



IMAZINE 2021

VOLUME 11

DELAWARE LIBRARIES' TEEN MAGAZINE

(cover

Present

by Sammi Huang, age 18

Crayon, Watercolor, Black marker, Red ink pen

T M A Z I N E

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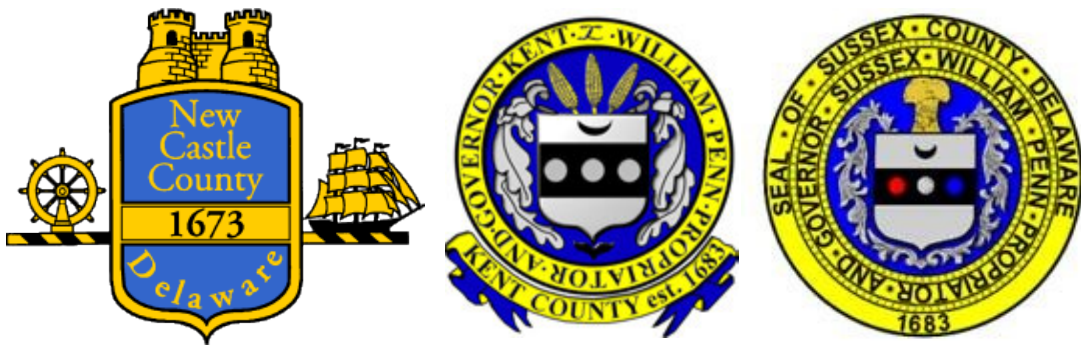
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<http://www.nccde.org/371/IMAZINE> and
delawarelibraries.org/imazine

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DelawareLibraries.org



Judgmental Mind

by Tahira Kiara Ahmed, age 14

I feel like everyone is watching me
I feel like everyone is judging me
Laughing at me
Someone could be telling me terrible things about my outfit
How I look
The way I walk
The way I talk
My culture
My style
My background
My skin colour
My personality
My pronouns
My likes
My dislikes
My hobbies
My emotions
My actions
My opinions
Why am I so paranoid?
Do my friends think about me like this too?
In a few years I probably won't even see these people from my school
But I just can't help it
I don't know if it's just how I was treated before
Or maybe I just have a judgmental mind



(cover)

Who Are You

by F.M., age 15
Digital art & Canva

Different Image

by F.M., age 15

Given a tag,
That's for you,
That's your label.
What is this contract?
What's your name? What's your hobby?
Turn the tables.
No introduction means no facts.

You see my face,
But you don't know me.
Assuming while I'm sitting here quietly.
Describing her would be a riddle to solve.
Do you really know me?

It's your claim.
But where's the source,
Where's the logic?
Am I becoming a clone for them?
Blinded by fiction,
But ready to listen,
What's the gossip?
What's my new status?

You scan me thoroughly,
But still see the outer shell.
Did I not meet your expectations,
Because you couldn't see my inner self?
A different image you want to see
Is not the version I want to be

The confusing society,
Has left me in a whirl.
I seem to be that lost pearl.
Who's stranded now,
But walks by.
Who stops and think,
"Who am I?"

Monster of Society

by Vivian Ladner, age 15

Monsters, such a term to describe imaginary creatures that strike fear within people.

Most monsters are known to be created within books and movies, fiction of course and monsters were originally created to scare their targeted audience, sometimes with gory scenes, or most commonly jump-scares.

These techniques are no doubt detectible, but also install a sense of fear within individuals. This isn't what I would call a monster though, at best an imitation of one. The true monster is found within. Undetectable without a trace, yet still there. No true intention, or purpose, it simply just is.

This particular monster is a nuisance, because it is intelligent, cunning, and manipulative. It is always unsure of its desires and motives. This kind of monster lies, sometimes compulsively, other times effortlessly. The lies go undetected though, due to their host. The host creates a path for this monster in order to survive.

To survive the urges of life, or living within itself. You see, this monster cannot live without its host, and the host cannot live without this monster.

This dependent relationship is the scariest of all.

The relationship between humans and their humanity. Humanity is the ultimate monster of society, and it stays hidden within plain sight.

We cannot see this monster, for it is not visible.

Many might not even know the dangers of it themselves, and still it is programmed into each and every one of us. Many people may argue that things such as social media are the true monsters of society but I beg to differ.

Who creates these media platforms?

Who creates and sets the social standards?

It isn't a question of who, but what, and the answer is humanity. Humanity, which is linked to human nature is what creates these social constructs, and interrelations that society has to offer.

These emotions, attachments, feelings, and sensations all create judgement and perspective. That same perspective changes the reality on a day to day basis. It isn't the media, or these tangible things people should be afraid of, but the people who create them. Many people may be scared of the people who do not have humanity. People that murder, that abuse, that prey upon the innocent, and more.

These monsters really aren't scary, you see they lost humanity, and lack remorse. Individuals with humanity are much worse, they have the power to destroy everything, even when they have everything to lose. This human nature to protect oneself from becoming vulnerable is what should scare people.

Humans will do whatever it takes to protect themselves, or guard themselves if you will, from anything that could hurt them. They will make impulsive decisions in order to protect their emotions. Now going back to the social media topic, we should worry not about the media itself, but again the people behind it.

The people who create beauty standards on the internet, by editing photos, and speaking down on the people who do not meet those standards so they feel better about themselves.

The people who spread false information about politics, in order to persuade society.

The people who manipulate others to stay in toxic relationships, so they aren't left alone.

No matter the choice made, it is to benefit oneself. We tend to do this unknowingly, because under normal circumstances we prioritize our body, and our mind. It's human nature, humanity is selfish.

Humans living every day to fulfil their desires. We kill and test on other lifeforms, and the excuse is to benefit the human race through science.

You see this is funny to me because we also take away our fellow human's rights, and discriminate against our own kind, and the excuse remains the same.

Everything we as humans do out of "human nature" brings us closer to extinction. Doing everything we possibly can to control each other like systematic robots and yet we fight for freedom.

Like I said before, humanity does not have one set motive, or reason, it just is.

Social Media

by Emma K. LaVelle, age 13

Ding.

I hear while doing my homework.

I put down my pencil on my science assignment due the next day, and I grab my heavy phone.

I type my password in only to see a notification from Snapchat.
I open up the picture and observe my friends hanging out together.

"Oh." I think, questioning what they are doing together.

I swipe left to open my map, and there they are.

All their small avatars are planted together on my map.

My face drops.

As I exit the app, my head starts to feel heavy and develop worst-case scenarios.

"Do they not like me?"

"Did I do something wrong?"

"Why wasn't I invited?" I think.

I open my TikTok to see them posting videos of them collectively.

It looks as if it's the best night of their lives. They were playing games, like pool and shuffleboard.

They even have fabulous food, like Chick-Fil-A, my favorite.

I sigh.

I thought that I was finally getting to know them.

I plug my phone into the charger on my nightstand.

I take off my heavy shoes and get in my light, floaty, soft bed.

I turn off my neon lights, and I go to sleep.

In the morning, I go to school and see their friendly faces again.

It was like nothing ever happened.

It was like the night before disappeared.

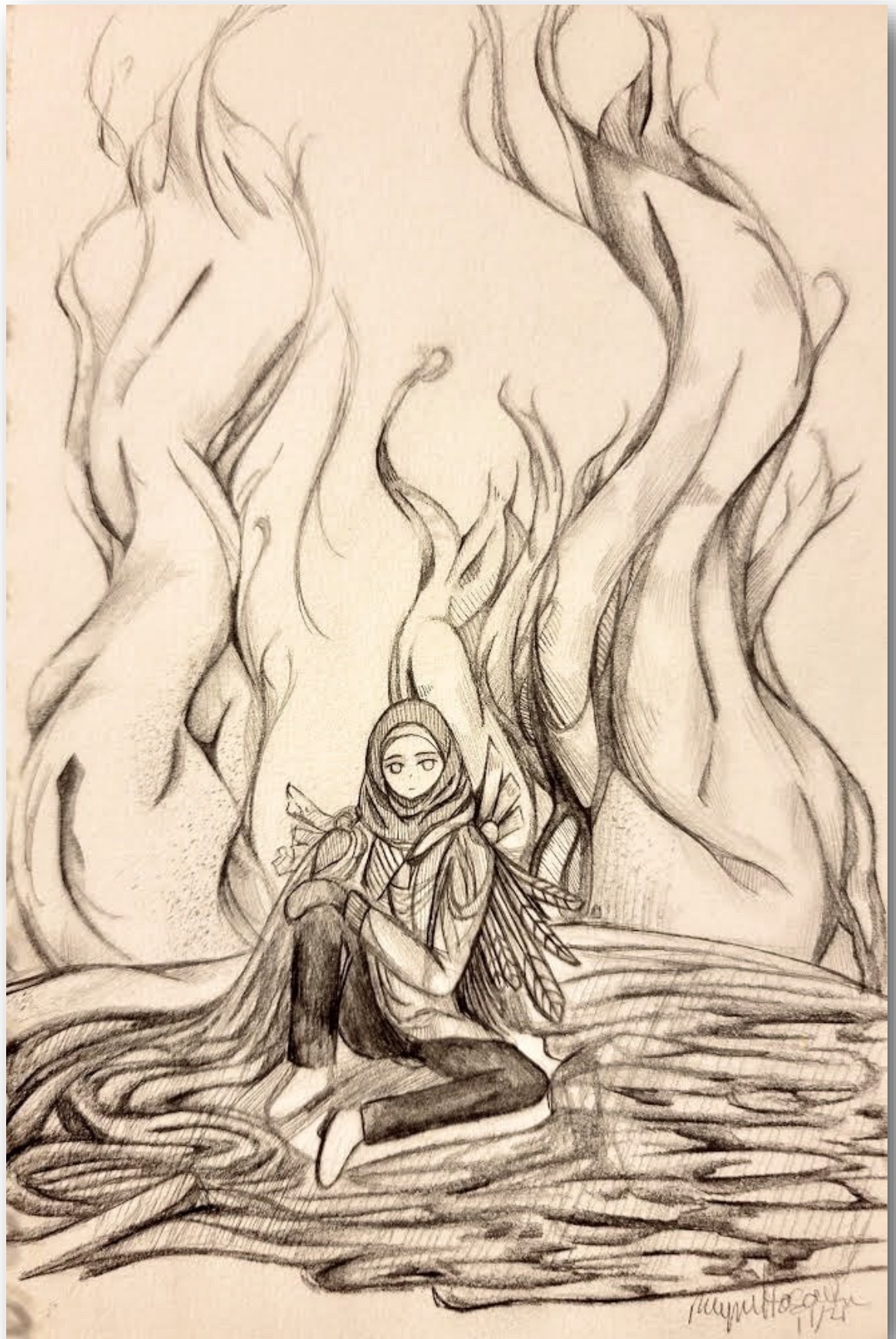
So I let it go.

Only for it to happen again and again.

Only for me to feel those feelings, again and again.

The question, "Do they not like me?" floats around my head daily.

Maybe one day, it will float away.



Sand

by Rayna Hossain, age 14
Ink & Graphite

Our Archaic Love

by Natalie, age 16

Sometimes I just need to be on my own
I can't handle constantly being surrounded
I don't mean to hurt your feelings
I just know you won't like the me I am when I'm tired and need a break
So I make sure you never see it
I pretend I'm happy all the time and love people
When really I hate them, their fake personalities, and popularity competitions
Why even bother dealing with them
I'd rather sit alone
Listening to rock music for the validation of knowing
I'm not the only person who just wants to scream
It's archaic in it's own way
But then again so am I
So are we
To make up for these shortcomings I do things to make you like me
I put on makeup but make it look natural and I dress modestly
The way you like
I'm not completely changing myself
Just making slight alterations to who I am
I need my time away but I also need to make that
up to you
It's not your fault
I'm just like this because I am
I'll understand if you leave but just know I didn't
want you to
I wanted you to stay by my side and keep me from falling apart at least a little
I guess you didn't think you should have to
But what's a relationship where you don't actually care
It's nothing really
Just a void between two people with no real devotion
to each other
We are the definition of broken
And it's not just me
You are broken in your own careless way
You don't deserve my carefully broken pieces
because at least I'm still capable of emotion
Your apathy is the death of us
I might need to take time away but at least I'm there
You never were and you blame that on me because
I'm not like other girls in the worst ways possible
And I refuse to ever stoop to that level even for you
Just grant me the serenity that I will have once you're gone
I don't forgive you but if it'll make you leave then I do
This isn't me just taking my time so that you don't see the worst part of me
This is me accepting that you are the worst part of me
You're not here for me just as I'm not here for me either

I'm starting to think that we're worse than broken
We are shattered and crushed and have been incinerated by the light that other people have
We never had that light
I have tried so hard to make you like me but all you do
is neglect the fact that I love you with everything I am
I do however forgive myself
For allowing you to enter my life
For altering the beautiful person I once was
For wishing away every ounce of happiness I had before you
I'll completely break down without you because of the dependency I've developed
But I will be okay eventually as long as you leave
Is it bad?
Wanting someone you love to leave?
I'm not letting you go, I'm forcing you out of my life because you've ruined me
You don't even know the real me but you ruined her too
I don't understand you
All I did was try and give myself time to collect my feelings and keep myself together and you
took that as a hit to your ego
I didn't do anything wrong
It was you who made me hate myself
You who pushed me away and
You who threatened to hurt me when I tried to leave the first time
What did I ever do to you?
I love you so so much and you repay me with words I never thought I'd hear you say
I left before you could see me cry
That's also why I take time away from you
You've never seen me cry and it's going to stay that way
If you see me and have me when I'm at my most vulnerable state I'll never get out
You're not abusing me at least not in the traditional way
You just aren't what I thought you were because of how much I've changed who I am for you
Now I'm expected to live up to every one of your expectations but unfortunately for me I don't
fit into them all
And that's when I start to change myself more until I'm unrecognizable
I've started taking more and more time because I need it more
As I stray further from myself I break more and more
But at least I still have you even if I no longer want you
All the effort I put in worked I guess
I'm not like other girls in the worst ways possible
But I'm also not like me in all the ways possible
I guess at this point I'm no one anymore because the person I am doesn't exist
She's a figment of my imagination and you love her when she's what you want and I'd leave
me for her but her existence is an illusion that I love
But I love you more
And that's what is going to end me
I'm sorry, Natalie
But you still love him

Baggage Allowance on a [Foreign] Airline

by Zoe Yost, age 18

My brain with its remoras of thought
my cells with their absorbed toxins from the poor
skipjack tuna who became my
dinner. Or maybe, if the foot bath
cleans me enough, I'll only have to say sayonara to the
tiny doughnuts that wander, translucent, across
my vision.

Then there is the food—I don't know
if heaven has cheddar, or Monterey jack. I hope I won't
be reincarnated as a cow. I like dairy, but not that
much.

Perhaps it's silly to ask, but what
if this is all for naught? For all I know, heav'n above
has all those things. I need only take a carry-on.
But how big's the plane? Will my bag fit? I looked
online, but can't find any specs for
Pearly Gates Air. Whom might I ask?

A cat, maybe, a cat might know. They get nine
free trips on that plane. Surely one of them
ought to remember! But would she tell me or just eyeball
her trademark look, How-stupid-are-you?
Cats have a way with words.

Assuming she said, though, what I should pack,
I'd have some choices to make.
I don't need a notebook, for thoughts fly free.
I'd leave the toxins, keep the cheese. Maybe
I'll lose my lactose allergy, like that tangle
of faded receipts that finally escapes your purse
after years. I'd like milk more than.

But still only enough
to drink it.



Rufus

by Kassidy Hale, age 13
Digital photography

untitled

by Aedin McKenna, age 15

I wonder ...

How much you would trade to go back then,
when we were innocent and didn't have them to fight.

To go back then,
when we were trusting,
young and naïve.

To go back then.

When our lives were more than lies and deceit.
When living wasn't just making to the next day, the next hour, the next second.
When living was more than waiting for a day.

A life without hiding,
a life of freedom.

Survival isn't living.

When did our expectations drop?
When did we become this serious?
When did we stop believing?
When did we stop trusting?

We lost each other somewhere along the way when our lone paths entwined for a short period of time.

Our lives had color and magic and fun.
We learned to laugh,
to live,
to love.

We learned that sometimes caring wasn't so bad.

Then, the flames started coming and burning all we held close.
We held on desperately, promising to never leave the other's side,
and that moment will never be forgotten,
as the flames reached towards us and turned to lava.

Drowning us in it and ripping us apart as effortlessly as string cutting through warm clay

The magma turns to rock.
Encasing us in it with nowhere to escape, nowhere to hide.
Suffocating us, allowing us just enough air to remain conscious.
Fully aware of the other in just as much misery, completely unreachable.

The lava heats up again, releasing us, allowing us to build a bridge.
For a brief second, we are alive again.
We are free.
We made it to the end.

Then the lava comes back, jumping at us even higher.

You let out a scream.
Yelling my name over and over.

But, I am paralyzed and can't save you.

The thunder roars as I remain un-trapped.
I reach out to you, but you don't reach back.

You're too tired.
You don't have comfort to sleet anymore.
I jump in and grab your arm.
But the flames steal your face
and lash out at me.

Pulling me under, away from you, forcing me to grab you and take you down.

It is sink or swim, and there's no way out.

You are an empty shell, the fire won.
I swallow the lava and accept my fate.

You died that day, and so did I.

We left and never came back.
Abandoning our positions.
Abandoning our fight.
Abandoning our cause.

But it was worth it,
to see the dawn of a new shining day.

To rise like a phoenix as one
and live (once again)
for a final fight
and ensure a legacy
that will never be forgotten.

Even by time itself.



My Light

by CallMeAnna, age

12

Color pencils

Finding Good in the Bad

by Elisabeth Washington, age 14

Rain pattered my windowsill outside my room. The room was chilly and gloomy. It never really occurred to me to turn on my nightlight since I don't like sitting in the dark, but right now, I really didn't care.

"Why are you sitting on the floor?" my little sister Tessa questioned as she skipped into the room we both shared, "with the lights off!?" She swung herself onto the top bunk and snuggled under the covers.

"Just thinking, that's all." I mumbled while pushing my teal colored glasses closer to my face to keep them from sliding. She rolled her eyes. "You always say that."

No I don't, I thought.

"Girls!" mom shouted from downstairs, "the cupcakes will be done soon so get ready 'cause we're about to go to your cousin's graduation party in a few, okay?"

"Alright!!" Tessa hollered.

I really don't understand why Cassie would still want to have her graduation party during a rainstorm. She could have canceled the party. Tessa interrupted my thoughts.

"Looks as if Cousin Cassie will have to have an indoor party after all. So...why are you so upset?"

"Well, I'm just a little disgruntled that's all," I said.

"Is it anxiety again? 'Cause if it is, remember what the Bible says, about keeping your mind focused on Him?"

Yeah, I guess so... I thought. I looked at my little sister with amazement. Tessa reminds me so much of me when I was her age, with light auburn hair and brown skin. Just then the verse Isaiah 26:3 popped into my mind that I'd learned in Sunday school. *Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee*, I repeated in my head.

"And also," Tessa continued, "try and like, think good thoughts or something exciting," she said. "Like...cupcakes! Can you imagine what they might taste like?"

I knew that my sister was trying to cheer me up and it was helping. I smiled a little.

Tessa's brown eyes sparkled with delight. "And all those colorful little sprinkles!" "It reminds me of a rainbow!"

"It sure does!" I say. Then Tessa climbed back down our bunk and scooted next to me. She reached out and coiled her finger around one of my black curls.

“Stop worrying sis. Have fun this evening?” she pleaded.

A few minutes later, the soon darkening sky turned into a pastel shade of bluish-gray.

“OOO! Look!” Tessa squealed. She pointed her finger out our bedroom window, to a picture perfect rainbow, that had spread across the sky. “What a coincidence! I just was talking about rainbows too.”

She scooted closer to the window for a better look. *Tessa's right*, I thought, *why am I so worried anyway*. Then it hit me. The rest of the verse came to mind. *Whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee?*

As I joined my sister at the window, I knew for sure this time that God's promise to never leave me was true. All I had to do was trust.



Unity

by Christina Law, age 16
Acrylic

Out of Reach

by anonymous, age 17

holes
in the sky
portals of light
just out of reach
leaving us only to dream
of what lies
on the other side
these are the lights
at the end of a tunnel
so big
that we forget we are in it

grains
of cosmic sand
become symbols
of hope
in an infinite
black sky
as waves
of nothing
consume
the lost souls

there is something there
there is something somewhere
when the night is dark
there is a reason we stare
at stars



Creative Protest

by Leandra Brutus, age 15
Digital photography

Do You Hear us?

by A'Zir Carey, age 14

Do you hear us when we protest with peace
Or do you hear us when we rampage the streets
Does it bother you that we educate, and elevate
Or do you like it when we sit around while you sit in your office making unjust laws and corrupt the system that we live in
And that's the thing
They don't have to live in our system
So they don't understand the struggle
Do you hear me
Does it have to take violence to be heard
Should we have to?
Should anyone have to?
Do you hear me?
Do you see me?
Or should I say do you FEEL US?
Because as I walk down the streets as a young black man with a goal and Ambition running through my veins
I am representing my people and the light that we bring,
The glowing rays of pure greatness coming from our skin as we elevate and conquer. I have asked lots of questions but the only real answer to it all is that it needs to stop, there needs to be peace and reconciliation.
Do you see that?
Do you feel that?

Just (us)

by Jazmyn Davis, age 19

Justice does not always mean equality. In a 1963 interview, Malcolm X goes on to describe justice as "If you do wrong, then you get wrong in return and if you do right, you get right in return.". Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. approached the 60s Civil Rights Movement with the thought of equality as everyone is given the same opportunities as their counterparts. He later went on to expand on his opinion of genuine equality in a speech at Stanford given in 1967:

"But we must see that the struggle today is much more difficult. It's more difficult today because we are struggling now for genuine equality. And it's much easier to integrate a lunch counter than it is to guarantee a livable income and a good, solid job. It's much easier to guarantee the right to vote than it is to guarantee the right to live in sanitary, decent housing conditions. It is much easier to integrate a public park than it is to make genuine, quality, integrated education a reality. And so today, we are struggling for something which says we demand genuine equality." (Stanford University)

As history explains both activists later succumbed to gunshot wounds, Malcolm in 1965 and King in 1968. Who was given justice? Was it the assassins and those who stood by them, or was it those that followed the Civil Rights movement? There's a high chance that the people who disagreed with the Civil Rights movement would say that justice was served when the faces of the movement were killed. Where would equality fit within this discussion of justice? If we were to look at the division between opinions, would equality mean the bullets' success or would that balance exist because the bullet ceased to? Therefore, equality is a difficult term to solely define. According to Google, equality is "The state of being equal, especially in status, rights, and opportunities.". However, whose status, rights, and opportunities are being held as the standard for others? Could the standard be just that because of societal expectations? If so then how did they evolve to be the space between equality and justice? Up until this point, I have asked a total of seven questions without having a definite answer to any of them. I believe the relationship between equality and justice consists of a multitude of puzzles with no foreseeable solution. To create a solution, the world would have to agree on how we define equality and justice and decide whose standards we are using as a model for others to follow. As a nation, we do not question the damage an "unjust" society could cause let alone an "unequal" one. These consequences are ones I know too well and most are not yet being recognized. The societal meaning of equality does not hold me, a 19-year-old lower-class Black girl, within its definition. The difference between my personal relationship with equality and justice and a definition-holder is the grim reaper's bullet.

Equality to me is not a grand breakthrough. It is to me like the air I breathe. Crisp and cool, but if I were to take in too much the world will have no problem pulling my plug. Equality to me is not being followed around the store. Equality is not getting dirty looks from people who think my skin looks dirtier. Equality is being able to contact our nation's form of justice and know that it will not be my last phone call. Equality is when I can no longer expect justice to not be served. Connecting the dots between equality and justice is complex, which could be the reason why no one has tried to relate them yet. My view of equality and justice is completely different from my neighbor's and so forth. However, confronting the red string of fate between the two nouns could be a start to not agreeing with your neighbors' views but respecting them as they are.



Civil Blood Makes Civil Hands Unclean

by Sadie Polk, age 14
Acrylic on canvas

Old Rock Creek

by Amber Gray, age 18

Down by Old Rock Creek there lies a cottage. In that cottage a man rests his head every night at 8 PM. He had a wife for some time, but she couldn't bear the isolation, or him, so she left. He was alone. Except for his clocks. In every room of that house he had a clock, decorated in all different styles and colors. From Grandfather Pendulum Clocks to Gear Based Wall Clocks he had more clocks than anybody could imagine.

Every Sunday he rose out of bed two hours early, and set each clock back to the equal times they were in. For years he had been using his wristwatch as the standard clock in his home. And so it went. At 4 o'clock on Sunday morning he began the tedious task of setting each clock back to the time that was on his watch. When he was finished, he would go about his day, admiring the fact that his clocks were all set to the exact day, hour, minute, and second.

By the time he had reached his old age, he only went out to the store every few months, at most. He grew every vegetable in his garden he possibly needed. He had saved up years and years of grain, and had dairy and meat items dropped on his doorstep twice weekly by his friends at Crest Valley Farm and Marley Mill Butcher. It was a lonesome life, but, at least he always had the right time.

One winter morning he had realized he was out of canned tomatoes. The growing season had been fairly poor, so he didn't get enough jarred for the winter. He determined that it would be best to head out as soon as possible to grab some of these tomatoes, even though store quality was never as good as his homemade quality. He also hoped to purchase a few smaller things like wood glue and wood tacks at the hardware store, for an upcoming spring project.

So he got his things, gathered himself into his truck, and turned the ignition. The car wouldn't start. The only signs that it had ever worked was the black smoke sputtering out of the engine and exhaust. He popped the hood. Nothing seemed wrong, so he opened the gas valve. When he did so, nothing seemed to be in there. He shined a light, and sure enough, there was nothing. He was puzzled. "Surely I filled this damn thing up only a few weeks ago!" he thought. Nonetheless he grabbed a can from the garage, it was the last one with any gas.

On the way to the store he was puzzled at how much the road had changed since the fall, when he last headed out. New buildings were all over. The road had a fancy new coat of paint, and less potholes. When he arrived at the store he was estranged from reality. Something was afoot. He knew it. How long had he really been at home? He checked his watch, the beacon of hope in this confusing world. Sure enough, it had only been four months since he last went out. What could be wrong then? Why did he feel so uneasy?

He walked into the store. He saw all sorts of new items, new produce that he hadn't seen at this grocery store at this time of year. He grabbed his tomatoes, noting the gross price gouging on them. "\$4.50 for a can of these? Last time I was here they were \$2.15!" he thought. Disgruntled, he approached the cashier. The young man was someone he surely recognized. He had to have known him. The boy scanned the tomatoes, and as he bagged the man's groceries the boy said to him, "[Mr](#) . Ludendorf, it's been so long since I last saw you! I barely recognized you! How are you?" The man stood, puzzled. "I-I'm sorry but do I know you?" he asked. "Know me? You practically taught me everything I know

back when you taught History at Foster Elementary. It's me, Robbie Arlington!" the boy said. "R-Robbie? That can't be. That can't possibly be! Your class was the last I taught, three years ago, and you were in fourth grade! That can't possibly be! What the hell is going on?!" Mr. Ludendorf was beginning to scare the customers in line. "Sir, you retired ten years ago. I'm nineteen now. I work here during the summers and winter break when I'm not at [college](#) . Are you okay Mr. Ludendorf?"

Mr. Ludendorf left with his tomatoes. He was shocked. Once again he checked his watch. January 22, 2014. That boy couldn't be Robbie Arlington, Robbie would be in the seventh grade by now. Unless? Had he been living a farce for seven years? Had time passed him by, slowly making his clock setting more and more inaccurate, slowly driving him towards insanity through cabin fever. "But the seasons? They surely haven't changed 28 times!" But then Ludendorf had lived a life with his curtains drawn for much of the year. He was only ever outside when it was warm, and in the part of the country he lived, that was only a few months in the year.

As he walked out of the store, he saw a newspaper. The date read, January 22, 2021. The boy was Robbie Arlington. Mr. Ludendorf had, essentially, left the world completely behind for seven years. He missed two presidential elections, if the country still had those! What had he done? His isolation drove him to believe that he was correct on his clocks, but without civilization or the real world to tether him to reality, he drifted. Drifted seven years into the future.

As he drove back to his home, he thought about the world around him. How it changed so much in that time, how much *he* had changed in that time. He arrived at his doorstep, and as he did, those seven years caught up with him. He felt his limbs weaken, his mind tired, his steps grew slower, his voice became more weary, his hair fell out of his head around him, and as he made it to his bed, his heart stopped beating. His brain stopped thinking. His lungs stopped taking in air. As he turned off the lights for the last time, he uttered, slowly, almost unintelligible, "Oh world, you cruel, cruel thing."



Disaster's Beauties

by Nicky Saitz, age 13
Digital photography

In Her Mind

by Oluwadamilola Oguntuyo, age 18

Unimaginable darkness
In the darkest night.
You can see the fear in her eyes through the moonlight;
Afraid of the night is a black girl,
Who only has ever dreamt about the word freedom.

On a good day bound by shackles, but on a bad day--Oh! So unimaginable.
To be sensible is so impossible, for Freedom they say is unattainable.
And they whip her when she begs for food.
The sign of their hate tattooed on her skin reads Failure,
Disgrace, Slave, Worthless.

What else do they want?
Broken beyond repair is what they see;
but a survivor she will always be.
She waits for the day she will strike because then she will arise.
She Laughs as they whip her; repeatedly but still she laughs.

They say she's insane for laughing.
What else was left to do?
She thinks and has made up her mind: 'NO MORE TEARS.'
They tell her that her ancestors were slaves and slaves they truly were.
HAHA!!!.

She laughs with a dazed look in her eyes as she tries to remember
life outside this hell she was put into.
She tries to be positive saying she will escape,
but she simply was through.
How can one escape her mind?
Death!!! She hears and knows that all is ...

A Tower View

by Sebastian Trainer Oneill, age 17

Lightning flashed across quivering skies. In response, thunder growled and echoed across the twilight. Below the clouds, waves pounded against a black cliff face in an endless, repetitive rhythm. Atop these cliffs, a slate-grey tower rising forcefully against an unwilling horizon. This tower was as slick and treacherous as the rocks it stood on, and the main shaft of its mass was speckled with clusters of barnacles, algae, and other such blights the sea provides unto her neighbors. From its summit, a beam of light cast glances across the ocean. Try as it might, she could not recede from vision; her secrets exposed by a callous and uncaring eye. Lightning struck again, glancing off the tower. The light dimmed, went out completely, and then returned with even more brilliance. The ocean's currents twitched in refusal, yet no heed was paid to her discomfort...

With some time the early light of dawn passed through the clouds, and as the sun rose the tower's light had no choice but to diminish. The ocean was granted temporary reprieve. Yet, it would not last. The tower was diligent in its vigil; its whims would be thrust upon her when next the skies darkened, and there is simply nothing to be done about it.



Untitled

by Janice Avevor, age

14

Pen, Pencil, Markers

Non Believers

by Nicky Saitz, age 13

I used to live at my moms and dads 50/50
Until my Step-Dad did something shifty
He started acting really mean
Worse then the worstest fiend
Yelling over things that were petty
Like the kids touching his spaghetti
He grabs, he slaps, he yells, he shoves
Does he even know the meaning of love
I told my mom she didn't believe me
Neither did her whole family
I told my Dad and Step-Mom and they're trying to help
But all my mom's doing is buying me stuff on Yelp
My dad's side of the family believes me so I know I'm not crazy
I told my mom I'm moving out
But she doesn't believe I am going to and it makes me want to shout
My mom thinks she can take the easy way
But that will not make me want to stay
I would tell you more whether you were a he or she
But you would not believe Me

Time to Believe

by Nicky Saitz, age 13

Come on down to reality
Take a look around there is lots to see
But mind all of your findings
You might find all the hindering binding
If you feeling scared don't block it out
Or you won't even know what it is all about
One by one you make even more sins
The easy way is not an option
And you ... you could set us free
But you ... you have to believe
It's time to believe in the broken family
It's time to believe in what you can't see
It's time to believe that you married an evil monster and it's not just affecting you
It's time to believe in the deep dark truth
It's time to believe in my trauma from my youth
Whether or not you want to make a choice, you're going to have to make it now
It's a surprise what the darkness does bring
So light it up by taking off that ring
I am going to need protection
From all your misdirection
You're choosing your husband over me
So that mean you blind to see
That nothing about this feels right
Trying so save it with all my might



Colorful Abstract

by Paige Williams, age 18
Markers

In the Kiddy Pool, c. 2007

by Zoe Yost, age 18

I wish I had been with my mom.

My little purple suit was measly protection—
I needed one for my face.

It would be nothing to me now, if not for the memory.
I am tall; the water is shorter than my legs.
I might as well be a mountain.

What a strange way to begin a lifetime acquaintance with a friend I'd always known, as a threat to the bonds in my H₂O-based cells. I have never been a great swimmer, maybe because I refused to step in again for years. Maybe, also, because I'm a rock. Yosts are rocks.

I wish my mom had been there. She could have done it so much better. Was I the only one scared, unwilling? I could never read the little girls in gymnastics class either. Anyhow, I was too distracted.

I remember the teacher as young, unfriendly. Maybe I was confusing her with the water. It goads me, feeling stupid and small, and she shrank me to the scope of her will. Or maybe it was I. Time won't tell.

A child's memory is strong like Kevlar, but bendable like it too. It's also two-dimensional. My thoughts had not yet expanded to include the third dimension—layers of people beyond my planar vision—though I remember quite well the toxic water in my sinuses, scalding every Z coordinate. What a peculiar taste! The flavor of asthma, and warm like a petri dish welcoming me home to the primordial soup, only to maul my cell membrane, pulverize my proteins.

The water's sterile infection desires my life, like it does my microscopic cousins', but I'm too big. Only by entering one of three doors can it breach my blood-organ fortress. It seeks the doors every time, but now I know the parley: give it air, then escape while it goes to report.

I did not know then. Only a brute pushes a four-year-old's head underwater, and holds it there against her will.

The world is full of brutes.



Untitled

by Dorian A., age 17
Digital photography

I Felt Everything

by Sindhu Sivasankar, age 16

She was alone. That fact hadn't bothered her as much as it should have.

A strong wind pushed at her and she stumbled, letting herself fall to her knees. Sand. There was sand beneath her. She shivered to herself and looked straight ahead. There was a large sea, dark and murky in color. The sky, what color was that? She didn't want to know, so she didn't look up.

She picked up a handful of the hard crystals of sand and let them run through her cold fingers.

She shifted a bit, wincing as the particles pressed against her bare knees.

She squinted, focusing on the ocean. It was high tide. The giant waves crashed harshly on the silky shore. *Thump. Thump.* She flinched as the waves came and put her hand on her chest. *The ocean, she thought. It's my heartbeat.* She felt her stomach drop. Emotions flooded into her body, moving in and out of her, until she was almost numb to its pain. Almost.

Her hand curled into a fist. A tear dropped from her eye. She touched it, confused. *What am I doing here? Why am I crying? What am I-*

She gasped, suddenly, and clutched her chest. *My heart...it hurts.* She gripped her sweater anxiously and closed her eyes. The water had somehow traveled to where she was — or was she the one who had moved?

I want to scream, she abruptly thought. But she knew if she opened her mouth, nothing would come out, because she wasn't alone on this beach. There were eyes, always watching her from the sky. But they can't see this, she realized. *They can't see any of this. All they see is me.*

She glanced down at herself. She was still wearing her school uniform and sneakers. She touched her cheeks, her nose, her lips, and hair. All of it was there. Nothing had changed. *But why do I see this?* she wondered. *Why can't I see what everyone else is seeing? What are they seeing? Are they seeing worse than this? Better? Am I being too optimistic? Pessimistic? Idealistic? Realistic?*

The ocean brought cold, slimy seaweed that tangled themselves around her feet. Her eyes went wild with panic, and she hurriedly tried to detach herself. *Calm down,* she told herself. *This doesn't exist. These overwhelming feelings shouldn't exist.* But the ocean kept bringing the seaweed back, again and again. It was the same slimy strips, being discarded in the ocean just to return to her.

She stopped resisting.

Helpless, she grabbed a clump of the mud-like sand. It slipped through her fingers and back onto the shore. She then stared at the ocean, marveling at it. *It's...it's ugly.* she admitted, staring at the black water. *It's disgusting. Not beautiful at all. And it feels...* She placed a hand on her heart.

Ugly. Her grip tightened. *I feel ugly.*

Water circled around her, almost up to her neck. A part of her wished to disentangle the seaweed and run away, but she didn't need to. As if she willed it, the seaweed let her go. She floated into the ocean like a lifeless corpse.

She drifted farther, far away from the beach. Even so, she knew the stars still stared down at her. She shivered at the thought. Instead of meeting their eyes, she glanced down. *The water's extremely deep, she realized. It's even darker than it is here, in the shallow end. She stared at it more.*

The deeper end of the ocean was a scary place. She knew that she shouldn't ever think of going down there. Then again, most people didn't even leave the beach, and here she was, willingly drifting in the ocean.

She couldn't help herself.

What's it like down there? she wondered. Is it better? I won't feel the wind down there. My eyes will close, so I won't see the ugly water. I won't hear the waves crash or have seaweed on my feet. And the stars won't reach me. She smiled to herself. They can't see me.

She stopped floating and plummeted.

No! She panicked, desperately struggling. I don't want this! But she continued to sink against her will — or was it her will that was causing it?

She sobbed to herself. Even her tears were helpless to the sea. She thought that crying was supposed to “help her move on,” but they were simply adding more water to the ocean.

She got what she wanted. She heard nothing. She felt nothing. The eyes could no longer stare at her. *But they guided me, she thought. I hate and fear them, but they still guide me. And now I'm lost...drowning...*

Why am I here? she suddenly wondered. Why did I bring myself here? It's because...I made a mistake, didn't I? It's my fault, my flaws that caused it. But my intentions were so innocent. Justice and truth are so unlike each other, she thought bitterly. Why can't I do the right thing?

Do I deserve to be here? Do the stars in the sky want me to drown in this ocean? Is this justice? Am I a criminal? A wave of humility washed over her as she remembered her past mistakes. The scenes replayed in her mind against her will. After that, the stars in the sky won't ever see me in the same way again. Not even the ones closest to me. Maybe this is justice. She closed her eyes painfully. Well, I wouldn't know either way. I can't ask them. They're so far away... so much higher than me. So much safer than me, protected in their little clusters.

They're another world away from me.

“Hey! Hey!”

She turned toward the noise, and just like that, her ocean was gone, and she saw what everyone else was seeing.

“I've never seen someone stare at their water bottle so intensely. Come on, let's go to class.”

She tentatively smiled at her friend and nodded. “Yeah. I'm coming.” *That's right, she reassured herself. None of that was real. The ocean didn't exist. I wasn't drowning. I was just being overdramatic.*

A tear dropped from her eye. She touched it, confused.

So why did I feel everything?

Benjamin



The Writing Spider

by Benjamin Griffith, age 13
Color pencils

The Word

by N.G. Fletcher, age 13

They were laughing. They were all laughing while I sat, miserably in the sorrowful room. I let what my classmate said ring through my ears, ending up as heavy storm clouds in my mind. Over and over my classmate repeated one word, one painful word. It felt like a stab of lightning to my head every single time the word was repeated. Cold tears started forming in my soulful eyes, then they fell like rain pouring harshly. More and more uncontrollable tears came, they wouldn't stop. Lights were flashing between each tear blinding me. Rumbles of thunder became what I heard. Like a child frozen in fear from the loud roars I was shaking. All I could do was weep nonstop. The rain continued pouring harder and harder. Like a tempest my emotions were scattered. I looked for shelter with no luck. Finally the teacher noticed. I was sent to sit outside in an empty hallway. There was nobody surrounding me, nobody laughing at me and nobody making fun of me. The horrifying rumbles were gone. The bright flashing lights were no longer blinding me. I was finally alone in the silence of the open hallway. Blissfully I took my breaths, closed my eyes and calmed down. My tears were gone. My eyes were swollen from crying. The silence brought me the shelter I desperately searched for. It helped me think and clear away the painful storm clouds. It was peaceful. My classmate soon came out, turned to me and asked, "Why are you crying?" I then felt one last stab of lightning.

The Well

by Jack F. Cunningham, age 14

It was a rainy cold night in the middle of September, where you feel the luckiest when you have a nice warm bed and a warm hearty dinner. Unfortunately, Jasper was not as lucky. His mother died when she was giving birth to her only son and soon after, his dad left him for a new family after he was born. Jasper was left by the farm well on that night. Without kind and loving parents he quickly became resentful and malicious towards everyone. He was shunned from the town for stealing from the market vendors and quickly became the center of all gossip. All Jasper had left was the barn pigeons who did not care about how he treated other people but how he treated the flock.

Soon after he finished his daily rounds of shoplifting, he spotted the girl, a baker's daughter with dark complexion but light, silk-like hair.

No sooner was he quickly snapped out of it.

"Hey, where did you get these oranges?" Demanded the constable.

Jasper had been through this once before.

"I got them from the market vendor; he throws out all the old and nearly rotten fruit." Jasper had been through this once before, but little did the constable know that these were the best and the most bountiful oranges, three dollars a pound.

Her name was Sophie; with stunning looks she was hard to miss and was the talk of the village but in a good way. Jasper had a crush on the girl but he was too arrogant to talk to her.

"I deserve someone even better, exclaimed Jasper on his way to the back of the barn where he shoved together a ramshackle house out of discarded pallets and old feed sacks. One day, he finally was bothered enough by her lack of attention to ask her.

"Hello," boomed Jasper boldly.

She paid him no attention because he was dressed in rags and had conversations with the dirty pigeons. This made Jasper quickly annoyed because he could not have her and he could think of no reason for her to not love him, so he tried again.

"Hello.'" Now with a more irritable tone. Again, all she gave him was a bothered glare.

He turned to the pigeons for counseling. The all white one stained red and brown from digging and swiping the pauper's beets suggested that Jasper should just talk to her. He quickly became frustrated because this was not what he was thinking. Another pigeon chimed in, this time it was a completely dark brown racing pigeon with a torn foot, the result of a narrow escape from a feral cat attack.

I think that we should kidnap the girl. As the brown one avowed. The white one ruffled its feathers in disapproval.

What do we have to lose? Churlishly questioned the charred hazelnut one.

What do you think they will do, evict us? He commented again.

As he hovered over the palletted citadel it began to drizzle which then turned to marble sized droplets that sent a chill down your spine whenever they seemed to find you. Jasper quickly hurried under the dilapidated structure and the pigeons flew into the rafter of the barn looking for cover.

As he scurried under the roof with the rain seeping through the seams of the feed sacks and in the slits of the pallets, he began to wonder if kidnapping the girl really was the best option.

The cold dew and the aggressive sun woke him out of his sleep. Tired and hungry, he cut through the cow pasture, went around the barn, the wet grass sticking to his feet like prisoners wanting to escape, he arrived at the market with the pigeons not far behind. In the morning, he decided that today would be the day. As he was scanning the myriad piles of potatoes and radishes, he spotted her.

Just go up and tell her how you feel. Chimed in the white one, ruffled from being waking up earlier than she is used to.

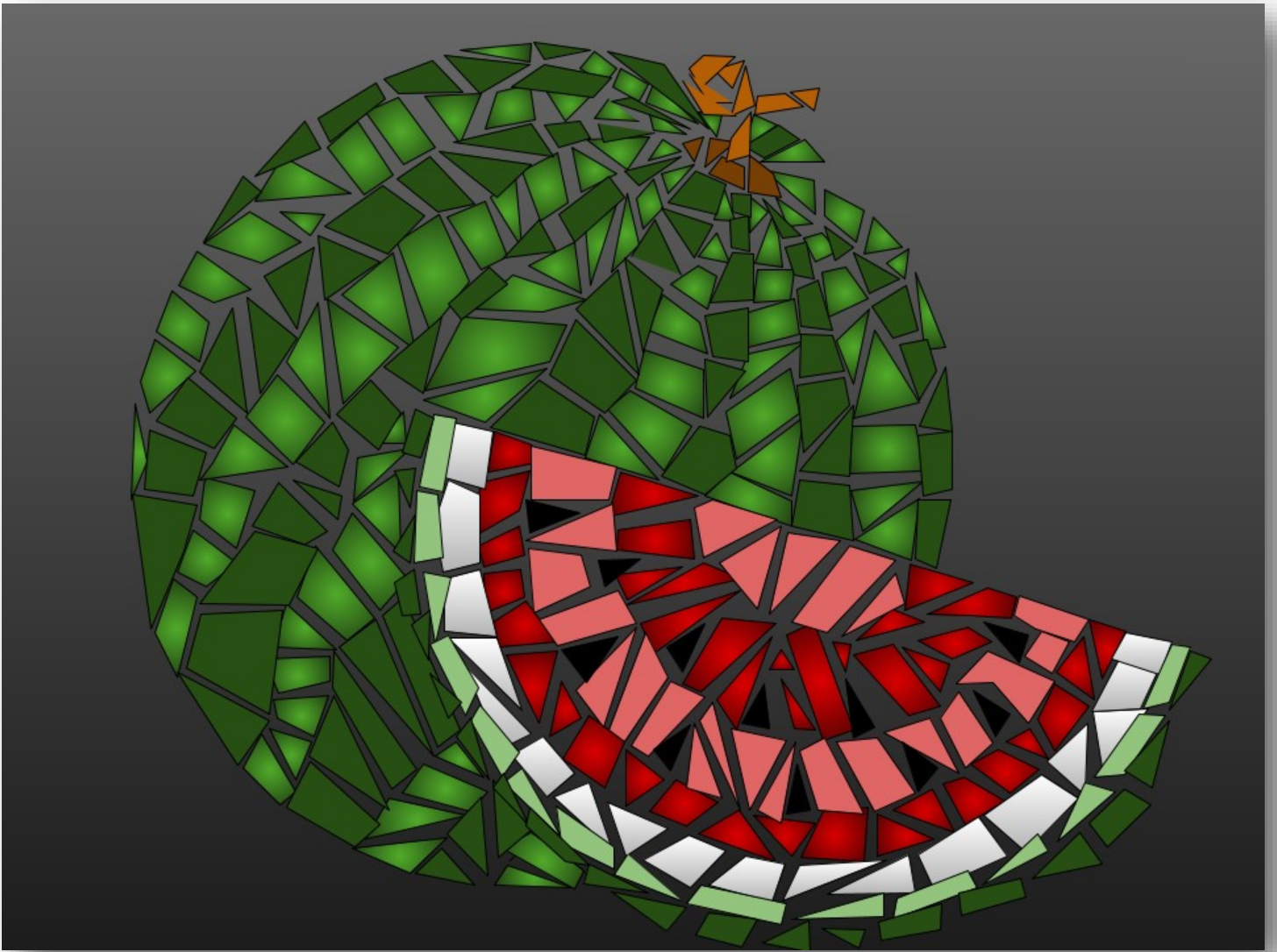
Why would you do that? She will just reject you again. Without fail, the pessimistic one responded.

In the morning, he scoped out the market looking to find a way through the stalls. Underneath the root vegetable stall, he spotted a board missing from the base of the stand, that would be his way through. In the evening, right before the day's market was closing, he ducked into the stall and stared obliquely at the young girl who was now watching the stall while her dad packed up the wagon and hitched up the donkeys to head home. Peering and watching, waiting for just the right moment. At just the right moment, he jumped out. Grabbing her by her apron and forcing a piece of old cloth around her mouth and eyes so that she could not call for her father. As he gave himself plaudits for being so sly he tried to refocus himself.

That's my boy, the brown pigeon remarked.

Although Jasper was waiting for a respectable answer from the other bird, he realized she was nowhere to be found. With much struggling he got the young girl home but he had no place to put her. So he decided that the farmer's well would be the best place for her to reside until the next morning. As the rain picked up again, it was a little colder than it was last night but Jasper paid less attention to the fact than the white pigeon. After Jasper awoke in the morning, he went to check on the girl but once he peered down the dark void all he could see was a lifeless body curled up on the right side against the stone wall. As the leaves whirled around the body like small gladiators in the Colosseum, a gust picked up her silk like hair and revealed a deep purple face that was once a beautiful tan and her eyes were bloodshot. What happened to Jasper next was strangely odd, he did not feel any sense of guilt or remorse. As he strolled away, he turned toward the opposite direction into the forest instead of his morning rounds at the market stealing the best oranges.

That's my boy. Murmured the devilish brown one with feet like one of a serpent's.



Juicy Mandala Watermelon

by Sovajra Vickerie, age 16
Digital art



Nature's Ornaments

by Christina Law, age 16
Digital photography

The Garden Lover

by Rachal Woodland, age 15

Here it is...another day that I remove myself from society and let all of my emotions go in this garden. Hmm, why am I in a garden you ask? This is my favorite comfort spot in the entire world. Without this spot, I would feel like I'm not meant to be here at all. This garden is the main key to the reason of why I'm still living.

"Ah, so quiet and breezy...just as I like it." I smile up at the bright blue and white sky as I lay in the garden with tall flowers and soft grass. It's hard for anyone to see me since I'm laying down and the grass and flowers are blocking anyone's view.

I don't have any friends. I'm just a loner I guess. I'm a very introverted person. I like it when I'm alone but at the same time I feel empty when I am. It's as if I'm missing something.

I continued to lay in the grass until it got dark. Then I got up and walked home like usual. My house was not very far from the garden but that's only because my house is in the middle of nowhere. I found that garden a couple of years before I moved here.

I live in a somewhat large house, it may look broken and torn apart on the outside but it is gorgeous and smells wonderful on the inside. I only make it look scary to scare people away. I do not like anyone invading my privacy.

"Did you hear about the house in the middle of nowhere in Gangnam?"

"Yeah, I heard it's scary."

"Yeah, it was on the paper this morning, apparently a scary old lady that practices witchery lives there."

"Remind me to never go."

"Same" the girls chuckled as they continued to talk about my house. I continued to wander around the mall in my hat, sunglasses and my long black dress.

I am not an old lady, I do not practice witchery, but I do live there. I am that woman they are talking about but I'm not what they see me as. I'm only a 19 year old girl from the city that has been through too much. I wished to be alone and here I am.

"People only judge from the outside, but the inside is completely different."

I got a couple dresses, oversized sweaters, and some light shoes from the mall. Once I purchased them, I left.

I don't really like heels, they're too exaggerated and tall. I'd rather wear comfortable shoes like sandals or boots.

When I got back home, I unlocked my door and set everything down. I put everything up and went to the kitchen to make myself dinner.

I made a fruit salad with green tea and pocky's. When I was finished eating, I washed my hands, changed into my nightgown, and laid down on the bed.

A waterbed makes me feel like I am floating in the ocean. I can hear the water in the bed swish around as I sleep. It's so comforting; not as comforting as the garden but it's close enough.

"Goodnight, my beautiful Garden." I smile to myself and slowly fall asleep.



The Orchid and the Hummingbird

by Christina Law, age 16
Acrylic

The Song the Forest Sings

Brayden Hauser, age 12

There's no song sweeter than the song the forest sings
There's no place nicer than the air the forest brings
There's no place more placid than the fireflies at night
There's no spot more splendid than the staring at the stars so bright

There's no sweet serenading symphony sweeter than the wind
There's no escape more enticing than Mother Nature's kin
There's no melodic voice more softer than the call of the wild
There was no better moment than the way the sun smiled

There's no better battle than the crimson blood blazing towards the blades of grass
There's no better band than the belligerent war of the rapids and the bass

There's no orchestra more orchestrated than the rumbling of a spitting storm
There's no ballad better than the breeze blowing to perform
There's no carol more candid than the canticle of the howling moon
There's no lullaby more lulling than the lyrics to the bullfrogs tune

There's no chorus more enchanting than the chant of the crickets caressing the silence of
midnight
There's no psalm more poetic than the pollinating petunias in daylight
There's no tune more timely than the fall of water and what it brings
There's no song sweeter than the song the forest sings



Untitled

by Amira Sandiford, age 18
Digital photography



Parrot

by Chuiyee Kong, age 14
Color pencil & Pencil



Llama

by Kaelin Brannick, age 13
Oil Pastels

The Sun and Stars

by Jazmyn Davis, age 19

Love is not something we seek
But, something that is already within us
I'd be lying if I said it does not feel like
I'm only touching the surface of Pandora's box
Like I'll never feel the luxury of seeing what's inside
Sitting beside myself, with a cloud hanging above
Hoping a white dove will pass me by
To feel as if I'm living inside a fairytale
A pure fable that I can recite to my inner child
A wasted fulfillment to be someone's moon and stars
A galaxy that can light up their darkest night
To feel something besides a waste of dust leaping from the sky
Maybe love is about waiting
Maybe, life is about waiting
Waiting for the right moment
Waiting for everything to fall into place
Waiting to be released from a prison
A noxious confinement disguised as a peaceful home
The taunting of looking through the window and spotting a white picket fence
seeing someone else's dreams and desires
Gawking at the sunflower across the road in a circadian rhythm
The golden sun-kissed petals fluttering freely
As the wind rakes through
The core turned towards the sunlight
Towards hope
Towards what I expect my future to be
Maybe one day I can become as vibrant and carefree as the flower I see
Instead of living life as a monochrome sea
Each wave bringing a new stress and anxiety
Maybe one day the bitterness of my salt will become as sweet as the plant I envy
Try to force myself into the template I believe was made for aspiring flowers
The framework I have been told to believe are for the budding blossoms
To push and push and push
Until that mold is filled to the brim with my water
Sloshing over the sides
With the reoccurring thought of
Haven't I done enough?
Haven't I sacrificed enough of myself?
Maybe, I will not become a sunflower
But I will build a door to go out and coincide with it
One day.



Kassidy with Flowers in Her Hair

by James A. Johnson, age 12
Digital photography



Belonging to Nature

by Sindhu Sivasankar, age 16
Digital photography

Life with Dogs

by Molly Dolan, age 14

They have the softest skin, with hairs peeking out from the sides. Their big eyes. Their cold noses. A wagging tail. Left, right. Never stops. Even their ears are bigger than the world. But, their heart is bigger than their ears. Big love. It is what defines them. They just want attention. When the sun goes to sleep, it's time for them to rest. They make their way to the most comfortable spot. They seem to like the pillows that feel like clouds. What do they dream about? If only we knew. But, they don't like to be alone. They want company. Their surroundings are more important than tennis balls. Up the creaky stairs they go. They lay on the new set of pillows. Except, they aren't pillows. It is us. When their head touches their surroundings, they smile. Even when we do not know it. When we stare into their eyes, we can feel their expression. How do we know? How can we tell?

Their eyes tell the story. Maybe they are hungry, sleepy, or energetic. But, there is more to their stories. They may have their pasts, however, they also have a goal. Not only for them to feel safe, but for the others around them to feel safe. When we don't have those protectors around us, our hearts feel empty. We need that extra love, even in the happiest times. Walking into a house, with no sounds of paws hitting the ground, it does not feel right. The loneliness we feel only goes higher. When they are around us, we feel right. You can hear the footsteps, batting the ground. The necklace around them includes the tiniest charm, stating who they are, where they are, where their people are. It is small, yet it makes the loudest noise. They know when others are in desperate need of comfort. They especially know when we need it.

The thing is, they do not know that they are our protectors. They do not know that they are guardian angels. They may never find out. But, they are all so different, yet the same. No matter size, texture, looks, they are the ones who can understand us. Having these fur balls around us can make life comforting. Their shadow, the mood they give off. They could be out of energy, or full of it. But they are always ours, and will never stop being ours. We want to know what they see. What they hear. What they say. They want to know what we say. They are special. They are like our four leaf clovers. They have those special places in our hearts that cannot go away. A special place that will forever be locked. They love us. But we will love them forever.



Untitled

by Amira Sandiford, age 18
Digital photography

What I See

by Mikayla Dayton, age 18

Depression is a dark house on a dreary day

It's motionless motion and limitless tears

It's a lightless tunnel

Surrounded by darkness, I feel around the black.

I hold the empty nothingness in my hands.

I breathe in the black.

Breathing doesn't come as easily as it once did.

It's like meeting the face of death, your face

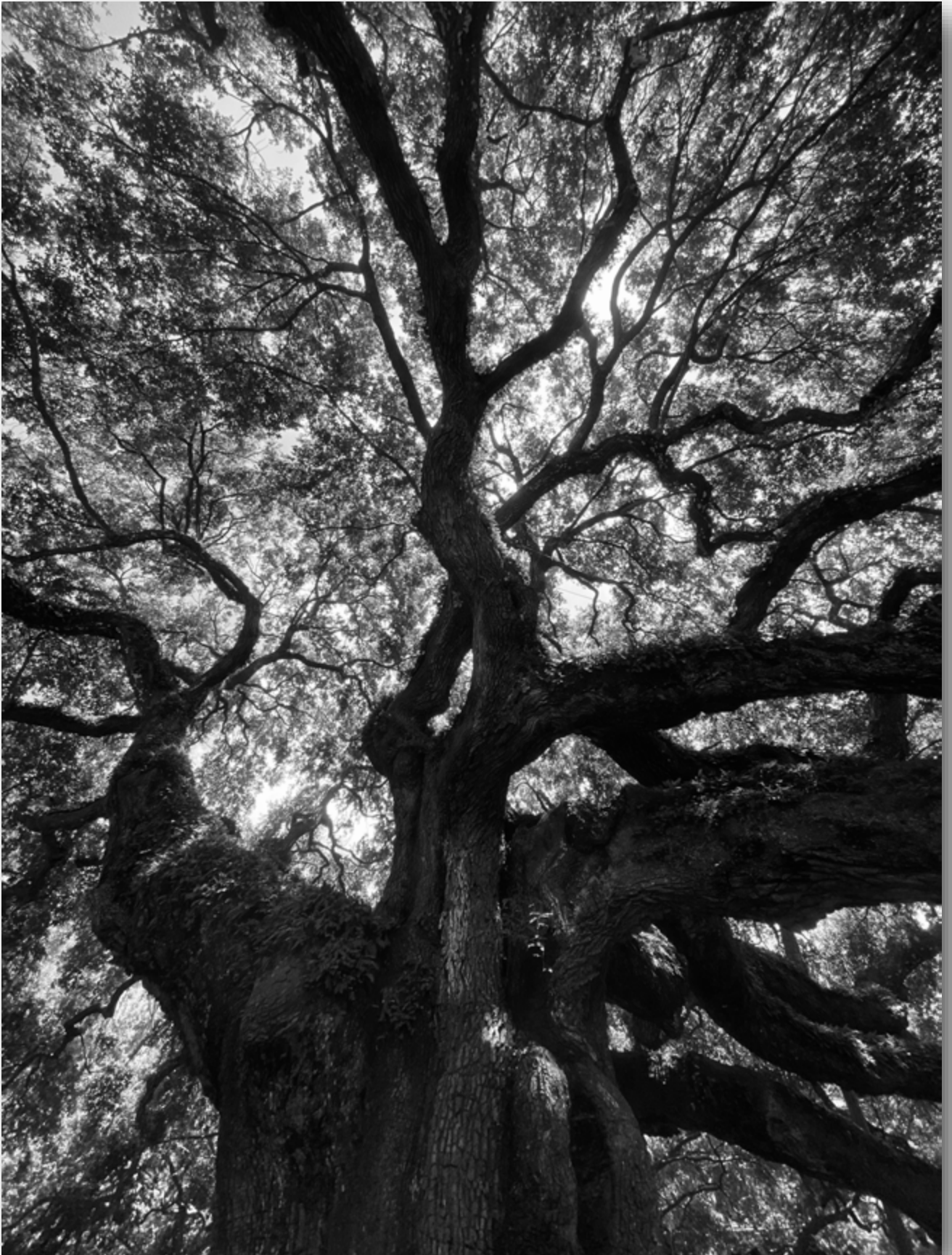
A whisper. "Not yet, but soon"

It's unfathomable quiet and suffocating silence

I view the world through blurry, teary lenses

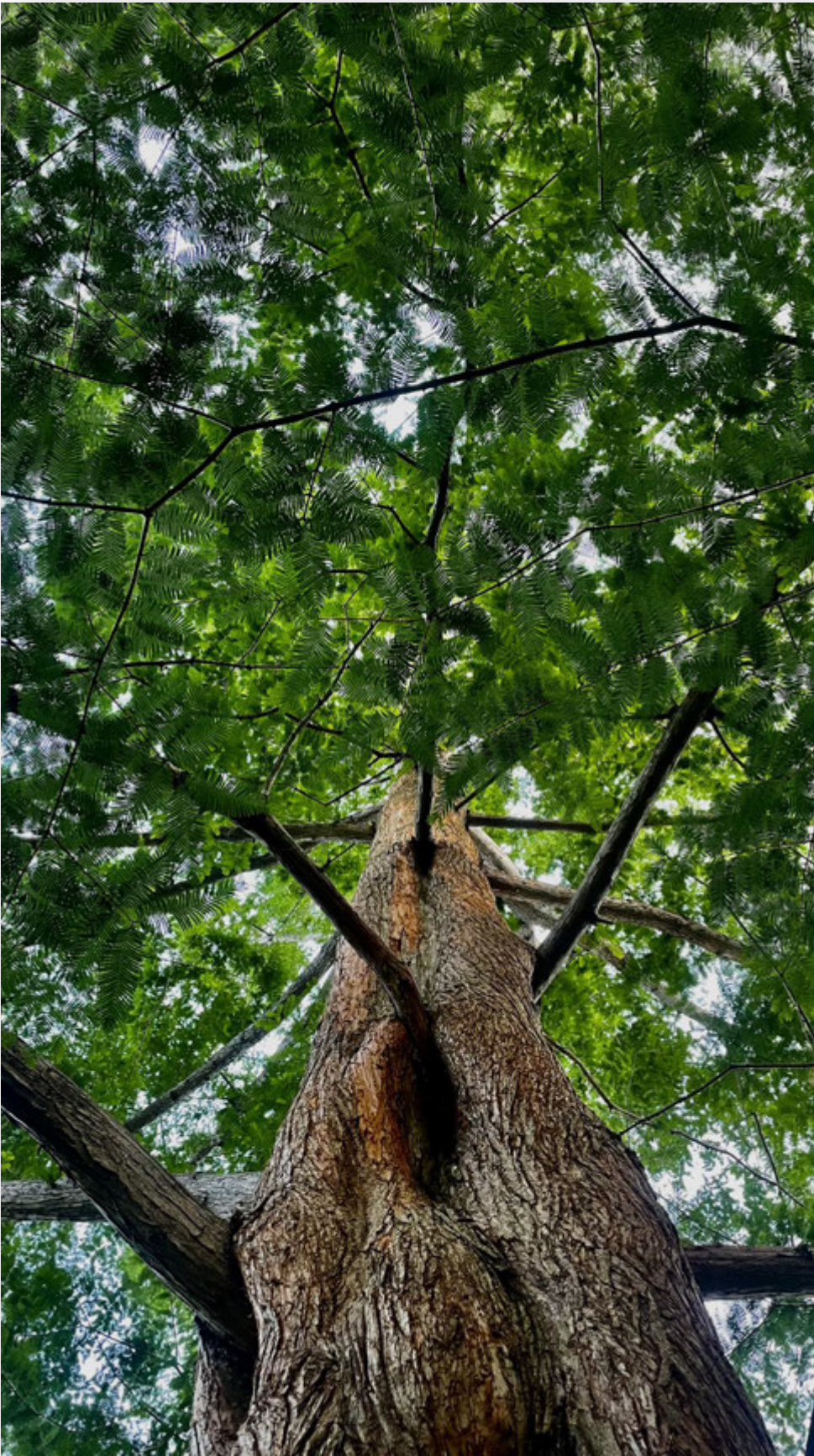
Each time I lose grasp of reality, distorted images are all I see

I go through life navigating around the large blobs



Angel Oak

by Mikayla Dayton, age 18
Digital photography



Skyward

by Zoe Yost, age 18
Digital photography

Calm of Chaos

by O. Lindquist, age 17

TW: Death, Chronic Illness

My morning starts the same every morning: I text my mom and Harley to let them know I'm alright, eat the cafeteria-sanctioned breakfast that has most of the nutrients I need in a day as I cannot eat after four, take the set of morning pills to keep the pain at bay and to help fight the infection growing in my lungs, devouring my healthy cells by the minute. Afterward, I draw and write back to my pen pals. It seems to be a very boring morning, but it's what I do to contain the thoughts of illness spreading within me. It keeps me positive. It keeps me sane. It keeps me hopeful.

The knock on my door at this hour could only mean bad news. The doctor motioned through the window and I reached to put on my mask, my trembling hands making it more difficult to fumble with the strings and oxygen tubes behind my ears. Giving them the thumbs up, they entered the room, holding that clipboard that always determined my fate.

"Ezra, good morning! Are you feeling alright?" I nod. "Great, great. You must be wondering why I decided to interrupt your normal writing time, but one of the nurses pointed out that you were having trouble consistently breathing last night, so we need to run some tests."

My cancer didn't start with me or my parents smoking. It didn't start with prolonged exposure to asbestos. Mine started with a minor infection of pneumonia. Just something I had picked up at school that should've been gone in two weeks, tops. But it wasn't. Every time I would start getting better, things would get worse. Eventually, I was driven to the children's hospital downtown and they ran tests on everything. I was to stay in bed under observation until they got results back.

That was the moment of no return.

I had been diagnosed with Stage Three Type-A non-small cell lung cancer. They had found a tumor about 3 cm across along the lining of my chest wall that was affecting my lymph nodes and carina, which is where my windpipe splits in two. The survival rate for me is about 33% for five more years of life. This was two years ago. I progressed through the stages, my body denying the treatment. Before covid, my specialist warned us that I had progressed to Stage Three Type-C, with a 13% chance of survival.

They've been afraid to run more tests since. I'm afraid too. Since even the smallest chest cold could kill me, I can't risk infection. Only my assigned nurses and doctors are allowed to be in the same room as me. They have to make sure all of my meals are prepared safely, as with every other patient in the ward. They finally found a set of meds that seems to be working, so the idea that it might have to change again and risk a negative reaction is putting off the push to run more tests. It's finally under control. There's no reason for a slip-up that will make it worse.

"Ezra?" The doctor's voice broke through my thoughts as I noticed the hot tears

running down my face. "I know you're scared, kiddo. We'll run them tomorrow and make sure the ward and hallways are clear as well as the MRI room. Is that alright?" I rubbed my eyes and glanced down at the tear-stained paper sitting on my lap.

"I don't have much of a choice," I whisper.

"What was that?"

"It's alright," I state, my voice hoarse.

"Do you want some tea from the cafeteria for your throat?" I shake my head. "Are you sure?"

"I'm fine," I say, my chest tightening. I take a shaky breath, ignoring the pain as my cough returns. Squeezing my eyes shut, I let my body contort and tense to run through its course. I clutch the railing to my bed until my knuckles are white. The doctor had rushed forward, gently rubbing my back and taking my hand. The metallic scent of blood soon was the only thing I could think of.

"It's alright. You're okay. I'm not going to let anything happen while I'm here. You're going to be alright, Ezra."

The inside of my mask is wet. It shouldn't be wet. I fumble to pull it off and stare at the blood staining the inside of the mask.

"Ezra, kiddo, hey. This is why I want to run more labs, alright? Whatever it is, we'll catch it."

...

I've learned to appreciate the little things. Conversations on the phone with Harley because I'm unable to have visitors, full sketchbooks of the same skyline every night because it's what I can see from my window, the laughter of a child who just went into remission, or even the letters I get from my friends who keep me updated on everything that happens. It's those little things that make the whole cancer thing less scary. It's less overwhelming to take it hour by hour.

I sat at the window, looking out at the dark clouds blocking the sunlight. I had moved there against the advisement of my doctor, but I felt as though I was suffocating sitting in bed with nothing to do. My sketchbook sits in my lap, the page staring at me empty. I can't get the pencil to work right. My hands are shaking too much. My phone sat beside me, the unread message to my mom staring at me as well.

The meds were supposed to be working. It was supposed to be fighting the cancer cells. I was supposed to be getting better. I glance towards my phone as it dings, but it's just a stupid social media ping. I didn't realize I had thrown my phone across the room until I heard it hit the door. Tears were running down my face again as I gasped for a breath. I ripped the tear-stained page and crumbled it up, throwing it as hard as I can at the wall in front of me.

This.
Can't.
Be.
Happening.

I tear my sketchbook to shreds, unable to deal with the pain and pressure any longer. I don't want to do this alone. I don't want to be alone anymore. I don't want to have to "stay strong" any longer. I don't want to fight anymore. I can't fight anymore.

My favorite nurse walked in to see what the commotion was, "Oh, Ezra, sweetie, you're not supposed to be out of bed." I shake my head as she offers me a mask before stepping closer. "Come on, let's get you cleaned up." She kneeled beside me and wiped up the bloody drool and tears from my skin. "What's wrong?"

"I want my mom and, and Harley," I cry.

"Ezra, sweetie, you know they can't visit. It's too risky," she said softly.

"I don't care. I want my best friend."

"Come on, let's get you back to bed."

"I can't."

"What do you mean you can't?"

"It hurts."

"I know it does, but you need to rest." I nod. "I'll help keep you steady then get your dinner so you can take your meds, alright?" I nod. "You'll be alright, Ezra. We're all making sure of it."

...

My phone rings and I reach for it, fumbling with the answer button. My mom wants to talk to the doctor to get all of the information instead of trying to make conversation. I don't blame her. She's about to lose her only son. I listen to their conversation as I fiddle with the tube feeding me oxygen. It took a while before my mom had the doctor hand the phone back to me. She looked like she was upset. They say their goodbyes and I love you's and promise to send another gift basket once my mom gets her paycheck.

I plaster on my best fake smile and wish them goodbye and goodnight before texting my best friend, Harley, reminding them that I love her and miss her.

. The doctors and nurses leave me alone for the night, insisting it was best for me to rest. I try to sleep. I toss and turned for hours until I found a position that doesn't hurt to breathe in. Sleep pulled me under as soon as I was comfortable.

...

My eyes snap open and search the room.

I can't breathe!

I can't breathe!

I can't move my arms to reach for the call button. Tears spill as I gasp for a breath, trying to will any part of me just to move. My eyes drift to a close as I give into my fate.

This must be it. This must be the end.

At least I got to say goodbye.



Untitled (1)

by Dorian A., age 17
Digital photography



Dew Drops

by Christina Law, age 16
Digital photography

Rain My Love

by Amber Gray, age 18

Cloudy day.

Gray skies.

Life is away.

And so am I.

For the rain has come.
And all thoughts subside.

The world weeps softly.
And the wind howls loud.
While a roof so lofty,
Gets blown around.

I like the rain,
For it brings me back to humanity.
The rain keeps me quiet,
And out of insanity.

If your world cries too,
Let it.
Say bye to the sky so blue,
But don't forget it.

For the rain has come.
And all thoughts subside.

So let it rain.

11:59

by Adrianna M. Hutton, age 15

8:24

the car clock blinked as we made the trek home,
just now leaving the school i've been at since 7 this morning.
i dont think ive ever left at the normal dismissal time.
each day drags longer than the last.

8:43

the front door opens.
dad goes straight to his room,
no goodnight,
just the promise for another ride tomorrow.
i don't even bother checking for leftovers.
i know by now there aren't any.
I don't have time to eat anyways.

8:57

steam covers the bathroom as i step out the shower,
the towel being the only thing protecting me from the new cold.
one hand wipes the foggy mirror and
i stare
but i don't recognize who stares back.

9:45

one subject done.
3 more to go.
my eyes ache,
head throbs.
i have a game tomorrow and
all i long for is laying down to sleep
but
i can't.
school comes first.

10:37

tears fall down my face and
onto the equations i don't understand
why am i so stupid?
why don't i know the answers?
i sit there for just a second
i don't have time to feel sorry for myself.
i have to move on.

11:08

finally

the last assignment submitted
my eyes ache from staring at the computer all day,
but that's fine.

who uses paper copies any more anyways.

my shoulders untense

and i can finally relax

until

my eyes skim the assignments section

“paper analysis due 11:59”

how did i let myself forget

tears begin to well up and

this time i don't even try to stop them

im so tired.

i don't want to do this anymore.

11:58

i stared at the submission button

it stared back.

i can't afford the late points, my english grade is already dangerously close to slipping to a B

and if that happens

id be ruined.

i click the button

and turn in quite possibly

the worst analysis ive ever written.

but it's okay.

i should still get an A

Maybe then my parents will be proud.



Chokma

by Li W., age 17

Mixed Media Collage:

wallpaper, cloth, acrylic paint, colored pencil, construction paper, pencil

The Modern Day Student

by Mikayla Dayton, age 18

the modern day student goes to bed every night in the middle of the night

the modern day student does homework for hours and hours on end

the modern day student cries more than a reasonable person should

because the modern day student is told

to study, but also play a sport

to devote time to family, but also to the list of never ending assignments

to have time for self care, but also be involved in extracurricular activities that will make them stand out on a college application

to study for standardized tests, while still making time for friendships

to take rigorous classes, but not "stress too much"

why is there so much on one person's plate? on teenagers? on children?

when did the expectation go from doing your best to burning yourself out before you even finish high school?

when did having stress, anxiety and depression become the normality in schools?

why is there so much pressure for students to be *perfect*?

the modern day student has no time for family

or friends

or free time

these words do not even exist in the modern day student's word bank.

the modern day student is left wondering if they are "good enough" even after they've been pushing to be the best.

they never will be

good enough.

because it will never be

enough.

Despite best efforts, the modern day student will face unimaginable failures with few successes, due to the never-ending workload.

there is always some assignment that a student should be working on.

guilt. an emotion that surfaces for students when they do actually take time for themselves.

the moral dilemma: "if I take time for myself now, I will be behind on all of my assignments. But, if I don't take time for myself now, there is no way that I will have motivation to do any of my assignments".

an endless cycle of deciding if mental health is more important than the magic number, *the gpa*.

often, *the gpa* wins. And mental health is pushed off to the sidelines awaiting the opportunity to be prioritized.

the pressure to perform well academically weighs as heavy on a person as the weight of the world, the weight of the future.

the modern day student is drowning, but there is no lifeboat on its way to rescue them.

there is no escape.

There's a Man at the Door with a Gun

by Brayden Hauser, age 12

Mama, mama there's a man at the door
I don't know quite what he's asking for
Mama, mama I think he's got something in his hand
Mama, mama he wants to take me away from this land

Mama, Mama there's a man in the hall
He's thundering down, knocking things off the wall
Mama, mama what's in his palm
Mama, mama how do I stay calm

Mama, mama there's a man in the kitchen
He's getting too close, just take a listen
Mama, mama he's getting closer
Mama, mama when will it be over

Mama, mama there's a man in the stairs
Done lots of damage, we'll need repairs
Mama, mama something's on his finger
Mama, mama we shouldn't linger

Mama, mama he's outside the door
Mama, mama what's in store
Mama, mama I think we should run
There's a man at the door with a gun



Side View Skull

by Hailey Barbuto, age 15
Eraser and Lead Pencil

The Man Draped in White

by Abigail Thurlow, age 14

I looked up to see my own words spelled out in big red letters for the whole town to read. They hung from small but not too small, brackets attached to the once old, crumbling, concrete building about the size of a small cottage home. The rather ugly old building has been standing since the 1930's but is now a warm, lovely looking and welcoming environment with no yellow stains decorating the walls. How those got there, I have no idea. Instead of a boring, cracking outside, my letters stood there very nicely and let everyone know that it was open for anyone to come to enjoy my library.

"Little Reads" it is called. You can probably already tell I am very happy with that title. I pulled the glass door open, walked over, and stood behind the computer that sat on my counter, admiring the place I had transformed. I made sure to add a fireplace for the days that got even colder than now, and so people could read in warm peace. Couches surround the fireplace with a very pretty gold and brass coffee table I found at a garage sale. A vase of baby's breath with orange and red tulips sits there to keep the furniture company and compliment the atmosphere with their aroma. The rest of the area was almost flooded with books. It might be a little overwhelming to some visitors but they will learn to love this little place.

I walked back over to the glass door and flipped the white sign over so it read "OPEN." I have always loved books. I mostly loved writing them. Ever since I was young, I have wanted to be a writer. I would dream of writing so many books people would open libraries dedicated to me. I may not be a writer, or have libraries filled with my words, but I still have my own library full of others. I was expecting, well, hoping at least, people would be lined up just waiting for me to flip that sign around and swarm in. That didn't happen however. Instead, I sat behind the computer and waited. I then waited some more, and some more after that. The aching of boredom began to seep in right as I heard, "It's a beautiful Saturday morning isn't it?"

A voice ricocheted throughout the library. An unfamiliar, strange voice. The tiring process of going around everyone's houses and telling them about my library has made a permanent imprint of everyone's voice inside my brain. There was something about the feel that voice that seemed... off. The person behind the voice sounded older, not as soft as the people from around the town. My eyes focused on the man walking through the door dressed totally in white. A long paper-white beard clung to his face, and his hair was slicked back into a firm man-bun. I wasn't sure if he was here to convince me to join his cult, or just to get books.

"Very beautiful indeed!" I smiled back. He sauntered throughout the library, stopping every now and then when a book caught his curiosity. I stayed behind my counter continuing to track him with my eyes. After a little while, he stopped. He just stared at one shelf on the bookcase closest to me. A blank expression had fallen over his face. Instead of choosing a book, he began to make his way over to the couch. His hands still, deprived of a book. He stretched his long scrawny legs onto my coffee table. I cringed at the sight of that. His legs were so thin, it looked almost that there was hardly any skin left on them. He pulled out a brown leather notebook. It was small, but heavily torn up. It looked as though a dog had made it a chew toy. He then pulled out a pen. The pen began to scribble notes down into the pad, his hand guiding it along.

Who walks into a library to take notes? I pondered. I was so engulfed in confusion that I began to become obsessed with the sight. What was he writing down? Was it about Little

Reads? When is he going to take his feet off my coffee table? My bookcase is falling. My bookcase is falling. Huh? CRASH! The bookcase to my left labeled "mysteries" tumbled to the ground. Creating a gigantic, atomic bomb sound, followed by a stillness in the air. I jolted back, covering my face with my hands. I then looked at the man again. He was unfazed. His body had not even changed position. He just kept scribbling. Legs feeling like strawberry jello, I walked over to try to clean up the mess. It bothered me how he did not try to help. Not even say a single word.

I managed to pry the bookcase upward and place it back into position, carefully maneuvering around the books, littering the floor. As the bookcase shifted into place, I noticed one book that had stayed on one of the shelves. A shelf that had just been on the floor. All the books had plummeted to the ground! This book seemed to stick to the shelf. Almost like it was superglued. It was an old book. A book scattered with dust. It was also the thickest book I've ever seen. I don't even remember it being delivered here. It was mesmerizing.

The book was decorated with bottle green vines that were strung around the sides of the cover. It was a dark book. The whole thing was full of dark browns, blacks and greens apart from the very center of the cover. In the space, a great white elephant stood. Its feet sunk into the mossy ground it lived on and it looked strong. The elephant's arms and torso were bulging with muscles. Even just looking at the creature I felt intimidated, or like I was being watched.

Before I could read a title, the book was snatched from the shelf and buried into the man's arms. His boney, slightly disturbing, arms. Obviously, it was not superglued. He abducted the book so fiercely, yet he held it so delicately, almost like it was a baby, or a bomb. It all happened so fast that words didn't have enough time to touch my lips. He sat back down on the couch and faced me. His face still, never changed. He traced his fingers along the spine of the book, taking the dust along with him. He flipped through the pages, scanning. I finally had a moment to look at his face close up. He had wrinkles drawn across his skin and the color of his eyes were painted grey. His hair was shinier closer up and his shirt and pants looked as if they were made out of fine linen. He looked wise, like he knew all the answers to all my questions.

I turned my head back to the shelf to resume my cleaning, but the shelf was fully stocked back with all the books back in place. Every single book was right where they were supposed to be, except one. I took a step back- a book staring me right in the face. A sharp pain squeezed my insides. A new book, with a glossy cover, propped up in the middle of the bookcase. It had a photograph of me on the cover. It was almost like looking into a mirror. The title sat above my picture in big, bold, black letters reading THE UNSOLVED CASES OF A SERIAL KILLER: THE MAN DRAPED IN WHITE. My spine felt out of place. I turned my neck to look behind me, and prepared myself for the sight I would see. On the couch that sat with the fireplace, held no one. The man had vanished. It was quiet. Almost too quiet in my Library. Yet, my ears still rang with one question, "What just happened?"



Nature's Zebra

by Myly Huynh, age 17
Ink & Gel pen

Such Simple Things Can Mean So Much

by Dorian A., age 17

2015 was an important year in my life. Several important experiences happened during this time. My last year in elementary school, and my first year in middle school. One of the most important adventures that happened during this time period was my music discovery. This year was also when I was still starting out on the internet without parental supervision, and I discovered a ton of music through a bunch of emo kids on obscure apps for loser kids. I wouldn't be who I am today without the experiences this year had brought.

Trips to Best Buy were a common occurrence when I was younger. Too bad they stopped carrying CDs... My dad, brothers and I were out one day, and decided to stop at Best Buy. Before we went in, my dad said to my two brothers and myself, "Don't ask me for money". That statement frustrated me, especially since he borrowed a few dollars from me, but okay. Off to the CDs I went. When we went to Best Buy, I always looked at the same few sections - Beatles, Buckcherry, Green Day, and Nirvana. However, my dad was getting his phone fixed this time, so I had a lot more time. I looked through most of the entire music section, and was seeing a lot of albums I'd never seen before - AC/DC's *Stiff Upper Lip*, Black Sabbath's *Past Lives*, Buckcherry's new EP, Led Zeppelin's first album - and then, I found a CD which I wanted. The *Black Parade* by My Chemical Romance. I'd heard about My Chemical Romance, but I had only heard a few songs from their final album. But what I had found at Best Buy was their masterpiece. This CD was priced at \$6.99, and I had only \$4. Although my dad had always told us not to ask him for money, I would always ask anyway. First, I went over to the cell phone counter where my dad was, and reminded him about the \$4 he had borrowed from me, and he immediately huffed at me, and rolled his eyes. He gave me the usual "I told you not to ask me for money" speech, followed by three one dollar bills placed in my hand from his. Excited, I ran up to the counter, and the person running the register (who was undoubtedly similar to the kids I interacted with online) looked at what I had, and said to me, "This is a good one." After a few more stops, we got home, and I immediately put the disc in the karaoke machine which I used as a CD player, and got ready to get into the blow-up pool we'd got at Walgreens.

That three dollars my dad handed me that day really did change my life. I don't say those words very often, or about much at all. If he hadn't given me that money, I would've probably listened to the album somehow else, but I don't believe the experience would've been as good or exciting. Although that CD isn't worth more than probably \$3 now, the memories attached are worth so much more than that price to me. One of the first full albums I'd learned to play on drums was the *Black Parade*. The first show I ever played, I played the song *Famous Last Words*, the last song on the record. I played that show with three other kids I didn't know, who were in the band program I was just starting out in at the Rock School. One of the kids in that band, Logan, became one of my best friends. He's played with me for over four years, and we have plans to start playing together outside of the band program. He is one of my closest friends, because of that album. I met my first girlfriend because of that album. I was wearing a My Chemical Romance t-shirt to school which I had bought a few months after the CD, and she started talking to me about the band. One of the reasons I love music so much is the way the songs can connect people. All of my friends connected with me through music. Music is beautiful, and is undoubtedly the most important element in my life.

The Escape

by Codishay Strayer, age 15

My room was cold and dark, the only light being from the full moon that seeped in through the tiny window that sat high up on the wall. My dressing gown was filthy and torn. The chain around my ankle that kept me in my cell was freezing from the winter air outside. I sat in the corner with my head tucked in between my boney knees. Other test subjects were crying and shouting at the guards who walked past the bulletproof glass. I felt a pair of eyes land on me, the bright light of a flashlight shining in.

"Food." A low voice spoke, pushing a tray through the small opening in the iron door.

I slowly lifted my head and crawled to the opening, grabbing the tray that held mysterious contents they called dinner. I watched as people walked by, waiting for my time to come. Finally, the coast was clear and I threw my dinner on the floor. With all the strength I had, I beat the cuff that bound me to this prison with the plastic rectangle until it broke off. I stood up cautiously, looking around to make sure I was still in the clear. Then, using my quirk, I teleported outside of the room.

"Hey, you, experiment 636! Stop right there!" a guard shouted from the end of the hallway, running toward me, aiming his gun in my direction.

"Invisibility," I spoke and my body faded away, becoming invisible to anyone around me.

"Huh? Hey, w-where'd you go?" The guard questioned, spinning in circles like a puppy chasing its tail.

I kicked the guard in the back of his knees, causing him to fall to the ground with a thud. He dropped his gun and I quickly picked it up, aiming it towards his head and placing my foot on his back whilst making myself visible again.

"Get in the cellar," I said, cocking my head towards the empty room.

"Hell no! Why would I-"

"Get in the room or I will shoot you!"

"Y-yes ma'am." The guard agreed unwillingly but walked through the heavy iron door. I made the man empty his pockets and took everything he had. I took his keys, ID card, knife, belt, and everything else he tossed.

"Put the chain on and sit in the corner facing the wall. I'm sure they'll let you out when they realize you're not me." I said as I locked the door behind me and tossed the keys away.

"W-what do you mean when they realize I-I'm not you?" the guard questioned, panic written out all over his face.

"Hypnosis," I said, walking away. To anybody else, the guard will look like me.

I ran down the halls, my footsteps echoing. I had the gun strapped around my back and the belt wrapped around my chest, carrying everything else the man spilled out in the pockets. Other experiments watched as I ran while others shouted and begged me to let them free, but I had to ignore their cries. Coming up to a door, I took out the ID card and scanned it, unlocking the door. Three other guards were on the other side, preparing to fight me when they saw me.

"It's experiment 636!"

"She escaped!"

"Get her!"

The guards all warned each other as they started firing bullets in my direction. I did the same and fired back, shooting two of them in the legs, crippling them, and kicking their guns out of reach. I head-butted the last guard in the chest then hit him over the head with the end of the gun, knocking him out. I had been shot once in the shoulder. [The](#) stained, white cloth that covered my body was turning a deep red as blood spilled out of my body. I wasn't going to let a lousy bullet wound stop me, though. Especially when I was so close to escaping.

Coming across another door, I used the same ID card and made my way through. This time, the door led me to the stairs. I took them up to the roof where there were two more guards, they hadn't noticed me though. I quickly hid back inside the stairwell and took off the gun and belt but

grabbed the knife from a pocket and hid it in my gown.

"Invisibility," I whispered to myself, my body disappearing once again.

I snuck out the door and crept up behind one of the guards. When I was a few feet away, I took out my knife and charged her, stabbing her in the back of the throat. Blood spewed out of her, the knife suffocating her. She collapsed to her knees with her hands wrapped around her neck. She pulled the knife out, worsening her situation as blood spewed out in a beautiful red fountain. Her skin faded into a paler color, her body going limp as her life came to an early end. The guard that next to her watched in horror. His body stood frozen in fear and confusion.

"W-we have a situation," The guard stuttered through the walkie-talkie on his shoulder.

"Claire just dropped dead on the roof. I thin-"

Cutting the guard off, I kicked him dead center in the middle of his back, causing him to fall to the floor. I quickly grabbed his oval head and twisted it, snapping his neck. Letting go, he fell to the ground and my body became visible once again. Letting an exhausted sigh escape my lips, I wiped the sweat and blood off my face and took a look off the roof. I could see a forest in the distance. I could teleport there. But before I even got the chance to leave, I heard the doors to the stairs slam open behind me. I peeked back over my shoulder to see him standing there.

The moonlight illuminated his features. You could see his fair, pale skin shining under the light. Those evil, red eyes of his suddenly looked different as his facial expression showed one of mixed emotions. He looked angry at what he saw, yet I could find traces of sadness written within the cracks of anger. His chest rose and fell again quickly, trying to catch his breath. Perhaps he was tired from running up the stairs. Or he was shocked by the scene before him. He stared at me and I turned to stare back at him, our eyes meeting.

We were silent for a bit until the voices over the intercom on the deceased guards broke it.

"Experiment 636 has escaped! I repeat, experiment 636 has escaped!"

"Somebody go check the roof!"

Loud sirens started blaring, making my ears bleed. I looked from the bodies and then back up to the distraught boy.

He finally found the courage to speak.

"Why are you doing this? Don't you like it here... with me and master? Didn't you enjoy the times we spent together?"

I laughed at his idiotic questions.

"You thought I enjoyed living here? You've got to be joking, I hate it here! I've been beaten, starved, tested on, and brainwashed! I don't even remember my life before experiment 636! I am leaving this hell hole. Don't expect to see my face ever again,"

I could hear the sound of heavy footsteps running up the stairs, indicating that it was my time to go. Turning my back to the male, not giving him a chance to speak, I looked out towards the maze of trees and took my leave.

"Teleport," I said and suddenly I stood in front of the large forest

I took one last look back at the old, rundown building. Large cracks carved into the sides and a variety of vines and fungi running along with the old, grey brick. Shaking my head, I focused my direction back on the mess of trees and plants that stood before me. Then, without another thought, I ran.

At last... I am finally free.



Red Dragon

by Li W., age 17

Chinese ink stick & stone paint style, red oil-based paint for stamp seal



Fallen Art

by Mikayla Dayton, age 18
Digital photography

Reading

by Cora Lohkamp, age 13

I move my arm from the left to the right. My world turns into a paradise.

I am in a forest coated in sunlight. I see the bunnies run by and the squirrels climbing up trees. The birds chirping peacefully in the background. All the plants are a shade of brilliant green with the occasional brown of bark and the color of a flower.

I smell the cool damp air, the smell after rain. My body is the perfect temperature from the sun and shade mixture. Being here makes me feel like I'm glowing.

Voices.

Then I remember, I am on the run.

I take off running from the stampede of people chasing me. Feeling the danger watching me on my shoulder, I just keep running.

I move my arm again from the left to the right.

I am instantly transported on a ski mountain going down as fast as I can. I feel the wind on my face telling me to go faster, faster, faster. The snow building up on my jacket, the air cooling down the sweat building on my face. I feel the speed pick up as I bring my chest to my knees, tucking into a ball.

The adrenaline is coursing through my veins.

I am going dangerously fast.

I love it.

I live for this.

When I reach the end of the mountain I take a sharp turn left and stop, perfectly still. I take deep breaths... I feel like I am glowing.

I move my arm again, eager for a new world to explore, but all I see is white.

Where is my next adventure?

I blink a few times. Then I see a blank page.
I look up and see my room, the room I have seen my whole life.
The book I am reading has just ended.

Realization hits.

I can't go places anymore.
No more adventures.

My shoulders go limp and my eyelids threaten to close. My exhaustion comes back to me.

I grow sadder

and sadder.

I was brought back to my dull life.

The glow inside of me has dimmed.

I no longer feel alive.

So I just sit here.

Waiting to glow again.



Evenings Bliss

by Leandra Brutus, age 15
Digital photography

Paw

by Rose Mulveny, age 14

Chewing on strawberry wafers, listening to his stories, his big jackets that I could hug, and
the songs he sang.

I was so young and so naive.

Time was just something on a clock, dividing up my day.

School, swimming, sleep, school, ballet, sleep, school, hospice, hospice, **hospice**. I remember
the day exactly. The sky was so blue, like a painting.

"Rose Mulveny please report to the main office."

Shuffling of feet, whispers, laughing, the heave of my bag as I leave the classroom.

I was too young, I didn't deserve this, no one did.

My dad shifts around in the cold October air. "HI DAD!" I feel a warm body enveloping me.

Looking up and seeing my dad's mouth open.

Silence.

Nothing.

No comforting, no peace.

Hot tears flow down my cheeks, silently begging for help. I open the door.

Not the little songs I knew, not the silly stories and jokes, not the Paw who was sitting there
with a tube in his throat, not the Paw who lost too much weight.

3 days. 78 hours. 4320 minutes. 259200 seconds. Gone.

Down, down, down, down, down... down? That's what rock bottom felt like. Pitch- black.

No escape ladder, no helping hand, just darkness.

I just wanted to go away, to stop pretending that I'm fine.

I was drowning.

It felt like a glass cage closing in on me with no intent of stopping.

Everything fell apart. No one even noticed.

My childhood burned away.

Blinking away tears.

Moving on is like moving back, it gets harder every time I confront it.

So I don't. It stays in the back of my head.

When you have something that smells bad you can't just put a lid on it.

You have to open it and throw it out. I'm just not ready to pop open the lid.



Balloons

by Rylee Anna Wilson, age 18
Digital art

Bear

by Emma K. Lavelle, age 13

I hear the breeze coming through my window. It is a windy fall day. The air is crisp and cold, and I am watching YouTube on my noisy iPad.

The dog began barking loudly, and I can't hear my video. Every fall day, the mailman comes at 3:00 pm on the dot. "Emma, there's a package for you!" my mom says as she stomps toward the living room.

"Yay, a package!" I cheer. I love packages. The feeling of opening a box, not knowing what is inside gives me a sense of exhilaration like no other.

My mom carries the large box into the room and places it down carefully on the table. I shake the box, thinking it would be heavy. No clinks or clanks came from the package. "I wonder what's in the box!" I comment to my mom. She takes a knife and slowly cuts it open. There is a note on the top with my name on it in bright pink letters.

I love pink. Everything I own in my closet has pink on it. I open the tightly sealed letter and read it the entire way through. It was from my friend who had left Delaware and moved to Florida. I thought it was nice she was thinking of me because I had not seen her in a few weeks since she moved.

"Good luck on your surgery," it read in scribbled handwriting. My first back surgery was in a few months, and just thinking of it made me incredibly nervous. I haven't gotten surgery since I was a baby. I have no memory of it whatsoever.

The thought of them putting things inside me makes me want to throw up. I hadn't thought about it in a few days, probably because I have been pretty busy. I peaked farther in the box to see some pink tissue paper covering the item in the bottom. As I unrolled my present out of the box, the crinkle of tissue paper sounds like crunching the fall leaves with your feet.

In the box was a brown fuzzy teddy bear. "I'm going to name you Bear!" I said to my mom as she put it in my arms for me to cuddle! Fast forward seven years later, and I still sleep with that bear every single night. The way I have grown up with it gives me a sense of security. Even though it came from a friend, it represents my mom, dad, sister, grandparents, and dogs.

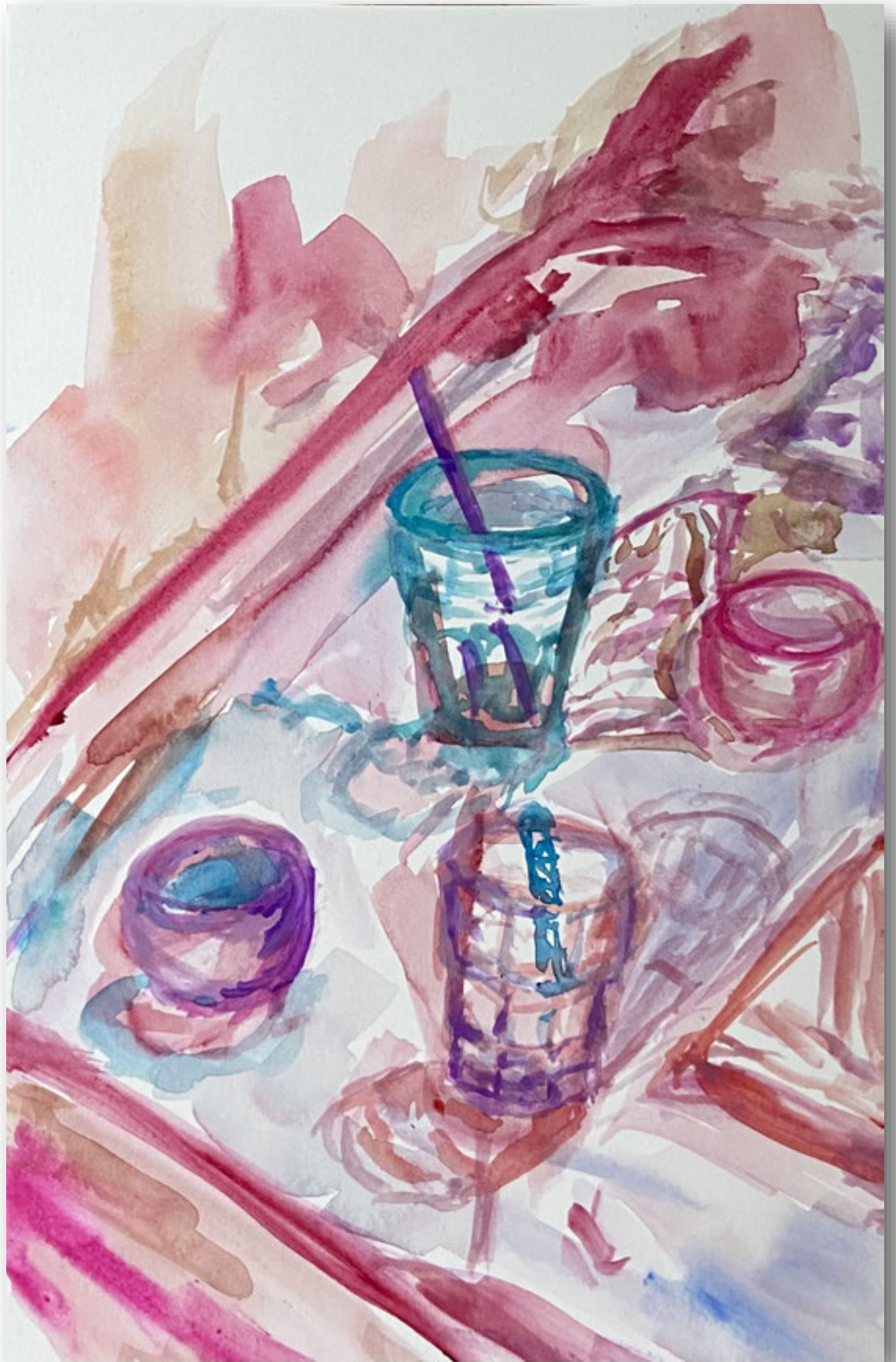
I have taken it to every one of my surgeries, sleep studies, vacations, and sleepovers. It has been with me through everything I can think of.

It's like a piece of my and if it ever got ripped away, a part of my childhood would be gone too.



Tea Cupboard

by Chuiyee Kong, age 14
Color pencil & Pencil



Empty Table

by Cassie Dong, age 15
Gouache paints

To Whom it May Concern, Your Water Bottle

by Bonnie L., age 15

We were great friends few years ago
But now I'm hidden away.
You walk right past me every day,
Yet you never stop and think.
We used to be the best of friends
But now I am forgotten
I hope you have a happy life
Of love and joy without me.

I came a gift of earth-toned wrap
With pinecones and a leaf.
Your sister gave from her to you
Two Christmas Eves ago.
I wore a light blue coat and cap
And you brought me everywhere.
From school to home, from trips to class
We journeyed through thick and thin.

But one fateful day, a package came
Within it a new bottle
It was metal, blue, big, and tall
That made me seem pathetic.
You stuffed me away on a shelf
Never to be used again.
I sit lonely in my wooden box
Seen yet never seen.

We were great friends few years ago
But now I'm hidden away.
You walk right past me every day,
Yet you never stop and think.
We used to be the best of friends
But now I am forgotten
I hope you have a happy life
Of love and joy without me.

Insomnia

by Sara Clothier, age 13

Toss and turn, toss and turn. I have been repeating the same motion for what feels like hours. I sit up and look at my bright, colored, alarm clock. Squinting I read 2:13am. "Ughh" I whisper as I slump down into my soft bed. My mind keeps racing and thinking things like, "Did I leave my book in my locker or did I lose it?" "I hope I got a good grade on that math test." The thoughts are flooding my head like a river flooding over its river bank. I start getting hot and my soft blanket isn't very comforting anymore. Maybe I should read a book, I think. I turn on the light, but immediately turn it back off when the shining light blinds my eyes. I sit on my bed, doubts starting to crowd and overflow my head. "I am never going to fall asleep" "I will even be up when the alarm on my phone goes off" Again I collapse back into my bed. "I tried everything," I think "I tried listening to music, thinking of happy thoughts, counting in my head, EVERYTHING." My covers are messed up and my mind with it. I start to focus on my breathing, shortly after, my body starts to relax and I finally just let go, and start to doze off. I guess all that I needed was to focus on my breathing. In and out, in and out.

The Test

by Sara Clothier, age 13

In through your nose out through your mouth, in through your nose out through your mouth. I repeat the same words in my head as I walk into the classroom. When I sit down at my desk I immediately feel trapped under the anxiety pushing me down, the divider acting as a cage. My heart is thumping in my chest, and it feels like it will leap out of my chest and run away. This is a familiar feeling for me, I desperately try to imagine something more comforting. I think about what my mom said that morning, "don't be nervous, you know all of the information." I start to feel good and get calmer, but in the back of my head there is the voice reminding me of all of the times I froze up during tests, when my mind goes blank, and my breathing gets faster. When all you see from the outside is a girl staring at one blank question, frozen with fear of failure. That voice takes over my brain and that's all I hear. The voice saying "ooo don't mess up" "remember that science test, that was a disaster, hope this one doesn't end up like that" "you better go over everything or you're going to fail" Everything else blocked out, like having noise canceling headphones stuck to my ears, the voice in my head playing as the music. I snap back to reality, "Okay guys, let's get started. I'm going to pass out the tests. While taking the test there will be no talking." My hands get sweaty and my body starts to tingle. Great, it's time. The test slaps on my desk, and it's time to start. In through your nose, out through your mouth, in through your nose, out through your mouth.



Untitled (3)

by Amira Sandiford, age 18
Digital photography



Silently Slithering

by Nicky Saitz, age 13
Digital photography

The Eels Quest

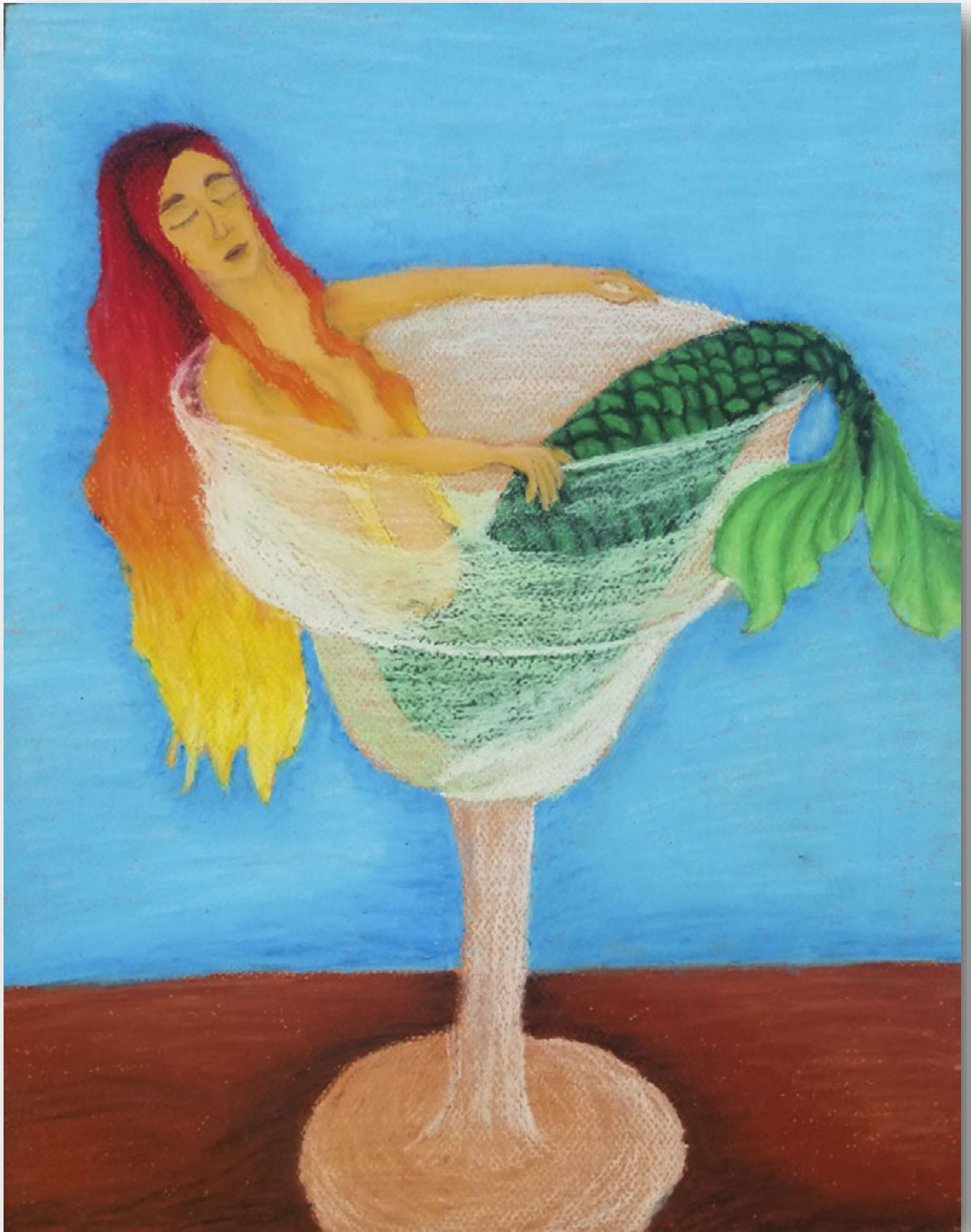
by Anonymous, age 17

The eels quest never ends
The depths he dwells present
Less rest, extreme stress
The feeble get swept
Where strength gets fed
The slender, needle-edged teeth serpent creeps deep
The element he represents
Perplexes men,
Yet
The serene scene sweeps feet



Forgotten Lemons

by Cassie Dong, age 15
Gouache paints



Margarita Mermaid

by Ashleigh Umbrecht, age 19
Oil Pastels & colored pencils

Cape Cod

by Cora Lohkamp, age 13

I step out of the car and onto the beach. I have been in the car for 8 hours.

I am finally able to do whatever.

A breeze instantly relaxes me. The cool, salty air of the Atlantic Ocean overwhelms my senses.

My face immediately lifts into a smile.

I am changing things up.

I take a couple of deep breaths.

There is something different about the smell of this beach compared to others.

The smell that candles try to capture but never can.

The smell makes me happy, thrilled, and calm all at once.

My body stretched out from being trapped.

Like a bird free from its cage.

The sand is no longer warm from the sun. It's refreshingly cool from the hot, sticky car.

No one is here, no one screaming, no one blasting music, and no one even walking, it is the picture of peace.

I hear the waves crash onto the sand.

Creating a steady rhythm of relaxation.

I see the lifeguard stand. The old wood has cracks and is covered in sand.

I hear the seagulls. They fit in with the rhythm of the waves in a way that makes you think it was rehearsed.

The sun is setting in the background sending colors to flood the sky.

No one disturbing the scenic view

.

I am finally free.

Untitled

by Arlo Nekoukar, age 13

I shout excitedly
using a wave to propel me
back to the beach.
Back in I go,
waiting for a giant wave.
I prepare.
The ocean's salt smell invades my nose,
splashes into my eyes, filling up everything.
The cold ocean floor is rocky as I get ready.
"Let's go!", my friends shout,
also prepping for this monster wave.
I launch.
The wave strikes me,
tugging me underwater,
not letting up.
It claws at me.
I struggle.
I crash into the rocky shore,
doing a flip,
landing face first on rocks.
I stagger up,
back to my seat,
to clean my cuts.
Staring at the water.
15 minutes go by.
Then 20.
Then 30.
I get back up,
grab the board,
and sprint
right back
into the water.



Westfield Streets

by Leandra Brutus, age 15
Digital photography

Seeing You

by Samuel Gatheca, age 17

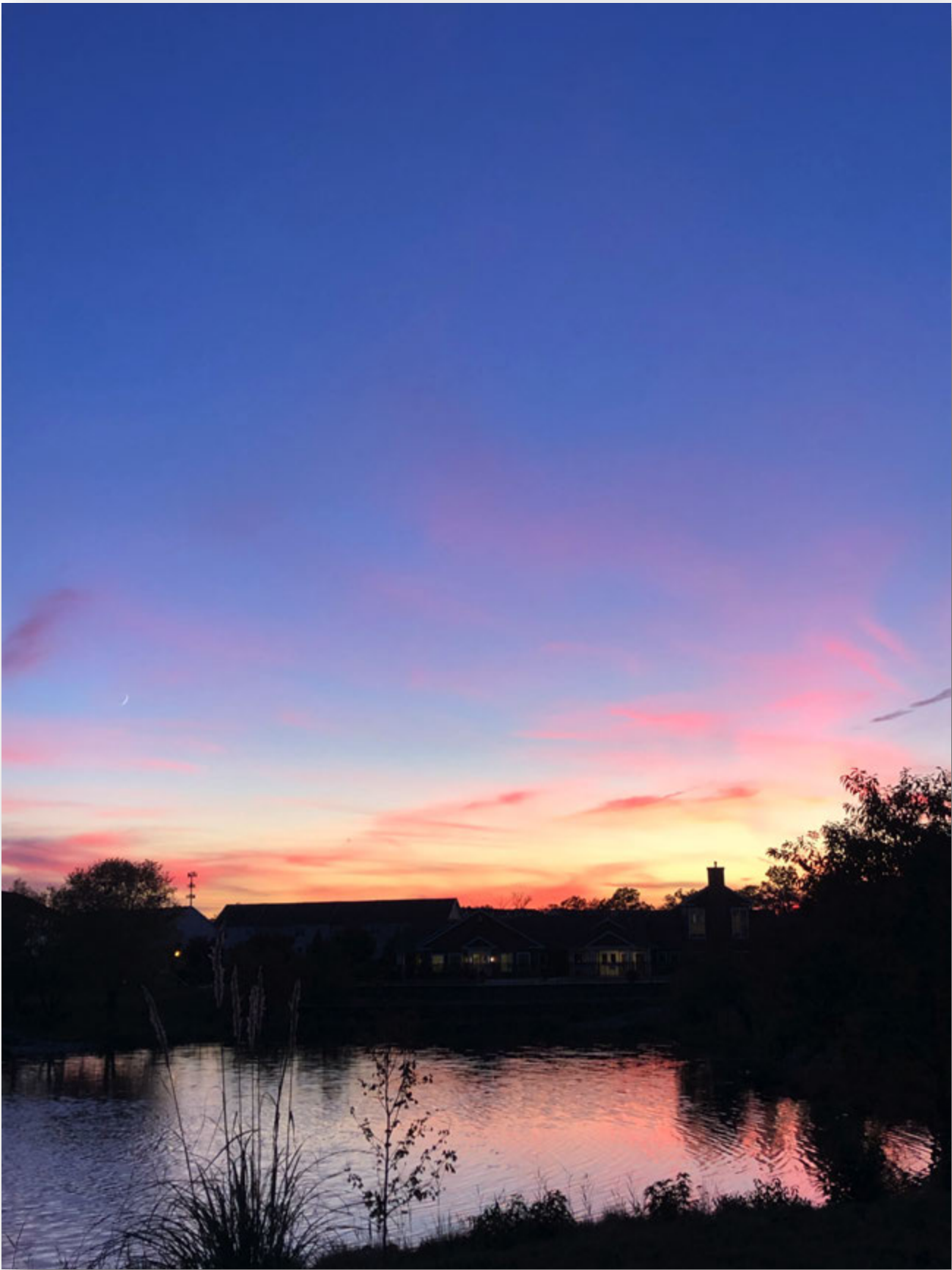
Lost in my mind, lost in my thoughts is the sight of you just walking by. Our time together was special. Something that felt so unreachable was right in my hands. It felt like a peanut being smashed onto jelly.

The moment of bliss and elation came in a rush like a wave sweeping up a rural town. As quickly as I had you is almost as quick as I lost you. You made me feel like no other human being in this world. Who knew it would be you to pull the plug?

Seeing you makes me wonder if what I'm doing is right. All I can do is look the other way stone-faced, but you are still in the corner of my eye. Spontaneous we were, but foolish I was.

Questions cross my mind like, What if? What if I hadn't? What did I do? Am I good enough? Is anyone going to love me? Why did this happen? All these questions have been built up as insecurities and baggage oftentimes too much to carry.

Seeing you let me know all things are possible. Seeing you let me know dreams do come true. Seeing you has taught me that no matter how many times I try there is no way I will forget about you.



Serenity

by Christina Law, age 16
Digital photography



Reflections

by Zoe Yost, age 18
Digital photography

• • •

by Jade Lindblom, age 15

Silence is the lack of; speechlessness, the act of not acting.
Silence is a species dying not adapting.
Silence is the blank canvas as you hold the brush in frustration.
Silence is the script that never will be played but heard every day by people in all nations.
Silence is the singer's song that always stands forgotten.
Silence is the apple that sits; untouched until rotten.
Silence is the blinking bar at the beginning of the paragraph.
Silence is the comedian who has never heard a laugh.
Silence is frustration for many and peace for others.
Silence is grown children parting from their mothers.
Silence is the dancer who is still as stone.
Silence is the cook looking at the empty stove.
Silence is the gamblers table; empty, no cigar.
Silence is the track without a roaring car.
Silence lurks in all of us though most push it aside.
Silence a beautiful symphony, from which we cannot hide.

Inktober 2021



Inktober 2021: Prompt 9- Pressure

(Fan Art of Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba)
by Rayna Hossain, age 14
Ink & Graphite

White Moments

by Zoe Yost, age 18

The moon—
she winks at me
smiles from heaven
her still, deep light
pouring in a wash

on twiggy branches
reaching
in a wave toward
curving sky
streaking in bolts
from earthen mouth, both
loud and silent

never ceasing their dance
till moments shine white
and curve blue
and heaven pours
back into earth



Transformation Flight

by Ashleigh Umbrecht, age 19
Acrylic

The Rose

by Amber Gray, age 18

It must've been twelve days ago. Yeah. That's when I got it. The Rose. It came in the mail, along with a letter addressed to me. The Rose was beautiful. It was red with life, its green stem vivaciously supporting its flower. The Rose was truly remarkable. Like I had never seen before. I immediately wondered who sent me this beautiful thing, and opened the letter. Much to my chagrin, there was nothing inside the letter. Just a photo of me taped to old yellow parchment paper. I tossed the letter in the trash, thinking it to be nothing more than a piece of junk, and placed The Rose delicately in a vase full to the brim with water. I then went about my day, as though nothing had happened, The Rose sitting on my desk, waiting for a burst of sunlight.

I awoke the next morning feeling well rested. I noticed the Sun shining through my curtains, and the moment I opened I saw just how beautiful The Rose was shining in the light. It truly embraced the glamorous Sun. That day was quite nice. I was the most productive I've been in ages, working from home hadn't been easy, and it had taken a toll on me. But that day was different, for one reason or another I finished all of my work early, went on a run, and ate healthy all day. It was wonderful. Truly a delight. That evening I lay down to rest, and heard the *pitter-patter* of a light rain rolling off a cloud. "A nice storm to top off my day" I thought to myself. I couldn't have been more wrong.

I woke the next morning feeling desperately ill. I opened my eyes and noted how terrible The Rose had looked. I only had it for two days, it must've been a cheap plant I told myself. I made my way to the bathroom to brush my teeth, and when I did, I felt it. My right-hand, front tooth was missing. It had fallen out in my sleep. My entire mouth, in fact, looked awful. It looked as though I hadn't brushed in years, let alone flossed. When I went to brush, I found something even worse. As soon as the bristle met the gum, blood gushed out of my mouth. More blood than I'd ever seen in my entire life. Enough to make a person worry. When I washed my mouth out to clear away the blood, all of my teeth were gone. I immediately called my dentist, and he said there was nothing they could do. It was already too late, he kept repeating. "Too late for what?" I asked, "This came out of nowhere! Help m-." Before I could finish he hung up the phone. Leaving me in despair. I got no work done that day, and that night I received a call from my boss notifying me that I was to be terminated. I had missed too many days.

I went to sleep that night in misery. When I awoke the next morning, the Sun was out again. I felt my mouth, and to my surprise, all my teeth were there. I ran out of bed to the mirror, checked my smile, and sure enough, everything was in the right place. I looked much younger too. The Rose was in wonderful condition, and once again I had a lovely day, albeit with nothing to do. I really did lose my job. That wasn't a dream.

After a day of gallivanting about town, I went to bed quite early, hoping my rest

would quell the nightmares of the day before. I woke up the next morning to much of the same conditions. In fact, we must've had a string of good luck, it was sunny for about five more days.

Then, four days ago, the storm hit. It hasn't stopped raining, and there hasn't been a break in the clouds. The Rose is near dead. And with every fallen petal I age more and more, grow more and more ill. I write this final message on what will be my deathbed, not as a remembrance for me, but as a warning to those who read it. The Rose will kill you in time, do not accept it. No matter what.

Beware, my dear reader. Beware of The Rose.



Death Attracts Life

by Myly Huynh, age 17
Metal & Ink



How Many is Too Many

by Kassidy Hale, age 13
Digital photography

Look-alike

by Rose Mulveny, age 14

I pull out the doll, it looks just like me. Hazel eyes, copper hair, pale skin, freckles. Smiling, I take her down stairs. Pulling myself into a different world. Doing whatever I want. Indulging in the fun, activities, and smiles of my new me. Life flipped over sideways. I make my own decisions.

Wanting to get everything that went with my doll. Horses, clothes, food, pets, and friends. She was perfect. Jealous of the luxury of her life. I wanted to have it so bad. Sucked into hers and left my own.

My little doll turned into a lifestyle, it was my dream. It was like wading through thick mud. So hard to get out of.

Too focused on something that wasn't real and that never could be real. Ending, putting aside my desire for something different and starting to work on something that would make me happy.

Now that I am older, I have to forget the past and look forward. But, putting away my doll in a plastic bin feels like betraying her.

I made a life I couldn't have, and in the end I had to box it up and stow it away. Bella is me, but I am not her.



Autumn Change

by Mikayla Dayton, age 18
Digital photography

The Ides of November

by Amber Gray, age 18

When she wakes me in the morning
Or tires me at night

She puts me down
And pulls me up

And though we both know anger
My love for her is undying

For she is the introduction to all that is beauty
As well as all that is at the end of time

She is my hope
And my hatred

Happiness is not a feeling everlasting
But it is a feeling ever true

In the ides of November
The wakes of fall

I love her with my soul
I love her with my all

gray

by Anonymous, age 17

drifts
through the haze
of gray
aimless
fades
into
a sea
of faces
unknown
forever

is nothing
is forever



Into an Unknown World

by Li W., age 17
Acrylic



Griffin Peak

by Ashleigh Umbrecht, age 19
Charcoal

The Magical Reawakening of Spring

by Amber Gray, age 18

The Magical Reawakening of Spring

But once a year does life come round,
In such a fashion we here have found.

Spring when sprung,
Is like wreaths to be hung.
So full of green,
So full of life,
So full of everything,
We learn to like.

When Spring does come,
It bites, not gnaws.
It pets, not claws.
It tells you everything,
And nothing,
All in a phrase.

Spring has sprung .
Rejoice.
Sing Praise.

For when Spring rises,
Hear its reprises.
Feel its soft whispers,
And try not to whimper.

Spring is our blessing.

After Hours

by Cassie Dong, age 15

After hours I seem to pass
Looking at lonely windows
And watching the sunlight cast
Down on the grass
In a dimming glow

I know my shadows trend alone
My burrow underneath a hole
I hear the wanderings on earth
And stop my steps short from mirth

Perhaps I have missed my time
Far too tardy to be fine
Waiting for my moment to arrive
During this period when after hours thrive



Starlight

by Zoe Yost, age 18
Digital photography



Children's Christmas Dreams

by Nicky Saitz, age 13
Digital photography



Kassidy Portrait

by James A. Johnson, age 12
Digital photography

Endless Tears and Burning Heartbeat

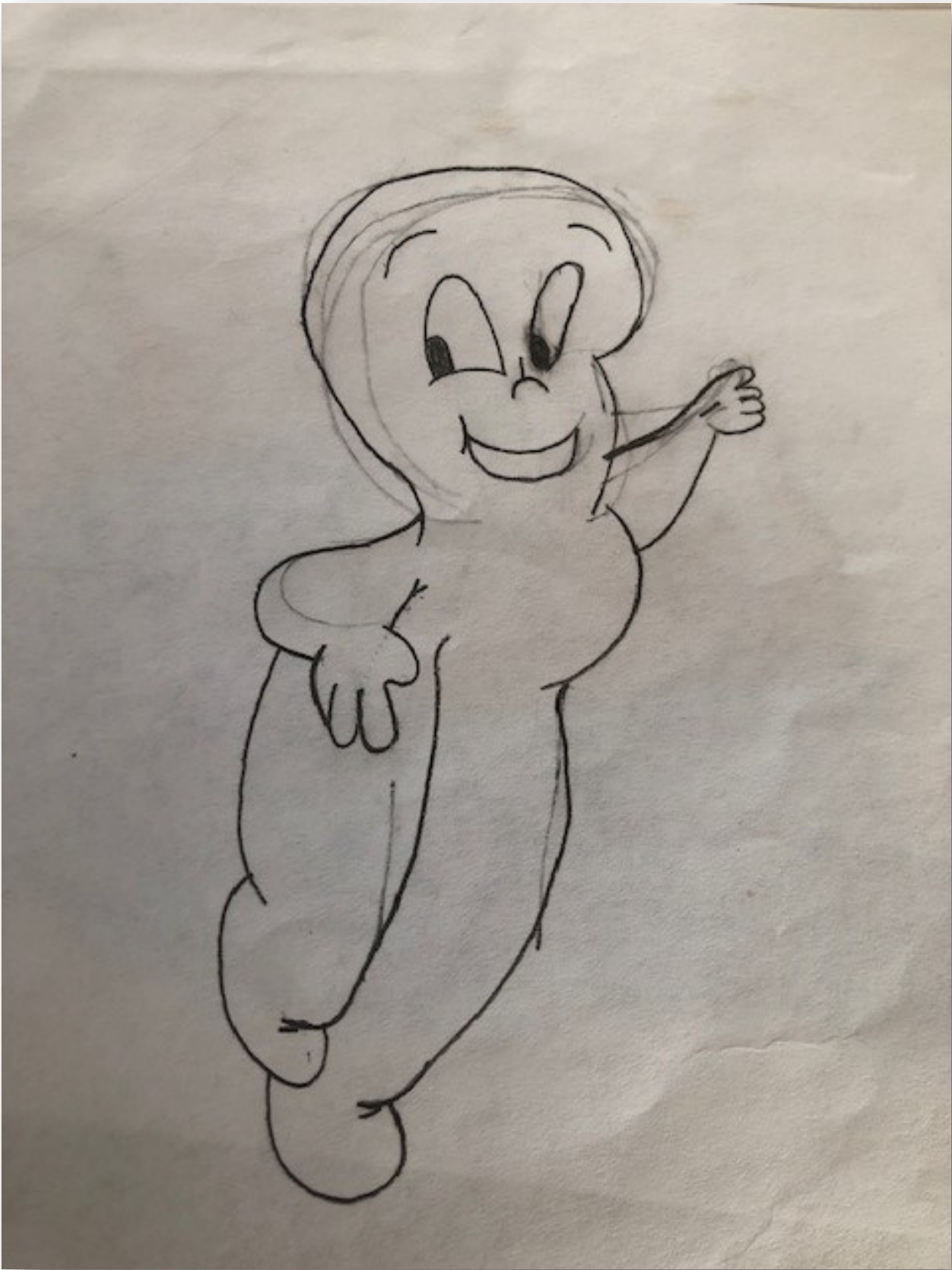
by Nicky Saitz, age 13

Almost nothing gets me through a normal day
The thoughts are so horrifying
Yes I have had happy times, but at night I lay
On the inside I feel like endlessly crying
Because it might be the only way to set out my burning heart
And when I wake tomorrow
I hope I don't feel the sorrow
I know this will end but I don't know when the forgiveness will start
The self forgiveness I deserve
But that I can't give to me
I have to bring this to curve
I have a locked door and a key
I'm opening the door
I can not be hurt
There are people and friends that need me more
Sorry for telling you too much when you only ask for a blurt.



A Different Tree House

by Tahira Kiara Ahmed, age 14
Pencil, Fine Line Pens, Acrylic Paint, Alcohol Markers



untitled

by Janice A., age 14
Pen, Pencil



Kassidy in Sunshine

by James A. Johnson, age 12
Digital Photography

The Game of Lacrosse

by Molly Dolan, age 14

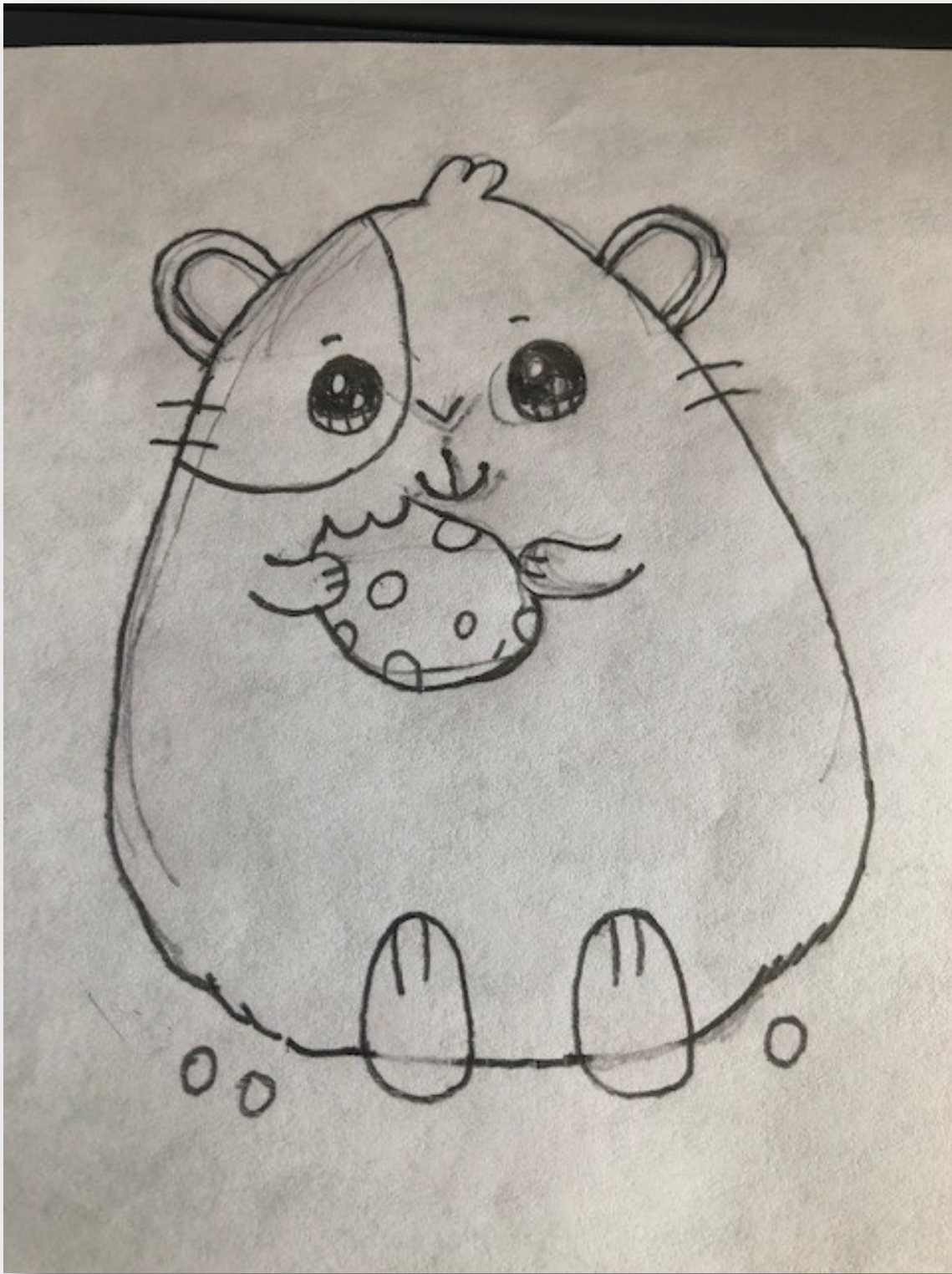
My foot touches the ground. I feel the excitement flow through my body. Hot. Cold. It can be any temperature. Running, sprinting, jogging, but never walking. My legs power through the thin layer of turf or bumpy grass. They feel like there are rocks attached to them. Stick in two hands, sweaty palms. Sweaty face. Loud whistle sounds. *Tweeeet*. Ball goes up like the sun rising in the clouds. Eyes suddenly move up. The reach, timing. You feel like everything is in slow motion. Thinking. Sticks colliding with each other. *Clank*. Ball is being carried in the air by the gusting wind. The sound of the ball landing safely in your pocket. No sound. It landed safely. Movement of your wrists are the boss of your stick. Stick opens, and closes. It never stops. Vision of the goal. The determination to hear the ball hit the back of that net. "Swoosh". Cleats hitting the ground, one by one. Stomps. Non-stop stomps. My hair brushing up against my neck, little pieces slowly starting to fly out. You can see the glares and stares focusing on you. You feel watched, nervous, but excited. Excitement level is high, but the determination level is even higher. You want to win. You want to catch the ball. You want the goal. You want it all. My thoughts scramble in my head. Maybe I made it, and it was a nice smooth goal. When the ball jumps out of my stick, it wants to get to that goal. My excitement level is starting to increase. I feel like I am being picked up, and taken away to the clouds.

But there are other thoughts in my head. They aren't the thoughts that bring me excitement. What if I miss? What if I hear that pipe sound? *Clink*. My head starts to ache. I feel my legs getting heavy. The look on my face changes faster than a second. That gut feeling in my stomach. I messed up. I'm more than embarrassed. How could I. Why? I make too many mistakes. I now have angry thoughts in my head, they never seem to get happier. But, something kicks in. Determination. My eyes move from the ground, up to the sky. I pick my head up. The weight on my legs is getting lighter, and the determination in my heart is getting stronger. I am not finished yet.



James Multiplicity

by James A. Johnson, age 12
Digital photography



untitled

by Janice A. , age 14
Pen, Pencil



Show Night

by Kaelin Brannick, age 13
Crayon, Pencils