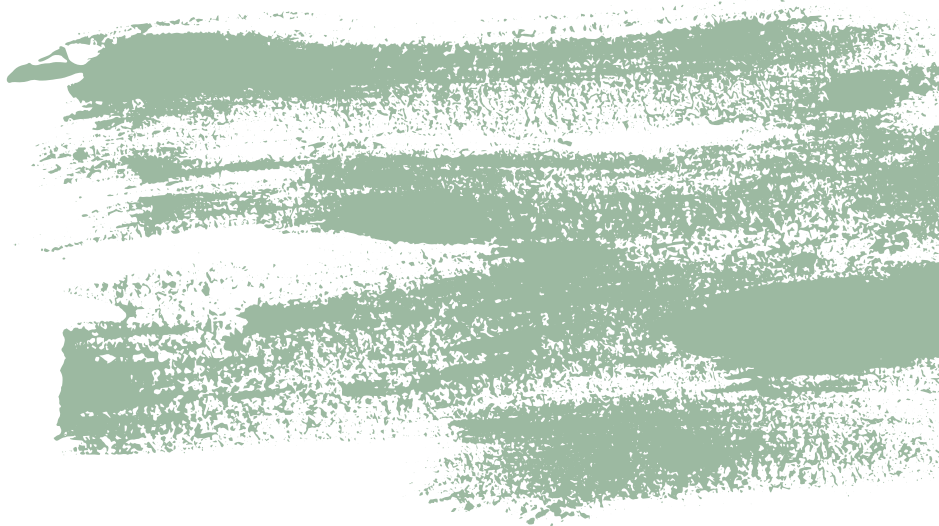
my gender is improv

Alex Thomas
Meraki, Grade 11

yes and

i take what you give me
and add it to the essence of myself,
naturally occurring
you give me woman,
girl
daughter
niece
girlfriend
(maybe wife, to someone, someday...)
the words nestle in my heart
a cat it a blanket
i hold them with both hands
then say
and
person
child
partner, lover
(maybe spouse, to someone, someday...)
the words meet each other like old friends
tangle together like loving bodies in bedsheets
simply existing in each other's space
you call me she
she is love and fury
a wild storm, untamable
she is anger, rage, righteous and forbidden
she is devotion and power
force one with nature
she is rain, snow, sleet

flower petals and the smell of old books and vanilla
the embrace of a best friend
she is a witch
you call me they
a whisper of "are you awake" in the dark
an entity existing for themselves
because of no one
they is a color hidden behind your eyes
missed, because everyone looked past it when they glanced at you
and only seen once someone else lifted up a mirror
and you finally, actually, saw yourself and what was always there
they is a rumor
a plume of smoke
forest trails, moss on boulders
candles burning away
and unknown friend around the corner of a passage
hidden, but not unsettling in its unknown
my gender is improv
yes and
all that she is, because she is all that she wants
they on their own, not lonely
content and joyful in themselves
unburdened by the pleas of those who wish it were smaller, quieter,
more like she if she were tame
they join hands with she
and live together in my soul, in myself
yes and



Solitudes Silk

Anonymous

In shadows draped, where echoes mourn,
A soul, smothered, in the depths is torn.
A spider knits the dark embrace,
It's trapped within, no light to face.

The web of despair, a suffocating veil,
Silken threads laced in moonlit pale.
In the dark where twilight yields
Its maker weaves what solitude seals.

Cannibal spiders, instincts cold,
Spin webs of sorrow, as tales are told.
A prisoner to its habitual script,
Held captive of its cryptic grip.

In moonlit dances, the spider weaves,
A tapestry of yearning it conceives.
Habit etched in every spin,
A fate entrenched, no begin nor end.

The final strand, the spider's breath,
A deathly silence, the dance of death.
In the echoes, shadows deepen,
A requiem sung for the self it's been.

Child

Leo Wallberg
Bella Vista, Grade 11

Did the title of "oldest daughter" create my entire personality?
Sometimes I wonder if birth order shaped me
Forced me to be a caretaker when it wasn't my instinct
Who I would be if I'd been born last?
Would I feel responsible for everyone's feelings?
Would I feel the need to appear strong?
Would I be able to form relationships without holding the person's heart in
my hands?
Am I the only one who taught myself not to cry when someone was sad?
Would I still have been the good kid?
The rule follower who hated authority?
The one who never needed checking on?
Would I be able to let my guard down?
I wish I didn't grow up as fast as I did
I wish I'd play with dolls a little longer
I don't even remember being a kid
I was always this grown

My childhood takes up no space in my mind
Sometimes I try to sit back and remember
Did I prefer pretend or tag?
I wouldn't know
That seems like decades ago
Maybe I should ask my parents
Although I think I've always been this grown in their eyes
I used to wear on my shirt like a trophy when people would say I was an old soul
I wish I could go back in time and rip it off my sleeve
Give myself Barbies to carry
Instead of burden on my shoulders I was too weak to hold
When I'm alone my identity flees
Worrying what would happen if me or my loved ones were to up and leave
The strings would unravel
Undoing every knot I tied
When I laced up the problems that were never even mine
The guilt I feel about us leaving each other one day makes me realize it may be
the very thing in my way
Is this why I can't be happy?
Because I don't even have an inner child cheering me on
I just need to put myself first

But then who even am I when I'm not fixing someone's hurt?

I am the oldest daughter

An overdeveloped child

The makings of an underdeveloped adult

Endless Echoes in a Gray Symphony

Ryland Wilson

Bella Vista, Grade 9

He walked along the curb of a sidewalk, lost in a crowd with a myriad of men doing the same. Of different appearances, of different names, and of different minds, yet all somehow the same. With eyes blank and baggy, he seldom glanced about his surroundings, for they were all merely colorless, gray structures that bordered the road. Even the blue sky began to fade as bleak, angry clouds surged from far away. Car horns blaring over futile disputes, footsteps of mindless drones scraping the concrete, insolent dogs barking from their windows: the jewel of human creation.

Honk-honk, clomp-clomp, bark-bark.

At his destination, another colorless, gray structure that bordered the road, he stepped through swinging glass doors as he did every other day. The stale, musty stench of recycled office air coursed about his workspace. As he sat in a rigid chair and switched his computer on, he sank into the withered cushion and watched his stained monitor boot up. The letters on his keyboard were heavily eroded, erased of identity and meaning. Still, his bony fingers slithered across it as he entered a jumble of letters that formed a jumble of words that formed a jumble of passages that formed a jumble of nothing.

Bzzzzzz, click-clack, tap-tap-tap-tap, click-clack, bzzzzzz.

Drifting in and out of sleep, he widened his bloodshot eyes to see the time. He lowered his stiff fingers to the computer, switching it off and barely managing to lift himself out of the chair. His spine burned in pain, slouched and displaced, though the burn had become second nature. He reached into a drawer and pulled out a thin plastic

bag containing some form of nutrition. Sinking his teeth into it, he savored the taste, the taste of nothing more than consumption. He spent a few minutes speaking with familiar faces that had filled the cubicles next to his. They talked back and forth, exchanging worthless formalities, before splitting, having heard not a single word the other had said. Then, he left through the swinging glass doors, as he did every other day. As he looked to the sky and took to the road, the angry clouds now hovered above, threatening to release the tears of the anguished unto the earth.

Pitter-patter, plip-plop, pitter-patter, plip-plop.

Droplets hit the ground, combusting into even tinier specks of water, before congregating into a solemn mass of one, with no distinguishability from their former self. The sun dared to peek from its veil, allowing but a few rays of light to shine through as the surge of raindrops only increased. Soaked, cold, and lost in the storm of monotony, he tread forth and watched as the only light remaining faded, leaving only the wet, gloomy road that led to his next destination, and the walls that enclosed it.

Splish-splash, splish-splash, splish-splash, splish-splash.

In a home more akin to a coffin, he sealed himself away behind a decrepit wooden door. Even so, he took shelter. Stains littered the walls and a faint odor of rotten food floated throughout the room. The floors were laden with junk and trash, with no semblance of organization. The air conditioner unit at the back of the room sputtered, emitting a high-pitched, never-ending hum, leaving the room miserably cold.

Spit-sput, spit-sput, spit-sput, spit-sput.

Rain continued to pound away at the thin, rickety roof while only growing in volume. The periodic thumps echoed in his room, and a thin droplet permeated through small cracks. Growing large in the corner of his eye was a puddle, reflecting the blinding fluorescent lights on his ceiling. He stared into it, and saw himself. Pale, gray, as if he were faded. As if the world had ceased to recognize him. As if he'd become invisible. And so his tears fell, but nobody saw them. So he wept and wailed, but nobody heard it. So he felt the soft, wet tears of god falling alongside him, offering him the comfort of release, extinguishing his flame at once. And the rain poured harder and faster whilst rampant winds howled about outside in a frenzy of agony. And when the world crashed around him, his rage was heard, thundering beside him without fail. Drowned in anguished sorrow, he faded, washed away in the storm.

Crack-clap, crack-clap, crack-clap, BOOM.

The gray plume that had polluted the sky parted at once, and the golden light of the sun baked the ground floor. As quickly as the rain had fallen, it ceased, and so too did the memory of the man. The dogs barked and the clouds floated and the sun shined and the people walked and the machines hummed and the cars honked and the earth continued to rotate, with no difference from yesterday. And so the world continued, just as any other day.

If You Knew Me Well - For the Misunderstood

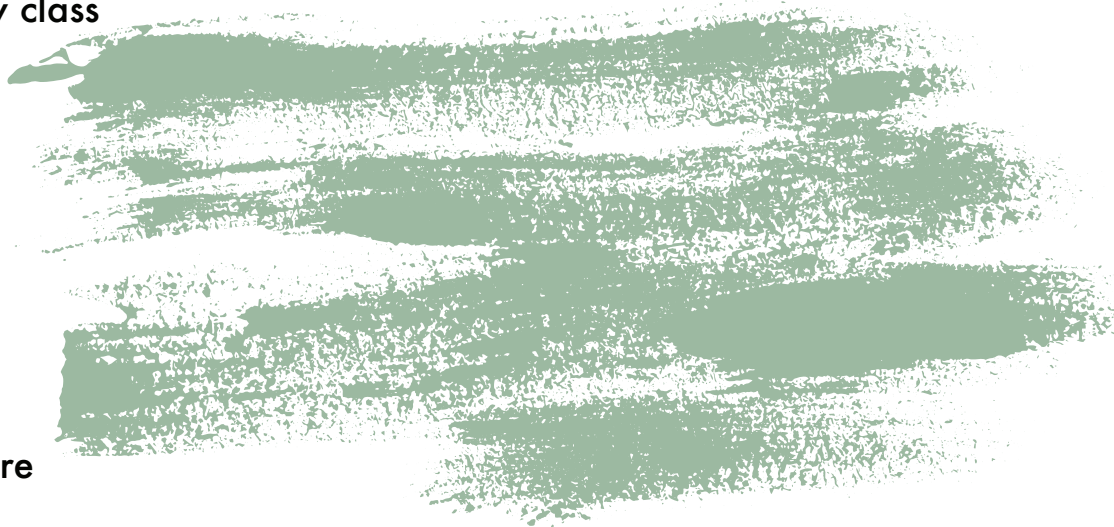
Benji Workman
Bella Vista, Grade 11

On the outside, I come across as confident
Or at least I try to be
Because people will think of me
As odd or a loner

I walk the halls,
With my headphones and thoughts
Wrapped around my head all across
But I feel rushed to get to my class

The music I hear,
I keep them inside my mind
There's a radio in my head
I use to express my feelings

The songs I write,
I want to share
Because I want people to care
For the person I want to be



I try to be myself,
But I don't want those dirty looks
So I keep my face in my books
And my mouth shut

I want to talk,
But people won't listen
My brain becomes friction
And I keep it in

If you knew me well,
I'll let you crawl into my brain
To see the beauty and the pain
As a terrifying expression is painted on your face

What I wish you knew
Is that I'm proud to be your friend
I hope you understand the things
That I hope you do for me

Bodies

Benji Workman
Bella Vista, Grade 11

She has her mom's big hips
He keeps growing taller and taller
They have strong legs
Just like their father

I have a friend who's short
But can't grow tall even if she wanted to
She looks good in any clothes
The other girls don't have a clue

I look at guys but I can't look any closer
They don't have the nerve to talk to me
But with their smiles, freckles, and eyes
Being a guy is what I want to be

I observe many people
Who treat their bodies with hate
Starving, weighing, and carving
With high emotions they wish would erase

Every girl who wants to be in the movies
Skinny, long legs, tight clothing
They wish to never wake up
They're filled with sorrow and loathing

I constantly look at myself in the mirror
At a body that changes when I look away
Covered with hair, scars, and stretch marks
Excuses for when my body won't see the light of day

A body is your life, your identity
Along with your name, values, appearance, soul, and brain
Something that is fragile but powerful
You can strive and embrace the pain

BIOGRAPHY

Benji Workman, legal name will not be mentioned for privacy reasons, is a passionate writer. She writes poetry, realistic fiction, non-fiction, science fiction, and comics. She is interested in reading, drawing, music, tennis, softball, painting, and embroidery (specifically crocheting and sewing). Her novel called, "In the Midst of Giving Up" is currently in the works.

En Haut, En Haut, et Loin

Anonymous

En haut, en haut et en allant, ils vont
Au-dessus de la colline et en bas de la route
Où ils séjourneront
Et les enfants jouent à faire semblant

En haut, en haut et en allant, ils vont
Courir vers un endroit que personne ne connaît
Ils sont donc gardés cachés
De leur famille sans pardon

"Je veux voler dans un monde
Là où la réalité est tourbillonné
La liberté est possible
Et vivre n'est pas aussi difficile que mon crâne"

En haut, en haut et en allant, ils vont
Plus de combats avec un ami ou un ennemi
Dans un monde où il accepte l'inconnu
Et dans royaume renversé

En haut, en haut et en allant, ils vont
Ne pas y aller, mais ne pas aller lentement
Je ne suis pas un gaspillage d'espace
Il y a des gens comme moi partout

Up, Up, and Away

(English translation of
En Haut, En Haut, et Loin)

Anonymous

Up, up, and away they go
Up in the mountains and down the road
Where they'll be staying
And the kids play pretending

Up, up, and away they go
Running to a place that no one knows
So they are kept hidden
From their family unforgiven

"I want to go into a world
Where reality is swirled
Freedom is possible
And living isn't as hard as my skull."

Up, up, and away they go
No more fighting with friend or foe
Into a world where it's safe from the unknown
And into a home surrounded by snow

Up, Up, and away they go
Not to go fast but not go slow
I am not a waste of space
There are people like me all over the place

What is Identity?

Mark Yadchuk
Bella Vista, Grade 9

If you wanted to find out what identity means, you could easily just google up two words: "identity definition," and bam, you'll get your answer. However, if you wanted to really know what identity is, you'll have to take a deeper dive than that.

In short, identity is the values, beliefs, and characteristics of a person. Really, there's no one way to define it. However, many people (including me) define identity as the collection of all of the things that make up a person's sense of self. This collection builds who you are and affects things like your goals and values.

One aspect of identity, for example, is your religion. There are all sorts of things to believe in—Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and so many more. Even if you don't belong to one religion, I'm willing to bet everything I have that you believe in something. These religions and beliefs provide different ways to live your life.

So, let's say we have a man. This man is part of a religion, and his religion basically states: "Help others, help yourself, and you will be rewarded with life after death." With this basic principle in mind, this simple statement has a heavy influence on his core values, making up a huge part of his identity.

However, even people in the same religion have drastically different personalities. Some people are quieter and can be a little shy, while others are loud and expressive. Some people have a very short temper, and some are more patient. Some people are very adventurous, while others like to stay in their comfort zone. These are some of the many different personality traits that people can have. This is another huge part of someone's identity—the way they act.

Then, there's the simple statement of knowing that you exist. Understanding this simple fact is the foundation of your identity, since you can't really have one unless you're conscious.

These three pillars: consciousness, religion, and personality—largely make up your identity. However, it will inevitably change over time. There are so many factors that impact this.

For example, the people you hang out with can change you. If your friends are very introverted, you will probably start seeing some of that in yourself. If your friends are extroverted, you'll probably start talking a lot more. If your friends do productive things and follow rules, you'll probably do that, too. If your friends are bad influences, odds are that you'll be doing the not-so-great things that they are. There are many more scenarios, but that's the gist.

Your environment (and the people in it) also affect your identity. If you live in a big city, you might end up being inspired by all of the constant movement around you. This could lead you to be more ambitious. The size of the city could also lead you to be a little less kind to strangers since there are just so many people there.

In a rural area, you might feel more inclined for the simple life due to the amount of people around who chose that path. You're also probably going to be friendlier in general since there are less people around you. In a city area, you might have a larger social network, but in a rural area you'll know less people much better. These small differences affect your identity as a whole.

Your identity can also change as you get older. Younger people, with less life experience, have different opinions and values than older people who have much more life experience. Older people are more likely to want more stability, while younger people crave change. These are a few examples of how people have different identities at different ages.

So, the closest "definition" of identity is the values, beliefs, personality, and characteristics of a person. These three pillars, which are constantly affected by the people and places you are around, shape the way you live your life. Your goals, actions, political stances, and more all stem from this foundation.

However, at the end of the day, identity is too complex of an idea to be explained in words. Every person has a different definition of it, but the cool thing is that your identity can be whatever you want it to be. It's your job to sculpt it.

THE SAN JUAN UNIFIED LITERARY MAGAZINE WOULD LIKE TO THANK:

STUDENT READER SELECTION COMMITTEE

Matthew Cao

Tyler Osborne

Julia Clauson

Ace Owen

Dallen Eubanks

Ia Rycerz

Matthew Kersting

Mekenze Walden

Elizabeth Ninh

Hayley Winalski

Grace Yessaian





San Juan Unified
SCHOOL DISTRICT