

**HAYS ARTS COUNCIL
CREATIVE WRITING AWARDS
IN
POETRY + PROSE**



SPRING 2021



**THE HAYS ARTS COUNCIL
CREATIVE WRITING AWARDS
IN POETRY AND PROSE ~ 2021**

Dear Friends,

Once again, I was honored and ecstatic to help judge the K-12 Hays Arts Council Creative Writing Contest. Also, it was my privilege to serve as the chairperson in the FHSU English Department for the contest this year. As in previous years, the quality of this year's entries was exceptional and provided much needed enjoyment to the judges. Writing, whether it be poetry or prose, is a challenging undertaking. These young writers have exceeded that challenge with enthusiasm and professional quality.

I would like to thank everyone who took the time to be a part of this amazing event. First, thank you to the students who mustered the effort to submit their prose and poetry in such a challenging year. Then, there are the teachers who cultivated and encouraged the imaginations of these young students—that support was readily apparent in this year's creative works. Hold your heads high. You should all be proud. Thank you for your efforts.

Also, I would like to express my utmost thanks to the following colleagues for taking the time to help judge the entries: Linda McHenry, Dr. Brett Weaver, Dr. Linda Smith, Dr. Cheryl Duffy, Dr. Matthew Smalley, Lisa Bell, Judy Sansom, Dr. Lexey Bartlett, Dr. Eric Leuschner, Sharon Graham, Dr. Sharla Hutchison, and Sharon Wilson.

Writer Neil Gaiman once wrote, "This is how you do it: you sit down at the keyboard and you put one word after another until it's done. It's that easy and that hard." I hope you enjoy the wealth of words on these pages.

Sincerely,

Morgan Chalfant, MA
Fort Hays State University, Department of English
Creative Writing Judging Committee Chair

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The Hays Optimist Club
Friend of Youth

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2021 Creative Writing Awards ~ Poetry

<i>Gr.</i>	<i>Place</i>	<i>Student</i>	<i>Title of Work</i>	<i>School</i>	<i>Teacher</i>
K	1	Kat Whited	<i>Penny</i>	St. Mary's/Ellis	Beth McDougal
K	2	Davin Bollig	<i>Mack</i>	St. Mary's/Ellis	Beth McDougal
K	3	Willow Swagerty	<i>Lemonade</i>	St. Mary's/Ellis	Beth McDougal
K	HM	Ainsley Haas	<i>Summer</i>	St. Mary's/Ellis	Beth McDougal
K	HM	Brielle Honas	<i>Mermaids</i>	St. Mary's/Ellis	Beth McDougal
1	1	Shayden Boydston	<i>Summer Fun</i>	St. Mary's/Ellis	Megan Everett
1	2	Landon Schield	<i>Shark</i>	St. Mary's/Ellis	Megan Everett
1	3	Mason Schield	<i>Summer</i>	St. Mary's/Ellis	Megan Everett
1	HM	Griffin Dietz	<i>Komodo Dragon</i>	O'Loughlin	Kenda Leiker
2	1	Zachary Rice	<i>Leaf</i>	Wilson	Betsy Forinash
2	2	Addisyn Karlin	<i>Winter Is. . .</i>	Wilson	Betsy Forinash
2	3	Layla Crisenberry	<i>Wheat</i>	Wilson	Candace Sage
2	HM	Gavyn Wolf	<i>Paper Cut</i>	Wilson	Betsy Forinash
2	HM	Lauren Goodale	<i>Books</i>	O'Loughlin	Denise Danielson
3	1	Adalyn Nilhas	<i>Scared School Supplies</i>	St. Mary's/Ellis	Patty Meagher
3	2	Xayne Hood	<i>No Control</i>	Wilson	Kenda Leiker
3	3	Niko Tsereteli	<i>Red</i>	O'Loughlin	Kenda Leiker
4	1	Sarah Niehaus	<i>Ever Moving</i>	USD489 Remote Learning	Sonya Herl
4	2	Ellee Lang	<i>A Rainbow</i>	Wilson	Rebecca Summers
4	3	Mason Rozean	<i>Tired Red Sun</i>	Holy Family	Teresa Schrant
4	HM	Lexi Casey	<i>Creation</i>	Holy Family	Teresa Schrant
4	HM	Chevy Morton	<i>My Puppy</i>	Washington/Ellis	Pauleen Edmonds
5	1	Trent Ryan	<i>Eyes Eyes</i>	O'Loughlin	Gina Johnson
5	2	Jaceir Whitley	<i>Betrayal</i>	USD489 Remote Learning	Sonya Herl
5	3	Emily Zolnierz	<i>My Hands</i>	O'Loughlin	Gina Johnson
6	1	Edison Leuschner	<i>Words</i>	Hays Middle School	Sydney Niernberger
6	2	Xiarhianna Hood	<i>The Boy Who Could</i>	Hays Middle School	Sydney Niernberger
6	3	Angela Feyerherm	<i>Snow</i>	Hays Middle School	Sydney Niernberger
6	HM	Julianne Stecklein	<i>Callie</i>	Hays Middle School	Sydney Niernberger
7	1	Savannah Clingan	<i>Being Human</i>	Hays Middle School	Rebecca Kuehl
7	2	Jenna Brull	<i>My Mind</i>	TMP-Marian JR High	Brenda Rose
7	3	Reghan Byer	<i>Lucky Charms</i>	TMP-Marian JR High	Brenda Rose
7	HM	Maria Diaz	<i>Songs of Forgiveness</i>	Hays Middle School	Melissa Treinen
8	1 (tie)	Macara Rohr	<i>Art</i>	TMP-Marian JR High	Brenda Rose
8	1 (tie)	Clare Tholstrop	<i>Faded</i>	Hays Middle School	Jerry Braun
8	2 (tie)	Chloe Purinton	<i>One Fantastic Ride</i>	TMP-Marian JR High	Brenda Rose
8	2 (tie)	Breanna Seiler	<i>Pandemonium</i>	TMP-Marian JR High	Brenda Rose
8	3 (tie)	Gracie Sloan	<i>Secret</i>	Hays Middle School	Misti Norris
8	3 (tie)	Shyanne Yost	<i>Jealousy</i>	TMP-Marian JR High	Brenda Rose
8	HM	Shalee Gottschalk	<i>Growing Dreams</i>	TMP-Marian JR High	Brenda Rose
8	HM	Jalen Smith	<i>Thoughts</i>	Hays Middle School	Misti Norris

9	1	Emily White	<i>Seventh Grade</i>	Ellis High School	Sarah Tomsic
9	2	Mia Lang	<i>Social Worker</i>	TMP-Marian High School	Chelsie Niehaus
9	3	Kyle Wasinger	<i>Fishing Hole</i>	TMP-Marian High School	Chelsie Niehaus
9	HM	Kiera Wagstaff	<i>My Paper Outlet</i>	TMP-Marian High School	Chelsie Niehaus
10	1	Eileen Veatch	<i>Personifying the Moon</i>	Hays High School	Vanessa Schumacher
10	2	Ryleigh Martinez	<i>Distant</i>	Hays High School	Vanessa Schumacher
10	3	Trent Summers	<i>World Hunger Haiku</i>	Hays High School	Vanessa Schumacher
10	HM	Madi Nottingham	<i>Skin</i>	Hays High School	Vanessa Schumacher
11	1	Kali Hagans	<i>Society</i>	TMP-Marian High School	Travis Grizzell
11	2	Sam Vesper	<i>Those Who Wait</i>	Hays High School	Vanessa Schumacher
11	3	Grace McCord	<i>Blood Red Ink</i>	Hays High School	Vanessa Schumacher
11	HM	Tyler Solida	<i>Categories</i>	Hays High School	Vanessa Schumacher
12	1	Caitlin Fisher	<i>Reincarnation</i>	Ellis High School	Sarah Tomsic
12	2	Caitlin Fisher	<i>Returning Home</i>	Ellis High School	Sarah Tomsic
12	3	Caitlin Fisher	<i>Toothache</i>	Ellis High School	Sarah Tomsic
12	HM	Audrey Rymer	<i>Headspace</i>	Hays High School	Kathy Wagoner

2021 Creative Writing Winning Entries ~ *Poetry*

Penny

Pig not money
Eats everything
Nice
Naps all day
You have never seen a pig like this

Kat Whited

St. Mary's Grade School
Kindergarten, 1st Place

Mack

Big and brown
Chews and chews
Always finds mud puddles
My favorite pet.

Davin Bollig

St. Mary's Grade School
Kindergarten, 2nd Place

Lemonade

Fresh, yellow, sugary
Tastes good on a hot summer day.
Sell it for a dollar.
Mmm, mmm, mmm

Willow Swagerty

St. Mary's Grade School
Kindergarten, 3rd Place

Summer

Hot and Free
Sunny and Bright
Hot dogs on the grill fill the air
Buzzing bees
Strawberry popsicles on my tongue.

Ainsley Haas

St. Mary's Grade School
Kindergarten, Honorable Mention

Mermaids

Magical creatures
Extra long hair
Really beautiful
Makeup is pink and pretty
Always singing
Incredible songs
Deep in the ocean
Swimming all day long

Brielle Honas

St. Mary's Grade School
Kindergarten, Honorable Mention

Summer Fun

Practice untying goats
Compete at KJRA
Give Gus oats
Go swimming
Ride Gus

Shayden Boydston

St. Mary's Grade School
1st Grade, 1st Place

Shark

Swim
Hide
Animal
Right for the fish
Kids stay away

Landon Schield

St. Mary's Grade School
1st Grade, 2nd Place

Komodo Dragon

SCALY, MASSIVE
BITING, RUNNING, POWERFUL
HUNTING DOWN THEIR PREY
LIZARD

Griffin Dietz

O'Loughlin Elementary
1st Grade, Honorable Mention

Winter Is. . .

Winter is skiing and cold.
Winter is pink and blue hats,
And warm scarves,
And snowmen, too!
Winter is jumping in snow,
And getting together with family,
And seeing your dog
Swimming in the snow,
And baking cookies with Grandma.
You never get bored!
Winter will always be
Wonderful

Addisyn Karlin

Wilson Elementary
2nd Grade, 2nd Place

Summer

Going to Grandma's house
Fishing at a pond
Playing with cars
Eating hot dogs
Hot, warm and the sun shines
Best season

Mason Schield

St. Mary's Grade School
1st Grade, 3rd Place

Leaf

Gliding in the sky,
My mom is a tree.
But what about me?
I turn up to be
A lonely leaf.
Oh, sad me.
I'm turning brown
And falling apart.
I'm not beautiful
Anymore.

Zachary Rice

Wilson Elementary
2nd Grade, 1st Place

Wheat

Wheat oh Wheat
You are so sweet
I make bread with you
The best bread with you
You are so tall
And you smell amazing
And all of your friends
That are growing right beside you
The sun and water helps
You grow so tall

Layla Crisenberry

Wilson Elementary
2nd Grade, 3rd Place

Books

Exciting, Fun
Reading, Loving, Exploring
Spine, Characters, Places, Cover
Saving, Falling, Sitting
Funny, Scary
Stories

Lauren Goodale

O'Loughlin Elementary

2nd Grade, Honorable Mention

Paper Cut

OUCH!

Why did you bite me
with your sharp teeth?
Why are you mad?
And why did you bite me?
WHY?
I was just coloring
on your back.
Don't do that again
or I'll throw you in
your worst nightmare. . .
The recycling bin!

Gavyn Wolf

Wilson Elementary

2nd Grade, Honorable Mention

Red

Red is the feeling of anger and frustration.
Red is the sound of tea boiling in a kettle.
Red is the heat of a spicy chili pepper in your mouth.
Red is the blaze of a flame burning in a candle.
Red is the sunset after a warm spring day.
Red is the sense of hot water scorching you from a faucet.
Red is a delightful pizza after a long day of work.
Red is the feeling of a basketball bouncing against the floor.
Red is the shrill sound of a whistle blowing.
Red is a delicious tomato ripening off its plant.
Red is the glance of the leaves on trees in fall.
Red is the scent of a fiery stick of cinnamon.
Red is the color that surrounds my day.

Niko Tsereteli

O'Loughlin Elementary

3rd Grade, 3rd Place

No Control

A black hole surrounded by the vastness of space,
Stars fall in without a trace.
It's hard to see through all the black,
Don't get too close or you can't come back
Floating in space, you'll find a black hole,
Gravity forces you in without control.
Further and further you slip away,
You'll never come back and have to stay.

Xayne Hood

Wilson Elementary

3rd Grade, 2nd Place

Scared School Supplies

"I am afraid of the teacher," said the chalk.
"Every time she uses me I shrink."
"I am afraid of the chalk," said the chalkboard
"It makes me so messy."
"I am afraid of the chalkboard," said the whiteboard.
"It takes my place."
"I am afraid of the whiteboard," said the marker.
"If I touch it my ink runs."
"I am afraid of the marker," said the paper.
"It stains me and it doesn't come off."
"I am afraid of the paper," said the pencil.
"If I touch it my lead will come off."
"I am afraid of my students," said the teacher.
"They are wild!"

Adalyn Nilhas

St. Mary's Grade School

3rd Grade, 1st Place

Ever Moving

The ocean is full of many sounds
It crackles
and flips
and tumbles
and splashes
and crashes
and it rarely sleeps

Sarah Niehaus
USD489 Remote Learning
4th Grade, 1st Place

Tired Red Sun

Tired red sun sets
Across orange-painted sky
Before white stars shine.

Mason Rozean
Holy Family Elementary
4th Grade, 3rd Place

A Rainbow

A rainbow
is as red as my cheeks after forgetting to put on sunscreen for a long, summer day in our new pool
is as orange as the vivid honeysuckle on my front porch, infested with hummingbirds my dog is
constantly barking at.
is as yellow as an original pencil with sharp, dark lead and its long, dull body with a flaky, pink eraser for
a hat.
is as green as the freshly cut grass on a sweltering, summer day with beautiful daisies poking out of its
soft, fluffy ground.
is as blue as my tongue after eating a staining lollipop, not noticing its new alien look.
is as purple as my old but special stuffed dog named Violet, who taught me feelings, numbers, and
animals and played lullabies as I fell asleep.

Ellee Lang
Wilson Elementary
4th Grade, 2nd Place

Creation

All creation shines.
Grass growing in perfect lines,
Fluffy clouds, the sun red hot,
Violets packed in flowerpots.
Because all creation shines

Lexi Casey
Holy Family Elementary
4th Grade, Honorable Mention

My Puppy

Little, black and white
Soft but he does not bite.
His name is Rusty
He only loves just me.
My little black and white puppy.

Chevy Morton
Washington Grade School
4th Grade, Honorable Mention

Eyes Eyes

Eyes, eyes bright blue eyes, the ones who see danger,
the ones who see kindness
Eyes, eyes they all say you look like my dad's,
and well I believe it too.

Eyes, eyes the two that saw the Grand Canyon,
and Mount Rushmore.
Eyes, eyes the ones who have seen many beautiful sunsets,
and thunderstorms.

Eyes, eyes this one's to you, for watching my bobber dig
deep down under the waves.
Eyes, eyes the ones who saw a huge shad in a wiper.

Eyes, eyes the ones who have spotted the big dipper
thousands of times.
Eyes, eyes thank you for all the amazing memories of
tomorrow and the past.

Eyes, eyes thank you for overlooking all the words my hand
quickly scribbles.
Eyes, eyes the ones who are free, and do not need glasses.

Eyes, eyes seeing many rare critters like that wild beaver, or
that scary black widow.
Eyes, eyes I thank you for being unique in your own way.

Trent Ryan

O'Loughlin Elementary
5th Grade, 1st Place

Betrayal

I put on my best tree climbing shoes
As I head toward the tree
Before I know it,
I am sky high
In the tree,
there are many things I can see –
Bugs and spider webs. . .
So many creepy crawlers
I'm calm as I enjoy the breeze
Until snap. . . .

My favorite tree branch betrays me.

Jaceir Whitley

USD489 Remote Learning
5th Grade, 2nd Place

My Hands

Thumb war with my brother,
fighting and then we resolve it with a pat on the back.
Holding someone close if they are scared or worried.
Gently petting the soft fur of a kitten.
Making the world nicer by drawing a beautiful drawing.
Holding something gently, a newborn chick, warm and fuzzy.
Crafting delicate pottery, my hands covered in clay.
In case someone trips, my hands are there to catch them,
make sure they don't fall.
Without my hands, I would lose one of my senses, a part of me.
My hands, with short nails, tender skin are unique.
To me every person is a snowflake, we all have different fingerprints.
Hands make me neater, cleaner, stronger.
They let us connect and share.
Some hands may be rough, some may be smooth, but that doesn't matter.
All I know is if we all join together, hold hands, we can accomplish anything.

Emily Zolnierz

O'Loughlin Elementary
5th Grade, 3rd Place

Words

Words are one of the best things we have.
They can heal better than any medicine and be the light of someone's day.
They can also hurt more than a hit and can be sharper than a sword.
Words have rewritten history itself.
They helped us build cities; as well as destroy them.
Words influenced famous people in the world.
Make sure to use them for good and not to harm.
One of the best gifts we have are words.

Edison Leuschner
Hays Middle School
6th Grade, 1st Place

Snow

Snow. Crisp, crunchy, white
How it shines in the bright light
Each snowflake is oh so special
But watch out for the color yellow
If one eats the snow colored yellow
It will very much taste like the devil

Peek into the yard, where the grass was once green
But look now, not a blade is to be seen
As I play and play, the sky that was once blue has faded away
The day is done, and dusk is near
As I fall asleep, I hear someone whispering in my ear
But who is it?
Could it be? Could it be that Santa is here?

Angela Feyerherm
Hays Middle School
6th Grade, 3rd Place

The Boy Who Could

There was a boy, small and tender
People mocked him for being slender
He was told he couldn't do anything
That he was worth nothing
Then he stop listening
He stopped questioning
And started awakening
He finally started believing that he can do it
And said he wouldn't quit
He would commit
And, he could
He should, and he would
He is, the boy who could

Xiarhianna Hood
Hays Middle School
6th Grade, 2nd Place

Callie

Callie, your fur is yellow as lemon cream.
Callie, your eyes a beautiful shade of copper.
Callie, your purr's so loud it could cause an earthquake.
Callie, your paw's as soft as a blanket.
Callie, your ears go back as I boop your little triangular nose.
Callie, you are a special girl!

Julianne Stecklein
Hays Middle School
6th Grade, Honorable Mention

Being Human

Nobody was born perfect or full of love,
Instead we were born with problems, sin, and struggles we can't get rid of.
We are stuck in this life like we are stuck as imperfect human beings,
And after too many years of age we'll finally start seeing
What we needed to be believing since we were born,
Since we were young and almost innocent,
That nobody taught us to make mistakes, just how to fix them.
No one taught us to fight wars, but how to win them.

There is a plague in everyone's mind,
An illness of doubt.
It grows and spreads, everyone wanting it out.
As if a weed, it grows in places nobody wants
And by the time you notice it, its roots are too deep
A beautiful garden destroyed, by one tiny thing.
You can pull and pull, but it is stuck in the ground.
Not by yourself could you ever get it out.

You've heard other phrases about the thick and the thin,
But here is a new message to tell you that when
You ask for help from family or friends
It makes life different, for you and for them.

Savannah Clingan
Hays Middle School
7th Grade, 1st Place

Lucky Charms

Life is like a bowl of lucky charms,
Most of it is bland and boring,
Bland, just like depression,
Like stress,
But the marshmallows,
The marshmallows are the good moments in life,
With friends,
With family,
But just like the bowl of lucky charms,
Life is low on marshmallows.

Reghan Byer
TMP-Marian Jr. High
7th Grade, 3rd Place

Art

My imagination wonders,
with all the different colors.
Bright and rich pigments that burst,
which makes my eyes thirst.
Strokes of art,
fill my heart.
Emotions flow from the canvas.
Swirling wonders of madness,
which gives me gladness.
Darks over power lights,
this perspective is from great heights.
This wonderful piece of art.

Macara Rohr
TMP-Marian Jr. High
8th Grade, 1st Place (t)

My Mind

My mind is like an abandoned mansion,
Large and bare.
The walls beaten up
With my regrets written all over them.
They don't just erase,
Written with a permanent sharpie.
I try, but they won't leave me,
No matter how hard I try.
They don't go.
I can't leave my regrets like I wish I could.
I try and paint over it, but it all seeps into the cracks on the floors and the walls.
I can't get over the things I didn't do or what I should have done.
I wish I never did any of these things that are engraved in my mind.
It's especially hard to leave those regrets when that's the room in which I sleep.
I try to run from that room, but the door is locked
And the key has been lost.
The key dropped somewhere that I can't see
Because it got dropped in my regrets.
I will be stuck in this home until it collapses on top of me.
I will never find the key that will save my life
Unless I make things up to the people I have done wrong.
It's hard when my fist holds a grudge on those people.
I can't let go of these things
Because they will always be with me.

Jenna Brull

TMP-Marian Jr. High
7th Grade, 2nd Place

Pandemonium

Chaos, Cacophony, Pandemonium

Bombs plummeting down
Soldiers dropping like flies
Mothers losing sons
Silence when all is done.

Chaos, Cacophony, Pandemonium

Children running
Their squeals piercing the air
Parents yelling for order that cannot be obtained
Silence when all is done.

Chaos, Cacophony, Pandemonium

Voices screaming in your head
The lies they tell become truths
False freedom is your goal
Longing for silence in your head

Chaos, Cacophony, Pandemonium

Breanna Seiler

TMP-Marian Jr. High
8th Grade, 2nd Place (t)

Faded

Pink fades into orange
Orange falls into yellow
Yellow melts into blue
Blue hovers over the
 Long dirt road
 Past the stone
 And the sign
And the faded "R"
 I never drew
Through the green
 And yellow
Waving in the wind
 Sunflowers
 All are dead
But that is nothing new
 The faded sky
Is brighter now
 But it still
Misses you

Clare Tholstrop

Hays Middle School
8th Grade, 1st Place (t)

Songs of Forgiveness

Time has gone by as my dear father settles in
with someone more important than the life he is living.
He will leave and never return,
though I am highly aware of this.
The more I try to make him see
that his actions will tear our family apart,
he won't listen.

The more I think, the harder it is to stop grieving.

This very soul is kind at heart,
but to me she is a beast I wish to slay.
My father loves her.

I can feel the hatred and sadness rolling in a peaceful bliss.

Forgiveness is what I need and what I crave.
The thought of being left behind again has me to my knees.
Although the hatred lives in my heart like an eternal flame,
tears fall from my eyes like the steady streams of river waves.

No one can stop the fear and pain.

Though these feelings torture me every living moment,
it will pass and I won't feel any grief.
And if my father does leave me behind,
I will come running back like a lost dog in a swirling storm.

Forgiveness is like a song playing on and on
in my mind that will lead me to my release.
This woman will live in his heart and in his home.
Once I can forgive, I can have her by my side
without hate in my heart anymore.

Maria Diaz
Hays Middle School
7th Grade, Honorable Mention

Thoughts

Where do thoughts go?

Do they fly away
like a spooked bird?
Or do they hide
when heard?

Do they slither away like a snake?
Or do they sink
into a vast lake?

Maybe they get sent away
into the atmosphere?

Or do they just disappear?

Jalen Smith
Hays Middle School
8th Grade, Honorable Mention

One Fantastic Ride

It's the ride that thrills me,
As we go up and down.
Sitting steady in my seat,
We travel all around.
Knowing it's more than a ride;
It's a companion.

Not a worry in the world,
Never felt more free.
A relaxed mind;
Vacant of all stress.
The feeling of flying,
Higher and higher, the faster we go.

A bond made of trust,
I put my safety on the line.
Always on edge,
This rush is more powerful than a roller coaster.
Gallop my horse,
Through the golden fields of a perfect sunset.

Chloe Purinton
TMP-Marian Jr. High
8th Grade, 2nd Place (t)

Growing Dreams

A child is born, so gentle and meek.
Shimmering baby eyes fill with future dreams.
Not a worry in the world, as though it may seem.
For this child, so small knows not a thing.

Birth

Years have flown, for this child has grown.
Life is such a precious thing, so unsure.
Her dreams came to life as she started to mature.
Her soul was kissed as she strayed from bliss.

Adulthood

She is now aged and old.
Life is fragile when taken for granted.
Dreams flash in waves of gray.
As she battles her final days.

Death

Shalee Gottschalk

TMP-Marian Jr. High
8th Grade, Honorable Mention

Jealousy

A strong feeling of envy,
Deep down inside.
This can get you in trouble,
When these emotions arise.
The devil at work,
And one does not realize.
His treacherous path, to create despise.
Jealousy is hurtful,
It makes one weak.
If only the person,
Would turn the other cheek.
There is no purpose for it.
All it does is cause pain.
Everyone should rejoice
For what others have attained.

Shyanne Yost

TMP-Marian Jr. High
8th Grade, 3rd Place (t)

Seventh Grade

Seventh grade was the worst year yet,
I know, because depression is hard to forget.
I didn't know what it was,
But I was really, really, really, really sad.
It all started with some boy that I liked.
And everyone showing that I was disliked.
I had kind of wanted to be STUCO's Vice President,
Having a good platform and some great movement.
Failure hit me as results came in,
Then I knew no one would like me and I fell.
Deep into sadness, never coming up for air,
No one could help me. "This will never be fair."
I wanted to die and I almost did,
From crying for hours about how my life was just dead.
My mom blamed my friend that had this problem, too.
But this was all me, and I wanted them to leave me alone.
Despising the counselor and everyone who wanted to talk.
I couldn't handle all this drama, now get out!
New Year's came and I was tired of sadness.
January 1, I came out of the darkness,
All I could feel was the warmth of the sunlight.
I told that dark that kept me under,
"Just leave me alone, and find someone else to kill."
Seventh grade wasn't easy, but at least I wasn't queasy.

Emily White

Ellis High School
9th Grade, 1st Place

Secret

I had a secret
That made me cry
I kept it inside
Until I couldn't fight
Several times I asked why
Why I had to be the one to cry
Many nights I lost sleep
Because I was the one to weep
Why did I have to lie
When my friends asked why
I'm left with broken pieces
Holding onto this secret

Gracie Sloan

Hays Middle School
8th Grade, 3rd Place (t)

Fishing Hole

Fishing on a beautiful day.
Favorite lure on my trusty pole;
Throwing the line out all the way.
The best way to ease my soul.

Tranquility as I float along,
The birds are chirping, I hear them so.
I am at peace; I feel no wrong.
Through the trees I see a whitetail doe.

As I wait for a fish to pull,
The sky I praise.
Storm clouds gather and disperse in full.
I wait for the fish to raise.

Jerks and pulls with a fight,
As I cast up with a might!

Kyle Wasinger
TMP-Marian High School
9th Grade, 3rd Place

Social Worker

I see my future helping those in need,
They don't have much but they will come to me.
I feel for those who on the daily bleed,
The kids wish that they could be more carefree.

It's not a job that is for everyone,
But I have a desire instilled in me.
To not give up until the work is done.
Foster kids want a life where they are free

I help them find the home they always seek.
To love and to be loved is what they need.
They are strong but many say they are weak,
They long for a strong person who can lead.

The future awaits many things for us,
Parents cannot provide their loving care.
Their hardship is something we should discuss.
It doesn't ever seem like it is fair.

Being a social worker can be hard,
And they always say I cannot do it.

Mia Lang
TMP-Marian High School
9th Grade, 2nd Place

My Paper Outlet

Placing all emotions in one paper
An outlet for all struggles and stresses.
Imagining an endless skyscraper
Or a million dollar fashion dresses.

Allowing all emotions to flow out,
Letting my hand roam free without worry,
My inner artist travels its own route
While the image of my fears go blurry.

In times of distress I may be troubled
But I can place everything on my art.
The contents in my sketchbook are doubled,
Good comes out from something with a bad start.

But will society revoke all this?
Will it all get thrown into the abyss?

Kiera Wagstaff
TMP-Marian High School
9th Grade, Honorable Mention

World Hunger Haiku

People are starving
They can't afford food to eat
The real pandemic

Trent Summers
Hays High School
10th Grade, 3rd Place

Personifying the Moon

The moon is so pretty,
But imagine it as a person.
I picture the moon a girl,
And she would be rather fat.

But not the cute kind.
Not the good, curvy kind.
No.

Her arms jiggle too much.
Her stomach hangs over too much.
Her thighs are too big.
Her cheeks are too chubby.
And she has a double-take kind of double chin.

But she doesn't care.
She thinks it's cute.
She stands in front of the mirror,
and she smiles.

And her skin isn't perfect.
No there are
Scars,
Acne,
Stretch marks,
Blemishes
That cover her skin.
But she doesn't care.
She thinks they're cute.
And she has a name,
For every disruption on her skin.

And she doesn't have
A summer's tan.
No.
She is deathly pale.

But she doesn't care.
She thinks it's cute.
It gives her a radiant glow.
She shines luminescent.

The galaxy doesn't
Revolve around her.
And she may not shine
As bright as the sun.

But she doesn't care.
She thinks she's cute.
Because in the complete darkness of night,
She gives us just enough to see by.

I would like to think I'd be good friends with the moon.
For she loves herself so much.
Maybe she can teach me
To think of myself the same.
To help me not care.
To help me think I'm cute.
So I can take my imperfections
And love them.

Eileen Veatch
Hays High School
10th Grade, 1st Place

Distant

The Screen
Where everyone's lives take place.
Where my life takes place.
For this screen is where I can pretend to be okay.
Where I live an alternate life.
For once I am the main character in my own motion picture.
For once it is where everyone is.
You see—
We all have the tendency
To make our lives revolve around someone else.
But on this screen, I am my own.
I can pretend and hide the fact that I am not what I want to be
in real life.
But on this screen—
I can be—
The one I want to be.

Ryleigh Martinez
Hays High School
10th Grade, 2nd Place

Skin

Tired and true
I ponder,
Why does it ache?
Our skin is thin,
Only keeping out disease,
So why does it make us suffer so?

Remove my skin.
Look at the meat.
We come in many shapes,
Yet we are all made of the same parts.
The same muscle, the same bone,
We are just muscle,
Piloting muscle and
Using bones to keep us right.
We are just flesh mechs,
So how are we any different?

Life is short.
We are not more or less.
We are all the same.
Afterall, we have one thing—
We have time.
And in the end?
We all die.

Don't waste these little moments.
Don't spend them hating.
Spend them loving,
Give life everything in your heart,
And just maybe when you die,
There will be something good to say.

Madi Nottingham
Hays High School
10th Grade, Honorable Mention

Society

Strive for perfection they said
So she didn't eat until her hair began to shed
Skin and bones are all you need
So she ran until her feet began to bleed
Complexion nothing but glass
So she sat in front of the mirror letting the hours by-pass
Silky hair, long, blonde, and straight
So her short brown waves she came to hate
Nails perfectly colored
So she kept her bitten ones covered
Dark, striking lashes
So she kept her mascara fashioned
Small and petite
So the last cookie she did not eat
Strive for perfection they said
So she did, until she hung on by a thread

Kali Hagans
TMP-Marian High School
11th Grade, 1st Place

Those Who Wait

We as humans are not time savers
We are "do it later"
Destruction generators
We are procrastinators

Leaving a million things to do until the last minute
When you only end up regretting it
Constantly committing crimes against productivity
Along with your already weakened motivity

Stop and think. Where will this get you?
And what are you living up to?
You can't get anything done
When you substitute work for fun

So, quit putting things off and become an activator
Fix this issue, be a time dedicator
Time is a devil and it is not on our side
Procrastinators are in for a very bumpy ride

Now, get up
Be the best version of yourself before it's too late
Don't let anything pile up
Because good things don't come to those who wait

Sam Vesper
Hays High School
11th Grade, 2nd Place

Blood Red Ink

Evil seeps out of the bullets of war.
It was not enough for her to protest, never enough.
They sent her friends off to fight knocking at death's door.
The boy she watched leave all rough would need to be forever tough.

He felt so wrong being in such a destructive force.
The boy left with a rifle not only in hand, but in mind,
Knowing now he had power to change the world's course.
Holding close the paper he signed he would not allow himself to be left behind.

The girl and boy will never meet,
Both wanting to know how each other were,
Though they both yell and march down the opposite street,
Him holding onto the idea of her.

She lies in bed knowing one invisible boy after another feel for her.
Her stomach twists like the worms through the labyrinth of bones on foreign soil.
Her cries for ending fall short, no heads would stir.
Sometimes evil comes as failure, plans that always foil, resulting in his everlasting toil.

Please have mercy, boys here will see camouflage everlasting.
He was a paid killer, and it wasn't like anything he had done before,
The blood he spilt made headlines, blood replacing black ink.
This is not what he signed up for, not how he imagined war.

What if none of it happened like this, she did not have to cry for change?
Would he walk again if not for the war?
Would you call it a lie if his life was not used for an exchange?
Would you believe it will never happen again or did you remember how it happened before?

They cannot keep sending our boys to fight,
Fight their never-ending wars.
Never knowing what for, never knowing what's right.
Never knowing what they speak of behind closed doors.

When will they learn that we are tired of their game?
Blood is on their hands.
All they need to do is take the proper blame.
No longer will the boys take their blood covered commands.

A change is coming, and they better see the tide turning.
No longer will he stand for their greedy fist fight.
They old system crushed under his boots falling out of step, burning.
The boy and girl walking towards change, glowing bright.

Grace McCord
Hays High School
11th Grade, 3rd Place

Categories

We all live by this system that isn't even a law,
It's something that we go by if someone has a flaw.
This system hurts people and kills their self-esteem,
It feels like a nightmare when everyone just wants to dream.

It doesn't even matter if you hide behind your drapes,
Everyone is a part of it, and no one can escape.
It's like a monster that lives within everyone in society,
All it does is cause people to gain anxiety.

This systematic monster is something that nobody chooses to fight,
Our society is like a kingdom being invaded by a dark knight.
Only this dark knight isn't a living thing that we can battle,
It's called CATEGORIES, and it is treating everyone like cattle.

The time is now to break free from the chains we are trapped in,
Everyone must work together and use the pride we all have within.
So forgive your enemies and forget about what is on the outside,
Every one of us feels this same way on the inside.

Tyler Solida
Hays High School
11th Grade, Honorable Mention

Toothache

the dentist told me today
that my dental health
directly connects to my
heart.

the bacteria in your gums
slips from your mouth to the gallery of your heart
hiccupping the gentle motions – *da-thump, da-thump, da -thump*
i wonder if it goes the other way?
if the anguish that festers in your heart,
or the cavity in your chest,
can mirror onto your mouth.

a mother loses her child and
her molars.

canines come tumbling
out of a toddler's mouth
as do his wails.

your figure retreats
into the distance
and now
i have a toothache.

Caitlin Fisher
Ellis High School
12th Grade, 3rd Place

Reincarnation

your eyes pull downward under the shadow of vegetation,
hours weigh on your posture.
and the ground sways
as your head catches on the
soft grass.

this isn't over,
you plead
i still have more to do.

just rest your eyes,
the forest whispers.
her voice soothes your wounds.
she reminds you of your mother;

warmth floods your exiguous soul;
you are
so small and frail in comparison
to her inordinate vigor. . .

your veins hum, content.
just a small nap

you smile for what feels like
the first time in
years.

when you open your eyes again
your bones are wood,
hair made of moss.
your reality all
blurred with foliage.

vines extend past your fingers,
matting together across the soft dirt.

the trees thrum in
time with your
beating soul.

it's been years,
the forest hums.
you understand her now,
better than you've ever understood
anything.

everything feels so old.
they won't miss you, you admit
as the forest sways in the wind

your eyelids close.
you'll rest for a little longer.
and let the world continue on in
its infinite,

monotonous
rotation.

Caitlin Fisher
Ellis High School
12th Grade, 1st Place

Headspace

My words may change
For I have grown
Into a better Being
Learning what I never sought
And applying to what I knew
To create a better place
Than what I was given
For success is not a finish line
Success is an ideal
That one pushes
To become a revolution in the mind

Audrey Rymer
Hays High School
12th Grade, Honorable Mention

Returning Home

there is a large pot
on the stove.
a gentle simmer,
it is some attempt at soup, or stew,
or some other unimpressive dinner.

all of this is new to me.

the neighbors i used to babysit
are riding their bikes
up and down the gravel road.
i long to
mirror their glee,
or at least mimic
some bumbling imitation of the feeling –
i can pretend while i'm home.

we talk and eat and watch the news.
it is calm for a while.
calm, but uneventful.
neither of us are obstructive;
we just sit and say almost-phrases.
filled with almost-promises.

my brain echoes in the silence.
i wonder if they can see the
despair pooling in my mouth
the heat of it burning my tongue into a
false placidity.

this house is warm and smooth – yet void of life.
my childhood bedroom
is born anew, refurbished.
everything has shifted two inches to the left,
i stub my toe on the new coffee table.
they painted the living room eggshell white.
they replaced the couch.

my hand glides across the kitchen wall,
all dents of youthful vigor are smoothed out.
i watch the tendrils of my adolescence
wash through my fingers
like water,
all the dust and grime of time cleaned and there is nothing but anguish left and i –
well, it doesn't matter anyways . . .

with each renovation,
goes a piece of me that
i left in my absence.

the house
(*the pot*)
is (*is*)
empty of soul.
(*boiling over.*)

yet,
there is no mess to clean,
there are no memories to recover.
all burnt away in the cadence of their revisions.
it all goes in time.

this home is not mine.
this house made for different stage of
life, a different evolution.
i do not belong here.
the caverns of my arteries
are now empty
untouched.

Caitlin Fisher
Ellis High School
12th Grade, 2nd Place

2021 Creative Writing Awards ~ Prose

Gr.	Place	Student	Title of Work	School	Teacher
K	1	Oliver Buckstead	<i>Diplodocus' Scary Day</i>	Ellis Co. Homeschool	Kenda Leiker
K	2	Briell Honas	<i>The Crowd</i>	St. Mary's/Ellis	Beth McDougal
K	3	Eleanor Hickel	<i>Daddy's First Deer</i>	St. Mary's/Ellis	Beth McDougal
1	1	Harper Burd	<i>The Fairies Lost Their Magic</i>	Washington/Ellis	Kelsie McMillan
1	2	Griffin Dietz	<i>Discovery of a Lifetime</i>	O'Loughlin	Kenda Leiker
1	3	Addyson McMillan	<i>The Unicorn and Tornado</i>	Washington/Ellis	Ashley Dusin
1	HM	Mason Fitzgerald	<i>The Bird Party</i>	Washington/Ellis	Kelsie McMillan
1	HM	Sawyer Johns	<i>Space Story</i>	Washington/Ellis	Kelsie McMillan
2	1	Kelsey Robben	<i>Upside Down Land</i>	Holy Family	Kenda Leiker
2	2	Grayson Decker	<i>Bird Watching with Friends</i>	O'Loughlin	Kenda Leiker
2	3	Kincaid Demel	<i>The Desert Fire Disaster</i>	Roosevelt	Kenda Leiker
2	HM	Ava Ryan	<i>The Dog on the Plains</i>	Roosevelt	Pamela Grizzell
2	HM	Aubrey Hickel	<i>Super Dog</i>	St. Mary's	Karen Whisman
2	HM	Cade Starns	<i>The Magical Monkey</i>	Washington/Ellis	Libby Starns
3	1	Niko Tsereteli	<i>Monsters in the Forest</i>	O'Loughlin	Kenda Leiker
3	2	Braxton Delzeit	<i>Adventure of Gunner and Bo</i>	Wilson	Leslie Karlin
3	3(tie)	Kyler Kinderknecht	<i>Rose and Friends versus The Evil Lumberjack</i>	O'Loughlin	Kenda Leiker
3	3(tie)	Jackson Berges	<i>Jordan & the Alien from Outer Space</i>	Roosevelt	Kenda Leiker
3	HM	Adalyn Nilhas	<i>My Teacher's Desk Monster</i>	St. Mary's/Ellis	Patty Meagher
4	1	Ellee Lang	<i>Gabriella's Secret</i>	Wilson	Rebecca Summers
4	2	Ellee Lang	<i>Goodbye, Isabel</i>	Wilson	Rebecca Summers
4	3	Taryn Boydston	<i>The Cattle Drive</i>	St. Mary's/Ellis	Peggy Seibel
4	HM	Kendall Schulte	<i>Shirley's Broken Wagon Story</i>	Wilson	Rebecca Summers
4	HM	Sophia Gaschler	<i>Dreamtopia</i>	St. Mary's/Ellis	Peggy Seibel
4	HM	Genevieve Dietz	<i>Double Win</i>	O'Loughlin	Kristy O'Borny
5	1	Kesa Tsereteli	<i>Where the Birds Roam</i>	O'Loughlin	Gina Johnson
5	2	Emma Downing	<i>Wanda Rivers</i>	O'Loughlin	Gina Johnson
5	3	Arien LaDuke	<i>The Promise Neverland</i>	St. Mary's/Ellis	Jackie Baxter
5	HM	Jaceir Whitley	<i>A Scary Summer</i>	USD 489 Remote Learning	Sonya Herl
5	HM	Gavin Bemis	<i>Rainy Day</i>	Wilson	Janell Beilman
5	HM	Alivia Atkinson	<i>The Wacky Weekend</i>	Wilson	Janell Beilman
6	1	Isaiah Burkholder	<i>The Golden War</i>	Hays Middle School	Sydney Niernberger
6	2	Isaiah Burkholder	<i>Fountain of Fire</i>	Hays Middle School	Sydney Niernberger
6	3	Kaden Boomer	<i>Flowing Ink</i>	Hays Middle School	Gabrielle Otte
6	HM	Keiara Hook	<i>My Talking Dog Can Drive</i>	Washington/Ellis	Amy Kuppetz
6	HM	Ahnaelyn Leiker	<i>The Rise of Star</i>	Hays Middle School	Sydney Niernberger
7	1	Arianna Ayarza	<i>Some Days</i>	TMP Junior High	Brenda Rose
7	2	Kaylee Dinkel	<i>I'm Alive but I'm Dead</i>	Hays Middle School	Rebecca Kuehl
7	3	Jaci Schmidt	<i>My Choice</i>	TMP Junior High	Brenda Rose
7	HM	Rachel Staab	<i>The Buried Treasure</i>	TMP Junior High	Brenda Rose

8	1	Isabelle Jones	<i>Dream Flight</i>	Hays Middle School	Misti Norris
8	2	John Weisenborn	<i>Dangerously Funny</i>	Hays Middle School	Misti Norris
8	3 (tie)	Breanna Seiler	<i>An Everyday Fairy Godmother</i>	TMP Junior High	Brenda Rose
8	3 (tie)	Chloe Purinton	<i>Unforeseen</i>	TMP Junior High	Brenda Rose
8	HM	Caira Augustine	<i>The Last Hoorah</i>	Hays Middle School	Misti Norris
8	HM	Cooper Johnson	<i>Run</i>	Hays Middle School	Meagan Englert
9	1	Tridon Mitts	<i>Peripheral</i>	Ellis High School	Sarah Tomsic
9	2	Kaydawn Haag	<i>In an Instant</i>	Ellis High School	Sarah Tomsic
9	3	Santos Garibay	<i>The Bacon Boys</i>	Ellis High School	Sarah Tomsic
9	HM	Sydney Malleck	<i>The Grocery Store</i>	Ellis High School	Sarah Tomsic
10	1	Chase Wittman	<i>A Hoax</i>	Hays High School	Vanessa Schumacher
10	2	Eileen Veatch	<i>The Consequences of Power</i>	Hays High School	Vanessa Schumacher
10	3	Rylee Burd	<i>Escaping Reality</i>	Hays High School	Vanessa Schumacher
10	HM	Mason Norris	<i>The Final Final</i>	Hays High School	Vanessa Schumacher
11	1	Elliott Cox	<i>The Steel Cold Eye</i>	Ellis High School	Sarah Tomsic
11	2	Julia Meitner	<i>Dani</i>	TMP	Travis Grizzell
11	3	Rylee Stahl	<i>The Stone House</i>	TMP	Travis Grizzell

2021 Creative Writing Winning Entries ~ *Prose*

Diplodocus' Scary Day

The dinosaurs are living in Jurassic Park. It's a place with lots of trees, plants, rocks, and sand.

Daspletosaurus is hungry, and he wants to find something to eat. Diplodocuses are his favorite meat, so he decides to find one by searching through the trees in the park.

Then Diplodocus hears the Daspletosaurus coming. Diplodocus decides to hide in the trees and plants so it can't find him. As the Daspletosaurus gets closer, Diplodocus is feeling scared and worried. He thinks he hears more footsteps of different dinosaurs coming toward him.

He realizes that T-rex and Dilophosaurus join the Daspletosaurus to help hunt for the Diplodocus to eat. Then Diplodocus sees a big rock and decides to hide behind it so that they won't see him. The other dinosaurs keep hunting for Diplodocus by looking all around, smelling the air, and stopping to listen for it to move but they can't find him.

After looking for a while and not being able to find him, they finally give up. Diplodocus feels relieved and happy. He stops hiding and begins to eat leaves from the trees. He eats until the sun goes down, and then he goes to sleep.

Oliver Buckstead

Homeschool, Ellis County

Kindergarten, 1st Place

The Crowd

The football game had started and both teams were really good. This was a very important game and they all wanted to win. The score was all tied up with only a little bit of time left to play. When it was almost half time one team scored a touchdown and the crowd went wild. They cheered so loud that people could hear them all around town. The crowd kept getting louder and louder. They got so loud that the town was shaking. Then the other team scored a touchdown and their fans started cheering. With all the fans in the crowd cheering as loud as they could. The town was shaking so hard it felt like an earthquake. The crowd felt the shaking and go scared so they all were quiet. When the crowd was silent the shaking finally stopped. The crowd realized they were too loud and crazy and the rest of the game they whispered.

Briell Honas

St. Mary's Grade School

Kindergarten, 2nd place

Daddy's First Deer

My Daddy is a hunter. He likes to hunt. He hunts for deer. One late night he drove his truck to the forest. When he got to the forest he grabbed his bow and arrow and he walked as quietly as he could to his secret hunting spot. It was hard to be quiet when he was walking on the crunchy leaves. When he got to his spot he waited patiently until he spotted a deer. When he saw the deer he got his arrow ready. When the deer was not looking Daddy shot his arrow and hit the deer right on his heart. Then Daddy put the big buck in the back of his truck and drove it home to the house. He put the heart in a bag for me to feel it. I thought it felt really squishy. It was so cool but my sister Lydia thought it was gross. I was so excited that my daddy got a deer.

Eleanor Hickel

St. Mary's Grade School

Kindergarten, 3rd place

The Fairies Lost Their Magic

Once upon a time there were two fairies – Kyla and Charley and they lived in a kingdom. This kingdom had one rule – if you want to keep your magic you have to eat the magic fruit from the forest. The magic blue tree is two miles down the path in the forest. They have to get fruit from the tree every day. One day the fairies were so hungry that they ate the whole piece of fruit, instead of just the outside. It made them lose their powers. They didn't know what to do. They tried to eat some candy to see if it would help. They tried to eat some more fruit to see if it would help. It worked! When they went to school that day they went out for recess. They ran so fast that they lost their powers again. All the magic they had gotten from the fruit was gone. They asked the recess teacher if they could go get some more magic fruit. The teacher let them go home. On the way home they saw a dragon. They tried to fly away, but they forgot – they have no powers! The dragon followed them everywhere they went. Suddenly they saw Charley's dad – he was there to rescue them. He took them home and they were able to get the best fruit. When they got back to school they had to make up all the work they missed.

Harper Burd

Washington Grade School
1st Grade, 1st Place

Discovery of a Lifetime

Bob, who is 40, works at a zoo. He took a trip to the Outback to explore what lives there. After walking for several hours looking for a new species of animal that no one has ever found before, he starts to get hot. It was so dry, and he was so thirsty.

So, Bob went back to the edge of the Outback and got his water bottle. While he was there, he noticed a huge junk pile. He saw small and large pieces of material sticking out of it. There were cracks and small holes where animals could sneak inside.

This gave Bob an idea. He went over to the junk pile and started searching through it to see if he could spot a new species. He moved on piece of junk...then suddenly, he heard a sound. Bob froze!

ROAR! This creature jumped out and chased a mouse for food. Bob just stared. This animal was strange because the back of it looked like a tiger with stripes and the front-half looked more like a lion.

Bob picked it up and quickly headed back home with his new species. He later decided to call it a Lionger.

Griffen Dietz

O'Loughlin Elementary
1st Grade, 2nd Place

The Unicorn and Tornado

Once upon a time there was a unicorn and it went to a castle. It had so much fun but there was a tornado that was heading right towards it. The unicorn had no idea what to do but then she forgot she had a horn. She used the horn to defeat the tornado. The castle was saved by the unicorn.

Addyson McMillan

Washington Grade School
1st Grade, 3rd Place

The Bird Party

There was a bird named Jen. She was flying but it got too windy. She wants to go to Missouri so she sees a car and she thinks “that will get me there” but it only gets her to the store. Then she sees a train. She thinks “that might get me there” but instead of going to Missouri, it goes backward to Colorado! Finally, she sees a zookeeper and he said, “you can just walk there.” So, she does. It takes her four days to walk to Missouri. When she gets there, she gets excited because there is a giant bird party happening. She saw her mom, dad, sister, and brother were all there with all of her friends. They partied for 18 days.

Mason Fitzgerald
Washington Grade School
1st Grade, Honorable Mention

Space Story

Once there was an astronaut who went to space. He landed on a mysterious planet. When he got out of his space ship he saw an alien. He started to run away. The alien is chasing him and he catches him. He puts the astronaut in the space jail. The astronaut’s friend Space Hero finds him and lets him out. When they get out of space jail they find the alien’s UFO and steal it. The alien has to take the astronaut’s rocket. He wants to go to Earth to find food. The astronaut and Space Man see the alien flying and they go after him before he can get to Earth and steal everyone’s food. They blast the alien out of the air and he falls back down to the planet. The astronaut and Space Man win!

Sawyer Johns
Washington Grade School
1st Grade, Honorable Mention

Upside Down Land

Once upon a time in a land far, far away existed a happy little village called Upside Down Land where everything was opposite. The dogs walked the people and junk food was good for you, but most of all, the kids were in charge!

Now everyone in this village was happy except for one person. A mean old lady, a witch. She hated Upside Down Land because nothing was how it was supposed to be.

Meanwhile in a beautiful castle on a hill, lived King Louie who was the king of Upside Down Land. He loved his village and his people.

Three months had past, and the old witch had had enough of the village because she hated kids and she hated the kids being in charge. So, she put an evil curse on the land that made a black storm with deadly lightning. It would destroy everything in its path and soon the whole village was destroyed.

Back in the castle, King Louie was very nervous trying to figure out a plan to stop the evil curse from destroying his village. His only chance was to visit a good witch named Emma. He asked her to help him.

She agreed to help save the village, and together they made a special potion to stop the evil curse. Once finished, Witch Emma threw the potion up into the air toward the storm with both arms. The storm immediately started to vanish.

Upside-Down Land was saved!

Kelsey Robben
Holy Family Elementary
2nd Grade, 1st Place

Bird Watching with Friends

On a nice, sunny morning, Sam is walking in the park. He is wearing a blue shirt and jeans which looked great with his red hair and big smile. He is searching for a good place to view birds because he is supposed to do a school project that requires him to identify as many birds as possible in his notebook.

When Sam reaches into his bag to get his binoculars, he quickly realizes that he forgot them. He feels really depressed because he is supposed to turn in his project tomorrow, and he is frantic that he won't get it done.

Sam runs around the park asking people if they have a spare pair of binoculars he could borrow. When suddenly he trips on a rock, and he falls to the ground. A boy his age helps him up and asks if Sam is okay.

Sam said he is fine and thanks the boy, who he later found out was named Steve. Sam and Steve start chatting and soon become friends. As they talk, Sam noticed that his new friend has binoculars! Sam asks to borrow the binoculars and Steve agrees to share them. Sam's notebook project if identified birds was saved!

The boys then see a bluebird, a cardinal, and an eagle. They find out that there are more birds in the park than they thought. They continue searching and later see a sleeping owl. That morning the two boys saw a lot more birds that they could identify and added them to Sam's notebook.

Soon it was lunch time. Sam had brought a ham sandwich and an apple for lunch. Steve, however, forgot his lunch. Not a problem, Sam just shares his lunch with Steve since Steve let him borrow his binoculars earlier in the day. The two boys had made a great friendship that lasted as long as they lived.

Grayson Decker

O'Loughlin Elementary

2nd Grade, 2nd Place

The Desert Fire Disaster

One day a pangolin named "Panagolina" was walking in the desert with her elephant friend named Elephantina. They were walking, playing, and talking. They did this for hours and hours when suddenly...lightning strikes a cactus! The cactus immediately caught on fire. To make things worse, the cactus was in a field of cacti. Panagolina held off the fire from spreading for as long as she could so Elephantina could get as far away as she could.

Panagolina couldn't hold it anymore. Before long, the fire spread to the edge of the desert where the grass and weeds were much taller. The winds started to get heavier and began to whip in all different directions. Flames started to get bigger and were only a foot away from the grass.

Panagolina and Elephantina panicked and ran toward the edge of the desert to find water. They thought they could use the water to put the fire out and keep it from spreading. But the fire continued, and it reached the grass and started to get closer to Panagolina and Elephantina. The fire caught up to them! All they could do is run and run.

Luckily while running, they found water. At the last second Elephantina dipped her trunk into the small pond, sucked up as much water as she could hold and then with all her might sprayed the fire. It actually put the fire out! But now they needed to save the rest of the desert.

Panagolina cheered on Elephantina to do it again and again because it worked so well.

Elephantina did just that and the fire was quickly extinguished. She did it! Their teamwork saved the desert!

Kincaid Demel

Roosevelt Elementary

2nd Grade, 3rd Place

The Dog on the Plains

As I sat there, I wondered, “Where am I? Where will I live?” Later that day, I found a crate, just my size. So, I climbed inside. In all honesty, it was bigger than it looked. So that was my new home. But...still another problem...”What will I eat?” I went out in search of some food. I saw a really nice apple tree not too far from the crate. There was an apple on a low branch, but not in my reach. So, I tried jumping to get it. I tried over and over again. Finally, it dropped and I caught it in my jaws tightly and headed for my crate. When I got there, I scrambled into my crate and started gnawing and chewing on the juicy, shiny red apple. Then I took a nice long, peaceful nap. But I don’t know quite how long I slept. So, I can’t tell you that.

Later that day, I trotted off to explore the grassy plains. I found lots of grass. Since it was not that good of an adventure, I started for the crate. As I was walking, I saw a house, a big wooden house. I was curious but as my mom had said when I was younger, “It’s okay to be curious, but be careful, cautious, and safe.” So, I stayed a safe distance just in case. I kept trotting for the crate. As I sat in my crate, I wondered about the house. When I was done resting in the crate and ready to go outside, it was pitch black. The only thing I could see were shiny white stars floating in the sky. I was a little scared so I went back into my crate. I turned several times to find just the perfect spot. I laid down, shut my eyes, and went to sleep.

The next day, I woke up. I twitched my nose, stretched, and crawled out of the crate. As I came out I saw a butterfly flapping by. I jumped up and down and chased it all around my crate. I did it all around my crate. I did that for a solid five minutes. Then I got tired and hungry, so I went into the big grassy plains in search of something good to eat. As I was trotting, I saw some juicy blackberries on light green bushes. Yum! I had just found some yummy breakfast, so I started lifting my paws and knocking the berries down. Once I had enough berries on the ground, I laid down and started eating the really good blackberries. As I ate I wondered if there were more dogs like me anywhere nearby.

Once there was not one blackberry left on the ground, I trotted for home. As I was walking, I thought about the crate. “What if I get too big for the crate?” I thought. But I was a small beagle and I really can’t get too big so I did not worry about it anymore. When I reached the crate, I stood there but eventually I crawled to my crate. As much as I wanted to explore, I was tired. So, I curled up and fell fast asleep. When I woke up from my nap, the sun was setting. It was the most beautiful thing that my beagle eyes had ever seen. It was like the biggest orange that I have ever seen. It made my mouth water. I wanted to eat but when I went back, I knew it would be dark and I did not want to take the risk. So, I sat here looking at the sunset so pretty.. It got darker so finally, I crawled in my crate, turned three times, shut my eyes, and fell fast asleep.

The next morning, I woke up. I felt like exploring. I was about to go out when, “Thump!”

“What-wha-what was that?! My crate flew into the air. I heard these voices.

“Whoa! Okay kids, don’t get too close.”

“Ah, come on, Papa.”

“Okay, fine.”

“Yay!”

I felt rubbing on my back. Were they petting me? I thought. As they pet me, I felt a string being tied on my neck and I felt a latch click on it. Then it tugged so I walked along with it. Then...they let me inside the house! It was big. I walked around. There were three rooms that they called a bathroom, bedroom, and kitchen. In the bedroom, they sat down my crate and some dishes, one with water and one with chicken. I was so hungry that I ate the chicken like I had never eaten before. After that, I went to the kitchen to find them eating chicken. One was named Pamela. She pet me and said, “You need a name. I think I will name you...BUSTER!” I tried out the name, Buster. “Buster.” It sounded good to me!

Later that day, I learned their names. The tall man was named Papa. The tall woman was Mama and the tiny boy was Matthew. The small girl’s name was Pamela.

One day they decided to take a walk on the plains. As they walked, they saw a dog. I jumped and yipped and ran to the dog. She was my mom. At last, I was home with my family.

Ava Ryan
Roosevelt Elementary
2nd Grade, Honorable Mention

Super Dog

There once was a dog who loved heroes. He wanted to be a hero one day. So he worked harder every day. He was very strong, but something was missing, his superhero costume. There was a package at the door, when he put it on it fit like a glove. He was ready and he was determined to become a hero. The next day he set out for danger. When he saw a cat stuck in a tree he climbed the tree and rescued the cat and everyone said he was a hero. Another day he saw a dog chewing on a hose. The person who lived there was pleased because he stopped him. He went to look for more danger and he heard something suspicious. He tried to look for it, but he just couldn't find it. He looked and looked, finally he found it. It was just a kitten and he thought if it is not evil I'll just take it home. So he took the kitten home and he was having so much fun so far. Then he went home, and he was happy to see tomorrow. The next day he heard a lot of danger outside. This was very scary because there was traffic and cats were trapped in trees. He tried, but when he was done it was dark so he went to bed. The next day he found a buddy and his name was Bolt. He trained Bolt and a few days later Bolt was very strong too. So they went to look for crime and they both heard something. They saw it, it was a fierce bulldog so they stopped it. Bolt ran around it very fast and he stopped it. They were done fighting crime for the day. The next day they helped a blind man cross the street, and together they fought crime around the town.

Aubrey Hickel

St. Mary's Grade School

2nd Grade, Honorable Mention

The Magical Monkey

Two friends were headed down to the creek. There were lots of things to explore down there. Sometimes they like to take their chubby dog, but he usually gets all stinky in the water. Nobody wants to give him a bath when they get home. Anyway, the friends were swinging from trees, when they found a monkey. They grabbed him and jumped in the water. They swam to shore with the monkey. This was not a normal monkey because this monkey could talk. "If you don't return me within 24 hours, everything in the creek will die," said the monkey. The friends were sad because they wanted to show their other friends. They hatched a plan to show off the monkey and save all the living things in the creek. They would take the monkey, but he could be returned within 24 hours. It was fun to show off the magical monkey. The next day with only 30 minutes left to return the monkey they went back to the creek. With one minute to spare, they returned the monkey to its tree, and he was never seen again. All the creatures of the creek were safe!

Cade Starns

Washington Grade School

2nd Grade, Honorable Mention

Monsters in the Forest

One chilly afternoon, Alan was on his bed given a shopping list and was asked to go to the grocery store. Alan and his mother lived in a small house in a rural area, and it took a long time to finally reach the town. So, when Alan was asked to go get groceries, he decided to take a shortcut that went through the thick cedar forest by his house. There was a small path to follow, which allowed him to get to the store much faster.

Off Alan went, with his red jacket, a piece of paper that contained everything he needed to buy, and \$40 cash. Once he reached the start of the trail, he quickly read through everything on the list he needed. Thud!

"Augh!" he yelled suddenly. He caught his foot on a branch and tripped, covering his face with poison ivy and many other plants Alan was unfamiliar with. His face burning, he chose to continue. When he looked up, he noticed the path got narrower and narrower as he went along, and there was poison ivy everywhere. There was also a creek nearby where he could wash his face.

It felt like forever to him, but he finally reached the small creek. While he washed his face off, he noticed the trail split off in two.

“Light! That must be town!” He thought to himself. The left pathway had a sharp turn, and he could see light illuminating the space around the corner. He ran to the corner and was shocked to see... a creature that looked like a giant fierce bat, with white eyes that glowed. Alan was terrified and started running as fast as he could! What was that? Alan had seen normal bats before, and they were not as big, nor did they have glowing eyes!

He could feel the bat’s wings flapping behind him, and he kept running all the way to the other path. That was where he encountered a whole army of bats. They were all on him now, as well as two giant slugs, the size of Alan, inching toward him quickly. At that point, Alan didn’t know what to do. So, he just froze. Thousands of tiny spiders scattered toward him, surrounding him.

He couldn’t see anything else. He blindly kicked away everything that he could, and he realized he was laying on the ground. His vision came back, and nothing was there anymore, except for the forest. The creatures weren’t there at all.

That’s when he woke up. His sheets were kicked off, and he was shaking. Alan’s room was a mess. He had mistaken the cold air from his fan for the bats that were lapping air at him. The white eyes came from his toy robot, which he left on.

It was all just a dream!

Niko Tsereteli

O’Loughlin Elementary

3rd Grade, 1st Place

Adventure of Gunner and Bo

Chapter 1

Gunner was walking to Pizza hut to get a pizza for dinner tonight. He went home. The night went fast. When Gunner woke up his mom told him to go to the store. He got stuff to make soup. He went to the checkout. Then he saw a guy with a dog. “I wish I had a dog,” he whispered to himself. On the way out he heard a box shake. He was so scared to look, but he looked anyway. He whispered, “I hope it’s not a monster, a baby bigfoot, or an alligator!” After he thought of that he opened the box and ran back. He peeked in. It was a dog! “I guess that was not as scary as it sounded.” So he grabbed the dog and ran home. He decided to name the dog Bo.

Chapter 2

He did not know where to put the dog. He decided to put the dog in the basement. He couldn’t show his mom yet because she would make Bo leave. Gunner kept Bo in his room then went to ask Mom if he could have a dog. He heard her saying, “I can’t pay my rent.”

Then he heard someone say, “I will give you one more week.”

Mom said, “Okay, I will take it.”

The next morning was the weekend, but Gunner’s mom still had to work. That gave him more time to get to know the dog. The time flew by fast and Mom came home from work.

Chapter 3

When mom came in Gunner said, “How was your day?”

She did not respond but then she did, “I lost my job!”

“What?” Gunner said... “How did you?”

Mom said, “I don’t want to talk about it.”

So then they had to move with Aunt Calee. That meant Gunner had to leave his friends. So he decided to take Bo with him. He had to sneak the box in the car. It was not easy, but he did it. It was a long day.

Chapter 4

When they got there Bo ran out of the car. Gunner could not find him and it was about to storm. He decided to tell his mom about the dog. It did not go well, but Gunner finally convinced her to help him find Bo.

“I hope this does not take long,” Mom said. She was tired, but she still helped Gunner to find him. They did not find him that day, but Mom said, “We won’t give up.”

Chapter 5

Four weeks passed and Gunner’s mom got enough money to get another apartment. They were still searching for Bo. The night they got the apartment Gunner went to the store to buy some food for dinner. Then once he got out of the store, he saw Bo. Bo was in the same place he found him the last time. Gunner was so happy to find Bo! He just had to take him home to show his mom. He took him home to say, “Can I keep him?”

Mom said, “Yes, you can keep him!”

Braxton Delzeit
Wilson Elementary
3rd Grade, 2nd Place

Rose and Friends versus the Evil Lumberjack

Rose, a bird, flew across the lake to her nest with her young. She sat down, “Food,” the little birds begged. Rose fed the worm to her young. They fought over pieces of the worm, while Rose watched with a smile gracing her face, until...

Rose’s young birds started chirping, squawking, and making quite a racket. When Rose focused her attention on them, she noticed what their raucous behavior was all about. Over the trees, she spotted a lumberjack chopping down trees. Rose gasped as the lumberjack came closer and closer to ...HER TREE!

In panic, Rose watched as the mighty lumberjack held up the axe and swung at her tree. She screeched! The lumberjack dropped the axe and stepped back. He then looked up and saw a flock of birds fly over to Rose’s nest. The screeching call must have alerted them, and the birds responded to help. The lumberjack stared in amazement and shock to see the many species of birds of various colors and sizes.

The lumberjack stared up at the nest and swarming birds all madly chirping at each other. It was as if they were communicating to each other.

“Calm down, Rose. You are freaking out!” tweeted Mack, a red parrot.

“What’s the problem, everyone?” said Scarlet a Scarlet Macaw.

Rose went on to explain that the lumberjack below them was going to chop down her tree. “What can we do? Does anyone have a plan to stop him? Birds continued to chatter louder and louder. It was chaotic.

Then a little bird in the back raised her wing and with all her might squawked, “QUIET!”

Rose chirped, “This little one has something to share. Maybe it is an idea!” Rose nudged the little bird over. (It just so happened to be one of her children.)

“Let’s drop wood on him,” said Yankee. It was silent for a minute, then everyone cheered. The birds didn’t have much time because the lumberjack rolled his eyes and ignored the commotion up above him and picked up his axe to begin to begin chopping again.

“HURRY UP! HE HAS THE AXE,” cawed Tom, a grey falcon. Just then, Ed, a pigeon, jumped off and distracted the lumberjack by swooping toward him. The rest of the birds went to pick up a large log the lumberjack had chopped up. The lumberjack continued to slap and swing at Ed until he dropped his axe. The he looked up and saw a giant log falling toward him. He had no time to react. CLUNK! The log hit the lumberjack on the head and he fell to the ground. He scrambled to his feet and stumbled away as quick as he could.

Seeing this, the birds all cheered. They had come together to make quite the team. All alone Rose would not have been able to stop the lumberjack from taking down her tree. But, with the help of her friends, they had saved her home.

The sun began to set, and Rose thanked the birds as they flew away into the sunset. She then searched for another worm to feed her chirping little young and settled in for a night’s rest.

Kyler Kinderknecht
O’Loughlin Elementary
3rd Grade, 3rd Place (tie)

Jordan & the Alien from Outer Space

At recess Jordan and Brian were counting down the minutes until they would meet at the tree house later tonight. The two boys loved aliens and were convinced they exist. They would meet to share possible alien sightings.

At the treehouse...

When Jordan saw Brian he yelled, "Dude what's up?"

"You won't believe this, but I saw an alien!"

"No kidding, where?" Jordan asked with large eyes.

Brian nervously stuttered and whispered, "It's in Red Wood Forest."

"No way that's the scariest place in town," shouted Jordan.

Edge of redwood forest...

Jordan and Brian stopped at the edge of the forest. They questioned whether they should go any further. If there was a real alien, they wanted to be the ones to find it. After walking what seemed like forever, Jordan whispered.. "Wait, I think I see something..."

"OMG! It is a U.F.O., so there must be an ALIEN!" exclaimed Brian. The two boys creeps closer to the ship and hesitantly peeked in...

Immediately, they both turned and stared at each other with HUGE OPEN EYES! It really was a strange, sleeping alien.

Later back at the tree house...

The boys were still amazed that they pulled it off and got the sleeping alien into the treehouse without waking him. While they were staring at the alien, it began to wake up and said, "Bop ziegel bon verso." Then it continued..."Ziegel bon resoses!"

"Brian, we have a problem!"

Then realizing they didn't understand him, the alien handed them a note that said,

"Dear humans, you better help me get back to my spaceship and help repair it or ELSE."

Jordan and Brian were scared that the alien was threatening to take them as prisoners.

They quickly gathered up tools to help repair the ship.

Once finished, they waved to the alien, and within seconds he was swept up into space and vanished before their eyes.

Jordan and Brian once again looked at each other and simultaneously said, "Wow, no one is ever going to believe what just happened!"

Jackson Berges

Roosevelt Elementary

3rd Grade, 3rd Place (tie)

My Teacher's Desk Monster

"Hello, this is the third grade class and our teacher has a monster in her desk. When we go home the monster eats all our work and homework. When we come back it is all gone. So we look and look, but it's nowhere to be seen." Our teacher says, "Get back to work and we will look for it later."

When my teacher leaves to go to the chalkboard the monster comes out of the desk and gobbles up all of our work. When she comes back it is gone!

"Oh no!" our teacher screamed. "What happened?" we asked. "Your work is gone!" our teacher said. "We will help you look for it." we said. "Okay!" our teacher said.

I cannot find it, said the teacher. I guess I lost it for good." "Are you sure? we asked. "Yes I am sure." "Okay!" we answered.

Our teacher tells us to get back to work, but then we see the monster that has been eating all our work and homework. "Call the Monster Catcher," we yelled. The monster catcher got here and took the monster away. Now all of our work and homework is safe, and there is no monster in the third grade.

Adalyn Nilhas

St. Mary's Grade School

3rd Grade, Honorable Mention

Gabriella's Secret

Hello! My name is Gabriella, but most people call me Gabby. I'm ten years old and a colonist from Boston, Massachusetts. Today, I thought I was just going to get the paper for Papa, but boy was I wrong.

I was strolling down the street with our new dog, Roxy. My dad thought it would lighten up the mood, as he noticed the increase of taxes. He bought Roxy, who made me feel safe, even happy! In fact, today I was so happy that I went out with a huge smile on my face. As Roxy and I were walking to get the paper, Roxy started sniffing the air and then started tugging on her leash. I thought nothing of it, which was my first mistake. Instead, I kept walking, oblivious to what was going on. I was awed while walking past the glistening snowflakes gliding to the fluffy, sparkly snow.

"I wish I were a snowflake," I sighed as Roxy gleefully chased the wind. "It doesn't have any taxes or soldiers taking over its life." I gathered up Roxy, grabbed the paper, and went to check the nearest clock tower. "Just in time," I thought to myself.

I realized it was getting late, and I needed to get home before dark. My dad would get worried, and I wanted to impress him. Dad doesn't really like Roxy and I going out without him as protection. He said he knows what the British are capable of, they're just waiting for the money. I don't get what he's talking about. I'm ten now, and he knows I'm fine getting the paper on my own. Still, he doesn't trust me, so I still needed to impress him. I thought it all out, and my plan was to bring Roxy home safe and sound, and maybe give her a bath. Later, I'd make dinner and clean up afterwards. Once it was dark, I'd take Roxy out to go potty, and then hopefully Dad would finally see that I am capable of taking care of myself. Plus, as a minuteman, he has loads to deal with already. I don't need to be putting more stress on him. I also thought that Dad was a little disappointed, as he was sick and wouldn't be ready to fight if needed today.

Suddenly, Roxy jerked away from my grasp and ran to the middle of the town. I screamed at Roxy to come back, but there was no use. I sprinted after her as I finally realized these voices and sounds.

I made it to the next street when I, at last, saw it: the Boston Massacre. I...what? When did the colonists become violent, and when did they start attacking soldiers with mobs? I was devastated in the colonists' actions.

"Roxy!" I shouted.

I saw my dog, and my heart sank, then shattered. Roxy was in the fight! Not only was I going to be in deep, deep, trouble, but I was going to lose not only a dog, but a best friend. What was I going to do? I went to get a better view behind a bush.

"Stop! Stop fighting! They're gonna..." Before I could finish my sentence, the British did for me as the first shot rang down the street. "Roxy! Please, hurry up and get over here. No! Don't go to the Redcoats' side!"

I saw my dog's little legs run past a pile of snowballs and towards the British ammunition. That's when it hit me.

I ran to the other side of the fight where the colonists had made a pile of snowballs. I grabbed a few and started throwing them in front of me. Roxy saw but didn't seem very amused. She went further into the mass of Redcoats, but I could still see her silky, red fur. I threw a snowball about two inches away from Roxy, and this time, she chased it! I was thrilled with my idea until more guns were shot. I ducked back behind the pile of snowballs as I heard a colonist fall to the ground. Dead. A colonist had been killed. This was my cue to get Roxy out of there! I threw five more snowballs until Roxy was about a foot away from me. I grabbed Roxy as another was shot and killed. Three colonists were dead.

"Roxy!" I cried, "Are you alright?" Roxy looked perfectly fine except for the shiny metal that was sticking out of Roxy's collar. "Um...what is that?" I grabbed it, and...it was stolen ammo! "Good girl, Roxy!" As soon as I said that, the massacre ended because the Redcoats ran out of ammo, and by that time everyone had already left.

As we walked to the court room several months later, I felt way better. One, Roxy had made it out alive! Two, Dad didn't have to know about anything. At least, I hoped. My dad did have to go to court supporting the colonists point of view. Time passed as fast as a cheetah, and soon when we arrived, there were two easels with different perspectives of the massacre. I saw Paul Revere next to an engraving, which had the British shooting the colonists dead, and ...Roxy? A dog was in the engraving! I was super surprised.

After the arguing and seeing two Redcoats go to jail, I forgot about the engraving. As Dad, Roxy, and I walked home with our heads high, Dad asked, “Hey Gabby, do you know anything about the dog in the engraving?”

“Not a clue,” I responded while smirking at my dog.

“Weird!” Dad added.

When we got home that evening, I whispered in my dog’s ear, “You’re my secret little hero, Roxy.”

Ellee Lang

Wilson Elementary

4th Grade, 1st Place

Goodbye, Isabel

One fall afternoon, Hope, a young, ten-year-old pioneer girl, was on her way to fetch water in the Snake River. Hope was doing this for Isabel, her best friend, who had a terrible sickness, cholera.

Hope remembered why they-Isabel and Hope’s families – had gone on the Oregon Trail. In Independence, Missouri, the disease cholera, had an outbreak. Hope remembered the doctors and their horrific masks. Each mask was black, and the nose piece was long like Pinocchio’s. It reminded Hope of a crow, coming in and invading the corn field. Everyone was frightened of catching cholera, so they left. Sadly, cholera lingered along the trail, too. Isabel caught it, and now Hope had to do her chores, such as fetching water.

As Hope swung the water pail around and around, she heard the rushing water. Hope stared at the river, hoping she could make it back in time to help Mama with lunch. If you weren’t on time for Mama, you’d be gone all night with an overload of chores. Mama was harsh, but Hope loved her. As Hope thought about kneading cinnamon bread, she heard a fatal screech.

Hope swooshed the bucket in the water as it overflowed and sprinted toward the scream. Hope knew that voice inside and out: ISABEL!

Hope frantically whipped the water pail aside as she reached her family circling Isabel. Hope pushed her way in to see her, an old bucket pulled over her face as she started puking.

“Isabel,” Hope thought, “why now? When we’ve come so far?” All of their friendship gone? “No Isabel, no. Don’t do this now.” A shock of pain filled Hope. Could Hope move on? Was it all over? Hope didn’t want to know.

Hope buried her watery eyes in her plaid dress while most women did the same. Out of the corner of Hope’s blurry eyes, she saw her mother, Ruth. Usually, she was a tough girl. Today was a first. Ruth had never cried, and neither had Hope.

Isabel rotated as slow as molasses. Her under-eyes sagged low and looked dark as night. Her skin white as snow, Isabel tried to get up but buckled over in seconds. Isabel’s face was dead, no expression but fear. Hope walked toward Isabel and grabbed her clammy, sweaty hands. In that moment Hope didn’t really care about Isabel’s disgusting hands.

“Isabel, make it through the night, and we’ll, well...”

Hope stopped. Isabel was tapping nervously on Hope’s hand.

“Uh, yes?”

Isabel motioned for her to come closer.

Hope reassured her by saying, “I’m here, Isabel, I’m here.”

Isabel grabbed Hope’s hands as Hope’s wavy, egg yolk-hair scratched Isabel’s pale nose. Hope tucked her hair behind her ear as she comfortingly stroked Isabel’s brown hair that felt like cow’s fur. Hope was thinking of when she and Isabel herded their first cow.

Isabel interrupted Hope’s happy memories as she lifted her head a smidge and helplessly clanked it back down, making a deafening sound. She successfully held her head up with a helping hand from Hope.

She shifted her head as her rosy lips faded to a disgusting gray shade of loneliness. As the now dull lips of Isabel met Hope's ear, she whispered a word, a word filled with faithful tone.

"Go."

Hope took two seconds until suddenly... SWOOSH!

Isabel was swept off the ground by Hope's dad, Aaron. Another man held on, and they ran her to the river.

Before Ruth could yell, "No," Hope was halfway to the river, to Isabel.

"Stop! She can live! We just need to get a move on! Please! You agree, right, Isabel? I-Isabel? Papa..."

"Hope, Isabel's gone," Papa said in a mournful tone.

Ruth rushed to trap Hope so the men could set Isabel in the river.

Hope was dragged to the wagon as she screamed bloody murder for Isabel. Her mom forced her inside.

"Isabel's gone," Hope mumbled. "Well, she is now.."

Hope got blinded by a beam of sparkly, white light.

"What's that?" Hope thought.

Hope pretended to pout by drooping her lips, scrunching up her nose, and stomping until Mama went back to the kitchen to prepare for dinner. She then darted toward the blinding, mysterious light, cupping her hands over her eyes. As Hope stubbed her toe on Isabel's banjo, she heard a rattle inside like a snake's. Hope, still blinking back tears, felt inside her the drumming of Ruth's footsteps. She snatched the banjo, whirled herself in the tent, and stuffed the banjo beneath her yellowish pillow. As Mama's feet thundered away, she reached her hand back under the old pillowcase as some feathers peacefully swirled out.

Hope threw her pillow inside the wagon as she slipped past her tent to a tree. She clambered up it and shook Isabel's banjo.

"Oh, Isabel," Hope moaned. "What will I do without you?"

Hope closed her eyes and imagined Isabel standing in front of her and saying, "You'll be fine! You don't need me!"

"But I do," Hope complained.

"Well, I'm gone, but please, play a song for me!"

Hope's thoughts vanished as she grabbed the banjo and strummed Isabel's first song. As Hope played the first note, she heard something fall on the ground. Hope was amazed. Isabel had told her to play on the banjo because she wanted that blinding light to fall out! Wait! It wasn't a light, it was a shiny rock reflecting light. And it wasn't just any old rock, it was Isabel's good luck crystal!

Hope snuck back into her tent just at the break of daylight.

"Isabel. Isabel. Isabel. Isabel."

Hope yawned and then woke with a start.

She flipped out of bed and hustled onto the wagon. Hope lifted the crystal in the air and hooted at the top of her lungs. "Isabel, I love you! You were the best friend I ever had!" Hope felt like the sunshine was her smile. "Oh, Isabel. You were the greatest!"

Hope was ready to move on because she knew Isabel was with her. Hope had the crystal; Hope had Isabel. Hope was brave, and Isabel would've been proud. No, Isabel was proud. Hope was an adventurer, and she was ready to conquer Oregon City. Hope and Isabel. Hope now knew that when someone died, they really were never gone.

"Oh, Isabel," Hope sighed as she glared at the river. "Wish you well!"

Ellee Lang

Wilson Elementary

4th Grade, 2nd Place

The Cattle Drive

Ruth and Paytin, two best friends, were riding their horses in the backyard of Ruth's ranch. Ruth said, "I can't wait!"

"Well I've been waiting!" Paytin said angrily. "What do you need to tell me?"

Ruth started, "Well, my dad needs help herding the cattle to the smaller grazing ground with the pond. He was wondering if you'd like to join us on the drive."

"You want me to come with you on your cattle drive?" Paytin asked.

"Sure! If you want to." Ruth told her. "It'll be fun!"

"I'll ask my dad for permission!" Paytin said. Then she hesitated for a moment. She looked at Ruth, "I got to go!" she said and rode off on her horse, Captain. "Bye!"

Ruth unsaddled her horse, Smokey, a gray and blackish colored Grula, and then led him to the corral. After finishing her chores, she went into the house. She kicked off her boots in the mud room, and walked into the gathering room. Ruth sat down on the sofa and let out a sigh. Then her mother walked in saying that she missed a call from Paytin. So Ruth picked up the phone and dialed her friend's number in. She got an answer on the first ring. She heard a voice come through, "Ruth?"

"You're talking to ..."

A few moments later Ruth put the phone down and went to tell her Dad that Paytin was coming on the drive.

The next morning Paytin, Ruth, and her dad rode off towards the cattle. They got the cows out on the lawn and herded them in the direction of their new pasture. Soon they were in open country. The three of them kept 118 cows together. Ruth and Paytin talked while watching the herd. But something had caught Paytin's eye. "It's a run away?" She yelled. She rode off on Cap and tried to drive the cow back to the herd. Soon she came back, breathing as hard as her horse, but she got the cow back with its family.

"That was tough!" Paytin exclaimed. Soon they came across a river. They drove the cattle into the water. Ruth looked back behind herself, she saw a calf struggling to swim! So she turned Smokey around and tried to save the poor animal. Smokey started freaking out, because he had sunk into the deep mud of the river. Ruth threw her rope around the calf's neck and dragged it out of the water. She fought Smokey out of the mud. After freeing Smokey from the watery muck, Ruth led the calf back to the herd ahead of them.

When they reached the other cattle, Paytin said that a calf was being born! "Grab some buckets of water!" she yelled. When they returned with the water they saw Ruth's dad holding a slimy, wet, but cute, red calf!

"Aw!" The two girls cried.

"Let's name him...Babe!" Ruth suggested.

"I like it," Paytin answered. Soon the calf was standing. Babe learned to walk in a very short amount of time, so they started the drive again.

An hour later they reached the new pasture.

After their job was done, they headed back toward the ranch on their horses. They reached the ranch and unsaddled their horses. "I'll give you and Captain a ride home," Ruth's dad told Paytin. The girls said goodbye and then it was time for Paytin to leave.

"Let's do it again sometime," Ruth exclaimed.

"I'd like that!" Paytin answered, and then she was gone. The two girls said that they would never forget their adventure.

Taryn Boydston
St. Mary's Grade School
4th Grade, 3rd Place

Shirley's Broken Wagon Story

It is 1863 in the spring in the middle of the day with no clouds in the sky, and all you can see is the sun and the bright blue sky. A ten-year-old pioneer girl named Shirley is chatting with her friends. Shirley wears a long wool dress with a plaid design and boots and a bonnet. One thing she loves to do is tell jokes. She tells jokes all the time. Shirley loves her family, especially her little brother, Benjamin, her mom, Eleanor, and her dad, Roderick.

Shirley always walks beside her family's wagon, and today when she is walking beside the wagon, she sees a bolt come out of the wheel. She really wishes that bolt wouldn't have come out.

While she is thinking, Eleanor, her mother, is trying to talk to her, but she is so into her thoughts that Shirley doesn't hear her mom talking to her. Once she notices her mom is trying to talk to her, she snaps back into the real world. Once she snaps out of her thoughts, she hears her mom ask, "What was that noise?"

"Oh, that was a bolt that dropped from the wheel," says Shirley. "Do you want me to tell Dad?"

"Sure," says Eleanor, "if you want to."

As usual, she goes to tell her dad. So she runs up to the front of the wagon, and with a shaky voice says, "Dad, a bolt came from the wheel, and you might want to check it out."

"Alright, I'll come look at that rusty ol' wheel," sighs Roderick exasperatedly. Before he goes to look, he puts his gray trousers on. He always puts his trousers on when he has to fix something.

While he is checking the broken wheel, Shirley feels like she is about to cry because she thinks her dad is going to yell at her due to the fact that she didn't tell him about the wheel right away. Unexpectedly, her dad does something completely opposite of what she thinks he will. Within seconds her dad thanks her for telling him right away instead of waiting until the whole wheel came off. So unlike she expects, her father gives her a big bear hug. Shirley has never ever in her lifetime felt as happy as she does just then. She feels as if she were a joyful kangaroo. She feels as if she might erupt with joy. She is so ecstatic because her father has never hugged her ever before. She feels as if she might burst!

Before Shirley knows it, her dad gathers everyone from her family to help him find a extra bolt from inside the wagon...well, everyone except for her brother, Benjamin, since he is only two; her mother, Eleanor, had left him in the wagon.

While Shirley is off dreaming in her own world, her mom is trying to find the wheel that the bolt came out of. As soon as Shirley is done dreaming, she helps by telling her mom that the bolt came out of the left front wheel. Then her mom thanks her for being so helpful.

After a while, they find another bolt they had stored in the wagon and put it on. As soon as they are done putting the bolt on, they are ready to hop back on the road. Unfortunately, Shirley's friends are at the front of the trail, which means that she won't be able to talk to them. She suddenly feels so lonely, just like the last piece of pie on a plate. Shirley knows that she won't be able to talk to her friends until they get to Oregon City.

Unfortunately, just like she had predicted, she doesn't meet her friends until Oregon. As Shirley looks back on her wonderful journey, she is so proud about how she never gave up!

Kendall Schulte

Wilson Elementary

4th Grade, Honorable Mention

Dreamtopia

I was just a normal night, or that's what I thought. My mom walked out of the room and said, "Goodnight Jessie!" She shut the door. I fell asleep. I think. I was in space floating without my brother or mom or dad. It was peaceful. I could see the stars and planets, and then I fell. I didn't get hurt though, which was weird. I walked around for a while and it was not like Earth. The sky was different, the grass was, too. In fact everything was! I saw a man and I said, "Hi Mr. Do you know where I am?"

He turned to me and said, "Hi, you must be new. This is Dreamtopia."

And I said, "Um...What?"

“The place where all the forgotten dreams or thought and everything in your brain that happened and you forgot about it” he said.

“Is this even real, Mr.?” I said.

“Of course it is. Everything is real as long as you believe it is,” he replied.

“What’s your name?” I asked.

“I think you know that,” he said.

“No I don’t,” I said.

“Here this might give you a hint,” he said.

Then right before my eyes he turned into a snake, then a cat, and then a wolf. I suddenly remembered my old imaginary friend. He was a shapeshifter. “Tim!” I said in excitement.

“Yes silly,” he said with a smile.

Tim was very tall, about nine feet, maybe a bit more and he had a nice coat of white fur and beautiful green eyes. Maybe even a bit of an accent. I wrapped my arms around him and said, “Where’s Lyla?”

“Oh she’s right there,” Tim said.

She appeared out of nowhere! She could turn invisible, but usually she wasn’t.

“Lila!” I said. Lyla was also big but not as tall as Tim. She was probably about seven feet and she had big yellow eyes and she was a calico cat, all she ever cared about was looking great. Tim and Lyla were siblings and always fought. “I missed you guys,” I said.

“We missed you too, Jess. But we had to wait years to see you. You made us up when you were like, three. Now you’re twelve!” Lyla said.

“Don’t be rude,” said Tim to Lyla.

“How do I get back?” I asked.

“Why would you want to go back, Jess?” said Lyla, “This place is amazing!”

“You can’t stay here forever Jessie,” said Tim ignoring Lyla’s comment, “You will be here until you wake up, which will be in about one minute.”

“OK...but tell me the truth, is this real or a dream?” I asked.

“Both,” Lyla said, “it’s real and a dream.”

“What?” I said.

“You won’t understand,” said Lyla.

“OK. I kinda understand,” I said.

“Good,” Lyla replied, “You will be awake in 5..4..3..2..1..0.” Then suddenly, I was back in my bed. It was six thirty and time to get ready for school. Then I looked up and saw Lyla and Tim standing by my bed. “Remember, believe in Dreamtopia,” Tim said. Then they vanished and went back to Dreamtopia.

Sophia Gaschler

St. Mary’s Grade School

4th Grade, Honorable Mention

Double Win

Chrissy sat in the dark brown folding chair. Her legs were sticky with sweat. She couldn’t remember a time when she was more nervous in her life. She imagined herself standing on the black temporary stage staring out into the sea of faces. Then she closed her eyes and pushed the image out of her mind. It wasn’t helping her nerves any. Then she realized that the announcer had just named the 5th grade 3rd place winner. It wasn’t her. Neither was 2nd. But that meant.....no, it couldn’t be.

“And the 1st place 5th grade winner is Chrissy Sanchez,” said the announcer. Chrissy couldn’t believe it. She felt like jumping for joy but managed to maintain her composure as she walked up to the temporary stage to shake hands with the mayor. Then she received her trophy and cash prize.

“Th-th-thank you,” said Chrissy struggling for words. It was incredible. Then she walked back to the cold, metal folding chair but to her it could have been a plush, velvet throne.

Chrissy burst through her bedroom door practically bouncing with excitement. First place! That was better than she could have imagined! She dashed over to her desk and moved the framed picture of her family out of the way then locked the money in her purple sparkly mini safe and hid the key. She ran to go get her phone to call up her friends (she was very cluttered and unorganized). After about 10 minutes she came back, and she realized that her safe was gone!

Chrissy lifted her phone up to her ear and dialed 111-222-333-444 “Jane,” she said “I won a writing competition, and the money was stolen,” said Chrissy breathlessly.

“Be there in 10,” Jane replied calmly. Chrissy knew she could count on Jane to solve this mystery, after all, she was in her class. Just then the doorbell rang. Jane was here!

“Well,” said Jane “first we need suspects. Who do you think could have done it?”

“My brother was in the vicinity at the time of the crime and we’re basically mortal enemies.” Chrissy replied.

“Sounds promising, let’s go to investigate!” said Jane. They raced to Chrissy’s brother’s bedroom. There it was! Her purple sparkly mini safe! Chrissy snatched it up and walked back to her bedroom, bid Jane farewell and thanked her. She smiled to herself. Her brother would have a lot of explaining to do.

That evening, while eating Chrissy’s favorite meal, hamburgers and fried potatoes, made special to celebrate her achievement, Chrissy spilled the beans about the stolen money. Of course, her brother didn’t know that she knew. His face was HILARIOUS as Chrissy explained his pilfer. Chrissy’s parents turned to her brother and asked if it was true. Her brother reddened as he bashfully admitted the truth, then shot a glare at Chrissy. Then her parents said they would deal with this after dinner.

After the last bite of food disappeared into Chrissy’s mouth her parents sent her up to her room. But she snuck out and secretly listened to her parents lecture her brother. Even though she knew her brother would get her back for ratting him out, she decided to bask in revenge while she could.

Genevieve Dietz

O’Loughlin Elementary

4th Grade, Honorable Mention

Where the Birds Roam

I awoke to the sound of arguing. It was my grandmother whisper-yelling to my father. I was confused why but just went back to bed. “You can’t tell her about the forest yet.” I heard my grandma say. Started, I lay in my bed upside down because it always helps me think. Always.

“JEN ROSE SMITH! JEN ROSE SMITH! ARE YOU AWAKE YET?” “It was that odd boy next door. Finally, I got up, stretched, and ran outside. My neighbor was there with a toothy grin on his face. Was he aware that he had dirt in his hair? My grandmother always made me hang out with the odd boy. Constantly yelling at me because she wanted us to be perfect friends. I didn’t know what to say so I pictured the whole world made out of puzzles. Interrupted by my daydream, my neighbor said, “I have something to show you.” As a matter of fact, I did not really like this boy. “You know, you have dirt everywhere...especially in your hair,” I remarked. He gave an even bigger smile that made me suspicious of him. He then proceeded to grab my hand and led me to the forest. Of course, I was surprised and tried to take off running but saw my grandmother glancing at me through the window. Slowly, I walked back to the boy and tried to at least socialize.

“So, what’s your name?”

“I have no name,” he replied. Stunned, I didn’t want to ask anymore questions so I just followed him through the forest. The big trees towered over us as we walked. I wondered if they were giants or some man-eating tree creature. The smells and sounds of the forest were quite incredible. No name, sat down and patiently waited.

“What are you waiting for?” I asked, interested.

“My friends,” he said back. This boy was certainly odd but I sat down right next to him. The bright sun glowed like a glittering gem. What happened next, was the greatest moment of my fourteen-year life.

One second past. I blinked. Suddenly, huge birds swooped down. Chirping and singing songs of sadness, happiness, songs of all emotions. Deers and fawns tiptoed in, shyly. I was totally and utterly surprised. I blinked again and squirrels came down from the trees. Foxes dashed in making all kinds of noises. The boy who had no name started to laugh. I did too. Flowers bloomed all over and leaves started falling. It was the most beautiful moment ever. Some of the animals crawled onto our heads and stayed there. I couldn't stop smiling! As the birds chirped some more, I woke up...from my dream. A dream. The sounds of New York City crowded around me. A tear fell down onto my pillow. It stayed there. I surely did miss the place where the birds roam.

Kesa Tsereteli
O'Loughlin Elementary
5th Grade, 1st Place

Wanda Rivers

One sunny April day, Little Wanda Weeler sat on a large rock by the river as she had done every day since she was five. This river mesmerized Wanda in a way she couldn't quite put into words. Maybe it was that the sun reflected off the river, making it sparkly. Or maybe it was because of the rock by the river, which she would always sit on. Or maybe it was the fact that even though tadpoles, water snakes, snapping turtles, bullfrogs, and so many other animals could all live in the same river, they always seemed to remain happy together. Yup. That was it. Wanda had a big family. But unlike all of the wondrous creatures in the river, they were never happy. They did not like to live in the same house together. Wanda never knew why her family was always so grumpy. Maybe it was that their rooms were too small. Or maybe it was that they had no jewelry or extra fancy clothes. Or maybe it was that they didn't appreciate each other. Yah. That was it. The river she had come to love reminded her of what could be if she worked hard at it. So, one day, she decided to finally try.

"Can't we all try to get along?" she asked sitting at the dinner table, her five sisters, and two parents by her side.

Her father made a funny look. "Wanda we **are** getting along."

"No, we **AREN'T**," she mumbled to herself. Clearly, her family thought that everything was fine. But Wanda knew for sure that it wasn't. She needed a plan. So, the next morning, she sat by her sister, Tiffany.

"Tif," she whispered. "Do you want to be happy, because I have a plan?" Tiffany just stood there in shock with a disgusted scowl on her face.

"Wanda, we **ARE** happy! If we ever were, and ever shall be unhappy, it would be because of **you!** Now, stop annoying us all!"

Wanda was hurt by her sister's words, and started to shed tears. What if Tiffany was right? But Wanda knew better. She **wasn't** giving up on her family. She just needed a new plan. As Wanda lay awake in her bed, (Her sisters having an argument 1 room over), she sparked an idea. Her family wasn't going to see how absolutely positively they **were** having arguments, until they saw what a normal family looked like. (Even more important: What a **HAPPY** family looked like). She woke up before daybreak, and woke up her eldest sister.

"What is it, Wanda?" she barked.

"Get Tiffany, Iris, Lena and Julie up!" Wanda said. As Wanda left the room, and her eldest sister woke her sisters up, she could hear Tiffany say,

"Come on, Rena, you aren't actually taking her seriously, are you?"

"Yah, she's crazy!" Wanda heard Iris say.

"Wanda has lost it this time," Lena and Julie said at the same time. But not in 1,000,000 years would Wanda ever let those words get to her. Her family needed her, and she wasn't going to let them down. Because there **was** hope. If her family could see what Wanda had been seeing for the past 6 years, things could change. They would no longer be known as "*the cranky family*" by the neighbors. They would no

longer yell threats and mean insults in the night. It would be like a dream come true if Wanda could make her family happy. So, Wanda proceeded with her plan, and woke up her parents. They were none too happy to be awakened up at 7:25 AM, but they did as Wanda asked. They got dressed and brushed their hair, 10 minutes later, Wanda was leading her family down to the river. As the tadpoles swam, and the Bullfrogs hopped around, and the water snakes slithered through the glittering stream, her family stepped up to the river.

“What is all **this**?” her father asked in a very surprised voice.

She just smiled, and said, “This is a happy family. **THIS** is what I want our family to look like. I want us to be happy.

Her sisters seemed to have warm smiles, and her parents for the first time ever did not **seem** grumpy. It seemed like a magical paradise to Wanda. Her family was...Was...not frowning, not yelling, they were happy! But then, as if things couldn't get any better, the family shared a nice, long, bear hug for the first time ever. Wanda could almost **feel** the newly forming love. She could feel the warmth of her family.

Finally...they were happy. Maybe it was that they liked being up in the morning. Or maybe it was that they like the large rock. Or maybe it was that they finally realized what they had. Yup. That was it.

“Little Wanda Weeler,” Dad said, “You sure do have a way with love.”

Her sisters giggled, “Yah,” they said. “And to think it all started with this wonderful river!”

Wanda smiled, “Maybe I'll start calling myself: Wanda rivers.” Her father and mother gave her a warm smile.

“As long as that makes you happy. It would certainly go along with our new happy family.”

Emma Downing

O'Loughlin Elementary

5th Grade, 2nd Place

The Promise Neverland

There once was a girl named Ava. Ava was a beautiful 13 year old girl with long black hair that was usually in a ponytail. Her eyes were a colorful mix of blue and gray. She was sitting in her grandmother's field looking at the big blue sky.

“I wonder what it's like up there with the birds...” her voice trailed off.

She looked beside her and there she saw a small beautiful sunflower. She sat up and looked at it. The sunflower was just as lonely as she was. She stroked the petals of the sunflower. It wasn't any bigger than her fingernail.

She suddenly stopped as she heard something in the forest behind her. She stood up and looked at the trees. It was silent. She was confused and a bit nervous.

“It's probably nothing,” she thought.

That was until a snow white owl appeared in a tree. It had big yellow eyes and it was staring right at her. “What are you doing at this time of year?” Ava said, confused. She got closer to the tree to get a better look at the big white bird. As Ave got closer and closer the bird took off further into the forest. “Hey! Wait up!” Ave said following the bird.

Ave ran after the bird as it kept flying further and further away. Ave stopped to catch her breath. She breathed heavily and needed a drink. She looked around to see if she could find anything. Then she found a little peaceful pond. “That's just gonna have to do,” Ava said, a bit frustrated.

She went to the pond and cupped her hands in the water to take a drink. The water was cool and tasted fresh. “Huh, that's strange, fresh water?” The water began to sparkle as if there was glitter in it. Ave quickly moved away from the bond. “What?!” Ava said. The water started to form waves and then it pulled her in like a big wet hand. Ave kicked, screamed, and wiggled. “Let me go!” Ave cried. Ava got pulled into the water and everything went black.

Ava woke up a few hours later. She put a hand on her head as it hurt tremendously. It throbbed in pain as she looked around. Everything was made out of candy. The grass was a sweet green apple flavor, the

trees were made out of red licorice, and the leaves were made out of cotton candy. The sky was a bright blue and it smelled like homemade gingerbread. “Where am I?” Ave asked, still a bit confused.

“You’re in the Promise Neverland! What brings you here fellow friend?” said a voice coming from behind Ava. Ava looked behind her and to her surprise there was a little tweety bird standing there talking to her.

“Why am I here? And how did I get here?”

“Well, you kinda fell down the waterslide. That’s how you got here.” The tweety bird laughed. A rather small goose appeared from a fluffy bush.

“Come on Peter! Where are your manners?” The goose scolded the tweety bird.

“Oh right! Sorry fellow friend. I’m Peterson, but my friends call me Peter for short,” the tweety bird said and smiled.

“And I’m Marco,” squawked the goose.

“Oh! Well, I’m Ava. And it’s nice to meet you all, but I must be getting home. My grandmother will be worried sick!” Ave got up and looked around. “How do I get home?” Ave said strangely.

Oh well. You must go talk to the master about that. But please don’t go! We have so much to explore together.” Peter said sadly.

“The master?” Ava asked, confused.

Marco sighed, “The master is the king of this Neverland. He shall decide whether or not to let you go home.”

“Oh, alright then,” Ava signed nervously.

Marco and Peter looked at each other hopelessly. “Although we could take you to him.” Marco said smiling.

“Oh, really? Thank you so much!” Ave exclaimed. Ava bent down and gave the goose a tight hug.

“Hey Hey Hey! Don’t hug me!” Marco groaned. Ava giggled and let him go.

“Sorry Mr. Grinch.”

Ava, Marco, and Peter went on their way to see the master. They saw butterflies, flowers, and anything you could imagine. Ava’s long thick black hair blew in the wind as they walked.

“How much further must we go? Ava asked tiredly.

Marco groaned. “Uhm maybe one more mile?”

Ava sat down on the dirt road and breathed heavily. “I think I’m going to explode if I take another step.” Ava complained.

Peter laid beside Ava, and said tiredly, “Same here Marco.”

Marco signed and sat down with them. “How about we play 20 questions?” Peter asked.

“Alright, sure.” Ava said.

“Ok Ava, the first questions goes to you so...”

“Ok. How can you guys talk? Ave asked.

“Uh, cause we can-“ Peter interrupted Marco.

“Cause God gave us a voice” Peter said.

“Oh. Ok then. Uh...Why is this place called the Promise Neverland?” Ave asked.

“Well, you see the reason why it’s called the Promise Neverland is because everyone here before they leave they must make a promise they shall never break.” Marco explained. “When you leave, you will have to make this promise too.” Marco said.

Ava looked at Marco strangely. “What’s the promise?” Ava asked.

“To always have a heavy heart and soul. And to live in peacefulness forever. The last thing we must tell you, is that after you leave Neverland you may never come back.” Peter said sadly.

“So I’ll never get to see you guys again?” Ave sighed.

“If you choose to leave this will pretty much all feel like a dream when you’re back in reality.” Marco said while playing with his feathers.

Ave stood up again and said, “Let’s hurry up and find the master...” Her voice trailed off as she picked up Peter and Marco and continued walking.

They walked for a good twenty minutes before getting there. It was a great big castle that was a bright baby blue with stripes of white on the blue stone.

Ava went into the castle and was greeted by two guards that were Siamese cats. Their big blue eyes frightened Ava. “Does everything here have big eyes?” she asked.

“Yes, they certainly do. Do you realize you’re here as well?” Peter snickered.

“Oh shush?” Ava said, narrowing her eyes at Peter.

She walked into every room, but couldn’t find this master they were talking about. That was until she found a room that said master written on the door in big bold letters.

She opened the door and saw a fox sitting on the throne.

“Are you the master people speak of?” she asked.

The fox looked up and glanced at Ava. “Yes. Why do you ask?” he asked.

“Well, you see, I really want to go home to my grandmother.” Ava said with a bit of sadness in her voice.

“Oh, I can help with that.” The fox said, smiling. “Just answer my questions truthfully, alright?”

“Alright,” Ava said.

“Do you believe in magic?” the fox asked.

“Yup.”

“Are you kind?”

Once again Ava answered yes.

“OK, last but not least...are you ready to make your promise?”

Ava signed and thought, “Wait...I don’t want to go home! I’ll go home later!” Ava shouted.

“As you wish, Ava.”

Ava smiled happily and gave Marco and Peter a hug.

Arien LaDuke

St. Mary’s Grade School

5th Grade, 3rd Place

A Scary Summer

The summer of 2019 may be a summer you could forget easily but one I shall not because it was the time I almost drowned. It was like any other hot summer day. It began in my room as I was trying to stay cool. Then I had a brilliant idea! I quickly ran upstairs past the kitchen, past the bathroom to my mom’s office. I yell, “Mom!” The shout of my voice startled my mom.

She quickly asked, “What?” as she picked up the pen she had dropped.

I calmly ask, “Can I go to the pool?” It took her awhile to answer shocked to hear this coming from me because of my fear of water. “Well?” I asked again.

“Yes, yes,” she replied. So, I quickly hopped into the car and so did my mom. “Why the sudden change about water?” she wondered.

“No reason,” I replied. But there was a reason: The coolest group of kids would be there.

I arrived at the pool and took a quick peek out the thick glass of the thick window. There they were. The cool kids. My mom stopped the car at the front and dropped me off there. I ran as fast as I could over to the cool kids and said hi nervously. “Can I hang out with you guys?” I asked them. They just stared at me. Seriously, I suddenly felt so sick and nervous as if there was a beetle inside of me.

The kids shrugged, “Yeah, sure.” The beetle began to rest as if it wanted to take a nap. I began to ask where to the water slides? The mini pool? The chairs? The buckets? The oldest one just laughed and said, “Who knew the kid was a clown, too?” He continued, “First we are going to the snack stand.

I interrupted the oldest one, “Then are we going to sit down after that?”

“No,” he said. “We are going to the deep end to the diving board.”

I gulped, “Diving board?”

“Did I stutter?”

“No.” The beetle slowly began to wake up as we headed over to the diving board. We passed my best friend, Kingston.

He said, “Hi, wanna play tag?”

The cool kids all looked at me and said, “The little babies are gonna play tag.”

I quickly looked at Kingston and said, “Do I know you?”

The group leader said, “Come on. Let’s dust the big board. As I walked away from Kingston, I felt a big pile of guilt pile up on me. As we made our way to the diving board, I asked, “Who’s up first?”

They all agreed, “Since you’re the new member, you should go first.” Everything I ever had in my mind disappeared right then. I thought to myself they think of me as a team member. I quickly ran to the diving board. I could see everything from there: the slides, the buckets, and my best friend, Kingston, who looked sad and bored.

Suddenly, the beetle in my stomach came so fast like he was running a 10K marathon. I froze. The lifeguard and other kids were yelling at me to hurry up. All of a sudden, one of the cool kids came and pushed me in. As I fell into the pool, my heart was racing. I was helplessly being pulled down as if every time I made it up to the surface, the beetle pushed me down again.

When I came up for air for a few seconds, I frantically tried to alert the lifeguards, friends, or any other kids. Finally, I went down in the water again this time having given up my fight with the beetle until two hands reached in and pulled me up to the top. I turned over so my back was facing up and began to cough and choke. Soon, I turned back over to see who had saved me. Kingston! After everything I had said to him and how I had acted, he was the one who saved me. I began to feel ashamed and embarrassed about me being his friend.

That night I laid in my bed thinking about how I could have died if it wasn’t for the one who I had been mean to. That summer day I learned a valuable lesson to stick to my real friends.

Jaceir Whitley

USD 489 Remote Learning

5th Grade, Honorable Mention

Rainy Day

It all started with a rainy day, actually it didn’t. Let’s rewind a little bit. I never liked storms. Well, I liked the rain, lightning, and thunder, and I liked to watch the storms, but it still scared me. Especially hail. Hail is on a whole different level. Hail is like rocks falling on you from 1,000 feet!!! Now that’s scary and hail isn’t just scary, it damages cars, animals, and houses. Just go onto safari and search pictures of hail damage. I don’t think tape can fix that. But with every storm I kept getting less and less scared, until I wasn’t really scared of storms, anymore.

Now it all started on a rainy day. It started out small and kept getting bigger and bigger and bigger! Until it was a full downpour. It would stop raining for a second and then start pouring again. There was loud thunder but no lightning. The sky was filled with dark fuzzy clouds.

It was muddy and puddles were everywhere. I saw a big black rubber tub filled with water in the corner of my eye. My sister and I knew we had to go see if the water was warm or cold. I thought it had to be freezing. So, she went over to see.

“It’s so warm,” she said.

I thought she had to be lying, so I felt it and it was so warm. It was like a hot tub compared to the rain.

It was one of the windiest days ever. The rain and the wind made it like a hurricane. The trees were bending like cooked noodles. The rain was like ice it was so cold. All the birds were hiding, but the worms weren’t.

It rained a lot, like a LOT! Me and my sister played in the rain all day. We went all over the back yard. Because of how cold it was, I respected how much warmer it is in a house.

We had some kiddie pools that we used for our ducks. I pushed it up and the wind caught it. The wind was holding it. It was like hovering. When I faced the wind, the rain smacked my face. It hurt more than normal because it was cold. It’s like if you’re hand gets cold out in the snow and you get cut or pinched. It hurts more unless your hand is numb.

We played until the rain started to die off and the storm faded away like a little scratch slowly heals. The clouds left. The sky was clear except for the bright orange that filled the sky. The birds were all over now. The worms were still everywhere, but they should have been hidden so the birds couldn't find them. The air was a cool breeze with a slight mist I could feel on my skin. After the storm it was really nice outside. It wasn't warm, but it wasn't cold. The wind faded until it was gone. The day was about over and there was just a little sprinkle.

At the end of the day, as I'm lying in my warm cozy bed with my blanket covering my body, I hear the droplets of rain tapping my window softly and I see them running down the window. I wondered what tomorrow will be. Will it be warm, with the birds chirping and the blinding sun on my face or will it all start with a rainy day?

Gavin Bemis

Wilson Elementary

5th Grade, Honorable Mention

The Wacky Weekend

"Mom, I'm going to pick up Chloe!" I heard a muffled 'ok' in the closet. You might be wondering why my mom is in 'the closet'. Well let's just say that 'the closet' is the one closet where everything gets lost, and my mom couldn't find her crockpot. I just left because I didn't want her to make me help her find the crockpot.

If you're wondering, my name is Taylor and no, not Taylor Swift, and I am going to a behind the scenes special of Chrisley Knows Best season 9 premiere (it's me and my friend's favorite show). I got in my car and started to put in the address for Chloe's house, when I got a notification saying that the premiere was tomorrow morning! I quickly called Chloe, because we had to cancel all of our plans for tomorrow.

"Chloe! You won't believe the e-mail I just got!"

"I know, I'm already canceling the spa and dinner reservations." I don't know why Chloe was so calm about this. I was about to have a full-blown panic attack right there in my car. I decided to just calm down and let Chloe handle it. It only took me 3 minutes to get to Chloe's house, because I was going 25 mph over the speed limit.

"Chloe, I'm outside!" Chloe didn't have a car yet, so I was the one who was driving us to Tennessee.

"Hey! Not so loud, my brother is sleeping!" Even though Chloe was 18, her mom just had a new baby.

"Oops, sorry. We just have to get a move on, it's a long drive from Kansas City to Nashville."

"I know, I'm the one who looked up how long it would take. It will take approximately 8 hours and 3 minutes." Chloe was a big mathematician and liked things to be exact. She got a 96% in Algebra on her report card. Chloe hurried in the car and put in the GPS for Nashville, Tennessee. We stopped at a Starbucks right before we left town, so we wouldn't be thirsty on the way to our next stop at a motel in St. Louis. After about an hour of driving, I needed to go to the bathroom. "Chloe?"

"Huh, what?" Oh no, I think when I said Chloe's name, I startled her awake, and made her spill her coffee everywhere.

"Oh my god, Taylor!" Oh this was bad, when someone wakes Chloe up, she gets mad. But this made her even madder than before. She was drenched in hot coffee, and in a cranky mood. I just thought of holding it in 'til we get to St. Louis. About thirty minutes passed, and I saw the motel we will be staying at. I was pretty sure that the bathroom was right by the entrance, so I just told Chloe to wait for me to go to the bathroom. I was pretty relieved when I got out of the bathroom, but something happened while I was gone. Chloe was gone! I don't know where she went, but she left my luggage for me to deal with. I asked the front lady, but all she said was, "Like, I think she went that way, or wait, or she went that way. Like, I don't know." So much for help. I decided to go look for her. After about 20 minutes of looking, I thought that maybe she got the room number and went to our room. I asked the receptionist, but she wouldn't look up from her phone.

“Um, hello,” no answer. “Could I get—”

“Ma’am, I do not know where your friend is, go ask someone else.” Wow, talk about being rude.

“Um, I was asking if I could get my room number, my phone number is—”

“Ok then...are you Taylor?”

“Yes.”

“Ok, you are room number 1F.” After I got out room number, I was off to find Chloe. I went to our room, and she wasn’t there. I was thinking of places in the hotel she likes. Then I thought of it, the hot tub! I ran as fast as the speed of light, but I really didn’t need to. Chloe was just heading to our room when I ran into her.

“Taylor, what the heck!” I had knocked her onto her back, and she wasn’t happy. We talked it out once we finally got to our room. The rest of the night went smoothly.

The next morning, we had to rush to get ready because Chloe had forgot to set the alarm for 6 am. We had woke up at around 8:30 this morning, and the premiere started at 9, so we had to rush.

“Meet me in the car!” I think I heard her say ok, but the shower was too loud for me to hear her. I got to my car, and once I start the engine, I saw Chloe come out of the building looking nice like always. We drove to the building where fans get to meet them, but the Chrisleys weren’t there, so I took the elevator to go to the Starbucks upstairs. I got into the elevator with this random dude. He kept talking to me like he was famous or something. So I politely asked him if he was here for the premiere, but he turned around and said, “Well why wouldn’t I go to my own premiere?” Then I realized, it was Todd Chrisley who I have been talking to this whole time! I guess I didn’t notice since the masks were always messing up my brain.

“Omg, you are Todd!”

“Yep the one and only.” Then I could tell he smiled cause of his eyes.

“Well here is our stop. Hey, Taylor is it?” Oh my god, he knew my name!

“Ya. Wait, how did you know?”

“Well, you do have a name tag on your shirt.” Oh my god, I am so dumb. Of course there had to be something to embarrass me in front of a famous person.

“Would you like to eat lunch with the rest of the family?” Oh my, he just asked me that!

“I would, but my friend is waiting for me an—”

“Well, then, why don’t you invite her?” I didn’t have the guts to tell her that I met him without her, but I might as well ask her since someone we both loved just asked us to lunch.

“Ok then, wait right here.” I ran down the stairs instead of the elevator, because that elevator is very slow coming up and down.

“Oh hi Tay—” she had no time to talk since I had yanked her by the arm and was pulling her upstairs. When we reached the top of the stairs, Chloe turned to me, to Todd, and back to me with an expression that was priceless.

“Oh my god, Taylor! Look who it is!” Chloe said with huge excitement in her voice.

“I know, he wants us to have lunch with his family.”

“Hello, are you Taylor’s friend?”

“Um, y-y-ya.” The amount of embarrassment I felt for her was crazy. After we talked Chloe out of her embarrassed self, we headed over to Starbucks, and there were so many people. We actually made friends that night, and they promised to Face Time us every week. And the premiere was great! That weekend was the best weekend ever.

Alivia Atkinson

Wilson Elementary

5th Grade, Honorable Mention

The Golden War

Many years ago, in the land of Terraauri, there was the Red War. The fight between dragonborn and human. A struggle for power. Humans were the head of the land, from sea to sea. The dragonborn wanted to take that power from them. The dragonborn of Arceignis prepared for war. They took out the humans one by one with ambushes, but the human's wall around their kingdom, Sanctus, remained strong. Even though the humans outnumbered the dragonborn, the dragonborn had the most powerful leader in the land, Duke Xeno. With two giant axes strapped to his back, he charged straight to Sanctus on the frontlines to finish the war. He slaughtered many that day, and that is when the age of the dragonborn began...

Around ten years later, after facing tyranny and harsh rule, the people of Terraauri decided to rebel against the corrupt government. All the races of Terraauri joined together. The elves of Elderbark led the mission. The mission to create a child so powerful, that they could destroy the corrupt government for good and free the people. A mix of all races and their best qualities. Dwarfs, elves, humans, halflings, dragonborn, gnomes, half-elves, half-orcs, and tieflings. Once they had done that, their objective was to protect the mother until the baby was born. The child was referred to as the "Golden Child" because of its perfect qualities. Duke Xeno and his clan soon found out about the child and started assembling his army. This started the "Golden War."

8 months later the child was about to be born. The rebels were in Elderbark protecting the queen, who was birthing the child. She was locked in the castle of Elderbark while their army stood watch outside the doors. The rebels consisted of all races, with all types of people. Sorcerers, paladins, and rangers. Duke Xeno's army was coming to stop them. Duke Xeno blew his war horn, and the rebels became frightened. As the dragonborn were entering Elderbark, the queen was giving birth to the child. Duke Xeno slaughtered all the rebels he saw, making his way to the castle. As he was about to enter the castle, a sorcerer, named Scar Fang Draco, jumped out in front of him and tried to slice him with his dagger. It bounced off Duke Xeno's rock hard scales. "You pathetic little dragonborn." Duke Xeno growled as he threw Scar onto the ground.

"You need to stop what you are doing!" Scar growled back. "You will fall, and we will flourish forever," Scar said to Duke Xeno.

"I will spare your life; I admire your bravery little one. Know, that I will not show such mercy in the future," Duke Xeno said, looking at Scar struggle. Duke Xeno kicked open the doors to the castle. With the queens last moments of life, she threw the child out a window and into the river below. Scar Fang Draco saw it all, and saw wolves eat its body...

Two years later, the world was in ruin. People were plucked from their homes to serve Duke Xeno. Only self-sufficient villages remained strong. Exactly one, Elderbark who was still run by the elves, the last truly free city. Then there was Sanctus, who was under rule of Duke Xeno. Lastly, the adventurers remained independent. Elderbark was in a defeated state, still pitying the loss of their leaders, and the golden child. The one who was defeated the most, externally and internally, was Scar Fang Draco. One day he woke up from his house in Elderbark, the only dragonborn there. He was an adventurer, so he went to the newly elected king and asked for quests.

"Do you have any quests open right now?" Scar said as he bowed.

"Actually, I do. There has been a certain owlbear lurking around just north of here. Take it down."

"Will do." Scar said already walking away. He pushed open the gates and started his adventure. He walked around trying to look for a sign of it until nightfall. On the way back to Elderbark, he passed a giant ominous cave. He, being the curious dragonborn that he is, went in to look for the owl bear. He found nothing but animal bones but when he turned around to leave, he was faced with the silhouette of the owl bear. It made a bone rattling screech. The owlbear viciously pinned Scar to the ground! Right before the owlbear tore into Scar's flesh, a wolf attacked the owlbear.

"What?" Scar muttered under his breath, free from the grasp of the owlbear. At the entrance of the cave, there was another shape, looming over him. It had almost purple skin, dragon feet, and skeleton hands. Most importantly, he had golden wings spread out to a span of about 15 feet. The golden child. The child offered his hand to Scar, and Scar took him back to Elderbark. Then, he could defeat Duke Xeno.

Scar taught the child common language, using a wolf translator that he got from an old druid. He learned that the child's name is Ambush. A name that the wolves gave him. He taught Ambush battle strategy and martial arts. Months later, after going on numerous quests, he was ready to battle Duke Xeno. One day Scar got sent on a mission to go see if the Duke was planning anything on Elderbark, it had been so quiet for so long. Suspicious.

He arrived at Sanctus and cast a spell to disguise himself. He passed the main gates and entered Duke Xeno's throne room. Scar overheard him talking about a siege on Elderbark that was to happen in a week. Scar ran

out of the city to return to Elderbark. He talked to the king about it and the king told him to go get allies from the desert. Scar went to the first desert city, so remote that there were no guards. The king agreed to help them. Scar went to the next city. It was located in gargantuan caves. A winding path lead the way. This town seemed fit for war. People casually riding on chimeras. There was not a single person there that did not have a spear or a sword. When Scar entered the throne room of this town, he stood before an intimidating king.

“Hello young traveler. Do you have business here?” The king said in a majestic voice that sort-of echoed.

“I do. I was wondering if you would like to help us kill Duke Xeno and protect Elderbark.” Scar replied.

“I will do it. I will bring my pet too.” The king said as two guards opened a cage, so that an ancient copper dragon could come out.

“We will be ready then.” Scar said with a smile on his face. After they returned to Elderbark, they were prepared. It wasn’t even startling when Duke Xeno blew his horn in the distance. Elderbark charged into Sanctus’s army. A battle had commenced. Scar had thought that they won, until an ancient double-headed green dragon rose above the trees and started spraying acidic poison. After a valiant fight, Elderbark won. Duke Xeno’s final words? “We will come.”

Isaiah Burkholder
Hays Middle School
6th Grade, 1st Place

Fountain of Fire

Boom! Fire exploded in the sky, remnants raining down like a hailstorm. Crackling plastic landing everywhere. “That was a good one!” My mom exclaimed. My brother, parents, and grandparents were sitting in the driveway watching the firework show that my friend Eli and I were putting on. It was almost dark, finally. We were going to welcome the darkness by starting with a fountain firework.

It was dark, pitch black, and it was the Fourth of July! We were setting off fireworks on the sidewalk across the street from my house, a vast expanse of short grass covering a field behind the sidewalk. Eli and I were in the driveway picking up a very large fountain.

“You can set it off if I can carry it over,” he told me.

“Deal!” I happily agreed. The chattering of the adults in the background was overpowering. Eli and I have been friends since the beginning of Kindergarten, and we agree on almost everything. As we walk across the street, smoke filled my nostrils, I thought about that smell, the smell of Independence Day. I also thought about how soon this night will end, and I don’t want it to end. Eli set the firework down on the sidewalk. I looked at the driveway, then back to the firework.

“You ready?” I asked.

“Do it!” he said impatiently. I lifted my punk to eye level, bent over, and pressed it against the long, green wick. PPSSTT! The sparks started crawling up the wick.

“Go go go!” I said, already turned to the side- prepared to run. Our shoes clomped against the sidewalk as we ran; our feet getting slammed against the hard concrete with every step. We turned around and it exploded into a fountain of color. Sparks of all colors went flying! I was mesmerized by the beautiful explosion! Green, red, purple, yellow, and orange all flew majestically into the air, only to come down a second later and perish on the concrete. Then suddenly, it stopped...

It then exploded with an even bigger radius of fire, with blinding light obscuring my vision in the black of the night. Then, an eerie sound screeched up into the air. POP! It was fire in the sky. I was drawn in by the magical light. Tiny mortars were being set off from the fountain, a bone-rattling sound coming from each of them right before they explode. A noise just like a million parrots squawking in unison. “That is cool!” I said with delight. When it was over, an applause came from the driveway. “Best firework ever!” I shouted.

“I agree.” Eli said to me. With that, the best firework I have ever seen was a silent, empty container laying on the sidewalk. We stood there for a while, hoping something would happen. Nothing did.

“Let’s go get the next one!” Eli said enthusiastically.

“Ya.” I said, hopeful the next one would be just as great. We raced back to the driveway, excited for what was to come next.

Isaiah Burkholder
Hays Middle School
6th Grade, 2nd Place

Flowing Ink

June 23rd, 2009

It was a dark day out, rain running down Mila's window. Thunder crashed like the sound of two cars in a car accident. Mila always dreamed of being an artist some day, but the day hasn't come yet. Mila was sketching a bendy figure due to her obsession with the stories. Ah, the stories of the old workshop. It was a popular thing in the old days of her town. Joey Drew Studios was a pretty popular place there due to the first cartoon with sound being made there. Sadly, after thirty years the workshop went out of business due to bills costing too much. That's what Mila had heard, anyway. She really loved drawing and sketching, though she never showed anything to anybody. There is something Mila has always been curious about. It was if the stories were ever true. She believed them, yes, but never told anyone so. Most people think it's just a fictional story someone made for fun. She knew her friends would probably laugh at her if she said she believed in the tale. No one exactly figured out the location of the so-called workshop of Joey Drew Studios. Until one day that is.

June 24th, 2009

It was another day similar to the previous, though it was unusually darker out. It could've even been mistaken for night outside. Mila ended up sleeping in accidentally due to how dark it was. Eventually, she did wake up. She had decided to make a plan on figuring out if the mysterious workshop existed. She went to her closet and opened it, then started searching for supplies used for traveling. Behind a pile of clothes, she found a black flashlight. She picked it up and spotted a bag in the corner of her closet. She grabbed it, opened it, and found a couple things including pepper spray, a few water bottles, and a couple other things. She put the flashlight in the bag and set it on the ground, continuing to her desk and started drawing to pass the time for later.

June 24th, 2009

It was 11:34 P.M., her parents were asleep, so she sneaked out of the house with the bag and started exploring the quiet town. Most people were sleeping, so not many cars were driving through the road. It made it easier for her to travel because she could cross through the street because of the lacking traffic. She kept exploring until she went too far and got lost. "Out of all times, it had to be now." She muttered. Mila decided to try finding her way home but after a few minutes, she realized she just got herself more lost. "Just my luck, I go searching for a place that hasn't been found before, and now I am lost." She pathetically said. She just decided to search for some shelter since it was getting pretty dark, but after a few steps she fell through the ground into a 5 feet deep hole. When she landed, her body was feeling a sharp pain from the fall. All she could see was a hallway that ended with a door and a small light. She got up slowly and walked over to the door. She tried opening it but it seemed to be stuck, so she had to pull pretty hard to open it. Eventually after succeeding with opening the door, she found herself in a small workshop. There were bendy cutouts in random places, then she realized she must've been in the old workshop. She got excited for a moment but realized she couldn't exactly get out. The only thing she thought of was to look around the workshop in search for a ladder. The workshop was old and dusty, though most things looked brand new. Eventually, she found herself in a strange room. It had 6 pedestals evenly placed on both sides, with 6 pictures above them. One with a bendy doll, one with a music disc, one with a wrench, one with a gear, one with some kind of ink potion, and one with a book. Mila was confused but decided to search the workshop for these items. While searching, she found a room with some kind of machine inside of it. She inspected the machine and found a gear behind it. "Huh, that's kind of convenient," she said with a smile. After finding the rest of the items, she placed them on the pedestals with the correct pictures above. Lights lit up above the pedestals after everything was placed, but nothing had seemed to happen. Sadly, Mila couldn't find a ladder in any of the rooms so she just decided to figure out how to turn on the machine out of boredom. She thought about why the lever in this room wasn't working, but soon she remembered seeing a lever in the room she found the bendy doll in. She quickly ran to the room and found a lever with the words "Ink Pressure" written over it. She was able to pull it and ran back to the other room, almost slipping on ink that was on the floor. Luckily, she was able to pull the lever in the "Pedestal Room" (as she called it) and once she did, it got pretty dark. So she walked to the machine room and noticed some footprints on the floor and the room was boarded up. She was confused so she got closer to try and break the boards and a mysterious creature that looked like bendy appeared and tried grabbing her through the boards. Luckily, she was able to get away and start running out of the workshop, trying to find the exit because it was filling with ink. When she was about to reach the door she fell through the floor. Once she landed, well...no one knows what happened to her after that.

Kaden Boomer

Hays Middle School

6th Grade, 3rd Place

My Talking Dog Can Drive

When I was a little girl my parents got me a dog. I had no idea. I was just excited to see my parents again from their trip. My mom walked in with a bag of puppy food and I was so confused. I asked my mom “why do you have puppy food?” She looked at me and then turned around without answering me. I started to get angry when I saw my dad walk in with a two puppy toys. I thought it was for my uncle Bill because he just got a new puppy.

Then I heard barking and it struck me I’m getting a puppy! I ran outside and my mom asked me if I would like to name it I said yes. I named him Larry the Great and my dad calls him Bill. I don’t know why and I get so confused because he names every animal Bill. I was with my friend Lauren one day and she brought her puppy Bell. When we went into the living room are dogs were talking. I stopped in place and Lauren had the funniest look on her face and it looked like she wanted to scream.

Larry turned around and looked me in the eyes and had that look on his face like I messed up. My dog finally said something and said “Don’t say a word.” Then Lauren passed out. I took Lauren in my room and then me and Larry started talking. He told me when dogs started talking and what they were talking about. He said that cats were trying to take over the world and he needed help. Then I thought, I have a cat and was she is helping the other cats take over the world. Then I went to find her.

I called and looked everywhere but she was nowhere to be found. I went outside and saw her come out of our shed. I told her I knew that she could talk and she told me she wasn’t apart of taking over the world. She was trying to stop them but they wouldn’t listen to her. Then my dog came out and started yelling. I told him to calm down and that she was on our side but he wouldn’t listen. He finally calmed down and I told him everything about what happened. Then we started getting attacked by cats!

The cats started coming from every direction and we started getting hit by lasers! I didn’t know where to go and then Larry said, “follow me.” I followed him to my car and he said to get in. I didn’t want to go but then my cat jumped in and said, “come on there are robots coming.”

I jumped in and my dog started to drive off and the cats were turning everyone into stone! Then we ran out of gas. My dog jumped into a hole and me and my cat followed. There were thousands of dogs. My dog was the lead dog and he told me and my cat to wait in his office.

Me and my cat heard something and we peeked out the window. Five dog had costumes on and out came cats. My dog was stone and so were all the other dogs! I started to freak out but my cat threw a laser at me. I knew what she was going to say so I ran out and shot lasers at the cats.

My cat and me ran out of the hole and at least hundred dogs made it out and had robot suits on. Me and my cat took charge and led the dogs to war. My cat hit the lead cat but she got hit too and was falling. Then my dog jumped out of no where and caught her. My dog told me the stone melted off and he came to tell us that the lead cat was a robot.

I was confused and glad that the war was over. I found my parents and they said they didn’t remember a single thing and asked where the car was. I looked at my cat and dog and said, “maybe it got towed away!”

Keiara Hook

Washington Grade School

6th Grade, Honorable Mention

The Rise of Star

Where my story begins is a place of love and hope. I lived in a place, a beautiful place- Day and Night Palace because I was the daughter of King Day and Queen Night. They also had a son named Prince Dream and a newborn princess named Rain. I was the oldest out of my siblings. Little did they know I had powers... my life has been kept a secret.

One beautiful day I was walking across the shore of Daytime Beach when I heard a sound of someone scared crying, "Help! Help! Help!" So, I ran with my new super speed, without knowing, but when I realized it, I had already saved the little girl. She was shaking with fright.

That is when I saw the River of Life gleaming with sun light and remembered my mom had told me, "If a child is scared, throw her into the river and the fright will leap into the night."

So, I did and it worked but she did remember what had happened. Then I heard a familiar sound that came from the Midnight's Daylight song my mom had once sung to me. I ran West listening for the sound for it had gotten louder than it was back home. Then I came across the Cave of Secrets, but when I got to the core I had transformed into a story said to not be true.

That is when I realized I was hope for my people and my family because I am Star-bringer of light and goodness to all! Then the ground began to shake because the darkness was attacking my home. With my necklace, I teleported back home to put an end to the darkness. My family could not bear to see their home being destroyed until they saw me fighting for my home and risking my life. Soon my true powers had kicked in before the darkness knew it. I had already turned into an elemental dragon, the one thing the darkness could not defeat. I knew my powers were a sign that I was needed in more places because this was just the beginning of the darkness.

Eventually, I said goodbye to my friends and family saying I am needed in more places than ever. Every once a month I would visit my family no matter what. Ever since then I have been in three different dimensions, but I am keeping my promise.

Ahnalyn Leiker

Hays Middle School

6th Grade, Honorable Mention

Some Days

Some days in my life are smooth waves hitting the sand on a sunny beach. Others feel like a restless storm that rumbles inside of me. Now more frequently than ever, it feels like there's a storm in me that doesn't want to clear up. Today felt like the worst storm of all, and yet when I started to feel happy, the pain got even worse than before.

My mom had been completely out of my life for over a year now. Things were and felt so different. She had left me and my dad because my parents weren't the best at talking to each other. When I mean not the best, I mean they just could not control what they said to each other. This upset me most often because every time they would fight, I felt a part in me chip slowly away.

Now, every waking moment since she left, I would think of her. Every minute I'm by myself, I think of how lonely I am and how much I need her. So I'm done feeling that way, done with all the pain and anger. No person should ever feel that way. Little did I know that my dad had felt the same way as I did.

I asked him, "Do you ever miss her and regret some stuff?"

He answered me in a low depressed tone, "All the time."

We both had heavy hearts from thinking about my mom. I knew he needed a hug just as much as I needed one. I hugged him tightly, then I went on to ask if we could go find my mom. In a subtle, relaxed, less-depressed tone of voice he told me, "Your mom has been recently talking to me. She told me that she misses you a lot and that she wishes you were with her."

I jumped for joy; I wanted to see her so badly that when he told me, all I could do was ask him if we could go see her.

I was so excited to see her after all of this time, but I had no idea how to feel. Maybe I should've been angry she left me, but all I wanted to do was be in her arms. The second best thing to happen that day was that my dad was smiling. He told me that the reason he was smiling was because we were going to be back with my mom for the first time in over a year. But I knew that it was because I was smiling again.

Just a few weeks ago, my dad and I had seen my mom for the first time in over a year. There was tons of crying and even more hugging, I loved it. My family had been put back together and the dark part of my heart that was filled with numbness finally turned red again. To be completely honest with you, it felt just like just yesterday this all happened, not a few weeks ago. I mean we were happy, well for some time anyway.

My parents had been fighting again, but I didn't understand why because we were all together again. A Lot of things flew through my mind like having to go through the pain again and losing either one of my parents. I just could not take it anymore.

I was filled with so much rage and anger toward my parents; I didn't know why. It could have been the fact my parents were fighting again, or it could have been the fact I didn't want to be lonely again. I needed some time to think, to be alone, and calm down. So I went on a walk by the shore line. As the gusts of wind blew my long dark hair past my shoulders and the warm sun slowly set over the horizon, my brain grew empty of everything. All I had been thinking about is how pretty the sunset was.

Now I understood why my mom had left. She needed to be alone for some time to clear her head. That's the same thing I needed because after the sun had set, I felt okay with my life. I walked back home, and when I got back, my parents weren't fighting. They were worrying about me. They had finally realized what their fighting had been putting me through. They apologized many, many, many, many times, and each time I told them that it was okay. We all finally had a sense of feeling alright. My parents and I were going to be okay for a while.

Arianna Ayarza
TMP-Marian Jr. High
7th Grade, 1st Place

I'm Alive but I'm Dead

It was a cold Friday night when I stepped out of my house, missing my mom more than ever. She died three years ago, but I never got over it. I decided to go to the cemetery to visit her. I hopped in my car and started driving; it was night, I was going to a cemetery at night, this should be good. I got there, got out of my car, and started walking to where her grave was. I had just been here last week to put out flowers, and they looked beautiful in the light of the streetlights. I started reading her grave, September 6th 1995- March 28th 2027 Katherine Johnson...she was only 32. It was getting late. Midnight. I should get going. I started walking back to my car, reading the names on peoples graves as I walked by.

I was almost to my car when a certain name caught my eye, Ellie Robinson July 3rd 2014 - November 23rd 2030. Ellie was one of my best friends, and she was definitely alive. I saw her at school today, and it's November 20th 2030. Why is there grave for her from three days in the future?

I must be seeing things, I rubbed my eyes and looked again, nope still there. I grabbed my phone out of my pocket and took a picture, thinking *in the morning I'm going to call her and our other friend, Chloe Wilson.*

I walked back to my car, locked the doors, and drove home to go to bed. In the morning I got up and looked at my phone camera roll. The picture was there and said what it had said last night.

I went on FaceTime and made a group FaceTime with both friends. It started ringing. My heart dropped when Ellie answered, she was alive. This didn't make sense, just then Chloe answered.

"What's wrong? You look like you just saw a ghost!" Ellie said.

"Yeah, what's wrong?" Chloe agreed.

"I was missing my mom last night and I went to the cemetery..." I started, "and when I was leaving, I saw a grave, it was for Ellie but dated for November 23, 2030."

Ellie and Chloe were silent for a second and then they broke out in laughter. "Oh my gosh that's a good one!" Ellie laughed.

"Yeah, you had me there for a second." Chloe added.

"No... guys I'm serious, I-, I- took a picture of it." I stammered. I put the picture on screen share of the call. They went silent,

"Um...that's photoshopped right?" Ellie mumbled.

"No! I promise, let's go to the cemetery. Meet me at McDonald's in ten." I replied. They nodded and I hung up to start getting ready. I put on some jeans, threw my hair up in a messy bun, and brushed my teeth. I was out the

door in 5 minutes, Chole had said she was driving with Ellie. I started driving to McDonald's and when I got there, they were waiting inside.

“Sophie, you’re joking, right? About the grave.” Ellie asked.

“I wish, no I’m serious.” I replied. We got some food and coffee and went to my car Ellie sat in the front with me and Chloe sat in the back. I drove to the cemetery in silence. We got there and I jumped out of the car, slamming the door, Ellie and Chloe doing the same.

“Follow me.” I said, hoping I remembered where it was. I started walking and then I found it, I stopped and looked at them then to the grave. It still said what it did last night. Ellie looked like she was about to faint, she grabbed her chest and started breathing weirdly, like it was hard to breathe. She looked like she was about to puke and started fumbling around like she was very dizzy, just then, she collapsed.

Chloe screamed, “AHH WHAT THE HECK! CALL THE ER!”

I grabbed my phone, about dropping it while dialing 911.

“911 what is your emergency?”

“Um well... me and two friends went to the cemetery and one of them just collapsed and isn’t breathing normally,” I replied after deciding not to say anything about how there was a grave that said her name and birthday on it.

“Ok, where are you? We will send an ambulance.” the person on the phone said.

“Rover Valley Cemetery” I replied.

They started asking questions like, “Did she faint? Why were you in the cemetery? Does she have any health conditions? How old is she?”

Chloe was on the ground by Ellie, talking to her and trying to check her pulse. All of a sudden, I heard sirens and saw an ambulance turn the corner where a crowd of people was starting to form. Medics had a stretcher to put Ellie on and told Chloe and me that we could ride in the ambulance with her.

Ellie looked ashen, and when we finally got to the hospital and rushed into the ER. The nurse said we had to wait in the waiting room. We waited for nearly six hours in silence. Finally, a nurse came in and said that Ellie was unconscious. They thought she had a heart attack, and they were going to take some tests when she woke up. She also told us that we should probably leave and come back tomorrow.

I took Chole home and told her I was going to come back tomorrow around one.

“Can you pick me up?” she asked. After I said yes she got out of the car and I drove home, showered and went to bed.

In the morning I got ready and ate and by then it was 12:45 so I left to pick up Chloe. We walked into the hospital and went to the front desk.

“How's Ellie Robinson?” Chloe asked the worker.

“She had the heart attack tests, and they found out that she did have one. She is still unconscious, and her heart beat is very low. You can check with that doctor over there if you want to see her,” she replied pointing to a doctor.

We walked up to him and I asked, “Can we please see Ellie Robinson?”

He sighed and said, “You have ten minutes, room 112.” and pointed down the hall.

Chloe and I walked to room 112, and she opened the door. Right as Chloe opened the door, something grabbed her and with a scream she was gone. I quickly backed away from the door, falling on the ground.

The doctor came running over. “What’s wrong?!” he asked alarmed.

“Uh- when Chloe opened the door, something grabbed her and now she’s gone!” I replied.

The doctor looked like he didn’t believe me “what?” he said as he opened the door. Ellie was gone. Her hospital bed was messed up, but she wasn’t there.

“Where’d she go?” the doctor said.

“I don't know. She just disappeared!” I replied.

More doctors came and one called the cops. When the police came, they searched the room and found nothing. They told me to go home and so I listened.

I looked at my grandkids, remembering everything about the story I told them from 40 years ago, about the time I lost both of my best friends without a trace.

Kaylee Dinkel
Hays Middle School
7th Grade, 2nd Place

My Choice

I rubbed my eyes as the sun lit up my room. I had woken up later than usual. The soft feeling of the rug on my feet made me want to go straight back to sleep, but I rolled out of bed anyway and strolled to my bathroom. As I stepped into the shower, the hot water scorched my back. Great way to start my morning. Then I realized...I was gonna turn 15 tomorrow!! I dashed out of the shower and ran down the stairs.

“What are you screaming about?” my mom exclaimed.

“I AM TURNING 15 TOMMOROW!!” I screamed.

I got dressed and went to the store taking up the whole day getting clothes, food, and stuff to celebrate. Before I knew it, It was late at night. I went back home and layed down in my bed and fell asleep.

I woke up earlier the next morning out of excitement and nervousness. I got dressed as quickly as possible and rushed over to the mirror to see how I looked.

“What is that?” I thought to myself. I walked down the stairs to the kitchen and questioned my mom what they were.

She explained to me that on your fifteenth birthday, you get to choose from two options.

I ran back to the mirror. “Which one, which one..?” I thought to myself as I pranced around the room. I looked at my options. 1.) Forget only one day. “Eh, not that bad of an option,” I whispered to myself. 2.) To have everyone forget you for only one day. “Ok, wow ,that one’s a bit extreme.” I finally decided to choose, I mean I couldn’t just stand here all day.

Everything suddenly went pitch black in my room. Where was I?! What’s the date?! Did I get kidnapped?! So many thoughts were rushing through my head at that time.

Then my door creaked...”AHHHH!” I screamed at the top of my lungs as a tall skinny woman with black greasy hair waltzed in.. I grabbed the closest thing to me which was a slipper. I looked pretty pathetic standing there with just a slipper in my hand trying to protect myself.

“What are you doing?” she yelled back at me.

“Who are you and where am I??” I replied quickly in a shaky voice.

My mom continued to explain everything as she toned down her voice. I didn’t really understand what she was saying, but I didn’t mind.

“Well, you’re gonna be late for school,” she said back to me with a snap.

Ugh! I couldn’t believe this woman was making me go to school. Where did I even go? Alps High School apparently; that’s where my “mom” dropped me off.

People greeted me as I walked down the halls. I don't even know who they are. I ignored it and went to find my first hour. I walked into a room which I thought was my first hour. Apparently not.. Everyone chuckled. My face was turning cherry red; I could just feel it getting hotter and hotter in the room.

Once I found my actual first hour, I was so late.

“That's a detention,” the teacher said to me in a harsh voice.

Before I knew it there was the bell for lunch. Everyone was pushing and shoving their way to the lunch line. Once I got my food, I heard a group of girls calling my name. They were all calling me nicknames that had no meaning to me, but I just pretended to go along with it. I sighed with relief when the bell rang.

I sat in my last hour of the day dreading to go to detention. It was my birthday! I walked into the room a bit late and there was this boy sitting at the back of the room with his feet up on the desk in front of him. Stunned by how he was sitting, I decided to take a seat by him.

“Hi,” I said to him in a gentle voice.

“What do you want, Avery?” he said back at me.

Whoa! How did he know my name?

“What did you do to end up in detention?”

He rolled his eyes at me and responded with, “I stole a kids backpack.”

I was just getting lost in his eyes.

“Take a picture, maybe it’ll last longer,” he snapped at me. “I’ve been your bully since 2nd grade and this is the first time you’ve talked to me without insulting me.”

“It’s my birthday today, so I chose to forget for today,” I replied in a confused voice.

“Are you gonna remember what I’m about to say to you?” he said back to me in an anxious voice.

“Probably not, I mean-”

He cut me off with the words, “I have liked you since the second grade.”

I was shocked. All I could say was, “What’s your name?”

He was gone. I ran out of the room seeing if he was still there and there was no sign of him. I walked home trying to remember his name. I thought of it as I ate dinner and layed in bed that night. The next morning when I woke up, I could feel the warmness of the sun on my feet. I got dressed and went to school. When I got to school, everyone greeted me and I was able to greet them back. Then, James Klecher walked up to me and all I could say was, "What do you want?" "I see you got your memory back," he replied. "I did! Thank you for mentioning that," I snapped at him. "Well, I was wondering if you remember what I told you yesterday?" he said in a nervous voice. I looked at him concerned and said to him, "Obviously I don't remember, dork." He just walked away with a weird look on his face, but I went on with my day. As I was finishing my classes, I was walking to lunch with a group of girls from my class. All of the sudden I hear someone saying my name quietly. I looked over and there he was, James standing in a corner calling my name. Scared he was gonna beat me up, I made my friends stay close by. "What?" I said to him. "Do you want to know what I said to you yesterday?" he said to me. "I mean, you already have wasted my time, so say it," I said in a very annoyed voice. He took a deep breath and said to me, "I've liked you since the second grade." I just stood there with a stunned look on my face. I know I felt the same, but I just walked away yelling back at him, "I need time."

I couldn't believe he felt the same way about me. I needed to tell him. So at the end of the day, I walked up to his car, but he just started driving away, I know how he felt. I went home kinda hurt, but I got over it. I was washing my face and getting ready for bed when I heard a knock on the door. When I opened the door, there, standing before my eyes was James in the pouring rain outside. Immediately I hugged him and never let go.

After that night, James and I got along REALLY well and we lived our own happy ever after, all because of my choice.

Jaci Schmidt
TMP-Marian Jr. High
7th Grade, 3rd Place

The Buried Treasure

I could feel the breeze coming through my window as I woke up. It is my first day of school, and I am very excited. We just moved to this little town called Willows from Texas. Willows is a lot smaller than my town in Texas and has a lot less people. I finished getting ready and went to eat breakfast. I was in a hurry so I didn't miss the bus.

I got to school and couldn't find my locker. A girl came up to me and asked if I was lost. She helped me find my locker and my first hour class. I walked into class and everyone called me "the new girl" except Liz, the girl who helped me. After class was over Liz asked if I wanted to sit with her at lunch.

"Sure!" I said excitedly.

At lunch Liz and I talked and learned we had a lot in common. I asked Liz if she wanted to come over after school.

"I would love to," said Liz.

On our way back to my house, we stopped at the big willow tree in the middle of town. We noticed something shiny in the tree root; we got a closer look. There was a little keyhole in the root of the tree. Liz and I ran home to tell my mother.

My mother said that there is a legend about a man who buried treasure under the willow tree before he left town. She also said that there is a book that will tell you exactly where the treasure is under the willow tree.

We went to the library to try to find the book. We had no idea how we were going to find the book, there were so many books we didn't even know where to start looking. It felt like hours had gone by, but we eventually found a book that said in bold letters, "The Legend of the Buried Treasure." We flipped through the pages and looked at all the pictures. It was a really old book and had been on the very back of the shelf. Then we found the page that told us where the treasure was! Liz and I checked the book out and sprinted home.

Back at home we were reading through the page that had all the information on it. It mentioned something about an old clock tower. Suddenly I remembered the old clock tower on Boulevard street. I suggested that we go there and Liz agreed.

At the clock tower we walked up the long staircase to the top. On the wall there was a picture of an old man by the willow tree. Then Liz accidentally bumped the picture and it fell to the ground. Behind the picture was a key, a very small silver key.

“The key!” shouted Liz. “It matches the one in the tree root!”

I grabbed it and started running down the stairs as fast as I could. Liz, not expecting me to take off running, ran after me.

When we got to the tree, we were breathing so hard we had to sit down for a minute. “It is getting dark,” Liz said with a worried look.

Although I wanted to find the treasure tonight, I knew Liz didn’t want to. We decide to go home and come back in the morning. We said goodnight and started walking home.

I couldn’t fall asleep that night. I kept thinking about the treasure. Eventually I drifted off to sleep. The next morning I ate breakfast and ran out the door. I was so excited; I was going to find treasure!

Liz was already at the tree when I got there.

“Are you ready?” I asked Liz.

“Yes!” Liz said excitedly.

I slowly put the little key in the keyhole and turned it. All of a sudden, a little patch of grass started to slide open. We carefully looked in the hole; there was a treasure chest! Liz and I were speechless! It was really heavy, but we eventually lifted it out of the hole. I found a wagon on the other side of the tree. I suggested we put the chest on the wagon and pull it back to my house.

My mom was shocked that we had found the treasure. Liz and I told my mother we wanted to donate it to the town so we could repair things. Our town is old and broken down, so we thought it would be a great idea. My mom agreed, then she drove us to the bank so we could donate the money. The people who worked at the bank couldn’t believe how much money there was. A woman who worked there said the town would be able to repair a lot of things and also get some new stuff. Parks, new school equipment, and new books for the library!

The weekend passed by and it was time for school again. At school the teachers announced that we were going to get a new gym and new locker rooms. Everyone was so excited. Little did Liz and I know they were going to announce that we were the ones who found the money to get the new stuff.

The rest of the day was like any other day but one thing was different. Nobody was calling me names or being mean, they were being nice. I thought that was very strange because they were always mean to me.

At lunch Margret, the meanest person at school, asked me to sit by her. I thought about it and I could tell she was getting very impatient. “No thanks,” I finally said. “I am going to sit by my real friend but thanks for asking.” I walked over to Liz. Margret stormed off.

I knew Liz was my only real friend, and that’s fine. I would rather have one real friend, than have lots of fake friends.

Rachel Staab

TMP-Marian Jr. High

7th Grade, Honorable Mention

Dream Flight

It was a beautiful evening. Vibrant pinks, purples, and blues made up the sunset, stark against the horizon of cornfields. The fresh smell of rain and falling leaves wafted through the air. It was a perfect flying night.

My dad unloaded his powered parachute from its trailer at Marion Municipal Airport. It was the night of the annual fly-in, and eager pilots stood at the hangars waiting to see what neat aircrafts would fly in. My dad was taking me up as his first passenger that evening. I hopped in the backseat, and we taxied out to the newly mowed grass runway strips. Once we made it out there, we halted so we could lay the parachute out on the ground before takeoff. The bright blue parachute took up the whole width of the runway. In preparation for takeoff, I sat back down in my seat, put my seatbelt on, and then placed the headset over my ears and adjusted the sensitivity and volume of the microphone.

“Marion Area Traffic, November 862 Echo Foxtrot preparing for departure on Runway 13, Marion Area Traffic,” my dad said into his radio.

Then he shouted, “Clear prop!” before he started the engine. He pushed the throttle three quarters of the way forward, and as we started to accelerate down the runway, he pulled back on the throttle slightly so we could confirm we were ready to take flight. We both looked up to make sure the parachute lines were not tangled, all the cells were inflated, and that the parachute was centered over our aircraft. Once we made sure all the requirements

were met, he pushed the throttle to full power. We started to lift off the ground and take flight. We gained altitude until we reached about 800 feet above ground level. Up there, we could see everything: vast amounts of farmland, neighboring towns, and even the county lake! The cars were so small they looked like moving jellybeans.

My dad can only fly until civil twilight, which is roughly thirty minutes after sunset, so we weren't able to fly for a very long time. As we turned around to head back to the airport, we crop grazed a cornfield. Then, we returned to a 500-foot altitude and discovered that the field we grazed was actually a corn maze. From that high up, it looked like one big masterpiece that an artist intricately painted onto a canvas. The design with many zigzags and curly cues contained details so small we could miss them easily if we didn't look close enough.

"This is amazing!" I said to my dad while talking into my headset. "Who knew being a bird could be so surreal?"

We made a u-turn and passed over the golf course while realigning with the northwest winds to land. As we started decreasing altitude, a Cessna airplane was getting ready to takeoff on asphalt runway 17/35. Cessnas are a type of fixed-wing aircraft that generally seat one to four passengers. Right as our wheels touched down on the grass runway, the Cessna 152's wheels lifted off the asphalt runway. As we came to a complete stop, my dad pulled the parachute lines in and the parachute dropped gently behind us. The flight was complete. It was such an unreal experience that it felt like I had been in a dream...a dream I wanted to dream over and over again.

Isabelle Jones
Hays Middle School
8th Grade, 1st Place

Dangerously Funny

Irony. One thing that basic comedy is based off. But, the same things that make irony funny can also make it dangerous.

The bus that was carrying my family came to a halt with a screech in front of a somewhat steep drop to the riverbank. My family unloaded from the bus, gazing out at our next adventure. It was hot and damp, like the bathroom after a long, hot shower. Trees surrounded us on all sides besides the front, where the river ran, and behind us, where we had traveled from. Three families dawdled at the edge of the bank, getting out of their canoes, rafts, and tubes. I went around to the trailer that the bus was hauling. Carefully, I helped my mother and sister grab their canoe and carry it down to the bank. We clambered back up the bank and grabbed our life vests and paddles. I wanted to canoe with my mom, but I was stuck with my dad. He was still, after about eight minutes, talking with the bus driver...asking him questions about the wildlife and hydrology of the area. My mom and sister carefully climbed into their canoe, ready for the adventure.

I began to help them shove off when my mom said, half jokingly, "If you and your father catch up with us at any time, I'll give you ten dollars."

I sighed and looked up at my dad who was just now getting our canoe off the trailer. *Like that'll ever happen*, I thought to myself as I pushed them and their canoe into the mighty Ozarks.

I climbed back up the shore *again* to help my dad carry the canoe back down to the water. As we set canoe down in the water, I looked over to him. "Any chance I can sit in the back and steer?" I asked hopefully.

He looked at me like when a librarian pushes down her glasses. "What do you think?"

I sighed as I climbed into the front.

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Leaning back a bit, I paddled as I listened to the sounds of flowing water, birds singing, the wind, and just anything that happened to make a noise. It was so peaceful. Watching for wildlife on the tree-line, a tap from my right shoulder turned me around.

My dad pointed out on the river and whispered to me, "Look, a turtle."

Sure enough, as I turned back around there was a turtle floating gently on the river surface. Softly, I put my paddle back in the water to steer us towards the middle of the winding river. *Nothing can go wrong*. Or at least, that's what I thought as we continued further into the heart of the Ozarks.

*Of course*, I thought as I saw the obstacle in front of us. Right where the river widened out a little, an exasperatingly tall tree lay smack dab in the middle. Was that mother and sister on the other side? I couldn't be sure.

“Okay,” Dad started from the back, already coming up with a plan, “we need to get around that with one or no casualties.”

I turned back to look at him. I gave him a look of disapproval.

“I’m just kidding.” He said in a fake exasperated voice. “Anyway, we need to turn left, away from it.”

I nodded. My paddle gave a splash as it sunk into then water. With all my might, I paddled us leftward.

We underestimated the power of the fallen giant.

With one fell swoop, the right side of the canoe was bashed and sunk into the murky depths. I flew out of my seat, into the water.

There was a thunderous crash as water rushed into my ears. My body submerged into the river, cold enveloping my body. My feet reached out but could not find the bottom. As I tried to launch myself out of the water, something blocked my path. My mind started to fly, thinking of the fate that might await me I started to panic. *No*, I thought, *do not let yourself panic. Think*. Starting to calm down, I stopped flailing my arms and legs to conserve energy. Slowly, my fingers felt their way around my captor. As I felt, I started swimming in the direction I thought was the shore, although I had no real idea of which direction that was. Finally, my fingers found the end of my never-ending prison. With all my remaining oxygen and strength, I rocketed out of the water.

The silent murkiness of the water disappeared. Sunlight hit my face and I breathed as if an elephant had been sitting on my chest. I reached up to rub away the water from my eyes and opened them. Then I just floated for a while breathing in and out. I reached out to rest my body on the canoe, floating in front of me. I looked out to my half-soaked dad calling out to me, seeing if I was ok. I was too out of breath to answer.

It was only when I was lying there, gasping for breath I already had, that I realized the irony right in front of my face. I felt foolish for not realizing it earlier. The very thing that had kept me afloat, almost caused me to sink. *Ah, sweet irony.*

**John Weisenborn**  
*Hays Middle School*  
8<sup>th</sup> Grade, 2<sup>nd</sup> Place

### **An Everyday Fairy Godmother**

Everyone has secrets, big or small, important or unimportant. Now you are wondering who else could be hiding something from you. That is not the question you should be asking. You should be wondering what you're hiding and why you are hiding it.

Wake up, do makeup, get dressed, and drive the car to school. That is my morning routine. It’s been that way from middle school to high school. That particular day, my first-hour class was semi-normal except for a new girl in the back of the classroom.

After class, I headed to my locker to get Tylenol when the honey-haired fairy practically jumped in front of me.

“Hello! My name is Samantha, but you can call me Sammy or Sam,” she said in one breath.

“Vera,” I stated quietly. “My name is Vera Reeds.”

Sam turned back to me with a face filled with child-like glee “I believe we’ll be the best of friends.” I saw a gleam in her eye, and I knew something was going to happen, something that involved Sam and the fact that she was about to wiggle her way into my life.

Tick-tock. The clock of my psychology class wasn’t moving fast enough. I hate this class. It reminds me of deep, dark, hidden things that don’t belong in the light. The words my teacher said started to grow fuzzy.

“Pain . . .” The pounding of my head started up again.

“Tolerance . . .” My nails began to tap faster as my other hand clenched into a fist.

“The mind . . .” Most of the words didn’t make it past the ringing in my ears.

“Obey . . .” Even though it was in the same volume as the other words, it rang through my head. Memories of the past begin to play on repeat.

I have to get out! I exit the class and head toward the bathroom. Once I’m sure that the stalls are empty and I am safely alone, I fall apart.

I vaguely hear Sam calling out to me, “Come on, Vera. Breathe through your nose and out through your mouth.”

“Okay,” I say, even though my voice cracked. Everything’s alright. I felt like if I said it enough, it had to be true. I stood up at a snail's pace to make sure my legs were steady.

I didn’t realize that Sam was connecting the dots. The occasional limp, a hint of a bruise that makeup could not hide, my need for Tylenol almost every other week. I was a puzzle, and she almost had all of the pieces to solve me.

Sleepovers at someone else's house was my only escape. When Sam invited me to her house, I jumped at the chance for freedom.

“Did you not like the pasta?” Sam asked while painting my fingernails after dinner. “You didn’t eat very much.”

“I just wasn't hungry.”

“I was wondering,” she asked, “if it had anything to do with the bruise on your stomach?” My eyes went wide, and my breathing picked up when I looked down and saw that my shirt ran up and my bruise was visible, “Or the panic attack in the bathroom? I used to get them after I broke up with my boyfriend. He was abusive.” She said it so softly I almost didn’t hear it, but I did. I stared into her compassionate blue eyes with horror.

Abusive, it rang through my head repeatedly like a fire alarm. So I ran. I ran back to my four-story prison. Mother and father were away on business. I was glad they weren’t home. That meant they couldn’t stop me. As I ran to the cellar, I heard their words running through my head.

*“If anyone finds out, we’ll just move, and it’ll get worse. Do you understand?” I nod my head, but that wasn’t enough. My father slapped me, and my mother screamed, “Say it!”*

*“Yes,” I tell them, voice shaking.*

*“Louder,” she says softly.*

*“Yes,” I say in my strong voice.*

*“Good. Everything we do is for you. Remember that, sweetie,” she informs me while petting my hair like a dog.*

*“We just want you to excel in life. That’s all we want. To make you better,” my father says while coming closer. I nod through the tears because I believe them.*

*“No,” my mother laughs maniacally, “you’ll be perfect.” Then they descend on me like hungry wolves.*

I was nine years old. In my only way of defiance, I called my mother the perfectionist and my father the punisher behind their backs. Those described their jobs. Mother helped to make me perfect, and my father punished me when I wasn’t. They were grooming me to be the best version of myself. They were making me strong.

I remember the fall of steel, the smell of it. The steel knife was their favorite; it called out to me like an old friend. I could feel the phantom pain along my back, their canvas. Tonight, the wrists would be mine.

I remember feeling like I was falling asleep. I was tired, so tired. I welcomed it with open arms.

I thought that what I was doing would be better for everyone. My life would've been a bunch of loose strings that might never meet their ends. I did know that I would never be hurt again, but I would never have known if it got better, if I would be a good mother, if I would find love, if I would heal. I wanted to take the easy way out.

Sometimes what you want isn’t the best for you. It’s up to someone else to help you if the choices you make are hurting yourself. Sam was my person. Sam was the one who followed me to my house and called an ambulance when she found me. She was there for me when I woke up in the hospital, scared and alone. Sam and her family opened their home to me when I put my parents behind bars. She woke me up from my nightmares and held me during the panic attacks that followed. She was there when I didn’t know how to open my heart to someone else because everyone who was supposed to love me hurt me. She was my maid of honor at my wedding. She knocked some sense into me when I had a baby and was scared I would turn out like my mother. Maybe my high school nickname for Sam was accurate. She was my fairy godmother, always looking after me.

There is always a bigger picture. Sam could see it, but many people are so nearsighted or blind that they don’t. Think about that, the next time you pick on someone, spread false rumors, or gossip about a person behind their back. Think about that when you see a single mother with her child, a person with different colored skin, or a child who hadn't been taught right from wrong, or even when you see that person who seems to have everything while you have nothing. Nothing is ever as simple as we want it to be. You never know when a few kind words can give a person a reason to keep trying, or a few evil words can push them over the edge. You don’t know, so why don’t you try to find out. Be that person, the person that helps people up instead of pushing them down. Sometimes we all need a little help. Be that person who gives it.

**Breanna Seiler**

*TMP-Marian Jr. High*

*8<sup>th</sup> Grade, 3<sup>rd</sup> Place (tie)*

## Unforeseen

"Can I have another pop?" Blaire asked while crushing her previous can.

"You've already had two! That's enough. Why are you acting so random today?" Blaire's mother replied.

"I just can't handle myself! Dad's driving our new rescue horses home!" Blaire exclaimed as she grabbed another can from the fridge disregarding her mother's words. "Is that him?" Blaire asked, but without waiting for an answer, she shouted, "It's them! They're here!" She sprinted out the back door and waited to meet them in the driveway to help unload.

As her dad pulled in the driveway, Blaire watched the trailer slowly pass her. She took a good glance at all eight horses before starting to unload. One in particular caught her eye. It was a small paint that looked just a little bigger than a pony. He looked tired, dirty, and was the skinniest of the bunch. Blaire and Rhett, her father, got all eight rescue horses unloaded then put them in a big beautiful pasture. All of the horses went over to eat at the bale of hay, but not the paint.

While sitting on the fence next to the pasture, Blaire asked her father, "What's the plan for the horses? Could we train some of them?"

"I already have someone interested in buying some of the younger ones to train," Rhett replied as he and Blaire watched the sunset. Blaire loved to sit outside every night and watch the sunset. She thought it was especially beautiful this time of year in Oklahoma.

"How old is that paint?" Blaire asked.

"I don't have his papers, but he looks to be pretty old; maybe twenty or so. Why you ask 'n about the paint? He is the smallest of the bunch. I don't think he would be fast enough," Rhett replied.

"I just want to give them all a fair shot at a new, happier life. Why is he not eating?" Blaire asked.

Her father replied, "I noticed that, too. They have vet visits tomorrow, so hopefully we'll find out." Rhett jumped down from the fence and turned to Blaire. "I've had a long day. I'm going to bed. Good night, sweetie. I love you."

"Good night, Dad. I love you, too. I won't be out here much longer," Blaire replied as her father walked towards the house. She stayed there watching the paint horse.

After about ten minutes, Blaire jumped down from the fence to go inside when the paint walked over to her. He stood right in front of her and dropped his head. Blaire stroked his mane. It was ratted and unmaintained. The paint was overall very tired-looking and seemed to have no personality. Blaire, however, was determined to find his personality and make him hers.

The next day, all eight of the horses had their check-ups. The results were that all of them had worms. That's why they were so skinny, but the worms could no longer hurt them, and they could recover.

While feeding them all evening, Blaire asked, "Dad, could we by any chance keep some of them to train for barrels? I'm about old enough to start a project horse."

She then poured a huge bucket of grain into a trough for them to eat, and all of the horses rushed over to eat, including the paint. However, he ate with his head at a weird angle. Blaire noticed this, but just thought it was goofy since the vet never said anything.

"I think that's a fine idea, Blaire," her father said in response. "Which ones were you thinking about?"

Blaire looked her dad in the eyes and shyly said, "I want the paint."

"The paint?" Rhett said in sort of disbelief.

"Yeah," she said with no hesitation. "I think he has a past, and he wants another shot."

Rhett hooked some alfalfa onto the ground in the horse pen, then stood up and said, "I'll help you saddle him for the first time just in case, but after that he is all yours."

Blaire was so excited she looked at her dad with the biggest smile on her face. "I'm gonna call him Scout!" Rhett chuckled and walked out of the barn as Blaire went to groom Scout.

Nearly two weeks had gone by with Blaire riding Scout every other day. It was obvious to her that he used to be ridden by his old owner. He was still extremely skinny, but she was light enough she did not hurt him.

Within the next two week, Scout started to look a lot better. He was getting healthy enough that Blaire was starting to push him a little faster with each ride. Everything was rolling smoothly until Scout started to stop and freeze in the arena. When this happened, Blaire understood that Scout ran out of energy easily because he was not quite in shape.

The first show rolled around, and Blaire was stoked to finally compete on Scout.

Blaire was up. She calmly walked him into the arena, but suddenly Scout froze. "Easy, boy. Come on, Scout!" she kept repeating. But it was no use. She was in disbelief and started to regret all of her work with Scout.

Deep down, however, she felt bad. She somehow knew that he was doing this out of fear, but she didn't know what he was scared of.

Scout continued to freeze in other shows until Blaire and her dad agreed to have the vet check him again. What Blaire found out shocked her. Scout's tongue was split in half and was missing a large chunk. He was also missing many teeth. While it no longer caused him pain, he would always have a mental block from trauma that caused the injury. The vet told us he was probably punished when he was being broke as a colt, and more than likely had a thin wire strung through his mouth. This used to be a trick the trainers would use to make horses obey. All Blaire could think about was how anybody could do that to him. Scout only tries to please her. That is why she still wanted to use him as a barrel horse, and allow him to live past his old injury. She wanted to gain his trust.

Now that Blaire knew more about Scout's background, she focused on building his trust. At this point Scout was in much better shape than when she got him. His muscle was starting to build back up, and he was in an overall condition. Blaire started to go to shows again, and as time went on, Scout froze less and less. Blaire and Scout had made a special bond; they both trusted each other completely.

After having Scout for six months, he had gained eight hundred pounds and no longer got scared before an event. Blaire got an amazing opportunity to compete in a rodeo series riding Scout. She took that opportunity and made the most out of it. She was competing against the best of the best. Many people would travel from multiple states away just to compete there. Blaire got better and better riding Scout. They even started to win money from their placings, even competed for a world title

Scout taught Blaire to be a better rider, a better person, and a better partner. Blaire later went on to compete for bigger titles including world titles on newer, younger horses, but she gives credit to Scout, the horse that started it all for her.

**Chloe Purinton**

*TMP-Marian Jr. High*

8<sup>th</sup> Grade, 3<sup>rd</sup> Place (tie)

### **The Last Hoorah**

Winning, one of the greatest moments a human being can experience. It fills you up with triumph and makes you feel important. On rough days, it's what keeps you going.

Bottom of the third inning started up. I look over to the line up in hopes I'd be at third base, but my smile faded quickly. Left field. Not where I wanted to be playing during the last game of the season. I drug my feet in the dirt to left field, leaving a trail behind me as I slipped on my glove. My eyes quickly darted to the score board, five to four, barely, just barely we were ahead, winning.

I held onto the thin string of hope as a tall and lean batter headed to the batting box. Powerful knots started to form in my stomach. Our star pitcher began her windup. The wild pitch rose to the batter's nose. Not a strike, a ball. My hope started to shrink. The pitcher started her wind up again. This time a smack filled the sports complex. My eyes scanned the field for the ball. Slowly, it started to lose air in between center and right field. With a small thud it landed on the ground. No one could do anything but stare at it.

"Come on, let's get the ball in!" I yelled in frustration. Helplessly, I watched the batter run to first, second, and third where she finally stopped. Another batter came up and another great hit. And another one, and another one, and another one, until finally three outs. Five to ten read the glowing score board supplying little light in the night sky. Slowly, I headed to the dugout, which had filled with negative energy.

"Come on guys, we can still catch up!" said coach Angee. "We just have to keep trying!" I could see the hope in her eyes. I put on a fake smile and checked the batting line up. Fourth. The so-called clean up hitter; I didn't feel that special as I slipped on my worn-out batting gloves and watched one of our strongest batters come up to the plate.

The first pitch was just at her ankles. "Ball!" the umpire announced. Here came the second pitch. The softball whizzed past her so fast you couldn't see it if you blinked. "Strike one!" You could see her confidence plateau. "Strike two!"

Everyone's stomachs was in tight knots, their faces stiff. My heart was thumping fast, faster than—"Strike three!" rang through the stadium. Her head hung low as she walked back to the dugout.

The next batter came up, and I pulled on my dirt-covered helmet. A clink echoed, and I looked up to see her run at full speed to first, second, and make an abrupt stop at third. Everyone burst out cheering as a little hope sparked inside me.

I grabbed my old handy bat and studied the rubber grip, while taking slow and controlled breaths, trying to settle my nerves. The next thing I knew, I was up to the plate. I looked the pitcher in the eye. She seemed much calmer than me.

I squatted into my batting stance, trying to look as strong as possible. “You can do it, Caira!” my parents yelled. The pitcher began her wind up, and I became tense. “Strike one!” Frustrated, I prepared myself for the next pitch. The ball came soaring towards me and as a natural habit, I swung. It made contact. I took off running towards first base. A fast line drive was headed between first and second. I accelerated to a speed I didn’t know I could reach. The player at first caught the ball. Then she dropped it. I was safe!

Suddenly, the coaches from the opposing team walked on to the field. Their faces were serious. An important conversation began between the coaches and the pitcher. Their pitcher walked off the field as another girl stepped up to the mound. That’s odd I thought; the other pitcher was doing well.

“They’re trying to run down the clock!” Coach Angee said in shock. At that exact moment, it hit me, there was a very good chance that we may not win this game now.

After what seemed like forever, our last hope came up to the batter’s box. Only five minutes left on the clock. Everything pitched to her was impossible to hit. She walked to first. As I shifted down to second base, I looked at the clock only fifteen seconds left. We had lost. 10-9.

Trying to hold back the wall of tears, I slowly made my way to the dugout. All the faces were filled with sadness. We were so, so close to victory, but it was snatched from us.

So quickly, I felt a strong hatred towards that team. A long suspending silence lasted for what seemed like forever as we packed up our belongings.

My glove made it first into the bag. Grey with precise white stitching. The glove that should have caught the game winning catch. The catch that should have made us win that long game.

“Come on guys, don’t look so miserable,” said coach Angee, distracting me from my thoughts. “Don’t let that team make you that upset,” her voice was muffled by the sound of the other team celebrating. I shot them an unnecessary glare.

Still upset about the loss, I walked out of the sports complex. Past the snack stands. The usual smell of hotdogs and hamburgers didn’t give me the feeling of joy it usually did.

Then, past the team that sucked all happiness out of me. My anger grew at the point it was about to boil over, watching them celebrate. Then, all of a sudden, my dislike shrunk. They jumped up and down smiling ear to ear. I realized that the rest of the team and I wouldn’t have been that happy if we won. They needed that win more than we did.

Winning. Even though I may not have won that game, I had an internal win.

**Caira Augustine**

*Hays Middle School*

8<sup>th</sup> Grade, Honorable Mention

## **Run**

The hot, thick, summer air struck my face as I stepped out of the cool, air-conditioned bus. The hot day was shaping up to be a bad time for running. It was the first cross country meet of the season. My friends and I were giddy with excitement, fantasizing how the race would turn out. As we walked to the field that would be team camp, the dry buffalo grass crunching under foot, we studied the course. Seeing what I would shortly be running on made my stomach shrivel up, replaced by a knot of anxiety.

We arrived at the team camp, and my eyes could hardly take everything in. All of the schools, students, and easy up tents made the dead, barren field seem to be flourishing with life. The shouts and sounds filled my ears and overwhelmed me. We found an open spot under some small, thinning trees, and began heading towards it. On the way, a group of tall, lanky, and muscular boys passed by.

“They can’t possibly be in 7<sup>th</sup> grade!” I nervously speculated with my teammates, looking at each other with nervous glances.

I dropped my bags off in our shady camp area. The anxiety in my stomach becoming more and more dominant. It felt as if there were thousands of butterflies in my stomach. I surveyed the circus that was team camp, looking for my mom, knowing that she would be the only person that could comfort me. At last I spotted her amongst the crowd, and we embraced in a big hug.

"I'm so excited to see you run!" she exclaimed.

"I know, but I am so nervous," I replied queasily.

"You'll do great!" The simplicity of her answer comforted me and gave me the reassurance I needed.

"Thanks, Mom. Love you!"

"Love you too, buddy."

I started back to camp to warm up with my team, conducting many stretching and cardio exercises. When we finished, we headed over to the starting line, and nervously awaited the beginning of the race. The course marshall walked out in-front of all the kids and explained some basic rules of the race. He finished the rules and stepped away from the line. Raising his flag, he said, "Runners on your mark! BANG!"

The gun sounded, and everything seemed to slow down. I took off striding from our red spray-painted box, kicking up all the dead grass. The race had begun.

The wide, open field soon bottlenecked down into a narrow, two-lane path surrounded by forests and pastures. I settled into my pace, the anxiety shrinking, and powered through the first hill, passing multiple people. At the top of the hill awaited a lot of parents, coaches, and teammates cheering us on. Their voices pounded in my head and stuck with me throughout the entire race. Over the next couple of minutes, I passed a lot of people and covered a substantial amount of distance. The course was like a roller coaster, going up a hill then back down, then up and back down. I passed the half-way point and was in shock as the manager splashed me with cool, brisk water. It gave me the revitalization I needed to keep going. Once I got to the last quarter mile though, I felt like I was going to throw up. I stopped and walked until I had caught my breath and got my mental self talk under control. I started running again, picking up pace as the finish line drew near. I turned the final corner around two short, stubby pine trees and I could see the finish line. I sprinted toward it, my legs firing, my lungs burning, and my mind screaming at me to keep going and finish strong. The race was over. What had felt like an eternity had only lasted six minutes and fifty-two seconds. I finished twelve places away from first, and three from getting a medal. The first of many meets was in the books.

**Cooper Johnson**

*Hays Middle School*

8<sup>th</sup> Grade, Honorable Mention

### **Peripheral**

I woke up to a tapping on my window, I rolled over in my bed and looked at my alarm clock. It read 4:37 A.M. *Tap tap tap*. I finally got up, flicked the lights on, and opened my curtains. As I expected there was a tree branch swaying in the wind and tapping on my window. I turned around with a sigh and saw a black shadow in my peripheral vision. My breath caught in my chest and I whipped around. Nothing was there.

I figured I was just tired and imagining things. I decided to sit back down on my bed when I heard what sounded like a footstep, followed by a *plink* noise downstairs. My heartbeat began racing and my breathing quickened. I slowly got up from my bed and began padding my way towards the door. I stood at the door and listened. I couldn't hear anything, maybe I really was imagining things? I started backing up slowly when I heard a *thud* coming from downstairs again. I went back to my fearful state and walked back up to the door. This time I slowly opened it, cringing at the creak it made.

I stood there staring at the dark hallway listening. Through the little light coming out of my room I saw another shadow just in my peripheral vision. I let out a sharp gasp and quickly walked backwards into my room. *What is going on? I should just call the police. There's definitely someone, or something, in my house.* I went back into my room and grabbed my phone laying on the bedside table. I dialed 911 with my shaky hands. It rang five times, and hung up. *What? Why would the police not answer?* I tried again and again, no answer. *Thud.* Another noise from downstairs.

I walked back to the dark hallway and listened. Again, there was nothing. I walked out into the hallway and flipped on the light switch. I stood there for a second and saw yet another shadow in my peripheral vision. Somehow, my heart started racing even faster, I stared at where the shadow was with wide eyes. There was nothing there. I heard a slight creaking noise followed by the sound of rushing water. The bathroom sink was turned on. I

slowly walked through the hallway, with every floorboard that creaked I paused for a minute and listened. I eventually made it to where the bathroom was, the hissing sound of water coming from inside. I flicked on the light and sure enough, the faucet was running. I reached out my hand and turned it off, as I looked up I caught a glance of another shadow in the mirror, right in the doorway behind me. I let out a small scream and flipped my entire body around and stood staring at the empty hallway. As I stood there, I heard the sound of shattering glass from downstairs.

I chose my steps carefully and made my way to the staircase, the inky darkness more ominous than ever. I reached out and turned on the light switch on the wall. And again, I saw another shadow that moved quickly into the living room downstairs. Every single light upstairs was now on, and I was terrified of going down stairs where there was more darkness, and where the noises were coming from. I stepped down the first stair and listened. Nothing. I went down two more steps when I heard another *thud*. It took me five minutes of standing absolutely still and listening to muster up the courage to take another step. I walked down three more stairs, only two more remained. *Thud, thud, thud*. I tried to slow my rapid breathing, and eventually continued. I took extreme care and stepped down the last two steps and arrived on the wooden floor of the living room.

I reached around the wall and flicked the light switch up, illuminating the large room. Another shadow appeared just outside of my sight and I stood staring at where it was, the hallway that led to the guest bedroom. I snuck my way through the living room and over to the dark hallway. I turned on yet another light and I barely saw the shadow in the doorway of the bedroom. I reached into the room and turned on the light. Nothing. I investigated the closet, nothing was there. I turned around to exit the room and saw another shadow in my peripheral vision, but like the others, it disappeared when I looked at it.

It was almost leading me somewhere, and against my better judgment, I followed. There was only one room I hadn't been in, and that was the kitchen. I slowly made my way through the hallway and living room and peeked into the partly illuminated kitchen. From the light I turned on in the living room I could see a broken glass cup on the floor, but nothing else. I reached out and flicked on the last light switch in my house. Again, a shadow appeared in my peripheral vision. However, instead of looking at it I stood staring at the broken glass on the floor, the shadow stayed in the side of my vision. It was slowly starting to move into my focused vision. It inched slowly and slowly to the left and my breathing stopped altogether, my eyes were wide open and I resisted the colossal urge to look at the shadow. It moved into my central vision and everything went black.

*Beep beep beep*. I woke with a gasp. *Oh, it was a dream*. I hit the off button on my alarm clock just as I saw a shadow in my peripheral vision.

**Tridon Mitts**  
*Ellis High School*  
9<sup>th</sup> Grade, 1<sup>st</sup> Place

### **In an Instant**

I sat back and saw all the flashing lights from the back of an ambulance. People were running around chaotically. Everything changed in an instant. We were just enjoying ourselves on the last week of summer break. It had been a normal day we had pizza for lunch and watched our favorite TV show. We had decided it was a hot day and we could go to the swimming hole. As we started on our way into the small woods outside of our town, everything was normal, we were joking with each other, Mazy forgot the snacks, and Cooper had run ahead to try and scare us. After only a few minutes we heard him screaming, we thought he was fine and just trying a new way to scare us, but he didn't stop. We all ran after him and when we finally found him, we came to a dead stop. There it lay, nobody knowing who he was or what had happened. We surrounded it terrified at what we had found. A dead body just lying there brutally bruised and battered. None of us knew what to do. After what felt like an eternity of silence, with a tremble in her voice, Sophia asked Cooper what happened. Cooper was speechless as tears ran down his face, Sophia asked again but sterner this time.

"Cooper what happened?!"

"I- I don't know I was just running and...and -"

"Cooper! Spit it out" screeched Sophia

It fell silent again. The questions flooded my mind: Was it Cooper? Should I run? What happened? Is this real? The sun was beating down through the trees on my face.

"I didn't do it I swear. I found him like this" piped Cooper.



But still an unsettling feeling rested in the pit of my stomach. We decided we should go back to the car and call the police. As we were walking we told Cooper to pull it together but he just kept crying. We stopped before the edge of the tree line to calm him down. but that's when it all came out.

"I did it, I killed him!" shouted Cooper

"What?!" we all fired back

"He came out of nowhere and he scared me. I was trying to hide, but he just kept following me so I stabbed him..."

"With what?" interrupted Mazy

"A stick" replied Cooper "It was the first thing I thought to do. I know I shouldn't have but I was scared and I saw a sharp stick so I picked it up jumped out from behind the tree and stabbed him!"

We stood there in awe. After talking for awhile we decided it would be a good idea to still call the police and claim it was self-defense. Cooper did not like this idea however, we tried to calm him down again and insure him it would be ok. But out of nowhere he pulled a gun on us! We became glass figures and would not move our body in the fear of Cooper pulling the trigger. What had happened? We were going to the swimming hole to have fun and Cooper had a gun and there was a dead body. What was Cooper planning to do with the gun when we got to the swimming hole. Did Cooper want to kill us? As I was running ideas through my head out of the corner of my eye I saw Mazy take a dead sprint toward the car, and he did it, Cooper actually pulled the trigger. He ran into the woods knowing what he did. Sophia and I went to check and see if Mazy was ok.

"Call 911 Luke!" Sophia shouted at me

As I was on the phone with the dispatcher, Sophia tried to stop the bleeding by applying pressure. After about 10 minutes we heard the sirens coming around the corner. Immediately people ran to us and started asking questions. They quickly loaded Mazy up in the ambulance and took her to the hospital. They moved Sophia and I as they continue asking questions. I was tired and didn't know what to say so I sat back and saw all the flashing lights from the back of the ambulance.

**Kaydawn Haag**  
*Ellis High School*  
9<sup>th</sup> Grade, 2<sup>nd</sup> Place

### **The Bacon Boys**

One morning these two pigs named Kris p. bacon and Sir Porky were born just 1 day apart and they grew up together and they were the best of friends, until one day they were rolling around in their mud piles when Kris decided to have a challenge with Sir Porky saying "I bet you I can get more dirtier than you" and Sir Porky responded with "oh no you're not". So, the challenge began and Kris was in the lead until Sir Porky sprayed water on him, and he said "look who's winning now loser" and that made Kris angry so he pushed Sir Porky in the water bin and said "apparently not you, big boy". While Kris was laughing, Sir Porky decided to charge at him and push him onto his back but he ended up tripping on his own feet and face planted in the mud. As, the farmer was going into the barn to feed them all of a sudden, he heard a loud scream" REEEEEEEEEEEEEEE" and all he saw was Sir Porky run away from the mud pits where Kris was standing laughing his curly fried tail off. So, the farmer said "hey you better stop messing with Sir Porky or you're going to chop shop you hear me" in a yelling voice. "alright time to go outside, come on" he said leading them towards the door

As they were outside the farmer led them into a fenced area to run around and have fun with each other. While they were walking in Sir Porky said to Kris "move it you piece of bacon" with a little shove, Kris was angry so he pushed him back into the fence and said 'at least I'm a piece unlike you, you're the whole thing", "shut your porky mouth you pig, you're just butt hurt that I'm better than you" Sir Porky responded. "you think your better than me, the only thing your better than me at is eating, you fat pig" Kris said in a hurtful way, "enough with you to, hurry up and go run around" the farmer said staring at both of them. "alright well you go first" Sir Porky said to Kris, "I'm going because he told me to and not because you told me to" he responded as he was walking inside.

After just five minutes of them both not saying anything to each other Kris decided to throw mud at Sir Porky and he said "you're so annoying." Sir Porky responded by saying "just be quiet, you talk too much, that's why I'm better than you". "You're not be-" "yes I am", Sir Porky interrupted "no you're not", "yes I am" as they kept arguing it got dark and the farmer led them back into the barn but as they were walking Kris and Sir Porky challenged each other to not be the last one in the barn but as they were running Sir Porky pushed Kris and he

started to stumble then eventually started rolling and as he was rolling he went through the wrong door that was where all the sharp-edged tools were. Sir Porky got scared and started to run towards the room yelling “Kris are you okay” over and over waiting for a response, but he didn’t answer back. So, the farmer went into the room and as he went in there, Sir Porky heard him say “Oh my lord” in a shocked voice and at that moment Sir Porky knew something was wrong. As the farmer came out of the room Sir Porky saw a small tear coming out of his eyes and said “sorry, Porky”.

**Santos Garibay**  
*Ellis High School*  
9<sup>th</sup> Grade, 3<sup>rd</sup> Place

### **The Grocery Store**

“I’m so hungry” I whisper to myself as I walk into a gas station. The bell at the top of the door rings, notifying the workers that I’m here. I walk through the aisles slowly, grazing my fingers on every shelf trying to find something to eat. Eventually I find myself standing in front of the Sweets part of the snack aisle, I grab a honey bun and stuff it into my jacket pocket hoping it didn’t make too much noise. Slowly, I walk out of the gas station with a discouraged look on my face like I didn’t find what I wanted. People always buy that face especially half-asleep gas station workers. I walk out and run to the back of the store to sit down and eat my honey bun.

My mom and dad are always gone doing something, whether it be working or fighting, I don’t stay in the house a lot. Oh, and yeah, I steal, my mom hasn’t made dinner since last year so I have to fend for myself somehow. Every day I walk down to a gas station which replaced my favorite grocery store (the manager caught me stealing so now I’m banned) and get myself some food. Most of the time I steal it although sometimes my dad leaves me money on the table, not a lot, but some. Being on the streets most of the time makes it hard to go to school but I still manage to go. I’m a Sophomore at South Atlanta High School, I have two friends, Lily and Noah (probably the best friends ever) I hang out with them as much as I can.

On Monday, I walk into school and see Lily and Noah follow behind me, pretending they aren’t there. “Do you think she’ll notice?.” Lily says giggling

“Probably, if you don’t shut up.” Noah sighs and starts to walk faster so he can walk next to me “Hey Kat, how’s life been, any fun events lately?”

Lily catches up with us, “None that can top yours that’s for sure.” I look at Noah “Anyways you guys want to hang out after school?” Lily says, jumping with excitement. “Sure” me and Noah say together

We go off our separate ways and get to class. I’m excited to hang out today, the words “hanging out” hang in my mind all day until the last bell rings. We all meet up by Noah’s car and get in. I sit in the front and Lily sits in the back (Noah usually gets annoyed by Lily). We drive around blasting music for a little bit until Lily bursts out that she’s hungry and she needs food. I don’t think anything of where we might be going, we usually go to the gas station. We park at the gas station, I’m about to get out but I stop when I hear.

“Wait let’s go to the grocery store instead it has better options for snacks,” Lily says while pulling me into the car by the arm.

I take a deep breath and pray that Noah says no.

“Okay, yeah, let’s go to the grocery store then” Noah agrees.

Uh oh, I stay calm trying not to make it obvious that I don’t want to go there. It’s about a five-minute drive from the gas station to the grocery store, which gives me time to plan what I’ll do. Maybe jump out of the car? Or tell Noah to drop me off, wait my house is nowhere near here. Panic starts to set in, they’ll one hundred percent want me to go in with them especially Noah. If they find out I steal, it’s over. We arrive at the grocery store and I get out of the car along with Noah and Lily. I walk in trying to hide my face from the manager that’s standing at the front of the store welcoming people in. I think I’m in the clear until I hear a voice...

“Hey! What do you think you’re doing in here, you know you’re not allowed in here, get out, I’ll call the cops!” ...

**Sydney Malleck**  
*Ellis High School*  
9<sup>th</sup> Grade, Honorable Mention

## A Hoax

Citizen 13579 of New York City, New York, snapped its eyes open at the loud, metallic clang that reverberated throughout the city.

*7:00 A.M.*

13579 swung its bony feet out from under the grey, cotton sheets that were washed every Sunday at 5:30 P.M. and planted them on the hard, plain floor. A stretch—one to the left, one to the right, before taking the few steps toward the simple dresser at the foot of its twin bed. On went the white cotton T-shirt, and on went the dark grey jeans that were held above 13579's bony hips by a flexible plastic belt.

At 7:10 the heavy sliding door to its bedroom opened, and 13579 emerged into the shared kitchen that conjoined the other three bedrooms of citizens 13576- 13578. The four bedrooms, bathroom, and kitchen made up Pod 87 of Sector 113.

13579's fellow Podmates emerged from their rooms in sync, and the four citizens moved to the plastic table in the center of the kitchen to consume breakfast. Each citizen sat in the same chair that had been assigned to them since the day the Government had told them they were the required age for Working.

After completing the repetitive tasks in the daily instructions under "Hygiene" that was drilled into their brains, Citizens 13576- 13579 slipped on the soft, thin fabric shoes that were ornately lined up by the sliding entry door. Standing shoulder to shoulder, it was a matter of only a few seconds before the clock hit 7:20 and the citizens filed out of the door in numerical order.

*7:30 A.M.*

13579 sat behind one of the many plastic desks inside the glass and metal Government building, just beginning to pour over the day's work that was assigned to each employee on their advanced Government-grade computers when a larger, more well-rounded finger tapped it on the shoulder. 13579 swiveled to face its manager.

"Congratulations," its manager said charmingly. "You are to be promoted. Pack your things." At 13579's look of confusion, its manager clarified: "The Government picked you to work in a position under me, and to assist me when I need it." 13579's ears picked up the lower decibel its manager spoke in and registered in its mind that its manager was one of the *others*, as 13579 liked to classify them as in its own head. The *others* had a deeper voice, increased height, and a slightly bulkier shape.

13579 nodded—because you are not allowed to speak to anyone above you—and stood, following its manager because it had no belongings. No one did.

They arrived at a doorway inside a private hallway after passing many offices with projected screens on the walls depicting the workroom 13579 had come from and stepped inside a glass office with a view of New York. It was taken aback by the desk the computer sat upon—wood, they called it.

"In this position you will have access to classified files, but unless you aim to commit treason against the Government, I suggest you stay out of them." 13579 nodded. Its manager left, and it opened the files on the hard drive to the advanced computer. Curiosity killed the cat, and so 13579 looked into the classified files. GENDERS streamed across the heading of the document it managed to open, bringing it confusion at the unrecognizable term. Digging deeper, there was two very illegal pictures of what seemed to be bare Government officials. They were fatter, their bones did not jut out, and the picture on the left depicted a person with longer hair, a slimmer, hourglass shape, and a distinctive difference in bodily portions compared to the picture on the right.

"Female" and "Male" titled these pictures. 13579 determined it was most like that picture titled "Female." It made sense how the Government hid these genders by keeping its citizens thin and fully clothed with the same hair length for everyone.

*8:00 the next day*

Catherine, purely disturbed, out of her comfort zone, and a female, rubbed at her eyes while sitting in the office chair 30 minutes into assisting her manager with work. Catherine had roved over all of the hidden information and read each and every file down to the bone—even giving herself a name. There was history, race, religion, opinion, thought, and rule by the people in years long since passed. Catherine could also not believe all of the tabs kept on every single person from the work they did, down to the very breath they took.

Military men barged in through the door, catching Catherine by surprise and seizing her from where she sat rubbing her eyes against the tiredness from the new overload of knowledge. She was hauled out of the building and transported in a blacked-out vehicle to the Governor.

Brought before a shining, glossy, stained wooden desk, Catherine was forced on her knees on the hardwood floors, smudging the fresh polish. The Governor stared down her long nose connected to her filled out and sagging

body as she glared at Catherine before her. She let out a *hmp* as she disregarded her, picking at her gleaming ruby red nails, her fingers crowned in yellow metals that shone in the light of the elegant office.

The Governor never acknowledged or even so much as looked up as she said, “Another one bites the dust, I suppose,” and then returned to picking at her nails.

A needle was injected into Catherine’s thin neck, and the world became black.

It was all a Hoax, a test for loyalty.

**Chase Wittman**  
*Hays High School*  
10<sup>th</sup> Grade, 1<sup>st</sup> Place

### **The Consequences of Power**

I used to wake up hating my life every single day. I used to work in security for the president. But I could see the unjust, and the cycle that people repeated every day. Everyone is assigned a job according to their family and everyone is unhappy. I try to question our lives, but everyone shuts me up. Like a broken record they repeat, “Vika stop fighting.” “President Iniquus knows what he’s doing.” “He’s the best president we’ve had yet.” “What if he hears you?”

We are scared of him. We are scared of his punishments. But this is going to change. I only have one person on my side: my best friend Alina. We have planned for years and today is the day.

“Ready Vika?” Alina walks beside me on our way to the office.

“You bet,” I smile, nudging her arm with my shoulder.

“It’s time to make a change,” she whispers.

I sigh and we walk up the steps to our office, scanning ID’s and fingerprints. We are greeted by silent workers. Alina walks to her computer and I to mine. Our position is very fortunate for our plan. I catch her eye and nod. She types a bit, clicks some things and nods at me. We’re in.

I grin at how easy it is. I wonder why no one has tried this before. I click the popup that has appeared on my screen and allow access to President Iniquus’ files to Alina. She’s clicking furiously and soon some alarms go off. Everyone in the office begins working furiously at their computers, trying to find the problem and fix it. Alina and I get up and leave the room, running for President Iniquus’ headquarters. We run into several armed guards, but they ignore us. Reaching his room, we slow to a brisk, business-like walk and knock on his door. Iniquus answers, his chubby face pale.

“We need to look at your computer right now! It’s an emergency! There may be a hacker!” We push through the door, maintaining straight faces.

Iniquus nods and moves out of our way. Alina gets to his computer - she’s more skilled than I - and I run to his windows, pretending to search for any intruders. I nod an “all clear” to him and rush to Alina’s side as she hacks into his computer. Things are going well until...

“Put your hands up and back away from the computer,” I feel a gun barrel pressed to the back of the neck and look up. Iniquus has us at gunpoint and several armed guards are behind us.

I glance at Alina and she gives a quick grin. I sigh. We did it.

“You think we haven’t been watching? You think you could get away that easy?” President Iniquus sneers at us.

“Yup,” I grin.

Pings go off around the room. Everyone’s watch receives the same message, “You are free to do anything you’d like for 24 hours.”

A basic message but enough to cause chaos. Almost instantly people flee from their jobs, running home, running into stores and stealing, but most importantly, charging towards headquarters. The guards watch through the windows as their friends outside are overpowered. Citizens are shot but they are strong and are willing to fight.

“What have you done?” Iniquus runs to his computer and begins clicking but there’s no use. People have been waiting for this.

Alina and I are led away roughly towards the imprisonment rooms, but I can’t stop smiling. This was fun. I like this feeling of power. We are almost at the room when a huge crash comes from down the hall and people come storming at us. The guards let us go to defend themselves and we make our escape.

We bolt through the doors cheering and laughing. I stop in my tracks, grabbing Alina’s arm.

“Watch this!” I say to her. I turn towards the crowd of rioters and shout, “We have lived in misery for years! Because of the president!” The crowds stop to look and listen. “I say it’s enough! I want my own job! My own *life!*” I don’t realize how true the words are until they’ve left my mouth. “Follow me and let’s destroy this corrupt government!”

Cheers follow my speech and the crowds rush to me, waiting for our next move. Alina laughs incredulously.

“Vika this is crazy!” Alina watches the crowd flock to us.

“Alright! I say our next move is to storm headquarters! Let’s show them some of our power!” I turn and instead of heading to the main entrance, I go right to Iniquus’ office windows.

Several people follow me, picking up rocks and branches, throwing them through the windows. I can’t tell if my adrenaline is coming from this movement, or the power of people following me.

We crash into the office and Iniquus tries to back away, but the people are angry. They beat him to the ground.

“Vika this is too much,” Alina grabs my arm and tries to pull me away.

“What do you mean? This is what we wanted! Freedom!” I turn to Alina, her face frightened.

“Yeah, but I didn’t want to hurt anybody! I just wanted to get away from the control!” She backs away from me.

“No. No this is what we wanted. What we need!” I turn from her, suddenly breathless. I pick my way through the crowd; they are still cheering me on.

*No more president. No more control. Just how we wanted it.*

I look to my left and grab a trophy stating “World’s Best President” that was sitting on Iniquus’ desk. I walk to him numbly. This is what we need. There is so much fear in his eyes.

“Vika! No!” Alina screams as I smash the trophy over Iniquus’ head, leaving him bloody on the floor.

“Vika! What is wrong with you? Do you realize what you’ve done?” Alina is shaking my shoulders.

“I just wanted to free the world. That’s what I did. Why are you so freaked out?”

Alina backs away shaking her head. “This isn’t you Vika. You’ve gone crazy. You’re power hungry. I didn’t agree to this. This is all going way too fast.”

She’s right. I know she is, but how else could I have freed everyone? I turn back to the crowd. It’s a mix of hysterical cheering and pure shock. She was so right. The power became so much. I wanted it all. I shouldn’t have let this happen.

“There she is!” A guard is running towards me. Pointing at me.

I don’t even try to fight it. I deserve this.

“Alina, promise me to make the world good. I did a bad thing and I’m afraid I’ve ruined everything. Please promise me you’ll try to make the world better,” I’m begging her.

“I promise Vika,” she whispers, hugging me quickly then backing away.

I turn towards the guards, my hands up, head down.

“I’m sorry,” I whisper.

They take me away. And I know I’m not going to see anybody ever again.

**Eileen Veatch**  
*Hays High School*  
10<sup>th</sup> Grade, 2<sup>nd</sup> Place

### **Escaping Reality**

Trapped by her surroundings, Nala woke up in a cold sweat. Her blank room, which looked the same as every other teenage bedroom in their town, seemed to suffocate her. She awakened at the regular time, 6 A.M. sharp. She dreads today. Every day is the same. Nothing ever changes. There is never any excitement. She seems to get through the day by simply existing. She got up and made her bed. She did this without any thought. She wandered restlessly around the room, over to the window, and reflected on her dull surroundings. The next thing she did was drag her feet down the hallway to see if her brother had emerged from his room yet.

Slowly, Nolan approached the dining table for breakfast. That was Nala’s hint that it was 6:30. They eat at the same time every day. This morning they had toast, scrambled eggs, and blueberries. She felt nauseous and did not want to eat. She slid the plate across the table and got up from her chair.

She made her way back to her room to get ready for the day. She picked out the same clothes that she always does. A dark grey shirt and a pair of jeans. She did her hair into two braids. She looked into the mirror and immediately glanced away. *I look the same every day. There's no point in looking.* She looked at her clock, and it was time to endure another day of school.

Nolan walked out of his room with his backpack in hand. He seemed as motivated as Nala did this morning. Their moods never wavered and always seemed bland. He walked out the door and started on their usual route to school. Nala thought about how she would love to break the rules just once. She did not want to follow the same schedule every day. She wanted to be able to think for herself. She needed some excitement to keep her going. Continuing to daydream, she thought of the possible outcomes of her breaking the rules.

After seeing the school come into her sight, she knew ten minutes had past. *Same amount of time to get to school as every day.*

"We have three minutes until the bell rings. Don't be late," she told Nolan. Although she thought about being late and doing whatever she pleased, she did not want her thoughts to take place in her little brother's mind as well. She wanted to keep him safe. She felt like that was her only purpose.

Nala headed to her first period which was chemistry. She walked into the room and sat at her usual seat at the back of the room. She zoned out while the teacher was talking. They learned the same things every day and saw no point in paying attention anymore. An unknown number of minutes passed, and she heard the teacher's phone in her classroom ring. He picked up and glanced at Nala.

"They need you in the office. You should take your things."

Nala was starting to panic. As much as she thought about getting out of her normal schedule, this isn't the way to do it. She tried to playback anything she could have done to get her in trouble, but she came up blank. *I have not done anything. I follow the rules. I do what I am told.* Just like her parents taught her. It is what she has always had to do.

As she walked into the front office, she saw the secretary glancing over towards her. She motioned for her to go see the principal. She peered into the office and saw the principal alongside him were two people she had never seen before.

"Have a seat Nala. You are probably wondering why you've been called into the office. As you may know, not everyone likes the rules we have, or the way our society is structured. You are one of the students we chose to help us conduct our experiment. We need people to understand the consequences if they break the rules. These two people here are Hannah and Danny. They are going to be in charge of everything. You will go with them, and they will explain everything after this."

Nala was escorted out of the room by Hannah and Danny. Hannah had a similar build to Nala's body. She was tall and slender, but she definitely had more muscle than she did. Danny towered over her. His bicep was as big as Nala's head. She had never seen someone who looked as strong as Danny did. She wanted to run, to scream, to do anything but walk away with them. She convinced herself not to. *What if this was the whole experiment? What if nothing will happen as long as I follow them?* These thoughts were immediately stopped when they pushed two large metal doors open. Hannah saw a nurse and a bunch of medical equipment that she could not recognize. Her fear was interrupted by Hannah talking.

"We need to have you lie down in order to start the experiment. Just trust us."

She hesitantly laid down in the chair. She so badly wanted to bolt out of the room and run as far as she could. She was paralyzed. She had no strength to pick herself up. She was conditioned to surrender to the rules placed for her. The nurse started approaching her with a needle and a weird colored substance in her other hand.

"You'll only feel a little pinch and then a sting. It will be quick. I promise."

She looked away. As much as she did not want to be taken by surprise, she did not want to witness what was happening either. She felt a little pinch and sting, just like the nurse said. She was trying to hear what the people in the room when she started feeling dizzy. Everything became muffled, and she felt disoriented. It all went black.

Time passed. Nala does not know how long, but she assumes it has been quite a while. *Where am I? How did I get here?* It is a room with concrete walls. She looks over and sees a group of students gathered around a lunch table. None of them are wearing their regular clothes. *What are they doing? Who are they?* She is too scared to ask anyone what is going on. An unsettling feeling began welling inside her. There's was something wrong in the room. She slowly walked towards the table and realizes two students are fighting. She wonders if this is the test. *Am I supposed to say something or just let it happen?*

The next thing that happens shocks her whole being. A guy drops to the floor, but she is unsure if he is alive or not. Everyone stared at her, and that is when she realized they knew she did not belong.

“You’re next pretty girl.”

She was thrown into the circle. Her feet felt like they were weighed down with cinderblocks. She couldn’t move. A punch came out of nowhere. She was knocked from the place her legs held her to. She did not even have time to react before the next punches were continuously hurled at her. She lost her balance and fell. Her heart was thumping so loud that she was sure everyone around her could hear it. She looked up and saw the blurred faces of the people above her. In front of her, she could see the unnamed people’s mouths moving, words flying past her head. A hard knot constricted her throat, making it hard to breathe. The faces were moving in closer and closer, constricting her tighter and tighter like a snake. Then, they were upon her. The room was spinning, and everything went black. After that, her memory is blank. She was convinced she was dead, and this was the end for her.

Nala feels something cold, and she tenses up. Other than that, she feels fine. She’s too scared to open her eyes. She’ll have to accept whatever she sees as her new fate. Reluctantly, she opens her eyes and sees the nurse, Hannah, and Danny standing above her. Her gaze darted around maniacally, looking for escape. She is confused on what happened. *How did I end up back here? Where are the people she just saw?* There was a sickening wave of terror welling up from her stomach. She tries to find something that will take away these emotions, but nothing really helps.

“Congratulations Nala. You finished the simulation. That is what would happen if you broke the rules again.”

*Again?* She is dumbfounded. She has no clue what they are talking about. She rewinds her day throughout her mind. Nothing was different from yesterday, let alone the day before.

“Don’t let your thoughts on your way to school take advantage of you.”

**Rylee Burd**

*Hays High School*

10<sup>th</sup> Grade, 3<sup>rd</sup> Place

## **The Final Final**

The year is 2082. It has been 22,261 days since the government added the 28th amendment, *sacrifice pro patria*, Latin for *sacrifice for country*.

A young man walks down the street on his way home from school and slowly starts to drift to the edge of town. Soon he reaches the wall scattered every five to ten yards with barbed wire. He lightly presses his hand against the concrete, cold but smooth with little indentations in random places. He pushes against the wall, turning himself, and starts to walk away. He glances back and ponders the big red words along the wall, *FOR PROTECTION OF THE PEOPLE*. He feels a sense of deception.

When he arrives to his house he talks to his mom, Chloe, for a bit before doing homework then goes to bed.

The next day at school, as David enters the classroom, he dreads seeing Brad Smith, his hated enemy. Unfortunately, David has had to sit next to him because they share the same last name. For the past year David has tolerated everything that Brad has put him through, some days worse than others, depending on Brad’s mood. Before the bell rings, he notices that Brad has a devious look on his face and before he knows it, Brad pushes a desk over; Mindi’s supplies go everywhere. David hurries to the front to help her pick them up.

“Hey Dave.” He looks up, smiles, and replies with a slight stutter. “O-oh h-hey Mindi, here you go.” He hands her the notebook, pencil, and eraser.

“Thanks! Were you still wanting to study on Sunday?”

“Yah, that would be cool, if you want,” he forces out.

“Of course, I’ll come over right after lunch—” she is interrupted by the bell and the teacher’s voice.

“Hello class, today we are going over how we will take the test and the final scoring system.” Her voice fades as something catches David’s attention.

“Hey dweeb,” says Brad, “I saw you over there talking to Mindi, you in love?”

“As if you would know, moron,” says David bitterly.

Aggressively, Brad snaps, “What did you say Dave? You’re asking for me to beat your a—”

“Hey! You two, stop talking!” Mrs. Paul interrupts the conversation. David was never happier to be yelled at in his life. “The final is over the 4 subjects we’ve been teaching you and it will be 5 hours long.” She then

discusses the grading system; David chooses to ignore her because he knows he will ace it. The bell rings and kids flood the hall. David knows that Brad will be looking for him, so he quickly sprints home.

The next day is a bust, he does chores and studies a little but is too scared to call Mindi and check on their date. Late in the night he falls asleep staring at the phone wondering if he should have called.

When he wakes the next day, he has enough courage to call Mindi to make sure their plans for later are still happening; she confirms and shortly after they end the call. David runs around the house getting ready and makes a small study area around the couch for them. Finally, the doorbell rings. He is ready. He lets her in and escorts her to the couch where he starts the conversation by apologizing and thanking her. She says it was nothing and what Brad did was a cruel thing. The statement reassures David, he smiles, and they start to mix studying and talking. Hours pass before Mindi gets a call from her mom saying dinner is ready. David escorts her to the door.

“I had fun tonight,” Mindi says, giggly.

“Me too. I’m glad you came,” David replies.

They stare at each other, smiling, before David leans over and gives her a gentle, sweet, kiss; she returns one back.

“I promise, once we smash these tests tomorrow, I’ll take you on a real date!” David says confidently.

“Promise?” Mindi says seductively.

“Yes, I promise,” David replies, feeling like he’s on top of the world.

“Ok. I’m going to hold you to that!” Mindi says, then runs away giggling.

That night slept peacefully, dreaming about his future with Mindi.

The next morning Chloe wakes him up early with a five-star breakfast. They don’t talk much; David can tell how nervous she is. They leave the house and when they are parked outside the school his mom stares at him.

“Five hours, I’ll see you in five hours. David, I know you’re smart, but please try, don’t stress, and use your time wisely,” says Chloe cautiously.

He smiles and remarks, “Try? Never.” He chuckles lightly, hugs her tightly and enters the building.

He enters and is directed to his seat. David’s heart begins to pump loudly, slowly building pressure in his chest. Eventually everyone is seated, they are given a test and they start. Hours go by like minutes, buttons clicking, pencils dragging roughly along papers. The bell goes off. The pressure is gone. The bell gives a sense of relief and safety. Everyone turns in their test and returns to their classroom. The classroom is dead silent until they receive their scoring envelopes. Finally, the teacher comes in and lays them out, sorted by last name. Around the room lift sighs of relief, even David when he sees a 95%, but he notices one person who just looks petrified, Brad. He glances over to see that Brad scored a 49%. An unknown feeling takes control of David. He takes Brad’s paper and swaps it with his own before anyone notices. Brad sits there in a state of shock.

David says quietly to Brad, “I forgive you.” Quickly he hurries to the front of the class before they are dispersed into groups. Mindi smiles at him but he does not return the expression.

“Mindi, thank you for everything. You gave me the best night of my life” He starts to tear up.

“Dave what are you talking about?” she says confused.

“I love you and I’m sorry, I can’t keep my promise.” David begins crying.

It is at this point she realizes; she is at a loss for words. David, the smartest person that she has ever met did not pass. They are both sobbing now.

David pulls himself together, “Be strong for me. Be strong for my mom. I need you to be there when I am not. I am going to miss you, but please do not grieve for long. Know that I died saving another.” Before she can respond, government officials start taking kids and putting them in groups. David stops crying and finds the group of failed students. Everyone goes to town hall. David and 14 other students go to the podium and sit in chairs.

Chloe, searching for David, stumbles upon Mindi crying. All Mindi does is point towards the podium and Chloe’s eyes follow. She falls to her knees and begins to cry heavily but is interrupted by the speaker on the stage.

“We would again like to thank these young citizens for doing their part in our society. Our world was running out of resources, food, and water. As a result, our ancestors added the 28th amendment, *sacrifice pro patria*. The less we feed and care for people who do not contribute to society, the longer we will last. The pill they are given will not make them suffer and they will die a fast painless death.”

The speaker hands them all a pill and they swallow it. In David’s last seconds on that cruel Earth, he finds Brad, gives him a small nod, then he turns towards Mindi and his mother. As he starts to fade away, he mouths the words, “I love you”. He is dead.

**Mason Norris**

*Hays High School*

10<sup>th</sup> Grade, Honorable Mention



## The Steel Cold Eye

He lay there on the floor, motionless, lifeless. All around him was a pool of blood. I stood there staring, too scared to move. I could smell the stench of my father's blood. It was so strong my stomach churned. "Please no! Daddy wake up! Don't go!"

My eyes popped open. I sat up and rubbed my eyes, trying to erase what I had just seen. I turned my head towards my window. The street light landed on my eyes and blinded me for a few moments. The dream wouldn't leave me alone. It seemed like every time my eyes closed my father's death was waiting for me on the other side of my eyelids. I grabbed the glass of water on my night stand and took a few sips. I then laid my head back down on my pillow. I doubted I would sleep again tonight but I would at least try.

"Is something bothering you?" I heard my sister's voice but wasn't paying attention, "Eden! Are you even listening to me? Tell me what is wrong?"

"I can't get it out of my head." I answered in a flat voice.

"What? What can't you get out of your head?" her voice sounded worried.

"That night, it won't leave me alone." A tear rolled out of my eye as I looked up at my sister.

"Oh, Eden," Taylor's voice came out in a whisper as she wrapped her arms around me.

I was five years old when my biological father was murdered in our home. I had awoken in the middle of the night after hearing a loud noise coming from my father's room. I walked down the hall to his room to check on him but when I pushed the door open my dad was lying on the floor. I looked up from my dad's body to see a man crawling out of the bedroom window. Our eyes met and I stared straight into his steel, cold eyes before he slipped the rest of the way out of the window.

In the moment I didn't know what to do so I ran and hid under my bed. What felt like an eternity later I heard a knock on the door. I was too scared to move. After what seemed like eternity, whoever was at the door let themselves in. I thought the man who had killed my father had come back for me. All I could do was curl up in a ball under my bed and hope whoever had just came in my house wouldn't find me. I opened my eyes when I heard footsteps in front of the bed. A man bent down and looked right at me. I stared back at him and tears streamed down my cheeks.

"Please don't hurt me." I pleaded to the man.

"I'm not here to hurt you, I'm here to help. Can you tell me your name?" The man's voice was kind.

"It's Eden. Somebody hurt my daddy." I answered him with fear.

"I know, let's get you out from under that bed, come on out." He said as he reached out to grab my hand.

"Eden!" I was startled out of my thoughts by my sister's voice, "You did it again!"

"Oh, uh, I'm sorry." I answered her back, "I just can't stop thinking about it."

"I know, but it is almost eight thirty and you need to leave for work." Taylor prompted me off of my couch. She had come by this morning to drop off my jacket I had left at her house after our family dinner a couple nights before.

"Yah, you're right. The assistant director is going to be at the office today so I don't want to be late. I've never met him before and I want to make a good impression. Thanks for coming by to drop my jacket off." I stood up and slipped on my shoes.

"I'll see you later. Let me know how today goes." Taylor said as she left my house.

My father's murder was never solved and the man who took my father away from me was never found. I remember the day I was told the investigation had been stopped and the murderer would never be found. I wanted to blame the FBI for not trying hard enough, but instead of blaming them I decided that one day I would join them. I wanted to make sure no child was ever left without disclosure to the loss of someone they loved.

I was sitting at my desk filling out paper work for a case I was working when the Assistant Director arrived at the field office. I watched the man as he strolled across the building towards the office of the special agent in charge. After staring for a few minutes, I turned my attention back to the endless stack of papers on my desk. I was just about to take a break when special agent Hutten approached my desk. Alongside him was the assistant director, Samuel Gibbs

"Agent Harper I would like you to meet the Assistant Director of the FBI, Samuel Gibbs."

“Hello” I reached to shake the director’s hand, “it’s nice to meet you.”

“I’ve heard so much about you Agent Harper. Agent Hutten has informed me that you are one of his best agents.” Director Gibbs shook my hand.

“Oh well, thank you I guess.” I was taken back by the compliment from one of the most powerful people in the FBI.

“It’s true. Agent Harper, you are very talented,” Agent Hutten responded. “Well, I have a meeting I have to attend. Harper I would love it if you would inform the director on some of the cases being worked here at the office.”

“Yes, sir,” I was honored that I was the one to get to fill in the director on our work.

I gave the director a small tour of the office and introduced him to some of the agents in the building while telling him about the cases they were working. I enjoyed getting to talk with the director and learn a little bit about his work as well. After we finished we returned to my desk.

“Well, Agent Harper, it has been nice getting to know you but I better get back to my office.” The director said.

“Yes, of course I enjoyed talking to you too.”

We both reached out to shake each other’s hands, and I looked him in the eyes out of respect. I turned back to my desk and the director left. I continued the paperwork I had been distracted from, but just as I was about to finish, my mind flashed back to five years old. I was staring into the same steel, cold eyes I had just looked into a few moments before.

**Elliott Cox**  
*Ellis High School*  
11<sup>th</sup> Grade, 1<sup>st</sup> Place

## **Dani**

“Hey, you! What’s your name?”

“Who? Me?” I slowly turned around and peered over our white picket fence. There stood the girl with the biggest, green eyes I had ever seen. Almost too big for her face, the brown glasses dangled off the tip of her nose. Her cheeks were dotted with freckles and her hair was a dirty blonde mess. She gaped at me, waiting for an answer.

“Uhhh,” I stumbled, “my name’s Jack Hutchins and I....I’m twelve years old,” I said timidly. No one ever really spoke to me, especially girls. I had no friends and no siblings, so most days I spent by myself, utterly alone.

“Well my name’s Dani and I just moved in across the street. Do you wanna head down to the creek?” She smiled from ear to ear practically giddy from excitement.

I glanced up across the street to an old house that appeared as if it were going to fall apart. The year was 1972 and Little River, Kansas, was probably the tiniest town you’d ever come across. My family lived in a small ranch-style house. It was painted a faint gray, with white shutters on every window. The brick chimney shot up from the side of the house, drawing attention from all those who passed by. Most houses on the block looked like ours as if someone used the same blueprint to design each one. But the house Dani claimed to come from, seemed like it came from the dump. Broken windows and overgrown grass adorned the front of the gloomy house. The tall, Romanesque-style building loomed large over me, making me seem small. With a stone exterior and arched windows, it reminded me of a haunted house. Despite living in Little River all of my life, the home had been vacant for as long as I could remember.

I turned back to Dani, “I guess I can come, but I need to be home by dusk.”

“Whatever you say!” She took off running barefoot behind my house and down toward the thicket of trees. I had to sprint just to keep up with her. We spent all evening hanging out together — fishing and climbing trees. I had more fun in those few hours than I had ever had before. As Dani and I were walking back to our street, I blurted out, “Why do you live in that house? There are much more attractive places to live.”

“I dunno, my Pa promised that we would stay in the same town for more than a year, so I’ll take what I can get. Plus, he said we were gonna fix it up to be as grand as it was in the olden days,” she paused for a second, “do you want to see the inside?”

“You sure? I have to be home for supper but I suppose I could stop by...”

“Of course!” Dani started running again, this time dragging me along behind her. We stopped on the first step of the porch and gazed up at the historic home. I was used to observing the house from afar, but never this

close. It sent shivers down my spine as we opened the front door. The old floorboards creaked and the entire house smelled of dust. Furniture sat, faded and torn, in the corners. A beat-up grand piano rested in the middle of the foyer, beckoning us to be played. Dani skipped over to it, then sat down on the rickety bench. I was in awe as she swiftly began playing a quaint melody.

“I didn’t know you could play the piano!” Even though it was out of tune, she still managed to bring the rhythm to life.

“This was my Ma’s piano, she used to play it back when she was alive. I only know one or two songs, because that’s all she could teach me,” Dani looked down at her hands, which were covered in dirt and dried mud, “I’m named after her ya know; my real name’s Danielle. She died of cancer when I was ten.”

“Well, you’re very talented; it probably came from her,” I stated as I turned around ready to explore the rest of the house. All the secret details, one could only discover after living in the house for years, made each room unique. There were hidden staircases, secret cupboards, and long hallways where bedrooms lined each side of the walls.

“Someday this house is going to be the most magnificent place in the whole town! All it needs is a little elbow grease and it could be as good as new!” Dani exclaimed as she smiled at me; and for the first time, I smiled back.

That summer and the years to come became the best years of my life. Dani and I became best friends and eventually fell in love. In our late twenties, we finally decided to tie the knot. We were married in the small Little River chapel with our close friends and families surrounding us. Together as newlyweds, we decided to buy a small, picturesque house to start our lives. As for the house Dani grew up in, not much changed. Her Pa and her made do with what they had but never had enough money to construct the home they dreamed of. Life went on, but once Dani’s father passed away, I realized it was time for a change. We put in an offer on the newly-marketed stone house, but right before we closed the deal, tragedy struck. Dani had cancer; the same cancer that once took her mother’s life. It wasn’t long before we were saying our goodbyes at only fifty years old.

When she died, it was like I lost a piece of myself. Dani was a free spirit; she always managed to pull me out of my comfort zone and into a new adventure. She was fearless, bold, and audacious. She gave me a purpose, without her, I felt empty. I wanted to commemorate her one last time, and I knew just where to go: the place where it all started.

As I laid there beneath ample layers of blankets with the cool night breeze dancing through the window, I felt peace. I was finally alone in the old stone house. It was just the house and me, that was all. Tomorrow we would start our renovation journey together and I would return her to her former glory. I closed my eyes and began the journey toward deep sleep and then it happened. Suddenly, the piano downstairs began to play. It played a song I knew all too well. Each thunderous note of the song reminded me that I was not alone. I never had been.

**Julia Meitner**

*TMP-Marian High School*

11<sup>th</sup> Grade, 2<sup>nd</sup> Place

## **The Stone House**

As I slowly admired the beautiful, stone house I had been wanting for years, I spotted the sparking “For Sale” sign in the front yard. My heart skipped a beat and I was so ecstatic that I accidentally shoved my hand into my steering wheel, sending the horn screeching through the leaf-filled streets. I immediately pulled over under the autumn tree and jabbed the phone number into my phone as fast as my fingers could possibly type. I eagerly waited as I smelled the aroma of a rainstorm about to paint the streets. The phone rang and rang, but no answer sent my hope plummeting into utter disappointment.

I drove home in the pouring rain to my rundown trailer house. As soon as I opened the door, I felt droplets of water falling onto my frowning face; there was a leak. I was too upset to even care, so I just slapped some duct tape on the ceiling and stomped to bed. At precisely 3:03 am, I awoke to the alarming sound of my phone ringing. Groaning, I answered the “unknown caller ID” and heard an old man’s deep voice. The man’s name was Chuck, and he informed me that my dream home was still available, but he and his daughter, Ruth hadn’t moved out yet. I breathlessly blurted that I wanted the home and that I could sign the papers that morning. We made a deal that I could move in immediately, as long as he and Ruth could stay in the basement until they found another place to live.

I could not sleep that night because of the anticipation for my future in that stone house. Instead, I packed up all of my belongings in cardboard boxes. There was not much because I had been saving for a new home, in hopes of starting a family one day. My house was empty, but my small truck was bursting with my few possessions. My headboard rattled on the tailgate as I sped off to the bank as soon as the clock chimed at 8:00 am. There, I met the mysterious Chuck in the lobby. He was wearing a grey and brown tank top that had so many stains and holes, you could not even discern its former color. His jeans were shoved over a pair of old combat boots and he looked terrifying. He looked straight out of a horror movie. Chuck grunted as he reluctantly shook my hand, and we hurried to complete the paperwork on the house. Everything went smoothly, and I left the bank with a shiny new house key, a smile on my face, and a pep in my step.

I parked in the driveway of my new stone house and unlocked the unscathed front door. The house was old, but was still breathtaking and everything I ever dreamed of. I met Chuck's seven-year-old daughter, Ruth. She was humming a song that I had never heard of. She wore a blue dress and had long black hair. They told me they would be staying in the basement, and I would not be bothered. I was not too concerned about that, because what is the worst that could happen? I unpacked my truck and started to decorate my house. I went to sleep that night feeling successful and proud of myself.

I woke up in the middle of the night at 3:03 am, to the sound of fingernails scratching the wood off of my bedroom door, and the song Ruth was humming playing on the piano. I thought I was dreaming so I went back to sleep, but something worse happened the next night. I again woke up at 3:03 am, but this time my door was open. I jolted awake from the piercing piano song once again and discovered Ruth's dark, black hair and pale, blue dress standing in my doorway. I looked down and saw my wooden floor covered in scratches and what I thought to be crimson pools of blood. I shut my eyes and prayed I was just being delirious. When I opened them, she was gone. I stayed awake all night, terrified of who my roommates really were.

At sunrise, I wandered throughout my house and I discovered that everything was destroyed, scratched, and bloodstained. I was both petrified and furious at Chuck and Ruth, so I walked down the concrete steps to the basement. I slowly walked down the dark hallway, only lit by a flickering lightbulb. At the end of the hall, there was a door with two deadbolts, scratches, and holes. To the left, there was another door, slightly cracked open. There, I could see the piano I heard playing every night since I moved in. That song gave me chills, and I hoped I would never hear it again. I softly knocked on the door and prepared myself for the confrontation once I heard the deadbolts unlocking.

There stood Chuck and Ruth, just staring at me, not speaking a word. I told them that they could live in my old trailer house and I could stay here. They agreed to the proposal and said they would be out by sunset. I felt relief that I would finally be alone in my dream house. I whistled throughout my empty house and began tidying up my room again. Although I had the entire house to clean up and renovate, I wanted to start in the place I began and ended every day. The hard work and emotional roller coaster of my new house wore me out quickly, so I climbed into my newly made bed and knew Ruth and Chuck were gone.

As I laid there beneath ample layers of blankets with the cool night breeze dancing through the window, I felt peace. I was finally alone in the old stone house. It was just the house and me, that was all. Tomorrow we would start our renovation journey together and I would return her to her former glory. I closed my eyes and began the journey toward deep sleep and it happened. Suddenly, the piano downstairs began to play. It played a song I knew all too well. Each thunderous note of the song reminded me that I was not alone. I never had been.

**Rylee Stahl**

*TMP-Marian High School*

11<sup>th</sup> Grade, 3<sup>rd</sup> Place