

2024

*Voices  
Voces  
Anthology*



*Yakima*  
SCHOOL DISTRICT  
DISTRITO ESCOLAR

*The following pieces of writing  
represent the unique, compelling,  
and engaging Voices/Voces of  
Yakima School District students and  
staff.*

*Los siguientes escritos representan  
las Voices/Voces únicas, convincentes  
y atractivas de los estudiantes y el  
personal del Distrito Escolar de  
Yakima.*

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# 2024 Voices/Voces

## Table of Contents

### Narrative Writing/Escritura narrativa

• Rory Scheidegger - The Gamer.....	6
• Omar Garcia - Henry is Hungry.....	7
• Edaly I. Vargas - Mi Aventura En Paris.....	8
• Niamh Scheidegger - The Purple Octopus.....	9-10
• Sergio Gonzalez Orozco - Mr. Smiles.....	11
• Ashley Garcia - The Emerald Stone.....	12-13
• Autumn Snow - Dark Night.....	14-15
• Keegan Shockley - The Rat “Tail”.....	16-17
• Nalah Bellah - Marie.....	18-19
• Ethan Gordon - The Twix Takeover.....	20-21
• Isaac Gordon - The Power of Words.....	22-23
• Maximiliano Torres - Importance of Life.....	24
• Aubrey Gonzalez - Your Memory.....	25-26
• Adilene Cordero - A Soldier’s Final Reflection.....	27-28
• Adan Duarte - Freedom.....	29
• Jackson Ault - A Memory.....	30-32

### Poetry/Poesía

• Omar Garcia - Los Oceanos.....	34
• Polo Beltran-Walters - The Let Go Pass.....	35
• Deaglan Hammons - Grandma’s House.....	36
• Josiah E Carter - Freedom.....	37
• Ashley Garcia - School Struggles and Wiggles.....	38
• Harmonie Fisher - You and I.....	39
• Sianan Ketcham - Yellow.....	40
• Megan Lopez Nava - Friends.....	41
• Kayden Leingang - FiRE ANd ICE.....	42
• Zoey Fouts - You and Me.....	43
• Hailey Cabrera Mendez - Humanity Embodies Duality.....	44
• Mason Klein - (Kind of) An Ode to Rain.....	45
• Isabel Romba - To Hear The River.....	46
• Charlemagne Moua - My Love, Codependency.....	47
• Aubrey Gonzalez - “Paper and Ink”.....	48-50
• Kayleigh McIntyre - Society.....	51
• Gracie Pham - A Backwards Philosophy.....	52

• Erin Chaplin - When.....	53
• Blanca Manrique-Vivanco - Chayito.....	54
• Arnie Lewis - Sentinel of Memories.....	55

## Essay/Ensayo

• Jaquelin Bustos Ramirez - El mono tito.....	57
• Evelyn Martinez Morales - Mi mascota Snoopy.....	58
• Danica Morales - Some of my travels.....	59
• Gabriel Abercrombie - Hyenas.....	60
• Jazlyn Verduzco Cortez - Sharks.....	61
• Samuel Viveros - Wolves.....	62
• Ashley Garcia - Earth.....	63-64
• Ashley Garcia - The Adventures of Don Quixote.....	65-66
• Elliott Scheidegger - Why kids should have phones!.....	67
• Abraham Scheidegger - How playing an instrument can help you.....	68
• Luanna Huang - The Wild Field Back Door.....	69-70
• Wilson Harper - Safeguarding the Future: Preventing Contamination in the Search for Extraterrestrial Life.....	71-74
• Gracie Pham - A Boat.....	75

# 2024 Voices/Voces

## Narrative Writing/Escritura narrativa

*Writing that conveys experience, either real or imagined, and provides glimpses into the writer's or character's life through the creation of vivid pictures. Narratives can take the form of personal narratives, creative fictional stories, memoirs, anecdotes, autobiographies, etc.*

*Escritura que transmite experiencias, ya sean reales o imaginarias, y que deja entrever la vida del escritor o del personaje a través de la creación de imágenes vívidas. Las narrativas pueden tomar la forma de narraciones personales, historias ficticias creativas, anécdotas, autobiografías, etc.*

**Rory Scheidegger**

1st Grade, McKinley Elementary School

Teacher: S. Coyner

### **The Gamer**

There once was a gamer who played a lot of video games. One day when he was playing a video game for 17 hours straight he got into a video game. And when he woke up he was in a video game. So he walked a lot and he found a portal. So he walked in it feeling scared. He saw his house and realized he woke up out of the video game.

**Omar Garcia**

2nd Grade, Gilbert Elementary School

Teacher: S. Pedersen

## **Henry Is Hungry**

Once upon a time there was a dragon named Henry. He was a normal size, red color, short tail dragon, and loved eating birds. Sometimes he had accidents and was easily distracted. Henry spotted a black bird from far away and wanted to eat it because he was starving. He tried to destroy the bird with his fierce fire!

The bird flew to a nearby palace, so Henry followed him. The bird moved quickly, to find the prince, who was in his bedroom. Henry's fire came out of his mouth and went straight where the prince was, making a loud crash into the windows. Henry saw the prince laying dead. Henry carried the prince on his back and took him to the knight who was standing outside the palace, asking the knight, "Can I take the prince to the hospital?" The knight said "Yes please", scared of the big dragon.

Henry took the prince to the hospital and found out that the prince was Prince Royal. He is the hero of his dreams! He thought if his guard was not going to visit him today then he could visit him. So he did! Ten minutes later, when Henry was already at the hospital he forgot to eat. Henry was so hungry and went to the cafeteria. In the cafeteria he ate three red radishes and four green grapes. On the way back, the nurse in charge said "Prince Royal is sleeping". Henry did not trust her so he went to prince Royal's room. Prince Royal had one eye open. Henry was surprised to hear that Prince Royal was snoring. Prince Royal was sleeping the whole entire time! He was perfectly fine, no injury at all! Henry decided to go search for another delicious meal instead, a parrot, but this time away from the palace.

The End



**Edaly I. Vargas**

3<sup>rd</sup> Grade, Barge-Lincoln Elementary School

Teacher: M. Henning

## **Mi Aventura En Paris**

Una vez me despertaron mis padres con mi pastel y globos pues precisamente era mi cumpleaños al momento de soplar las velas mis padres me comentaron cuando bajara me tenían una sorpresa en ese momento brinque de la cama super emocionada y nerviosa pues esperaba que fuera lo que tanto le pedía a dios

En menos de 5 minutos yo ya estaba lista para bajar esos diez escalones se me hicieron super largos y grandes con lo emocionada que iba al momento que por fin estaba abajo mire 3 boleto sobre la mesa y rápidamente corri hacia ellos cuando por fin los tenía en mis manos y observe a donde estaban destinados di un grito de felicidad pues era el lugar que tanto soñaba Paris me sentía en la nube me sentía flotando completamente sin darme cuenta mi mamá tenía razón hablando – me ya con una voz molesta rápidamente voltee hacia ella y me dice corre enpaqueta el vuelo sale en 5 horas y tenemos que estar 2 horas antes corre o te quedas aliste mi maleta inmediatamente nerviosa porque era mi primera vez en un vuelo de mi papá Diego, Mi mamá Mía y mi Evelyn cuando por fin nombraron nuestro vuelo yo dudaba de ir pero mi madre me tranquilizó con un cálido abrazo que tanto me gusta.

Cuando despegamos y aterrizamos ni cuenta me di con estar platicando con mis padres de todo lo que íbamos a hacer yegando a Paris, al bajar del avión listo para tomar un taxi y iniciar nuestra hermosa aventura pero mi mamá nos dijo tenemos que ir a dejar nuestras maletas y cosas al hotel y en el camino planificar a qué lugar íbamos primero, quedamos en ir primero al arco de triunfo de Paris un lugar extraordinario y uno de los monumentos más famosos de la capital francesa que fue su inauguración el 29 de julio de 1836 al fin para después ir al parque de la Villette que es uno de los más grandes de la ciudad con tal solo mide 55 hectáreas se imaginan es enorme

Y pues como todos los días se tienen que acabar que incluso se me hizo larguísima la noche pues yo quería seguir explorando las maravillas de Francia que al acabar de desayuno se me hizo

Tenía que contarle a mis amigos y familiares de todo lo maravilloso que fue explorar Francia las catatumbas pues me encantó todo y Pues gracias a mis padres mi sueño se hizo realidad pues ojalá y ustedes pueden ir en algún día

**Niamh Scheidegger**

3rd Grade, McKinley Elementary School

Teacher: S. Coyner

### **The Purple Octopus**

Once upon a time there was a purple octopus named Tippy. Tippy loved making pies for his neighbors! Tippy had gold suckers! He was the best in his neighborhood. Tippy was kind and caring.

But there was something silly about Tippy. He didn't live in the sea like other sea animals, he lived in a little village with his friends. He loved his town and hoped that he never had to move away.

Then one day Tippy woke up earlier than usual to see that his whole village was gone. Instead of a regular house, it was a little cottage and instead of other houses there were loads of trees!

He said "I must be dreaming!" He slapped himself lightly on the cheek a few times and said "Come on wake up!" But he didn't.

So he wandered around the trees looking at the thick bark and the orange, yellow sap dripping down the trees. His tentacles got even stickier from touching the sap and bark.

Then Tippy found a door in a tree just his size. So he went inside it feeling scared and nervous. His teeth were chattering, his eyebrows were down, and he was covering his body with his tentacles! He thought there was something so scary behind that door. But, he just woke up in his room with everything back to normal.

But it was 9:P.M, he said "That was a loooooooooong dream! How was the dream 14 hours? It felt like 5 minutes!" But he was super tired from walking around in the dream so he went to bed.

Then he woke up in the same dream inside his little cottage. He decided to wander around and he saw something new that he had never seen before. It was a gold puppy. He happened to have some food on him so he gave it to the gold puppy. Tippy and his partner pup saw the door in the tree again so they decided to go through it.

Tippy woke up and ate some fish cereal for breakfast. When he was eating his fish cereal he saw another door in the living room. He went through the door and ended up back in his dream when he realized he forgot his gold puppy! But his puppy had food and water so he just went on. He finally found the door in the tree and went back to reality.

While this was happening his neighbor Miss Blobby, the sea eel, was watching everything through her front window! When Tippy woke up Miss Blobby asked him what was happening. She said, "I saw that some weird stuff had happened to you. You went through a door and came back with a gold puppy."

Tippy said, "Well I know I can trust you so, I have been having some weird dreams and it won't go away. Do you think you can help me?"

"Maybe," said Miss Blobby suspiciously

"Really?" Tippy said excitedly.

"Weeeell, #1 You should try to break stuff in the dream like chop down trees and that stuff." So Tippy went to the door in his living room and brought an axe. He chopped down a few trees and left the dream.

He went to sleep but it did not work. So Miss Blobby said, "Try taking down the door to the dream." So he went to the door in his living room and took it down. He went to bed and he still went into the dream.

The next day Miss Blobby told him the last idea. "Try not sleeping for a few days." Tippy said, "No way! I'll probably die if I don't get enough sleep."

"Okay!" Miss Blobby said. "I guess you want to have that dream forever," she said with a laugh.

"Fine," said Tippy. "I'll try!" For three days he did not sleep. Finally he was sooooo tired so he decided to go to sleep. Miss Blobby was right! That night he didn't have any dreams! He thanked Miss Blobby and they lived happily ever after.

The End

**Sergio Gonzalez Orozco**

3rd Grade, Roosevelt Elementary School

Teacher: A. Merrill

## **Mr. Smiles**

A while back there was a block of ice in the arctic that baffled people for years. There was a lone fox plush in the block. From time to time the people investigating the ice took small samples but never found anything. So some scientists decided to melt the ice that night. The scientists had a dream about the fox plush the next day the fox plush was gone so the scientists looked at the cameras but the cameras were destroyed. So the scientists quit but in the big city he saw something a kid had the fox plush his eyes. The eyes were red. It looked like it was watching the scientists. That night he looked at his doors but the fox plush was in there he saw a tag that said Mr smiles the fox toy that never leaves you. The scientists burned the fox plush. The next morning the scientists was reported missing Mr Smiles has a new friend.

**Ashley Garcia**

5th Grade, Gilbert Elementary School

Teacher: K. Clift

### **The Emerald stone**

Beep... Beep... Beep! The alarm went off and the day had begun.

"Wakey, wakey!" said Faith yelling at her sisters.

"What do you need?" said Maya, barely awake.

"You're going to make me late for the field trip! Now get out of bed and go change. We are leaving in fifteen minutes," said Faith, walking out of the bedroom ready to go.

Fifteen minutes later, the girls got on the bus and took their seats with their friends to head to the museum. When they got to the museum, principal Walter said, "Get in a straight line!" Principal Walter always had a bad temper. The triplets kept quiet until they got inside the museum.

Faith was amazed by the antiques, Grace was astonished by the ancient pictures, and Maya was feeling as if she was walking in the past. The class was divided into smaller groups. The girls walked past the dinosaur fossils' and were moving on to the antique carriages. The museum's tour guide told the students not to touch anything, especially the carriages. The fearless sister, Grace, decided to break the rules. As Grace got closer to the carriage she noticed a bright, shining, perfectly oval green emerald stone. She grabbed the stone and turned it over to find small printed letters that read: *Ticket to Fairytale World*. Faith and Maya saw Grace with the emerald stone and started fighting over it, saying...

"It's mine!" yelled Faith.

"No, it's mine!" screamed Maya.

"No, I found it first!" shouted Grace.

All of a sudden, the stone broke into three pieces. They felt a rush of wind and fog and felt dizzy. Once the fog had cleared, they became aware that they were in a different location.

"We must be in the Fairytale World," said Grace in a whisper voice. She was very confused. The girls were surprised by how beautiful the surroundings were. There was a vivid, bright, pastel color of pink, blue, and green filled with castles and villagers.

"We need to go back to the museum, now!" said Faith, in a scared voice. "Let's go to the village and find help."

When the girls got to the village they smelled the scent of sweet flowers, lavender, and cinnamon. They decided to follow the scent with the broken emerald in hand. The scent led them to a busy market. They asked the first person they saw, an old woman who had white hair and wore a beautiful, elegant, purple dress.

"Ma'am, can you help us? We are lost and need to get back to the museum in Yakima," asked Maya.

"Darling children, you are in the Fairytale World! It's a different dimension from Ya... ki... ma," the old woman said in a gentle voice.

"Can you still help us?" said Maya.

"Yes, but in return for that beautiful emerald stone," requested the old woman.

"It's broken," said Faith.

"Who are you?" the old woman asked. "I'm Faith,"

"I'm Grace the brave,"

"And I'm Maya. Who are you?"

"I am the great Sorcerer of the Fairytale World," said the old woman. "Give me the emerald and you will wake up where you last were!"

"How can we trust you? What does this emerald mean to you?" Faith said in a very calm voice.

"This emerald is very valuable, I have been searching for it for many, many generations. If this is placed in the wrong hands, it could be a catastrophe because of the emerald's magic, and could be used for evil. For us, the emerald brings prosperity, wisdom, and healing powers, and is used for good". The sisters were convinced that they needed to give up the emerald.

"Fine," said Grace.

"You can not tell anyone about this," the Sorcerer said.

"Ok.", the girls said.

"Now you can not argue, ever ever again. If you do, you will end up back here and might not find me on your next trip. Also, I need you to keep a promise. I need you to keep the dimensions safe by changing people's heart with kindness, one little thing can change many lives," The sorcerer said "repeat after me... Awoka"

"Awoka," they repeated.

The girls felt a rush of wind and fog like the one before. When the girls woke up, they were astounded that they were back in the museum. From that day on the girls never argued again. Grace started showing compassion, Faith started caring for others, and Maya was helping other people, in hopes of changing people's hearts.



## **Autumn Snow**

5th Grade, Gilbert Elementary School

Teacher: K. Clift

### **DARK NIGHT**

The night was as dark as the bottom of the sea. Daniel was running away from home. In the middle of nowhere there was a forest. Daniel lived deep in these woods. He was poor, scrawny, and dirty with brown hair and blue eyes. Daniel was running away from home because he was trying to escape from his aunt.

Daniel's mom died shortly after he was born because of cancer. His dad went to World War II as a navy soldier, and never returned.

When he was younger, he had a brother named Aiden, but the aunt said that Aiden was kidnapped around 4 years old. He only had some memories of his brother.

So he was stuck at home with his horrible aunt. She was in her 80's. She had buck teeth that looked like she never brushed them in her life. She had tangled and greasy hair, and she was thick.

She would feed him on Wednesdays, but when he got fed, he had to eat bugs like slugs, crickets and flies. She would make him sleep outside because she never liked kids and thought they were nasty little rats... Even though he wasn't nasty, no, Daniel was a sweet boy who missed his family.

Daniel ran away to the woods hoping to find something to eat. He ended up finding some blueberries and ate them. They weren't ripe and were really sour and disgusting, but he ate them anyway because he had not eaten in three days.

He feared he was on the edge of death.

After eating, he built a small shelter out of sticks for the night. The next morning as he was walking in the woods, he saw a small shack. He was so desperate, he decided to knock on the door. No one answered, so he knocked one more time when the door flung open and the lights flickered off.

With curiosity, he walked inside the shack. Inside, against the bottom corner of a wall, there was what looked like a door, but it was small, almost as if it were made for a mouse. He opened the small door and peeked inside.

Suddenly Daniel was sucked into it!

When he stood up after being sucked through the strange vortex, he found

himself in another world. It was a beautiful and clean city- with no trash or pollution. The sky was bright blue with no clouds.

Then he saw people walking by- and one of them seemed very familiar- he saw his dad!

Daniel asked his dad, "Dad, what are you doing here?"

"I got captured by Nazis and they brought me to a camp. I escaped and found this place. I tried to come back but the door was too small.

This city is full of forgotten people or the dead." said his dad.

"But I did not forget you," Daniel said.

"And I did not forget you," said his dad.

"So am I dead?" asked Daniel.

"Yes," said his Dad. "Your mom is here. Shall I take you to her?"

Daniel was so excited he cried! He had never seen his mom in his life. On the way there he thought about how he died. Then he imagined what she would look like.

But then he felt something, and he opened his eyes. He was not in the city. He was in real-life, still in his small stick shelter, and it was morning. It was the best dream of his life. It turns out the blueberries he ate were "imagine berries." He knew it was too good to be true, so he walked and walked for three miles because he was so freaked out.

As he was walking he came to a large lake, across it, he saw a house. He swam over to it and he knocked on the door. A beautiful woman who had a warm smile answered the door and invited him in. There was also a dad and his adopted son named Aiden. The son looked very familiar...

They could tell he was homeless, and asked him if he needed a place to stay. He said yes," and stayed. He felt like they were the family he never had.

Three years later, they adopted him. Daniel was always curious though about his new brother... could Aiden be his long-lost brother?...

The End?

**Keegan Shockley**

5th Grade, Gilbert Elementary School

Teacher: K. Clift

## **THE RAT "Tail"**

### **CHAPTER 1**

It was the 1930's, New York to be precise. The name's Bobsin Twinkletoe. I'm a rat but I am mighty because I'm in the mafia. On with the story. I'm in an alleyway. "I can explain boys. I got the money!"

"We don't WANT THE DIRTY MONEY, we want your tail." said the boss, Goat McNose,. "WHAT?" I asked. "Okay, I'm out of here!"

I scurried home to the warehouse, scared. I call out to my brother, "Fishy Lips! I'm back." "BUBBLE, you're back " taunted Fishy Lips sarcastically.

"Shut it." I said.

"Bubble?"

"I need to go. Hey ENCHILADA! I'm coming!," I yelled to my living car.

"Yay let's commit a crime." said Enchilada with much enthusiasm.

"I don't want to," I said .

"OK." said Enchilada.

"I'm in big trouble with the ma-" I got cut off by the English bulldog busting through the wall: "CRASH"

"'ello, Mate you're more fat on ya than I can imagine." said Henrick the English bulldog.

"Would you like a cup of tea?" Henrick said.

"NO I don't want your dumb tea! I want your cheddar! Give me the cheddar or I'll bring out my friend Tommy the jack-in-the-box! HA HA HA!" I said.

"AH ok ok I'll do it, if you let me ATTACK FIRST!" said Henrick.

"I was bamboozled." I flipped over a table.

"You are no match for my books!" He started to throw them at me. "EAT MY LITERATURE."

Henrick threw the books .

Then I did "POW POW POW POW POW" I got him I actually got him!"

I'm saved, or at least I thought...

"I did it, I did it I got the money back!" I yelled in excitement.

"Not so fast." Said Goat McNose.

"HEY that ain't fair!" I exclaimed.

"It ain't about fairness it's about revenge now you want to watch your parents get trapped?" Said Goat.

"NO I WILL NOT!" I Said.

"Fine, your loss. HA!"

"Ow" The rat traps went off. "NO!" I yelled in anger and sadness. Later that day I drove home to the warehouse.

## CHAPTER 2

I returned home

"Hey Fishy Lips.,"

"What?" said fishy lips. After that he shook off the silliness and went back to normal.

On the next day Fishy Enchilada, and I went to a nuclear wasteland so we got gas masks and went.

"I learned how to talk!", Fishy. said

"We're here to meet an old friend. He lives in a barrel." I said.

We left the car then we opened a barrel and a thing came out.

"Ok let's move ." I said . We kept walking then we saw a barrel that was bolted to the ground.

"Guys, we need to jump in it ." I said letting the team know

"WHAT!? Are you CRAZY!" Fishy yelled . You're more delusional than Don Quixote De La Mancha." But we went in anyway.

As we descended into the seemingly endless hole we finally made it to the bottom . "Hey Mr Cluck, it's been twenty three years!" I exclaimed.

"Hello Bobsin." Cluck said in a deep voice.

"I'm not the man I used to be," said Cluck mysteriously.

"What do you mean?" I said I was very confused.

"I'm not the punch first, talk later guy anymore okay! " He said angrily

"But why?" I asked.

"BECAUSE I'M"

"Being controlled... by me." Said Mc Nose.

"Mc Nose why are you doing these things!?" I said.

"He's right, why?" Then fishy joined me too.

"Fine I'll tell you. Ever since you ATE ALL THE CHEESE on your first day on the job I've hated you but I couldn't stand it when you brought your three buddies so I exiled Cluck and I was going to exile the rest of you guys. So on your birthday, I gave you \$5,0000 still owned by the mob so when you started a branch of the mob I sold one of your favorite bottles of cheese infused soda for \$5,000. I knew you'd buy it. I did that so I'd have a reason to trap you and your branch."

"Now that you're distracted catching your breath, Cluck is tying you up in a rope so I can turn the tables and put you in a rat trap." I said

"WHAT N-"

Snap

"Well now that's over, wait, where's Enchilada.?"

"(snoring snoring)" Enchilada was snoring the whole time.

THE END

## Nalah Bellah

6th Grade, Wilson Middle School

Teacher: A. Adkison

### Marie

In a world where emotions can be traded, a young superhero struggles to find happiness for her younger brother.

I trail behind a person with full happiness. I walk silently up to them and tap their shoulder. I put on a fake smile and begin talking.

"Excuse me miss, but I couldn't help to notice that you had full happiness-"

"Sorry I'm not interested in your offer," she replies with an arrogant smile. She flicks her hair over her shoulder and walks away. I scowl at her retreating figure.

After a tiring search of trying to find someone, I return home empty handed as always. I step into the house and head straight to Ethan's room. I find him lying down in bed with his headphones plugged in and staring up at the ceiling.

"Hey loser, are you doing ok?" No response. I nudge him gently with my elbow. His eyes flicker open and his cold gaze lands on me. I sigh and exit his room.

Later that week I'm searching yet again but this time it's different. Way different. I notice a young man around my age with 90% happiness. Perfect. I approach him with a gentle tap on his shoulder. As he turns around I get a strange feeling from him.

He's rather tall and reminds me of someone. More specifically the villain I used to fight against. My eyes narrow and I glare at him.

"You." We both say at the same time as we stare each other down.

"Now Ms. Marie what are you doing, tapping the villain on the shoulder that you're supposed to be fighting with?" He asks me with a smirk.

"It's none of your business Zade," I reply in a snarky tone.

"Are you sure? You seemed rather desperate for whatever you were gonna ask me."

"Like I said. It's. *Nothing*." I brush past him and walk home in the rain. He's very determined to know what's been bugging me these past few weeks. As I walk a car slowly drives behind and honks.

"Marieeee you can't hide from me. I'll give you a ride to your house-" I cut him off by walking to the passenger side. He locks the door as I try getting in. "As I was saying, only if you tell me why you've been moping around and not trying to fight me."

"What makes you think I'm gonna let my biggest enemy know my weakness?"

"Maybe because I'm offering to drive you home while it's pouring outside?" He gives me a cheeky little grin. I reluctantly give in and hop inside the car. I take a deep breath and start to explain.

"I've been moping around everywhere because I'm searching for someone to trade their happiness with my little brother. Our parents passed away a few months ago and he's been very depressed." He glances at me as I talk, a look of pity slowly fills his eyes.

"Don't give me that look," I say bitterly.

He returns his gaze back to the road. Uncomfortable silence fills the car. The rain falls heavily on the roof of his car. I give him directions to my house. After a few awkward moments we finally arrive at my apartment.

"Marie?" He whispers gently.

"Yeah what's up Zade?"

"I wanna help you and your brother." He places a small piece of paper in my hands. "That paper has my number on it. Whenever you search, call me so I can help you find someone for Ethan.

"How do you know his name? I never told you"

"I have my ways Ms.Marie."

A week has passed and I'm getting ready to search again. I put on my coat and see a little paper fall out. Zade's number. I bite my lip, debating whether to text him or not. I decide to text him

"Hey Zade, it's me Marie. I'm going searching today. Meet me at my house if you wanna come." I shoot him the text and wait for his response.

After 7 minutes I hear a soft knock on my door. I answer and find Zade waiting by the door. I follow him as we travel around the city. We approach over 20 people and ask if they were willing to trade happiness with my little brother. They all decline either politely or rudely. After spending 45 minutes we give up for the day and go back inside his car.

"I'm really sorry we couldn't find anyone" Zade gives me a sad smile.

"It's ok. It's not your fault. I understand people don't wanna trade full happiness for depression." I sigh softly and divert my focus to the trees outside.

He opens his mouth to say something but he shuts his mouth and stays quiet. After a few months have passed my happiness has slowly started going down since I can't find anymore to switch happiness with Ethan.

One day I'm sobbing in my room. My sobs quietly echo off the walls of the room. I hear a soft knock on my door.

"Hello?" I whisper, my voice sounds very cracked.

"Can I come in?" I don't respond and the door slowly creaks open to reveal Zade. I look away from him as tears stream down my face. He approaches me and wraps his arms around me.

"I'm giving Ethan my happiness."

"Why? Zade b-but you're gonna be sad!"

"It's worth it because I love you Marie. That's the only reason I kept going every day." He wipes tears away from my cheeks and kisses my forehead gently. I'm very shocked by his answer as he gets up and heads into Ethan's room. I get up and follow him. I watch as Ethan's happiness slowly goes up. But I notice something weird. Zade's happiness stays the same.

"Zade, why isn't your happiness going down?" He smiles and looks down at me."

"It's because of you, you make me happy." He leans down and kisses me gently,  
The end.



**Ethan Gordon**

7th Grade, Wilson Middle School

Teacher: K. Madrinich

### **The Twix Takeover**

I sat in my rocking chair, old and gray. Wondering how, how did it all go wrong. I was one of the only ones that remembered the days before Twix. Now it's the only thing keeping everyone alive. I look into my journal thinking over what we could have done differently to stop this.

4/2/1979

"Do you like candy, do you like caramel, well if so try Twix the candy sensation that's sweetening the nation." nb bbnnb b

"Time for dinner," My mother shouted from the dining room.

"Coming," I said, turning off the TV.

"We're having alfredo pasta today," my mother said.

"Did you hear about that new candy bar they're selling? I've heard it's to die for."

"Yea" my mom said. "That reminds me, I saw some at the store, I'll get them right now" my mother replied.

I opened the golden wrapper and bit into the chocolate. It was like my mouth exploded with flavor, the smooth chocolate melted in my mouth. The caramel was so creamy not even the most expensive caramel, (which I won in a competition) could compare. With the crunch of the wafer tying it all together. It was hands down the best candy I'd ever tasted. From then on I bought it whenever I could. I recommended it to my friends, teachers, and family. I was hooked.

Twix was growing in power; it was now the number one most popular candy bar in the world. Some candy fanatics were eating it for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. The best part was Twix had created technology to prevent weight gain from their candy. Aliens revealed themselves to earth just to get some Twix.

"Hey, did you hear the news," my friend asked me.

"No, I was too busy eating Twix".

"Apparently Twix has been selling their candy as replacements for food. This Twix stuff is getting out of hand.

Just then I heard the owner of the local candy shop Ms. Pratchett shouting nonsense.

"Don't trust them!" she shouted. "They're all lying."

"Who's lying," someone shouted.

"It's Twix," she said. "Heed my warning they'll kill us all, the world as we know it will end, run far and wide spread the word don't listen to Twix!"

Ms. Pratchett had just lost her husband a few years ago and was known as the local "crazy woman", but she made the best candy so the people tolerated her. So when the people heard what she had to say they thought her mind just couldn't take her husband's death any more. She was taken to a mental facility a day later, where she was heard screaming,

"DON'T TRUST THEM, DON'T TRUST TWIX."

Most of the neighborhood took it as crazy rambling but it left a lasting effect on my young mind. So I started researching Twix. Turns out they had very sketchy beginnings, but their candy was so good no one took notice. I began reading forums on the bad things about Twix, how it's like a drug. People were spending too much on it. I began to dread the power Twix would have if the world became too dependent on it.

4/15/1989

As the years passed I started studying politics in hopes of putting the world back on the right track. I was putting my ideas about Twix out to the world moving from one place to the next. Twix had gained so much power that they had practically taken over every major government and was now the staple food of every country, having different versions to show each country's culture. One country had even made Twix its official currency. One day at the hotel I was staying at, the receptionist called me on the phone.

"Excuse me we have a visitor for Mr. John Smith,"(It wasn't my real name, I had ditched that long ago).

I knew at once who it was. They were from Twix coming to capture me. I packed to leave at once but as soon as I stepped into the elevator someone was waiting for me.

"We have been looking for someone like you for a long time." the man said.

"W-Who are you?" I squeaked afraid for my life.

"I've come from the Anti-Twix Organization or A.T.O. I have come to ask for your help."

He told me he had a plan to take down Twix but he was short on people. He needed me to use my influence as a respected politician to recruit people to his cause. I readily accepted, eager for the opportunity.

The plan was to sneak into the main Twix building and insert a single USB chip into the main supercomputer, overriding all Twix factories and deleting the Twix recipe forever. The few people that knew the recipe in their head were eliminated.

The plan failed. There were spies in the A.T.O employed by Twix. They were waiting for us. It was a slaughter and to this day I still don't know how I survived. Those who weren't killed were taken as slaves to forever work for Twix.

9/17/2079 Present Day.

Twix has taken over the world. All of the currency, food, drink, buildings, even the universe is now Twix. Beings from other worlds travel from afar selling everything they have, even their whole universe just to get Twix. All of it was organized by the race known as the Achterkamp. They go to multiverses that have only been around for a few billion years and using food and technology that is far more advanced than anything on earth take over the whole multiverse. Traveling from multiverse to multiverse all to reach their ultimate goal. To take over everything. The Achterkamp were not a powerful race and other multiverses would steal the valuable resources that their planet had until they had nothing left. They swore to get revenge. To conquer everything, so they would stand on top of the world.

**Isaac Gordon**

7th Grade, Wilson Middle School

Teacher: K. Madrinich

## **The Power of Words**

### Prologue

In a rural island village in a far away place lived a community of people. This society looked normal enough, most men and women having dark hair and eyes and dark skin from working long days in the sun. However, if you were ever to visit this nation you would be met with a strange sight, because in this place you would hear laughter, and exclamations, and gasps but you would not hear a single word being spoken. For you see, this village believed in the power of words.

Nicholas woke up feeling elated because today was the day he had been dreaming about for most of his young life. He dashed out of his room, barely glancing at his reflection in the mirror, as his white hair trailed behind him in an electric mess. Signing good morning quickly to his parents he left the house forgetting to grab breakfast, though he remembered to grab his hat. Everyone knew how to speak, but sign language was mostly used to communicate as his community held spoken language in high regard and believed that you should not speak unless you were in the most dire of circumstances, as words could be rash and premature and could lead to trouble.

As Nick arrived to the middle of the island he looked up at the waving banner that read "**Decennial Boar Hunt**". Other people were giving him looks as usual because of his unique pigmentless hair that had caused him plenty of strife throughout his life. He shoved his hair farther into his hat and searched around in the crowd for any sign of his best friend John but he couldn't see him. Him and John had been fantasizing about joining the boar hunt ever since they had viewed their first one five years ago. The boar hunt took place every ten years. The goal of the hunt was to go to a secluded, wild boar infested, part of the island and slay as many boars as possible in an eight hour period. This challenge had been going on for hundreds of years, as it helped keep the boar population from growing too rapidly and kept the town well fed for years.

Suddenly he saw John's angular face in the registration line with... Will? Nick was confused and hurt, all his insecurities came pouring out from the darkest corners of his brain. Why would John go with his other friend instead of him? Soon his confusion turned to anger and his hurt into rage. From the beginning it was supposed to be him and John, John and him. He stormed over to the queue and as he approached, John saw him and tried to hide behind the crowd, but it was too late.

*What is this about!* Nick signed furiously, hoping that maybe, there was an explanation to this betrayal. John signed back timidly, *I'm going to enter with Will instead*, his eyes locked onto the ground.

Nick's blood boiled, rushing through every part of his body, thrusting out all reason from his head, and obscuring any logical thought from his eye. Nick then did something he had never even conceived of doing for over ten years, he spoke.

"I hope you enjoy the hunt with your new best friend," he said, his voice weak from misuse, but getting stronger by the second, "Just so you know, by doing this, with him, you have lost a friend in me."

Everyone was silent in the square, they had not heard words being spoken in a long time, but knew that anything spoken with words was the truth, and so now, everyone knew his disagreement with John wasn't just a petty squabble, but a serious issue.

Wait, I ca... John signed but Nick's back was already turned and he stormed away, angry and embarrassed.

Once Nick cooled off a little he decided to go to the hospital his dad worked at. Sometimes he would go there to help out and thought that it would be a good place to forget about his troubles. He decided to go to his dad's office, but on his way he saw someone signing rapidly to someone in another room. Upon closer inspection, he realized it was Will's parents with a doctor.

*Are you sure he is strong enough to go into this hunt,* his mom said

*He'll be fine. His condition is progressive even though he will...*, he paused for a second, *pass in a year, for right now he is perfectly healthy,* the doctor said.

*It's really nice of that boy, John, to take him to the contest for one of his last wishes,* his father added.

Nick was astonished. His heart sank as he realized that John did not abandon him for no good reason, he did it for the sake of a friend. That sounded much like the John he knew, and not the evil and betrayal driven figure he had created in his mind. He knew what he had to do.

He dashed out to where the boar hunt took place and waited. Finally after ten hours of strait waiting the Boar Hunt finally concluded.

He met with John just beyond the threshold where the boar hunt took place

"I'm sorry" Nick said in a timid voice. He then explained how he had seen Will's parents and how he had heard about his illness, and that he knew why John did what he did. John forgave him, of course, but their friendship was never quite the same again. Much, much later Nick would tell his grandkids this story. He concluded with a phrase he had told his kids before them, *Words can be good, and words can be bad, but whatever you say, always remember the power of words.*

**Maximiliano Torres**

7th Grade, Lewis and Clark Middle School

Teacher: J. Coons

### **Importance of Life**

It was a bright sunny day with a few clouds and the birds were singing so brightly that most famous singers would be jealous. Every bone in my body wanted school to end so I could go home and relax on my bed. After hearing that bell ring I was filled with excitement and relief. When I got to my car my parents asked me if I had a good day in school, and as usual I said, "Good!" and talked about how my day was. When I got home I rushed to my bed and laid there. The bed felt like marshmallows, soft and comfortable. I was about to take a nap when my parents asked me to get ready to go to my grandparents house for a BBQ.

When I heard that we were going to my grandparents house for a BBQ my mouth was watery and my heart was dancing for joy. My grandpa made carne asada with the carne marinated with beer. This dish is my favorite for its explosion of flavor. When I eat this dish I feel like my heart just got chocolates for valentines. When we got to my grandparents house, the grass was cut perfectly and the house was bright and colorful. Before my parents could knock on the door, my grandpa opened the door. We greeted him and our grandma. Our grandpa is an easy-tempered guy that is kind to others. He usually tells jokes and makes people happy. He is a Christian and is friendly with others.

"Wanna help me cook the meat?" asked my grandpa. I was filled with excitement. This was the first time I was watching my grandpa cook the meat. But first we had to get some of the ingredients for the meat, so we went to a nearby market. When we got there my grandpa saw a friend and talked about how they were. My grandpa was talkative and polite with the cashier and people around him. After we bought the meat we went back to his house to cook it. He taught me step-by-step how to cook the meat and we laughed and talked about our days.

After we ate, my family was talking to my grandpa in the backyard. I then realized that my grandpa was the nicest person I knew and he would care for people, even strangers. My grandpa was always happy and smiling, and in my whole life I've never seen my grandpa sad or enraged. Before we ate our meals he would give a quick prayer. I wanted to be like my grandpa. He was so generous with others and even more with us around. My grandpa said something that has stuck with me, "The most important thing is to enjoy your life, to be happy."

In conclusion, my grandpa made an impact on my life by modeling how to be polite and happy. He helped me through the years to help me become a better person. He taught me to be kind to others and to keep smiling. He taught me manners when I was younger. I just want to be just like him when I'm older. I will teach others how to live life happily and to be a good person. My role model who has impacted my life is my *grandpa*.

**Aubrey Gonzalez**

10th Grade, Davis High School

Teacher: S. Irwin

### **Your Memory**

I sat alone in the locker room, eyes fixed on the volleyball in my hands. I took a deep breath and closed my eyes, trying to calm the nerves that were threatening to overwhelm me. Today was the day of the big game, the one that would honor Gaby's memory. It had been exactly one year since Gaby had died and I was determined to win this game for her.

As I stepped onto the court, I closed my eyes and took a deep breath. I felt a sense of purpose and power wash over me. I knew that Gaby was watching over me, that she was there with me in spirit. As I felt that emotion I noticed a smile was forming and so, I played with everything I had, putting every ounce of energy and passion into each serve and spike.

It was now my turn to serve, and as I stepped up to the line, I took a deep breath and focused all my energy on the task at hand. I looked up at the scoreboard and saw that it was 25-24. I had to serve the winning point.

My heart pounding loudly in my chest as I closed my eyes saying>"This is for you Gaby. I love you." I opened my eyes as I looked to the stands where Gaby once sat and all of a sudden I drowned in memories that came to my mind.

I was suddenly brought back to the past.

I woke up in a hurry trying to put everything in my bag. Today was the biggest volleyball tournament in the history of volleyball. It was our school's biggest chance to win the championship. As I was preparing to leave, my phone rang. It was my girlfriend, Gaby. She was excited that I was going to play and told me that she would be cheering for me.

I smiled as I hung up the phone and got in my car to head to the tournament. I couldn't wait to see Gaby in the stands, cheering me on. As I arrived at the gymnasium, I could feel the excitement building inside of me. This was it. This was our chance to make history.

The game started off well, and our team was playing with everything we had. But as the game went on, we began to fall behind. The other team was playing hard, and we were struggling to keep up. We were down two sets to one, and the pressure was building.

As we prepared for the fourth set, I looked up at the stands and saw Gaby holding a poster. At first, I couldn't make out what it said, but as she got closer, I could see the words "will you go to homecoming with me?" in bold letters.

I was stunned. I had no idea that Gaby was going to ask me to homecoming. I looked at her, feeling a mix of emotions - surprise, joy, and nervousness. But seeing her there, with her heart on her sleeve, made me realize that I might love her.

But we were in the middle of a game, and I couldn't let my feelings distract me. I nodded to Gaby and turned back to the court, determined to give it my all.

The fourth set was intense, and we fought hard. But in the end, we lost by just 2 points. As we walked off the court, I felt disappointed. We had come so close, but it just wasn't enough.

As I made my way to the locker room, Gaby caught up with me. "I'm sorry we lost," she said. "But I just had to ask you. Will you go to homecoming with me?"

I looked at her, feeling a mix of emotions, but seeing her there, with her genuine smile and kind eyes, confirmed that I love her.

"Yes," I said, smiling from ear to ear. "I would love to go to homecoming with you."<sup>11</sup>

Gaby's face lit up, and she threw her arms around me in a tight hug. "I'm so glad," she said, her voice filled with happiness.



I hugged Gaby back, feeling a sense of warmth and joy spread through me at her touch. At that moment, I knew that everything was going to be okay, that even if we didn't win the tournament, we had each other.

Gaby pulled back, her eyes shining with happiness. "I can't wait for homecoming," she said, beaming at me.

"Me too," I replied, feeling a smile spread across my face.

I opened my eyes to the voice of Gaby's mom cheering me on, I tossed the ball into the air and swung my arm back, putting all my energy into the serve. The ball sailed over the net, and I watched as it hit the ground on the other side of the court.

The crowd erupted into cheers, and my teammates rushed over to hug me. We had won the game, thanks to my final serve.

As I looked up at the scoreboard, tears streaming down my face, I knew that Gaby was watching over me. I knew that she was there with me, cheering me on, and giving me the strength to serve that winning point.

And as I walked off the court, I made eye contact with Gaby's mom. I could see tears coming down her face. She walked over to me and hugged me tightly.

"Thank you," she whispered. "Thank you for playing for Gaby. She loved you so much, and I know she would have been so proud of you."

I felt my own tears trickling down my cheeks as I hugged her back. It was a bittersweet moment, knowing that Gaby wasn't there to see us win, but also feeling grateful that we could honor her memory in this way.

As we pulled apart, Gaby's mom handed me a small envelope. "This is for you," she said, her voice quavering but hiding it with a smile through her tears. "Gaby wanted you to have it."

I opened the envelope with trembling hands, wondering what could be inside. As I pulled out the small note, written in Gaby's familiar handwriting, my heart began to race. What could she want to tell me?

As I read the words on the page, tears sprang to my eyes. "You've been my calm, my breath, my peace, my fire, my pain," she had written. "And even through all of that, we finally made it to our own version of heaven."

As I finished reading Gaby's note, I looked up to see tears in her mom's eyes. She was looking around, lost in thought, and I knew that she was thinking of her daughter.

Seeing those tears on Gaby's mom's face, I felt a surge of emotion. I knew that I had played for something more than just a game. I had played for Gaby, for her memory, and for her love.

But most of all, we had played for Gaby- for the girl who had touched our lives in so many ways, and who had left a lasting impression on all of us.

As I walked over to Gaby's mom and gave her a hug, I knew that no matter what happened in life, I would always carry Gaby's memory in my heart. And I would always be grateful for the time we had together- the laughter, the tears, and the love that we had shared.

**Adilene Cordero**

11th Grade, A.C. Davis High School

Teacher: N. Pizano

### **A Soldier's Final Reflection**

They told us the Great War would be the one to end all wars. Yet there I was, some 27 years later, getting ready to deny ol' Adolf his twisted victory. Don't get me wrong I was proud to be able to serve my country but I couldn't deny my yearning to be anywhere else. Preferably with my Betty, she was the light of my life, the reason I got up in the morning. We were supposed to get married but there wasn't any time before I got shipped off. I thought of her when I felt like I couldn't go on anymore. And that she was waiting for me to come home so we could finally be together living the life we both deserved.

In all honesty, joining the army was the last thing I thought I'd ever do in my life. Because truthfully I was scared by the idea of never coming back. Yet, conversations everywhere were dominated by the attraction of army life and finally being in a "real" war. And all of those tacky posters plastered on every corner, urging me to enlist didn't help. Eventually, it all became too much, a constant reminder of the decision in front of me that would eventually shape the rest of my life, so naturally I joined.

General Miller's warnings about being ready for anything and the threat of the enemy - it all felt so distant and inconsequential that day as if nothing really mattered. But what did linger in my mind was the piercing coldness of that winter day, the bone chilling air that seemed to seep into my very core. That day felt so heavy and sorrowful, as if it knew what was to come. There was never much to eat. Most days, if we were lucky, a simple cup of coffee and some kind of jerky or bread but I couldn't bring myself to eat anything so I just went to my foxhole for the night. And as I laid there and tried my best to fall asleep I couldn't help but find comfort in the distant rumbling sounds of fighting going on in the distance. But the distinct and abrupt clamor of voices and equipment woke me suddenly the next morning. It had turned out that the Germans had made some significant advances during the night, becoming much closer than we all initially expected. "Get up Thomas, time to go and fight. What a way to wake up huh?" My friend Jake had said to me as he headed out with the rest of our company.

I quickly got up and grabbed my gear, these actions ingrained in me like tying my shoes. Acting first, thinking later something that two years in the army had etched into my very being. Our company got prepared swiftly, ready to march on those 'krauts' and reclaim some land for the allies. As we made our way along a wooded part of land, I couldn't help but appreciate the stillness of this moment as the snow began to blanket the earth. Then the distant rumble of tanks and the synchronized footsteps of the approaching enemy brought me back to the real world. The severity of our situation then suddenly hit me with a force that sent shivers throughout my entire body. My head pounded, beads of sweat started to form on my brow and my heart felt as if it was gonna beat out of my chest. Bullets then rained through the air, some narrowly missing me. "Take cover and fire!" Major Smith suddenly commanded.

I took cover behind a stone wall and gasped for air as the adrenaline coursed through my veins. This wasn't the first time something had almost gotten me, but the unsettling truth had finally dawned on me - my luck was running out. I then peered over the wall only to see more Germans advancing through the lines, and almost instantly my hands began to tremble as I tried my best to grip my rifle. As I shot in the enemy's direction most of me hoped for one to hit

its mark yet simultaneously a deep - rooted desire remained hoping it wouldn't. Because we really were one in the same, both fighting for our countries, for what we believed was right. I knew what they had done was wrong but could killing every German soldier I saw fix the problem? Killing somebody who might not have had anything to do with our deaths, somebody who might not have even believed in the cause? The weight of having taken another person's life pressed heavily on my conscience every day, the fact that the soldier I just killed was somebody who had a family, who had dreams of the future and I took that all away from them. I then continued firing, as I felt more and more repulsed by my actions, past and present.

The area where a few soldiers and I had been shooting from became increasingly dangerous. And as I tried to follow the men and regroup with the rest of our company, a sudden, searing pain shot through my shoulder. The impact knocked me down and my head grazed the ground. Looking up I witnessed the soldiers I was with, run into German forces. And despite their attempts to plead and beg for their lives, cruel reality answered them. Their acts of surrender were met with a deadly response; a shot to the head. The horror of the scene left me utterly speechless, my attempts to call out for help were useless. I was frozen, and the world around me seemed to blur into irrelevance as I felt what can only be described as sheer terror.

I stumbled back to my feet and rushed to find other soldiers from my company. It was all too much- the gunfire, planes roaring by and the blood-curdling screams of men as they died. The air was thick and reaked of death and despair; men I had shared a room with, had meals with and even trained alongside were just gone, why? Because of the age - old problem that has torn mankind apart for centuries, hate. It isn't fair not to the living nor the dead. Generations of people just gone because somebody somewhere thought it to be right. If there is a god I wonder what he would make of all this? We were given free will and mankind chose hate and greed over loving thy neighbor. How can god stand by as thousands of people die everyday with the thought that their god has forsaken them. Where is his mercy now?

I couldn't process what I had just seen or the blistering pain from my wound. Desperate, I sought cover and tried my best to breathe through the thick smoke that hung in the air. While all of the incomprehensible images played out before my eyes, the sights etching themselves into my soul never to be forgotten. Despite my grim familiarity of such scenes, this time it all seemed to cling to me with an unrelenting grip. As I was trying to regain my composure, my eyes then met his - a young German soldier no older than 17, his eyes showed a mix of fear and determination. As if this was his moment he could prove himself worthy.

I attempted to stand up and keep eye contact with him. Hoping he'd see the fear in my eyes and that I honestly meant him no harm. Yet like a flash of lightning, he fired, and an excruciating pain exploded in my chest. Disbelief then echoed in both of our eyes, shared astonishment that he had the courage to pull the trigger. I couldn't speak as I instinctively clutched my chest, attempting to stop the blood from pouring out of me. And as he turned away, a sense of betrayal washed over me. That he just left me behind, to die alone. Our thin thread of shared humanity seemingly snapped, replaced by the harsh fact that when in war it's either kill or be killed. The world will never be the same.

So as I laid there, it's almost as if I knew that this was it, the grand finale. The long awaited end to this living nightmare. There was so much blood pouring out of me yet it was as if I couldn't feel it. I tried to think about all the time I had spent with my family, fellow soldiers and my beloved Betty. But did I truly deserve this moment of peace in my final hour when my hands were so stained by the blood of the poor devils I killed along the way. I didn't want to die, there was still so much I wanted to do. But then, without warning everything around me began to fade away and it was calm again now, forever.

**Adan Duarte**

12th Grade, Stanton Academy

Teacher: A. Lyden

## **Freedom**

It was a dark stormy night in the southern woods of West Virginia. I was running for my life, my feet were tired, my heart was pounding, and I could hardly catch my breath. My clothes were soaking wet, but I found myself relieved because up ahead I saw something wonderful. Finally the very much spoken of safehouse was right before my eyes. I was there, it was real. As I ran up the stairs a mighty thunder wave trembled through my body, I clenched my fist and knocked as hard as I could.

A thin tall gentleman opened the door. I ran inside and dropped to my knees, for over a minute I couldn't say a word. I remember looking into this man's eyes and feeling a sense of relief. I was safe. But that didn't last very long. A demanding knock disturbed the peace. No! My worst nightmare. This whole time I had been followed by a slave catcher!

The tall man signaled me to the back door, which led into a dark closet. I could hear the slave catcher yell. "Where is he, where is he!" I hid under a huge pile of old raggedy clothes. I heard footsteps approaching. The closet door opened, the clothes on top of me felt lighter and lighter. For some reason, fate was on my side. I can't explain what happened that night, but the slave catcher didn't find me. He left infuriated, the door slammed shut. Finally, I could rest.

I spent the night there. The tall man was very welcoming, but I knew in my heart that I could not stay very long. I was less than 40 miles from the last safehouse, it would take me 2 days and 1 night to reach my destination. The next morning before the sunrise, I embarked on my journey. I headed to the last safehouse. It seemed like I would never make it, it felt like ages. When I finally reached the safehouse, my feet were throbbing, my legs were shaking, and I was hungrier than a bear on the first day of spring after winter hibernation. This time I was greeted by an elderly lady.

The lady and I talked for hours after supper. I told her about my grueling journey to freedom. After what seemed an eternal night's rest, I woke up, showered, and joined the elderly woman for breakfast. It couldn't have been later than seven or eight in the morning because the sun wasn't too high up in the sky yet. I quickly finished my breakfast, thanked the woman and proceeded to leave on what would be my last and final journey to freedom. The lady gave me directions and told me the shortcuts I needed to take in order to get to Philadelphia.

On my journey, I crossed a raging river, two enormous rocky hills, and the final trench, which was nothing more than a deserted pathway filled with wildlife that was native to that area. The sun was just beginning to set in the horizon. I knew I wasn't far because I could hear the hum of the city. Suddenly I heard a gunshot, "oh no" it was the slave catcher. I ran as fast as my tired legs could carry me. I could see the sign that said Welcome to Philadelphia in the distance.

Suddenly I felt something pierce my leg, but I couldn't stop, I was too close to give up now. Could it be? I was finally there, I reached my hand out to touch the sign. I felt a warm flush travel through the back of my head. My face scraped the dirt of the territory of freedom. I didn't make it alive as many others did. As I closed my eyes I felt a calm sense of relief because, even though I didn't survive, at least I died a free man.

### **A Memory**

As the trees faded into a clear sky over a bright expanse of rocky deserted land, I saw very well the open landscape before me. As we drove a few more miles towards the beach my mom told us we were almost there. As a child I was very excited to go to the beach for the first time. I remember clearly when we arrived at the hotel. The elevator stopped at the fourth or third floor. Our room was sparkling clean and uncluttered. The living room couches faced a breakfast bar in the kitchen and after eating a breakfast of orange juice and muffins we awaited the fun of the beach outside.

"Can we go down yet?" I asked my parents.

"You have to get ready. Put on this sunblock," my mom said as she took the bottle out of her beach bag.

"I don't need that much," I said as she lathered it on me.

I didn't, but she made sure to anoint it onto every part of my white skin that would get exposed to the sun.

"Don't forget your ears," my dad said.

I was so excited to go that I would indeed have forgotten that.

The walk along the beach was pleasant enough. Walking barefoot along the sand until we decided to stop and my parents layed out their beach towels and unfolded their giant umbrellas. Us kids made sand castles while our parents sat in the shade. The plastic cylindrical mold worked well to create a little castle. I sat and admired it until a tidal wave ebbed onto the beach, destroying it. Then I saw another kid's castle a few feet away from me and the water. I moved over there to make my new castle.

"How did you make that?" I asked the kid when I saw his giant castle.

He didn't answer but continued to make a new one beside it. There seemed to be a permanence to his castle. It had ramparts around it like you'd see archers positioned upon in a medieval action movie. The height reached its pinnacle of a few feet with one central pillar reaching the highest. But as the mighty have fallen, his too, was consumed by the waves.

"How did the waves ebb and flow like this?" I thought and looked into the sea, searching for a big wave that must have caused the tide to rise. But I could not find one.

The next day my uncle Eric came down to visit and go swimming with us. He took us to a spot that was not so crowded with people. This swimming hole was next to a cliff that jutted out into the sky.

"Don't you think the cliff looks like an elephant?" my brother asked me.

It did. I also watched people jump off of it. My uncle who wore sunglasses stood to the side of us. I asked him if he was scared of jumping off of it.

"Scared? I jumped off of bridges ten times this height before. I'll jump off of it right now."

He took his sunglasses and baseball cap off and placed them in the sand:

"Watch and learn," he said.

He stood behind a couple of people, the anticipation increasing with each person. Then he ran up to the edge of the cliff and scrunched himself up into a cannonball.

"Wahhooo!" he shouted from the sky.

We all watched, impressed that he had such courage. The only problem was when we saw his shoe fly off in midair.

"There goes his shoe," said my dad.

As we watched swimmers surface from the swimming hole, we saw Eric, rubbing the water out from his eyes with his fists, then we noticed his shoe slowly floating away from him. It was floating into the ocean.

My dad tried yelling to him about it, but once Eric saw it, it was floating faster than Eric could swim, silently away until it became a small dot.

After playing in the water for another fifteen minutes, we went back to the 'hotel. I asked My dad and Eric what we were going to do after the beach. I looked forward to spending more time with Eric and didn't want to go home yet.

"There is a hike an hour from here," Eric said. 'I can show you guys it on the way.'

When we get to the so-called hike, my uncle tells us there is a waterfall at the end and that if we think we can make it; it's worth it.

But my brother is more concerned with his shoes. He did not bring anything but crocs. The mini mart we stopped at also didn't have orange juice. That's his favorite. I remember my mom always giving him orange juice. When she asked if he wanted her to fill up his bottle with apple or grape, he would always refuse and say, "Orange."

The thickness of the trees that surround both sides of the path are impressive and I get a sense of calmness.

"This is nature as it is. The true reality of the world," I think to myself.

After walking for about ten minutes, I asked my Dad what we got at the store before the hike.

He pulls out a bag of mountain trail mix. It was an interesting mixture of flavors, with the raisin being the most surprising, as if it didn't belong there. It had some sweetness, although it was quite sour in comparison to the M&Ms, and of course the almonds, they were fewer than the peanuts which made me savor them even more.

"Watch out for the bears," Uncle Eric said to us.

"What bears?" I asked.

"The vicious grizzlies. The ferocious man eating monsters," Eric said.

"It's very rare that you would encounter a bear, and besides, bears are more scared of you than you are of them," said my dad calmly.

But this didn't convince me. I have heard of bears attacking people. Big burly bears with long sharp claws.

We walked in silence for a while.



There were many types of wildlife on the trail, but mainly we would see rabbits hopping along the forest floor. When we got deeper into the forest we'd see squirrels scurrying up branches until they would stop and eat a nut of some sort. Then they would again dart off up a branch and out of sight.

We eventually reached the waterfall. It was a glorious downpour of water. It was like Niagra Falls. My uncle showed us all a picture of him there.

"It's one of the biggest in the world," he said coolly as he showed us a picture on his phone. And that's when I heard it. A roar from down below.

"What was that?" my dad said.

There was a bear down below. It looked like it was searching for fish in the river.

After we got a way back down the trail, my uncle said, "If that bear wasn't already fishing, it might have come for us."

When I got back to school, as I walked among my peers I felt the feeling of adventure still lingering with me. The dense forest and the bear. The sea and the it's bank of sand. I wondered if my peers had gone on a trip like this as well. However sitting at my seat my thoughts started to drift away as I awaited the instructions of the next assignment.

I met with my friend Teddy later that day on the playground. My curiosity had been greeted with a game of marbles from him. He had many new ones, a sign that he had not lost interest in it. As we sat in the grassy field, I watched him pull out from his bag his new marbles.

"These marbles are from my grandma's house. She lives in Kansas," Teddy said as he handed me a small cat-eye. It had stained markings of dirt on it as if it was played within the hands of children that were no longer children.

"I also have something for you," I told Teddy as I dug into my pocket for a seashell I collected from the beach. It had a strange shape to it. It was like the opposite of a chicken nugget because it was spiky, but roughly the same size.

I trusted Teddy as my friend. By exchanging souvenirs I felt our friendship unite in a strange way. The seashell looked like a toy and I thought Teddy may try to play with it, but I kept these thoughts to myself as I went back to class. I watched as some kids ran back and fell down on the cement. They were in such a hurry, or if their minds weren't, their legs were. Or perhaps they were not in a hurry and fell down anyways. I didn't know. After all, no one person can know everything

# 2023 Voices/Voces

## Poetry/Poesía

*Writing that develops an idea in a fresh, original way, in a format that breaks from traditional prose through the use of line breaks, word placement, rhythm, rhyme, and/or other poetic elements.*

*Escritura que desarrolla una idea de una manera nueva y original, en un formato que rompe con la prosa tradicional por medio del uso de pausas, colocación de palabras, ritmo, rima u otros elementos poéticos.*

## **Omar García**

2nd grade, Gilbert Elementary School

Teacher: S. Pederson

### **Los Océanos**

Saltar sobre las olas,  
Nadar en las aguas saladas,  
Con mis camaradas,

Miro algas marinas,  
Que están en la orilla,

Navegar en un bote,  
Talvez con un sacerdote,

Es divertido jugar en el océano,  
Cuando estoy mirando,

Los océanos cubren gran parte del planeta,  
Eso dice la historieta,

En realidad, los océanos cubren más superficie que la tierra,  
incluso más que Inglaterra,

Así es el mar ancho y bonito,  
Hasta el cielo infinito.

## **Polo Beltran-Walters**

4th grade, Roosevelt Elementary School

Teacher: D. Goins

### **The Let Go Pass**

The place where we are is the hard part about life. You just have to lighten up.

The place where we are is the place where we become better.

The place where you can have fun and the parts you didn't.

We all have changes, some make us let go of hard feelings, some are good.

We all have changes that can deeply hurt you like someone broke your heart.

We all have some doubts. Some make us shut down.

We all get doubts. Some make us think we should stop. But we tried to not.

We can let go like when we got made fun of when we couldn't do something. That was easy.

We can let go like when we couldn't get an answer right because everyone can.

Don't stop if somebody says you will never succeed in life. Don't let people stop you.

Don't stop if somebody makes fun of you and makes you stop. Get out of that and keep trying.

Don't stop. You can go to your dreams. If you believe you will make it, then you will.

This is the part that will never stop you and never will

Keep going and don't stop, just keep going and never quit!

**Deaglan Hammons**

4th grade, Roosevelt Elementary School

Teacher: D. Goins

### **Grandma's House**

How it smells like flowers.

How it is as messy as a dog.

How it is as small as a cabin.

How it is fun to have a sleepover!!

How it is fun to spend time with my grandma!

How I love my grandma.

**Josiah Carter**

4th grade, Roosevelt Elementary School

Teacher: L. Bailey

**Freedom**

Freedom is undiscovered  
Freedom is a choice  
Freedom is an opportunity

It comes in many ways  
leaves in many ways  
hides in many ways  
pops in many ways  
screams in many ways

You will never know if it will  
Come, leave, pop, hide, scream  
Or if it just ends.  
Frequent sounds break through my  
Bedroom door

## **Ashley Garcia**

5th grade, Gilbert Elementary School

Teacher: K. Clift

### **School Struggles and Wiggles**

At school in the daylight,  
My class isn't right,  
When it's really bright,  
When time is tight,  
We fight,  
For things that don't matter,  
We talk blather,

My class doesn't have a clue,  
On what color is blue,  
Which is true,  
They know the color red,  
Because it is the color of their bed,

They can't think,  
Of what color is pink,  
(They really stink!),  
They don't like to say teal,  
Unless they have a deal,

My class knows how to write a nine,  
They know how to draw a perfect line,  
They know how to draw the number ten,  
Because of their friend Ben.  
Soon after, he turned eleven,  
Just like Kevin,

When my class starts paying attention,  
They might mention,  
Of going to college,  
With enough knowledge,

These are the struggles,  
And wiggles,  
Of fifth grade giggles.

## Harmonie Fisher

5th grade, Gilbert Elementary School

Teacher: K. Clift

### You And I

You and I,  
all alone no one's home,  
only you and I.

So go, go little bird fly,  
fly away in the sky.  
We're all alone, so go.

Why would you want to stay here?  
There's a whole world out there,  
so why stay?  
Because only ones worth loving stay.  
Are you worth loving?  
Will you fly to the sky?

You, my friend, say  
"Here I stand  
so here I will stay.  
You have no one to stay so I will.  
I must stay to love you,  
We will grow older together  
As friends forever."



## **Sianan Ketcham**

5th grade, Nob Hill Elementary School

Teacher: H. Lamb

### **Yellow**

Yellow is the color of happy

Yellow is the color of hope

Yellow is the color we feel when we get better

Yellow is the color of brightness

Yellow is the color of cheer

Yellow is the color of laughing

Yellow is the color I believe we should all feel

## **Megan Lopez Nava**

6th grade, Lewis & Clark Middle School

Teacher: J. Macias

### **Friends**

We all have friends  
Some are best friends at this point  
But some friends are just  
Backstabbers with no manners  
But then we meet someone new  
Who puts back our screws  
And then we learn they've been through  
The same sad true  
We escape to a new place  
Where we are free and they see  
Our face full of grace  
We promise one another in our  
Friendship in an airship  
That we are friends until it ends  
We hug and love one another  
We swore that we cared for one another  
The longer our friendship was,  
The stronger it would become  
Even to this day  
We are still friends  
Forever and Ever

**Kayden Leingang**

6th grade, Lewis & Clark Middle School

Teacher: J. Macias

## **FiRE And ICE**

FiRe will burn You to Ash

ICE will water you Down

FiRe is the Hate You get

Water is the Person that loves You

FiRe will tear You Down and distroy u

Water will make your life Easy and

Find you some one to love

IN Your liFe You will Have

Both Fire and Ice

## **Zoey Fouts**

7th grade, Wilson Middle School

Teacher: K. Madrinich

### **You and me**

You're like me but not me  
You're tall and I'm short  
You know me better than I do  
And you love me just like I love you  
You smell like flowers  
And your hair is silky smooth  
And your hair is blond like mine  
You have lots of freckles and I have little  
Your skin is light and mine's dark  
I like video games and you don't  
I know computers and you don't  
I'm better at spelling than you  
When you were small you were tall  
And you are smarter than I am now  
You have brown beautiful eyes and I have blue  
You and me, mom and daughter, love forever.

## **Hailey Cabrera Mendez**

7th grade, Lewis & Clark Middle School

Teacher: J. Coons

### **HUMANITY EMBODIES DUALITY.**

It's like a kaleidoscope of emotions,  
that,  
when blended,  
morph into  
a subtle, yet consistent ache,  
causing a state of uncertainty  
between desire and longing,  
How troublesome.

Her work emerged  
like whispers of tormented souls,  
weaving tales of sadness  
and unfathomable anger that nobody knows,  
entwined with dreadful experience  
and unwanted words  
she had once thrown at a man she cherished most.

With each word left ,  
creating a waltz of ink for those who come by,  
witnessing an orchestration of self ruin  
and loss of one's mind

A mournful dance,  
of dreams and desires left astray,  
it always been that way, ever since she stayed.

## **Mason Klein**

7th grade, Lewis & Clark Middle School

Teacher: J. Coons

### **(Kind of) An Ode to Rain**

Rain,  
is it really worth its praise?  
It's understandable to like the rain  
and what comes with,  
but is the rain's gloom and ominosity really worth it?  
This boon,  
this gift of rain,  
it gives life but can remind of death  
(Which can be a good thing).  
It floods,  
overflows,  
and can be of annoyance.  
As well as it gives,  
helps,  
and feels overall,  
very cozy.  
The rain provides a reason  
to gather around a fireplace  
with friends and family,  
and for some,  
a reason to explore nature.  
Yes  
rain is worth its worries and woes  
because in the end  
the good outweighs the bad.  
Unless you are allergic to water...  
Then you'd be dead.

## **Isabel Romba**

7th grade, Wilson Middle School

Teacher: R. Holt

### **To Hear The River**

The first thing I heard was a river.  
Each drop rushing past in a hurry like a crowded hallway.  
Trying to keep with the flow.  
I always wondered where else the drops went.  
Each has a story, each carries with it importance.  
But only seen as a group.  
The first thing I saw were mountains.  
Massive and looming.  
An observer of everything below.  
I always believed despite how scary they looked, they are truly gentle.  
They hold so much beauty within them unseen by the passing eye.  
But never given the chance to reveal what's within the ominous slopes.  
The first thing I smelled was grass.  
Not freshly cut, unbothered grass.  
Swaying in unison to the melody that is the breeze.  
I always thought grass shouldn't have to be cut to be appreciated.  
Tall and strong.  
But never perfect the way it is.  
The first thing I felt was bark.  
The bark of a tree.  
Rough and stiff.  
But there to preserve what is soft.  
I always sympathized with what it had to endure.  
A protector that never gives in.  
But never receiving gratitude for its perseverance.  
The first thing I tasted was dirt.  
Moist and plentiful.  
A creator of beauty.  
I always admired its creativity.  
Providing life to what is barren.  
But never seen as the artist it is.  
Nature.  
Seen and unseen.

## **Charlemagne Moua**

10th grade, Eisenhower High School

Teacher: A. Jaramillo

### **My Love, Codependency**

You were the day but you made the night  
Who knew you had the power to change the time  
24/7 darkness in my eyes  
Who knew you had the power to switch off the light

There was a void I didn't know to exist  
In my brain, in my skull, I wish you weren't the fix  
How do I fill the void with something meaningful  
When you were the one who changed the meaningless

It sounds selfish I know, what can I say  
But it's hard to go on when an intertwined soul was ripped away  
I was made to love, but now I feel I was made to fade

For you, my love I'm sorry,  
But I'd sooner leave than stay



## **Aubrey Gonzalez**

10th grade, Davis High School

Teacher: S. Irwin

### **"Paper and Ink"**

Sentence:

*a line composed of words put together by an array of letters.*

I've always known that a word on its own has immense power,  
but even more when surrounded by accompanying words that  
emphasize its meaning.

A single person holds so much power  
and even more when surrounded by others who  
emphasize their meaning.

My whole life,  
I have never known the power I hold within myself.  
I have never had those people who  
emphasize my power but,  
most importantly,  
my meaning in life.

My fifteen years of life have been full  
of instabilities and deceptions  
fabricated by my parents.

I quickly came to realize  
the widely normalized concept of  
the "immigrant family"  
is nothing more than one of the many dystopias  
created by the modernized society in the United States.

Both my parents have always been physically  
present in my life,  
they failed to be the nurturing and welcoming parents  
a young child needs in their early stages of life.

Unlike most kids my age,  
I matured much faster because  
I felt I had to protect my younger brothers  
From the trauma our parents were  
constantly  
inflicting  
upon us.

I suffered significantly,  
always looking at  
the negative in every situation,  
preparing myself for the worst so I wouldn't be blindsided.  
I never believed a child could possibly  
despise their own life so much to the  
point that they no longer wanted it...  
until I was that child.  
From the age of ten,  
the age when I was supposed to be playing with dolls  
(which I feared),  
filming fake slime videos with my cousins,  
or playing outside until my parents forced me back inside.  
Instead,  
I began to beg god.  
I begged and begged him to make it all stop,  
to pause my life  
for even a split second  
and give me a break.  
At the age of ten,  
I had hit my end point,  
a point no human should ever have to reach,  
especially not a child.  
To me,  
my life meant  
nothing;  
I had no one around me  
who emphasized the meaning of my life.  
At the age of ten,  
I was ready to throw my life away.  
I was a child,  
understanding  
and  
grasping  
concepts some adults around me couldn't even quite grasp yet;  
I had no one to turn to,  
no one who could help me through my silent suffering,  
and so I turned to the only thing I knew.  
I kept a diary, hidden away from everyone,  
in which I wrote almost every day.  
Writing gave me a sense of freedom I didn't have in my household;

I could express every meddling thought  
or emotion that overcame me  
because I had no one around to relay this information to.  
Writing saved me in a sense.  
Writing saved a ten-year-old little girl when her world  
was  
crumbling  
beneath  
her.  
If it hadn't been for that little purple diary,  
I might not be writing today.  
God didn't make my world stop;  
he didn't give me a break.  
Instead,  
he gave me  
paper  
and  
ink.  
As I've grown older,  
I've come to realize that my parents' emotional absence  
has driven me to aspire more for myself.  
It is thanks to my parents that I found the security  
I had searched for as a child in writing.  
The words I wrote as a child are what became  
my power.  
I hold power in my words, and  
they emphasize my meaning in life.  
It wasn't the events I went through that shaped me into who I am.  
Instead,  
it was the many entries I wrote in that little purple diary  
that made me the person I am today.  
I took the setbacks  
and used them to  
empower myself  
while striving further  
in life.  
I wrote about the world through  
paper and ink,  
and  
I want to continue to do so.

## Kayleigh McIntyre

12th grade, Stanton (Ridgeview group home) High School

Teacher: N. Lust

### Society

The society sets us up to never be enough,  
The society wants skinny waists and big butts,  
White skin and blonde hair,  
Clear skin and us to weigh as much as air,  
Sit up straight and be polite,  
If a man wants your body, never put up a fight,  
Men are stronger and we are to obey,  
You are to eat less and less till you fade away,  
A woman's place is the kitchen,  
Cooking cleaning and taking care of the children,  
Worth is something weighed in pounds and mirrors,  
No one cares that your drowning in depression and tears,  
As the standards penetrate your skin,  
You lose yourself and forget who you are within,  
Your self worth relies on makeup and calories,  
Finding men with nice faces and high salaries,  
Male validation and popularity,  
The beauty standards motivate all your insecurity,  
You begin to change but it doesn't matter,  
You'll never achieve the standards no how hard you battle,  
So why try, why care?,  
Eat what you want and dye your hair,  
Be with who you want, be respected,  
Take care of yourself and never let yourself be neglected,  
I don't care what society says women are not inferior to men,  
What matters if how hard you work and what's hidden within,  
Be who you are, and don't worry about looks,  
Focus on your education put your nose in the books,  
A woman's place is at the top,  
As long as you work hard and never stop,  
Be who you are and never look back,  
Societies standards are a deadly trap,  
Never let a man decide your fate,  
Your a strong independent women never take the bait,  
Don't let society decide who you are,  
Your beautiful the way you are, you're a shining star,  
So screw the society and silence the standards,  
In the end, be a good person, and grow, that's all that matters.

**Gracie Pham**

12th grade, Davis High School

Teacher: T. Rasmussen-Wood

### **A Backwards Philosophy**

Never settle

The job is never done

I always believe

That what I do is never enough

I will never think

That I can be the best

In my heart I know

I am defined only by my achievements

I will not accept that

My failures don't define my abilities

The job is never done

How can I settle?

## Erin Chaplin

Staff, The Learning Center

### When

When did you  
When did I  
Say good-bye?

Was it  
A Sunday  
Or somewhere in between?

Between a glimmer  
And the gaps  
You slipped  
I slipped  
Further away

Further away  
From us  
From who you knew  
Further  
From me  
From who we were  
Together  
Until  
You were lost  
I was lost

Disappeared  
From you  
From me

A stranger

No longer  
You  
Or me  
Your first  
Your granddaughter

Just a stranger  
On the phone

## Blanca Manrique-Vivanco

Staff, The Learning Center

### Chayito

Seis añitos tenias

Luciendo icon orgullo! tu cabello negro, largo y sedoso

Tu sonrisa de repente chuequita

Y sin poder usar tu manita

En tu cumpleaños de siete

Tu hermosa cabellera quedó

En una melenita moderna

Que a todos nos sorprendió

Tu sonrisa alegre se me grabó

Al igual la corona que, en tu linda cabecita, la enfermera colocó

Mientras al cantarte las mañanitas

Tu boquita las velitas sopló

Rojos y lagrimosos•

Eran los ojos de mi padre

Mientras mi madre aguantaba

Con una fuerza inigualable

Al llegar a nuestro hogar

Tu cabecita ni un cabellito lucia

Pues, arráncandote el tumor

Las manos benditas te habían salvado la vida

Un mes, tal vez un año

Inaceptables palabras para sus amados padres

Ellos nunca se rindieron

Pues, El Rosario rezadle

-Cuiden a Chayito

Palabras a diario de mis padres

Hermanitos obedientes,

Quizimos cumplirlo sonrientes

Cuarenta y siete años después de tus seis añitos

Después de una sonda alimenticia y dos tumores benignos

Tu boquita volvió a soplar

Y sentí tu último suspiro

## Arnie Lewis

Staff, The Learning Center

### Sentinel of Memories

When the morning air is still and the only sound is the breath of the trees,  
my memories wander back to when my grandfather and I sat in these  
Adirondack chairs  
watching through the endless canopy of this ancient maple, watching  
the sun beams dance down through the leaves, bouncing off  
the bark until they are defeated by its volume and are lost  
among the crooks,  
and helicopters and bird nests  
somewhere far above our heads.

The North Carolina sun will never reach us here while we sip cool lemonade,  
concealed beneath its emerald expanse. This giant umbrella pops open to  
the world to envelop us.

Come afternoon, grandpa would tell one of his talki.ng animal  
stories while we shelled new-green peas from a late summer  
garden  
and fed the shells to the rabbits who would come out of the thicket long enough  
to retrieve their treat before returning to safety.

In the evening, the shade from this magnificent giant would creep farther out to  
protect the earth  
and he would sing a childhood song  
taught to him by his grandfather  
that one day  
I would teach to my grandson.  
The words changed every summer, but I cherished them still as I launched  
myself off the chair to seize a firefly drifting playfully just out of reach.

We buried my grandfather next to his grandfather in the  
plot  
in the corner of yard.  
Forever, he is under the eternal,  
watchful shade of that sentinel of memories



# 2023 Voices/Voces

## Essay Writing/Ensayo

*Writing that includes opinion or argument pieces and informative/explanatory pieces in which the writer offers unique insights into a topic.*

*Escritura que incluye piezas de opinión o argumento y piezas informativas/explicativas en las que el escritor ofrece puntos de vista singulares sobre un tema.*

**Jaquelin Bustos Ramirez**

1st Grade, Barge-Lincoln Elementary School

Teacher: B. V. Moya

### **El mono tito**

Tito no es un Mono Cualquiera. A tito no le gusta trepar por los árboles y odia comer Bananas El prefiere pasear el bosque oler las flores y recoger las nueces que se caen de los arboles. Siempre va cargado con uno cesto hecho con ramitas y cuando tiene mas de treinta nueces elabora una deliciosa tarta de frutos secos y mermelada de mango. como tito es generoso compart el Postre con sus amigos la ardilla y el Puecoepin.

**Evelyn Analí Martínez Morales**

1st Grade, Garfield Elementary School

Teacher: G. Alcántara

### **Mi mascota Snoopy**

Hola me llamo Evelyn y quiero platicarles, de mi mascota tambien es mi mejor amigo ¿listos? Se llama Snoopy. Snoopy es. Un perrito color negro, pelo..chino es chico i muy inteligente. Me hace muy feliz. Todos los días jugamos con sus juguetes. A el le gusta que le aviente su juguete favorito que es una pizza. ¡Me hace mucho reír! Mi perro tiene una cama muy cómoda y calientita. ¡Snoopy es muy chulo! Snoopy es mi perrito favorito. Él come la comida que le damos, pero su comida favorita es el postre. Snoopy come dos veces al día. Lo llevamos a que le corten su pelito y lo dejan muy lindo. A Snoopy le encanta ir al parque para perros igual que a mi me gusta ir al parque para niños. Snoopy disfruta cuando lo acaricio y le gusta correr mucho, pero se cansa muy rápido y tampoco le gusta bañarse. Él es un buen compañero y trata de hacerme feliz. Cuando me mira triste, él se porta bien. Lo llevamos al baño afuera también lo llevamos al veterinario para que le pongan sus vacunas y que esté saludable. Mi mascota Snoopy hace guf guf cuando hay alguien en la puerta y lo hace para cuidarme. ¡Me hace muy feliz!

**Danica Morales**

2nd Grade, Barge-Lincoln Elementary School

Teacher: V. Rodriguez Villegas

**Some of my travels**

Table of contents

Title page 1.

Table of contents page 2.

Arches page 3.

Pacific Beach page 4.

Mount Rushmore page 5.

Yellowstone page 6.

Devils tower page 7.

Arches

I went to Arches and saw a kangaroo rat. Arches is really hot  
bring water for this trip.

Pacific Beach

I have been to Pacific Beach like when my dog went to the beach.

Mount Rushmore

I went to Mount Rushmore in the winter. it was very pretty.

Yellowstone

I went to Yellowstone when I was little. We looked at the plants and animals and the  
geysers!

Devils tower

Ferrets live there. When there I saw lots of ferrets.

**Gabriel Abercrombie**

3rd Grade, Roosevelt Elementary School

Teacher: A. Merrill

## **Hyenas**

Have you ever wondered about a hyena? One fact about hyenas is that they are a vertebrate. They are also warmblooded. They are mammals. Hyenas only have 4 cubs. They have a strong neck! You are going to like this one because they have a really strong jaw! Hyenas can live up to 25 years. They are 4 feet tall. They are 180 pounds.

Hyenas live in Africa. Hyenas like to prey on zebras and buffalos. They also have very good hearing. Hyenas are carnivores, which means that they only eat meat. Hyenas predators are lions and alligators.

Hyenas give live birth. Produces milk As adults they run 35 mph and run 56 kph.

One fact about hyenas is that they eat bones and meat. There are 4 types of hyenas. Hyenas laugh. hyenas communicate by laughing. A hyena's front legs are bigger than its back legs. A Group of hyenas is called a cackle. hyenas live in dens. Some hyenas are known as the chasing prey. Hyenas poop is white from eating so many bones gross! Hyenas poop is white wow! I can't believe hyenas poop is white because of bones that's gross! Hyenas Are one of the most common species.  
Now do you see how hyenas are my favorite species?

**Jazlyn Verduzco Cortez**

3rd Grade, Roosevelt Elementary School

Teacher: A. Merrill

## **Sharks**

Do you ever wonder about sharks? One fact about Sharks are a vertebrate. They are also cold blooded. They are amphibians. The traits that a shark has is gills, scales, fins and tails.

A shark lives in the ocean. A shark's prey is birds, squid and meat. That means they are carnivores. A shark predator is humans and bull sharks.

A shark's life cycle is that pups grow inside their mother and some hatch from eggs. An adult shark catches prey and an apex predator shark maintains prey.

5 facts about sharks are that a megalodon shark lives up to 20 to 40 years. A great white shark lives up to 70+ years. The size of a great white shark is 21 feet long. A pygmy shark can glow in the dark. A stingray lives up to 15 to 25 years. Do you think sharks are cool?

**Samuel Viveros**

3rd Grade, Roosevelt Elementary School

Teacher: A. Merrill

## **Wolves**

Have you ever wondered about wolves? Wolves have a lot of characteristics. They have fur that means they are mammals. mammals are vertebrates which means they have a backbone. Wolves are warm blooded and they have big sharp teeth they are gray to.

Wolves live in Asia and North America. They like to eat fish; elk, sheep and deer. They are carnivores. some predators are bears, humans and wolves.

Wolves have a life cycle. They start by being born alive and they will live in the cave. They will drink their mothers milk.

Some interesting facts about wolves; are they can run for 1 hour. If wolves need to kill other wolves they will. wolves have packs if it is big they need a lot of land. The resin wolves howl to find lost wolves. wolves eat 20 pounds of meat. Don't you think wolves are cool?

**Ashley Garcia**

5th Grade, Gilbert Elementary School

Teacher: K. Clift

## EARTH

Have you ever wondered why we live on this planet called Earth? Why don't we live on Mercury or Neptune? Why Earth?

We are the third planet from the sun which means it's not too hot or too cold, it's just right. Earth has enough water for us to drink, 97% of the water is salt water and 3% of the water is freshwater. Of that 3% of the freshwater, 69% is found in glaciers and ice, 30% is found in groundwater, and only 1% of water is found in surface water. The surface water is found in the lakes which has 87%, 11% is found in swamps, and 2% of the surface water is found in rivers. (Stemscopedia pg. 7

How much oxygen do we have on Earth? Earth has 21% of oxygen. Surprisingly there are different kinds of gas, like carbon dioxide! Carbon dioxide is found in living things like plants, animals, and humans. For example, animals like a horse breathe in oxygen and from behind the horse takes carbon dioxide out. There is 0.035% of carbon dioxide. There are so many more kinds of gas in our environment like Neon, Helium, and Methane. (<https://news.climate.columbia.edu>)

Also, non-living things help living things to survive. Water is a non-living thing, so is air, rocks, soil and sunshine. Humans (us) need water for hydration, air to breathe, and we also need soil and rocks so we can have fruits and veggies for food. In order for our plants to grow it also needs water and sunlight. If we didn't have these non-living things it could destroy our ecosystem.

(Stemscopedia p. 33; <https://science.nasa.gov/earth>)

Where is Earth located? According to Cool Cosmos "Earth is located in one of the spiral arms of the Milky way ( called the Orion arm) which lies about two thirds of the way out from the center of the galaxy." The center of the galaxy is called the Ba1ycenter. (<https://www.nsf.gov>)

Have you ever wondered how you stay grounded on Earth? The gravitational force pulls you down by combining all your mass in your body. That is what gives you weight. The gravity on earth is  $9.807\text{m/s}^2$ .

(Magic School Bus: Lost in Space)

How long is a day or year on Earth? Earth has 24 hours in a day. Our Earth is not a perfect circle, so some days are longer than 24 hours. Earth goes around the sun in 365 days, 6 hours, and 9 minutes each year. This is why every four years we have a leap year on February 29th. (<http://science.howstuffworks.com>)

Did Earth used to have a ring system? Earth used to have a ring in the past. Early



in history a Mars sized object collided into Earth breaking its ring. Then, the ring formed our moon. (<https://spaceplace.nasa.gov>)

As you all know, Earth has one moon. It is the brightest object in our night sky and it is 238,900 miles away. It takes less than one month to orbit Earth ( 27.3 days). Our moon is unique because it controls the water level, this is called Tides. The Tides rise and fall according to the cycle of our moon. For example, in the morning you are at the beach and decide to build a sandcastle. You leave it overnight and come back the next morning and your sand castle is destroyed! Who did this? Our moon did this, at night when the moon is facing the ocean the water level rises, this is called a high tide. When the sun comes back up the water level lowers, and this is called a low Tide. This is how our moon affects us.

(Magic School Bus; Stemscoopedia p. 54-55; <https://science.nasa.gov/moon>)

Earth is such an amazing planet because it provides everything humans need to live; like food for fuel, water for hydration, and air to breathe. We need to take care of our home planet.

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**Ashley Garcia**

5th Grade, Gilbert Elementary School

Teacher: K. Clift

### **The Adventures of Don Quixote**

Do you have a family member that meddles in your business, makes things worse, and hurts people? Well that person is less crazier than Don Quixote de La Mancha. The adventures of Don Quixote take place in the heart of Spain. Don Quixote is an honorable man. He is a 50 year old man who is tall and skinny. He read knighthood books and started to become crazy! One day he decided to go on adventures to fight and punish evil with his squire, Sancho Panza. Sancho Panza is a poor farmer, short and stout. Sancho only went on adventures with Don Quixote because Don Quixote promised him that he would give him a land to govern, which would make Sancho rich. Don Quixote is a knight who meddles, makes stuff worse, and hurts people. I believe that Don Quixote's good intentions did not justify his actions.

When Don Quixote left on adventures to fight and punish evil and help the weak, he meddled in people's business. He tried to help a kid from being whipped but he made it worse. The kid was being whipped because the Farmer didn't think the kid was doing a good job (p.g 6). Don Quixote shouldn't have interrupted the farmer from whipping the boy because the farmer ended up whipping the boy twice as much as before. Later on, Don Quixote meddled in the guards' business when they were taking thieves to the castle. Don Quixote got it all wrong because he thought the guards were really the thieves and they were blaming some random people. At the end he set the thieves free (p.g 5).

Don Quixote tried to fight and punish evil, but he needed to assess the situation first. He thinks people are lying to him when they are not and when they are not lying to him, they are. After Don Quixote got a squire, Sancho Panza, he left to continue his adventure. They came across a group of windmills. Don Quixote thought they were giants. Sancho Panza said they were not giants and he wasn't lying. Now the giants were not doing anything to Don Quixote, he was only trying to "fight and punish evil". Don Quixote didn't win against the giants instead he got hurt (p.g 9).

Another situation was when Don Quixote was at a Dukes and Duchess castle. They were outside in the garden, when a group of ladies who were really men with long beards approached him. The ladies were lying to Don Quixote; they said that an evil wizard cursed them. Don Quixote was the only person that could defeat the wizard. They told him to get on the wooden horse named Clavileno that could fly, but the wooden horse didn't really fly. The ladies were lifting up the horse and carrying it around to act like it was flying. Don Quixote and Sancho were blindfolded. "After having fun for a while the people decided to end the adventure. They set fire to Clavilenos tail," ( ch 13 pg 37). When the fireworks exploded all the people fell down and acted surprised. Don Quixote took off the blindfold, they told him he saved them (pg 37). This is why I think Don

Quixote should have assessed the situation first.

Don Quixote hurts people or himself when he challenges them to fight or when he thinks people are doing something bad. He hurt some mule drivers at a ceremony (backyard of an Inn), because he thought they were trying to steal his armor that was laying on top of a tub filled with water. The mule drivers were only trying to get water for their mule. Don Quixote started beating them up, but the mule drivers fought back and Don Quixote ended up getting hurt (p.g 3). All of this happened because Don Quixote forgot to get... dubbed a knight.

In conclusion, I think Don Quixote didn't really fight and punish evil instead he made matters worse. Don Quixote did some pretty crazy stuff and meddled in people's business. I also think Don Quixote needs to listen first, instead of interrupting because when he interrupts he makes the situation worse and ends up hurting people or himself. What do you think about Don Quixote? Do you think his actions are justified?

Sources:

The Adventures of Don Quixote

**Elliott Scheidegger**

5th Grade, McKinley Elementary School

Teacher: S. Coyner

### **Why kids should have phones!**

"Ring, ring!" That's the sound of a kid's phone ringing. I think all kids above 2nd grade should have phones. They could call for help, play games for fun, and learn lots of responsibility. I'll tell you more about it!

First, kids with phones could call for help if they are in danger. This is vital because if, for example, someone was following a kid home, the kid could just call their parents or 911. One time, my brother was walking home and he had to call for a ride because there was a blizzard. Or, if a kid were hiking and got trapped in an avalanche they could call 911.

In addition, kids could play games to entertain themselves. Some fun games kids like to play on their phones are Roblox and Subway Surfers. Times this might be useful are if they are babysitting their siblings or waiting for their parents while the parents are doing something boring.

Finally, kids could learn lots of responsibility with a phone. For example, they could budget their money in their bank account, track their chores, set an alarm to know when to get ready for school, or even study for school!

Even though some people might claim kids would be on their phones too much, parents can just set parental controls on the child's phone. Also, schools have a policy that states no child can have their phone out of their backpack when school hours are in. If you have your phone out of your backpack the teacher will tell you to bring the phone to the office where you will get it back at the end of the day

In conclusion, phones are important for children's safety, entertainment, and responsibility. Let the children have phones!

**Abraham Scheidegger**

7th Grade, Franklin Middle School

Teacher: S. Coyner

### **How playing an instrument can help you**

Playing an instrument in school or anywhere can be really good. It can help you with memorization, music is also very calming.

According to the site [bhamcityschools.org](http://bhamcityschools.org) " Even when performing with sheet music, student musicians are constantly using their memory to perform. The skill of memorization can serve students well in education and beyond." This shows that people who are in band can memorize things that are really important to know.

According to the same website "Students can fight stress by learning to play music. Soothing music is especially helpful in helping kids relax.". This is important because stress can be bad for students' learning abilities. Even though some people might say that some kids won't want to be in a band, Kids don't have to be in band if they don't want to.

If kids play an instrument in school it can help them with school and even later in life.

**Luanna Huang**

11th Grade, Eisenhower High School

Teacher: M. Hinson

### **The Wild Field Back Door**

When I was about 7 years old at my parents' restaurant, I noticed a little boy about 5 that was next door throwing a birthday party. Between the restaurant and the boy's house was a row of trees and a fence. At that time I had really wanted to jump on his bouncy house because I had never jumped on one before. So, I split my pack of Skittles and gave him half as a birthday gift. I climbed the fence, and I jumped on the boy's bouncy house. Who would have known that after that day a friendship would begin with many stories to tell. Behind my parents' restaurant was a wild field that was full of calm, tall, soft blades of bright green grass. It was full of dandelions, bees, butterflies, and most of all, it was full of life. Everyday after school, I would go out and find the next-door boy and we would play tag in the field. He spoke almost no English, and his family also didn't speak much English, but between his family and mine, we understood what the other was saying through broken fragments of English. As the years went by, we interchangeably hung out at each other's places. Sometimes, I would eat Jello at his house, play tag, play hide and seek, or watch movies.. Other times, we would hollow out the trees that lined the field and make our own tree house or vlog our made up adventures.

When my brother was old enough, he joined in on our friendship and we became a trio. Everyday after school we would meet up at the gated fence and climb over to hang out with each other. We even made a hole in the fence to pass snacks and goods to one another "in case of an emergency". As the years went on we continued to play with each other, creating games from our imagination and getting into meaningless fights, then making it up, and continuing to be friends.

When I was about 10 the field we played in began to dry up. There were no longer tall blades of grass, and they certainly were not green anymore. The dandelions quit growing, and the bees and butterflies no longer came around. All that was left was dirt with patches of dead, brown grass. However, we still continued to play tag in the field, rode scooters on the cement, and played four squares. Then at dark, when the sun began to set we would watch the sunset as a trio. There wasn't much thought in my head at that time, just that tomorrow the previous day would repeat.

When I was 11, I found out that the owners of the restaurant and land would sell it to someone else. So, my family had to move, and so did the boy next door. When I first found out, I believed that time did not go by as fast, and that there was plenty of time to continue on with my life. I continued to do what I did. Everyday after school, I found the boy next door and we played. Once in a while we would run towards the back fields

which were further away, and over there, sat apple trees full of color. Together, we simply had a good time, we did not think about the future, only the present. More or less, the both of us didn't know that moving meant our friendship would come to an end. The weeks that led up to the final move were the most memorable to me. The first week we continued to do what we usually did, he came over and we played tag, hide and seek, four squares, everything we usually did. The second week, we played games, watched movies, and ran through the field. The last night of that third week, we rode scooters till dusk. My parents had handed his parents a bag of food, we said our goodbyes, and we exchanged hugs.

The week after his family moved away I realized all this time, I never knew what his real name was. My brother and I called him "Matey", his name came about because he loved the movie "Cars" and especially the character Tow Mater. Occasionally, he had also claimed his name was Daniel, just like my brother's, or Isidro. However, the language barrier between us made me never understand, and I didn't happen to catch his real name. On the day my family would finally move for good, I thought maybe he would be home. He was not home, the yard had been abandoned, and the toys that we played with were no longer there. So, I trekked back to the field we would play in and sat there with a heavy heart. With nothing to do, I pulled the weeds that had overgrown the once beautiful lively grass and squashed some ants and rally pollies that took the place of the bees and butterflies. I was very upset, not at anyone or anything in particular. I was upset for no reason, maybe because of the feeling of melancholy that took over me. It made me cry. That evening, I rode scooters outside by myself for the first time, I ran in the fields without someone chasing after me to play tag, and I watched the last sunset on that field alone. Afterwards, I went into our makeshift tree house with my cherry jello, and carved in our trio's initials, as a reminder that the tree there was our house and that we were family. Not related by blood, but by soul.

Now that it has been 5 years, I sometimes pass by the area that was once our field and remember all the playful innocence that took place there. Then, I fret over not learning Spanish soon enough to learn his real name. It is very sad looking at Matey's house gone, the restaurant flattened to rubble and wiped away, the hollowed tree that has been gifted back to earth, the large field that contains only dirt and tumbleweeds, and most of all the destruction of my childhood that only exists in a perpetual memory that sits at the back of my brain. That is how I know, I have grown up... and I didn't even see it coming.

**Wilson Harper**

11th Grade, Davis High School

Teacher: L. Hieber

## **Safeguarding the Future: Preventing Contamination in the Search for Extraterrestrial Life**

The greatest scientific breakthrough in human history could be our last-the discovery of extraterrestrial life. First contact with aliens might seem like science fiction, but scientists are examining Mars for life right now. While it's much more likely that we will discover alien microbes rather than evil green men, finding any life in space would be monumental. Worryingly, though, humanity could repeat the mistakes of our past and exploit or even destroy these new life forms. We could also destroy ourselves in the process. Therefore, we must make every effort to ensure the safety of this newly encountered life-and our own. If we haven't prepared protocols for handling contact with extraterrestrial life, the results could be disastrous. In fact, efforts are already being made to keep all life safe, but these efforts are insufficient-and we must develop stronger plans before we face an existential threat from extraterrestrial life.

The biggest threat both to and from extraterrestrial life is contamination, and there are two types we must be concerned with. The first is forward contamination, where contaminants from Earth make their way to celestial objects. For example, a terrestrial life form such as bacteria may accidentally be aboard an unmanned mission to, say, Europa, Jupiter's icy, watery moon. There is a risk that this invasive species from Earth could affect unknown life already on the moon, causing an ecological catastrophe for Europa. Additionally, scientists may erroneously conclude that they have discovered extraterrestrial life when they actually find the Earth-based contamination on another planet (Keith, 2019).

With vigilance, we can almost completely negate those risks. The most well-known solution is NASA's clean rooms. According to Mike Weiss, Hubble's technical deputy program manager, "The High Bay Clean Room is to Hubble what hospital operating rooms are to patients" (NASA Hubble Mission Team, 2008). These clean rooms are partially for the benefit of the complex and sensitive electronics on board spacecraft, but these precautions also ensure minimal biological contamination. Additionally, past missions' spacecraft have been sterilized through heat through a process known as Heat Microbial Reduction, or HMR. Unfortunately, full-scale HMR is impractical-it is slow, costly, and could damage a modern spacecraft with all its complexity. To solve this problem, NASA employs a combination of heating individual components and sterilizing other components with chemicals (Smith, 2023). These solutions are very successful-as far as we've observed-especially in combination with the numerous other techniques that NASA employs to reduce contamination risk (GSFC, 1999). If the worst happens and a spacecraft is known to be contaminated, though, mission termination is necessary. In fact, NASA intentionally crashed the *Galileo* probe into Jupiter to avoid contaminating Europa (Thomas, 2003). In short, to avoid forward contamination, we must be conscious of every living thing that leaves our atmosphere.



Unfortunately, private space flight—which now accounts for hundreds of billions of dollars— is reluctant to prevent forward contamination. Elon Musk, the CEO of SpaceX, said in 2015 that he doubts that there is any life on Mars and is therefore not hugely concerned with contamination prevention (Berger, 2015). While he could be correct about life on Mars—he probably is!—his altitude is highly concerning and could lead to devastating effects. In our own history, many private entities have sought profit ruthlessly, unbothered by ethics: Smallpox exported from Europe killed approximately 90% of Native Americans (PBS, 2019). Considering how lucrative space mining will be, this deadly scenario is bound to repeat itself on a galactic scale without outside intervention (Yarlagadda, 2022). Clearly, international organizations must step in to prevent contamination of humanity's next frontier.

The second, perhaps more frightening, type of contamination is backward contamination. This occurs when extraterrestrial life travels to Earth. While backward contamination is much less of a current concern—as far as we know, life only exists on our home planet—it could have disastrous consequences for humanity. For proof, just take at the tropes that any science-fiction adventure set in space uses (Walker, 2014). In more realistic terms, external organisms could negatively impact Earth's biosphere, throwing it off balance. Additionally, Earth's organisms would likely lack the defenses necessary to protect themselves from radically different space-originating creatures (GSFC 2020). None of these risks mean that humanity should not explore the cosmos. However, we must be vigilant to avoid contamination of any kind to ensure our survival and the survival of those we may encounter.

Because life in space has not yet been found, there are fewer standards in place to counteract this form of backward contamination. So far, though, scientists around the world have concluded that return samples from Mars and other bodies have posed relatively little threat. This makes sense—Martian-based meteorites that come to Earth leave us unaffected. This is partially because samples taken from Mars are within centimeters of the surface of a planet that has been highly irradiated. The long, exposed return journey will further sterilize any organisms hitching a ride. Not all of those minimizing factors apply to every planet or moon, though, which is why we should not become complacent. In fact, NASA and the ESA, or European Space Agency, have created additional protocols to ensure Earth's safety. First of all, samples must be returned to the Earth's atmosphere in specially-designed vessels to ensure their safe landing. Once on the ground these samples are treated with the same care as infectious diseases. Unless they are known to be safe or can be made completely safe, the samples won't leave specific NASA or ESA laboratories (National Aeronautics and Space Administration, 2023). Again, with the profitability of space mining, international organizations need to have an influence regarding how extraterrestrial objects are brought to the Earth.

Of course, it is impossible to verify the safety of anything to a perfect degree. Therefore, protocols should be in place to determine what risks are acceptable. There is no substitute for human exploration, even in space, but unmanned missions are sometimes necessary. Furthermore, robots can, of course, explore areas out of reach of human beings. As a result, when deciding whether to send spacecraft-manned or unmanned on a mission, NASA must determine possible risks; analyze, classify, and mitigate those risks and communicate those dangers to the public. Again, space capitalism must be heavily regulated to prevent forward and backward contamination, and that includes both mining and tourism.

Any extraterrestrial life that we find should remain on its home body unless absolutely determined to be safe to remove—both for their ecosystem and for our own. Aside from the fact

that it is morally wrong to separate organisms potentially capable of feelings, a utilitarian perspective would tell us that we could learn a great deal from undisturbed intelligent extraterrestrial life. To decide whether it could be ethical and safe to remove an organism, though, a few factors must be considered in a publicly-observable way. Ideally, we should attempt communication with extraterrestrial life, but that will likely be difficult. While it may be challenging to measure, we must make an effort to check for consciousness, self-awareness, and an ability to perceive their surroundings in the life. We must also assess their cognitive abilities, their communication skills with other organisms, and whether they form relationships or organize. Finally, appraising their morals and ethics is necessary. Additionally, the extraterrestrial life may pose a greater risk to human life if it is intelligent. Depending on these factors, we can decide how important a given species is and whether or not we may return it to Earth (Dick, 2018).

In a worst case scenario-where aliens are aggressive towards us-protocols would need to be put in place to make sure the life does not return to Earth to attack us, the ultimate form of backward contamination. If the hostile life is at a place in its technological development where mission abortion would be enough to save humanity, we must, of course, end the mission. In that case, if the mission is unmanned, the craft should remain at its location and never return to Earth. On the other hand, if the spaceship is manned, the astronauts may be required to sacrifice their own lives for humanity's sake. Despite these efforts, if the organism is still capable of journeying to Earth on its own, humanity would need to follow a science-fiction style plan and wage defensive war.

While the prospect of discovering extraterrestrial life is thrilling, it is imperative that humanity takes every possible step to safeguard our future. We have a dual responsibility to protect the Earth and any newfound life from contamination-both forward and backward. If alien life is found to be hostile, we must protect Earth without destroying the new life. To ensure these goals are met, we must regulate the private space industry and create contingency plans in the event of finding hostile life. As difficult as it may be, we must balance the safety of every living thing to make a home for ourselves in the cosmos.

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**Gracie Pham**

12th Grade, Davis High School

Teacher: T. Rasmussen-Woods

**A Boat**

It all started with a boat, a boat that carried him to the land of promise, escaping the oppression of the communists in Vietnam who slowly were consuming the place he called home. This boat pinned together by the hands of my people, wasn't only a chance at a new life for my father, but also, for the unborn generation. Clinging to the arms of his mother, brothers, and sisters, as unsure as he was about what was to become of his future, this boat served as safety as safety and home for him and thousands of Vietnamese refugees on their journey towards a better life. These thousands would multiply and pass untold opportunities on to generations to come. I am a direct result of the pain, suffering, yet relentless hope, of the people that came before me. My family's legacy is a testament to the transformative power of hope, and I am committed to honoring that legacy by making a positive impact in my community and beyond.

As a teenager, I later journeyed on a small fishing boat to an island village in Raja Ampat, Indonesia. As I navigated the brisk currents aboard a diminutive wooden vessel amidst the sparsely populated isles, I attentively absorbed my mother's dialogue, conveyed with ease in her native language. Although not from this area her blood contains the red and white of the Indonesian flag. Since my mother had introduced me to her language when I was still a child, I had a basic understanding and halting proficiency. "Sudah sampai anak, jangan lupa bagang - barang semuanya, sma bilang terima kasih," she exclaimed. As the boat docked on an island beach, I saw the curious eyes of the island children as we unloaded our bags. I heard the soft giggles of these barefoot children as they ran across the beach and watched their unabashed smiles and welcoming gestures. I learned the ultimate lesson of life from them: affluence does not bring joy. During our two weeks in Raja Ampat, I observed as local children guided us around the island, showcasing Indonesian games, and generously offering toys and gifts made from beach debris. I reflected on the teens in my country, a country where depression and suicide rates continue to grow every year, where children are prescribed anti-depressants and are in therapy...surrounded by more, and more, and more...living the American dream? In remote Indonesia, children embrace simplicity, untouched by Instagram, TikTok, or Roblox; rather finding joy in playing with sticks, rocks and makeshift toys. Through a brief excursion on a modest wooden boat, my eyes were privileged to behold the purest manifestations of joy.

As I navigate through the uncharted waters of my future, I carry with me the profound lessons of my past. My journey has been marked by resilience, fueled by the unwavering pursuit of knowledge, and illuminated by the transformative power of perseverance. In the tapestry of my experiences, I find the threads of determination and passion intricately woven. It is with this fabric that I embark on the next chapter, ready to contribute meaningfully, learn voraciously, and make an enduring impact. My story is a testament to the belief that within every challenge lies an opportunity, and as I step forward, I do so with the conviction that the best is yet to come. As I embark on my journey, I carry with me the lessons of resilience, determination, and compassion that have been woven into the fabric of my family's narrative. Furthermore, I am a firm believer that my achievements, as an athlete, scholar, and student leader do not define me. Surrounded by greed and doubt, there's one thing I can know for sure: I am me because of the blood, sweat, and tears of my family, and I will live life to the fullest because happiness is a choice I make, Every Day.