THE CAMP HILL

LITERARY LION

Creative Writing and Arts Magazine 2025



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cover art by Sofia Fitzgerald (Class of 2025)

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A MESSAGE FROM THE EDITORS

Dear Reader,

Thank you for picking up the 2025 edition of the *Literary Lion*! We received an astounding number of submissions for this issue, all of which demonstrated the creative talent of our student body across the middle and high school.

This year, we welcomed three new members to the editing team who embodied the spirit of the publication. And with our two senior editors passing on the torch, this issue marks a new era for the *Literary Lion*.

This tradition will continue as long as there are stories to tell, and students to tell them. To everyone who submitted their work, thank you for your contributions to the arts at Camp Hill and beyond.

Sofia Fitzgerald & Jet Gillan ('25), Editors-in-Chief
Eva Bordlemay, Evan Mills-Ramm, & Katy Ruoro ('27), Editors

Grow Up and Blow Away

Hayden Keich | ‘28



Thanks



Reading, PA



He's Just Sleeping



Behind the Pagoda

Across the Shore

Reese McInroy | ‘28

In front lies an array of endless
heavy pocketed
sand, the beginning of everything—
here lies struggle, somber.
A cradle of vast coarser
sand. Beyond and above
the bright sun shines
blinding the leading steps.
To my left,
siblings slink with the same desires
to go beyond. Some speed,
Some fall behind,
some plucked by
the relentless squawking birds
above. My strength
depleted,
my spirit *invigorated*.
I can feel the sea breeze,
Smell the salt
Taste the grainy rocks slip
into my mouth after exertion
—those I fail to grip
The brisk chill upon
my scales. I see the
water, breaking before me—
A warning, a sign of the dangers that
destroy us. Once awoken, we won’t stop,
won’t break until broken.
The sand thickens,
pulling me down
with each toiled step taken.
The cool, wet waterfront,
the fierce frothy waves reject
our presence pushing against,
unbidden
Once through, the peril is not past—
predators seek to feast.
I must thrive, grow—use the
opportunity of life to be something,
create something. For in the
main we will find a way to flourish,
to become what we once never
thought we could—or would.

all you had

Olivia Guillermo | ‘28

broadcast a message into the stars she said
can you see us—can you hear us
the stars were quiet all night
she needs to be grateful for the friends she has and what she’s been given
because there are others out there that have less
she is not alone
but she feels alone
a new star was born on her birthday
the same day she lost all she had within her
but she was okay because others have had less
and she cried that night
because she was selfish
and the star almost within her
the sky could’ve died that night
but she captured all she had in a glass jar
and glowed
they could hear her

and they could see her
and they loved her

Amidst the Banks

Daniel Murphy | ‘28

On the banks of a ravine, there was a fox
the fox wandered in solitude, noticing it not, completely consumed in an encompassing calling
Soft, squelching, supporting, earthen structure gave way to
Unyielding, unforgiving, untainted boulders
Heavens above began an insincere gift
The liquid of life
A sudden ditch, a stream, spurred
On by the thundering torrents
Became a rushing, raging, run of rapids.
The fox
perhaps spurred by knowledge not known,
Found the deluge amusing
and left others the task of heeding common sense
With fallen limbs in plain sight, a crossway was simply formed-
Confidence above the clouds
Yet the rushing rivulets were not so easily
Denied, and the ambiguous animal,
a might brash, found the thunderous current dragging through their
Flailing fur and into the incomprehensible. With
Crossway still intact, the creature fell, defeated-
On the banks of a ravine, there was a fox
A consciousness stirred and a survivor rose
Limping past earthen pits with battered mitts,
and covered in dark musk of moisture the fox found
Branches aplenty, and a ravine
Some vague sense of recognition flashed, impulsively, the fox marked a tree
but then the clarity disapparated, replaced with a dull, coppery flavor of instability
A sudden ceaseless call emanated from the far banks,
Shifting from one voice to another, vaguely familiar, and an urge to cross resurfaced
All found consciousness was lost as the puppet began to once again build a passway across,
ignoring the sudden rain, the gangway was built,
but as the deluge grew higher, the prisoner sank lower- and the tearing torrents
once again tugged the creature into its clutches
On the banks of a ravine, there was a fox,
The fox crawled up the steep slope until they could make out a grove of trees-
Each one with hundreds of markings around the trunks
Recognition never flashed in its deadening eyes, yet a mark was made
The catwalk returned, as did the storm-
On the banks of the ravine, nothing was left

The Archive's Elegy

Lila Seip | '25

In quiet halls I found my place,
a refuge in the world's swift pace.
Your pages breathed of times long past,
and futures shaped in ink, steadfast.

Now silence fall where you thrived,
your doors locked, your light deprived.
Texts reaching for the sublime,
once spoken in tongues, now lost in time

Who will sing the Grecian urn's ode?
Who will read maps of paths you showed?
Your wisdom humble, yet knows acclaim,
a beacon in the fleeting game.

BaaAaaah

Jake Hockenberry | ‘28

Here lies the gloomy gorge,
with fog so thick you can’t see,
can’t see ahead of you, can’t see below you.
    It’s quiet, despite one unmistakable sound,
    a sound of struggle, stress -
    the sound of a bleating goat.
The ravine seems to have disappeared, did it walk away?
The air tastes like something spewed immensely, throwing off your sense of direction,
one wrong step, and...
    You hear it crying for you,
    you need to find a way through
    the, what seems endless, murk.
You’ve been here for a couple of hours, alone, but you can now see the canyon again,
the malodorous smell has gotten to you -
the scent of a dead animal.
    This smell distracted you from the bough
    holding, gripping, ripping your leg,
    not letting go -
Its thick, thorny bark is rough,
making you stop everything,
giving you cold feet, but it let go
    The sound of the goat is here again,
    except louder, echoing against the walls of the gill, and in greater quantity,
    there are many more, many more -
It’s a family
that, by the sounds of it,
is missing someone, missing their son
    The angle of confrontation was idiosyncratic,
    putting me in a strangle,
    like when I look into the abyss -
That at first wasn’t crossable, but now is,
now there’s an aqueduct
that appears adequate to traverse the trench.
    As you walk across the chasm you notice the once grizzling goats again,
    waiting for you,
    their brother, now in view.

Big City Dream

Sebbie Knisely | ‘28

A small rat scurries—suddenly
Popped out onto the sidewalk
Came out beneath the big blocky bodega
Paws skimming quickly over pavement

As the floor pools with light from the planted trees’ leaves
He watches confident red heels, click-clacking their way down
Big black briefcases swing above his head—serious loafers below
He catches enchanting neon beams and smells salty-sweet scents of pizza

He scampers over warm concrete
Cigarettes & magazines
Weaving through a flurry of feet
A dazzling flashy billboard gleams

Expensive cars with wraps so tight
Electric, shiny, new
He hears the harmonious hymns of buskers
Watches businesses bloom briefly

Many faces—many kinds
Many men in suits and ties
Many people they walk past
In need of alms—they can’t be asked

Boom, Boom, Boom, Boom
His little ears shoot up in fear

The shoes once dancing,
so mesmerizing
Now more like soldiers,
black leather lace up

He scurries about, searching for cover
But sweet metallic tastes take over

Sell-outs, liars, cheats and frauds
Ash falls from fingers onto his head
The city really never sleeps
Sudafed they’ll soon be fed

Ribs and rolls and needles and cheeks—
Was he really so naive?
Plastic, concrete, brick, and steel
Could the dream have not been real?

Blacktop Memories, Silent Screams

Ash Fox | ‘28

Our innocence sparked at five
on the playground, by the swings.
Here we fantasized ourselves as
fairies,
saving the forest
And when the whistle blew
by our teacher, sharp on the
blacktop

Hand in hand, we rushed inside,
our steps in sync with time itself—
That time of simplicity
a reflection of youth
I long for it now

Now I cry
tear stains on the pillow
the lingering taste of salt.
Now I scream,
but I fear being heard

I beg—
to someone
to a single man
or many gods.
Take this weight from me,
an imposed duty
one I never chose,
this fear of failure
a buried seed of fear,
deep-rooted

And my thoughts—
twisted with anger,
choked by regret,
drenched in longing.

Every night,
whether drowning in work
or swallowed by silence,
I lay awake until five,
eyes wide, sleep distant—
haunted by echoes,
the same torment,
the same silence screaming back.

Crossing the Meadow

Molly Kaylor | ‘28

Through a meadow a small kitten
traipsed carelessly along a path,
wandering through halls of tall grass and wildflowers—
flaming marigolds and snow-white daisies
encircled by buzzing bumblebees—
corridors of cheery greenery.
Every now and then a bit of debris would waft into his line of sight,
and the critter would respond
by batting it back and forth,
until he was certain the threat had been thoroughly neutralized,
occasionally rolling over
to nip at the crumb,
exposing his fluffy, white, cotton-candy-stomach to the smiling sun.
He once spied a fruit tree, in a pasture just off of the road,
twisted and gnarled, with endless interwoven branches,
and he trotted towards a plum that had just fallen,
plunging his incisors into the fuzzy flesh
and lapping up the gem’s tangy, saccharine secretion.
His hunger satiated,
a deep, enveloping sleep fell upon him—
a peaceful escape from all troubles,
broken only by the gentle drip-drop, drip-drop of raindrops on cracked and crumbling dirt.
This sudden development sparked excitement in him;
he plopped through chocolate-milk-puddles,
holding out his sandpaper-tongue
to catch sweet globs of rainwater.
However his joy quickly faded,
as the light drip-drops turned into plump plip-plops,
and his fur grew wet and matted,
and the puddles began to merge,
turning the entire glade into a sloppy sinkhole of mud,
swirling around the meager creature,
forcing his paws to slip and stumble backwards.

Crossing the Meadow

The air grew bitter,
the day's brightness replaced with a haze of misery,
brought on by spiteful clouds.
Still he trudged forward through the meandering trail,
determined to escape this bleak grassland.
He spotted a building in the distance—
a church perched atop a grassy knoll—
a beacon of hope and stability,
beckoning at him with pure white walls and brightly lit windows.
He bounded onward with a newfound pluck.
He dodged clumps of stirred soil and pebbles,
now paddling through the muck
to reach his destination.
But the current picked up,
and the wind howled as hard as it could,
and the rain roared back as if to answer,
and the meadow began to flood,
and the kitten began to mew,
crying out desperately,
gasping in surprise
and confusion as
his head bobbed up, out,
and into the water
again and again,
until nothing
remained
except
for a few bursts of bubbles, which quickly disappeared,
as a kitten sunk down into a flooded meadow.

A few dozen feet away, in a church,
filled with warmth,
a child sits on the floor,
and dangles a piece of red string,
amusing a small kitten.
They do not hear the other's cries.
They listen to the rain together.

Drag

Finn Ericksen | ‘26

“Good morning,” whispers the air as it flows from your lips in a thin and gentle strand. It’s cold, but it’s been a warm winter anyway so you don’t really get to complain about it. The blue comforter tucked over your body on the mattress clings to your waist as your limbs unfurl from your threadbare cocoon. Red light sears into your eyes the date and time: 6:00, December 25. Monday.

Merry Christmas.

You exhale, cloudy fog softly growing in front of your face in dispassionate curls. Shivering once, then twice, you crawl out of bed. You have mandatory PTO today; part of an HR campaign for ‘better working conditions’ after a recent company strike. But if you can be honest, you’d rather be working. Typing away, writing and signing, literally anything else but do nothing today. But you wouldn’t even get paid (overtime or otherwise), even if they would let you into the building, so you can’t do anything. All the same, you go to the bathroom, brush—and floss, don’t want the dentist to lecture you again—your teeth, comb your hair, and put on a dress shirt.

Feeling a little fancy, you decide to also put on your favorite black necktie. Just like your dad showed you, you tie the knot of the necktie slowly, but smoothly. You trudge downstairs and walk into the kitchen. Any other day, you’d probably start up a pot of coffee and go on with your day. But it’s Christmas, and you can’t go to work anyway. Walking over to the cabinet, you open it and remove a small cardboard box.

Collecting your lighter from the junk drawer, you step onto your back porch and take a seat on the wooden chair you have there. It’s rickety and covered in splinters, but it’ll do. Not everything can be a company-provided office swivel chair. Snow starts to fall, collecting in small sheafs in the backyard. You let out a breath.

Taking a cigarette from the box, you flick open your lighter and watch intently as the glowing end catches, before closing the lighter again. For a moment, you stare deeply into the yellow-orange glow of the tip, wondering what your parents are doing right now. Probably sleeping. It’s six in the morning, after all.

You put the filtered end to your lips. Smoke softly drifts from your mouth, forming into dispassionate, apathetic curls.

A directionless sense of unfulfillment curdles in your chest. An irrational weight of failure comes to a rest at the base of your spine.

Merry Christmas. You take another drag.

The Duality of the Seas

Colden Nattress | ‘28

As the ship flew from the port,
Their voyage would not be short
The ship and her crew,
Alone—
sailed into the unknown.
The next day,
As the boat soared against the tide
The crew could see
Nothing but the sea.
The waves no longer crashed
on the distant shores,
for land was no more.
All that could be seen was the endless blue.
Then—
clouds were spotted
as the storm came—
The seafarers felt the wind whip,
They heard the sound of thunder,
They could taste the salt of the sea.
The ship was a stick upon a river—
their rations were lost,
the deluge pulled them to the sea
the waves crashed,
the rain attacked,
as the water grasped upon the boat.
But as they had lost hope,
they stayed afloat.
For 6 days—
the storm stayed.

Upon the storm’s seventh day,
the rain ended, the azure sky was clear and balmy
once again, an Auspicious scene
Now the ocean was without a breeze,
the men could smell the crisp clear air.
The ship sat motionless,
the wind was taken from them,
The powerless crew waited upon the still sea.
It was two weeks later,
The wind returned—
no one was left to witness it
The ship drifted,
alone
across the endless ocean.

Echoes of a Lost Hand

Ash Fox | ‘28

We walked together, your hand in mine—
So delicate, I missed the moment you let go.
At the path where dirt meets stone,
your black Mary Janes left only faint impressions
In the malleable soil, almost mud.
Then the storm came—
Your last trace, simple footprints,
Filled in the berm with warm, murky water,
Swirling with leaves and grass blades.
The water melds into a rhythmic symphony
Its droplets drumming against themselves,
While ripples weave a baseline into the melody of life.
Every drop, swelling, fading—
Every drop absorbing her faint lavender trace
A song too brief to last.
As soon as it began—it ended.
Gray clouds dissipated, revealing a blue hue—
A false sense of clarity—
I knew I couldn’t turn back
To witness the crack behind me
To search for pieces of you
So much as scattered in our worn furrow
I had to go forward
Across a once-strong foundation, now
Cracked, crumbling, consumed by time.
I see the start of a fissure, its jagged cracks,
Like an open wound, sporadically splintering the frame
The allusion widens, unraveling the bridge itself
Splitting the earth beneath in quiet protest
Hesitant, I hear stones
Falling into the river’s throat—
A sound that murmurs “don’t.”
A feral wind flushes my cheeks red,
It’s a phantom lover, pulling me forward with a grasp that never lasts
A push met with resilience,
Forcing pips from my shoes—
They refuse on old cobblestone, darkened with mourning dew.
Their shrills settling
As wind’s whispers cease—
The bridge breathes in silence
One breath of musky air, honeyed like the damp earth after rain—
The scent of memory, lost in veins.

Experiences of a Cave Diver

James Pettegrew | ‘28

In this cavern darkness surrounds me—
overpowering, smothering darkness,
grasping for my soul.
The feeble, flickering light
of my headlamp,
shining on the dense, drab rock
is my only defense.
In this cavern is the repeated dripping of water from
a stalactite that glitters, sending eerie, haunted echoes
through the hollow tunnel
Crawling
through, my fingers
scrape upon the dark rough rock—
like tree bark chewing on
my skin. All four sides of the narrow stone cavern press against me,
Squeezing, clutching, crushing my very bones
I am
unable to turn back—
for the writhing rocks rumbled in
behind me with a smack— they were
the doors of a dungeon that
were guarding the way back
slamming shut. I must continue—
deeper, deeper.
In this cavern I smell the
fell rotten ramps of musty rock,
damp from lonely springs of puddles and pools
of water. The taste of
salty minerals sends
salivating shockwaves
through my tongue.
I continue on past
jagged armies
of boulders—
deeper,
deeper.



fall leaves

Helen Pynes | ‘29

fall leaves fade from green
into brown and red

the stars gleam
this bright scene
hurts my awful head

the fall brings sadness
the trees watch me mourn

as the dawn creeps in
i find myself enclosed in madness

so let my brain change
let my roots grow
make me something strange

dip my fingers into the frost
guide me till i’m no longer lost

let us go through the snow
to the morning through the night
teach me all you know

the fall leaves
welcome winter,
teach me what you know

Five Feet, Three Inches Tall

Vivian Giang | ‘29

Sometimes I stand up a little too fast,
And I witness the oil spill into my vision
Pouring into my head and causing
My life to turn me upside over
Drip
Drop
Splash!
And I wonder, nonetheless
Wasn’t it just yesterday that I

Was three feet, three inches tall,
Drawing with black, blue, and purple crayons
The color of my dark hair
And my blue and purple dress
Scrawling across the page
With no care for the confinement of the notebook lines
Meant to cage me
And my mother worried I would bump my head
On the shower beam, and lose my mind
And I couldn’t even witness myself
Looking back at me through my sink’s mirror
Because I was three feet, three inches tall, afterall
But even then I wondered
What will it be like tomorrow

When I’m four feet, three inches tall
With desires to become a doctor
To save my heritage
And sign field trip notes by myself
Because my parents couldn’t read
The foreign language scrawled out on the yellow sheet
I learned to count to a hundred in a foreign language
Someone else’s that doesn’t belong to me
Hey, that’s mine!
No, it belongs to me!
You’re wrong, that’s not yours.

Five Feet, Three Inches Tall

Before I could even count to ten with the words
That were my family's, something that I supposedly inherited
But what ownership could someone have
At four feet, three inches tall?
I learned to confine my scrawling on the red and blue
Lines of notebooks so that soon
Tomorrow I would be

Five feet, three inches tall
Longing to relive the times I had at
three feet, three inches tall
Four feet, three inches tall
Five feet, two inches tall
Draw with my black, blue, and purple crayons
Over the lines that will confine me
And learn a language I was supposed to inherit
And count to twenty with those words
And to be able to understand what my family gossips about at gatherings
And to live my childhood a little slower
At a turtle's pace, with no worry about the hare
In Front of me
My wiser reflection in the mirror
A reflection of someone who supposedly lost their mind
That I had longed to meet
When I couldn't see past my sink
But tomorrow, and the day after that

I'll still be five feet, three inches tall
And watch the oil pour into my vision
And my head
Drip
Drop
Splash!

Flowing to a New Future

Samuel Sachs | ‘28

Ebbing and flowing through the subsidiary,
as frigid water spray conflicts
with the shearing rays of sun
on the sailor, an aspiring sailor,
an optimistic sailor.
An angry whiplash
of salty needles -
reminding him of the dangerous, perilous
journey ahead. His tiny tug
dwindles in the
ever growing water mass,
as doughy mud moves
to jagged, angry boulders.
No longer is the cottage, the village -
but instead the touring towns, as
the large river waves hello to a fluctuating future,
as the quiet stream says goodbye.
The juncture joining the stream to the river -
connecting the past to the future,
connecting the stream to the river.
As the tugboat floats along,
it drifts into the basin,
a churning mess with rockets blasting
the current along.
Sweet mildew scents hugging
fuzzy hills fading away -
as the sickening smell
of oils, metals, urbanism
fill the atmosphere,
paired with rocky banks upon the river.
Shiny bronze factories,
holding risky opportunity
for future conquistadors.
A *conquest* for success -
with a blessing from home,
but only as a lone prospect.

Genesis

Eli Owen | ‘26

In the beginning when God created the Heavens and the Earth
The Earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep
While a wind from God swept over the face of the waters
Then God said, “Let there be light;”
And there was light.

And life was good.
Then God made humans
And Lucifer rebelled
He did not think humans were worthy of God’s love
And he sought to prove how bad we were by feeding us the apple

A battle as old as time.
Humans against demons
To prove ourselves able and willing to fight back
God sent down his angels to gift a drop of blood to abandoned mothers around the globe
These babes grew to adults and were silver weapons imbued with holy energy
Lightbringers or Lightbearers depending on translations from old faded cultures
We were heroes;
Demigods,
Legends,
Kings,
Queens,
Chosen to fight the darkness back.

Our strongest gathered to lead us.
Children of Michael, Raphael, and Gabriel
Are our leaders
Passing down weapons through generations
As time passed other families started to give way to duds
Powerless fighters, but fighters still

It was said to be a miracle the day triplets of Michael were born
The oldest Raymond born strong and filled with the blessings of Michael,
The middle Talia born strong and quick to open her eyes,

Genesis

And the youngest Edward born disabled with power only enough to cast a temporary shield. A true shame
Often forgotten as his siblings grew stronger and wiser he became a drunk
Somehow he was the only one to get a spouse
Raymond didn't wish to marry he had too much on his plate
Talia didn't get the chance.

Talia. O sweet humble naive Talia.
Honored in the oldest church in England.
She had her own mural.
No one talked about what she did
How she fell from grace
Tricked by the devil into having a child with him
They didn't paint her dead daughter into the mural
And they didn't paint her living son
Because no one knew she had a son
And I wasn't to tell anyone
That I was her son,
That I was *His* son.

Hasty generalization; it can’t be a phrase or a starting point, only a reflection

Alisha Hidalgo | ‘26

I could do it like Rudy Francisco
using the title to start his works of art

or I could do it like Hayley Grace
It won't have a title
she won't let a word or phrase define how she
writes her own story
but what if it was too late for
that?

Maybe I should be Myself instead
someone so selfish and self-centered
it wouldn't even be a work of my own
just a shattered self imagine of what I thought I could be.

A month ago I gave away 60 dollars
20 dollars to three people
an argument was brought up in my head days later
when I needed it most, yet I wasn't mad. Because
I would give all the money I have to see those three
smile again

A week ago I started to offer rides to people I saw
walking home alone
thinking outside of my own shoes
knowing if I was in theirs, I’d wish a car would stop and ask

even if they say no
I’d make them pinky promise that they’ll be alright
because even someone as cold and heartless as myself
can't break a pinky promise

Hasty generalization; it can’t be a phrase or a starting point, only a reflection

Yesterday someone realized I always say, *I love you get home safe* to everyone at
practice, because I don't know if that’s the
last evening
I'll ever share with them

Today I gave away my sunflower charm to
a girl in my algebra class, a girl
I don't even know the name to
but she had one, and maybe just maybe she likes sunflowers just as much
as I do

Tomorrow I'll continue to give my lunch to people who ask.
If they want a piece, I'll give them a whole
because...
well I don't know the reason

I brawl with my
subconsciousness my
selfishness my
greed my

eyes swell while I write this
tears will get in the cracks of my computer
I won't regret it though
because at least I'm giving even
when I thought I couldn't give

anything

a hundred and one ways the west sings hallelujah!

Helena McKay | ‘28

“Kid,” he calls you
You, boy, haven’t got a name
Nor a mother neither

You offer to mend the
Fallen fence posts you saw
But he says “No kid,”

And Dallas, Holy Land it
Is, offers you a bed
Instead of some fresh hell-

Sunday morning comes soft and
He takes you to church
God lives and God lives

“I ain’t got nothing
worth saving, cowboy,”
“You ain’t a’wooofin’ kid, who——
Does? You ain’t never
Learned to hide your teeth.”

His hands are warm and
He has no idea what
That means to you,
Dear boy damn froze kid.

He gives you a rag
To wash your face
Six bucks for a pair
Of new riding boots

a hundred and one ways the west sings hallelujah!

He saddles a filly her
Name Slowdancer a horse wild
As a thousand colts

And tells you this hymn
Of the west, tender as
A slab of meat——

“The world may have a
Hundred ways of tearin’ you
Apart like the cold or
The hunger but in Oklahoma
You wrap ‘em in leather
And you look homeward
You angel.” -

2025 Scholastic Writing Awards Honorable Mention

I’d Like to Watch the West Burn

Sophia Geller | ‘28

It’s cold here,
It’s frigid.

There are people
standing in the streets
turned to the west and watching
as a fire begins—
they are witnessing the
Miracle of the Century
but they don’t know that
because they have had warmth
they have had light.

It’s dark here,
My eyes are painted over with pitch—
I have never felt more fevered with loneliness.

With *fear*.

The water is hugging me,
choking me,
killing me—
it’s telling me to come home.

This subterranean world is verging closer and closer
to a very untimely Hell.

The stalagmites and stalactites are flying and standing and sitting—
I’d like to think they’re watching over me,
but it’s more probable to presume there is
nothing watching over me
and maybe that is worse.

This aquifer is beginning to feel like
thick, sweet, sickly sweet, syrup
but it’s cold
and maybe it will soon harden as well
like the maple candy from the snow.

I'd Like to Watch the West Burn

I'd like to think the needles poking into me
the stew of nails I'm swimming through is simply
an accumulation of all my hardships
and that once I get through it I'll be done with them.

Except I think the needles have anesthetics
And I think the dripstones are mixing benzocaine into my bath.

Every time I make a splash it echoes around me
like when I coughed in church and I couldn't
run from myself then—
and I can't now.

I try to be quiet.

It's quite difficult though, when every time I stop breathing
I have to breathe more the next time
more than I thought I ever could
and this water tastes like what I think
Mount Rainier would;
earthy, icy, with whatever poignant spice
Mother Nature took it upon herself to add.

And the air around me
when I get to breathe it in
is unwavering, it's unmoving
and gives away nothing—
I know nothing of this place,
what has lived in it,
what has died—
there is nothing of the Mother in the space above the water
in the space below the rock.

I want to see that fire
did I mention that?

I've such an incredible desire
to run far, far away...

Except I have to swim,
I suppose,
and I have to find a way out of this cavern
out of this stale time
if I ever want to see the West Fire burn.

I Saw a Rock in Death Valley

Michael Gabrielle | ‘28

Wretched, forboden land
Far as eye shall wander
To find something
A soul dependent of water
Instinctively, I tread for not to squander
Now closely,
I do see—
Only but an unconfined rock
An ordinary sight
For I long to be free
Anywhere but this valley
I can taste the heavens
And feel closer
Within the reaches of expiration
The edge of the experience
What it is to be human.
Oh I long for bliss
To find an oasis
Suitable for solitary me
For that rock
I do connect
Bodies united in circumstance
Struggle and state
That insignificant rock
Akin to I
Staring up to the sky
And down to society
One I had been deeply connected—
Inseparable—longing for acceptance
But now I was accepted
In this peak of shams
Keeping the living from its beauty.
Finally
Tasted belonging in desolate seclusion
Self-assuredly I stand
My feet rooted
Like a tree in this infertile waste bin-
More confident in it than ordinary life
How I wish to return
To the untouched-infertile oasis
To *reunite* with my kin—
I *do see* that rock—
I relate to within



Losers Fill the Spelling Bee

Lila Seip | ‘25

Losers fill the spelling bee
Many cry and many scream
None of them, stoic as she

Children dressed in Gymboree
Practice, ponder, recite, and dream
Losers fill the spelling bee

While moms and pops hoot and decree,
“My child’s a winner!” on they gleam
None of them, stoic as she

She will place no higher than three
No matter her plot, no matter her scheme
Losers fill the spelling bee

Then she misspells “bourgeoisie”
Her eyes hide the bell’s extreme
None of them, stoic as she

Fourth and fifth place both agree
Jeopardy! remains supreme
Losers fill the spelling bee
None of them, stoic as she

Olive theory

Alisha Hidalgo | ‘26

Maybe one day you'll forget about me
of course, I hope you don't

but I wonder if you'll still eat bottle caps in 40 years
and complain that coca cola is too hard for your teeth
maybe one day when we’re going grocery shopping
you'll pick up tomatoes and ask if we should get these

and at the same time I'll pick up cucumbers
hopefully we'll smile at each other
and put them in the cart

but if you do forget about me
I'll still smile when I'm at the farmers market
staring at fresh olives

I hate olives
but you said Italy had the best ones

If you do forget about me
I'll still write poetry

on you having 3 favorite colors
and how much you hate mushrooms

or you loving chicken gnocchi soup

I'll still write about you hating taking test on Mondays

and secretly loving playing the guitar
but if you don't forget about me
we can eat your moms famous pumpkin roll
and listen to all types of music

you'll recommend a rap song
and I'll help you dip your toes in alternative

hopefully if you still love me in 40 years
I'll sing the chorus for “Sailor Song”
and you'll still strum the chords for it
“hopefully we can laugh off things we know nothing about

we can go forever until you wanna sit it out”

Orpheus and Eurydice

Helena McKay | ‘28

EURYDICE
I WOULD SO READILY
ALLOW YOU TO BE
MY FUNERARY
PYRE, MY MORGUE—
MY KILLING FLOOR

EURYDICE ONCE IN A DREAM I
KNELT IN A SINGING TEMPLE IN THRACE
AND I LEARNED FROM MY
FATHER, GOD OF PROPHECY HIMSELF—
THAT ONE DAY
THERE WILL BE NO NEED TO SAY

THERE ARE SOME THINGS
NO ONE TEACHES, YOU KNOW
AND YET I FEEL I NEVER
KNEW THIS PLACE

HALF-DEAD, ON-*FIRE*
NOSE OF A SERE MEADOW
ONE FOOT IN THE GROOVE
OF SUCH THESE HAJJES TO HELL
EURYDICE

HADES IS A COLD, COLD MAN HE
TOLD TO ME
ORPHEUS, FOLLOW YOUR
ROPE
AND HADES IS A COLD, COLD PLACE

WE FEEL OUR FEET SINK INTO
MARSHLAND WE FEEL AS
THOUGH MADE STEW IN
SLOUGHS OF ASPHODEL

Orpheus and Eurydice

EURYDICE, DO YOU HEAR ME?

HOOKED BY THE LITTLE WORDS OF
HOLMS, THE MEANING THIN AND
ADDING SHADOWS TO THE
WALLS OF THE CAVE

I HEAR GURGLING SUMPS
CLEAR AS THE TRUMPET
OF AN ANGEL MY
MOUTH SWEET WITH SPORES—
O SLOW

IN THE CORNER
OF THE COLDEST YEAR I
WHITTLE LOVE INTO
AN INSTRUMENT ONLY I
CAN PLAY MY
TONGUE FUZZY

I SEE THE WAY
THE WORLD COULD BE—
I UNSPOOL OUR SONG
IN AN AWFUL DAWN
CHORUS—I SEE YOU

ORPHEUS

EURYDICE

The Smoke Is a Sign

Genevieve Kern | ‘28

The mighty mountain stands tall,
towering above me, snow at its peak
water falling down its side.
The realization that I must climb
hit me like the whipping, winter winds

So I start down the col.
The path is serpentine, but I can still see my way
The path seems endless it was
thoughtless, thrown together
The trail is muddy, damp—
my feet sticking
to the ground with each step a squelching sound coming from the mud
The ground, it’s holding me,
grabbing my feet

The mountain wants me to fight—
to struggle.

I’ve reached the end of that terrible trail
There’s a tree, alone, forsaken.

It's branching its arms out to me,
calling out to *me*
grabbing me.
Its arms are rugged and they cut my skin
breaking it, my blood falling to the Earth

I need to leave
I can’t let the limbs hold me here
the tree smells
warm like cedar,
the smell fills my nose
smells like—
home.

But the branches let go of me
They are a guiding compass
They point me to a steep, slippery slope

I sit waiting for it to come to me—
an idea
If it will come to me

I just want to go back down to the lowlands
But I hear a susurrus from above
The sound
intrigues me
The voice wants me to climb
I can't even tell if it's my choice.

The top is a plateau the ground monolithic for miles
the wind is strong here
it blocks my mind, my thoughts

I walk this mesa
Day turns to night into day again
There's nothing in sight
I am—
alone.

Until,
it's over
I reach a precipice
This time there's snow on the top

The crisp, cool air at the top carries a smell
the smell of smoke.
I can taste it in the air, it's filling my mouth
the flavor clinging to my tastebuds.

Maybe
I'm not
alone.

Stories from the Eriean-North Michigander War of 2031

Nathan Vogel | ‘26

Slug on the Beaches of Presque Isle (Free Verse)

Traversing in steel containers
The Michiganers came

Their boats beached themselves upon the island
they thrust themselves in droves onto the sand
They saw our encampments clearly
Our flag of green and blue visible above

They were exposed: visible from our 1.5 degree incline
We mowed 30 down, the bombardment swept.
Their ships fired volleys upon our shores, as we fired our own artillery
We were blanketed in sand.
They ran headlong into our bullets.

“Do not abandon this hill!”
Our commander yelled,
we fired all we could, threw anything we had.
No matter how futile.

A barrage struck us,
The men to my right became mist.
All I could hear was ringing.
Falling; my comrades joined me
on the ground, while the boots of the enemy crushed my last sense

Sight

The inevitability of moral reconsideration in the city of Erie, Pennsylvania on February 23rd, 2031 (Question/Answer)

A week after the boats landed on the 27th, I was asked:
What is Justification?

I told them it was a reason for an action.
They asked: *What’s the reason?*
The reason for what?

Questions pass as
Bullets fly
No need to reconsider
But the city is dark now.

Sitting down on stolen soil. What is *The Reason?*
The Erieans didn’t pay their debts
Is what we’re all told
stole the dignity of our nation they did

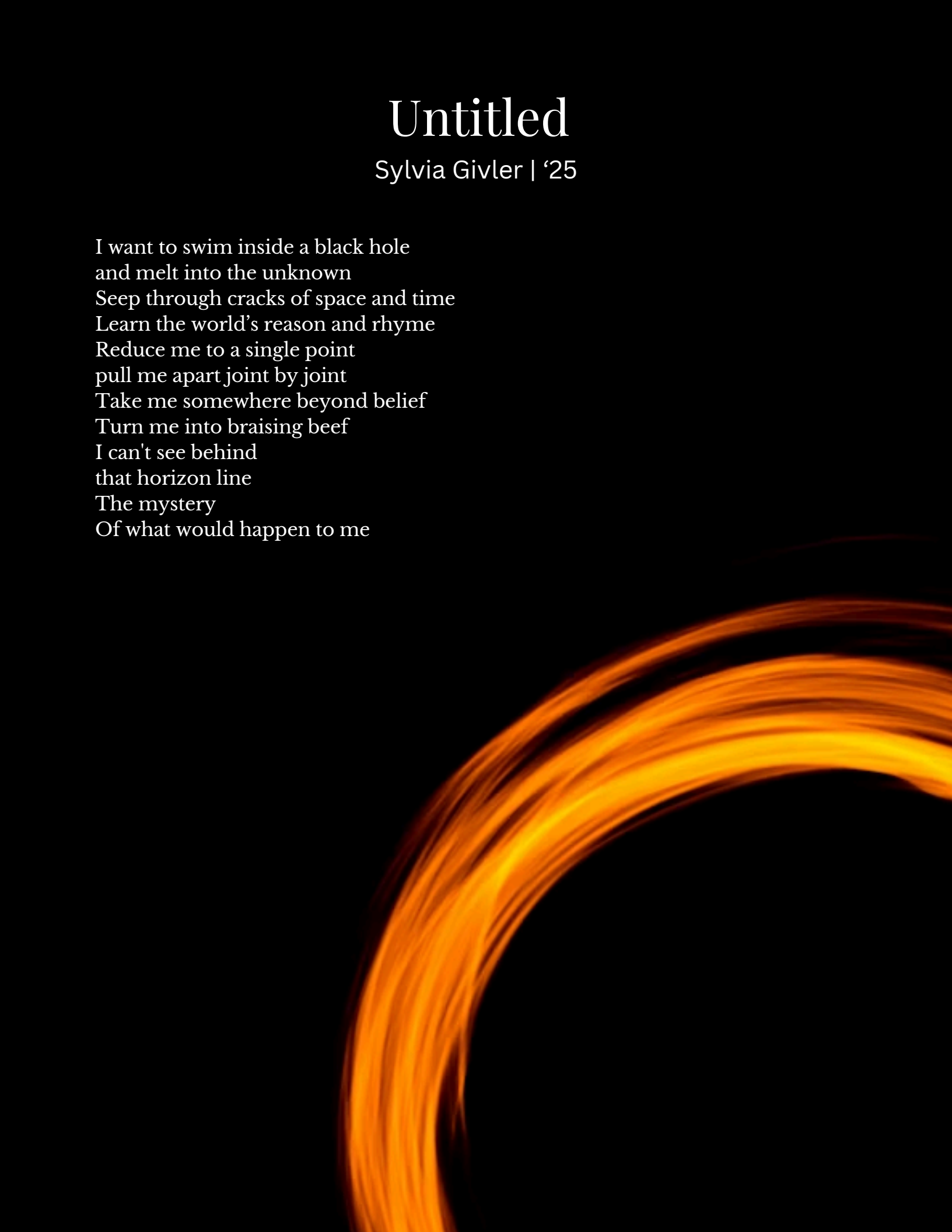
Since the lines cooled, the reasons changed
Well! Those damned lakesquaters killed Jones!
They leave too many mines!
Who Cares.

It’s been quiet, and my original answer seemed
lackluster.
Justification doesn’t exist
It’s only there to give us a reason to commit atrocities nobody imagined to be true.The sun lay pristine behind the onslaught

Untitled

Sylvia Givler | ‘25

I want to swim inside a black hole
and melt into the unknown
Seep through cracks of space and time
Learn the world’s reason and rhyme
Reduce me to a single point
pull me apart joint by joint
Take me somewhere beyond belief
Turn me into braising beef
I can't see behind
that horizon line
The mystery
Of what would happen to me



The Warmest Place to Hide

Robin Murphy | ‘28

The bright sky reflects on snow
entrenching me in blinding light
Harsh winds traverse through thick sleet
A frigid, crystalline, raw, breeze
singes each nerve as it makes contact—
numbing the skin
Powder audibly crunches under my weight
Wet, red paws constantly in motion
The taste of iron lingers on my tongue as my front leg kicks out
displacing a holy white to cover vibrant vermillion—
an arc in the air before it wafts down
Fresh precipitation hides all that remains
A pointer finger still lingers on the West—
rigor mortis eternalizing a mistake
Motioning towards sleek hills, impossible to traverse
Fresh precipitation effortlessly engulfs a disfigured being
who promised shelter while lost
who had been useful up to a point
who had heard barks morph into shrieking
had seen tangled tendrils shoot out
a jaw dislocate into thousands of teeth
in its final moments
Over the hills a shout rings out—
bounces over glistening, soul-cleansing white
I retract an extra limb and resume my journey
bounding off over
the unsteady, uneven, uninhabitable
I sniff out my target, a pungent musk revealing its position
It melts at the sight of me, relieved for company
This one is vocal, on a mission
Searching for a friend that disappeared
just last night, wandered off in the blink of an eye
It claims to know the route to the base so I will keep it safe—
until it forgets and *another* comes along
Using and using these things for my gain
until I escape these pristine ditches

what a journey

Olivia Guillermo | ‘28

the only thing i saw
not far beyond the permafrost fields of emptiness
not abandoned but never found,
was the last bit of vivid color that never remained,
the last bit of lonely life before the winter froze over.
i could feel it coming
strife with each step,
i could feel the frigid, frozen air seep into my
bones,
katabatic wind passing by me, dancing like a child,
trying hard to carry towards the ravines, the troughs,
but i resisted–
following the path of the soil stripes,
the cold air pierced my nose, it smelled sharp, and
ill-timed tears filled my eyes.
i passed by more carcasses than i’ve ever seen
in my lifetime— they remind me of my sister. the
mountains seemed to get bigger with each mile i walked,
reminding i’ll suffer if i don’t get home—
i’ll lose my lifeline.
my hands began to warp and freeze over,
slowly becoming the same shade of blue as the
lake, it will have the same fate as me—
it will freeze, but unlike the lake,
there will be no life left in me.
i taste nothing but bitter blood in my mouth,
biting my tongue in an attempt not to scream,
i heard my voice audiate within me, telling me how badly
i want to die here,
oh, how badly do i want to die,
to become one of the skeletons another negligent
nomad will pass by on their valiant journey to get home,
but there is no home to arrive at—
and so, i knelt down, and pressed my hands to the frozen ground,
and both decided and accepted my fate;
a slow and painful death.

My Voice in America's Democracy

Vivian Giang | '29

My father was bound to be drafted to war, to fight for a smothering nation that he didn't stand for. In a desperate attempt to escape the impending war, he sailed on a foreign ship, letting the chaos of the ocean sweep him away for weeks on end with no food or adequate water source. He sat on that boat with a major case of seasickness and no plan, but instead, a dream. A dream to live his life in America, and embrace democracy in the land of the free. He arrived in America with the sponsorship of a local church, obtaining bits and pieces of broken English. With the little amount of education he received, he lunged himself into the foreign world with no guidance.

My mother lived off of the bare minimum, with no proper education for her quick-witted mind. With a family to raise by herself, she worked strenuously everyday, using the little money she collected to feed her little brother. Her voice had the potential for so much more, yet the hunger for something greater was never fulfilled in the country she was in, nor would it ever have been. She took a precarious chance for freedom, for the opportunity to be more, and immigrated to America through marriage with no prior knowledge of the country itself.

I am a thirteen year-old first-generation immigrant. I don't like to ponder about what would've been if my parents kept their feet planted in the ground, but I know it wouldn't have been pleasant. Everyday, I live in continuous motion, racing and running, refusing to stay in one place. My mother's rebuff of staying static, and my dad's dream that floated him across the turbulent tides all funneled into who I am today.

Each clap in a sea of applause when I place in the school Spelling Bee. Every sentence strung together by letters, commas, and periods that I write everyday in school. The ability for me to learn this language, English. The ability to treat every word with great value, cherishing each vowel that comes out of my mouth. The ability for me to use this language, my voice, and my confidence is because of America's democracy. Because of America's acceptance of my family, I am able to grab the metaphorical and literal microphone and use my voice to spread the story of my family's American dream.

“A Perfect Day for Bananafish”: Salinger’s Most Cryptic Short Story

April Schreader | ‘28

“A Perfect Day For Bananafish” opens on a bright summer day in 1948. Through awkward lines and strange, sometimes seemingly unintelligible dialogue, J.D. Salinger guides the reader through a beachside day of a Floridian vacation, focusing on a young veteran, Seymour Glass, who, at the end of the story, suddenly commits suicide. However, because of these factors, it is arguably one of Salinger’s best works, and the reason is simple: It makes the reader think. It forces the reader to evaluate the work, to take time and really digest the words on the page. And every single time, it leads the reader to a rather complex question: Why did Seymour do it?

The narrative opens up on a young woman, Muriel Glass, on a vacation in Florida. She’s calling her mother, talking about Muriel’s husband, Seymour. Seymour has recently come back from the military. He is mentally estranged, which is made clear later in the story through his notably cryptic dialogue and actions. Muriel’s mother warns Muriel that he was released from the hospital far too early to have completely recovered from the mental damage he had endured while at war, and there’s a chance he might completely break down. Meanwhile, down on the beach, Seymour interacts with a little girl named Sybil Carpenter. She wears a blue swimsuit which Seymour mistakes as yellow, even though he wears blue swim trunks himself. He takes Sybil out to the water and Seymour tells her about a made up fish—a “bananafish.” According to Seymour, this fish would go into holes with bananas and keep consuming them to the point that the fish would be too fat to get back out of the hole. At that point, the fish would simply accept its fate and die. Sybil claims she’s spotted one, and at this moment, Seymour decides to go back inland. After bidding adieu to Sybil, he heads back to his hotel room, and on the way, accuses a woman sharing the elevator with him of staring at his feet. Once he gets to his room, he reaches for a gun hidden under a pile of shorts, and pulls the trigger to his head.

To answer our question, one must realize the biggest theme presented by the author: alienation. As is communicated through the phone call between Muriel and her mother, Seymour is a veteran of World War II, and has recently been discharged from an Army hospital after sustaining a sort of mental breakdown. Muriel’s mother mentions that he might have been released far too early, which is a fairly valid point to make. It is mentioned that Seymour has very irrational and often violent behavior—some sort of window accident, speaking disrespectfully to Muriel’s grandmother, and, of course, attempting to

crash his father-in-law’s car into a tree. It should also be noted that the dialogue between Muriel and her mother seems very unnatural. They don’t stick to a specific subject, and they barely pay any mind to whatever the other is speaking about.

This behavior might suggest a sort of motivation to find an outlet out of the materialistic, selfish world that he was suddenly thrown into after being at war for an extended period of time. His behavior is carelessly disregarded by his wife, though it is mentioned that she spoke to the hotel’s psychiatrist in case of an emergency—though she didn’t speak with him enough to retain anything, as she doesn’t even remember his name. Muriel doesn’t seem to pay much mind to Seymour’s clearly desperate mental condition, and instead chooses to focus more on her own personal concerns—as Salinger says, “She was a girl who for a ringing phone dropped exactly nothing.” This sort of comportment adds to Seymour’s growing feelings of alienation. In fact, throughout the entire narrative, the husband and wife don’t exchange a single word. The only references to the two interacting are the drive down to Florida—on which Seymour was allowed to drive, despite his history of attempting to drive into trees—and Seymour giving Muriel the “greatest poetry book ever written” and telling her to read it, although it’s written completely in German, so Muriel will never understand what the poetry book is communicating.

This might explain why Seymour is drawn to youth—he seeks an escape from the awful adult life he’s been subject to, not to mention the monstrosities he had to have witnessed while at war. However, he is still alienated by his young accomplice. This can be seen symbolized in Sybil’s first line: “See more glass,” a misinterpretation of “Seymour Glass.” The same miscommunication is demonstrated when Seymour mistakes her bathing suit color, and then again later when Seymour kisses Sybil’s foot as a gesture of respect, which Sybil finds to be weird because she could not comprehend the gesture, seeing as she’s too young to understand. Perhaps he points the “bananafish” out to Sybil because he believes that she’s the only one who will understand what’s going on in his brain, another attempt to make a connection with someone.

Plenty of other examples of alienation are weaved into his approach to his fate. For instance, the awkward elevator ride; Seymour isn’t able to interpret the body language of others, and might even come off as rude or insolent himself. Then, in the moment before his demise, perhaps the last glance at his sleeping wife could have been one final attempt at trying to create a bond with those around him.

So, why did Seymour do it? To answer this, let’s consider one last question: What is a "bananafish"? In my eyes, Seymour is the "bananafish." He’s subjected himself to so much violence, so much tragedy, so much trauma, that

he’s forced himself into a hole in which he cannot escape from. He has no way of reconnecting with the rest of the world around him. That is what drove him to suicide. This post-war paradise that Seymour’s been suddenly thrust into is, in fact, no paradise at all. Seymour decides he isn’t fit for this new reality he lives in, and takes a surefire route out of it.

This short story can be a projection of the author. J.D. Salinger fought in WWII as a counterintelligence officer, communicating with prisoners of war to gain information. It is also known that Salinger sustained a sort of nervous breakdown, and was sent to an Army hospital to recover. On top of this, Salinger also fought with depression. This story might have been a projection of the stress and other heavy emotions Salinger was experiencing after having been discharged from the hospital, perhaps earlier than he might have thought fit. Perhaps this short story was Salinger’s “bananafish”; an attempt at making a connection between himself and the reader, a way to communicate his dire state of mind and his struggles in trying to make sense of the new world around him.

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2025 Scholastic Writing Awards Gold Key Winner

*This essay was adapted for a middle school/high school audience.

Youth Behind Bars

Scarlett Wagner | ‘28

It is 1995. Thirteen-year-old Brandon Flood sits in his 8th grade classroom, wearing a black hooded sweatshirt, looking for trouble. The bright colors of banners and quotes covering the walls irritate his eyes. Brandon slouches, staring at the floor, with the hood covering his tired eyes. Just one wrong move could change the trajectory of his life, just one disagreement could lead to a lifetime of regret.

His teacher starts to approach him, and he immediately feels his muscles tighten beneath his skin. His leg starts to bounce underneath the desk, making his water bottle tremble. She asks him to remove the hood. Brandon scoffs, refusing. His teacher then sends Brandon into the hall and he approaches the school’s resource officer, expecting him to de-escalate the situation. The officer asks one more time for Brandon to remove his jacket, and unfazed, he refuses once again. The man then grabs Brandon by his collar, and suddenly Brandon is in a wrestling match with a police officer. Police backup is notified and sent to the school, and ultimately, Brandon gets placed in a juvenile detention center for aggravated assault on a police officer.

Brandon Flood sits in a juvenile detention center, the harsh, cool-toned lights shining violently in his eyes. He tries to focus on his book, but the low buzz of youthful offenders talking clouds his mind. He scans the room, looking at the discouraged faces of the children that have been placed in this facility. Many of them are sitting with their heads down, completely ignoring the slop they call lunch in front of them.

Delinquents.

These children are there because of the unfortunate realities of a system we incorrectly label as a place for youth to “get better” or “learn from their mistakes.” Just like Brandon, many young offenders enter the justice system with a single misstep. Yet, once inside it, the system that was intended to discourage recidivism and be a corrective measure can negatively affect the rest of someone's adult life.

Despite its goal of rehabilitation, the system frequently stigmatizes children and teens, leading to continuing criminal records that hinder job opportunities, affect

mental health, and cast a long shadow over the rest of their adult life. The often-hidden, lifelong impacts of the justice system make us wonder, do their current policies really serve society's best interests?

***

It is 2024. I sit on the phone with Brandon Flood, former Secretary of the Board of Pardons, and now the founder of the Lazarus Firm. There, Flood strives to help people gain their pardon or reduce their sentence for a criminal offense, and ultimately, clear their record. He is one of the many people who has experienced the justice system during their childhood, but his experience was significantly different from others.

“I’ve always heard about what it was like being in the juvenile justice system,” said Flood. “But it’s one thing to hear about it, and another thing to experience it.” For Flood, the juvenile justice system “wasn’t as scary as people made it out to be.” He compared it to a day camp. Due to the lack of programming and structure, Flood feared neither going to the detention center, nor the consequences.

When a minor is accused of committing a crime, the process they go through before stepping into a detention center is long and overwhelming. First, after the juvenile commits the crime, the judge hears evidence against them. The child may or may not have a lawyer present. After hearing the evidence, the judge decides whether or not the child is guilty. If deemed guilty, the child is labeled as delinquent and is given a date for the disposition hearing. In 2019, approximately 52% of minors were labeled as delinquent. At the disposition hearing, the child is told the legal consequences they will face in the future. One of the most common consequences is probation. While on probation, there are conditions including regular drug testing, paying restitution to the victim of the crime, and community service.

However, for some juveniles like thirteen-year-old Brandon Flood, a minor could go to a juvenile detention center instead. According to studies done in 2021, approximately 1 in 4 children are detained after juvenile court appearance. Once the child is taken into custody, the decision is made whether to release them back to the community or to hold them in a detention center. This decision is based on the severity of the offense and whether or not the child poses a threat to public safety. If the authority chooses to detain the child, they go through an intake process.

Within 72 hours of being placed in the center, the juvenile must appear in court for a detention hearing. This is where the judge determines if the child should remain in detention, be placed in an alternative setting, or be released. If the court orders continued detention, the child remains in the center. When placed back into the facility, they typically use programs focusing on a variety of different areas necessary for a child's development. The goals of these programs are to rehabilitate, rather than punish.

At detention facilities, typically the programs focus on education, counseling, and recreational activities. They have tutorial services, many mental health treatment programs, and organized sports. While these seem like a good alternative to adult-based facilities, the programs don't always prove to be the most effective way to discourage children from committing another offense.

"I ended up becoming desensitized to it," Flood said.

Depending on where you are, the facilities handle youth very differently. Some lack functional services to discourage children from recidivating, and some focus more on harmful correctional practices which could lead to trauma. So, either way, children are not getting the treatment they need.

Noelia Dondele, head of juvenile probation in New Haven, Connecticut, saw the services the justice system has to offer for juveniles first hand. Dondele explained that "The services have not caught up to the behaviors of kids today."

The experience and effects of the system depend greatly on each child. Every kid behaves differently, comes from different backgrounds, and has a different mindset entering the system. We can't expect this system that is made to discourage children from committing another offense to work on all youth. "It's not a blanket for everyone," Dondele said. "Anytime a child is removed from their home, it's going to significantly impact them." Every day, Dondele saw children go in and out of the juvenile justice system. She saw, for most children, the point in their life that leaves a permanent mark– not just on their record, but also on their well-being.

Amyra Weiss, a former intake assessment and referral specialist, also saw the system first hand. "I would never want my kids to go through that," she said. Unfortunately, the reality is that many children have been or are in the process of being removed from their homes, despite probation officers, specialists, and psychologists warning them of the negative effects of doing so.

According to Ryan Hatoum's UCLA article on early childhood incarceration, 38% of children who were incarcerated before the age of 14 experience depression later in life and 24% of children incarcerated at 14-15 experience it as well.

Mike Fox, a therapist at Laurel Life in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, has worked with a variety of different children throughout his career. He got to see a number of children who have been through the juvenile justice system and the direct effects of it. Every day, Fox speaks with a variety of different people, from children to adults. He listens to their experiences, background, life stories, et cetera, to try to better understand them. He believes that mental health is just as important as physical health and that it is overlooked by many. Through the kids he has worked with, Fox has seen symptoms of depression in nearly all his clients that have gone through the juvenile justice system. Along with depression, common mental health disorders include conduct disorder, reactive attachment disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, and PTSD. Because of the impressionability of minors, the juvenile justice system tends to leave a lasting effect.

"There is always a stigma that follows kids who are either within or leaving the juvenile justice system," Fox said. When someone is incarcerated at a young age, the stigma surrounding them is overwhelming. Society often labels them as criminals, a judgment that can feel like a permanent mark, no matter the growth someone has made. Even in the education system, the effects are significant. Schools may not want to take the child back, and even if they get the chance, they could face discrimination from peers. This same stigma can also follow someone into the job market, where a criminal record can close doors before they even get to them. On top of the stigma, there is also extreme emotional trauma.

"People that have gone through deeper things, like a detention facility," Fox said, "stay stagnated in their trauma and it keeps repeating over and over again." For many people, the trauma they carry through life after being incarcerated, feels like an invisible weight. According to The Sentencing Project, 70% to 80% of youth who left residential correctional programs were rearrested within two or three years of release. Being locked away during critical years of human development often leaves them stuck in that cycle.

The negative impacts of the justice system follow juveniles far beyond the courtroom, shaping the lives of many young offenders. The legal process is complicated with many steps to the juvenile court proceedings. Combined with

the lack of effective programs in detention centers and the outdated practices, children often remain trapped in cycles of incarceration and trauma. Yet, there are solutions. Advocates familiar with the system have suggested improvements to both pretrial and post-trial handling of juveniles, to reduce recidivism and allow them to move beyond their past mistakes. It is the hope of the proponents for juvenile justice reform that the life trajectory of Brandon Flood be the rule, rather than the exception.

2025 Scholastic Writing Awards Silver Key WInner

Cái ôm của thần chết

Sofia Fitzgerald | ‘25

Chúng tôi trốn trong những nơi trú ẩn
Khi chúng bắt đầu rơi

We hide in the shelters
When they begin to fall

She was a hardworking woman;
Nails lined with grime and worn to the tips,
Skin like a tight-fitting garment round her bony fingers.
Wading through the paddies in the whispers of morning
(When sleep still rimmed her heavy eyes),
Gooseflesh prickling up to her thighs in the lonely dawn.
He was a hardworking man;
Nails clicking compulsively against the arc of the trigger
Rusty flecks caking his hands like a long-dried paint.
Lurking through the leviathan labyrinth of growth
(One wrong step could mean death),
Beads of sweat luring the incessant music of the mosquitoes.

The heat of the jungle weighed him down
Where the tropical rains gave her life.
The
        RATATATAT
of his gunfire kept him breathing
When she feared that she would die.

“*Cục cưng*
        ở lại với tôi.”
“Dear
        Stay with me.”
They found peace in war’s deadly embrace
Love in the sweet nothings of hatred
And their heartbeat thumped in unison
With the explosions that shattered the earth.

Downstage Center

Jet Gillan | ‘25

And so I stand just steps away from a plummet to death, the crowd who adores me too far away to reach out their hands.
And so, instead, they throw them together, a congratulatory cacophony.
And so I bathe in beams of light, making me shine, as though the Sun herself offered up her rays just to pluck out every one of my shadows and turn me into a star.
And so the ink I’ve applied to my eyes will force them to glow in one way or another.
And so, upon my entrance, they will be delighted.
And so they’ll leave, another night come and gone.
And so maybe they’ll see me in a shop and we’ll exchange the recollective pleasantries.

And so the cycle continues.

And so, maybe, one night, I’ll plummet, the hands still and silent, the Sun refusing a drop of her light, the ink staining my pupils, the night fading into day, the pleasantries growing painful.
Unlikely.
And so I stand, fixed here to pretend, night after night, like I know who I am, much less who I pretend to be.
And so the curtain will close.
Scene.

Just for Today

Katy Ruoro | ‘27

Endless days grow and change
Dark whispers envelop
Everything seems to only get harder
To you, which every day is brighter than sorrow
Where are you hiding?
I feel you fading, more and more, everyday

i wish the days would last this way forever
bringing the same golden light
splashing my feet in pools of rainbow joy
i can’t wait to catch up to you

The distance between us seems to only grow
There is a weak child inside me
Tomorrow will be just as difficult
You paint me black with nothing but a pure heart
The distance between us seems unimaginable
Please don’t leave me

there’s wonder in every shadow
laughter in every breath, even the ripple
of rain brings a roaring of life to my precious world of now
there are things that only time allows to fade. I’ll reach you one day

Even when I laugh things off like an adult,
I don’t want to lose what’s inside of me
Keep your world just as it is, precious, so precious
Despite my isolation, in this cold darkness
I won’t be lonely because I have you
Stay here with me

it’s ok to take your time. waste it.
even if you’re called immature
after shoving it off, sob like a child
the world’s a strange place to play
i’m not afraid to laugh, or fall, or run too fast
i can never leave you

Just for Today

Let's love even our hidden despair
we are so similar, together
I'll stay a kidult, wear a smile
i'm not afraid of falling tomorrow
There's a piece of my heart that
never grew, holding on to its playful glee
This world is more than precious
just the way we are now
I find me in the vision of you
i'll live merely as a child
Who has grown up a lot
just as you are

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