



ink

VOLUME 02

Teen journal for writing and visual art
VANCOUVER PUBLIC LIBRARY

A GIRL READING

Yue Yang, Age 15



WELCOME TO *ink*

Vancouver teens have a voice. It can be loud. It can be strong and proud. It can laugh or cry. It can whisper, or be sad and frustrated. It can also be talked over, dismissed or deemed unimportant. *Ink*, a teen journal for writing and visual art, aims to protect – and project – the voices of teens in the city of Vancouver.

In this 2019 edition, we hear a variety of voices that talk about everything from the problems of gentrification to gender stereotypes and feminist think-pieces. There are also emotional expressions of what home means, concerns for our climate, and thoughtful tales of displacement and loss.

We'd like to dedicate this issue of *ink* to Koa Krakowski Horwitz, a gifted writer and contributor to *ink* vol. 1. Koa passed away from a rare form of cancer shortly before her work was published.

Thank you to everyone who worked hard to make this project come to fruition, including our *ink* Teen Advisory Group, whose feedback and vision shaped the direction of this 2019 edition. We hope to keep *ink* a platform for teen voices and art in the city for many years to come, and thank our contributors from the east side to the west side who bravely shared their voices in this powerful collection.

Teen Services

Vancouver Public Library
2019



Cover art: "Loaded" by Amelia Vegt, Age 14

HOODED

Tammy Hoang, Age 18

THANK YOU

to all the artists and writers who contributed to *ink!*

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"Darkness. It surrounded me, covered me in shadows, shadows that should've protected me. But now I was here."

-Koa Krakowski Horwitz, from *Hoopoe*



WE ARE THE FUTURE

Jasper He, Age 14

People don't take us seriously; us teenagers.

No, we were just another pain, another burden to carry, another load of debt.

With all of our:
video game playin' and,
swear-word sayin' no,
people never take us seriously.

Not even when you've organized rallies, or played jazz at parties.

Or even when you've done debate and Model UN and solved gay rights and slums for them, people just don't take you seriously.

But do they have to?

I mean, all that matters is that YOU realize YOUR potential.

We are the leaders of tomorrow; your future, and if you don't believe us we don't have no sorrow.

And we won't have to borrow, because

WE—are the leaders of tomorrow.

I WANT TO WRITE A POEM

Amaruuk Bose, Age 16

I want to write a poem so good
that when people read it they think,
Damn, I want that tattooed on my chest.

I want to write a poem so good,
people read it over and over
to find the hidden meaning.

I want to write a poem so good,
people memorize it by accident.

I want to write a poem so good,
people put their favourite line
as their Instagram bio.

I want to write a poem so good,
Button Poetry invites me to a performance,
offers me a book deal,
records me for their YouTube page.

I want to write a poem so good,
the words flow from my fingertips
like Rapunzel's golden waves
(or a different, better comparison).

I want to write a poem so good,
people say, "this poem saved me."

I want to write a poem so good,
people tear up when they read it.

I want to write a poem so good,
it makes a teen who hates poetry
want to be a poet.

I want to write a poem so good,
I won't have to write metaphors
about my family anymore.

I want to write a poem so good,
my name is associated with Rupi Kaur
and Edgar Allen Poe.

I want to write a poem so good,
it kicks off my career as a poet,
and I actually get open-mic gigs
and people buy my book
and I make money off something I'm good at.

I want to write a poem so good,
I get the chance to meet poets I admire.
I want to shake hands with Neil Hilborn
and tell him "OCD" changed how I look at love.
I want to hug Olivia Gatwood
and tell her "Alternate Universe In Which I Am Un-
fazed By The Men Who Do Not Love Me"
inspired me to write my own satirical poems
and that I embraced my inner bitch for her.

I want to write a poem so good,
I feel proud of it, I want to share it,
I want to perform it in front of
a full audience of complete strangers.
No, I want to perform it in front of
a full audience of people I know,
people from school I feel inferior to,
and not feel like they're judging me.

I want to write a poem so good,
I open up my heart
and let the world perform the surgery
with no expertise
and a Surgery for Dummies as their guide.

I want to write a poem so good,
the similes are like swirled paint,
the metaphors are crystalline snowflakes,
the hyperboles echo through 1000 canyons,
and the personification sings to the reader.

I want to write a poem so good,
I'll be remembered for it.

I wanted to write a poem so good,
I wrote this one.

CLOCK KEEPER'S SECRET

Charlotte Gilhuly, Age 15

The sharp November air pinched my cheeks, reminding me of my rush out the office. The cold stabbed at me, even while I ran. I sighed, my breath fogging in front of me.

Tom, you could've at least brought a toque or scarf...

Fumbling in my pockets, I drew out the disk. After months of research, I had finally deciphered the intricate etchings in the stone. Unfortunately, there wasn't enough time to prepare.

2:56 11/05/74

I glanced up at the clock in Center Square.

2:48

I turned sharply, skidding into the square. My boots crunched on the frosted grass as I sprinted towards the clock tower. I felt the wary stares of dog-walkers. Artifact researchers were a rare sight in public, and one running around Center Square was even more peculiar.

The clock tower door opened with a bang, startling the man at the desk. Panting, I showed him my card. With my wind-ragglled hair and tired eyes, I doubted I looked much like the photo on the pass.

"Mr. Van de Klohck?" The staff member raised an eyebrow. "I do hope you realize the tower is closed to the public today."

"No – you misunderstand. This is an emergency – I need to get to the top of the tower! The whole world is at risk."

"I'm sorry sir, but if I let in every person who said that, I'd have been fired a long time ago." He chuckled at his own joke and waved his hand dismissively. "Please come again when we're open."

I gritted my teeth. I had a feeling I would have to pull my trump card. From out of my pocket, I withdrew a note on yellowed paper, the Gothic script fading. "I am on official business for the Crown. By order of the Queen, I demand you let me enter."

The look on the man's face was priceless, but I had little time to savour it. He regained enough of his wits to close his mouth and fire off a limp salute. "Y-yes sir, sorry to hold you up... Y'see –"

I rushed past him and clambered up the stairs, two at a time, without waiting to hear his excuses.

Luckily, the clerk fell for my ruse, tricked by the royal crest on a note from when I once grasped tendrils of importance. I let out a puff of laughter. I had fallen a long way from being one of the Queen's artificers.

You are making a living still, Crown Staff, or not! Be grateful you are able to work with what you love. Not everyone has that opportunity, Tom.

As I climbed, I withdrew the disk and a watch from my pockets.

2:51

Would that be enough time for me? The second hand ticked away, mocking my plight.

By the time I reached the top of the tower, I was beyond out-of-breath – my legs and lungs ached in protest of the sudden and rough treatment. Hand trembling, I lifted my watch.

2:55

I had roughly thirty seconds to prevent the world's demise. Now I just had to find the altar – the one that functioned as the trigger.

Four large clock faces fenced me in, their hands shifting in a mocking song, their gears dancing to an intricate waltz. Each wall looked the same. Rough stone, wood floor, clock face and hands. I stared at the disk, willing for a clue to appear.

2:56 11/05/74

Frustrated, I paced around the room. "Just show me a clue – a hint – something!" I hissed under my breath. "There has to be information you're not telling me."

Almost as if it was a response, the stone in my palm began to warm. My head snapped up. The south side of the city spread out beneath me, the outlines of the building faint behind the fogged glass. I held the disk closer to the wall, and in response, the carvings in the stone began to glow a warm yellow. To my amazement, the hands and supports of the clock had symbols that began to glow as well. The symbols swirled towards the center of the clock hands, highlighting a small ring-shaped indent.

The seconds marched by, building up my apprehension and adrenaline.

Eleven... ten... nine... eight...

Slowly, the glass began to glow, tossing around shadows in the small room.

Six... five... four...

I wiped sweat from my forehead with the back of my hand. Was it getting warmer?

Three... two... one –

I thrust the disk into the clock.

2:56

The light was at its climax now, raking at my eyes. Was that it? Did I fail? Was this the afterlife?

"Well done, Tom Van de Klohck. You truly gave your best effort." A soft voice came from behind me.

A figure stood, silhouetted by the glow. Their robes flowed, without a breeze in the enclosed space.

"Wait – you mean I did it?"

"Yes, Tom, you did it. Exactly as we wished you to. You followed your orders quite well." There was pleasure in those words, but something put me off.

"So... I saved the world, right? I'm a hero now?"

They chuckled. "Oh, Tom. Save the world? I'm afraid you've gotten yourself into something quite different..."

The world seemed to sway through my eyes. My stomach leaped. I stumbled down the flights of stairs, and threw open the clock tower door.

It took a moment for the dust to clear, but when it did, it knocked my knees out from under me. My stomach heaved.

An empty wasteland stretched before me, dotted with craters.

Softly, laughter echoed in my ears.

Thank you, Tom. I'm so proud of you.

EASIER DONE THAN SAID

Judith Tani, Age 16

They tell me what I feel is not real
That I'm still young and I may be mistaking a
strong liking for love, a crush
Is it a mistake then, when I after two years I still
remember every single thing you told me about
yourself.
That your favorite colour is yellow, your favorite
fruit blackberries, your birthdate
I remember you hate when people watch you
sleep, that you sleep on your stomach
That your favorite song is "Location" by Khalid, but
I'd never have to ask you to send me yours, be-
cause I can sense you within one-hundred meters
of me without having to look

This was all already etched in my memory before I
even knew I was in love with you
It seems my subconscious knew more than I did
Forgive me, for all the times I've stood quiet be-
side you, for all the silences and gaps in our con-
versations I should have filled with words that
would have brought us closer
Yet just to be close to you was enough, to stand
by you
As soon as I entered that room, I sought you out
You made me feel like I belonged more than any-
one else, like I was safe, tucked under the goose
down quilt of my bed, like I wasn't the only shy
one who didn't understand the need to talk when
you could just listen and observe instead

Where I was afraid, your presence made me brave,
knowing that you would be watching me and
what I did, and, wanting to show you I wasn't
some weakling pushover who didn't speak I did
things I'd never would have done without you
I confessed my embarrassing secrets and danced
obscenely in public, though I sacrificed a great
amount of energy and dignity, when I saw a look
of awe on your face, heard you gawk, "I can't be-
lieve you actually did that," I felt like I could di-
vulge the rest of my deepest darkest secrets and
become a stripper

I was a better person when I was with you

You made me a better person, you taught me hu-
mility, you taught me that it's okay to take some
risks sometimes, and if you make a mistake there
will be no regrets, not once you've accepted them
You taught me to enjoy life, and I thank you for
that, though these expressions of deep gratitude
may not reach you, I had to say it at least once
just in case our paths might never cross again,
because in two years, in two years we'll both be
leaving and I won't know where you're heading
There are so many things I still don't know about
you that I wish I'd had time to learn, but being
with you was enough, and being with you was
not enough, because I made that so, because I
couldn't take it anymore, couldn't take it for you
You're just across the classroom from me, but we
could still be worlds apart, our voices could carry
across the space where the words still hang un-
spoken

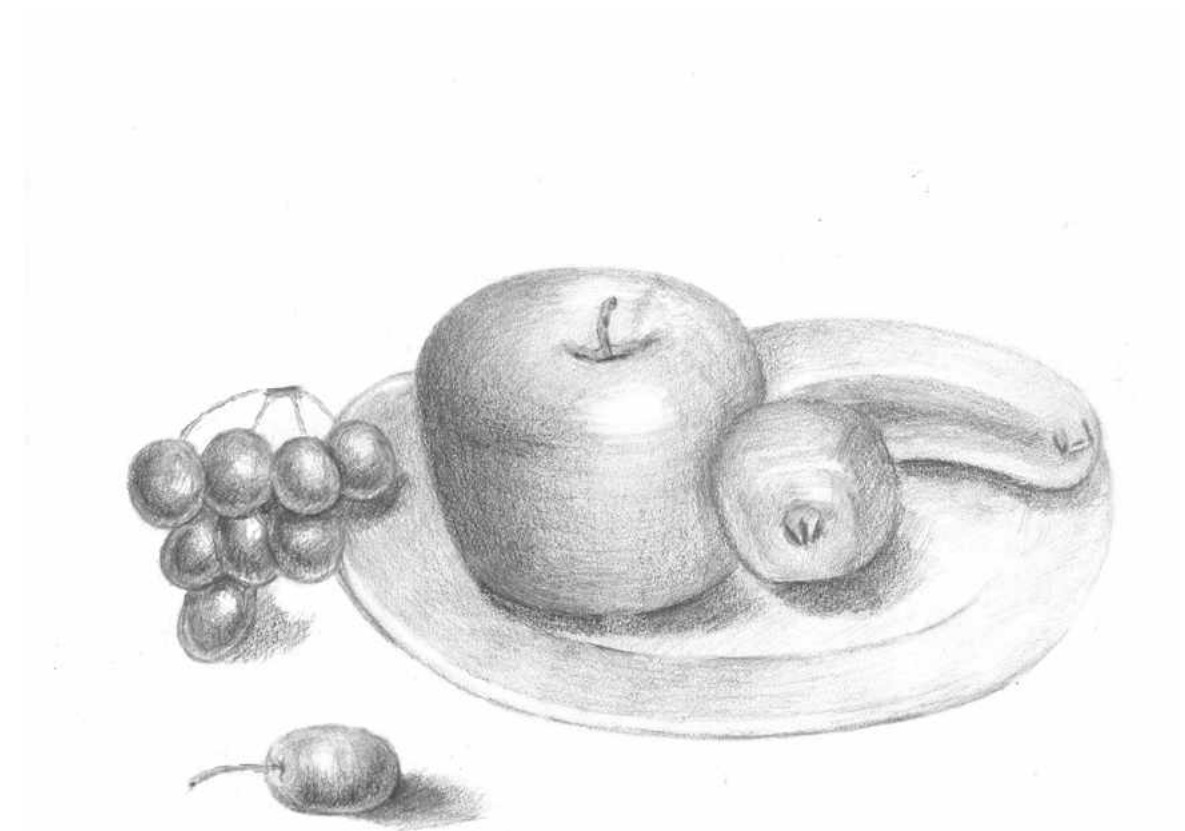
Unspoken love, that's what I have, until spoken I
do not know if you will return it
But the risk of ruining our existing relationship is
too painful, because I would not be able to stand
being away from you
With your peculiar yet pleasant scent that reminds
me of winter rivers, and spring winds and makes
me want to cry

The risk of losing what we have is more painful
than this unspoken love left unsaid, so I will con-
tinue to bear the pain of these feelings people say
are mislead

This love is mine, no one can take it away from me,
and if you don't reciprocate, I've decided it's fine
I know you taught me to take risks, so I did
I was brave, and now we'll be together forever
So I hope you like lime sodas, and don't mind the
mildew, because you'll be stuck in my basement
For a long, long time

PRACTISE

Jason Su, Age 16



LADY OF THE LAKE

Hannah Wicki, Age 15



I CAN'T UNDO ME AND YOU

Tiya Tanaka, Age 17

I'm sorry I liked you.
I'm sorry I hurt you.
I'm sorry I left you.

Once you were the rain I yearned to bathe in every day.
Your tears and our talks formed puddles of youth,
Pure and innocent – always in bloom.

Day and night and night and day.
I wish you could stay.
I wish time would go away.
I wish my feelings didn't stray.

Don't give way.
Just know you are beautiful, intelligent, kind and compassionate.
Just know you deserve better than me.
I just can't handle listening to
All the negative things you think you do,
But you don't even know
Yourself
But you don't even know
What I withheld
But you don't even know
How much I wished you loved yourself.

We're better now,
Thirty feet apart.
Where my arms can't grasp ghostly problems of the past.
Where my thorns can't poison your pearly white petals of a rose.
Where my head can't hurt, and you can't make it worse.

Please, let's stay this way.
I don't want the past to repeat and repeat and repeat.
Please listen to me, to me, to me.

I'm sorry I liked you.
I'm sorry I hurt you.
I'm sorry I left you.

A POEM IS NOT JAPANTOWN

Allen Huang, Age 18

i.
a poem is not japantown.
it isn't the pasty mild-mannered absence of substance, elapsing into irrelevancy.
it isn't the fault line that divided man / woman / child
from meaning. a poem is frivolous, trivial, and bone-aching for elusive symmetry.
take the pair of scissors hiding in your mother's tin of sewing supplies and snip out the map of vancouver.
ignore the thudding in your heart as snip, snip.
snip.

ii.
a poem is not the internment camp. it isn't the godforsaken
smell, that goddamn stench lining every single moment of their
lives. an ocean surfaces. aimlessly sailing, a baseball floats on by.
we've lost the underbelly. a sunken memory.
not once was it justified. memoirs of hastings park.
we've lost the meat of the argument to dilapidation. although, i guess it was to be expected.

iii.
a poem would be something excessive, plenty—
marketable, in all sense of the word: robson; davie;
thurlow.
this is nothing like such—a poem should be noisy, past pride onto arrogance, loud in the sense
one can be heard when not seen. a poem can never be tepid, boiling only on memory.
unforgiven, voiceless.

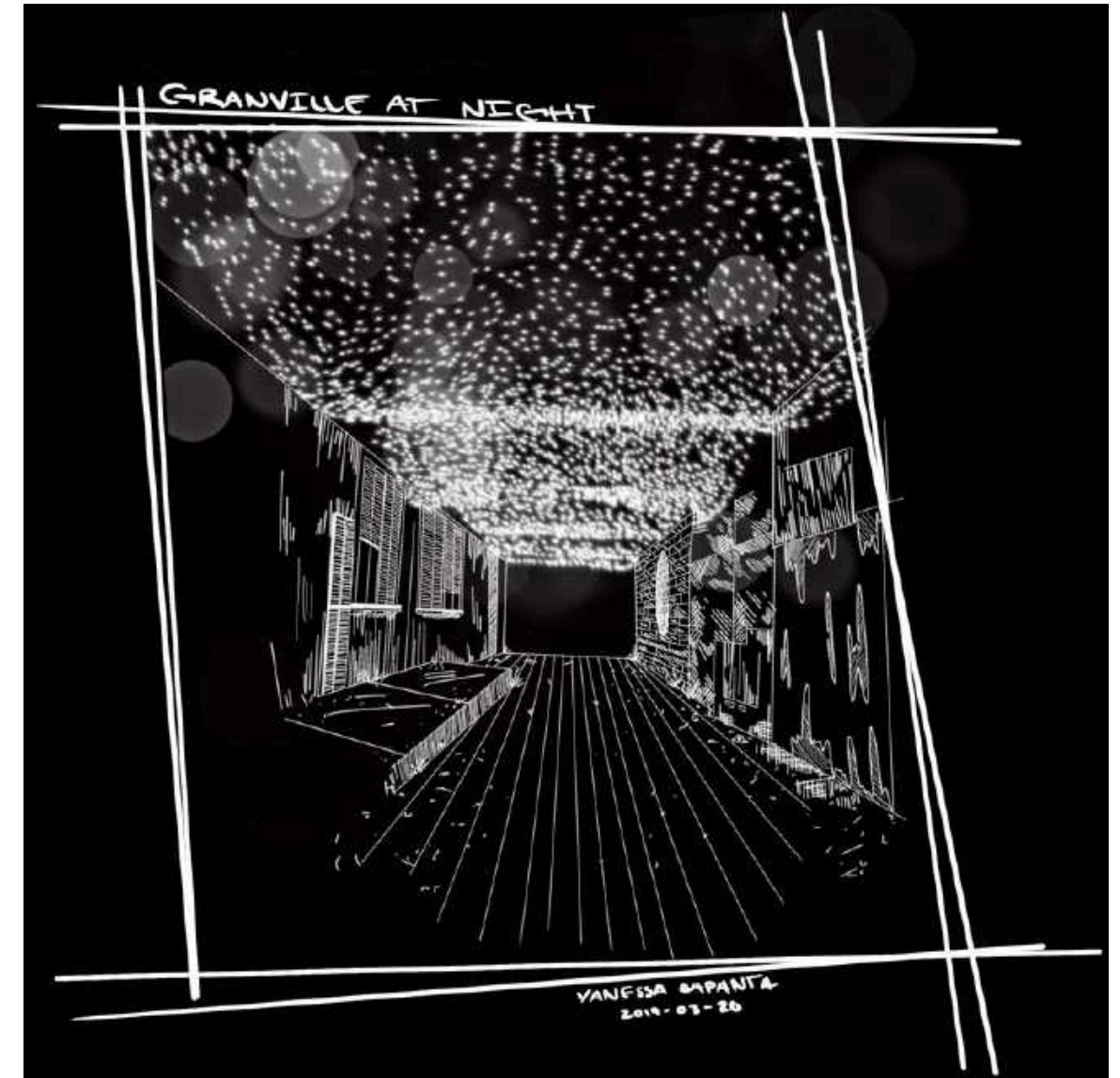
iv.
japantown is an amateur's jagged verse
with corroded chicken-scratch footnotes—heading whitened
out. a house that's been set offshore, drifting.
drifting. we have sacrificed the peace for war
and in turn, sacrificed war for nothingness, insubstantiality.

v.
a poem isn't japantown.
a poem would be powell street, railtown. it would be
perfect in how much anger and air that's been tightened. it would know exactly how to
scream and shout about the burnt-black distrust mucking in fog. catharsis—release.
and, well, this isn't a poem.
this isn't anything.

— a missing ---- town

GRANVILLE AT NIGHT

Vanessa Sapanta, Age 16



PLUSH

Romani Gray, Age 13



THE DARK SIDE OF GROWING UP

Stella Zarei, Age 17

A child often sits to contemplate their life in the years to come, as if it is an entertaining pastime. The world holds endless possibilities and the younger you are the more you let yourself dream them. But as time passes and reality begins to have a stronger grasp of your imagination, your ability to dream freely slowly deteriorates. Those who can prolong the life span of their imagination are those who can live happy lives, free of regret.

We all look fondly back on the memories of our youth. The hours we spent in our favourite costumes pretending to be a princess, a ninja, a warrior. At the time it all seemed possible, as if the only thing standing in our way was a few years of experience. The phrase 'when I grow up...' was followed with an endless array of fierce statements all vividly seen in the mind's eye. I doubt anyone can pinpoint exactly when that wonderful fairy tale turned to dust; much like how Cinderella's chariot turned back into a pumpkin, and her white horses into mice, when did the clock strike twelve on our childhood and all the possibilities it held?

Soon the mice wearing little red hats turned to actual rodents and the reality of life changed our idea of happily ever after. It belittled our expectations of our future, and worse, it belittled our expectations of ourselves. We began to doubt the possibility of true love when we learned of divorce, and the possibility of our castle when we realized the tragedy that is real estate. Slowly we settled for the idea of a well-paying nine to five job and an apartment with a nice view. All of our once lively ideas dulled gradually, without us ever realizing and slowly but surely we trapped ourselves. We gave up on our ability to dream that anything can be possible in fear of realizing it was not.

I would like to dream of the possibility that not everything bends under the responsibilities of life. That some people still put on a dress and feel like a princess; that some stand up for their beliefs and feel like a hero; that some lay in bed at night, close their eyes, and imagine.

POEMS

Saima Daryabi, Age 16

1. Join me in this promise

I am sitting in the corner of my room alone
thinking about my sweet home, Earth
thinking about facts that have been ignored by
my generation
My sweet home, Earth is no longer green
Fire is everywhere
No more rain, no more snow
thinking about the white bears, suffering from ice
melt
thinking about animals who are losing their
homes every day
I am in pain of not doing anything for my home
but today I am going to mark my word
I promise I am going to be faithful
Try my best to save this Earth
By reducing my plastic use!
Let's make our Earth green again
Let's make a better place for living
Let's be the best version of ourselves and save our
home
We are the generation of change
So, join me in this promise.

2. I am at the beginning...

I am at the beginning of my journey
But most of the magicians predict it's the end of
the world
It's based on global warming and floodwaters in
many countries
I am at the beginning but everyone sees the end
How desperate we are?
How far are we doing this?
There is no end if we do not give up on our dreams
Let's make it the start of a new chapter
Let's write the history again
Let's make a history of us saving our planet

3. Know about your past

It's okay if you can't add 2+4
It is okay if you do not understand a Bohr diagram
or don't know anything about black holes
But it is not okay if you do not know about your
past life

4. So many things to do

There are words that need to be said
There are rules that need to be set
There are relationships that need to be reunited
There are dates that need to be marked
There are loves that need to be spread
So many things to do...

5. We deserve better

I am not trying to be heartbroken because I am
heartbroken
I feel so much hate around me
I am breathing hate instead of oxygen
I am broken since my grandpa died without say-
ing goodbye
I feel so much pain in my chest since the attack
in NZ
I am stuck between decisions of what am going to
do for my people
I hate this hate between people
I need love to be my oxygen
I want my atmosphere full of love
I want a child to smile not sweep tears
I want all religions to feel safe not like me at the
moment
But if you are heartbroken you don't have to stay
broken
Let's be like a human again
Let's raise our children with pride
Let's have a beautiful tale for them
They deserve better
We deserve better

HANDS OF TIME

Tammy Hoang, Age 18



UNTITLED

Khatira Daryabi, Age 15



I AM THE CHANGE PAINTER

Khatira Daryabi, Age 15

It was my dream to be a storyteller one day and tell the story of my country, women and children grieving, burying their pain in silence. I found painting and drawing a fascinating path to explore and to reach out my dreams by telling unheard inspirational stories. Visual art was the choice I made to demonstrate to the world what women and children are struggling with. I can consider myself an artist now and I define art as a silent language, the ability to be creative and joyful.

Art is a tool through which I can convey an idealistic, peaceful and powerful message to people. Art is speaking ideas, telling stories about a concept, challenges, feelings. Like the feelings and challenges that Afghan women or 6.8 million refugees around the world are encountering.

My drawing of refugee children and the Afghani girl patriot express fears, wonders and the dream that would never come true in a war environment. My drawing and painting is a powerful and spiritual vision because it can open up dialogues for an extensive impact. I feel joyful and motivated when I put the pen between my fingers to start with straight, vertical lines, or when I am playing with colors to produce an image which interprets my values, cultures, and beliefs.

I drew a girl who covered all her face with an old cloth and hid her left eye with her hand, but she has a smile on her face. This represents violence, inequality, limitations, who suppress their beauty with traditional thought. It shows her overcoming struggles and dreams she wants in life.

I had an art exhibition at school and heard a lot of appreciation and how people were impressed by my drawing and paintings. A large group of people was talking and interpreting the concept of my drawing. I literally saw some understanding in everybody's eyes that they can take the hands of children, empower women and change society. That day inspired me by a smile yeah, I succeeded today to tell the unheard story. I found that my art skills are capable of bringing change. I also figured out how sharing stories can make a difference. As sharing my life story made a different shape of my existence by drawing my values.

Today more than ever I will walk away to spread the women and children's story, to advocate, fight and empower women. I want to explore and read art books and discover a profound understanding of people's opinion about art because it can increase my knowledge and deep understanding of why, what and how we can make a difference.

THE FOG

Jonas Baltakis, Age 15

I. warm me like wool, hug me
i'm falling, in fog, in between worlds
i shed tears and they froze me
a Siberian winter is upon me
i still see it as a dream
and if i'm careful,
maybe the fog will swallow me whole
i'll be a wanderer of the night, forever more
let the morning never come
and i'll never be cold again, my wool

II. click on your blinkers, so the world can see
watch the mist kiss your face
the smell, steamy, like water
it's coming close, so close
i can almost feel it, covering my eyes

III. here it comes
i see nothing everywhere
i'm almost lost in it
i know you see it coming too
nothing, that is fog

COLOURS OVER HOME

Jonas Baltakis, Age 15



NOTHING LASTS FOREVER

Chang Qu, Age 14

THE ASKING

Esmé Decker, Age 17

I think about what I would do
if a mandolin player came up to me
and said "You have beautiful eyes"
and if that mandolin player was you.
(Are your plants dying?)
Trees are going away. They're falling
down. When the earthquake comes,
I'm not sure if this building will
be able to sway.
(How's your grandmother doing?)
I really hope I get to grow old. I really
want to feel what it's like to ride
a bus with my fellow elderly ladies
and speak a language our descendants cannot.
(Is this tape sticky enough?)
The photo of John Coltrane fell
off the angled wall. His puckered
lips hanging down, waiting to bring
the horn to life, if only someone
would hurry up and turn him over again.
(How come I haven't seen you in a while?)
Everyone's so busy. Whatever happened
to all those kids who were so bored. I never
Let myself get bored back then, and I guess
Keeping busy is the continuation of that.

(When will the world end?)
I'm not sure if people question things enough.
It seems like they've been letting things go by
for a long time now without doing anything.
Say something, why don't you.
(Where's the cat gone now?)
Wandering is a good pastime.
(What radio station is this?)
The signal's getting fuzzy.
(What are you thinking about?)
(Are we out of toilet paper?)
(How do I work this machine?)
(Why does your handwriting look like that?)
(What's so funny?)
(What's your favourite flower?)
(Do you collect anything?)
(How do you want to die?)
(Where's your future?)
(What are you afraid of?)
Give me an answer.



LEARNING ABOUT MYSELF

Elly Noetzel, Age 17

I was talking to a fellow autistic person online the other day about how autism affected our respective childhoods, when he said the most brilliant thing: "There is nothing more empowering for an autistic person than learning about ourselves." At the time, I thought nothing of it, and I soon ended the conversation so I could continue with my life offline. A week later, the phrase came to mind again, and, thinking it over, I came to the realization that this person was absolutely correct, and his words, while I had known them to be true at the time, ran a lot deeper than I had first thought.

When I was first diagnosed as autistic at nine years old, the word meant nothing to me. My mother explained that the word meant my brain worked differently and I wasn't as good in social situations. This, and a fun book listing some famous autistic people through history, was all I learnt about autism at the time, and none of it did anything to actually teach me what it meant. When I told my friends, they didn't care, because the word didn't mean anything to them either. My friends' reactions influenced my reaction as well, and so I looked upon the diagnosis with indifference. British private school had nothing in the way of mental health education. I actively avoided reading literature about this aspect of myself, and my life went on as it had before. As far as I was aware, the diagnosis didn't change a thing. However, being autistic had already been affecting me, and my life continued to be affected by it. Instead of learning about why I do things and how they are beneficial to me, I internalized society's message of what a person should be, and I tried my best to live up to these impossible standards. I continued to struggle with social cues, and I eventually found myself getting bullied, presumably for my 'weirdness'.

The next year I moved to Canada to be put in a school that meant to 'change my brain' which I felt

and still feel, was code for taking my autistic-ness away. The school was stressful, and there was very little in the way of academia. I did poorly. During this period, I had to complete an educational assessment to prove to the Government of Canada that I was a real autistic. I proved more than that, and I was diagnosed with generalized anxiety disorder, ADHD, and was recommended to be tested further for OCD. I never saw my Individual Education Plan, and all mum told me was that I had anxiety, so I didn't learn of my ADHD or OCD until two years later.

The next school I went to was better. There I met a girl who would later become my best friend, and had a taste of the empowerment that comes with learning about yourself. She also had anxiety, and together we would often talk about what made us anxious. Slowly, with her accidental help, I got rid of my internalized shame about my anxiety.

Last summer, two years after I had done my educational assessment, I had to take my Individual Education Plan to the teacher to prove that I had unlimited time for exams. When mum handed it to me the day before, she told me not to be angry. When I looked at it I wasn't angry, but I felt betrayed. She told me that she kept it from me because the psychiatrist we had been seeing at the time, whom I always disliked, didn't think that these professionals had diagnosed me correctly, and she didn't think that they fit me. I thought long and hard about it. I fluctuated between believing mum and believing my instincts that said that there was a reason I couldn't focus in class, a reason why my thoughts would turn to the paranoid if I didn't end conversations a certain way. Once I had chosen to believe myself in that I did have ADHD, I felt better. The more I learnt about ADHD and OCD, the more I was able to put words to things about myself that I had previously just seen as character flaws.

During my childhood, I had never truly been able to relate to any fictional character. Books with so called relatable protagonists were not relatable to me, which contributed to feelings that there was something inherently wrong with me. There are only five autistic characters in comic books, one of whom is a supervillain, and another is constantly referred to as an extremely unlikeable character, which deliver a message to a younger me that I cannot be a hero. When I first went to see Power Rangers (2017), I cried, because the blue ranger gave a similar speech about his autism that I gave to my friends when I told them. He would clap his hands when happy, similarly to me, and he would ramble and overshare when introducing himself, just like I do. This character's existence, telling me that I wasn't alone, inspired me to learn more about what being autistic actually meant, and how that applied to me. Learning about autism meant that I was able to recognize when I am overwhelmed and leave the situation before I get too overloaded, and that I am more self-aware during meltdowns. Learning about myself had improved my quality of life.

Sometime in the last four years, I realized that I couldn't separate myself from my autism. I am not 30% autism and 70% person – I am an autistic person. I decided to learn about it, and I have felt freer doing so. While the empowerment that comes with learning about yourself can apply to any aspect of life, it is especially empowering from an autistic perspective. Being autistic is not something to be ashamed of, and it is not something that I need to cure, a mindset that I still struggle against.

THAT'S ALL WHAT I WANT

Hanin Al Fares, Age 15

Full family
Home country
These are things I want

Separation, blood
War and death
That's what make me cry

I want to die
Go up to the sky
Where there's peace and love
A quiet place or music playing everywhere
Is there a day without hate?
No racism
Or heartbreak

Is it possible to have this day in the world?
Is it possible to remove darkness and silence?

One day hand in hand
We all will work for this day
Hopefully before the end of the world

SNOWY MOUNTAIN

HaoMing Du, Age 13



TUMBLING AWAY TIME

Roxanna Wang, Age 16

SOMETIME BEFORE ONE

Jane Bau, Age 16

Inhale, exhale.
Clocks read nine fifty seven.
Shivering green digits say,
put the baby to bed
before her corneas become
dripping opal.

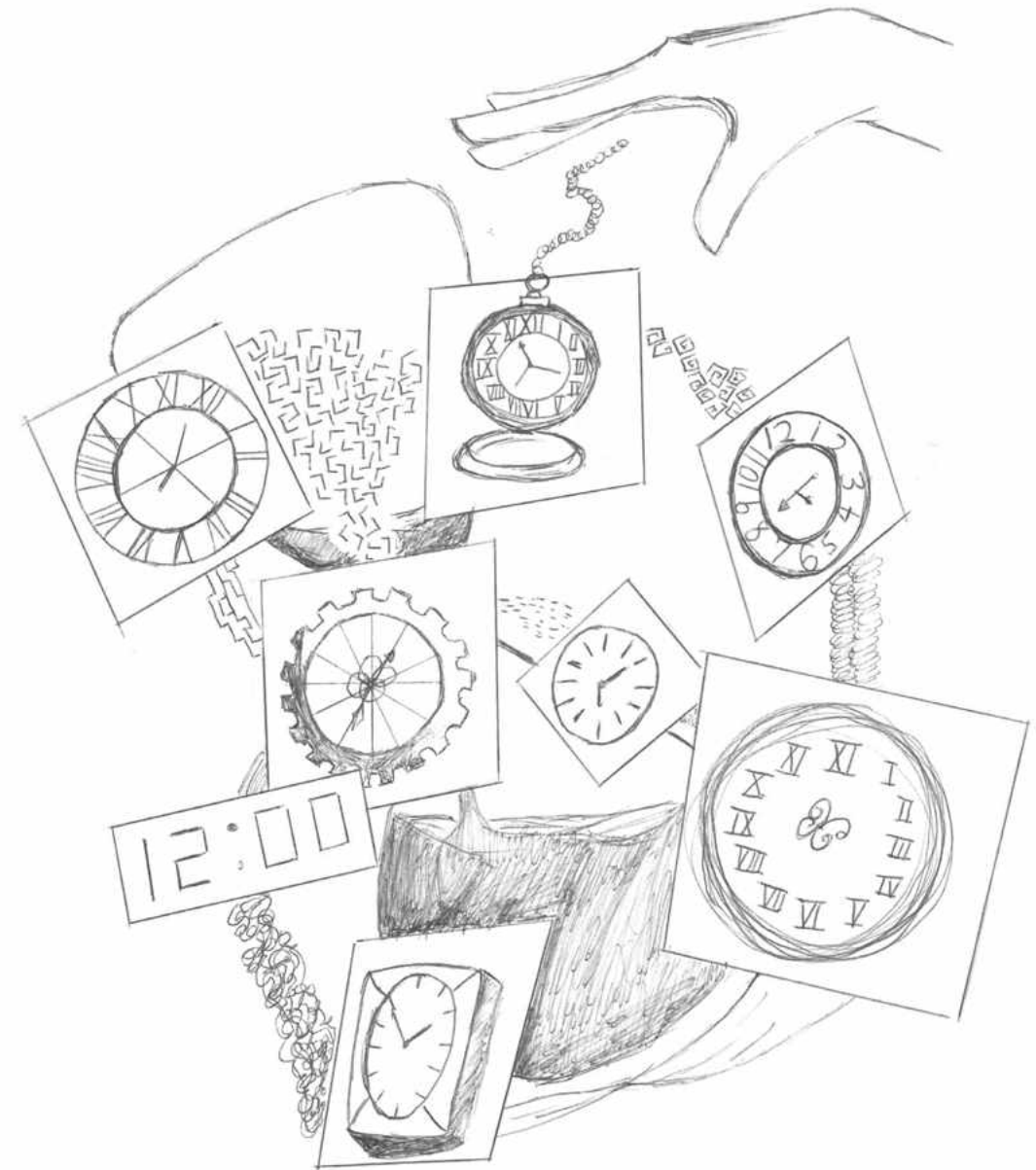
Inhale.
Clocks read nine fifty eight.
Young sighs from down the hall
interrupt the white noise,
the thick static, cream of sound.

Exhale.
Clocks read nine fifty nine.
a shadow whispers, dances
on the wall.
It's the grey hum of the city
alive,
asleep.

Inhale.
Clocks read nine fifty nine
and three quarters.
He runs out the door
before your words ensnare.
They miss,
fizzing into the empty night.
a trap unfulfilled.

Clocks read nine fifty nine
and almost four quarters.
Red veined marbles
spill out of the head,
shivering green digits say
put the baby to bed.

Exhale.



SADE

Akie Leesmith, Age 16

There was once a girl who lived in a rickety old house at the edge of a small town where nobody came, nobody left, and for the most part everybody was happy. Though this girl went through her bouts of unhappiness, as everyone does, she lived most of her life in peace. Though it may not have seemed so to others, she was happy, in her own way. Most people in her situation would certainly have gone mad, but Sade was not most people.

Sade named herself when she was six years old. She wanted to be like Cher or Madonna, where a single name would suffice for anyone to recognize. It was that same year that Sade went to her first therapist.

No one in the world had every experienced what Sade had. Her peculiarity was one that made therapists and doctors and scientists whisper in groups about The Girl with the Rain. That is what Sade called it. It was her Rain. Nobody else could see it. From the moment she woke up to the moment she fell asleep, and in her dreams, it rained. Soft, dreamlike rain that showered in all directions, unabiding to the laws of physics.

Doctors loved to run their tests on Sade, but none of them could find anything wrong with her, other than the fact that she insisted rain was falling when it clearly was not. For these first years, Sade's mother spent her days winding her fingers in their telephone cords on calls with doctors telling her that her daughter had a brain tumour, or schizophrenia, or that Sade had made everything up. Their family learned to disregard these phone calls over time, but not before both of her parents had gone grey in the early thirties. Eventually, the doctors and psychologists and scientists grew tired of not finding an answer to Sade's problems, so they left her alone. There was some peace in Sade's house and when she was seven, her parents gave birth to Sade's sister, June.

It was three years later, at the age of nine that Sade's life truly changed.

In the eighth year of her life, Sade was surprisingly normal. She was in her third year of elementary school and was safely mid-tier in the popularity hierarchy. She had few friends, but few enemies, and best of all she was no longer The Girl with the Rain.

In fact, Sade had become quite good at pretending that The Rain wasn't there at all. Having been there all her life, the constant dribble of raindrops around her head were just a part of her life. If she thought about it hard enough, sometimes The Rain would become lighter, and then everything would be silent. And during this third year of elementary school, that is exactly what Sade did.

It is common for children to hide their differences as to not be as an outcast. Whether it is the income of one's family or odd birthmarks, or in Sade's case, her Rain; however, suppressing one's differences is never a long-lasting solution. For Sade, hiding her Rain during the day make the Rain feel infinitely worse during the night.

As the eight year old crawled into her bed each night, thunderstorms that only she could see would stampede her room; invisible showers taunted her in dreams and thunder that only she could hear boomed for hours on end. Only weeks into her ninth year, Sade's terrible and relentless insomnia began.

It was on one of these nights, when Sade sat in her bed with ears covered, rocking back and forth, that through the thunder and rain, she heard her sister, June, scream. June was not like Sade. Where Sade was rain, June was always sun, always shining brightly for the world to see. While Sade was not a bad sister by any means, she and June were like distant cousins living in the same house, rather than siblings.

Hearing June scream put Sade into a panic she had never felt throughout her years of tests and storms. She had barely spoken to her sister in more than small uncomfortable exchanges, but still, on that night, Sade decided to go into her

sister's room.

June's room had been dark when Sade entered, but it seemed the moment she stepped inside moonlight started to creep through the opened curtains for Sade to see. It became bright enough for Sade to see her sister through the Storm, sitting upright in her crib. The toddler's chubby knuckles were clenched around the bars of the crib, feebly shaking her arms in an attempt to escape. June's lips were sealed, but Sade could still hear her sister shrieking despite the fact that any ordinary person would not have been able to hear a thing.

In this way, Sade found joy. Not in her sister's pain, but in their closeness from that moment on. They could not talk to each other in their minds; instead they shared feelings. Whenever Sade had darker, more raging Rain, June would feel it as if it were her own and push feelings of calm and joy into Sade's mind. It would ease them both, and bind them together tighter than the braids they would weave on each other's heads. June was a perfect counterbalance to Sade's persisting Rain.

In Sade's teenage years her Rain got better. She began to be able to sleep through the night, and learned again how to ignore the constant pitter-patter, the way she had before she turned eight. After enough time, she grew less and less dependent on June's happiness and started to feel her own.

She was normal. Almost. Better than normal, Sade was happy. When it truly stormed (in real life for everyone to see, not just her mind) she learned to love the feeling of real rain soaking into her jeans and wrinkling the tips of her fingers. She was afraid of storms, even her own.

A SUMMER, FOREVER

Sadie Dunnage, Age 14

The sun stains my shirt, along with my fair skin.
Peach juice runs down her arm, dripping onto her white dress
She doesn't notice.
My hair, tucked behind my ear
Held in place by a single, yellow flower.
Sunglasses. They hide her numb eyes, as well as her heart
Allowing no one to see her pain.
I should speak, but I keep my lips together.
A tear, emerging from beneath her tinted glasses.
I slowly wrap my arm around her.
My finger tips just skimming her skin.
She lays her head on my shoulder.
Our actions blend roughly
Our fingers lace together like broken mosaic.
She is tender and I am scrawny.
I fear to look at her, for she could break into a thousand pieces I could not pick up.
Silence.
It swallows the air, then me.
I smile at her
Hoping it will say everything I cannot.
A sad smile arises from her lips.
We watch the sun turn to the moon and clouds turn to stars.
As the light disappears,
The day follows
Leaving nothing but my burnt skin and her sticky arm
She laughs lightly.
It echos.
I join in and soon all you can hear is a round of laughter.
I do not know what was humorous but it feels right.
Like putting a bandage over a wound.
Our wounded, mosaic hearts.

THE WIZARD WARRIOR WITHIN

Dugan Uribe, Age 16

A banner, seen from far and near
Reads "Daniel Flame: Rookie of the Year!"
My name is well known in every household
By the men and women, the young and the old.
But how did I gain such fame and intrigue
As the favourite underdog of the Wizard War
League?
I will show you how it was done....

I was a rather young lad, in my early teens
Didn't know what to do with myself
But my older brother, he was full of beans
'Bout being a Wizard Warrior, himself.

A Wizard War is a wrestling match
But with wizards, obviously,
Using their magic powers to dispatch
Their opponents and claim victory!

He trained for years, perfected magic and spells.
In curiosity, I followed suit.
While he rose up to the tune of golden bells
All the major leagues gave me the boot.

You see, my magic made pure fire from within,
But it was also sort of lame,
Using strong attacks would burn my own skin!
Success would never know my name!

One day, however, out of the blue
I was scouted for the Golden Wizard League!
My eyes two olives, my mouth an open flue.
Despite my shock, I shook his hand and agreed.

I was ecstatic to join a cast of legendary casters
But the spotlight soon lost its charm
The sole reason I was invited to join the masters
Was the gimmick of my own self-harm!

I was no wizard, but a laughing stock
Little more than a pathetic joke.
I lost motivation, my future was dark
'Til a stranger offered me a deal

He was a Wizard Warrior from the days of old
And fire magic was his forte.
We trained together for years and he told
Me secrets of the fire way.

While my self-harm thing was never fully solved
My pure skill was multiplied by then!
I learned techniques, regained my resolve
And I felt like I could fight again!

I fought my way up to the League once more
And became a true Golden Warrior!
While I didn't exactly have the master's score,
I was massively better than before!

But the truly best part wasn't about the wins,
For my brother also made it in! What a feat!
Embracing after years of being separated twins
Made our reunion together so sweet.

And so, the comeback was fully complete
From a joke to the Rookie of the Year
And maybe someday I'll rise up and beat
The Wizard Champion with a cheer!

So for anyone who finds it hard to climb
The ladder of glory and succeed:
Just give it a little hard work, a lot of time,
And victory will be guaranteed!

(Just don't try to burn yourself. That hurts)

LOOK UP

Grace Patterson, Age 13



PLAYLAND

Evelyn Chan, Age 17

It was surrounded protectively by a crystal bubble
Tender sun rays refracted through
Everything was a kaleidoscope of colours
Daytime, fragments of bubbly laughter, pieces of bright memories
One is tempted to give even the world a whirl

Night time, bedtimes well past, worries near forgotten
The young have never felt taller, the old never lighter
And the flashy fluorescent daunted the stars

Though glued to my seat, I was constantly moving
Sunset, the city a blur of concrete, sparks flitter on one by one below dangling feet
In one hand, a plastic bag in hopes of trapping a slice of atmosphere
The other, its fingers snaked around a cool metal chain
Opening my mouth, I swore I could taste the fluffy pink clouds

MOUTH OF THE CITY

Allen Huang, Age 18

what's after vancouver,
after the lights fixed on whistler flicker on. after, the aquarium with the jellyfish and frogs and...
what's after when you get bored of a city.
of course, doesn't that sound silly, when you stop loving a city but ignoring such—

what's after the sea wall or the art gallery or the rose garden. what's left when you begin to feel comfort. i
would think when you stop feeling excitement and it slows to safety: that's when you've stopped
loving a city.

and not love in the sense that you're good or whatever you tell yourself but love of which
passion has run out and what's left is usually mentioned in one-night stands.
could you handle a love affair with a city when

you don't love them. when nothing is left after granville island or false creek or the mess that
kingsway is, what more can you do.

how easily victoria bleeds into commercial. how peerless the shangri-la looms over us in clouds.
the steam clock rolls fog into a tourist's trap and then the lake freezes over for the first in years, but no

vancouver has become the walk-of-shame and everyone loves new york, chicago, l.a.
(somewhere romantic, or maybe we should just simplify and say busy or bustling or bruising.)
regardless, gassy jack will still be here as will vandusen or stanley. the city will love itself, fuel its
own fire or water or whatever. it's been sufficient like that.

— vancouver

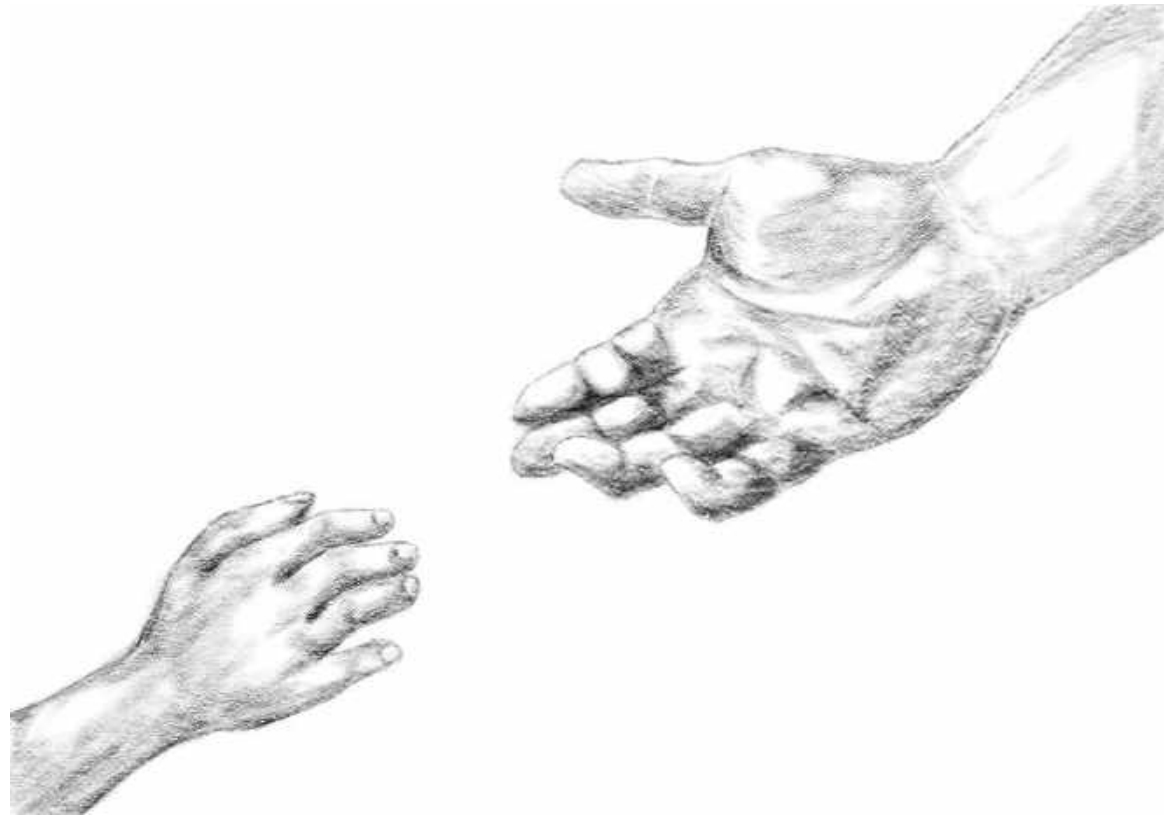
NICE FENCE

Anonymous



GIVE ME YOUR HAND

Yue Yang, Age 15



MY HOME

Hanin Al Fares, Age 15

I was born in a country
Didn't live there for long
I was homeless around the world
I didn't know where to go
My country devastated and destroyed
It became a land for enemies
I didn't leave by choice
People were in front of my eyes
Stained with blood
Dying inside the mud
Praying to god
To keep them safe and alive
I was not able to cry
I saw what I should not have seen
I saw the rockets and explosions
I was nine years old
I did not live much in freedom or independence
But in difficulties and exploitation
My dream is not to live in Prince's palace
And not to travel to Hawaii or Paris
My dream is to return to my country with peace and love
To meet all of my family without breaking up
I want to see the birds in the sky
Is my dream that complicated?
It is the dream of millions of people

THE COFFEE HOUSE THAT SAVED MY LIFE

Grace Patterson, Age 13

It's early morning and I can't sleep. My clock says it's just after 5 so I get up out of bed. I pull on some jeans, a plain black shirt, and my cousin's hoodie. Out my window I can hear the wind whistling along with the soft patter of rain drops. A storm is on its way. I need to go for a walk. I snatch some money and one of the Harry Potter books off my shelf. Running out the door I almost forget to lock it but remember at last minute. Stepping outside the wind hits me harder than expected. I'm not quite sure where to go, so I just start walking. The longer I walk the harder the rain comes down and I realize without an umbrella, I will need to seek shelter. Up ahead is my favourite coffee house but I fear they won't be open. I tap on the window and Amanda setting up. She knows me because I'm a regular and we've become pretty good friends, so she lets me in without hesitation.

"What are you doing out so early in the rain, Clara?" she asks me.

"Hoping for a hot chocolate and a quiet place to read."

"Be my guest, the place doesn't open for an hour so it should plenty quiet."

"Thank you so much, I just had to get out of my house." I head straight to my favourite spot, a blue-grey love seat with decorative pillows displaying words like Peace and Love. The spot is right next to the front window on one side and an electric fireplace on the other, so I get both the view and warmth. I look over to see that Amanda is not only making the hot chocolate I requested but has also heated up a cinnamon bun for me. I turn over my Harry Potter book noticing just now that I grabbed the first one in the series. I've read this so many times but it's still my favourite.

When I'm about a chapter in, Amanda walks over with my food.

"This looks delish, thanks so much" I say.

"Don't mention it," she says, sitting and staring at me, as I take a sip.

"Is something wrong?" I ask.

"You tell me. You're the one who showed up here at 5:30 in the morning soaking wet." I look away hoping she won't see the tears that I'm trying to suppress.

"Clara look at me, something is obviously wrong here and I want to help." She won't stop staring at me.

"I cried myself to sleep last night," the words come out before I can stop them, "and when I woke up this morning at 3, I couldn't get back to sleep, so I just lay there for two hours until I got the courage to bring myself here." The tears are streaming down my face now and onto Amanda's shoulder as she hugs me.

"God Clara, I completely forgot about today, frankly I was hoping you would too." She knows why I'm sad and I'm so glad she does. "You know your cousin Emma was such a carefree and happy person, she wouldn't want you crying over her death a whole year later."

"I know, I know," I choke back the tears and wipe my face, "I can't just forget about her though."

"Of course not, but Clara listen to me, you need to get some help, talk to someone who really understands. You come to me almost every week and it always comes back to this, it's just not healthy. Honey, I really want to help you, I just don't think I'm qualified."

I try to smile at her. Amanda doesn't realize how grateful I am for her support.

"Emma was my whole life. We lived together, worked together, we practically shared the same life. She was like a light inside of me and when she got hit by that drunk driver, that light went out. She didn't deserve it and neither did I."

"You're right, I do need help and that's why I've booked an appointment with a therapist this afternoon."

"Clara, that's amazing, good for you. I can drive you there if you like?"

"I would love that, thank you."

I know Emma would never want depression to be the boss of me. She was my hero and always will be, but I need to take care of myself. She would be proud knowing I'm getting help.

Amanda leaves me and goes back to her preparations for opening. Once she's behind the counter I take off my boots and curl up on the couch to read.

Right before I get lost in my book, I can see the sun peeking out from behind the clouds and I feel Emma smiling down at me.

GRIM REAPER'S GARDEN

Nicole Hagley, Age 16

NIHILISTIC TENDENCIES

Harmon Chambers, Age 16

The bloodlust grows with every night - When rage comes so does a clouded sight
The takeover of a hostile mind - Where control is a treasure that is hard to find
My body driven by a distant thought - Where I'm forced to watch and left to rot
My memories a faded mess - I'm so lost, so I'm forced to guess
I'm behind the wheel but so far away - Defenseless yet I'm thrown into the fray
A warzone in my head - Leaves me wishing I was dead
Yet a coward cannot so easily - Run away from ones reality
I wish I was not, yet I'm here still - All until I find the will
The courage to end it all - Cause what is it worth to stand tall
We all fail in the end - We all have fences we cannot mend
Walls that have broken beyond repair - and no reason why life seems so unfair
My pain is different than yours, that is true - and we all have different things we must do
To ease the pain that never ceases - Some cut away and others fold the creases
Yet in the beginning and in the end, we're all the same - It matters not, your wealth or fame
We're all made of flesh and essentially - We will all die eventually



Kamilah Bradley, Age 14

SOGI IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF STUDENTS

Michael Ma, Age 17

SOGI has been a major policy initiative of the Richmond Board of Education intended to address the equity issues within schools. There is no doubt that its discussion has triggered paramount attention from not just parents and staff, but also students.

Last spring, I, as a student council member, was invited by the district to share feedback on the SOGI 123 policy. Although I was not quite educated on this matter at the time, I did interview members of the Rainbow club at my school to share their thoughts on the concepts of "inclusiveness" and "equity". The Table 38 conference in January served as a kick-off event for the Pink Shirt month for February that comes along with the district's education week.

Exactly one year later, on January 15th, I was invited to attend a district-wide Table 38 conference hosted by Cambie secondary student council, where 2 guest speakers from "Outinschools" presented to students across Richmond's secondary schools their unique experience as members of the LGBTQ community. This event was also to raise awareness about LGBTQ rights in schools. Members who are invited to the conference are encouraged to wear pink as a way to show and support the spirits of inclusiveness. Among the attendees were school trustee Norman Goldstein and Heather Larson. The two guest speakers are Melinda, a mixed-race, queer, femme (language they used to identify themselves) who serves as a school outreach program coordinator of "Outinschools"; and Kevin, a Quebec-raised writer and filmmaker dedicated to inspire students through storytelling.

We firstly began with a short and engaging "Guess and Check" game, in which students, learnt the basic terms associated with the LGBTQ community.

Melinda, accompanied by her PowerPoint, threw a scream of terms like "LGBTQ", "homosexuality", "lesbian" and "queer" at students and asked them what they mean. Students showed a lot of enthusiasm in answering questions to the best of their ability. As the questions got harder with some of the less known terms like asexual, bisexual and heterosexual, the chattering faded away.

After that, the students entered the discussion period led by Mr Partridge, district administrator asked about why supporting gender rights in our district is crucial to the well-being of all students. Common answers like "Richmond is the most diverse city in Canada", "Respecting gender rights ensures safety and equity for all" filled up the engaging discussion among student leaders from across the district.

Perhaps the most valuable and unforgettable lesson I learnt as a participant is when the screen showed some of the compelling figures and numbers of how the LGBTQ community is being left behind and often ignored by our mainstream society around the world. For instance, about 1% of the population are identified as asexuals, that is 13 million people being forgotten. Melinda then interjected a gravely tone, "That is 13 million people being ignored, never and ever were they remembered." Students including myself had mixed feelings as this last slide concluded the presentation. Overall, the event was well attended with more than 150 students from across the district in attendance.

"Outinschools" is an educational organization in partnership with "Outonscreen" and "Vancouver queer film festival" that provide learning opportunities for high school students about the LGBTQ community. According to their website, costs of hosting one presenter for 2 hours is 600 dollars.



LOST IN EVERY INK DROP

Charlotte Gilhuly, Age 15



CONFESSIONS OF A STRAIGHT-A STUDENT

Yumai Bishop, Age 17

There are times when things must be said, and there are times when they should be silenced. Now is the time to speak up. Below are my confessions of the crimes I have committed during my school years as a straight-A student.

I love studying. How can I hide the fact? I know that it is illegal in schools (especially high schools), to enjoy learning, but I could not contain myself. This grave offence weighs heavily on my mind, and I have no way of defending myself. I am guilty.

I have also been found reading books instead of socializing on the internet. Most of my classmates can attest to that, and the librarian knows that better than myself. Despite the iron rule that all kinds of literature, primarily the classical ones were to be ignored, I broke it knowingly and willingly. The law that states all libraries are to be seen and not used was violated by me, and it caused me to become more familiar with a diverse range of subjects. To this day, I have a challenging time being horrified at my own acts when the public knows this to be an unspeakable crime.

I paid attention and took notes during classes. The act is so terrifying that I shudder to think I did it. It is common sense that any young student at any institution should never listen or contemplate on what the teacher is saying, and I lost my mind and did just that. I can never forgive myself for wasting so much time scribbling on notes and making new notebooks based on that.

This sin is great--I don't know if I'm ready to share it. But I must. It is the offence of research. From what I know, if I had been merely surfacing subjects for schoolwork, the punishment was lighter. Yet I researched for my own purposes. There was absolutely no need to go in depth. I went more than in depth in some subjects that I knew every little trivia concerning this, however. It now breaks

my heart at what my parents must have been feeling when I openly scavenged around for information of all sorts at my pleasure. Such horrors! What dread I feel now!

I associated myself with clubs that promoted such activities as the ones listed in this confessions. I should be charged with aiding others in this rebellious act and spreading such lifestyles. My weekends were filled with these filthy organized crimes. My only relief is that now, they are all dissolved and safely neutralized.

And lastly but not least, I wrote. Even now as I dictate these words, my fingers itch for a keyboard--a notebook and pen--or whatever. This seems to be an incurable disease that I carry that must be dealt with medicine. The only relief I feel from this ailment is when I am drugged into a stupor. Such a waste of my life spent on intellectual growth! I pray and beseech you, dear listeners, that you would never, ever learn or study. Do not listen to your teachers or parents or adults who encourage you in these vices. Keep clear away from them, and you will live a long and happy life. I can guarantee you that.

(These are, and were, the true confessions of a straight-A student, a graduate of Oak Secondary Institute.)



PLEASE STOP! THIS IS A MANGA!

やめて下さいこれは漫画です!
We apologize for troubling you, please read from right to left. Thank you.
すみません、右から左にお読みください、ありがとうございます。
對不起麻煩您，請您看右邊去左邊，謝謝。

PAGE
12



PAGE
11



PLEASE STOP! THIS IS A MANGA!

やめて下さいこれは漫画です!
We apologize for troubling you, please read from right to left. Thank you.
すみません、右から左にお読みください、ありがとうございます。
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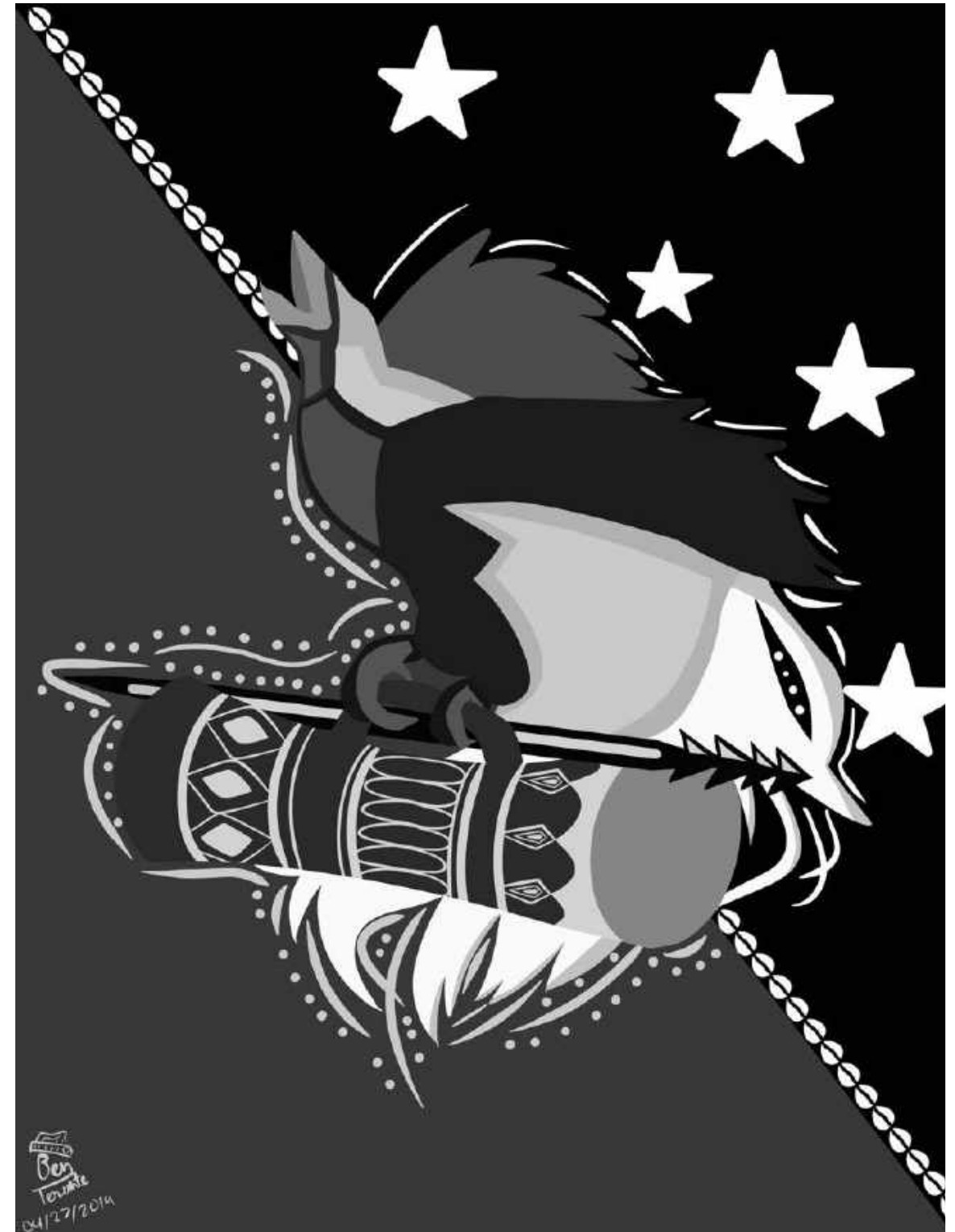
PERSPECTIVE

Bowen Wang, Age 14

I step from civilization, and into a city of green.
I walk where bears brood
and the birds sing of melancholy times
I run and there is no land
There is a scream as I plunge into a canvas of blue and red
Where the secrets hide and the creatures glide
and it is dark with blinking lights
I am home and out the window
I stare at people.

THE BIRD OF PARADISE

Ben Terante, Age 14



LIGHT IN NATURE 1

Kamilah Bradley, Age 14

SOMEWHERE LOST IN TRANSLATION

OFF(SET)

PRESENT

Van Nguyen, Age 17

Our names, cradled in our mother's palm, are syllables of staccato rhythms, forever tied at the base of our throats. Sometimes, our names tumble out of mouths and twist foreign tongues, sometimes our names hold the power to hush a crowd, sometimes they are rarely spoken of at all. My name is personal; from the moment my mother caressed my forehead to ensure my tough Vietnamese skin could withstand all the forces, I knew I had to float. Weightless. An untouchable airiness. Yet still, I felt a tinge of guilt. It took a while, but I've learned not to despise being tied down to the city or being the middle child in the name of my father. So, when my Vietnamese purity was contaminated, I remained unconcerned. The accents did not fit right in my mouth, and when tradition and culture confronted my ignorance, I faced the other way. Perhaps the shame I felt was too great, for I found safety in dissociating people from their names. No one would catch my lie. However, there must be no more deception, for my grandmother's quivering hand would falter to touch my heart.

There is no secret as I have confessed through the branches of our beaten-down family tree; I've altered their names. For the selfish purpose of creating a false sense of security, and to relay stories that accurately reflect my parents' journey. When writing a story, especially one delving into secrets beneath the bark of an oak tree, names do not slither off the tongue of a menacing villain or are bombarded across the stage of a political debate. There are no villains or politicians, only Vietnamese people with the desire to rediscover their names beneath the debris of a fallen regime.

Vân is a cloud. Vân is friends with the Sun (mặt trời) and works when there is rain (mưa) needed to be released. Vân is a gentle mist where airplanes (máy bays) swim and is the culprit to a shaded afternoon. As bits and pieces of my identity have been scattered over the years, I am determined to re-find them. In time, I will learn.

My name is Nguyễn Danh Thùy Vân.



BLANK PAGES

Zoe Fenster, Age 17

April 1st

Today the sun rose exceptionally slowly. Maybe it was afraid to return.

April 2nd

I opened the bookstore at 9am. Not one soul stepped through the threshold until 11. I had some time to talk to the books. They wouldn't stop sneezing, irritated by thick layers of dust, so it was difficult to understand a word they said. At 8pm, I closed the door and tried to ignore the sound of muffled sneezing.

April 3rd

I cried.

April 4th

The bookstore buzzed, our most popular section no longer fantasy, but rather, survival.

April 7th

Everyday our customers run thin. We're out of books on how to's and do it yourselfs. I never figure how to survive in the wilderness' would be a bestseller. The bookstore is an almost-empty jug of syrup; someone tipped it over, now everyone trickles out.

April 8th

When she walked in my heart rate doubled. Is that what a 'double take' means? The books laughed with disdain. Jane Eyre shuddered in pity. I wonder if she heard.

April 9th

She didn't.

April 11th

The threats came today. No one left their houses. I opened the bookstore at 9am.

April 12th

Not one soul stepped through the threshold until 1pm. I thought I was the only one who found comfort among the books. I was wrong.

April 14th

She keeps coming back, day after day. I can hear the books cry when she leaves. The air is damp. She gives us hope.

April 15th

The first bombs came today. The books were fine, but I worried about her. Was she among the rubble, or hidden safely like me?

April 17th

I worried for forty eight hours. My nails are bitten down. Today she came into the bookstore just before closing. She bought a book from the fantasy section, and then she kissed me.

April 18th

There is so much death around me, but I've never felt more alive.

April 19th

She comes when I open the store. She leaves after I close. She gives me everything the books never have.

April 20th

She's my only customer now. No one dares to step outside their front stoop.

April 21st

We spend all our days together, wrapped in pages of mystery books, biographies, historical fiction. She wants to write a book that someone else could wrap themselves in one day. She writes my story with her hands when she touches me. We sleep among the worlds.

April 23rd

The second bombing came today. I held her in my arms as she trembled. The books shook with fear this time. We couldn't hide in the fantasy section forever.

April 24th

I cried.

April 26th

I haven't heard her voice in two days. Her words are beginning to fade. The bookstore is a desert. I am scared. The books have given up.

April 27th

December 28th

I passed by the old bookstore today, on my way to work. A pile of snow-dusted rubble where beauty once was, where stories were told. Our story. I think they're putting an apartment building up there now.

I wish the books had given him the protection he deserved.

AM I AWAKE YET?

Amanda Yau, Age 15



FIRST TIME

Claire Dooley, Age 17

Last night
sounds came at you from
underwater and you
talked in bubbles
in someone's backyard with
people who yelled at you to
come on and dance!
and then you never saw them again.
When you went to the bathroom you
looked blurry-eyed into an
alternate mirror dimension before
going pee and revelling
being alone.
You ended up with a girl
who you knew pretty well
(but not well enough)
her dry lips on your dry lips with
dry tongues entangled the way you
saw it happen in movies that felt like
nothing in real life
until finally you ended up in
someone's empty bedroom
where a cat hid in the corner and
ran away at first sight of you two monsters
who lay on the bed awkward
in your denim skirts
and you touched her with unfeeling fingers
and she asked do you want to?
and you said sure why not
because your walls had been broken down
by grapefruit vodka and the
sagging passage of time.
Twenty minutes later it was over
you could smell her in your hair
and when you went looking for your underwear
under the bed
you found the cat instead.
When you went downstairs (hand in hand)
you found a girl wandering in bare feet
through broken glass asking everyone to leave.
You said yes and you both went,

saying goodbye as an afterthought
To the girl whose bed you just had sex in.
Even though you left together you walked
on opposite sides of the street.
On the bus ride home you listened
to the playlist she had made you and
told yourself that you were
probably
maybe
not
in love.
The next morning you woke up
and smoked a cigarette out of your
bedroom window
took a shower and went
downstairs with wet hair.
Your mother asked how was your night?
and you said it was fine as
you dripped into your cheerios.

12,000 METRES

Adelyne Heng, Age 16

12,000 metres above the ground
above life as I know it.
it doesn't escape me
but it seems that I've escaped

and when 12,000 metres in the air
hurtling to a place anew
leaving myself behind
while I'm right here.
it doesn't escape me
but it seems that I've escaped

gliding 12,000 metres through the blue
I feel like
maybe
my world is uncertainty and stress and fears and tears and the love that makes my heart
swell and the pain that makes it just about break but
the world is okay

JÖTENHEIMR

Phineas Eaton, Age 17



SOCIETAL STANDARDS: A SYNTHESIS BETWEEN JAMAICA KINCAID'S PROSE POEM "GIRL" AND CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHE'S TED TALK "WE SHOULD ALL BE FEMINISTS"

Brooke Soobrian, Age 16

Jamaica Kincaid's prose poem "Girl" and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's TED Talk "We Should All Be Feminists" elucidate the ways women are oppressed due to societal gender standards. "Girl", set within Antigua in the mid 20th century, depicts a mother instructing her daughter how to live a successful life. Adichie's TED Talk "Feminists", written in 2012, explains the hardships she faced throughout her life because of gender expectations. Both pieces stress the requirements of a successful marriage, the integral goal of a woman, by illustrating the two most significant ways societal gender norms oppress women: obligatory domestic duties and maintaining a respectable comportment.

In both pieces, women are limited by their unyielding, tedious, and obligatory domestic duties. Kincaid's prose poem enumerates the many tasks women must be able to perform. It is a woman's responsibility to "sweep [the] whole house" (23) without a man's help, "iron [her] father's khaki pants" (18-19) regardless of whether he is capable of doing it himself, and "set [the] table" (27) each meal for her entire family. Similarly, "Feminists" shows that societal expectations make a woman's domestic duties mandatory despite aversion towards it. Adichie recounts a woman who abhors domestic duties, yet she pretends to enjoy it to be "good wife material" (34). Consequently, the vast amount of effort women invest in being "homely" (34) limits their abilities to pursue careers or to be successful in other aspects of life. Both pieces show that men are not taught to be "homely" (34) like women are, leaving women the laborious responsibility of completing all domestic duties.

In particular, "Girl" emphasizes the requirement of women and girls knowing how to cook. The daughter in the prose poem must learn how to cook "pepper pot" (37), "bread pudding" (36), and "doukona" (36) as it is her duty, regardless of her enjoyment or capability. Likewise, "Feminists" shows that the ability to cook is depicted as the woman's job. She must know how to "cook Indomie noodles for [her] brother" (36), as her brother has not been taught the fundamental "ability to nourish [himself]" (37), or to cook. Because these social norms have become so entrenched, women "have been socialized to see cooking as their role" (35), rather than both men and women's equal duty. In failing to comply with this gender expectation, women risk losing the respect of men, something society dictates women should aspire for to achieve marriage, which is necessary for a successful life.

Societal gender standards of women's rigid and respectable comportment thoroughly hinder their abilities. "Girl" outlines the strict approach to attire women must have to be considered respectable. Specifically, the hem of a woman's dress must be appropriate to "prevent [her] from looking like a slut" (16) and thereby becoming disrespected by society. Similarly, "Feminists" shows the hesitancy towards attire that women face in the workplace. Women are taught to be "apologetic for [their] femininity" (39) and to worry about looking "too feminine" (38) in business. They are taught that their comportment should reflect their "ambition, but not too much" (27), and display their desire to be "successful, but not too successful" (27), so as to not threaten a man's abilities.

Comparably, in Kincaid's prose poem, a woman's interactions with men must be strategically respectful as well. There are distinct approaches to smile at someone the daughter "[doesn't] like very much" (24-25) and to "someone [she likes] completely" (26). Adichie emphasizes women's deeply ingrained desire to be liked. Copious amounts of time are spent "teaching girls to worry about what boys think of them" (24), as a result, stifling them and preventing women from expressing themselves freely.

Carrying out obligatory domestic duties and maintaining a respectable comportment, two societal gender norms, thoroughly limit women's abilities, as expressed in both pieces. "Girl" shows that society dictates that women have the complete responsibility of household chores for their families, just as "Feminists" elucidates how women have been socialized to see all domestic duties as their role. A woman's strict comportment in society must be maintained to achieve the respect of men, and thereby be married. It is because strict gender standards exist in society today, just as in both works, that Kincaid's prose poem and Adichie's TED Talk firmly remain as reminders to continue to progress society away from these patriarchal, oppressive ideals.

Adichie, Chimamanda N. *We Should All Be Feminists*. New York: Anchor Books, 2015. Print

Kincaid, Jamaica. *Girl*. San Francisco: San Francisco Examiner, 1991. Print.

DEVOTION

Jewel Cao, Age 14

It woke up on a dark day, a day when the surfaces outside the compound were bleached of their colour. The lights were on overhead, very harsh and bright, and that was the first thing it saw. It could remember the exact moment of its birth. First the lights, and then the objects hovering above its head that it categorized as human faces. It remembered them exactly. It remembered their movement, the shape of their eyes, the curve of their necks.

"Well, that's that. The last one."

"I'm so glad it's finally over. We'll be able to get away from this planet in the middle of nowhere."

It was turned around, inspected, hands fiddling at its wires. The soft press of skin against metal was a flood. Billions of electrical signals firing, currents in its delicate metal veins, uncountable names, and facts, and stars and planets, all human history. The man flipped it around again, bent over its head, arms clasped around its body as he looked at the tubing on its back. It stared at the faces that were furrowed in concentration, a little worn, visibly soft and strange compared with the starkness of the lights, the grey walls, the window and the grainy blackness outside. It stared at the faces, a part of the race that left a trail of broken planets behind it, and it knew what they called this feeling.

It was stood up on feet that, despite its own uncertainty, were sure. The woman slapped its left shoulder with an air of finality. There was a hollow clang and a reverberation of metal.

"You can go now," she said, and separate from its own will, its feet ate up the floor in swift strides, some ungraspable force pulling it away. It watched the number of tiles from the tip of its feet to the exit diminish rapidly. It could see the woman and the man, watching it go, and still it was

pulled along.

It was a farming robot. It knew that somewhere deep inside twisted circuits and hollow metal. It would take pleasure in the care of the fragile sprouts that the humans needed, and that rooted so unwillingly into the dry soil. Striding through wide halls that crawled with shining tubing, it watched mismatching metal shapes roll, or walk, or fly by, and it listened to the clank of metal against metal that stirred in a mechanical symphony. And its feet swung forwards and backwards like a pendulum in swift, smooth rhythm, propelling the rest of his body forwards, past the walls of a compound to the greenhouse.

The greenhouse was perhaps even more well-lit than the compound. But where the compound was flat, sharp edges devoid of dimension, the greenhouse hummed with a softer kind of energy, a more fragile kind of life. Its feet stopped its movement at the doorway of the greenhouse. It watched the robots with its own feet, its own legs, its own arms move with stiff purpose through the neat rows of tables on which were sitting neat rows of pots, planted with small green sprouts. The sprouts curled in many different directions, tasted the air at various heights, splashes of colour that leapt out from a black and white palette.

With a flash of certainty, decades of programming kicked in. It exalted in the efficient way that its arm became a solitary mechanism in a moving line of arms, rhythmically and gently filling the pots, then hollowing a space, then dropping a seed, then covering again, then tearing off the label and making sure it adhered to the clay. It took pleasure in the way the pots were set on the table, adorning the bare metal. It hummed with satisfaction the way that it, without needing assistance, became one significant, yet unnoticeable gear in an oiled machine.

It was assigned a table, and as it watered the tender shoots, minute by minute, the sun rose and a world emerged. The sharp canyons took form, striped with streaks of red and green and blue. The sky, tinted orange, melded with the red forest of rock that pointed accusing, sunburned fingers at the sun that cracked the surface of the planet. A thin thread of a river wound through the canyon, surrounded by a tangle of red vines and scarlet leaves.

Its hands halted on the thin leaf of a shoot as it watched the way the air hovered underneath the hot sun, the burnt earth, the scorched rock, the lush tangle of vegetation, the pastel sky. It looked, and it knew what they called this feeling.

It remembered, drawing from the sea of its knowledge, the images of forests of rubble, centuries of darkness, mountains of dead. Of smoke curling through the air, suffocating, drowning, burning, the painful cacophony of sounds that should not exist. Of oceans of charred stumps and snowflakes of ash, withered branches and paper leaves.

It remembered the faces of the man and the woman, the timbre of their voices, the smiles.

It looked out the wide glass walls and saw a hollow skeleton of the river, of encroaching smoke on the pastel sky, the sheared tops of the rocks. It looked out the window, the vibrant scarlet of the forest juxtaposed against images of grey blocks with square windows, grey streets sectioned off into sterile rectangles, grey clothes and grey sky.

She lifted her fingers off the small green leaf of the plant.

"I can't believe this."

"That's life, I guess. What happened to this one?"

"Found it a couple miles away from the compound, sitting in the forest. Got a day of work in, that's all. Wasn't even worth the effort."

"Well, it happens sometimes. Here."

I love you, she thought. Mother, father. I love you. The lights were on overhead, very harsh, very bright, very cold, and that was the last thing she saw.

BOTTLED AND DRAINED

Jenny Nguyen, Age 15



SCATTER BRAINED

Dane Manrell, Age 15

My motivations are few and thin, my patience is at its lowest. My hair never been messier, my feelings never more unstable, never been searching more than I am now. My mind's running on an endless treadmill, my need for sleep is unmatched but my will to do anything is at a record low. My armpits never felt so sweaty, my ears never listened to so much music, my eyes never felt so heavy, my feet never felt so cold, my hands never been so shaky.

You ever wondered if dreams were all just cattle in real life too?

Never understood not caring but now I do, you just don't care and that's about it, you just don't... I've never changed so quickly or ever changed like this. My heart never raced so fast, well actually, that's probably a lie because it has out run hyenas in the winter and the spring. Never thought I would ask myself so many questions, never thought I would have a reason why. Never questioned if death could be better than living, I never thought I would need to know why.

But I have thought these thoughts and pondered these questions. Don't worry though, despite my internal banter I never blackened anyone's coffee, I always tread lightly on the grass. I never wanted my ocean to ripple your tidal pool, I just wanted you to soak up the precious burning sun. (sigh)

So breathe in those carbon molecules. Look around you and look at all the stigma, it's everywhere. Don't use plastic grocery bags, and don't ask questions that don't have answers. Instead, taste that disgusting salt water while you can, you'll miss it when you can't. We only miss things when they are no longer.

RAINBOW

Anonymous

In my rainbow shirt and bright green shoes
Not a single cut or bruise
I hide it well behind a crescent smile
It hasn't been real for a while

And when I pass them every day
I cannot help but look away
Knowing if I look them in the eye
Right in the hallway I'll start to cry

Most kids think at the end of the day
My life is perfect in every way
But one single small mistake,
Could ensure those bruises are not fake

And there are too few who really get
What it's like to really be upset
And they say that it's all in my head
That I should eat more and go to bed

But late at night I cannot sleep
Since into my brain those demons creep
And I wished to drown my sorrows that night
But creeps like me don't get an invite

I see all of those girls
With long, dark lashes and perfect curls
But I don't like them one bit
Because they left me here deep in this pit

Why do they have it all?
And why do they get to let me fall
And why do I have to go home
And feel even more alone

I always weigh a little too much
And my friends always seem to lose touch
My heart has been broken but I can't cry loud
Cry-babies don't make mom and dad proud
I'm heart broken and nobody can see
The cuts and bruises under lock and key
Behind a big crescent smile
Bright green shoes and rainbow style

HIDDEN SECRETS

Amelia Vegt, Age 14



STEP BY STEP

Erin Leung, Age 17

Step by step

I wander the busy streets of the city in which I no longer remember the name of
The bitterness of the pollution cling onto my senses
While the honking of cars and endless footsteps fill my eardrums

These people have ambition in their lives
They have somewhere they need to be
Something they want to obtain
Someone they yearn to see

Step by step

I hear the sounds of children crying and people laughing
But I am as muted as the night
Quiet like the soft winds whispering against my hair

The wind has the freedom I don't
They can go wherever they want
Whenever they desire
Whichever direction they go, they will never be lost

Step by step

I search for open arms that will take me in
Arms that will pull me into a warm embrace
And certainly, won't let me fall

But I am already falling
Falling into the dreams of fruitless hope
Hoping for a path that will guide me to where I need to be
Being a wanderer of the city in which I no longer remember the name of

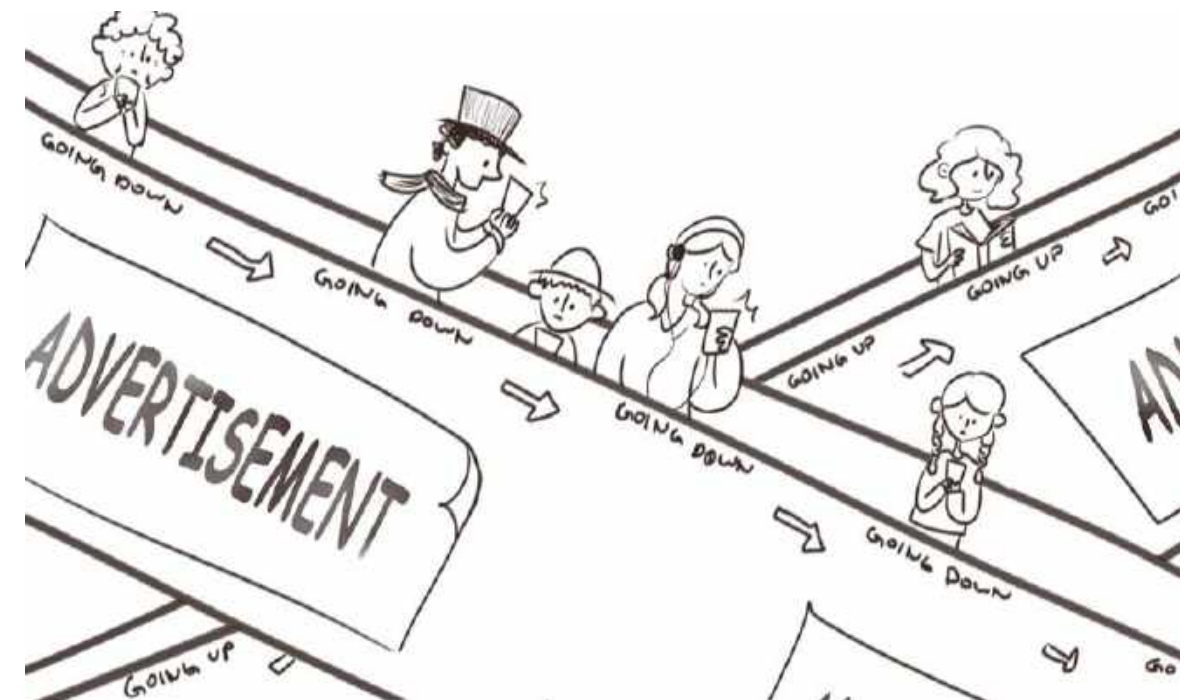
Step by step

Step by step

Step by step

ESCALATORS

Devon Takagawa, Age 13



TOXICOLOGY

Anonymous

The world is poisoned
by petroleum.
Making opaque white smoke
that breaks the shield from the sun.
Producing clear bottles, white spoons,
and things not biodegradable.
Destroying the peaceful waters
that were once so pretty.

The world is poisoned
by money.
Those thin sheets of blue, purple, red, brown,
make the world move.
Even if people can't afford it.
Apparently,
the more you have of it,
the better life you will live.

The world is poisoned
by people.
The root and cure of all poison.
The greatest weapon is our brain
we have knowledge.
And we created tools,
yet we can't use them wisely.
Don't we realize we're self-destructing?

SLEEPLESS

Anonymous

He lay in bed thinking of nothing
I lay in bed thinking of him so long his face unseen, his voice unheard
I wondered of his thoughts
My oblivion I used as a burden of hope
Nothing decided, nothing impossible
He lay in bed thinking of nothing
I lay in bed thinking of him

Amy Rice, Age 15

THE SAME PATH CHANGES YOU

Anonymous

I walk the same path most days
but sometimes it's hard
I pass by the places you like to avoid

at school shades of pink cover my face,
swollen eyes
the people who pretend to be nice look over
I sit in this class knowing what's next to come
concerned by my expression they approach
one by one

I say I'm fine

their whispers scatter only a few miles
not enough to ruin me
not even close
I've had it worse before

at home all alone
I rekindle our past routinely
staring vividly
sparks, warmth and colour
my brain says

PUT IT OUT

I don't listen
I get too close to the flame
I don't know what's worse
the scalding hot burns
OR
the scolding from my brain

icing the aches doesn't help
my ears are still open

your whispers arrive

they knock, I let them in
they search for the delicacies
they find time and space and grab them quickly
they run away leaving my mind a mess

I spend a long time cleaning up after them

I walk the same path most days

but it's getting easier
I pass by the places you like to avoid

at school shades of beige cover my face,
makeup
the people who pretend to be nice look over
I sit in this class knowing what's next to come
they ask for my homework answers
one by one

I reluctantly give it to them

at home all alone
I treat my wounds routinely
staring vividly
almost healed, healthy and happy
my brain says

I AM PROUD OF YOU

but sometimes I let a memory slip into my brain
I keep them cluttered
why do I hoard them?
because I don't want to throw them away care-
lessly

like you did

but that doesn't matter anymore
I've stopped inviting your whispers
even if they do attend, I kick them out
before they can trash the party

And at the end of the day I still walk the same path



EXCERPT FROM DANDELION

Lucy Pan, Age 14

NEVER STOP SHINING

Isabelle Chang, Age 15

Through the branches and
under the leaves, lies a shy,
little, glowing star.

She sits waiting for
her time to shine, but she fears
it will never come.

Where her name is called,
she floats onto the bright stage.
"I am El," she says.

Her song begins and
she begins her piece, but too
soon, the others, boo.

Sadness washes through
her, then replaced with fury.
"You'll all regret this!"

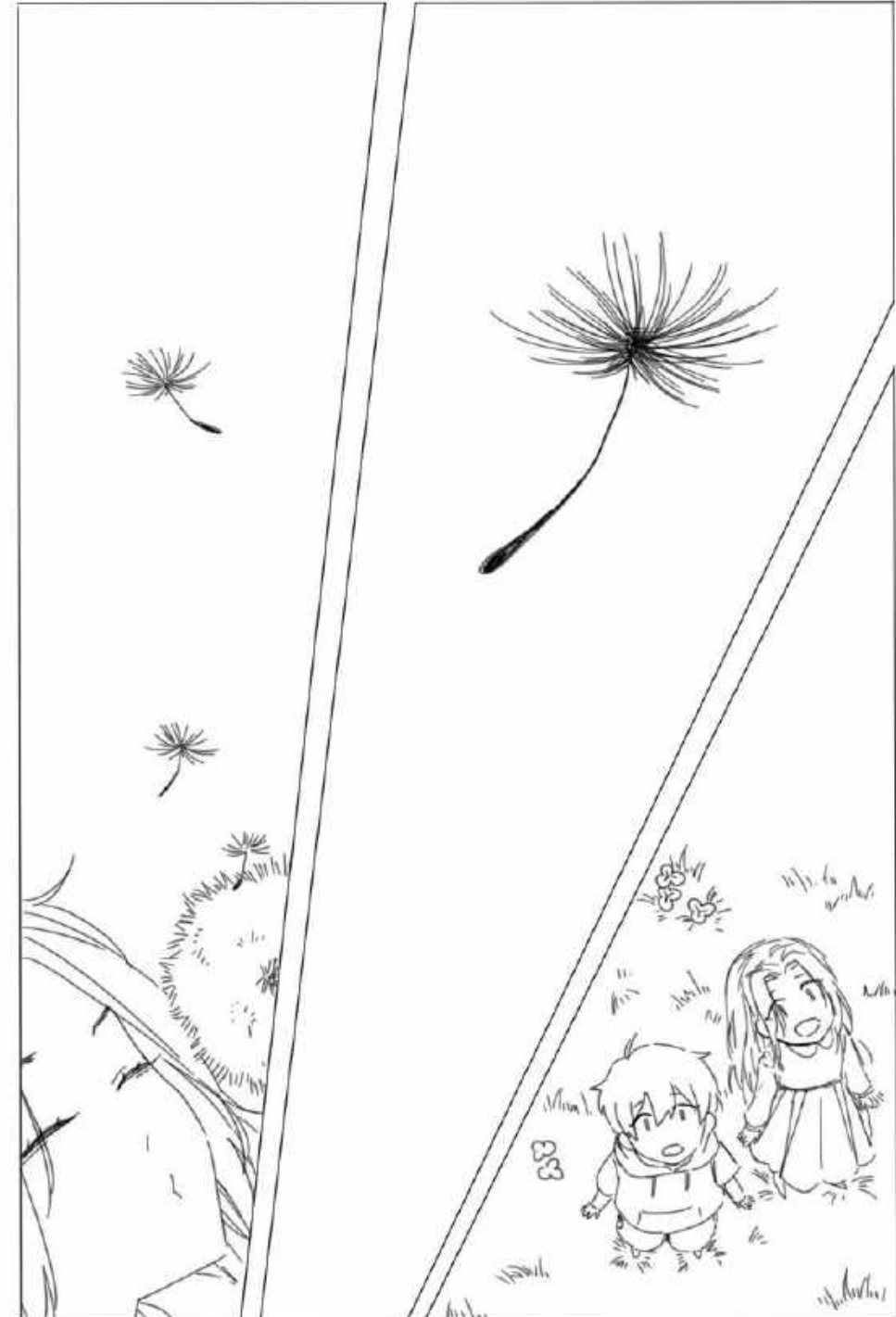
She zooms off in haste,
shooting into the night sky.
Eyes streaming diamonds.

Anger boiling and
feelings hurt, she decides that
life is not for her.

Emotions explode,
sending fiery hate around.
El becomes no more.

Below, they scatter
but they are no match for El.
They all die with her.

With each passing, leaves
a mark that shines intently.
Stars make sure of that.



UNIQUE

Kara Yeh, Age 15

LOOKING FOR WATER IN A DESERT DUNE

Juhyeong Kim, Age 15

I am so thirsty
That my throat is as dry as paper.
One drop of water
Could make be happy,
But my neck still burns.
Water hiding under the ground.
I keep digging.
Scrap, scrap, scrap,
Still finding nothing.
The gloves that protected my hands
now punctured everywhere.
Every time I dig,
More holes appear
on my glove, until there's nothing left.
My bare hands touch the steaming sand,
But I keep digging.
Still hoping.
Still burning.



THE ARMIES OF THE NORTH AND SOUTH

Ryan Wong, Age 16

The army of the North with their soldiers at the ready
And the army of the South with their lines solid and steady

Standing face to face like a spectrums two ends
Now they are enemies but once were friends

The afternoon sun shines on the soon-to-be battlefield
But the cold wind reminds that one army's fate is already sealed

An uneasy silence is held in the air
By a feeling of restlessness of the coming affair

The northern army with their shining, white armour
The garments of the south hold a shade much darker

Both companies maintain the exact same formation
As they once stemmed from common nation

The infantry soldiers hold rank at the front
They are to bear the battle's brunt

Siege towers are wheeled to the corners of the battle zone
The optimal distance for watching the majesty's throne

The horse-mounted cavalry are prepared right beside
In any battle, their presence may turn the ride

The royal mages wait beside their rulers
Staying on guard to spot and stop intruders

At the backlines center sit the king and the queen
Atop elevated thrones so that all may be seen

With haste and pride, the infantry move first
Both sides already preparing for the worst

Now the northern horsemen make their move
Their frontline hold they to improve

The mages of the south already know their mission
They move into place with grace and precision

At the same time, the siege towers take motion
One to the king and one into the commotion

Soon enough, everyone's dragged into the fight
Each combatant filled with faith and might

As forces on both sides begin to diminish
The south queen seeks out the battles finish

Toward the enemy backlines, she travels out forth
But she is intercepted by the queen of the north

The two queens' blades clash and parry
Each with fierceness of the burden they carry

The northern queen is now knocked down
With one nimble strike, she loses head and crown

The northern king leaps in with diamond dagger
Down drops the south queen without even a stagger

With his true love gone, the north king walks slowly but straight
And stand in the field's center as the perfect bait

The southern troops, not wanting to lose their chance
With no thought at all, make a careless advance

For the north king's soldiers lie in wait
Holding out to make one last stand for their state

In the blink of an eye, the soldiers of the south are all taken out
Just one more obstacle and they've won, just about

The north king stands over the field of the slain
All the unnecessary hardship, blood, and pain

As the sun sets on the horizon's end
The king of the north approaches his old friend

The king of the south kneels as the sky grows dim
Ready to accept what is coming to him

The air is cold but no breeze is there
And once again a silence fills the air

The north king raises his dagger ever so slightly
Its diamond and jewels glisten so brightly

He stabs into the ground, his anger he seeks to abate
And he lets out just one word: "Checkmate"

THIS IS REAL

Kitty Charlie, Age 17

Today is Monday, January 21st 2019. I think that's a good way to start a story. I suffer with depression, I know that it's a common thing and I'm not alone. But it's different for every person. I struggle to just get up in the morning it's like someone is sitting on me and I'm tied to this bed. Imagine there are weights tied around my ankles and forced to swim you kick and kick and still sink. Every time someone tries to pull you up you find a way to bring them down with you. I don't mean to hurt anyone but I do. I have a voice but sometimes I feel like I don't. Imagine you have weights in your cheeks and eyes you're exhausted but you haven't done anything. People tell you to just smile and get over it.

I want to disappear sometimes to forget about this pain. I sometimes have the thought "there is an easier way out" I know that's not true. There is no easy way out. But it's just one thought right? A harmless thought right? Wrong it's not just some harmless thought. It's only harmless if you don't act on it or believe in it. Sadly not everyone knows there is a better way, always. Do you ever just cry for no reason? Me too I want to cry as I write this. I feel worthless and pointless. I feel a hole in my chest and I write this hoping to fill this space and maybe help me make some sense of it. As I write this it still doesn't make sense why I'm hurting. I guess this loss I have experienced can contribute to pain. Depression still doesn't make sense to me even if I have a reason to feel it I still don't know why we have to feel this way.

Sometimes I look into the mirror and I just see this monster that supposed to be my reflection. Some people look at me but don't see me. I speak they hear me but don't listen to me. When people do listen to my words they turn into something messy. I'm afraid to say I am not okay. I get told I'm using it for attention. I know I can't run from my pain I wish I knew that when I was young I did drugs I drank alcohol to try to forget it just dam-

aged my body. I tried to kill myself to get rid of the pain. Believe me there is a reason why I am telling you this because there is a better way. You are going to be okay someday.

I feel like I am suffocating writing this I keep trying to catch my breath but I don't know where I can find it. I want to find my real smile but I am so depressed. I am in a room with someone who broke my heart and I have to be civil even though I want to scream at this person I want to tell them how much I hate them... it won't help I know it won't because I don't hate them... I could hurt them the way they hurt me but what will that do? It won't make me feel any better. But I don't because I know they're probably going through their own stuff. Remember there is a reason for anything.

I live with severe PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) I was raped by a boy I was dating and to this day I am afraid of affection and intimacy. To this day I have anxiety just hearing his name. I still panic when I see him. I know a lot of women and men have gone through these things so I'm not afraid to talk about it. My silence gives the rapist more power and he doesn't deserve it. It fucked me up big time. The justice system is corrupt in my opinion just because you were truly raped just because you're telling the truth doesn't mean they're going to believe you and they'll still run free and you are left broken. I also experienced something no one should I heard three loud bangs. Me and my family thought they were fireworks and weren't alarmed. But they were gunshots. To this day I hate fireworks and guns with a passion. I know there are going to be a lot of people who will still be pro-gun no matter what happens no matter how many people die.

Anxiety is a real disorder and I suffer with it. It feels like someone is sitting on your chest. Your heart aches from beating so fast. Sometimes

anxiety is so bad you have to call 911. Anxiety is different from just feeling nervous from time to time it's different for every person. For me living with anxiety is constantly worrying about what I look like. I walk home just so that I don't have to go on the bus. I hate publicly speaking. My anxiety attacks can be mild to severe. Mild attacks are like swimming imagine you forget to breathe from time to time you feel this pain in your chest but comes and goes imagine you want to scream but nothing comes out every little thing makes you jump. More severe attacks are like drowning imagine your lungs are on fire from the lack of breath your brain is all foggy and you can't think

straight you can hear words but can't process them so you don't understand what is being said your eyes are burning and you don't notice that you're crying.

What I'm trying to say is this is real. That it's okay not to be okay. This is my story and I am still alive and living. Even though I have suffered and felt pain I can still smile and laugh. I used to want to end my life I used to hurt myself. I've grown I'm not telling you this for attention I'm telling you this to be aware that everyone has a story and to treat everyone with kindness because everyone has suffered in their life.



LOST BATTLE

Catherine Diyakonov, Age 14

Racing through the trees
The setting sun blinding me,
Obstructing my vision,
As if she wants me to run out of time,
Ignoring my unseen pleas for help.

I struggle to run faster,
Pushing my legs to surpass their limits
Waiting until the pressure becomes excruciating,
And for the explosion I had kept bottled up
To burst open.

The crunch of dried leaves under my feet,
Scraping my legs against rough bark shards
My hands burning from deep cuts;
The steady flow of blood
Are my emotions helplessly seeping out.

The path is like a tunnel;
Each time I see the light,
I take an unexpected turn
And the darkness engulfs me,
Creating an endless cycle of misery.

Will I ever escape?
How do I get there in time?
I am running out of time;
I have to show that I am worthy,
Capable of fighting through the pain.

Legs on fire,
Hands cracking
My mind is a cacophony of numb thoughts
Where is the finish line?
How do I escape?

Will I ever escape?
Two paths come into view
I sprint towards one,
The trees swallowing my soul
No time to think.

Did I make the right choice?
Running, racing, refusing surrender
Until there is no more time to run
The sun peeks out to give me a sly smile
Before it disappears

I crumble down onto the soily ground
Letting pain crawl into my wounds
As I let the darkness overcome me.
I have run out of time;
Given up.

MOTHER OF DRAGONS

Morgan McLean, Age 13



FEATHER THE CHANCES

Nghi Nguyen, Age 14

Our story starts with a boyish little girl named Myra. Myra, Myra—my miracle, her mother used to always say. A miracle indeed.

The most important thing you should know about this girl is that she's easily bored. One would be lucky to find a book with more than two pages read in the stacks around her bed. Messily plastered on her walls are things you would expect to be on walls: posters, newspaper bits, pressed flowers petals—but there was also a strangely large collection of feathers on the wall opposite her window, each feather neatly lined up in a grid like pattern.

Myra likes those feathers very much, letting her fingers brush them every night before she slept, naming them by phonetics that had no meanings. Unlike absolutely everything else in her life, she has never gotten bored of them. Those feathers, oh, how they will be the death of her.

One day her brother had crawled on her bed, seeking warmth and comfort and protection and she had provided those things as she listened to his stories, saving him from drowning in fear. Then the stars that watch her at night had told her to do something very unfitting of a seven-year-old and told her to use the knife she hid under the mattress.

And she had listened, and followed suit.

I was supposed to kill her before she did so. And I had failed.

As of now, the siblings pick at their food, their appetite not there in the early morning. Myra tries to rub away the gray tired from her eyes. For weeks she has not slept well. The warm sun filters through their canvas curtains and Blue is happy as ever to take it all in.

"Can we go outside?" he asks.

First eat your food, his mother would say. But the mother is not here today, for she died at the dead of night hours ago. The question was for Myra.

"You can go, but I will stay," says the older sister, as a tear rolls down her pale cheek.

Blue goes to the lake he has always loved with swans of blue and pink floating upon its surface. He picks up a shed feather. It would not do. He dives into the cool green water, his blade firmly gripped, and turns the water red.

Myra paints to give her mind peace, but her strokes are stiff and her colors dull, so she takes the palette knife and stabs through the canvas. An idea comes. She paints a child, his heart where the cut canvas is. Then she takes a kitchen knife and delicately slices her palm, letting the blood drip on the child's chest.

Blue takes the swan feathers home, with a skip in his walk and humming an improvised tune. I follow him, my great white wings beating silently. I'm careful not to cast a shadow.

He puts the feathers down on a window sill and sees the portrait painted with blood. He does not give any concern, but simply asks his sister, "What is its name?"

"I don't know," Myra admits, her creative mind feeling very blocked, and the siblings stare in silence for a moment. A hot pain breaks through Myra's head and her eyes go bloodshot and she collapses, fingers buried in her hair. Blue cries out and tries to help Myra up, but he can't with the strength of a five-year-old.

Then the pain disappears. Myra staggers back up.

"I'm going to rest for a bit," she announces with a hoarse voice, stumbling to her room.

Blue shivers. He's scared but his sister is strong and she knows best so he does not think too deep into it. There's a small clatter when the painting falls.

Blue whips around to see me, crouched upon the highest shelves, wings uncomfortable against the ceiling.

With sticky fingers, Myra takes a hand mirror and examines her bare back. Two little stumps have started forming on blades of her shoulders. Small scarlet feathers poke through her flesh.

It was the sign that she was going to die.

"I've come too early," I say to the shaking boy below, "mind to provide some hospitality?"

His hazel eyes and long lashes are awfully pretty this close. I feel almost sorry. But another blink and he is already climbing the shelves with a knife in hand.

"I told you to stay away!" he growls, "I killed those animals today to make sure—"

"And yet here I am!" I let out a chuckle. "You can't mess with fate, boy. Though I must admit, those were beautiful swans you killed; my friends up there would be furious!"

I dodge the swinging blade with ease when Blue finally reaches the top of the shelves. He waves his knife again and again, blindly, as his eyes have welled up with tears. I grab his wrist and twist it so his grip loosens. The knife falls with a clank.

"It's okay." I try to comfort him.

"It's not! How is this, and what you monsters do,

any way okay?" He's really sobbing now.

"Shh, now now..." I jump off the shelf, taking little Blue into my arms. "Haven't you ever considered that your sister might want to go?"

"Why would she? She needs me."

"You need her," I correct him, "but you love her, don't you?"

I let him down on the carpeted floor and crouch next to him. He nods. "More than you need her, perhaps?"

He swallows, his eyes wide.

"Then let her stop being in pain."

He closes his eyes, and says with a cracked voice, "Leave me alone. Please."

"Whatever you say, dear. Whatever you say." I step back and let him cry.

A spinning dagger slices through the air, narrowly missing my head, and sticks to the wall behind me. Surely it had cut off some hair. A young girl stands in the hallway. Bright red wings jut out from her back.

"Stay away from him," she rasps. She's crying, too. I smile. What a brilliant girl. "Myra, I've come to take you home."

SERENITY

Sarah Wang, Age 14



CHINATOWN MEMORIES

My first memory of going to Chinatown is from my Chinese school, where I learned Mandarin. My parents sent me to learn Mandarin because they wanted me to be able to communicate with all kinds of Chinese speaking people, not just Cantonese speakers. At Chinese school, my friend Daisy and I would run around in the Chinese Cultural Centre courtyard around the garden and play. I started going to Chinese school when I was around 5 years old with my older brother, and I remember really enjoying my time there. When I think back, I hear other kids running around talking with their friends. I hear faint Mandarin conversations from my teachers at school, and some people on the street walking by. Since then, 10 years later, the way I experience Chinatown has changed. After learning the history of the neighbourhood, my perspective of Chinatown has drastically changed and I realize that there is much more meaning to its origins.

Angela Cao, Age 15

My first memory in Chinatown was going to visit my great grandma at her house where she lived with other elderly people. My brother, grandpa, and I would visit her together. My great grandma was very kind and caring. While we were visiting, she gave my brother and I haw flakes. At this time, I think I was about 5 years old and my brother was 9 years old. I don't remember too much, but we would usually spend a good 30 to 60 minutes playing. My brother and I always enjoyed going there. This memory is something I look back fondly on. I also can't remember where her house is, but if I did, I'd like to see how it looks today and I wonder if it's still there.

Jaedyn Yee, Age 15

My first memory in Chinatown is with my grandma. I didn't go to Chinatown often, but I still cherish the days that I did. My grandma was the typical grandparent who fed you A LOT! So we would stop by bakeries quite often. I would smell the delicious scent of sweet bread and was always enamoured by the plethora of baked goods available. My grandma was a kind woman, so money didn't matter to her and we would always leave the bakery with many boxes. From our tour of Chinatown, I noticed that the bakeries and local grocery stores that used to be here were not there anymore. Not seeing these stores in Chinatown felt similar to losing that key part of my memories with my grandma. The businesses, architecture and food have all changed so drastically since my last visit here.

Carmen Nguyen, Age 15

I wish the future of Chinatown to be a safe space where people of all cultures, ethnicities, and genders are treated equally. However, I would still want to see the authentic Chinese culture here being well preserved and the significant historic stores and nostalgic places remaining here in the future. When I would come to Chinatown with my mom, we would take a moment to appreciate the beautiful variety of flowers and trees as well as the traditional dried food stores, BBQ pork/duck stores, and bakeries; so I hope the City of Vancouver would continue to maintain the history of these places which were and still are staples in the lives of the residents or nearby residents of Chinatown.

Celine Ta, Age 15

REFLECTION

Marian Manapat, Age 16

I found you in the silence
In the hidden twinkle in your eye
You stare up at the vastness of the sky while you
search for
Something
I see that you know it
Like you knew about that new picture of the old
black hole
A blurry mass of darkness and light
Being molded together to make
Silence
You were there, weren't you?

I watched the silence rub its sleep-crust-ed eyes
And yawn
In its mouth was the end of an age and the begin-
ning of an era
In its mouth I found a nebula

Where ribbons and streaks of sun and moonlight
waltzed along your dusty laughter lines
Painting galaxies of purple tears and golden
blood

That's where you were
Sitting in the dusk of an endless night
Clear as day

The volume of your mother's heart and the arms
of your father's love
pulled you together like gravity on earth
Your parents caressed your purple stained face
until your heart formed a core
And your being became a star

Whenever I needed to find you
the compass in the roots of the wind
clasped my waiting hand and led me
The desperate air pulled me and I always, always
found you
But in the new era, the middle of strange millen-
nia, you grew
Suddenly, you were a mass of orange and yellow

and blue
Your mellow whispers evolved into the bellows of
a naive opera singer

I couldn't find you in the midst of thick rings or
hear your voice in a million other dying things

Hey, what happened to silence? Why are you
screaming at your fellow stars?
You don't own the sky
Look at me! I am you. I am your reflection
You have forgotten who you are
You are a star within a system of flames and gas
This orbit is vast but within these galaxies and gal-
axies more massive than the last
You are not the centre of the universe

You are growing too much at unprecedented
speeds
There is way too much pride in your deeds
Your fires are doing flips
It won't be long till you fall into eclipse

And you did, right?

The last time I saw you was in the whisper of light
You were glowing still, but this time
Your light was white
I sensed that something was over
The remnants of a supernova

Your confusion dyed your colours black and your
decisions dug a hole
You engulfed your friends in charcoal flames
And they fled in fear of your toxic waves

In your solitude
The darkness grew

I couldn't find you. I couldn't find me.
How could I find me, if you lost yourself?

You were missing something, and you knew it
So you searched within your own depths and fell
into your blurry mind
You became a mass of darkness and light
Being molded together to make
Silence

The silence whispered its mirror into my fingers
And you stared at your reflection in our hands

You were a vacuum, it appeared
You had dust and life within you

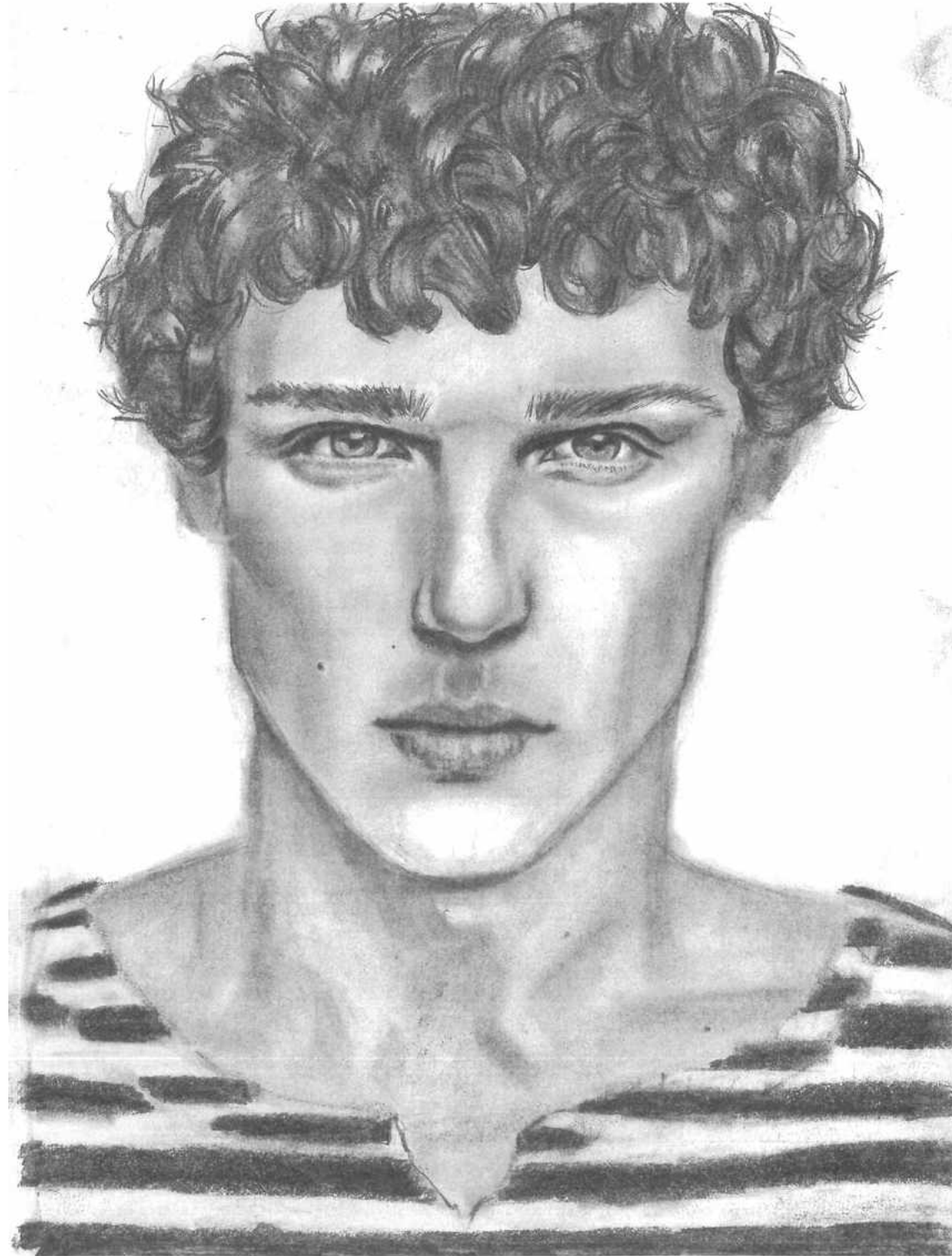
You remembered
That when you yawned
In your mouth
Were streaks of purple tears and golden blood
The whole world and just a speck of dust
All at once

And there you were
I found you
You had lost yourself within yourself
And I found me when silence screamed for help

This is where I am
This is who I am
Sitting at the dusk of an endless night
As clear as day

UNTITLED

Hiba Alodat, Age 17



A PLACE TO BE ME

Fiona Zhang, Age 13

Sound of a whisper
Rustle of a page
Thud of the footsteps
On the carpeted floors

Glint of the binding
Wrinkle of the cover
Clunk of the book
On the silvery shelves

Beep of the scanner
Clicking of the keyboard
Drag of the chairs
On the dry withered carpets

A library
A refuge
A haven
A place to be me

SCINTILLA

Ema Popovic, Age 14

Deep tones of whispered gratitude slip from the darkness of my mouth murmured into a dark green sweatshirt as I held this friend 'til the very last given moment. A confused expression shows on the surface, but this young boy knows what has yet to come. The horror of the darkness I would face later does not show on my character, as fear is the last thing a brave warrior should show to the enemy. In this case the enemy was not a person but rather a series of events plotted to ruin my life. There was a white dress with a very tiny black flower pattern that hung sadly from the back of my bedroom door. Occasionally I'd slip into it and dance to our song in the backyard. Painfully aware of the fugacious feelings, I'd bring up a memory with my friends who would hesitantly decline the conversation. Was I the only one who thought life should be celebrated instead of mourned? Was it wrong to do so? Now it would be bitter black coffee and pure dark chocolate in the morning; the window blinds closed like two lips that had draught such a vexing sinking feel to the bottom of my heart.

We were a picture-perfect example of teenage bliss, but there's a reason nobody else had it: it simply didn't exist. And maybe that's why it's so beautiful to me despite all the bad. Like a flower that bloomed with no water or fertilizer, our love budded from the dirt of nothing. When this city lost everything to the men and women with big capital, the culture fell out. But you and I kept it running like adrenaline in our veins. Everyone saw it, but they'd never seen something like it. There was no chance to intervene and save perhaps what you and I could have been. I found solace and place in our conversations. Comfort that I couldn't find anywhere else throughout the hectic events of my life. I'd wished and hoped that I'd still get to talk to you once you left but it ended up being we would say good bye earlier than I anticipated.

A pretty damsel had also left my sister in woe the same day, returning a talisman sealed with a kiss before her departure. Later that day, my sister and I went to get frozen yogurt then sat on the porch in the sun. She tried to soothe me, telling me everyone chooses their time to leave. I had no tears to shed or space in my head to forgive him for what he had done, not just to myself but to his body. All the stories and laughter had diminished and now it felt like he did not care for what he did. The older girls had an insouciance with throwing their words around to boys. I'm not one to say things I don't quite mean but as I sit in the green meadows of our town, the necklace you gave me still proudly hanging from my neck; I realized I love him. Perhaps I still do. But he either stopped or never did. Then he wouldn't have made the choice. Nevertheless, I continue to smile with pride despite my loss of two dear people. I walk the streets with the scent of young romance and friendship; perhaps let myself cry a river in the exact spot where you had left. A walk by our school would make me remember that when summer ends, I would face heaps of change but I was okay with it since it meant I'd survived. The worst thing would be to forget the ebullience I had experienced with you. We deserved a beautiful denouement to this story, but the story never ends.

POND REVERBERATIONS

Haad Bhutta, Age 15

(1) People gathered in the square,
With limbs –
Arms, legs, and faces,
Flaunting themselves,
Heads jerking,
For the flocking pigeons to see.

(2) Poems,
Of a lullaby,
Like a lullaby,
From a lullaby.

Lullabies,
Of a poem,
Yet not like a poem,
Somewhat form a poem.

Lullabies,
From a mother's tongue,
Poems,
From the hard-wrung,
Lullabies to poems,
As poems to lullabies.

teens



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- Two pieces of writing per person
- Two visual pieces per person - a piece of artwork, a comic *OR* a photograph

Artwork: 8 1/2 inches by 11 inches preferred. Artwork will be printed in black and white except for front and back cover. You may be required to submit your original artwork if your work is selected for publication.

Digital Art: High resolution. Minimum 300 dpi. Black and white artwork only.

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Comics: One 8 1/2 inch by 11 inch page maximum.

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Title of submission: _____

Type of submission:

- Art Comic Fiction Poem Review Other _____

Where did you hear about ink?

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(for program participants aged 18 and under)



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Program Date (MM/DD/YYYY)

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STRANGER

Amanda Yau, Age 15

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