



The 2025 EHS Poetry Slam

Monday, May 19, 2025 | Sony Hall



Tú y Yo

*Often in this life of ours we resemble,
in our failure to meet,
the Shen and Shang constellations,
one of which rises as the other one sets.**

We keep missing each other, you and I.
And now it is so very good to see you - and to be seen by you!
Our common and shining humanity, a family beyond dark borders.

Amidst deportations. Cancellations. Shock invasions and slow evasions.
Encampments and occupations. Preoccupations. Bombs bursting in air.
Quiet starvations. Mass migrations.
It was Kosovo - and now Congo - there always has to be some no-go zone.
The drive-by and the walk-on-by, our urban, homeless lullaby. The old air-
kiss, that close near-miss, an old hello that means goodbye.

But our warrior poets tonight say *hello* to us and our brighter angels.
Our common humanity.

A family reunited for this evening.

Tú y yo. You and I.

The magic our children work on stage tonight is why, at the **3oh!9**,
we stop to bow to each other,
share plant based meals in the fullness of time,
play and strengthen ourselves under the sun.
It is why we write poetry - and why we speak it, intone it, both in dulcet, and
in those let's-make-no-bones-about-it tones.
So tonight these poets guides, and not AI, will let no constellation pass us by.

Mere presence. It is the beginning and end of quite everything at our school.
You and I, we are more than enough.

Enough even to cast away a lingering late autumn chill.

Enough for all - why not? So too, you and I can be more than enough for an
elegant education on that ever bright half acre Spanish Harlem refuge,
a place where we all are made whole.

*Let us go then, you and I...***

May we look after one other, tú y yo, with ease,

Ivan

* 贈衛八處士 - Tu Fu, 759

** *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* - T.S. Eliot, 1915



Evening Program

SHORT FILM: THE HISTORY OF EHS

WELCOME

Debra Beard, Trustee

ACT I POEMS

SHORT FILM: TÚ Y YO (PART ONE)

ACT II POEMS

INTERMISSION MINGLE

ACT III POEMS

SHORT FILM: TÚ Y YO (PART TWO)

ACT IV POEMS

GIVING OPPORTUNITY

CLOSING REMARKS

About EHS

The East Harlem School has brought an elegant liberal arts education to students from low-income families from Spanish Harlem and beyond since 1993. It is still led by co-founder Ivan Hageman, who grew up on the site of the school when it was a drug rehabilitation center run by his parents.





- We give preference to families with the lowest of incomes and the highest of values.
- We accept students based on character, not standardized test scores.
- Classes at EHS are limited to 18 students.
- Our graduates attend top high schools including Marymount, Nightingale-Bamford, Beacon, Cristo Rey, Loomis Chaffee, and Miss Porter's, among many others.
- Over the past 32 years, EHS alumni have gone on to study at colleges and universities including Cornell, Notre Dame, Swarthmore, Barnard, Wellesley, Dartmouth, and NYU London.
- The overwhelming majority of our alumni have become first-generation college graduates.
- Our regular session cost per child is less than \$17,000 per year. By contrast, the NYC Department of Education spends over \$30,000 per public school student each year.

MC Spotlight

Harold Ford Jr.



Harold Ford Jr. is a former five-term U.S. Congressman who represented Memphis, Tennessee, from 1997 to 2007. During his decade in office, he focused on education, economic development, and public service, earning a reputation as a thoughtful and independent leader. He later served as chair of the Democratic Leadership Council and held faculty appointments at Vanderbilt University and the University of Texas at Austin. Since leaving Congress, Mr. Ford has built a successful career in the private sector, holding senior leadership roles at Morgan Stanley and currently serving as Vice Chairman of Corporate & Institutional Banking at PNC. In addition to his work in business, he is a political contributor for Fox News, where he frequently appears on Special Report and serves as a co-host of The Five. He remains a visible voice in public affairs and a committed advocate for civic engagement, leadership, and opportunity. He lives in New York City with his wife and two children.



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WE WILL START OUR TOUR HERE

Nadia, Grade 8

Our backyard,
where a willow tree stands
that gave us shade on our
first day of fourth grade,
as we listened to a man
help us forget our nerves by
telling us to feel the wind
and focus on the melody
of the birds chirping.
Where we managed
to kick the ball over the fence
during swift games of soccer,
trading shoes,
snowball fights –
memory held on
by a leaf of the willow tree.

And next on our tour
a bulletin board,
photos of our
Delaware Water Gap trip –
we played countless rounds of Uno
around the fire,
games of tag
illuminated by flashlights in the dark.
Hiking with heavy backpacks,
scrambled up a wall of rock,
and I saw the cerulean sky
reflect off my brown skin.

Now let's head upstairs to the
cafeteria,
where I walked through a
world of new flavors –
chickpea curry, vegan pizza,
tomato soup.

I stuffed my mouth
on Thursdays to be the first to get
dessert.
Where we had Circle in the cold or
rain,
and I announced "joke of the day."

Now heading up to the classrooms
where I noticed
my mind, my body.
I tried to bring stillness
to my shaking leg
during meditation.
Where I saw the human desire for
power
play out on Manor Farm.
Where I learned how our organs
work together to produce
a sneeze or a cough.
Where I stepped out of my comfort
zone,
took a deep breath,
and used my words
to build bridges.

We have reached the end of our tour.
Any comments or questions?

NADIA | Nadia is the younger sister of two EHS alumni. In her free time, she enjoys exploring the city with her friends – from Yorkville sushi eateries to the bucolic expanses of Central Park. Nadia's fascination with dance, which began at the age of four, continues. You might just see her on the Alvin Ailey stage one day.

HAY FUEGO EN MI FAMILIA

Christopher, Grade 8

Seated between my mama and dad.
They tell me they have a lot to say...

Their stories are flames -
working stories,
in Puebla, where my dad
"no jugamos,"
went to work in el campo
to help his family get out of poverty.

In Guerrero, where my mama
found her love of romantic music.
Introducing me to her era,
she says,
"There is a line that always makes me
shed a tear...
It goes...

*'Tú eres la tristeza, ay, de mis ojos
Que lloran en silencio por tu amor
Me miro en el espejo y veo en mi
rostro
El tiempo que he sufrido por tu
adiós'".*

I can feel the way these lyrics spoke
to her heart.

Stories like flames -
like when he didn't have toys to play
with,
but played with rocks as cars.
Like when she didn't have food to
eat,
but kept quiet because she
understood
the times they were facing.

If I could go back in time to help
them,
I would.
Maybe like a brother,
or a parent,
I would protect them.
I would give them whatever money I
could,
toys to replace the rocks,
food to replace the silence.
I would light a fire to give them hope.

I will tell these stories
of the good memories
and the tough ones too.
I will continue adding light
to our fire.

CHRISTOPHER | Christopher spends his weekends watching Real Madrid games and playing soccer with his friends. He hopes to become a pediatrician one day. He is inspired by his sister who is enrolled at Columbia University.

MY MOM, LILIANA

Emily, Grade 4

My mom, Liliana.

My kind, beautiful, smart mom, Liliana
whose skin color is the same as mine,
tan like a very light orange.
Long hair always up in a bun
to keep away the tangles

My mom, Liliana

who says "Te amo mucho,"
when she drops me off at school
and "Buenas tardes,"
when she picks me up
and "Que te duermas,"
when I don't want to go to sleep.

My mom, Liliana

who lays with me in her bed,
each with our own light brown blanket.
Not talking,
but hugging each other.
That is happiness.

EMILY | Although she is an only child, Emily has cousins who feel more to her like siblings. Outside of school, Emily practices gymnastics.

JOEY AND SERENITY

Serenity, Grade 8

From one heart, two were formed.
Fraternal twins -
not alike in looks,
but alike in love.
Serenity and Joey.
Serenity means peace
and Joey means God will increase.

My twin brother is the sun,
making smiles grow
with energetic gestures.
His hands are his own language.
He is heard from taps and points,
not in spoken words.

He tells me he's happy
and I know he's thriving
by his wiggles and screeches
as he plays his RnB music
loud on his iPad.

By putting his hand out
to our mom while she's cooking,
he tells us he wants to try
seasoning the food.

At school,
while I talk with my friends,
Joey taps on a category
and chooses what he wants,
which is often the button for "crackers".

I look at him and smile,
wondering what this happy boy
is thinking about.

Serenity and Joey -
not alike in language,
but alike in love.

SERENITY | In her free time, Serenity enjoys DIY projects, listening to music with her twin brother, and exploring neighborhoods of the city with her friends. One day, Serenity will be a residential architect.

HALLS OF MONTEZUMA

Jocelyn, Grade 8

Brother who tells me, "I love you"
and laughs when I reply, "I hate you".

Brother who sings ballads
so loud his voice breaks.
Belting Frank Ocean,
"If you think about it,
it'll be over in no time".

Brother who has our ma's laugh,
high pitched like a parrot.
And blames her for his height,
"Es tu culpa".
She replies, "Perdoname".

Brother who outgrew his
mango chupado haircut.
Whose once crooked teeth
suffered three years of pushing and
pulling
aligning them like little soldiers.

Brother who boarded the train
with the blessings of our pastor
as I lay sweating out a fever,
a warning of the Carolina sun.

Soldier who told me,
"Cuida a mamá,"
but does his part from afar
with white lies to protect her heart.
He takes the hits,
a forearm scar
that he excused as a fall,
but was really a fight.

Soldier who turned the clippers on
himself
to minimize the pain
of the sergeant's indifferent hands
that hold the shears.
Who gave us relief via video
with his unwavering smile,
even through the loss of
memories held on by a strand.

Soldier who went to church
every Liberty Day,
a habit brought from Queens
to Parris Island.
With a recruit
stealing my seat beside him,
they prayed in a makeshift church
reading an English bible,
olvidando los versos que lo criaron.

Soldier who told Ma
on the morning of March 25th,
"Tengo una sorpresa, abre la puerta."
A mariachi singing for her in his place,
while he watched through the screen
with tears for he knew her forty-
seventh
would be the first of many missed
milestones.

Soldier who ends the Facetime with,
"I love you"
and I force the expected reply,
"I hate you."

JOCELYN | At EHS, you can find Jocelyn giving tours to visitors, tutoring fourth graders, and participating in Violin Club. Outside of school, Jocelyn loves to take bike rides with her brother and bake carrot cakes and cookies with her aunts. She leads her class both through word and deed.

THE WAR OF CHESS

William, Grade 6

Chess is a game of war.
The king gets trapped and has nowhere to go.
The enemy troops
attacking from all sides.
He loses the war.

Checkmate.

So the king sends his first available troops.
To the center battlefield,
the pawns and the knights.
Protecting and watching out for each other.
For the vulnerable pawns, especially.

In the crowded center
are chess pieces
looking for an opening to pounce.

Except for the king,
the one piece looking for a place to hide.
And me, the player
doing both combined.
Thinking the opponent's thoughts,
before I move.

In the endgame,
both kings and players try their best
to defend, attack, and counter.

But only the one who plays the smartest,
wins the war.

Checkmate.

WILLIAM | William decided to learn chess when family members told him it was too hard. On weekends, he helps his father sell traditional Mexican food from a food cart in Spanish Harlem and plays chess in Bryant Park.

MI BICICLETA

Natalia, Grade 4

Vete en tu bicicleta.

Yo tenía una bicicleta tan bonita,
azul con flores rosas.
Siempre manejaba con ella.
Iba a comprar cosas que mi mamá
necesitaba -
tortillas, tomates, quesos, y hielo.

Vete hacer compras en tu bicicleta.

Nunca me quejaba porque me
gustaba ir.
Manejando.
Libre.
Con el aire, en mi cabello
Le digo hola a mis vecinos
Comida en las manos.

Vete a pasear en tu bicicleta.

En un pueblo muy chiquito -
Montañas y caminos de tierra.
No había muchos carros.

Vete a ver a tu tía en tu bicicleta.

A su casa iba
para jugar con mi prima favorita
para verlas cuando quería.

Tienes que dejar tu bicicleta.

¿A dejar a mi prima?
¿A dejar la comida de mi mamá?
¿A dejar mi pueblo?

Tienes que dejar tu bicicleta.

No dejo a mi prima
porque tenemos el amor y sangre.
Y nunca dejo mi pueblo
porque tenemos el amor y sangre.

Recuerda tu bicicleta

Mi bicicleta me enseñó eso
Le doy gracias a las rosas azules
A mi mamá,
A mi prima,
A mi pueblo.

TRANSLATION OF “MY BICYCLE”

Go on your bike.

I had such a nice bike,
blue with pink flowers.
I always rode it.
I would go buy things my mom needed -
tortillas, tomatoes, cheese, and ice.

Go shopping on your bike.

I never complained because I liked to go
riding.
Free
with the wind in my hair.
I say hello to my neighbors,
food in my hands

Go for a ride on your bike.

In a very small town -
mountains and dirt roads.
There weren't many cars.

Go see your aunt on your bike.

I would go to her house
to play with my favorite cousin
to see them whenever I wanted.

You have to leave your bike.

To leave my cousin?
To leave my mom's food?
To leave my town?

You have to leave your bike.

I won't leave my cousin
because we have love and blood.
And I'll never leave my town
because we have love and blood.

Remember your bicycle.

My bike taught me
to thank the blue roses,
my mom,
my cousin,
my town.

NATALIA | Natalia was born in Santa Ana Necoxtla, Mexico. She elegantly masters both a new language and urban setting. One day, she hopes to become a lawyer or kindergarten teacher.

KOSOVO MORNING

Sara, Grade 5

Ose ndoshta do të
shkojmë në male
në vend të pishinës.

Every morning,
I hear the birds chirping,
chickens clucking
as the sun rises up the sky.

Mëngjeseve në Kosovë.
Gjshi and gjisha are sipping tea.
Dark green watering spout to water the flowers.
Bakery for bryek.
Perfect way to start the day.

Searching for shade
We eat under the awning
Seven of us, all family
Maybe we will go to the pool.

Ose ndoshta do të
Shkojmë në male
Në vend të pishinës.

SARA | Sara's fondest memories are from her yearly visits to Kosovo, where she enjoys the simple moments with her family, by the pool or riding horses in the mountains near Peja.

THE PLAZA HOTEL

Liya, Grade 5

A Ukrainian girl had a dream
to go to a place she saw in a
magazine.
At 18 that dream came true
when a man with a camera
at a mall in Michigan
took a picture
that would take her
to the city the whole world knows.

A Palestinian boy who had a dream
of his own,
to put his creative culinary skills to
the test,
left behind his desert land
and found relief
in a kitchen fancier
than any he had ever seen.

The Plaza Hotel
looked like a castle,
with the most delightful decorations.
The Ukrainian girl saw this place
before
in a movie, *Home Alone*.
And it was there
that a Palestinian boy gave her
a Godiva box
and a bouquet of tulips.

A walk in Central Park,
a plan for the future,
a family was formed.

This Ukrainian girl
with cheekbones, facial symmetry,
and the perfect height
to be a model.
This Palestinian boy
with strong arms
that carve meat
from the broiler for shawarma
and build his daughter's bed.
This girl who was born in New York
but is Ukrainian and Palestinian
goes to her Papa's restaurant
during Ramadan
and eats dates to break the fast.
She is her Mama and Papa's dream.

LIYA | Liya, whose parents hail from Jordan and Ukraine, dreams of becoming either a judge or a fashion designer. She is inspired by her mother Valeriya's sense of style.

KISHORE AND COCO

Adrian, Grade 4

My dad, Kishore, used to be the
super of a building.
When apartments had issues
he was the inspector,
the fixer.
His phone would ring a lot,
people who needed something fixed.
He usually answered the calls,
but sometimes he didn't
and would go for a bike ride with me.

We used to bike to Randall's Island
and sit under a big tree.
Sometimes I'd fall asleep.
It was relaxing.

I don't go with him anymore.

After third grade,
my dad left in the summer
to fix buildings in Nepal.
Now it's just me, my mom, Aadrika.
I talk to him on the phone a lot.
I miss him.

Before he left,
he gave us a surprise.
I was asleep on the couch
on a Friday evening
and when I woke up,
there was a dog right next to me.

My dad got him from a lady
in the building where he was a super.
She already had too many dogs.
No more space for this one.

We named him Coco.
Coco.
Like hot cocoa.
He's exactly the same color as the
hot cocoa I drink.
He has soft, brown curly hair.
He looks so small,
like a totally different dog
after he gets a haircut.

When I get home,
I open the door
and Coco gallops over like a horse
and scratches my legs.
But then he looks past me,
for another person.
The one who got him.

Coco must feel kind of sad.
He misses belly rubs
and walks
and running laps in Jefferson Park
with my dad.
Now I'm the one who goes with him.

My dad calls from Kathmandu,
where his day is our night.
He always asks about Coco,
the surprise he gave us
before he left.

ADRIAN | Adrian lives with his family and their dog, Coco. In his free time, you'll find him on the soccer field, chasing his dream of becoming a professional.

AS THE RIVER OF BAGMATI FLOWS

Aadrika, Grade 8

G, E minor, D and C –
my fingers press the nylon strings
of the guitar you gifted me.
The chocolate colored wood,
the chords of a song so engrained,
“Take me Home, Country Roads.”

As my guitar sings this song,
memories flood
like the river of Bagmati flows.
Memories that call to me
as you were called to Kathmandu,
your home so far away.

Papa, I remember
the final bear hug,
easier this time
because we’ve been down
this road before.
Letting go is the chorus of
this song.
Accompanied by impatience,
emptiness, and trust.

G, E minor, D and C -
until you come back again,
I will start the evening conversations
at the dinner table.
I will keep pedaling up steep hills
with Adrian.
I will be the extra hands
folding the laundry.
I will play the verses
to complete this song.

Our calls are the bridge
of this duet across the sea.
Pressing the red X
on the screen
pauses the music.
But in a tiny apartment
in East Harlem,
I will strum the chords
G, E minor, D and C.
Until we meet again,
until our roads cross.

AADRIKA | Aadrika has a deep love for music and storytelling. Outside of school, she practices taekwondo and participates in a pre-med program at Columbia. Aadrika hopes to become a pediatrician.

COMO SI VIVIERAS ALLÍ

Genesis, Grade 6

They always say:

“Mi amor, hablas como si vivieras allí,
bailas como si vivieras allí,
es como si vivieras allí.”

“My love, you speak like you live
there,
you dance like you live there,
It’s like you actually do live there.”

My parents were born in parroquia
Nulti
where they walked as far as
my house to Queensboro Plaza
to get the cows,
and played with the leftover ropes as
toys.

The most colorful place,
like the flag’s shades of rojo, azul, y
amarillo,
so bright you can see them from
faraway.

The trees and mountains that touch
the clouds,
the bacas, chanchos, pavos,
the cheese empanadas that hiss on
the pot,
qué sabores tan deliciosos,
the crunch and the stretch.

Danza folklórica.

Women’s skirts transform into ball
gowns as they spin.

The men lift their legs with power
in their fur chivarras and the Aya
Huma
protecting our land.

To mi familia still in Ecuador.

To mi Papa Juan,
Papa Mario,
y Tia Sandra that once were.
The ones I couldn’t say goodbye to.

One day I’ll go back
to the comida,
bailas,
familia,
y el país, Ecuador.

GENESIS | Genesis commutes to EHS from Queens. She is passionate about climate justice, immigration, volleyball, and music – and imagines a future working as an immigration lawyer.

HIDE AND SEEK

Elías, Grade 5

Hide and seek in Alpoyecá,
with the neighborhood kids.
I have to find the perfect spot.
I slide in behind the tires
stacked next to the taxis.

But, what if I am never found?

I would explore the places I dreamed of -
the beaches of Cancun
el donde la luna brilla mejor,
the Mayan pyramids
where the people reunite with their gods,
Estadio Azteca
to see Club América,
my Papa's favorite team growing up.

I would visit Abuelito's grave in San Pedro,
catch him up on my life and tell him
how Papa, his son, is doing.
I would leave him my soccer jersey
to make him proud.
And then I would go to La Ciudad
to visit the grave of my tía
who left us too early.

But I hear my friends' laughter,
calling me back to the game,
snapping me back to reality:
hide and seek in Alpoyecá,
with the neighborhood kids.

ELÍAS | Elías' favorite memories are of playing soccer with the neighborhood children in the plaza during his annual visits to Alpoyecá, Guerrero, Mexico.

TWO SISTERS – AN EKPHRASTIC POEM

Lyanna, Grade 6

There's a pillow fight
in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.
Two sisters:
a teenager with a serious face, trying
to hide the spark in her eye,
a little girl with pigtails and a joyful
smile.
Two pillows ripped from hitting way
too many times,
feathers and fluff from the pillows,
landing on two purple beds.

That pillow fight painting is familiar.
Two beds, two sides:
neon blue sheets on her side,
pink sparkly flowers on mine.
Hot glue gun and canvases
ready for action on her side.
Vanity mirror, skincare
and journals on mine.

Two sisters
sharing a room.
It can be pretty chaotic.
A little sister who interrupts my
reading
with snorts, honks, and
noises that don't even sound human.
But, sometimes we're in harmony
when I help her with her homework
or when we stay up late on the
weekends,
watching videos on the top bunk,
or when it's thundering
and Alyssa climbs into my bed.

Two sisters,
very different personalities.
All of the clothes are on the foot of
her bed.

When we get home from school,
her uniform gets thrown on the floor.
Mine is neatly folded and placed in
my drawer.
I'm an early bird,
a light sleeper -
the sound of an air conditioner,
a toilet flushing,
or a drawer opening wakes me up.
Even a dinosaur roaring wouldn't
wake Alyssa up.

Alyssa can't make up her mind about
her favorite color.
First it was light blue, then black,
then somehow even clear, and now
orange,
which is the complete opposite from
blue
on the color wheel.
But I stick with the same things.
My favorite color has been pink
for 11 years.

And then of course,
there's the hair.
Everyone says we look like twins,
except for the hair.
Alyssa's hair is curly like a
bowl of noodles.
Mine is straight as a pin.

There's a pillow fight
in East Harlem.
Two sisters:
a younger sister with rosy cheeks
pillow ready to attack,
and a preteen who seems grown up,
but is really still a little girl inside.

LYANNA | Lyanna's mother hails from the Dominican Republic and her paternal grandfather from Poland. She loves meditation, choir, writing, journaling, and plans to be an actor and writer of romance-horror novels.

I KEEP THEM SAFE

Kevin, Grade 8

I am 13 years old.
He is 1 and
she is 18,
but they see the world
quite the same.

Junior, my baby brother
is stuck to me like glue.
He wants my attention –
tugging on my pants
and dragging me
to get two toy microphones
so we can sing a duet.
He falls asleep in my arms.
I lay down with him on the bed
and watch him sleep.
I carefully place a plushie in his arms
hoping he won't notice that I'm
gone.

Luz, which means light.
She's 18 years old
and loves nothing more than
watching kids cartoons,
playing with her dolls,
and going to the park.
A mind that focuses
on one thing at a time,
and can stay entertained
watching lights flicker
different colors.

Watching Junior grow,
saying new phrases,
putting up a finger
to show me he's one year old.
While Luz stays the same,
sometimes stuttering,
searching for the right word,
watching kids cartoons,
playing with her dolls,
and going to the park.
Staying alert,
watching them play together,
my 1 year old brother
and my 18 year old sister.
I keep them safe.

KEVIN | Kevin participates in the Greater New York Division Band of the Salvation Army. He plays the trumpet, tuba, and recently won third place out of two hundred fifty musicians, playing an acoustic bass guitar solo.

SENT AWAY

Vivianne, Grade 8

A man folds his clothes in neat piles,
arranged in a small suitcase.
Photos of his smiling wife and children,
neatly zipped
so they won't crumple.
He clutches a cross with his Lord
for comfort
on his long journey
to America.

Hundreds of immigrants
of all ages
cross the border
every year.
They want to find their own pot of gold.
So they push,
como un pajarito dentro de su huevo,
through the unforgiving heat and
cold in the desert
for 2,000 miles
to feel the embrace of
hope, security and freedom
in the United States.

Jobs and apartments were harder to find
than fitting the contents of home
in a small suitcase.

"Immigrants are dirty people."
"They do not belong in America."
Words that sound simple,
but are meant to stab.

Isn't America supposed to be a vast
canvas
splattered with color?
The canvas is tearing apart
before our eyes
and transforming into a new painting,
one that exposes
the darkness, violence, and betrayal
hiding behind the greatness
in this country.

Immigrants are el tronco del árbol de
América,
waking up with the sun
to provide our everyday produce:
picking naranjas, fresas, melones,
aguacates.
Crouched down, transporting baskets
to trucks,
serving and preparing our favorite
meals at restaurants,
and biking tirelessly through the biting
cold to deliver them.

Immigrants work every job
imaginable,
yet people treat them like they do
not belong here.

But still, the man waves his bandera
Mexicana,
tears in his eyes.
A strong shout taking aim
at those who want to take his voice
away.
Alongside the others who wave their
flags high with pride
and shout,
"Esta es mi bandera! Nuestro orgullo
nos trae a América!"
We won't stop.
No matter what.
Our roots will stay planted,
Because this soil belongs to us too.

Without immigrants, America will fall.

VIVIANNE | Vivianne commutes to EHS from Astoria. She is the proud daughter of Mexican immigrants. Vivianne is both a wonderful artist and a practitioner of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu.

THE CLOCK OF LIFE

Jesus, Grade 4

Tick tock the clock hit 12.
My mom gave birth to me.
She took care of me and cuddled me everyday,
like a penguin keeping its egg warm,
filled with so much love.

Tick tock the clock hit 3.
I was once a child
celebrating my birthday in Mexico,
playing with Papi Lelo.

Tick tock the clock hit 6.
When I found out he passed away,
I cried
looking at my grandfather's portrait.

Tick tock the clock hit 9.
My mom's phone background shows me as a baby
in deer pajamas.
It felt like life was going too fast.

Tick tock.
A beginning and an end.
I'm receiving all of this advice.
I want to return to the start
like a little fish
trying to return back to the ocean.

JESUS | Jesus loves history, reading, art, and soccer. When he visits family in Chilac, Mexico he enjoys making fresh lemonade from the fruit of the tree that stands in the family backyard.

UNA TRABAJADORA HERMOSA

Oswaldo, Grade 8

Her keys click
against each other
as she misses the keyhole
multiple times.

I see her tired eyes.
The exhaustion
from the sighs she makes
at the end of each sentence.

But she always keeps moving
like a machine,
tending drinks
for wealthy people
who don't think.

And serving steaming food
that burns her tired hands.
She is a non-stop clock:
clicking to make,
clicking to do,
still clicking after midnight.

Mi mamá,
an indestructible diamond
like the one on her
calloused hand.

OSVALDO | Oswaldo takes joy in visiting the family palenque in Zapotitlán, Mexico where they cultivate maguey plants for mezcal. He enjoys bike rides with his father through his Parkchester neighborhood to visit his tía.

BROTHER MEMORIES - AN EKPHRASTIC POEM

Mia, Grade 6

A pillow fight painting brings me back to my brother and I.
Playing in the snow years ago,
it was freezing cold.
Mama was making food,
calling out to us “yo voy a hacer tacos y sopa!”
My stomach rumbled in advance.

Throwing snowballs on the apartment roof.
We were laughing so hard,
we barely heard the cars going by or people talking.
I fell over and over on purpose,
trying to keep his deep and loud laugh on repeat.
He took off his glasses so they didn’t break.
I didn’t have glasses just yet.

Now I go back, back to my house,
waiting for the right time.
Now he’s in college and calmer than before.
He’s so busy with school, work, and everything else.
We’re still just as close,
but we have to plan to see each other.
He reminds me he’s just a text away,
but it’s not the same feeling.

Sometimes a pillow fight starts still,
just like the siblings in this painting.
Only now, he’s much stronger.
And I still fall,
but on purpose.
I can’t help but wonder:
Will we still have time for each other? When?

MIA | When Mia is not at school, she is often curled up with a book or in the kitchen making Mexican food with her uncle – quesadillas, tacos, and tostadas are their specialties.

AN ABSTRACT FROM 4 TO 12

Johanna, Grade 7

Since I was 4 I've had a dream
of a future polished and soft.
I picked up a crayon.
My small chubby hands
moved as the wax pigment crayon danced
on the plain paper.
Thoughts of color -
my lightest hue of comfort chestnut,
the sky newborn blue,
the soft pale pink
and the haze of lavender.

Fast forward 8 years.
Dreams continue.
I pick up a skinny marker.
My slim practiced hands
curve the swirl.
The marker dances
on the sketchbook paper
my gradient is
ice blue, to soft violet,
to bubblegum pink.
My colorful days unfold
in my maze brain.
The spectrum of my younger self
spreads to fill the canvas.

JOHANNA | Johanna has been drawing since she was four years old and now splits her time between digital art and acrylic painting. She lives in the South Bronx with her family and goldendoodle she loves like a sibling. Johanna hopes to become an animator one day.

AN INTRUSION OF DUST

Justin, Grade 8

A speck of dust lies
in every crack or corner,
left unbothered for many hours, days,
and weeks.
Untouched by someone
whose desire is to leave everything
perfect.
As it was.

To my uncertain concern,
I come to realize that I cast myself
upon the filthiest rooms,
stressing every vile vein in my body,
Making me not want to stay.

My instincts tell me to go on a stroll,
but I am on duty for patrol.
My mind tried to contain itself,
as desperation clogged it in a hurry,
with every gasping breath comes a
disastrous outcome.
The kind where everything will come
crashing down.
Not in the way I picture.

Reluctantly, I return,
bursting through the fragile door.
I figured I was required to clean
every room,
every window,
every drawer,
even every ceiling.
This feeling
rumbles inside me
like a headache.
Throbbing.
Non-stop.

This cycle of cleaning
only repeats itself
day after day,
until I can not stand it
anymore.

I need assistance
to stand my ground,
to remain a hard worker,
dedicated to finish what I started.
That is when the sound of a timer
goes off,
awakening the reinforcements.

Focusing on the time our exhausted
mother comes home from work,
is when doors begin to bang,
curtains begin to flutter.
With every sweep taken by hand,
we waste every bit of time working
as an unstoppable force.
Swishing through the moist air,
second after second,
minute after minute,
piles of sweat stacking themselves.

Just before our hearts pound out of
our sockets,
we could hear as the door creaks
open.
Rushing as we made it out alive,
and with a smile,
we welcome our mother to our home
sweet home.

JUSTIN | Justin is an avid reader and passionate weightlifter. Justin loves to be outside, exploring his neighborhood and meeting new people. One day, he hopes to be a private chef. He makes a mean bolognese!

A TROPICAL BIRD IN THE CITY

Roslin, Grade 8

A Philippine eagle
lands in New York City.

With every inch of its being –
its white plumage, soft coating,
black eyes surrounded by grey,
its sharp inky beak,
this baby bird in New York City
wishes to flap its wings
and go to heights no bird has
reached.

To fly from arctic cold apartment
buildings
to the melting temperatures,
the outdoor flea market
where milk fish sit out
in ice-filled wooden stalls.

To soar beyond
wrecked-reef beaches,
to fly over the vast sea
clinging onto the Atlantic scent.

The bird weeps
for the burgundy and yellow sunset,
dreams of White Beach,
jellies are clear as water,
lemony sand is stove-hot to the
touch,
tidal waves cool the sun's fire.

Stretching its wings
hoping to land in the country of
dreams,
unable to see
through the smog
of an uninviting city.
Perched on a building
scraping the sky
of the wrong island,
the land that never sleeps.

The bird belongs to the land of the
sun.
It belongs to the land of dreams.

ROSLIN | Roslin was born in Quezon City and moved from the Philippines when she was two. To this day, her grandmother speaks to her in Tagalog. Roslin turns her inquisitive mind to topics as varied as aerospace engineering and French singers of the 1960s.

SWEET GRANDMA LUCY

Alyssa, Grade 4

Passed away at 97.
August 2, 2024.
10:38 PM.

My dad picked me up from my Mom's house
and I heard the words,
"Grandma Lucy passed away."

I didn't cry.
I knew she would reunite in heaven with her daughter.

I understood why she had to go.
Breast Cancer.
Old age.
Having too pure of a heart.

It's confusing to see someone
turn unhealthy in such a short matter of time.
To go from
easy speech,
open eyes,
Joy.
To
oxygen mask,
twitching hand,
Flat.

Kelly said,
"I hate seeing her like this."
My little brother and sister
wouldn't go anywhere near her.
They were scared.
But I held her hand,
sitting right next to her.

*ALYSSA | Alyssa has lived in every borough of New York City - except Staten Island.
She is an avid reader and participant in the art, choir, and theater clubs at EHS.*

ACCEPTANCE

Kaylee, Grade 8

I knew a girl
who grew a flower,
who flew to the city of the stars,
and almost held the moon.

She begged her mother to buy
peaches
at the grocery store
and ran through the sprinklers
with her brother,
seeing only the sunshine.

I knew a girl who saw her mother's
name
written on a black tombstone.

She sought comfort
in the voice of any female teacher
who spoke even slightly
in her mother's tone.

I knew a girl
whose anger turned inward,
throwing blame upon herself.

She lost herself,
she lost her childhood,
she had the world
pour down on her.

I knew a girl
who felt ashamed
as the only one
without a gift to give on
Mother's Day.

I know a girl
who stopped living in a dream,
who learned to accept
how things are,
who learned to accept her
mother's death.

I know a girl
who was lifted up
by a father who
took on the role of a mother.

I know a girl
who stood on this stage
and told the world
of her love
for her parents.

I know a girl
who stands here again
planting a new flower.
Una flor muere pero otra se planta.

KAYLEE | Kaylee uses poetry to connect the inner and outer worlds. One day, she hopes to become a psychologist and support children who have had experiences like her own.

AQUÍ VIVE MI GENTE

Alena, Grade 8

Aquí vive mi gente,
la isla de encanto,
the magic island.
You want to take the beaches.
You want to take the schools.
You want to take our home.
Pero porque?
You think money can buy our island,
my home?

Aquí vive mi gente,
the crashing, the booms
of collapsing buildings,
just so you can buy it for cheaper.
Your filthy dollar bills
will never buy our island.
You want us to leave,
to colonize the reggaeton, salsa,
the sound of the coquis.

Aquí vive mi gente.
We will wave our flag.
We will always keep our voice loud.
The blasting sound of country music,
the smell of the grill, the hot dogs,
and the awful stares we get.
Get out of my island.
Fuera de mi isla.

Aquí vive mi gente.
Knocks on the door,
red bold letters saying,
"Eviction notice, 30 days to leave."
You are trying to take our aqua
beaches,
the magic of Puerto Rico,
all because you don't want to
pay taxes.

Hurricane Maria,
dogs and animals drowning in the
rising water,
houses sinking and floating away,
cries of loss, screams of fright.
Cameras clicking, flashing, ticking
as you toss paper towels towards us.
News articles printing.
You tried to burn marble,
instead you made it shinier.

Aquí vive mi gente.
You're washing away Hawaii's true
origin.
You will not do this with Puerto Rico.
We are made of diamond.

Get out of my magic island!
The light green trees will never darken.
The pam pam non-stop
beat of the neighborhoods
will never stop singing.

Aquí vive mi gente,
from the tostones, the pasteles,
the bachata,
is truly what represents Puerto Rico.
You are repainting our colors.
You are taking away the blue from
the flag,
the sky and sea.
You are taking away red stripes,
the blood of the warriors.
You are taking away the white star
the island.
Leave our island of steel!
This magic will never stop.

ALENA | Alena lives around the corner from EHS. Her older sister is an EHS alumna, enrolled at St. Thomas Aquinas, and her younger sister will be starting as a fourth grader this fall. Alena's family has roots in the towns of Isabela, Luisa, and Ponce. She loves acrylic painting and is learning the electric guitar.

DIFFERENT OATS

Kayla, Grade 8

I put the spoon
back in my bowl
after tasting the cardboard disguised
as oats.
Is it the gray hue?
Is it the smell of crayons?
Or is it simply not my mother's?
Mine made with artificial flavors,
hers made with love to savor.

I wish I learned how to make it,
but she makes it for the French girl
with blonde hair, sapphire eyes,
and milky white skin.

In the faraway borough of Brooklyn,
her building shines bright with lights
like the lost city of gold,
El Dorado.

In the busy streets of East Harlem,
my red brick building,
AC units jutting out the windows,
like a mini Latin America.
El Barrio.

I was once mommy's little girl,
but now she has another little girl.

Is there a difference between the
labels we carry?
Why is it that she serves the
privileged?
Why does this little girl get most of her
time?

Why does she have mornings
accompanied by
my mother,
while mine are spent in solitude?

I can't feel this jealousy.
I shouldn't.
She is just a child,
but so am I.

Maybe one day I too will learn the
perfect recipe,
but for now I will sit and stare
at my loveless oats.

KAYLA | Kayla enjoys exploring cooking and baking. She looks forward to summer days at Greenwood Lake with her family. Kayla looks up to her older brother, an EHS alumnus, who serves in the military.

WAITING FOR REUNION

Amanda, Grade 4

I told my mom, "I want to go to Mexico,"
but she said, "Later, when you're older."
I've always wanted to meet my great grandma in person.
I've always wanted to hear her stories.
I want to see the house my grandpa built,
where my great grandma lived.
But at least we could still keep in touch on phone calls.

Time passed
and I still had to wait,
until one day
my mom received a call
saying that my great grandma was about to pass away.
My mom told us the news.
We sat around her.
My mom dialed the number
and passed the phone around
so each of us could speak to my great grandma.

Finally, it was my turn to speak,
and she told me,
"Que Dios te bendiga mi niña. No pude conocerte en esta vida, tal vez en la próxima."
And I told her,
"Que Dios te bendiga también."
And I said,
"Te quiero mucho."

She hung up, and my family hugged.
I could see tears in my mom's eyes.
Tears ran down our cheeks.
I had never felt this sensation.
My soul felt empty,
like a dark basement.

When I go to Mexico,
I want to visit her grave.
I want to bring her flowers
and a picture of me,
so she can remember me,
so we can remember each other.

AMANDA | Amanda commutes to EHS from Astoria. She loves ice skating and like her sister, practices Brazilian Jiu Jitsu. Amanda hopes to become a teacher one day, inspired by her own teacher, Ms. Bendich.

EVERYTHING WE NEEDED

Ailyn, 8th grade

After 12 miles,
smiles formed
on our cheeks,
reddened from the heat.

A bittersweet feeling of leaving
behind a
place where we formed a *familia*.

With heavy feet,
like the rocks we used to weigh down
our tents,
and sore arms
from a week of lifting bags
filled with everything we needed
to survive in the woods,
we found new energy
reunited at the campsite.
Nuestra familia.

Arriving back at EHS,
I can see the willow tree
through the gate.

I reminisce...

Sitting in the backyard
next to our willow tree
on my first day of fourth grade.
Unable to see my classmates' smiles
behind their masks.
But they didn't let
the chaos of a pandemic
stop them from playing tag
around that willow tree.

In sixth grade
we fought with the boys
to see who was taller.
Them standing on their tippy toes
to be as tall as the willow tree,
but the girls still measured more than
them by two leaves.

Now
we take advantage of
the walks to Randall's,
the piggyback rides at frolic,
the moments we help out in the
kitchen,
and walking each other home.

Leaving behind a place
where we became a *familia*.
A tree with roots from
Mexico, Ecuador, Puerto Rico,
Dominican Republic, the Philippines,
Nepal, Guatemala, Trinidad,
planted here
at the East Harlem School.

Our day is coming.
We will hold the gold tassel
on our white dove cap
and move it
right to left,
and next to us
the willow tree will sprout
its new set of leaves
for a new *familia*.

AILYN | Ailyn is proud of her Ecuadorian heritage. She looks up to her older sister, Corelie, who attended EHS, Westover School, and is finishing her freshman year at Gettysburg. Ailyn loves to crochet and eat her father Chef Mario's cooking.

MI MAMÁ

Juan, Grade 6

Mi mamá's phone beeps from the doctor's call.
She's been getting many calls recently.

Stillness in the house.

Silence.

"Ok."

Silence.

"Sí."

Silence.

She puts the phone down.

Mi mamá's face is covered in tears.

Confusion engulfs my brain.

She only cries when it's something really bad.

She hugs me.

I wonder if she can feel my heart beating.

She's trying to tell me something.

Her words get stuck behind her tears.

"Me regreso."

Like a somber song restarting.

"Voy a ser esto por ti y tú papa."

The fear of losing her settles inside.

I'm scared to not have those walks together

to Times Square or 86th St.

Holding her hand,

keeping up with her brisk pace,

chatting about what to buy for dinner.

She still went to work that morning.

JUAN | Every weekend, Juan plays soccer games with his team, Imperio Azteca, in Jefferson Park. He's currently working his way through the Bible, cover to cover. Juan's parents are his greatest joy.

MY STRONG PEOPLE

Giselle, Grade 8

My people,
The ones who have my color,
the same language,
and are from a land.
A land called *Mexico*.

My people are taught to be tough in
my land.
They are as tough as the prettiest
diamond known to man,
formed en esta tierra.
Americans are like cubic zirconia,
formed in a lab created by man.

The people in el Estados Unidos,
no son como los inmigrantes
Mexicanos.
My people do the jobs,
that no American would want to do.

My people are in the fields,
in the scorching red sun,
that makes their skin a dark rich hazel
brown.
To pick the brightest fresh fruit for it to
be in your local grocery store.

My people are in racing trains,
that travel throughout the city of
Nueva York.
Holding boxes of American sweets,
hoping that someone will pay
to feed the little life they are carrying
behind their back.

My people are across the street
wearing a silvery coloured helmet
and a bright greenish yellow jacket,
carrying enormous pieces of wood
to build new buildings for it to be filled
with pale faces.

My people are wearing yellow
rubber gloves that reek of cleaning
chemicals,
to clean the luxurious homes they
may never experience
in the Upper East Side of Nueva York.

My people are on electric bikes
that cost a thousand dollars.
They ride the bikes on the smoky,
gray roads
no matter the weather or time of day
to deliver your McDonald's meal.

No matter the pain my people
endure,
they will not take a break.
For their love of their motherland
will be brighter than any stars in the
sky.

No American can take my people's
pride away.

GISELLE | Giselle's family hails from Guerrero, Mexico. Both of her parents speak the ancient language of Mixtec, along with Spanish and English. Giselle has a profound and far-ranging mind, taking interest in both the visual arts and literature.

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Emalyn Atkins

Cara Bendich

Jonah Chasin

Luisa Cruz

Grace Eagar

Katie Ennis

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

EHS VOW

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



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



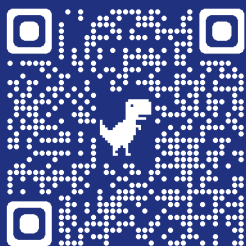
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4. For all other donation options,
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