

# HAYS ARTS COUNCIL CREATIVE WRITING AWARDS

IN  
POETRY + PROSE



SPRING 2023



**THE HAYS ARTS COUNCIL  
CREATIVE WRITING AWARDS  
IN POETRY AND PROSE ~ 2023**

Dear Friends,

Also, it was my privilege to serve as the chairperson in the Fort Hays State University English Department for the K-12 Hays Arts Council Creative Writing Contest again this year. Again, it was my privilege to help judge the contest. As usual, this year's entries were of high quality and spanned a wide variety of genres from ghosts and monsters to favorite pets to the love of family. It is always fantastic to see the creativity of the entries every year. All of the young writers have met the challenge of providing an appreciation for prose and poetry with quality work.

I would like to thank everyone who took the time to be a part of this essential event. Thank you to all the students who submitted their creative projects this year in prose and poetry. Then, there are the numerous teachers and parents who enkindled the imaginations of these young people—that support means so much to the continuing prosperity of all creative endeavors. You should all be proud of your own efforts and your students. Thank you.

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. Brad Will, Dr. Perry Harrison, Dr. Camilo Peralta, Dr. Brett Weaver, Dr. Cheryl Duffy, Lisa Bell, Dr. Lexey Bartlett, Dr. Eric Leuschner, Dr. Sharla Hutchison, and Linda Smith. Also, a special thank you is due to Brenda Meder for her tireless hard work as usual. Without her, none of this would be possible.

Writer Ray Bradbury once wrote, "You fail only if you stop writing." To all the young writers out there, never stop writing. I hope everyone enjoys the numerous enthusiastic voices on these pages. Thank you.

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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## 2023 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	Reagan Deutscher	<i>Weasel</i>	St. Mary's	Beth McDougal
K	2	Adalie Hann	<i>Pizza</i>	St. Mary's	Beth McDougal
K	3	Silas Wagner	<i>Orange</i>	St. Mary's	Beth McDougal
K	HM	Ellis Helberg	<i>Dolphins</i>	St. Mary's	Beth McDougal
1	1	Tommy Detrixhe	<i>Eels in the Ocean</i>	O'Loughlin	Kenda Leiker
1	2 (tie)	Macie Day	<i>Koalas</i>	O'Loughlin	Kenda Leiker
1	2 (tie)	Jayden Qi	<i>China</i>	O'Loughlin	Kenda Leiker
1	3	Kinsley Petz	<i>Spring</i>	St. Mary's	Megan Everett
1	HM	Brecklynn Fischer	<i>Spring</i>	St. Mary's	Megan Everett
2	1	Jade Whitmer	<i>Flowers</i>	Holy Family	Kenda Leiker
2	2	Julie Smith	<i>Water Bottle</i>	O'Loughlin	Denise Danielson
2	3	Brielle Honas	<i>Chocolate Donuts</i>	St. Mary's	Karen Whisman
2	HM	Khali Richmeier	<i>The Park</i>	O'Loughlin	Denise Danielson
3	1	Theron Walters	<i>The Bermuda Triangle</i>	O'Loughlin	Kenda Leiker
3	2 (tie)	Reese Gilbert	<i>Jellyfish</i>	Wilson	Kenda Leiker
3	2 (tie)	Theron Walters	<i>Gold</i>	O'Loughlin	Kenda Leiker
3	3	Boston Wilkie	<i>T Rex</i>	O'Loughlin	Kenda Leiker
3	HM	Oliver Buckstead	<i>Insects</i>	O'Loughlin	Kenda Leiker
4	1	Alex Lee	<i>Colorado</i>	Holy Family	Teresa Schrant
4	2	Gianna Ochoa	<i>Sunset</i>	Holy Family	Teresa Schrant
4	3	Gianna Ochoa	<i>Woman</i>	Holy Family	Teresa Schrant
4	HM	Cailynn Luck	<i>Parades</i>	O'Loughlin	Sonya Herl/Kristy O'Borny
4	HM	Emma Meagher	<i>Orchestra</i>	Holy Family	Teresa Schrant
5	1	Niko Tsereteli	<i>Easel of Thoughts</i>	O'Loughlin	Hannah Wince
5	2	Kyler Kinderknecht	<i>Racism</i>	O'Loughlin	Hannah Wince
5	3	Bethany Eiden	<i>The Other Side</i>	Wilson	Alicia Plante
5	HM	Jackson Berges	<i>Hot Chocolate</i>	Roosevelt	Hannah Wince
6	1	Lily Basgall	<i>Fear</i>	HMS	Sydney Niernberger
6	2	Caden Pinkney	<i>Devoted Delightful Dolphins</i>	Holy Family	Jennifer Howard
6	3	Maggie Downing	<i>I Am</i>	St. Mary's	April Pfeifer
6	HM	Lauren Schmeidler	<i>Waffle</i>	Holy Family	Jennifer Howard
6	HM	Kayden Tiernan	<i>A Man Named Jim</i>	Holy Family	Jennifer Howard
6	HM	Genevieve Dietz	<i>When I Hear Spring</i>	HMS	Colton Gladow
7	1	Dylan Billinger	<i>Art</i>	TMP JH	Brenda Rose
7	2	Victoria Macias-Leyva	<i>Game, n, Life</i>	HMS	Amy Schmidt
7	3	Khloe Vahling	<i>Dishes</i>	TMP JH	Brenda Rose
7	HM	Evey Schmidt	<i>The Words</i>	TMP JH	Brenda Rose

8	1	Sam Krannawitter	<i>Nighttime Enchantment</i>	TMP JH	Brenda Rose
8	2	Juliet Gross	<i>Fading Sun</i>	HMS	Amy Schmidt
8	3	Kennedy Normandin	<i>I'll Love Enough for the Both of Us</i>	HMS	Meagan Englert
8	HM	Samantha Casper	<i>Remember When</i>	TMP JH	Brenda Rose
10	1	Clare Tholstrup	<i>Daydreams</i>	HHS	Jerry Braun
10	2	Alivia Sellens	<i>An Orange Illusion</i>	HHS	Jerry Braun
10	3	Isabelle Jones	<i>Home for the Brave</i>	HHS	Vanessa Schumacher
11	1	Emily Whyte	<i>My Box of Dreams</i>	EHS	Savannah Downing
11	2	Emily Whyte	<i>Hate Comments</i>	EHS	Savannah Downing
11	3	Leonardo Hernandez	<i>Shell</i>	HHS	Dave Buller
12	1	Eileen Veatch	<i>Haunted</i>	HHS	Kathy Wagoner
12	2	Seth Trip	<i>The Bitten Apple</i>	HHS	Kathy Wagoner
12	3	Eileen Veatch	<i>Little Boy Among the Moon</i>	HHS	Kathy Wagoner
12	HM	Harlee Danner	<i>At Peace</i>	HHS	Kathy Wagoner

## 2023 Creative Writing Winning Entries ~ *Poetry*

### **Weasel**

White with black spots  
Small and chubby  
Running around with a lot of energy  
Playing with Penny is her favorite thing to do.  
Snuggly in my bed, Weasel, my pal, my dog.

#### **Reagan Deutscher**

*St. Mary's Grade School*  
Kindergarten, 1<sup>st</sup> Place

### **Dolphins**

Shiny and gray  
Slippery and smooth  
Swim and dive all day and night

#### **Ellis Helberg**

*St. Mary's Grade School*  
Kindergarten, Honorable Mention

### **Orange**

Orange looks like a tasty snack  
Orange smells sweet and sour  
Orange tastes delicious  
Orange feels smooth yet scratchy  
Orange sounds juice  
Orange is my favorite color and my favorite snack.

#### **Silas Wagner**

*St. Mary's Grade School*  
Kindergarten, 3<sup>rd</sup> Place

### **Pizza**

It looks bubbly and yellow.  
It smells good and tasty.  
It sounds squishy.  
It feels soft and crunchy.  
It tastes delicious.  
Pizza is my favorite food.

#### **Adalie Hann**

*St. Mary's Grade School*  
Kindergarten, 2<sup>nd</sup> Place

### **Eels in the Ocean**

Eels swim in the ocean  
With a wiggly motion  
Their dangerous teeth are very scary  
Which makes their prey very wary.

Living in the rocky coral reefs  
They are mighty good thieves  
They eat their prey  
And then swim away.

#### **Tommy Detrixhe**

*O'Loughlin Elementary*  
1<sup>st</sup> Grade, 1<sup>st</sup> Place

### **Koalas**

Koalas sleeping twenty hours a day  
Only eating eucalyptus leaves  
Awake at night while sleeping during day  
Live in the forests of Australia  
Around the trees they move gracefully  
Sleeping trees most of the day

#### **Macie Day**

*O'Loughlin Elementary*  
1<sup>st</sup> Grade, 2<sup>nd</sup> Place (t)

## China

China's culture is very unique  
Hoping for fun at the boat festival  
Impressive symbols in their writing  
Navigating the Great Wall of China  
Admiring the cool dragons on New Years

### Jayden Qi

*O'Loughlin Elementary*  
1<sup>st</sup> Grade, 2<sup>nd</sup> Place (t)

## Spring

Sun is shining  
People outside playing  
Rainbows in the sky  
Ice cream trucks drive by  
New flowers blooming  
Green grass grows tall

### Kinsley Petz

*St. Mary's Grade School*  
1<sup>st</sup> Grade, 3<sup>rd</sup> Place (t)

## Spring

Sky is clear and blue  
Puddles on the ground  
Rainbows in the sky  
Ice cream melting  
No more snow  
Gardens growing fruit

### Brecklynn Fischer

*St. Mary's Grade School*  
1<sup>st</sup> Grade, Honorable Mention

## Flowers

Fun to see me every day.  
Like to soak up sun and nutrients.  
Outside is where you'll see me.  
Winter's coming, I'll bloom soon.  
Eating soil and saying, "Yum Yum!"  
Rain down on me I plead.  
Spring is coming, I can't wait to see you again!!

### Jade Whitmer

*Holy Family Elementary*  
2<sup>nd</sup> Grade, 1<sup>st</sup> Place

## Water Bottle

Happy when I open the lid  
Storing my water for me  
Keeping me hydrated all day  
Thirsty when empty  
Sad when I close the lid

### Julie Smith

*O'Loughlin Elementary*  
2<sup>nd</sup> Grade, 2<sup>nd</sup> Place

## Chocolate Donuts

Chocolate donuts yum yum  
So good and chocolatey  
Sprinkles are the color of the rainbow  
Chocolatey donut frosting on your face.  
So good and squishy warm and chocolatey  
So good yum yum

### Brielle Honas

*St. Mary's Grade School*  
2<sup>nd</sup> Grade, 3<sup>rd</sup> place

## **The Park**

The kids playing tag,  
Kids yelling and screaming.  
The wind on my skin,  
Fresh air all around.  
Sweet lemonade snowball,  
Playing with my best friends.

**Khali Richmeier**

*O'Loughlin Elementary*  
2<sup>nd</sup> Grade, Honorable Mention

## **Jellyfish**

Jellyfish in all different colors and sizes,  
Each polyp growing a disc-shaped foot,  
Lighting up is trait some have,  
Light colored ones are harder to find,  
Young start out as an egg,  
Fish isn't truly what they are,  
In every ocean they are found  
Stinging people if they get too close,  
Huge jellyfish...the most dangerous yet.

**Reese Gilbert**

*Wilson Elementary*  
3<sup>rd</sup> Grade, 2<sup>nd</sup> Place (t)

## **Gold**

Gold is the feeling you feel when you get first place  
Gold is the color of a first-born star  
Gold is the smell of freshly made maple syrup  
Gold is the taste of butter melted on mashed potatoes  
Gold is the sound you hear when you set off fireworks  
Gold is the feeling you get when it is your birthday  
Gold is the color of a shiny king crown  
Gold is the smell of fresh farm honey  
Gold is the taste of fresh squeezed lime juice with sugar  
And gold is successful and is always number 1

**Theron Walters**

*O'Loughlin Elementary*  
3<sup>rd</sup> Grade, 2<sup>nd</sup> Place (t)

## **T Rex**

Terrifically huge extinct hungers  
Ready to fight for a mate  
Eager to defend their territory  
Xtraordinarily awesome creatures

Killing helpless herbivores  
Intimidating to the eye  
Navigating prehistoric land masses  
Gouging giant footprints as they go  
Survival of the fittest!

**Boston Wilkie**

*O'Loughlin Elementary*  
3<sup>rd</sup> Grade, 3<sup>rd</sup> Place

## **The Bermuda Triangle**

The Bermuda triangle is a mysterious place  
Some think that it came from space.  
The ships and planes crash, or sink  
In a plane or ship there is no time to think.

In the sea your body lies below  
Scattered around you is all the cargo.  
Moss and algae gradually cover you  
Over time you become a sea of blue.

**Theron Walters**

*O'Loughlin Elementary*  
3<sup>rd</sup> Grade, 1<sup>st</sup> Place

## **Insects**

Insects invading my house  
Never considering that it's MY space  
Squeezing through tiny cracks and crevices  
Enjoying eating my very own food every day  
Crawling around on the kitchen counter  
Termites nibbling away on the wood  
Scaring me to death

**Oliver Buckstead**

*O'Loughlin Elementary*  
3<sup>rd</sup> Grade, Honorable Mention

## Colorado

Mountains freckled with evergreens  
and topped with soft snow,  
almost touching the stars.  
Vast crevices,  
dens for bears, berries for deer.  
At night,  
the distant howling of wolves.

**Alex Lee**

*Holy Family Elementary*  
4<sup>th</sup> Grade, 1<sup>st</sup> Place

## Parades

I LOVE to watch parades...  
Wonderful kids in all colors screaming with friends and family  
Clouds looking like big delicious mysterious cotton candy  
A bright sun shining with a joyful smile  
Dazzling dancers with their jewels sparkling in the sunlight  
Huge colorful balloons of all sizes floating happily  
Floats with great creative designs  
Pretty princesses propped in pink  
Horses trotting with their fancy hooves  
Mothers and fathers taking pictures  
Beautifully dressed prom queens lovely waving  
Girl Scouts throwing GIANT BIG-sized candy  
Fabulous clean fire trucks honking their humongous horns,  
Outstanding American Flags being waved in the clear blue sky,  
Kids rushing to get lots of candy,  
Generous cleaners sweeping the street with some kind little kids,  
I wish I could fly around with the exquisitely colorful balloons in the  
crowded parade. . .

**Cailynn Luck**

*O'Loughlin Elementary*  
4<sup>th</sup> Grade, Honorable Mention

## Sunset

In the distant sky the sun,  
the star that begins and ends each day,  
has decided to rest  
and allow the moon to rise for the night.  
As the sun sets,  
the sky fills with color...  
hot pink, rose, scarlet, light yellow,  
and a small tinge of amethyst.  
Everything blends together perfectly  
as if it were smudged.  
No one knows how Sun does it.  
Sun is the Artist of the Sky.

**Gianna Ochoa**

*Holy Family Elementary*  
4<sup>th</sup> Grade, 2<sup>nd</sup> Place

## Woman

Hair as black as coal,  
eyes pitch black like a starless night,  
skin pale like snow.  
Wearing an amethyst-colored dress  
with white trimming,  
a pearl hair clip  
to keep the coal-colored hair  
from hiding her gorgeous face.

**Gianna Ochoa**

*Holy Family Elementary*  
4<sup>th</sup> Grade, 3<sup>rd</sup> Place

## Orchestra

Violins, cellos, and horns  
are sounding.  
Musicians at stands  
are counting the beats.  
Timpani thunders  
and trumpets blast.

**Emma Meagher**

*Holy Family Elementary*  
4<sup>th</sup> Grade, Honorable Mention



### **The Other Side**

Bully:

Chaos, loud, scary, family always fighting  
School is safe  
Hot shining sun, a break from schoolwork  
Bursting out, I run  
Oops, bump, ouch, knock into some girl  
“WATCH IT, IDIOT!” she says  
I freeze, my fists clench, shaking  
Impulse takes control  
Slap, crash, boom, I won  
A smile creeps across my lips  
Dad would be proud

Victim:

I wake up to this  
Sizzling bacon, fluffy pillow  
School is boring  
Balls bounding, kids yelling, swings creaking, recess time  
Giggling, cool, popular, I find my friends  
Oof, bump, ouch, get knocked by some girl  
“Watch it,” I say  
I flip my hair and roll my eyes  
What a waste of time  
Slap, crash, boom, I fall  
Rears run down my cheeks  
Loving, caring I want Mom

Teacher:

I wake up to this  
Baby crying, alarm ringing,  
School is work  
Dramatic, chaotic, fun  
Girl drama, fighting, common, need to help  
Rude comments  
try to stop it  
This is annoying  
Slap, crash, boom, she falls  
My eyebrows start to stiffen  
I want the best for my students

**Bethany Eiden**

*Wilson Elementary*  
5<sup>th</sup> Grade, 3<sup>rd</sup> Place

### **Easel of Thoughts**

Pick up the brush  
The world is your canvas  
Majestic mountains and reflecting rivers  
Each stroke paints new imagination

Soaring skies above  
Elegant birds swoop down  
Luminous lighting with vibrant colors  
Framed in one delicate image

Hold the palette  
Portray the forthcoming  
Let thoughts roam free and artistry flow wild  
Brush the boundaries of your mind

**Niko Tsereteli**

*O'Loughlin Elementary*  
5<sup>th</sup> Grade, 1<sup>st</sup> Place

### **Racism**

Nasty Habit.  
Offending others without reason.  
Care for people, racists lack it.  
Leaving a trace, no matter the season.  
Knuckleheads, can't you see,  
He deserves love, no matter the color they may be!

**Kyler Kinderknecht**

*O'Loughlin Elementary*  
5<sup>th</sup> Grade, 2<sup>nd</sup> Place

### **Hot Chocolate**

I drink the hot chocolate fresh out of the pot  
It tastes good  
But suddenly while sipping  
My MMMMM goes to AAAAAAAHH  
Worth it.

**Jackson Berges**

*Roosevelt Elementary*  
5<sup>th</sup> Grade, Honorable Mention

## Fear

Fear is me, fear is you.  
When we fear, we see something new.  
The people we fear are always known and true.  
Whether old or blue; They can't be told what you're fearing,  
So they don't know the damage done.  
Button your shirt and tie your shoes.  
New things to fear, new emotions become one.  
Don't look back or tears will slip down rosy red cheeks.  
Fear is all, fear controls, fear fears you, fear fears me.  
Tears slip down rosy red cheeks and cry themselves to sleep.

**Lily Basgall**

*Hays Middle School*

6<sup>th</sup> Grade, 1<sup>st</sup> Place

## Waffle

Waffle  
Burnt, fluffy  
Burnin', toastin', crispin'  
"Waffle, stop burnin'!"  
Better than pancakes

**Lauren Schmeidler**

*Holy Family Elementary*

6<sup>th</sup> Grade, Hon. Mention

## I Am

I am a sixth grader  
I wonder if my friend group will stick together in middle school  
I hear my friends laughing about a joke  
I see them all having fun at recess  
I want to have classes with them in middle school  
I pretend that I was listening sometimes when one of my friends is talking to me,  
but I have actually no idea what they said  
I feel happy as things are  
I worry that middle school will be hard  
I hope that things will stay somewhat the same  
I try to spend time with my friends when I can outside of school  
I wish that math didn't exist  
I understand most of what we learn  
I say that I don't like cottage cheese but I've actually never tried it  
I dream about random stuff to say in arguments that will never happen  
I imagine what my life will be like in 10 years  
I believe that I can achieve my dreams if I work hard  
I am Maggie

**Maggie Downing**

*St. Mary's Grade School*

6<sup>th</sup> Grade, 3<sup>rd</sup> Place

## A Man Named Jim

There once was a old man named Jim  
He ate nothing so he was very slim  
The only thing he ate  
Was a very small date  
His best friend recommended going to the gym

**Kayden Tiernan**

*Holy Family Elementary*

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

## Devoted Delightful Dolphins

A variety of silver dolphins  
Swimming and diving gracefully  
On the verge of a pristine sunset  
In the diamond aqua ocean  
To find a purpose among the earth

**Caden Pinkney**

*Holy Family Elementary*

6<sup>th</sup> Grade, 2<sup>nd</sup> Place

## When I Hear Spring

Some might call me insane,  
To them, spring is mundane.  
They think that it's clammy and cold and wet,  
But they don't see its beauty yet.

When I hear spring,  
I think of the birds.  
The little birds,  
Flying over our yards.

When I hear spring,  
I think of the flowers.  
Growing higher and higher,  
With all of their power.

When I hear spring,  
I think of the bunnies.  
Hopping around,  
When the weather is sunny.

When I hear the call of avians,  
When I see the struggle of the geraniums,  
When I spot a fleeting hare,  
I know that spring is in the air.

**Genevieve Dietz**  
*Hays Middle School*  
6<sup>th</sup> Grade, Honorable Mention

## Dishes

All of us are like dishes,  
Some like Glass  
And Others built to last.  
And there's a point,  
A breaking point where we'll all snap,  
Break, or crack as if we were dropped like glass.  
The dishwasher is earth,  
Breaking us down. We all have something to wear us down,  
Whether its words, work, people, or even life.  
There's a point where we'll crack,  
And meet our breaking point.

**Khloe Vahling**  
*TMP-Marian Jr. High*  
7<sup>th</sup> Grade, 3<sup>rd</sup> Place

## Art

Colorful splashes or masterful stroke,  
Twirling on the canvas, like a ballerina  
Beautiful but delicate dancing on a stage  
Art comforts the disturbed but disturbs the comfortable.  
The most masterful paintings can come from mistakes  
Art is beautiful, no mistakes, only new opportunities.

**Dylan Billinger**  
*TMP-Marian Jr. High*  
7<sup>th</sup> Grade, 1<sup>st</sup> Place

## The Words

Words can hurt,  
Words can heal,  
They can knock you into the dirt,  
And they can also reveal.

People use them to destroy,  
while others use them to build.  
Some use them to play you like a toy,  
And some use them to get you thrilled.

Words can do anything.  
They can make you happy and mad.  
They can be secrets that you are carrying,  
while some words can be bad.

Words are everywhere,  
some new, some old.  
Some words aren't meant to be shared,  
and some are supposed to be told.

Words show moods,  
there is no doubt about it.  
Some words are rude.  
Some people want those words to quit.

Words can rhyme and describe.  
Words can be silly or serious.  
Some can be used to bribe.  
Some can be very mysterious.

Words, yes words,  
they are delightful.  
They help people move forward,  
and they are so wonderful.

**Evey Schmidt**  
*TMP-Marian Jr. High*  
7<sup>th</sup> Grade, Honorable Mention

### **I'll Love Enough for the Both of Us**

I love you  
I love you not  
I love you  
I love you not  
I love you

And that answer has never changed  
I didn't have to pick petals off of a flower to determine whether I loved you  
Though I was much too young to know you stole my heart  
I could never be angry it was stolen  
I will never ask for it back  
Instead, I'll sit patiently and quietly  
Hoping you will lend me yours  
On days my hope faltered  
I would remind myself not to pick the next petal  
Because *loving you not* wasn't something I could do  
And I just couldn't understand how easy it was for you  
So, instead of picking daisies  
I am wishing on dandelions  
I love you  
Always  
But that's not my wish  
Rather, it's that someday  
You will pick up a pen  
And the first thing you write about is loving me  
*That's my wish on every birthday candle*  
Shooting star  
And coins thrown into fountains

**Kennedy Normandin**  
*Hays Middle School*  
8<sup>th</sup> Grade, 3<sup>rd</sup> Place

### **Game, n, Life**

Life is like a video game  
We all start not knowing what  
Awaits next.  
Overtime, we enter new levels, and start  
Learning new skills.  
As time passes we over come  
Obstacles in our way.  
The only difference is, we have only  
One life.

**Victoria Macias-Leyva**  
*Hays Middle School*  
7<sup>th</sup> Grade, 2<sup>nd</sup> Place

### **Nighttime Enchantment**

The night descends, a cloak of black,  
Enshrouding all in its embrace,  
A world transformed, a new attack  
As light recedes and shadows race.

The moon, a queen, takes up her throne,  
And spreads her silver-gilded beams,  
A guiding light, a path unknown,  
That dances on the midnight streams.

The stars, a tapestry on high,  
A glow in glittering diamond light,  
A million jewels in endless sky,  
That twinkle, sparkle through the night.

The owls hoot out their haunting call,  
As bats on wings flit to and fro,  
The world alive, both big and small,  
In darkness things we cannot know.

For in the night a magic lies,  
A mystery shrouded in the dark,  
A chance to ponder and surmise,  
And let the mind and soul embark.

So welcome in the night's embrace,  
And let its beauty set you free,  
For in its depths, there is a grace,  
That only those who seek can see.

**Sam Krannawitter**  
*TMP-Marian Jr. High*  
8<sup>th</sup> Grade, 1<sup>st</sup> Place

## Fading Sun

When I say you are my sun I don't mean that you are  
luminous,  
brilliant,  
gilded,  
beautiful,  
warm,  
or even the center of my universe.

I simply mean that I cannot look at you without hurting.  
Under your spell, I am but one star in the universe that you deserve.  
I am but a rain's puddle when it is an ocean you need to swim in.

Wish upon me,  
dance and jump within me,  
I long to be enough for thee,  
with a sincere smile,  
I look to the stars knowing the future is worthwhile,  
even with a thousand scars.

**Juliet Gross**

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

## Remember When

Remember when the glass was half-full?  
Remember when you used to be a rascal?

We were dared to stay up late,  
but it could never be done.  
We watched cartoons about animals,  
all having fun.

They taught us different things,  
different songs, morals, and themes,  
how the sky is blue,  
and the grass is green.

Now the glass is half-empty,  
Now we dare ourselves to put down the coffee,  
to finally go to bed.

Now we understand those cartoons,  
we understand those odd jokes.  
They weren't meant for us,  
they were meant for our folks.

Remember when the glass was half-full?  
Remember when you used to be a rascal?

**Samantha Casper**

*TMP-Marian Jr. High*  
8<sup>th</sup> Grade, Honorable Mention

## Daydreams

Wild daisies in the rocks  
By the beach of the lake  
You want to go back  
And stay in that place

People write poems  
That should bleed in the rain  
Or soak in the sea  
Let that wash it away  
But the ink stays firm  
Like an ancient seal  
To send away letters  
To never be revealed  
Like a lost hope in war  
And words of "I love you"  
Because a "Dear, John" would harbor  
One less on the field  
And every man is needed  
Even if his soul is gone  
So you keep breathing  
Even after all is lost

Did you know that  
Scissors work just fine  
To trim the petals and cut the line  
You tell yourself so many lies  
It's hard to distinguish from truth  
And the nightmares that will come true  
But you just stare into the darkness  
And think about the happiest  
You'd ever been  
And if you went back, it'd be okay again

A deadly poison  
You've grown immune to  
You can stomach it all now  
It doesn't hurt you

Cigarette smoke will  
Hang in motel halls  
Like a ghost with no past  
Just tales so tall  
Books filled with lies  
And fake memories  
Will you be just like that  
Or last centuries  
If the reels all burn up  
And your name fades off screen  
Will you fade into the walls  
Never to be seen

Get caught in the moment  
Between drowning and breathing  
It's all just so peaceful  
To not feel anything  
And just stay in those eyes  
Blue as could be  
They're just like the lakes  
You wish you could see  
A crystal that's shattered  
And never could mend  
A daisy that's stepped on  
And stuck badly bent  
A love story written  
That should last centuries  
But it froze and died  
Cold as the lakes  
You wish to see

**Clare Tholstrup**  
*Hays High School*  
10<sup>th</sup> Grade, 1<sup>st</sup> Place

## An Orange Illusion

My fingers reach across the bed for your hand,  
but it's long gone.  
Almost missing for years.  
The absence hurts my head.  
Painkillers no longer work.  
I can't see your thoughts anymore.  
Brain fogged over last night.  
Betraying me yet again.  
I missed you yesterday,  
are you here?  
Rocked myself to sleep,  
instead of allowing you.  
I shiver off my clothes.  
You once held me,  
from my head to my heart,  
And now you cannot stand to look at me.  
I still sit and wonder what true love feels like.  
Can someone really just...  
Were you ever real?  
You once shared an orange with me.  
I can remember that day well.  
A beautiful spring sunrise.  
A day I was in love,  
with someone who loved me.

**Alivia Sellens**  
*Hays High School*  
10<sup>th</sup> Grade, 2<sup>nd</sup> Place

## Home for the Brave

Children lined up at the border  
Their young faces caked with dirtiness, except for the vertical streaks on each cheek from where tears had fallen.

Soldiers in camouflage holding weapons  
Their manner of intimidation instilling fear in each person waiting to gain entry to the  
“Land of the Free.”

*“No solo firmes”*

The sound of illegible scribbles on paper, refusing to obey the advice each traveler heard before starting their journey north.

*“Don’t just sign.”*

The sound of signatures of millions of immigrants being seized without full understanding of what they are agreeing to.

So many people waiting

Watching people leave everything behind, for the thought, the hope, of something new.

Uneasiness wafts through the large crowd

Watching people and families one-by-one get turned away from their hope of access to the  
“Land of Opportunity.”

*“Para aqui, por favor”*

The thorough examination conducted of each person

*“Stop here, please”*

The belongings of migrants being discarded as they pass through the border.

Tears of joy falling from each tired eye

As entry is finally granted.

The coming of something from nothing

As individuals are allowed into the

“Land of Wealth.”

*“Bienvenido a los Estados Unidos de America”*

The sound of freedom, the sound of opportunity, the sound of wealth, the sound of hope.

*“Welcome to the United States of America”*

The sound of new beginnings, the sound of new learnings, the sound of a new future for the  
“Brave.”

**Isabelle Jones**

*Hays High School*

10<sup>th</sup> Grade, 3<sup>rd</sup> Place

## Shell

Crack, crumble, away goes the shell

See! Beware of Earth's creeping hell

    This darkness weak to only one

    Vigilant child, don't be unwell

**Leonardo Hernandez**

*Hays High School*

11<sup>th</sup> Grade, 3<sup>rd</sup> Place

## My Box of Dreams

I have a little box of dreams.  
I keep it deep in my broken heart.  
I don't know how long it can stay there,  
For my heart breaks a little more every day.  
What have I been able to hold in my little box?  
A career, a bucket list, opportunities,  
The big stuff in life,  
Things I wish,  
Things I want,  
Most of my few dreams have escaped the box,  
The days when I can't hold them captive anymore.  
My poor dreams wander and wander,  
Unsure of who they can trust again.  
I've been able to keep the rest of my dreams,  
Who struggle to leave that little box,  
My little box of dreams.  
I don't know how long they'll stay deep in my broken heart,  
Because now my heart shatters piece by piece.  
Everyday.

**Emily Whyte**  
*Ellis High School*  
11<sup>th</sup> Grade, 1<sup>st</sup> Place

## Hate Comments

You're loud and obnoxious.  
*That's how I express myself.*  
I like when you're calm and quiet.  
*And I like to be funny and let my emotions run wild.*  
You're retarded.  
*Still smarter than you.*  
You're ugly.  
*But you still haven't found a date to prom.*  
You're too short.  
*No, I'm not. I'm just fun-sized.*  
This isn't working for you.  
*I'm better at it than you ever will be.*  
You should quit.  
*Why? I didn't know this was your life.*  
You're too innocent.  
*Yeah, but at least I'm not gross like you guys are.*  
You shouldn't look up to a guy who wears dresses.  
*Who cares? He's a human-being, just like the rest of us, and I respect him as an artist.*  
You're bossy.  
*That's because I can't control things that happen in life.*  
Your teeth are crooked.  
*Why don't you stop worrying about how I look and take a look in the mirror?*  
You need to stop talking.

**Emily Whyte**  
*Ellis High School*  
11<sup>th</sup> Grade, 2<sup>nd</sup> Place



## **The Bitten Apple**

may the book of Genesis be placed upon my wrists of ice,  
the wrists you slit with the crucifix of Christ  
will my heart be replaced by the apple of life,  
or will it be strangled by the serpent's body and the Devil's bite?

will you dig your daggers into my skin  
and tie me up for Satan's revenge?  
will you treat me like a sheep,  
whip me and never allow me to speak?

will I be the lambs working for God,  
that allow me to grow from ethereal sod,  
or will I be dismembered, tortured.  
lambs decomposed, grown into apples in the Devil's orchard

growing from the Devil's horns,  
will be the apples of life's thorns,  
they are bitten, they are sins.  
they are written with broken pens.

the bitten apple created the sins of everything despite  
that I am a sin, that's what God has said.  
but is that true? that's not what Jesus bled.

the book of Genesis, the book of life  
was shackled onto my wrists of ice.  
the wrists you slit with the crucifix of Christ,  
the sinned blood I leak for the apple's bright light.

the bright light that replaces my heart,  
maybe I can prove myself—like Eve from the world's start.  
I am not a sin, I am not a serpent,  
I am just a broken rib that breathes again.

God has given me the book of Genesis.  
Life given, yet I am a sin on Hell's list.  
May my heart manifest into the apple of life,  
the bitten apple that birthed the sins of you and me.

**Seth Tripp**  
*Hays High School*  
12<sup>th</sup> Grade, 2<sup>nd</sup> Place

### **Little Boy Among the Moon**

Little boy  
Among the moon  
I heard you're leaving  
Is that true?

Little boy  
With his fishing pole  
So charming you are  
My heart, you stole

When did you decide  
That you were too old?  
Leaving the moon  
So very cold.

Since you've left  
I've been alone  
But I swear I still see  
The boy I had known

Sitting atop the moon  
Once more  
Picking up our talk  
And living happily evermore

**Eileen Veatch**  
Hays High School  
12<sup>th</sup> Grade, 3<sup>rd</sup> Place

### **Haunted**

The ghosts, they lay  
In my hand.  
Following like shadows  
On command.

As close as space.  
As far as skin.  
Where I end and where  
They begin.

Suffocate the  
Body, they hound.  
I beg the ghosts to  
Leave me un-

**Eileen Veatch**  
*Hays High School*  
12<sup>th</sup> Grade, 1<sup>st</sup> Place

### **At Peace**

Bouncing around,  
like a bunny with no home.  
Feeling alone,  
I seek comfort in places unknown.  
I hate to play,  
knowing that we will not stay.  
Isolation is key,  
for fear that they won't like me.  
We move one last time,  
and find people who are kind.  
Finally signing a lease,  
at last, I am at peace.

**Harlee Danner**  
*Hays High School*  
12<sup>th</sup> Grade, Honorable Mention

## 2023 Creative Writing Awards ~ Prose

<i>Gr.</i>	<i>Place</i>	<i>Student</i>	<i>Title of Work</i>	<i>School</i>	<i>Teacher</i>
K	1	Adeline Seibel	<i>The Teleporting Witch</i>	St. Mary's	Beth McDougal
K	2	Brandt Seibel	<i>Astronaut Buck</i>	St. Mary's	Beth McDougal
K	3	Sage Espino	<i>Leprechaun</i>	Washington	Ashley Dusin
K	HM	Calder Keimig	<i>The Rainbow Treasure</i>	Washington	Ashley Dusin
K	HM	William Bertelmann	<i>Whale Man</i>	Washington	Ashley Dusin
1	1	Jayden Qi	<i>My Forever Friendship</i>	O'Loughlin	Kenda Leiker
1	2	Tommy Detrixhe	<i>The Lost Eel</i>	O'Loughlin	Kenda Leiker
1	3	Oliver Adcock-Smies	<i>Colorful Mystery</i>	O'Loughlin	Kenda Leiker
1	HM	Hayden Chessmore	<i>The Story of the Twins</i>	Washington	Kelsie McMillian
1	HM	Tynlee Bowles	<i>Two Cat Sisters</i>	Washington	Kelsie McMillian
1	HM	Ryken Mayfield	<i>The Candy Cane Sword</i>	Wilson	Kenda Leiker
2	1	Jade Whitmer	<i>The Three Penguin's Journey</i>	Holy Family	Kenda Leiker
2	2	Kersee Wince	<i>Jealousy Gets in the Way of Friendship</i>	Lincoln	Kenda Leiker
2	3	Bryce Irwin	<i>Snowmen at the Ice Cream Truck</i>	O'Loughlin	Denise Danielson
2	HM	Brendall Gabel	<i>Friendship</i>	Washington	Kelly Hansen
2	HM	Tyler Morton	<i>Baking Disaster</i>	Washington	Kelly Hansen
3	1	Kelton Legleiter	<i>The Prank War</i>	Holy Family	Kenda Leiker
3	2	Nigel Williams	<i>A Nutty Tale</i>	Wilson	Kenda Leiker
3	3 (tie)	Griffin Dietz	<i>One Crazy Boat Trip</i>	O'Loughlin	Kenda Leiker
3	3 (tie)	Bearret Tillman	<i>Leo and the Great Discovery</i>	Lincoln	Kenda Leiker
3	HM	Coleman Downing	<i>Bats</i>	St. Mary's	Patty Meagher
3	HM	Addyson McMillan	<i>Oreo's Bad Luck Day</i>	Washington	Jessica Russell
4	1	Katie Hines	<i>Witchcraft</i>	Washington	Ashley Rohleder
4	2	Prestigious Connally	<i>One Big Hardship</i>	Wilson	Tara Wildeman
4	3	Kelsey Robben	<i>Finding Cupcake</i>	Holy Family	Hannah Wince
4	HM	Sophie Seibel	<i>The Prankster</i>	St. Mary's	Peggy Seibel
4	HM	Charlotte Mergen	<i>The Best Day Every</i>	O'Loughlin	Hannah Wince
5	1	Niko Tsereteli	<i>Lost in the Woods</i>	O'Loughlin	Hannah Wince
5	2	Elizabeth North	<i>Snow Fall</i>	O'Loughlin	Gina Johnson
5	3	Niko Tsereteli	<i>Temple of the Unknown</i>	O'Loughlin	Gina Johnson
6	1	Taryn Boydston	<i>The Memories at Raven</i>	St. Mary's	April Pfeifer
6	2	Taryn Boydston	<i>The Possibilities are Endless</i>	St. Mary's	April Pfeifer
6	3	Josiah Olmstead	<i>All in a Rock's Life</i>	HMS	Colton Gladow
6	HM	Bode Holloway	<i>The Cure</i>	HMS	Sydney Niernberger
6	HM	Avery Kieffer	<i>The Doll Maker</i>	HMS	Megan Pantle

7	1	Delanie Sanders	<i>Rosie</i>	TMP JH	Brenda Rose
7	2	Leo Billinger	<i>Sol Purpose</i>	TMP JH	Brenda Rose
7	3	Bladyn Werth	<i>The Keys for Things You May Need</i>	HMS	Melissa Treinen
7	HM	Emma Wasinger	<i>Christmas Miracles</i>	TMP JH	Brenda Rose
8	1	Logan Baalman	<i>The Book</i>	TMP JH	Brenda Rose
8	2	Jules Fleenor	<i>The End is Only a New Beginning</i>	TMP JH	Brenda Rose
8	3	Gus Corsair	<i>Tackled by Life</i>	TMP JH	Brenda Rose
9	1	Khandi Guzman	<i>Untitled</i>	HHS	Lisa Renz
9	2	Loren Tervort	<i>Untitled</i>	HHS	Lisa Renz
10	1	Noah Martinson	<i>Station</i>	HHS	Vanessa Schumacher
10	2	Keaton Fisher	<i>June 17, 2163</i>	EHS	Savannah Downing
10	3	Keaton Fisher	<i>Timebomb</i>	EHS	Savannah Downing
11	1	Sydney Meier	<i>The Water Where We Met</i>	HHS	David Buller
11	2	Nolan Dreher	<i>Happiness</i>	HHS	David Buller
11	3	Calvin Evins III	<i>The Devil's Gamble</i>	HHS	David Buller
11	HM	Evyn Cox	<i>Bed and <del>Breakfast</del> Blood</i>	HHS	David Buller
12	1	Chase Wittman	<i>Blood on My Hands</i>	HHS	Kathy Wagoner
12	2	MacKenzie Cunningham	<i>The Hike to Finch Lake</i>	HHS	Kathy Wagoner
12	3	Emily Smith	<i>The Pungent Demon</i>	HHS	Kathy Wagoner
12	HM	Chelsea Herrington	<i>Stuck</i>	EHS	Savannah Downing

## 2022 Creative Writing Winning Entries ~ *Prose*

### **The Teleporting Witch**

There was a princess named Afnow. One sunny, bright day she walked to get her mom a bunch of flowers. She lost her way home. She yelled, "Help"! A good witch came out of the trees. She said watch out because there is a bad witch standing outside the castle. That made Afnow feel bad. She was worried about her mom alone at the castle. She thinks she might have been taken. She made a plan to sneak in the castle window and save her mom. The witch did a spell and flew Afnow out of the forest to the castle as fast as can be. She yelled to her sister Rapunzel and told her to throw her hair out of the window. Afnow climbed up her sister's hair into the castle and scared the bad witch. The bad witch tried to teleport out of the castle but Afnow tricked her in a cage and locked it. Now she is stuck in the cage forever and Afnow and her family can live happily ever after.

**Adeline Seibel**

*St. Mary's Catholic School*

Kindergarten, 1<sup>st</sup> place

### **Astronaut Buck**

One nice warm sunny day Astronaut Buck bought a rocket ship for one hundred dollars. He blasted off. Now he was in space. He got out of the rocket ship and went for a walk. He tried to open the door to get back in the rocket. He remembered he accidentally slammed it shut when he went out in space and now the door was locked. He tried really hard but could not get the door to open. The rocket ship battery died. He floated to Jupiter and found some aliens to help. They helped him fix his rocket ship. The aliens gave him a new battery so he could go back to Earth.

**Brandt Seibel**

*St. Mary's Catholic School*

Kindergarten, 2<sup>nd</sup> place

### **Leprechaun**

So once there was a little and fat leprechaun that lived with his family by the lake. The leprechaun went fishing with his dad and he caught a fish. Then his mom and little brother came fishing. There was a bunch of fish but their poles were broken. So, they used their hands and caught 20 fish. A little dog was lost in the forest by the lake and came out to swim in the lake but couldn't swim. The dad leprechaun saved the dog and the dog became part of the family. They decide to name him Gold and gave him a gold dog tag so he could never get lost again.

**Sage Espino**

*Washington Elementary*

Kindergarten, 3<sup>rd</sup> place

## **The Rainbow Treasure**

Once upon a time there was a rainbow under the sea. It started one day when the fish found a treasure chest full of gold. When fish opened the treasure chest the gold made a beautiful rainbow. The fish really liked the rainbow. The chest also made numbers. This helped the fish learn their numbers and colors. So, they're super smart now.

**Calder Keimig**

*Washington Elementary*

Kindergarten, Honorable Mention

## **Whale Man**

There once was a whale and he lived in a cave in the ocean. He had five friends fishy that came to see him and two more came. Now there is seven fish friends with the whale. They swam around to find new friends the starfish and the clam. They found them on a rock. They then worked together and found a pirate's treasure and coral.

**William Bertelmann**

*Washington Elementary*

Kindergarten, Honorable Mention

## **My Forever Friendship**

My family and I decided to go to the beach to go swimming one afternoon. First, we had to pack up the car. Then we went to McDonalds to grab lunch to eat on our way. We had to drive twenty-one minutes to get to the beach. I couldn't wait to swim in the ocean. I love using my goggles to explore underwater marine creatures.

We finally arrived at the beach, and I immediately ran to the water. When I stepped in the water, it was freezing cold, I heard seagulls in the sky, and I heard the waves crashing all around me. I started swimming, but before long the water got too cold, and I decided to get out of the water.

After I warmed up, I went back into the ocean. This time I was distracted by a fish swimming near me. He looked so beautiful! He had a teal blue body and green fins. I carefully caught the fish and left the water to put him in an empty cooler with ocean water in it. My plan was to take him home with me as a pet.

When I got home, I named him George. I put him in a kiddie pool with more ocean water and fed him fish food. The next day George taught me how to swim like a fish. Each day we played and talked together more and more. Soon George got too big for the kiddie pool, and I put him in my backyard pool.

Each day he kept growing bigger. George continued to teach me how to swim like a fish and we became better friends each day. One day I noticed that George was getting too big for the pool. He really needed more space. I was really sad, but I knew what I needed to do that was right for George. I had to put him back in the ocean so he could have more space and a happier life.

The next day, I put him in the ocean. When I released him, tears were dropping from my eyes. I couldn't stop crying, but it was best for George. Every summer, I returned to the ocean to see George. I was so happy to see him at the beach. He will be my friend forever.

**Jayden Qi**

*O'Loughlin Elementary*

1<sup>st</sup> Grade, 1<sup>st</sup> place

## **The Lost Eel**

Once upon a time there was an eel named Ace. He was lonely, so he set off on a quest to find a friend. It was getting late though, and he wanted to go home. The problem was that he was lost.

He kept swimming and swimming, and finally he bumped into a whale. The whale pointed his fin in a direction to swim, but the whale sent him further away.

Then Ace bumped into a shark. The shark, who wasn't very friendly at all, chased him until Ace found a hole in some coral to hide.

There was another eel inside. Ace thought the eel looked friendly. She was about his same size and length. They got used to each other very quickly and soon became friends.

During the time they were hiding in the coral, they were talking about each other's names. Her name was Susan. They talked about how they were both lost and couldn't find their families. After more conversation, the eels decided to build their own community and home.

To celebrate their new friendship, both Ace and Susan peeked out the hole and saw that the shark had left so they went through a fun maze in the reef and had a great time together.

**Tommy Detrixhe**

*O'Loughlin Elementary*

1<sup>st</sup> Grade, 2<sup>nd</sup> place

## **Colorful Mystery**

It was a normal day at school when after recess I noticed that I had only six markers in my supply box. That means two markers were now missing in the past two days. So, I looked and looked and couldn't find them. I looked under my desk, and I looked on the other kids' desks to see if they accidentally picked up my marker. Then I thought it might be a prank that one of my friends pulled on me...but it wasn't. I was frustrated, but I went on with my day.

The next day, another marker was missing. Now I only had five markers out of the package of eight. I was even more MAD! It was an annoying mystery because no one else in my class was losing markers.

So, I came up with a great plan to ask the principal to check the school camera. At first, the principal told me no, but after I explained the situation about losing my markers and really needing to know who the thief was, she agreed to help me out.

After several hours she came back to my classroom with a huge smile on her face. Then she told me to look at Ronald's cage, the class lizard. I wondered what she was talking about but quickly turned my head and saw that Ronald had 3 markers. Lying inside of his cage was my black, brown, and yellow marker. I shouted, "Now that is a colorful mystery solved!" The principal then told me how Ronald carried out the task. Every night, Ronald would crawl through a small hole in the screen and slowly sneak to my supply box. He grabbed a marker in his mouth and took it carefully back to his cage.

The more I looked at how Ronald arranged the markers, I realized that Ronald wasn't a boy at all. She was a girl because she was pregnant and was using my markers to make a nest for her babies. So, we solved the mystery and now called her Ronalda.

**Oliver Adcock-Smies**

*O'Loughlin Elementary*

1<sup>st</sup> Grade, 3<sup>rd</sup> place

## **The Candy Cane Sword**

There I was lying on a shelf, a freshly baked candy cane with red and white stripes. Then the baker gave me to a child. I heard him say the child's name was Bowen. He sucked on me. "Oh No!" Before I knew it, the boy had transformed me, and I had a sharp point. Then, the child laid me in the cup holder of the car and forgot me.

Thankfully a while later, Bowen remembered me, grabbed me again, and took me into the house. This time he didn't suck on me. Instead, Bowen used me as a sword. I didn't want to be used as a sword. So, I jumped out of his hands towards the back door of the house and ran as fast as I could.

I climbed up the door and used my pointy part to wedge open the back door. Then I ran to the bakery down the street where I used to live. I slipped under the oak door and snuck behind the baker. The baker was making more candy canes. I climbed up to my shelf and finally rested.

The next morning, the baker didn't notice me when he put the other candy canes on the shelf below me. A few minutes later the bakery door opened, and an eleven year old kid named Taten, his mom, and brother came into the bakery. I saw Taten glance toward me. It was his birthday, so he was allowed to pick a treat. He picked a cake instead. "WHEW, thank goodness he chose something else."

Just when I thought I was in the clear, I noticed there was Bowen again! He was next to Taten. Bowen asked his mom, Tessa, if he could get another candy cane. I was so scared and started shaking. Oh NO! I saw him staring right at me, so I froze...

Luckily, Bowen picked a different candy cane, "WHEW, I survived another day. I felt scared yesterday, but I am okay for now.

**Ryken Mayfield**

*Wilson Elementary*

1<sup>st</sup> Grade, Honorable Mention

## **Two Cat Sisters**

There once was two cats named Moonlight and Sunlight. They lived in the same house, but they never got to see each other because Moonlight is only awake during the night and asleep during the day and Sunlight is awake during the day and sleeps at night. One night Moonlight was walking down the street to get to the cat store and she saw her cat sister, Sunlight, sleeping on the bridge. Suddenly she saw a mean dog coming towards the bridge and she yelled at her sister, but her sister couldn't hear her because she was sleeping! The sun was starting to come up so she yelled even louder to wake her up! Sunlight woke up and got away from the dog just in time. They were finally awake at the same time and could go play together!

**Tynlee Bowles**

*Washington Elementary*

1<sup>st</sup> Grade, Honorable Mention

## **The Story of the Twins**

Once upon a time there was two girls named Ally and Rose. They were both living in a homeless shelter. One day Rose got adopted, but Ally didn't. She got adopted into a rich family. One day the rich mom told her she had a twin and her name was Ally. Rose was so happy. She ran all the way to the homeless shelter and yelled "Ally, Ally where are you?" When she found her she said, "I'm your twin." "I'm a twin?" Ally said. "Yes! We're here to take you home!" When they got home, she looked for her room, but she couldn't find one. Her sister told her they could share a room. They could go shopping for new clothes,



visit lots of places, and have so much fun together. They even got to go to a water park. It was Ally's first time at a water park and she had a great time. They went home and Ally got to sleep in her new bed. That weekend Rose invited all of her friends over for a sleepover and Ally got to meet so many new friends! They lived happily ever after.

**Hayden Chessmore**  
*Washington Elementary*  
1<sup>st</sup> Grade, Honorable Mention

### **The Three Penguins' Journey**

Three penguins decided to go to their favorite iceberg which was far away. They wanted to have fun, and they loved that it was tall with mounds of snow. They also loved to have parties there, But they had to pack first.

The first penguin packed fish to eat and a map to guide the way. The second penguin packed some meat. The third penguin packed carrots. They needed food and snacks for the day!!

The penguins started out on their journey. It was supposed to be a nice trip but they ran into a couple problems along the way. When they crossed through the snowy land, they came across the polar bear's home. The polar bear was nice so it was no big deal. The penguins went inside to see him. "Hello!" they said. However, they could tell that he was not in a good mood and that he was hungry. So they immediately got fish from their bag and threw it at him and ran away.

The penguins continued their journey to get to their favorite iceberg. As they got closer to the iceberg, they were looking ahead and did not see the arctic fox's den and suddenly fell in. The arctic fox was normally nice. So, they thought it was fine, but today he was in a bad mood! They could tell by the growling tone of his voice. The penguins were very scared, as they should be. The fox chased them out of his den and then around and around in circles on the ice. The second penguin got fish from his bag and threw it toward the arctic fox to make him stop chasing them. The fox fell for it and ate the fish then went back to his den.

Once they escaped the arctic fox, the penguins continued their journey. "Hey!" yelled the third penguin. "We are finally here at the iceberg!" "We are finally here at the iceberg!" They were very happy that they made it to the iceberg. They had a big party, danced, at good food, and slid on their bellies. So, they all had fun and the day turned out to be a great success.

**Jade Whitmer**  
*Holy Family Elementary*  
2<sup>nd</sup> Grade, 1<sup>st</sup> place

### **Jealousy Gets in the Way of Friendship**

In the year 3033, a planet named Boo existed in our solar system. The Sun was Boo's friend. The Sun was a star. The planet Boo loved just the right amount of heat to keep its temperature right. One day, the Sun got mad at Boo for making new friends with aliens from another planet. The aliens wanted to live on the planet Boo. Boo accepted them and the Sun got even more frustrated and jealous.

The Sun came up with an idea to punish Boo. He would turn up his heat so the planet Boo and the aliens would be too hot and uncomfortable. Very quickly, Boo and the aliens realized that the temperature was rising.

Boo came up with three ideas to fix this problem. One idea was that Boo and the aliens could persuade an asteroid to move their planet away from the sun's heat. A second idea was that they could make a rocket ship that would pull Boo behind another planet to shield Boo from the heat. Or a third option was that they could take all of their launchers and fire them off from the same side of the planet all at the same time. This will then move Boo in the opposite direction.

Boo and the aliens all voted for using the launchers. So, they took all of their launchers and put them together in the same place. Then they fired all of them off at the same time. The ground shook and it was very loud. Then suddenly the alien and the planet Boo shifted in one direction. Boo and the aliens orbited behind another planet and didn't speak to the Sun anymore.

The Sun felt bad and realized his actions ruined their friendship. So rather than going back to the amount of heat he was producing, he kept the heat high so the planet Boo and the aliens would be warm even though they were further away from the Sun.

Planet Boo realized what the Sun did for them and appreciated his act of kindness. Soon Boo and the Sun were friends again. I guess friendship is more important than jealousy.

**Kersee Wince**

*Lincoln Elementary*

2<sup>nd</sup> Grade, 2<sup>nd</sup> place

### **Snowmen at the Ice Cream Truck**

One warm winter night, all of the snowmen jumped excitedly out of their front yards clear over to the ice cream truck in the parking lot.

The ice cream truck was locked, but the snowmen saw an open window. It was very small, so a few snowmen had to cut off their bottom ball to squeeze inside.

After jumping inside, they saw a cooler. They opened the cooler and spotted the ice cream. Then the snowmen ate all of the ice cream. Their favorite ice cream was the chocolate and vanilla swirl.

Next, the snowmen had a burping contest. They burped so loud that they blew their noses off!

The snowmen were very full from the ice cream. The sun was starting to rise, and the snowmen knew it was time to go home. Some snowmen fell down when they stood up. They gathered up all of their supplies and slid all the way home.

They were all droopy, wet, and slanted over when they got to their front yard.

**Bryce Irwin**

*O'Loughlin Elementary*

2<sup>nd</sup> Grade, 3<sup>rd</sup> place

### **Friendship**

One day, I was riding my unicorn. When suddenly, he got nervous. He thought he saw another unicorn, but it was just a horse. They were immediately confused and didn't realize what each other even were. The horse wondered how the unicorn got his horn. The unicorn pondered how the horse lost his. As the animals were discovering each other, I noticed a girl in the distance. She sees us with her horse and approaches us to see what's going on.

I exclaimed that our animals met and were confused. Both the other girl and I introduced ourselves and became instant friends. We start hanging out and before you know it, we've wandered away from my unicorn and her horse. We are lost in the woods.

The animals come looking for us, but the unicorn has the most amazing adventure. While he was looking for us, he finds his unicorn family. They use their unicorn powers and come find me and my new friend. That's how the horse and the unicorn save the day and how I met my best friend.

**Brendall Gabel**

*Washington Elementary*

2<sup>nd</sup> Grade, Honorable Mention

## **Baking Disaster**

In a bakery far, far away, a baker works all day and all night. Even though he does this every day, he still feels mad and sad that he has to work so hard. Every day, he wonders how he might be happy. There has to be more than making boring pancakes.

Then he has a great idea. He decides to make a special pancake. He mixes a special sauce that's both sweet with sugar and spicy with hot sauce.

He pours the batter onto the pan, when the most amazing thing happens. The pancake comes alive. Unlike the gingerbread man, that was sweet, this pancake was a tad too hungry and a little evil. We might say he was a little hangry. Out of nowhere, he jumps off the counter and eats the baker that made him. After that he spits him out, but makes the baker pour a whole army of pancake men.

The baker makes dozens of more pancake men, but he has to find a way to stop them from taking over the world. These evil pancakes are working fast. They can even eat concrete for dinner. The concrete gives them special powers. Butter knives are their light sabers.

The baker splashed syrup on the pancake army and they melt away saving the day.

**Tyler Morton**

*Washington Elementary*

2<sup>nd</sup> Grade, Honorable Mention

## **The Prank War**

Once upon a time there was a shark and a fish that lived in the ocean. They were both young and lived with their parents. They did not like each other at all so they tried to avoid each other at all costs. But the only problem was the fish kept pranking the shark just to annoy him.

The shark was fed up, so he decided he should prank the fish. First the shark went out to look for some seaweed. Once he found some, the shark snuck up behind the fish. When it was the right moment, the shark dropped all the seaweed on the fish. The fish wasn't shocked or scared of the seaweed at all. He only said, "I play in this all the time."

Knowing this didn't work, the shark went on to his next plan. The shark covered all the holes in the fish's little coral home. Now he couldn't see anything, and it was dark inside. This backfired as well because the fish was still able to go outside of his house.

At this point the shark was feeling very angry and wanted revenge. So, the shark swam to a sunken shipwreck and gathered metal and wood chunks. He took them back to the fish's home. When he knew that the fish was inside his home, the shark surrounded the entire fish's coral home with the shipwreck pieces. He made sure that this time the fish would not be able to escape.

Now the fish was really frustrated! This is when he finally realized why the shark was doing this. It is because the fish had been pranking the shark so many times and the shark wanted to get even and go to war. The shark was fed up with the fish's pranks.

The fish knew he was stuck and needed the shark's help to get out. The fish begged the shark to please let him out. The fish agreed to stop pranking the shark if he would just help him out. The shark agreed that the pranking was over and in the end they became friends. They both realized that they were better off being friends than enemies.

**Kelton Legleiter**

*Holy Family Elementary*

3<sup>rd</sup> Grade, 1<sup>st</sup> place

## A Nutty Tale

It was a Saturday in the park on a warm day in fall, when a squirrel named Dan was out for a walk. He was out collecting acorns for the winter. When all of a sudden, Dan tripped on a nut. "Ouch!" he yelled. His foot was hurting so he waddled back to his tree to rest up.

Dan thought to himself, "I guess I will have to heal this bruise while lying in my toothpick bed!" So, slowly he climbed up his tree, and into his bed. Just as he was settling in and about to relax, his bed collapsed, and he fell out of his tree! While he was falling, it felt like he was skydiving, only in a bad kind of way.

When he landed, he heard a snap and a sharp pain coming from his leg. Knowing he broke it, Dan crawled over to the hospital. Thankfully it was right next to the park so he could get healed.

At the hospital, Dan didn't know that the automatic glass doors weren't working properly. This was just his luck. He ran right into them causing him to get a black eye and a bump on his forehead.

When he was finally able to open the doors by pushing them apart, a nurse put him into a healing machine on the second floor. It was a small white one shaped like a tube, and it had a red cross sign on it. A nurse turned on the machine. The machine suddenly glitched causing Dan to get electrocuted and faint!

Dan shouted, "How could this all be happening to me? Why do I deserve this? I can't take much more!" He was at his breaking point, when... the next thing he knew was he was in his bed in the tree. It was morning. That's when he realized that it was just a bad dream. "Thank goodness!" he thought.

So, Dan climbed down from his tree and started gathering acorns for the winter. But...he tripped on an acorn causing him to think one thing. That one thing was, "Here we go again!" The only thing he didn't know was that he was in a nightmare loop!

**Nigel Williams**

*Wilson Elementary*

3<sup>rd</sup> Grade, 2<sup>nd</sup> place

## One Crazy Boat Trip

There was a chihuahua named Jerry. Jerry likes cookies, and he also likes to make his owner laugh. He and his owner went boating. They did this every Sunday because they don't like watching football, so they boat instead.

They were on their boat traveling toward the middle of the ocean. The water was calm until a large ship zoomed past them and created waves that came right toward them. All was good, until out of the blue, they were flipped over by a humongous wave! Both Jerry and his owner gasped for air and then started swimming toward each other. Jerry gradually crawled on his owner's back and the two of them headed toward the flipped boat. Before they made it to the boat, they saw sharks swimming all around them, and they were stunned with fear. By the look in the sharks' eyes, they were hungry for fresh meat. Jerry was frightened and clung on tighter to his owner. Then Jerry saw the shark's tail popping out of the water. The chihuahua saw this as his chance to escape the situation.

At the right moment, Jerry jumped from his owner's back onto a shark's tail. Even though he was scared, he knew it was his only way out. Once he landed on the tail, the shark flung around and whipped his tail upwards with force. Jerry was flicked off the tail and through the air. When flying, he noticed that his owner had made it safely to the flipped boat. Then suddenly he landed with a thud on a sandy beach.

Jerry looked around. There was nothing around but sand and weeds. Jerry was hungry, exhausted, and lonely. This is when he realized how big of a mistake it was to leave his owner who always took care of him. He had to find a way back to his owner.

Jerry chewed off weeds and pulled twigs together to build a raft. This took most of the night. In the morning, Jerry pushed the finished raft into the water and hopped onto it to start his journey to find his owner.

Three days of being on the raft and Jerry was tired, thirsty, and starving. Just when he was about to give up, he saw something from afar floating in the water. After a minute or two of just staring at it, he knew it was his owner!

Once they were both on the raft, they hugged each other. Jerry got soaking wet, but he didn't care. They started paddling with their hands and paws and headed toward land. They settled in a village and lived the best life they could eating cookies and laughing together.

**Griffin Dietz**  
*O'Loughlin Elementary*  
3<sup>rd</sup> Grade, 3<sup>rd</sup> place (tie)

### **Leo and the Great Discovery**

Leo the lion entered his rocket ship to fly to the moon. He touched the buttons and the countdown started. Then within seconds, he blasted off. After a couple of days, he was close to landing on the moon. He was just about to land when suddenly, he ran out of fuel...

BANG! The ship fell and hit the moon. He tried to call Earth, "Hello, Hello!" no one answered. "The radio is busted!" he roared. Leo was angry and depressed, but he had to figure out what to do next.

That's when Leo remembered he had a spare fuel tank in the back. He went to get the tank and put the fuel in the rocket. Now he would be ready for the trip back home.

Just as Leo was about to exit the rocket, he noticed that he was in the wrong spot on the moon. He intended to land in a large crater on the moon. So, he tried to blast off, but the ship wouldn't go.

He tried again and again, but the ship still wouldn't go. He went to the engine compartment to see what was wrong. Then he noticed the motor was broken. He went to get the rover so he could drive around the moon to see if the past astronauts left any spare parts lying around. While driving the rover, he looked and looked and finally found the right gear that he needed. He drove the rover back to the rocket and quickly fixed up the engine.

Leo drove his rover into the crater and then prepared to move the rocket to the crater. Within 30 minutes, Leo landed on the crater that he was looking for. He then gathered moon rocks and took soil samples to analyze back on Earth. Once he had collected everything he needed, his mission was complete, and he got back in the rocket to fly back home.

When he got back to Earth and the scientists tested his moon crater samples, they realized Leo had made a great discovery. The particles were actually very flammable and explosive. They must have been particles left over from the asteroid that created the crater on the moon. The actual asteroid pieces were put in a museum for safe keeping. Leo was forever famous.

**Bearret Tillman**  
*Lincoln Elementary*  
3<sup>rd</sup> Grade, 3<sup>rd</sup> place (tie)

### **Bats**

A bat flies into its cave when daytime comes. Then after the daytime hours have passed, all the bats fly out of their caves and into the night sky. One of them uses its echolocation. The vibration bounces back. It spots a moth. The bat flies toward the moth and eats it. Then the bats go back into their caves.

Bats are nocturnal, which means that they sleep during the day and are awake at night. The reason that they sleep in caves is because predators such as snakes, eagles, and big cats will not see them there.

Bats live on every continent except Antarctica. Bats are the only animals that can fly. Bats eat moths, mosquitoes, flies, and other insects. Bat species include fruit bats, vampire bats, and brown bats. Bats do not lay eggs but give birth to their young.

**Coleman Downing**

*St. Mary's Catholic School*

Third grade, Honorable Mention

### **Oreo's Bad Luck Day**

Once upon a time there was a cat named Oreo. Oreo was so very tired after playing with yarn all day, then remembered she had a lot of stuff to do tomorrow. She set her alarm clock for 8:00 a.m. then went to bed.

While she was sleeping, she had a terrible dream! She dreamt that some dog was going to steal her from the house and drop her off at the shelter. She woke up so scared and she jumped out of her bed. She looked at the time and realized she slept in! It was 11:00 a.m.! It was three hours past her alarm and she still had so many things to do! Now, she had to go do them and she had to do them fast!

She went to Super Shop where she was going to get some ingredients for a cake but decided she should just buy a cake instead. Next she went to Cat'O Mart where she bought candies and streamers. She went to the self-checkout to buy her stuff, but she couldn't afford it! So, she put her stuff on hold and then she went to her house. She got her money, went back to the store and bought her stuff.

After she finished she went home and put the items on the counter. She still had to clean her house. She dusted and mopped till it looked spotless. She was ready! She finally invited all her friends over. They all walked in and she yelled "SURPRISE!" Everyone was happy! Maybe it wasn't such a bad luck day after all.

**Addyson McMillan**

*Washington Elementary*

3<sup>rd</sup> Grade, Honorable Mention

### **Witchcraft**

"Wake up!" Mom called up the stairs. I had slept in too late, which isn't hard to do for a 12-year-old girl. Today is September 23, 1692. I came downstairs to a huge breakfast. While I was eating, I heard a knock on the door. "I'll get it," I said.

When I opened the door, two strong hands grabbed me. A man ran inside and grabbed my sister, Mia, who is two years younger than me. They pulled us outside where the mayor was waiting. He said, "You and your sister are under arrest for practicing witchcraft." "No!" I screamed. "I would never! Please, let us go. Please let me go. Please, I'm innocent!"

I kicked the man holding me down. He lost his grip on me. My sister saw what I did, and she did the exact same thing. We knew we had to get away, so we ran towards the forest as fast as we could. As we were running, I looked behind us. I saw the mayor's men take hold of my mom and beat her as she was trying to tell us something. She never got the words out.

I grabbed my sister's hand and we ran even faster to the forest. I knew we would be safe there because we played there every day. We knew all the best hiding places. We hid and stayed silent while the mayor and his men looked for us. They never found us.

My sister and I knew we couldn't go home. We were so scared. Mia held my hand tighter than she ever had before while we walked through the forest day after day. I wasn't sure where we were going, but I felt something pulling me deeper into the woods.

After a week of walking, we came to a cottage in the woods. I knocked on the door. A woman opened the door and said, "I knew you were coming." I thought this was weird because I didn't know her. I asked, "Who are you?"

"Oh Elizabeth," the woman said as she tried to hug me. I stepped back and asked, "How do you know my name?" I was horrified. She just smiled and said, "My name is Breanne. You two girls look just like my sister, your mother. You both also just like me." She smiled sadly. I looked around her into the cottage and saw a broom sweeping by itself. I stared in shock, and then I realized something that terrified me. "You are a witch" I screamed in fear. Mia had behind me because she was scared too.

Breanne laughed and said, "You're both witches." "We are most certainly not," I said, still scared. She slowly and gently took our hands and led us into the cottage. She said, "Sit down on that broom. I'll show you that you are a witch." I sat down on the broom, and then the broom started to float. "No!" I shouted. "This is not a possibility." I was horrified.

When I got off the broom, I looked at my sister. There was a huge smile on her face. She started jumping up and down saying, "My turn! My turn!" I was shocked to see her so excited. Her smile was contagious. When Mia got on the broom, it floated, and she giggled more than I had ever heard before. Her giggles made me realize that maybe we should accept this.

I took Mia to a different room when she got off the broom. I asked, "Do you want to stay with our aunt? Do you want to become a witch?" She nodded. I still wasn't sure, but then I realized something. As witches, we could take revenge for what the mayor did to our mom.

I told Breanne, "OK, we are witches. Now what?" Breanne said, "You will stay with me, my sweet nieces. I will take care of you, and teach you everything I know about witchcraft." "Will we be able to take revenge on the men that hurt our mother?" I asked. Breanne said, "I believe we could probably figure something out. But remember who your mother is. She is such a beautiful woman with a kind and caring soul. Think about what she would want.

Over the next year, we grew to love our aunt. She taught us the ways of witchcraft and loved us like we were her own daughters. Mia and I became stronger with our power. When the three of us worked together, we would accomplish great things.

On the year anniversary of us being accused of witchcraft, we knew we were ready to try the spell we had been working so hard for. Breanne, myself, and Mia joined hands around a fire that morning chanting. This chant was to trap the mayor and his men in their homes. They would not be harmed, but they would forever be prisoners in their own homes.

That night, we snuck back to town to see if the spell had worked. We first snuck to the mayor's house. We could hear him yelling out his window. He was screaming at everyone that he couldn't get out. Our spell had worked! We all smiled and walked away.

Walking hand in hand with my aunt and sister, we traveled to our mother's home. We didn't know if she was still alive, in prison, or just at home. We knocked on the door and no one answered. We opened the door and went inside. Everything looked exactly the same as it did the day we left just with dust on it. Our mother was gone.

On our way back to the cottage, the three of us held hands, but this time we were very sad. Mia and I missed our mother so much. She had given everything for us. When we got to the cottage, we were surprised to see a candle burning in the window.

Breanne opened the door and a smile came across her face. When I realized through the door, I was shocked to see my mother. Both Mia and I ran and hugged her so hard she almost fell over!

"Mother! We took care of the mayor and his men for you, but we thought you were gone forever! How are you here?" "Oh, my sweet girls, I am so proud of you. After you ran away, the mayor put me in prison. Earlier today, somehow all of his guards were drug away by some magical force and they never came back. I was able to escape. I came straight here knowing my sweet sister had a hand in getting me out of that awful place."

What a wonderful way to end a long year! We decided it would be best for us to all live in the cottage. We didn't want other men coming after us and separating us again.

Living with my little sister, my mother, and my amazing aunt was great. We learned ways to use our witchcraft for good. We had spells and potions to cure the sick. Once we felt safe to leave the cottage, we traveled from town to town healing the sick.

We never stayed in one place for too long in fear of being caught. The four of us loved traveling together. We loved helping the sick. We all loved our lives as witches.

**Katie Hines**

*Washington Elementary*

4<sup>th</sup> Grade, 1<sup>st</sup> place

### **One Big Hardship**

“Today is your first game! Aren’t you excited?” Mom squealed as she rubbed my cheeks as if I was a baby saying my first words. “I know I can’t wait!” I said with excitement. “Maybe if you do good, we can get ice cream.” Dad added. “Maybe...” I said slowly looking at my feet. Mom then noticed my feelings. “You’ll do great! Don’t worry about it. I was worried my first game!” Mom explained. “Empathy nerd” I thought. “Okay, Okay.” I said, taking deep breaths. “Are you done yet?” Dad complained. “Oh please” I joked. “That’s how I feel when all you talk about is work!” I said, Mom and Dad laughed while I mocked Dad when he came home from work. A little after that Dad drove us to the field.

“Are you ready?” Coach asked. I grinned and nodded my head. I looked around to see my teammates playing catch. “Hey!” A voice called, I looked behind me. “Hey Presley! Over here!” The voice called again. Still looking behind me, I squinted my eyes and leaned forward, and what I saw was Sophie. Sophie was my best friend ever since I started softball at age 7. I smiled and sprinted towards her and came to a hard stop. “Wanna play catch!” she asked politely. No matter the cause, Sophie always had the best manners. “Sure” I somehow managed to say something while also catching my breath.

We played catch until Coach said that we are to practice batting when he calls our names. I also noticed the field’s grass was completely hideous, not to mention the velvet-ish brown fake grass that goes with it. Then, in the middle of nowhere, Coach blew his whistle. “Alright, has everyone practiced batting?” He asked, we all nodded our heads. “Okay then...our game starts in about 5 minutes. I expect hard work and perfection, we are good enough to win this game! Golden Mitts on 3!” “1!2!3 GOLDEN MITTS!” We all said with great pride. My team and I dashed to the dugout; my Dad was standing in the doorway giving high fives. No softball coach or Dad compares to him.

In the dugout me and Sophie immediately started talking as Coach assigned my teammates where to go in the field. Sophie nor I heard him say our names. “Presley and Sophia!” he yelled. “It’s Sophie actually...” Sophie corrected him. “As I was saying... Presley you will be our starting pitcher, Sophia you will be staying at 3<sup>rd</sup> base.” He smirked. Sophie just laughed and rolled her eyes. Coach laughed too. “Ok you guys need to get to your places!” He finally said. Sophie and I charged out. The crowd was going wild, I could even hear my Mom and Dad. No offense but it sounded like dogs straight up whining in my ear.

We won the round in the outfield, so now we are batting. I patiently waited for my turn. I just was really nervous, I wanted to make my team proud. But what if I didn’t, what if I humiliated myself in front of everyone? I took a deep breath, “Presley, you’re up to bat.” Coach said. I got up from the bench and grabbed my bat. I walked out into the field and got my stance ready. Like I said, I was pretty nervous.

The pitcher got set and launched the ball. I swung and missed the 1<sup>st</sup> pitch, the 2<sup>nd</sup>, and the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> were balls. “Full count!” the umpire said. “Watch the ball!” Mom shouted as the pitcher pitched the ball. I tried to swing the bat but instead the ball crushed my thumb, a shot of pain went through it...Tears dripped down my cheeks, time seemed to come to a stop, my ears were ringing like never before, my whole hand was in pain too. I safely made it to the dugout without collapsing to the ground and yelping in pain.

“Are you alright?” Coach asked. I held up my thumb. Coach looked very concerned. “What happened!?” Mom called rushing towards me. “She must’ve broken her thumb,” Coach managed to say. “I m aware she might need to go to the doctors to check her wrist too.” He said. “Not so bad...” Dad muttered.



I glared at him. “If you couldn’t hear, I’m still groaning in pain!” I said in my mind. My heart raced with anger, happiness was gone. After a while we went to the doctors, and they said my thumb would heal, and my wrist was just twisted. I guess I was excited. It was pretty hard doing things with a broken finger. But I kept on doing hard things. The best thing is, I never gave up.

**Prestigious Connally**

*Wilson Elementary*

4<sup>th</sup> Grade, 2<sup>nd</sup> place.

### **Finding Cupcake**

It was a sunny day, there was no wind, it was perfect, but Eliza could feel it in her bones. There was something going on. It was about to happen, she just knew it. There was a loud bang. A shiver ran down her spine not because of the bang but because she knew where it came from. Then out of the blue, her best friend Cherry came up behind her, crying. She yelled loudly, “Someone broke into my house and stole my beloved puppy, Cupcake!”

“Did you see them!” Eliza asked while reaching for her spy glasses.

“No, I just heard a loud bang and Cupcake was gone!” she screamed.

“Okay, okay, I will find her. Just calm down and show me where you saw her last,,” Eliza said calmly.

Cherry led Eliza to her living room. The window was closed but it wasn’t locked; which was weird because it was open earlier, and when it wasn’t open it was locked. Eliza was scribbling in her notebook. There were paw prints on the floor that led to cupcake’s dog bed and then stopped. Eliza scribbled in her notebook some more. It was almost supper so Eliza called her mom and asked if she could spend the night. Her mom said yes. That night, Eliza couldn’t sleep. She knew she was close to finding the answer. When they woke up and ate breakfast, it hit her and she shrieked “I figured it out!” She ran to the clubhouse in Cherry’s back yard. She sighed and looked at Cherry, “I really thought Cupcake would be there, I just don’t understand!”

“It’s okay Eliza” Cherry said softly.

Cherry’s mom came out and said it was time for Eliza to go home. Eliza turned to Cherry and said “I’m sorry I failed, Cherry...I’m a terrible detective.”

On the ride home Eliza was really quiet. When she got home her mom was waiting at the door holding something, it was Cupcake! Eliza was so happy. They finally found Cupcake.

**Kelsey Robben**

*Holy Family Elementary*

4<sup>th</sup> Grade, 3<sup>rd</sup> place

### **The Prankster**

This is a tale of a very mischievous caterpillar. His name is Brandt. He always pulls pranks on his family! They never appreciated that. I’m his sister. My name is Bella and he always pranks me! It’s never Mom, Dad, or my other caterpillar brother Jeremy. It’s always me! Mom and Dad always say, “He’s just a baby caterpillar having fun!” Uhh no! Have you seen his pranks!?

One time I was crawling around the block and when I came home I opened our front door and there was water on the top of the door and it spilled all over me! The next day he pranked me again! What happened was I was washing myself and then I put some caterpillar conditioner on and Brandt had put caterpillar hair removal in there, so I told my Dad.

“What Dad?” said Brandt.

“Apologize to your sister right now!” Dad shouted in a stern voice.

“Sorry” said Brandt.

“Now get to your room, you’re grounded?”

A few hours later, Mom yelled, “Dinners ready.” We all came downstairs.

“What’s for dinner?” asked Jeremy.

“Extra big leaves?” said Mom.

Yes! That’s my favorite meal! After dinner we settled down to watch a Friday night movie.

“Can I pick the movie!?” I yelled.

“No, I wanna pick the movie!” yelled Jeremy.

“Actually, it’s Brandt’s turn to pick the movie,” said Mom.

“Nah Nah Nah boo boo haha!” mocked Brandt. He knows I hate watching the Trolls movie so he made his move. “I wanna watch Trolls!” yelled Brandt.

“What!” I yelled. “He knows I hate the movie!” I cried.

The next day was Brandt’s birthday and I knew this was the time to get back at him.

“Wakey wakey eggs and bakey.” said Dad.

“What Dad?” said Brandt sleepily.

“It’s your birthday, get up!” said Dad. Brandt jumped out of bed and crawled downstairs as fast as he could. Brandt was having a great time! That evening I knew it was my time to shine. I knew Brandt would go right for the birthday cupcakes so I replace the frosting with ketchup.

“Brandt!” Wait up. Here is a cupcake!” I said, smirking.

“Oh gee thanks!” he said, taking a bite out of it.

“Gross!” he said, spitting it out.

Then it was time to open presents so I took a baby diaper box and put fake snakes inside and put it in the biggest box. “I wanna open the giant one!” said Brandt. He opened it up, “Diapers!” said Brandt thinking Mom and Dad put a present inside. He opened the diaper box and screamed “AHHHH!”

“Pranked you! Hahah!” said I proudly.

“Worst birthday ever!” said Brandt, crawling up the stairs. (Because he is a caterpillar).

I ran up after him. “Brandt, I’m so sorry.” I said.

“Just leave me alone!” screamed Brandt. I did have one more present so I gave it to him. It was slime he’d been wanting. Then we agreed on no more pranking and we lived a happy caterpillar life.

**Sophie Seibel**

*St. Mary’s Elementary*

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

### **The Best Day Ever**

“Honey wake up,” my mom whispered. I awoke to the sight of her face smiling at mine. “Can I just stay home today?” I asked. She said something about me having a field trip to someplace. “Huh?” “You’re going on a field trip to the zoo!” she said excitedly. I didn’t know which one, but I didn’t ask. I was too tired. She left my room, and I laid in my bed for about thirty seconds and realized it was already 6:45. I had to do everything as fast as possible or else the bus might leave without me. I got a pair of black leggings out of my drawer and grabbed a random shirt. I went to my bathroom and brushed my hair and teeth. I only ate a banana for breakfast because I was running out of time. I got my backpack and coat on, hopped in the car and I was off to school.

I got to school and sat in the gym because it was fourteen degrees outside. I found my class and sat with my friends, but I had to stand up right away because that was when the bell rang. We walked up to our lockers, and I saw my brother standing there. I didn’t really see him this morning. Not even in the car! I was

too busy studying my math review page because we had our test tomorrow. We didn't say anything, we just got our things out of our backpacks and put them in our locker. I walked into the classroom and sat my stuff on my desk. I got out my pencil to only find out there was no lead in it. I kept clicking it, but nothing came out. "Ugh," I said frustratedly. I got a new pencil out of my pencil bag and started my morning work. We checked our work, all my answers were correct, of course. Mrs. Beckett told us we were taking a bathroom break before the field trip, so we got lined up. We walked to the bathroom, and all went in.

Once we were done, we walked back to the classroom to talk about rules and expectations. When those boring five minutes were over, we walked to the front of the school, went outside, and hopped on the bus. I wasn't that excited, but it would be fun, I guess. "I think we are going to the new zoo," I told my friends. "Yeah," they said. There were two ways to go, right and left. If we are going to the new zoo we must turn left. But we didn't, we went right. I guess we aren't going to that one. We kept going straight for a while until we turned. The bus parked somewhere but I couldn't tell where we were. We got out in a single file line, and I realized we were at the movies. I was confused but I didn't care because the movies were better anyway.

We walked in the theater, and it was huge! Our teacher said we could each pick out one snack, so I got popcorn. I walked into the room where I saw the movie we were watching. It was a dance movie, so I thought I would like it. When the movie was over, we got back on the bus and I wondered where we were going next. It took us about 10 minutes to get there but it was fine because it was an ice cream shop! I looked at the flavors and I decided I wanted to get the peanut butter chocolate one, it was so good. When everyone finished their ice cream we got on the bus and headed back to school.

We got back and started packing up right away because the movie was long. No one said anything about not going to the zoo. I said bye to my friends, and I was out the door. When my mom picked me up, she asked me how my day was. I said it was the best day ever.

**Charlotte Mergen**  
*O'Loughlin Elementary*  
4<sup>th</sup> Grade, Honorable Mention

### **Lost in the Woods**

Thick white snow barreled down the sky. Pine trees shook under the stress of the winds, and ice covered the ground in a thin coat. No animal or person was in sight, as all were tucked away in shelter to hide from the destruction of the blizzard. All except for one lost girl, running from home.

Rachel fought against the wind and attempted to reach into her coat pocket for her phone, so she could call somebody for help. Although not sure who would save her, she patted down all her pockets and came to the horrifying realization that she had in some way lost her one and only source of communication. Rachel panicked and ran around looking for a way out of the woods. She had been outside at the community park by the time the blizzard started, and, knowing her friend's house was a lot closer than hers, she had run through the forest to take a shortcut straight to the house where she would be safe. The winds were so abrupt she began worrying, and eventually got lost. Now she seemed to be stuck.

"Hello? Anyone?!" Rachel yelled, knowing it would be futile because of how deafening the sounds of the gusts were.

Rachel decided to stop running around and build a fort where she could stay warm. She'd read those survival books before and tried packing snow around into a cave. The snow was easy to compress, so it was perfect for building something to stay in. After about 20 minutes, Rachel had herself a fort, strengthened with ice because of refreezing.

"I need to call for help, but I lost my phone. What am I going to do now?" Rachel thought to herself.

She assumed waiting the blizzard out would be the only way, but the winds were starting to pick up even more, and she knew couldn't last long in the negative temperatures. Just about the time she thought of giving up, a small red cardinal hopped inside her snow cave and chirped. She was surprised to see any life outside in the freezing.

“Yeah, I’m lost! I also misplaced my phone, probably in the snow, and I have no idea what to do now...” Rachel spoke quietly.

She blinked, realizing she had just understood a bird. The small animal had been asking if Rachel had needed help.

Pausing, Rachel said, “I...know what you’re saying. But who are you asking anyway? How would you be able to help me, you’re just a bird.”

The cardinal tweeted and hopped closer to Rachel, examining her. Then, it let out a loud and long warble. Rachel heard leaves shifting and gasped. Deer with soft linen fur leaped gracefully out of bushes, along with snowflake-white rabbits and many other winter animals.

“W-who are all of you?” Rachel asked with shock. She wasn’t scared, they were actually quite beautiful, but a pack of all kinds of animals outside, prey and predator, in a snowstorm isn’t an everyday sight.

At this point, the blizzard was slowing down, and a mama deer jumped up. Rachel realized what they wanted, and she walked out of her snow fort and followed the animals, leading her outside of the woods. Finally, she spotted her friend’s home, she ran for it, and finally made it back. She was out! Rachel knocked on the door, panting and soaked, but she was incredibly happy to be able to make it out fine. “Hi. I’m freezing, just let me in! I’ll tell you the story later.” Her friend let Rachel in, and she warmed up with hot chocolate in the living room while she told her friend what happened.

**Niko Tsereteli**  
*O’Loughlin Elementary*  
5<sup>th</sup> Grade, 1<sup>st</sup> place

### **Snow Fall**

I was walking in the woods at twilight hoping to catch a glimpse of snow or a sign our guardian is okay. My town has been waiting to start the winter feast is a celebration we have on the first snow of the year but sadly, it hasn’t snowed and we think there is something wrong with our winter guardian. Each season has its own guardian but for some reason the winter guardian hasn’t made it snow yet. Even though it’s getting dark I must find our guardian, what if she’s sick?

As I walk along the path, I find a hooded figure talking to someone or something, though I can’t see who. I creep closer trying to see what is going on, ‘Snap!’ I look down to find I accidentally stepped on a branch and the hooded figure snaps her head in my direction and starts running.

“Hey come back!” I call hoping they will stop “I need to ask you some questions!”

“Go away!” says the person in the hood, “This is none of your business!”

With that they vanished. They had to know something otherwise why would they be running? As I get closer to where they disappeared, I notice something silvery on the ground like...glitter?

“Glitter? Why glitter?” I think aloud. I crouch down to get a better look at the glitter and now it doesn’t look like glitter. Is that fairy dust? Magic dust? It must be something that has to do with magic, how else would they have vanished out of thin air? Maybe it was an old witch, but the only witch for miles and miles is the Christmas witch, why would she take the winter guardian? Maybe it’s a fairy, but what would the fairy’s motives be? Is the cold freezing her wings? I don’t know, but what I do know is that I am going to find the winter guardian. As I continued to roam the forest the forest got darker. I have heard tales that if you are out too late you might get attacked by giants. Then again, people in this town like to tell tall tales-  
“ROOOOAAARRR!!!”

“What was that?” I yelp. I see a giant brown blur a mile away from my location. I spin around frantically looking for a place to hide. Then I see a little shack a little ways ahead. I sprint in and slam the door shut. As I look around this hiding place, I see the winter guardian lying on the floor unconscious.

“Winter Guardian! Wake up I’m here to rescue you!” I tell her.

“And who might you be?” She asks groggily barely able to get up.

“I am Rose, I’m here looking for you and now I found you!” I say excitedly.

“Indeed you did,” she says “but where did she go?” The winter guardian looks all around her looking befuddled.

“Who” I asked full of curiosity.

“Me,” says a deep voice.

I turn around to find the person that vanished in the woods earlier.

“Who are you?” I asked.

“Autumn,” says the hooded figure as she pulls off the cloak revealing the fall guardian her deep voice gone now, much lighter, and soft.

“But, but, but why?” I ask not believing what I am seeing and hearing “You are the kindest guardian of the four.

“I might, but I’m also nothing when spring, summer or winter here come along!” she says with disgust.

“I am sorry about that but you can’t just take away winter completely! You and winter need each other, without her you would not have something to go towards. Summer goes to you winter goes to spring you all need each other or there would be no balance!” I go wide eyed as I try to reason with her. She looks at me like I’m crazy and turns to use her magic but then winter cuts in.

“You didn’t deserve that treatment but I don’t deserve to be locked in this awful cabin?” Winter booms.

“I can’t, you won’t, you are ...right,” she sighs defeated “I am not cut out to be mean I am so sorry winter! Please, can you forgive me?”

Winter looks at Autumn with dagger eyes then at me and her gaze softens “Alright” she says “I forgive you, but if you ever and I mean ever do this again you will be taught a lesson.”

“Thank you so much!” cries autumn gratefully. “I promise I will never do this again!”

“This is the best?” I say. “But what about everyone back home they need it to snow to eat the feast, and I told my mom I’d be back for the feast.”

“Look outside,” Winter tells me.

I hurry outside to see it snowing. I spin around laughing in the white powdery dust. Autumn and Winter come outside and use magic to send me back home. In the swirl of snow and fallen leaves I fly home. I hope someone believes me at the feast I have quite the story to tell and this time it’s a true one.

**Elizabeth North**

*O’Loughlin Elementary*

5<sup>th</sup> Grade, 2<sup>nd</sup> place

### **Temple of the Unknown**

Talking to Cooper, Alex stared around at the vivid scene of autumn leaves dancing down the air and orange grass waving in the wind. A sweet aroma of honey and oak filled the air as the two boys rested on the hill, enjoying the view as they chattered about.

Cooper pointed at the sky.

“Look at that one!” Cooper said, shifting to look at a bird-shaped cloud in the sky. After a pause, Cooper twisted his arm to check the time.

“It’s almost time for lunch, let’s go.” He twirled up, waiting for Alex to follow with him, but he just stared at the grass, oblivious to whatever Cooper is saying.

“Come on, Alex. We need to go.”

This time, Alex heard, but he ignored Cooper and reached his hand out slowly. As Cooper stood there, Alex proceeded to lift a small white parcel, stamped with red wax.

“What is that?” Cooper asked, confused.

“I’m not sure. Maybe someone dropped it.”

“Let’s open it at home. Right now we need to go.”

So off they went, running through their small town back home from the hill. Once home, the two friends pulled out the parcel.

“What do you think is inside?” Cooper wondered.

Alex steamed back the seal and pulled a small piece of paper, along with a shiny bronze key. Unfolding the piece of paper, it showed a black-and-white diagram of a compass with a series of dots and dashes to the side. Immediately Alex perked up.

“This is Morse Code! What if it’s a clue to something!” Alex exclaimed.

“Well, what does it say?”

“I remember our teacher taught us about Morse Code on day. I don’t remember it, but I should have a paper with the cipher in my backpack.”

Digging in his bag, Alex removed a sheet with a list of letters beside their Morse Code translation. There sat Alex, scanning through, and decoding ever letter until they successfully had interpreted “--, --- / -, ---, -, -...” Into...

Alex paused.

“It says, Go North.”

“Should we go? North from our house is in the woods. We’ve never gone there before” Cooper stated.

“Well, it’s not very far. We could check out if there’s anything real quick.”

Hence, they slipped their shoes on and headed out for their seemingly short journey. However, their expedition would turn out much longer than they expected.

Trudging through the woods, the boys cautiously took every step deeper into the thicket, glancing around for anything of interest. Passing through a clearing, they slowed down their walking. Right in front of the two stood a grassy pyramid of limestone. Vines overgrew the rock in brush, and cracks lined the stone. In the center was a large crooked door, also made of limestone.

“I don’t know if we should go inside this thing.” Cooper worried.

“It seems empty.” Alex remarked.

Cooper hesitantly followed Alex as he creaked open the door. It was terribly heavy, but Alex managed to creak it open with a grunt and a push. The sound of grinding stone shrieked in their ears, and they both cringed at the noise. Inside was a steep staircase walled with torches.

“I think I see a hallway at the end of the staircase.” Cooper pointed out.

Without saying a word, Alex carefully advanced down the steps in the dimly lit room. Abruptly, a loud switch noise filled their ears. Alex stopped his trip and caught himself but when he looked back, a sharply tipped arrow laid on the place where it happened. Alex and Cooper quickly ran down the steps in surprise.

“Let’s go home! It’s a trap!” Cooper shouted through panting breaths.

This time, another loud screech arose behind them. They snapped their heads back to see a huge chunk of stone blocking the doorway back. Exasperated, Alex looked forward. A long hallway extended out, with dozens of more arrow traps lining the walls, tripwires strung across.

“It’s the only way.”

Alex slowly stepped over the first wire, careful to look around and catch more lines. Weaving through bit by bit, he lost his balance and his ankle slipped back straight into a tripwire. They flinched as the arrow released, and Alex lurched forward, setting off a dozen more traps before falling flat on his face. Cooper almost would have laughed if they weren’t dealing with deadly arrows. Nonetheless, Alex was at the end of the hallway, and it was Cooper’s turn to cross.

“That’s one way to get through,” Cooper joked.

This time, Cooper got across without any problems, and they were ready to open the next door. Once they pushed open the stone door, a heavy piston sound emerged, and maces on chains started swinging from the ceiling.

Alex looked around, “Hey, there’s a boulder over there. Maybe we could block the maces if you help me push.”

Alex and Cooper both pushed the boulder to the swinging mace's directory. They jumped back, and the spiked ball smacked against the boulder and lost its momentum. Once they pushed the rock forward, the chain just hung, not moving. They repeated this process for the last two, and made it to the end.

"One last door."

They didn't even have to push it open this time, it just crumbled on its own. Stepping over the rubble, the two boys looked forward. In front of them stood a small room with a pedestal inside, with shiny pieces of gold scattered on top. Alex laughed with joy. Treasure! He pranced to the pedestal, but something felt off. Alex looked closer at the riches.

"This is all plastic!" Alex stated, disappointed. "We did all this for nothing!"

"There's something on the side!" Cooper said.

On the side of the pedestal, a hidden keyhole was carved into the stone. Alex jumbled in his pocket for the key they had gotten from the parcel, and he pushed it in and turned. A rumble shook the ground, and a stone wall in front of them pulled up. There was another pedestal with a wooden box, along with a ladder leading up.

Now excited again, they ran towards the second pedestal. The box on top was made with polished mahogany, and it had bronze accents around it. The wood at the top had a large 'Q' imprinted in it, and Alex had estimated the box was about a half-foot cube in size. Lifting the top, they gasped. Dazzling gold coins, filled to the brim. However, there wasn't much time to talk as they needed to get out.

Alex and Cooper rushed up the ladder until they reached a stone trapdoor at the top. Alex pushed it up, and warm sunlight streamed through. Taking in a breath of fresh air, they each propped themselves to the top, back into the woods.

"If we go the other way we'll run into the entrance again." Cooper thought aloud.

They didn't have to walk long before they came across the same pyramid that they went in through. Then, a hooded man with monotonous clothing ran up to the two, panting.

"Greetings!" The man said through breaths.

"Who are you?" They backed away.

"Oh sorry. My name's Quirrel. I'm the owner of this here box. You see, recently my treasure was stolen by thieves. These thieves had already known the temple was here, so they decided to hide it in the pedestal room. Although I know the temple like the back of my hand, I am far too clumsy to navigate the traps, so I gave you a note leading you there, along with the pedestal key."

"But why should we trust you?" Cooper asked.

"Well, the box has a Q on it, which is my initial.

Alex hesitated, but passed Quirrel the box.

"Thank you. And as a reward for going through all this..." Quirrel handed the boys three gold coins. "Anyways, I must go now." Quirrel ran.

"Wait!" I still have more questions?" Cooper yelled, however he was already gone.

The next day, Alex sat alone, examining the coins. They each had Quirrel's name written all over. Suddenly, the doorbell rang. Alex swung the front door open, but no one was there. He looked down, and on the doormat lay...

...another key.

**Niko Tsereteli**  
*O'Loughlin Elementary*  
5<sup>th</sup> Grade, 3<sup>rd</sup> place

## The Memories at Raven

### Part 1

“Emberlie Jane!” my mom yelled.

I skipped down the stairs, turned the corner around the kitchen, and burst through the screen door. I sprinted across the clearing, made my way into the woods, and ran past the treehouse. I heard my Mom shouting at me from the porch.

“We need to talk!”

I ran faster. Tears soaked through my cheeks. I could taste them in my mouth; they were salty on my lips.

I found my tree, and I climbed to the top, I climbed 269 feet, all the way up to my branch. It’s a Raven’s Tower, 298 feet high.

I sat on my branch, staring at the clouds, and Old Wesley’s barn in the deep wood.

I turned my head away finally, and noticed a green ribbon tied to the branch below. I scooted forward a bit, placed my tippy toes on the big branch, and lowered myself down.

This was Winnie’s branch. There was a tiny tree hollow where the branch and trunk came together. Winnie used to put her collected items in there. Coins, keychains, arrowheads, and nail polish. I remembered the ribbon she used to wear in her hair.

“When did she put this here?” I thought. The last time we were here together was last Saturday. October 4th. The night she died.

A memory of that night set into my head,

I held in my breath, racing to the top as fast as I could climb. Winnie was right behind me, getting closer!

“Wait!”

“Eat my dust!” I yelled down at her.

I got to my branch just before her. She settled on her branch and smiled up at me with her bright teeth and green eyes.

“Come up here!”

I offered my hand and raised her up to sit with me. We stared at the moon in awe.

“It’s so beautiful!” I said.

She shook her head. But I could tell she was distracted. I didn’t do anything though. I just swung my legs like a coward. I watched a tear roll down her cheek a moment later, it sparkled on her skin from the moon’s light.

“What’s wrong?”

Then she pulled up her sleeve...

The memory faded away faster than it had come. If only I could have seen what was on her arm. Maybe I would discover a secret that she had meant for me?

An hour later I climbed down from the tree and headed home. I knew my father would be mad, and I deserved it. I shouldn’t have ran out against the rules.

“Emberlie?” my mom called from the top of the stairs. “Is that Em?” I watched her come down the stairs, my eyes locked on hers.

“Mom, I know what you’re gonna say!” my voice squeaked.

“Don’t worry. I just want you to stay here until your father gets back... You shouldn’t have run out! It’s a rule for your own safety!”

“I know!”

“Here’s your Dad now. And don’t get upset! It’s your own mistake!” Mom warned.

My Dad walked into the house. At first he didn’t notice I was there. He had a baby blue tank top on, dirty jeans, and his arms were muscular, covered with dirt. His blonde hair was ratted and sweaty.

“You know the rules! You’re still not back to normal!”

“I’m fine, Dad!”

“You woke up from a coma just four *days* ago! You’ll stay in bed for the next two days!”

“Dad, no!” I cried.

“You’re lucky. She died, and all you still care about is that stupid tree! It put you in a coma!” He cursed. “You shouldn’t be climbing that. You might fall again! Shoot! You could die, Emberlie! You almost did.”

“You’re not gonna cut it down?!”

Oops. Mistake.



He shook his head. "I might." He walked away. He got to my bedroom door and said, "Two days you'll stay in this room." And he slammed the door.

## Part 2

I felt like a jailbird for those two terrible days. My room was very small, and all I could see was my tree sticking out of the middle of the wood from the window. I was scared to look out, in case Dad had cut it down. Before the first night all I could think about was the fall I had taken. Winnie and I had been climbing, people told me we had fallen. I had been in a coma for a week, but Winnie had died. Was it my fault?

I missed her so much. She was the only friend I'd ever had. And since people thought that I was responsible, she'd probably be my only friend. Of course, I don't remember, that whole night is gone. I don't have any memories of what might have happened.

Although my dreadful hours spent there did give me time to think, I got another wave of memories of the night Winnie died.

The marks on her arm were raw and looked like fresh cuts. I looked at my friend. She was so beautiful when she was happy. I noticed that most of the time it was only when she was with me. I felt so bad for her. She didn't deserve to be whipped.

Winnie lived with Old Wesley. He sounds like a nice guy. But he's not. And Winnie actually didn't *live* with Wesley, she's his maid and lived in his barn. He treated her terribly from what she told me. He would whip her and make her bleed bad. She didn't have any girl's clothing, so she wore overalls and oversized shirts and pants. But she's pretty for the shape that she was put through. She was an orphan once, and Wesley's wife offered Winnie a home. Until she died. Then she was left with Old Wesley.

"What are you gonna do?" I asked.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Well, he can't do that! Does it hurt?"

She wiped her tears. "Can I talk?"

"Yeah..." I whispered.

An owl hooted somewhere nearby.

"I told the Master that..."

"Hey! Don't call him that! It's not right!"

She choked, "I told Old Wesley that I wouldn't be coming back. Ever. So I have to run away."

"Oh, well there's room in our house. You can bunk with me!"

"No. I'm running away"

I didn't understand. "What!"

"I have to Emberlie! Understand. I do!"

"You're my only friend! Please stay!"

"Emberlie, please, I've got to go!"

"I thought we were friends!"

"Don't get mad at me!"

My hands grasped her collar bone. And she wrapped her hands around a branch. "Emberlie, pull me up!" She screamed and I watched her fall 269 feet to her death.

I scrambled up the limbs. The wet branches scrape against my face. Just four more limbs and I was there.

I situated myself on Winnie's branch. This was where it happened. Where she lost her life because of my selfishness. My hands were trembling. I knelt next to the tree hollow and started digging through Winnie's things. At the end of the hollow, where I knew it would be, was Winnie's diary. I flipped through the pages but found nothing except an odd map of the woods folded into the diary.

A pink crayon trail led right to my house on the map. I set it aside.

It all sank in as I looked around me. I'd pushed her, then had fallen myself.

"No!" I cried. This had to stay secret...I'd pushed my friend to death.

**Taryn Boydston**

*St. Mary's Grade School*

6<sup>th</sup> Grade, 1<sup>st</sup> Place

## The Possibilities are Endless

“Mom!” I yelled. I was crying and squeezing my pillow. “Mom!”

“Danny! Please! Your mom isn’t here right now! Hold still!”

“It hurts!”

“I know!” She groaned.

“No you don’t!” I hugged the pillow tight.

“It’s gonna help.”

“Maybe. I’ll be fine. I can deal with it. Being paralyzed, not so bad.” She looked at me angrily.

“Oww!” I yelled.

“I’m almost done, Danny.” She pinched my leg and wrung my skin like a washcloth. It stung bad. Then she massaged my leg *hard* with her knuckles.

“Alright! Done!”

“Thanks a lot, Georgie.”

“Miss Morris to you.” she replied.

Moments later my mom walked into my room, late again. She and Miss Morris, my nurse, talked for a few moments, but it seemed like hours. And Miss Morris must have ratted me out with bad news, because Mom kept glancing at me with her “*I can’t believe you!*” look through the door.

When that business was done, Mom came to talk to me. She seemed angry.

“I know what you’re gonna say!”

“You shouldn’t complain about your treatment. I feel like you don’t want to get better!”

“What if that’s how I feel? Does it matter?”

“What’s this about?” my Mom scolded me. “I’m not going easy on you because you’re like this. You’re doing it yourself! So you don’t want to get better? That’s your fault if you’ve got any regrets later on.”

“Nevermind.”

“Good.”

Silence.

“Do you want to try more exercises?”

“Great! Let’s do it!” I said sarcastically.

“I’m serious Danny.”

Hi. I’m Danny Rack. I’m thirteen years old and I am paralyzed from the waist down. I’m not that concerned about it. But my family acts as if I’m going to die. I can’t stand that. I’ve been at the hospital for only seven days. But I’m like a helpless one year old who’s just learning to walk. Except I’m five feet tall. I love being so tall. Well at least I’m taller than everyone else I know. I’ll be in and out of this hospital soon enough. I don’t know why everyone is overreacting. I can’t stand that either! My mom was always so worried, and I kinda used her to protect me from the nurses. Like earlier, when I was screaming her name. Miss Morris does exercises with me. They’re supposed to help my muscles loosen and relax. She massages my legs and feet and puts heat pads around my legs during the night. I don’t see that helping a lot. I can feel her massaging and the heat of the pads, but I’m not able to even wiggle one toe yet.

It was night again. The end of the seventh day. I’ve been paralyzed for eight days. It was nine o’clock, I think. There wasn’t a clock in my room, so I took a guess from the sunset light out the window. I needed to roll over so badly, but my legs were so helplessly heavy. I’ve been secretly trying to move them but haven’t succeeded. My pillow was making my hair all fuzzy and was driving me nuts.

“I can’t wait to get out of here!” I mumbled. My room was *so* quiet.

The next morning, I woke up and my Mom and brother were already there.

As soon as I sat up my brother said, “We have a surprise!”

“Huh?” I rubbed my eyes.

Mon said, “Come with us to the first floor!”

We went down one floor in the elevator.

“What happened?” I asked Levi, my brother. He just smiled.

“Look!” Mom shouted. I saw through the window...My car! My Dad’s silver car! He honked the horn.

“Dad!”

“Your doctor said it was okay for you to come home for Thanksgiving! Your cousins are at home waiting.” I gave Levi a high five.

Getting in the car was a struggle, and my wheelchair didn't fold easily enough to fit in the trunk. Dad put it on his lap. It was funny. I didn't tell anyone, but just sitting in the car was a challenge. I didn't have any strength to keep myself up when the car hit a bump, or we turned. I had to use all of my arm strength to keep myself balanced. It hurt just a little. But now I'm glad I did upper body strength exercises with Mom and Miss Morris. I wanted my legs back so badly. I realized this, but I couldn't say this to Mom or Dad. They'd flip for sure! They'd say, "We told you!"

We finally got home and my three cousins greeted me at the front door. My uncle and Dad helped my Wheelchair and I up the porch steps. This was going to be hard.

I couldn't go upstairs, Dad didn't want to carry me every ten minutes, plus, some of my cousins were up there sleeping in my room. My family watched television and my cousins braided my hair. When it was time to eat they tried to get me on a chair, but just like in the car, I couldn't keep my balance. So I ate beside them, and I felt like a dog. Bryce, a one-year-old, was sitting higher than me. I could have used a highchair. I told Bryce this secretly during his nap. Anyways, I slept on the couch at night. I really missed my hospital bed. Actually.

In the morning, before anyone else was awake, Mom massaged my legs but left the pads on. The worst part of this whole "memorial" was the Thanksgiving meal. I usually help with most of the meal. But I couldn't do anything to help. I love to cook. All I did was slide the cherry pie into the oven (I was eye level with the oven). I watched them cut vegetables, mash the potatoes, make brownies, fry the pheasant and butter the rolls.

They finished the job and we sat down to eat. Aunt April, Mom and I said the prayers. My dad gave a toast to me. How embarrassing!

"...And to Danny. Our brave little woman. Lord please help her and the rest of us to get through this. All we want is our girl back." He winked at me.

"Amen!"

I stared straight into Mom's eyes. Then I wheeled myself out of the room. Mom came behind me. I sat on the bed with Mom. I tried hard to hold any tears in.

"What happened?!"

"You heard Dad!"

"It was lovely! He thought it would make you happy."

One tear escaped. Shoot!

"He said he just wants his girl back!" I said this, knowing the risk. "I'm still the same! The same, but I'm a retard!"

"Danny! I'm sure your dad didn't mean it that way! Plus, you've told us many times how being paralyzed couldn't do anything bad to *you*... Now I know it can't because you are *brave*! All we want is to see you walk again!"

I was so frustrated at the moment. I was clenching my fists. Being mad...made me feel great.

"OH MY...DANNY!" She shrieked. "YOUR FOOT!"

I looked at my foot in awe. It was moving...shaking!

She immediately moved me into the dining room and I showed off my wiggling foot. They decided to put candles on the pie and let me blow them out.

"You guys are ridiculous!"

There's a chance that I might walk again someday. But even if I didn't, I knew that my parents love me, even if I'm in a wheelchair.

**Taryn Boydston**

*St. Mary's Grade School*

6<sup>th</sup> Grade, 2<sup>nd</sup> Place

## All in a Rock's Life

Life as a rock- it is everything from boring and the dullest time imaginable to insanely exciting physical changes that shatter all memories of mundanity into a trillion smithereens. Yet, it all takes millennia to accomplish successfully. There's also an element of mystery, due to the unpredictability of what stage of the rock cycle you will advance to next. Today, I, Henry the magnificently magical magma making marble take you on my adventures as a metamorphic born rock, going through stage after stage of the rock cycle, until I transform into metamorphic rock once more. Before we get into the story though, let's get this straight: rocks do actually have vocal chords. Therefore, we can talk, it's just too high pitch for you humans to hear. Now, to the story!

Chicago, Illinois- a place you probably weren't expecting a tale of a rock's life to begin. But, that's where I was born. Sort of. I mean, rocks don't have wombs, so it's not like my parents literally gave birth to me. They just got heated up and had pressure applied to their bodies to create me. So really, my parents are part of me. Therefore, when my parents' dialogue is mentioned, it means part of me as a rock is speaking. It's out of this world bizarre, I know. That's undeniable. But it's true. And don't expect me to call them "mom" and "dad," whatever those words humans use mean. No, we rocks call them by their names. So if you hear me call somebody "James" or "Claudia," I'm referring to my parents.

So, a lot of people begin the rock cycle with igneous rock. But, if you're a rock, you can be born at any stage of the rock cycle, even sediment or magma. So, therefore, I can actually start at metamorphic rock. In fact, a human could start the rock cycle at metamorphic rock. But anyway, like I said earlier, our story begins in Lincoln, Nebraska, where I lay beneath the corner of O Street and 84th Street. I've been in the area for 894 years now. That probably seems like a very long time, but we rocks don't travel fast, and we can essentially live forever, assuming we never end up in some rock collection, or in some university lab in Philadelphia or someplace, or in a rock bed we can't escape from. That's when our cycle ends.

Anyway, we can finally get into the action packed adventures I came here to tell you. It all began for the ninth time in my life, when I was conversing with my good friend Bobo, when we began to slowly but effectively melt into a thick, liquid magma out of the blue. This was nothing new, as I was 23,098 years old, and Bobo was 23,457 years old.

But anyway, we began melting, and we finished doing so after a few years.

"Woo wee!" said Bobo when the process was completed. "That one felt extra hot!"

"I know!" I concurred. "I measured the temperature of the heat this time, and it was approximately 347° hotter than the last heat we experienced!"

"Wow! That's insane!" said Bobo.

"I know!" I replied. So now, we were at the magma stage of the rock cycle, and on the second one out of five in the cycle. However, since magma is a liquid, and flows wherever it pleases, Bobo and I got separated, which was okay, since rocks are really quite lucky if they get to travel through the cycle with friends and family, something quite rare indeed. Anyway, I ended up in a volcano, and after a few centuries, it erupted, and I transformed into lava, which began to cool quickly, and before another year had passed, I had cooled into extrusive igneous rock, or igneous rock on the Earth's surface (if I stayed underground, I would eventually turn into intrusive igneous rock).

There I lay, for several weeks, until a strange looking human came romping around nearby. "Now what do we have here?" he asked before walking in my direction. My heart sank. I knew from this that I must have turned into an interesting rock. That meant I might end up in some collection in a research laboratory where I wouldn't be able to complete my cycle. I wouldn't see any of those close to me ever again if that happened, unless if some one in a billion miracle occurred. However, to my thankful amazement, the approaching geologist stopped about six feet away from where I lay. "Nah, that's just some obsidian" he said before walking off to investigate some rocks higher up on the volcano. A bomb of relief exploded in my soul, firing gratitude all throughout my body. I had just escaped a reality of every rock's worst nightmare. And that's something I can't wait to tell Bobo.

Two months later, a torrential downpour came barreling down from the heavens, causing the processes of weathering and erosion to go into effect on me. The weathering of the rain eroded me into sediments, and carried me into a fast flowing river, which carried my old body parts downstream to a canyon, where they were deposited, and began to compact with other rocks' pieces, before being buried, and cemented together. So I now had a sandstone body made partly with my old parts, and partly with pieces of other rocks.

I remained a sedimentary rock for another fourteen years, before I pushed down so deep, by so much pressure from the rock above me, that I reached the California mantle, where the temperatures soared to scorching

heights. Slowly, all that heat and pressure transformed me back into a metamorphic rock, like I was at the beginning of the story. And just like back then, I became marble. That meant my cycle was complete. I had been through one of the longest processes on Earth-again. And that is my exciting tale of the rock cycle.

**Josiah Olmstead**  
*Hays Middle School*  
6<sup>th</sup> Grade, 3<sup>rd</sup> Place

## **The Cure**

### **Part One**

Brody's whole life he's had cancer. He would try his best at things but he felt like the whole world was against him. He would try out for sports, theatre, just anything he could do, but it always ended up being a horrible time for him. He wasn't able to do sports because they said it was too much of a risk. Every time he would do any other physical group activity, he would have to go to the hospital putting him behind in class. Until he got an unexpected call.

### **Part Two**

*Ring! Ring! Ring!* The phone rang and Brody answered it. "Hello," Brody said curiously.

"Hello Brody," said a familiar voice excitedly.

"Hey Doctor Caden!" Brody exclaimed.

"I need you to bring your parents to the phone," said Dr. Caden.

"Hello?" Said Brody's parents in unison.

"Hey! I need all of you to come down to the hospital for Brody," Dr. Caden told them.

"Why?" said the parents in unison yet again.

"We may have something for Brody to get better!" They hung up the phone and rushed to the hospital.

### **Part Three**

When they all got to the hospital, they ran up to the door and ran in. "Hello, we are here to see Dr. Caden," said the mom excitedly.

"He should be in his office," the nurse at the front desk said.

The parents replied, "Thanks!" As they rushed to his office. They knocked on the door and he welcomed them in.

### **Part Four**

As they walked in Dr. Caden told them to take a seat. Brody could barely keep himself in his seat knowing that he might be cured. "Good evening," said Dr. Caden, "it seems you guys got my call!"

"Yes we did!" Brody exclaimed excitedly, "sorry, I am just excited."

"No worries, I would be too," Dr. Caden replied. Dr. Caden went through how the medication would work, "But," said Dr. Caden "you will be required to stay in the hospital for as long as this medication takes."

Brody looked down at his hands and thought, '*Do I want to stay here for this long?*' After he thought about it long and hard he decided that he would...

### **Part Five**

As he sat in his hospital bed he thought back to when he was younger, he remembered not being like the other kids and watching as they ran and played. Kids would come up to him making fun of him for being different and just sitting all day. He would cry himself to sleep and have dreams of being like the other kids. As he drifted back to reality, he sat in his hospital bed waiting for his parents to enter the room.

### **Part Six**

"Hello!" Said Dr. Caden.

"Hey," Brody replied.

"How long do you think it will take?" said Brody.

"There is no telling how long it will take," Dr. Caden said, "It could take weeks, month, possibly years."

“Oh,” replied Brody, “I hope it works.” His parents came to visit him and make sure he was ok. That night he fell asleep.

### **Part Seven**

Brody has now been in the hospital for a year now. He has celebrated his birthday in the hospital and has had every other holiday in the hospital. As he was going around the hospital he made a new friend. His new friend's name was Ethan. They saw each other every day and played video games, watched movies and tv, and just had fun. One day they pranked a doctor but it didn't go as planned. They planted a bucket of slime on the door while a doctor was coming in.

### **Part Eight**

Brody has been in the hospital for two years. He sits in his hospital bed hoping for the best, he waits and waits but there is never news of his cancer being cured. His friend Ethan was out of the hospital by now, but still visited Brody. As Dr. Caden walks in Brody sits in the same spot not even looking at him. “Hello Brody,” says the doctor in a sad voice.

“Hey,” says Brody with a voice of no interest.

“We are sorry to tell you, but the medication is not going to work. Brody looks at him with anger and doubt in his eyes.

“So I've been here for this long and it won't work,” says Brody in a content voice.

“Yes,” said Dr. Caden, “you may pack up your stuff and get ready to go.”

Brody gets up and goes to his laundry. His parents rush in and ask Dr. Caden what happened. He explained it to them and they helped him with his bags. As they walked out Ethan was there to greet them and come with them.

### **Part Nine**

“Happy Birthday to you! Happy Birthday to you! Happy Birthday dear, Brody! Happy Birthday to you! Yay!” Says all of Brody's family in unison.

“Happy 18<sup>th</sup> birthday Brody,” says Brody's mom, “I can't believe you're this old!”

“Thanks guys,” said Brody weakly. As he opened his presents everyone watched patiently. As Brody said thanks to everyone he asked, “Can we eat cake now, or what?”

Before Brody knew it, it was the next day. His birthday was also around when he graduated, so he just had to wait a week until he graduated. When he graduated, he wanted to go to medical school. Brody had been going to college for a while now, he had been studying to become an oncologist. It was now close for him to graduate college and become an oncologist.

### **Part Ten**

When Brody finished college and graduated, he immediately started his research on the cure. As he researched the DNA of different cancers he would fail, fail, and fail, but each time he failed he did it again. He tried a new approach each time. As he researched, he got sicker and sicker. Brody had reached stage four of cancer. Even as he got sicker he still researched. He was sitting at his desk and he was running tests, as he watched to see he saw the cancer cells slowly dying. He immediately called his coworkers and family, he even called Dr. Caden. Even though he found the cure it was too late for him. He had gotten too sick. Before he died he saw all of his friends and he knew he left his mark forever on the world.

**Bode Holloway**

*Hays Middle School*

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

## The Doll Maker

I remember the day like it was yesterday. I made the worst decision of my life; we were in our car to go to a brand-new town.

“Piper how are you doing back there?” my dad called out.

“I’m fine, it’s just I don’t want to move, I want to live our old town it was perfect.”

“Come on, I know you will love this town. Your brothers are excited!” I looked beside me at my two younger brothers, they were both clapping like we were going to the carnival or something.

“That’s because they are only 3 and 7, they don’t know any better, but I have to leave my best friends.”

“I know you’re mad, but we are almost there look out your window” my mom said.

I peeked out my window to look at the luxurious town, but it was not beautiful like in the pictures I saw, it was run down, and everything looked abandoned.

“Mom, this is nothing like the pictures!” I said.

“Yeah, mom I thought we would have our own pool,” called out Oliver.

My mom asked my dad, “are you sure we are in the right place?”

“I think so. That sign over there says Riverside, so I hope.”

I started having butterflies in my stomach. This does not look like the pictures, I’m getting a bad feeling.

We kept driving in silence because I think we were all trying to process what was going on.

“Ok, this is the address everyone gets out of the car” my dad said.

The house was huge! It was run down, painted black and the windows were broken. I walked up to the house, and it opened. I suddenly got a chill and I shivered.

“Well, I guess we are staying here for a while. Until me and your mom fix this place up.” My dad called out as he was bringing boxes inside for us.

Oliver ran to the backyard and yelled “cannonball!”

“OLIVER GET OUT OF THE POOL!” My mom said, running after him.

I walked inside as my dad went back outside to grab more boxes. “Wait up dad!” I yelled at him.

He turned around and asked, “what’s wrong Piper?”

“Don’t you get a weird feeling about this town?”

“No, not really but I had a feeling you would say that, so we let you have the master bedroom.”

“Really? Cool I’m going to go check it out!”

“Ok have fun.”

I ran up the stairs until I saw a wide-open room. I walked in, and it was huge, pink, and it looked beautiful! I went and sat on the bed when I noticed a diary on the bed. I picked it up and it said on the front cover “This belongs to Annabel.” I looked through it and saw that it was empty. “Well might as well keep this for myself to write about this weird place” I thought. I threw it back on the bed and looked around some more.

There was a vanity, a walk-in closet, and my own bathroom. I finally don’t have to share with my brothers!

My dad brought in my things from home and asked, “How do you like it?”

“It’s amazing! But you did say I could paint it? I cannot live with pink walls.”

“Of course, we can go pick out what color you want tomorrow,” he answered.

“That’s good!”

He then told me, “Dinner is ready.”

I followed him out of my room.

My mom had made the dinner table so nice to celebrate, but I didn’t think we should be celebrating this creepy place.

“Oh, there you are!” My mom said, “I made your favorite.”

“Thanks, mom,” I answered and sat down.

My parents tried to make small talk, but too much was on my mind. We finished eating and I went to explore the rest of the house a little bit while my parents were cleaning the dishes.

I walked along the creaky floor to the living room. It was filled with black bricks and a rusty fireplace with ashes on the floor from the fireplace being open. I walked over by the front door to see if we had a neighbor who I could be friends with. I walked out and suddenly got a chill run down my spine. I was so used to Florida, where it was warm all the time, but was freezing here.

The sky was beautiful, the dusk was amazing! I shook my head to get back to what I was doing. I peeked my head around the corner and saw that we did have neighbors, but their house didn’t look like a little girl lived. Their house was small and white, the paint was chipping.

I carefully walked over to the small cottage, but as I got closer, I felt it getting smaller so I ran back home and closed the door as fast as I possibly could.

“Oh, I thought you had left the house forever,” my mom said looking at me.

“No, I’m fine I’m just going to go get ready for bed,” I answered still shaking.

“Ok, well goodnight” she said hugging me tight.

“Goodnight mom,” I walked up to my room petrified that something was following me. I went to my room, and I picked up the diary. I flipped to the first page, and it said, “I know you saw my playhouse don’t be afraid, come play for I am the doll maker.”

I threw the diary down! “I need to stay calm it is probably just me” I said to myself.

Suddenly my dad walked in, “Hi, Piper,” he said holding my little brother. “Lucas tell your sister goodnight.”

“Goodnight, Pip,” he said because he can’t say my name right.

“Goodnight” I said drifting off to sleep.

The next morning, I woke up scared, I thought the dairy was on my face, but it was just a note from my parents saying, “Dear Piper, we went to the store. We will be back soon. From Mom.”

I told myself I wouldn’t go back to that other house, but I think I have too. I got out of bed, got dressed, and brushed my teeth and hair. “Well Piper looks like you’re going back over to that creepy house,” I said to myself. I put on my favorite hat and ran outside.

I opened the front door and it creaked. I carefully walked out and locked the door behind me. As I walked closer and closer to the house and then I heard a little girl talking.

“Come play Piper,” said the voice.

“How do you know my name?” I yelled. “I know you called me here.”

“Well, yes you are right! Now it’s either we play in my dollhouse, or you will have a horrible consequence.”

“Well, I didn’t come here to play,” I said as I got closer to the house.

Suddenly, a little doll looking girl came near me. I backed up because she was coming closer to me “I guess you get a consequence!”

I watched petrified as my parents walked towards me with button eyes “STOP!” I yelled.

I reached into my pocket and found a triangle. I threw it in the air, and everything turned white. I don’t remember anything after that, except for being in a hospital bed. I do know that she got away, but I will get the doll maker back.

**Avery Kieffer**

*Hays Middle School*

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

### **Rosie**

As I was curling my hair, my younger sister Elana came into my room, “So, these guys and I were gonna hang out after the game. Would you cover for me if mom asks?”

She’s been hanging out with these senior boys every weekend. I thought it was weird, given she just turned 15.

“Sure,” I said, “but if I get in trouble, I’m blaming you.”

She rolled her eyes and walked out.

After the game, I drove around with some of my friends. As we were talking and listening to music, my mom called. “Where are you?” she asked, sounding frantic.

“Right outside town,” I answered.

“Come home now,” she said, like I was in trouble.

I rolled my eyes and looked at my friends, “Okay, I’ll be home soon.” I hung up.

“What was that about?” my friend Ally asked.

I sighed, “I think my mom found out about my sister hanging out with these seniors. I have to go home.”

After my friends dropped me off, I walked into the house, my heart racing. I expected my mom to be yelling at my sister, but she was crying.

“Where’s Elana?” I asked.



“Eleanor, your sister was in an accident and passed away,” my dad answered.

My heart dropped and my knees became weak. It felt like a bad dream; the world grew dark and quiet.

I stood up to go to my room, passing my parents and ignoring their stares.

I sat down on my bed, looking at the unplugged curling iron and the memory of my sister coming into my room. I realized that was the last I talked to her. It was my fault. I should’ve said no to covering for her.

I sat there for at least an hour, blaming myself for what happened.

I woke up the next morning feeling gross. As I sat up, my head was pounding. I looked in the mirror, puffy-eyed. I walked to the kitchen to see my mom and dad standing there staring into their coffee.

“Morning,” I said, almost in a whisper, my eyes moving from one parent to the other. They both jumped a little as they turned around to look at me. They looked worn out.

“Good morning,” my mom said with a forced smile.

“So,” my dad started, “we’re having the funeral on Tuesday.”

“Why?” I asked, looking up at him.

“What do you mean?” Mom asked.

“She died less than 12 hours ago, and you don’t even seem to care! You seem eager to forget about her already!” I regretted it the moment I spoke but couldn’t stop.

My mom took a breath, “That’s not fair. You’re the one who walked away last night, and you’ve been sleeping all day! It’s two in the afternoon, Eleanor!”

I’d been crying for a while at this point. I looked at them both before I walked back to my room feeling exhausted.

A sense of *deja vu* hit me as I sat down on my bed looking at the floor, the same I’d done the night before.

That night I went to bed feeling worse than the night before; I felt disgusting inside.

My parents tried to talk to me, but every time they came into my room, I’d pretend to be sleeping. I felt too ashamed to look at them.

It was the morning of the funeral, and I didn’t want to go. The whole school was going to be there.

Besides myself, I blame the boys she was hanging out with that night for Elena’s death. If they weren’t drinking or speeding, she’d be alive.

Once the funeral was done, we had lunch for everyone. I sat there watching everyone happy, living their lives as if they weren’t at a funeral. Everyone kept saying, “I’m sorry for your loss... It must be hard... It must be so difficult for your parents, losing a child.” They didn’t really care, though, because they went right back to smiling and enjoying life, unlike my sister.

My parents probably thought I was a disappointment. I was lashing out at everyone and ignoring my friends. Last night when I went downstairs, I heard my parents talking, “It’s not healthy. You heard the way she talked to me. It’s like we lost both of our daughters.”

I felt crushed as I stood there, thinking.

My mom came up to me, “I was looking for you! Why don’t you go say goodbye to your friends and thank them for coming?” she nodded to the mob of people.

“Can you?” I said looking her in the eyes for the first time in a while.

I could see she was hurt. “You haven’t been yourself lately. You used to always want to talk to Catie and Ally,” she said, placing her hand on my arm.

“Well, things change,” I said, pulling my arm away from her.

I walked up to Catie and Ally, thanking them for coming and told them I’d be back to school on Monday.

Monday came faster than I thought it would. I told Mom I didn’t feel well and didn’t feel like I could go to school.

Tuesday came, and I still didn’t want to go, but I knew I had to. Once I got to school, I put a smile on my face that faded away as the day went on. The more that people came up to me, the harder it was to smile and act happy.

The next day was harder than the last. Everyone was back to leaving me alone and not caring about her. Yesterday that was all I wanted, but today it was the opposite.

The next couple of weeks went on like that, slowly getting worse as time went on. My mom started to let me drive myself to school, and I started ditching school and pushing my friends away more.

One day, my mom and dad surprised me with a dog. “This is Rosie,” my mom said with a smile, handing me the small, golden puppy.

“This is your way of replacing Elena?” I asked, holding the dog and looking at my parents.

“That’s not it at all, we’re just trying to make you...” she paused, “happy again.”

I knew exactly what she meant, but I couldn't agree. "Thanks for trying, I guess," I said walking back to my room still holding Rosie.

My phone lit up from a message from the group chat. I opened it to see my friends telling me I've been distant lately.

I responded back with a simple "okay" and layed the puppy on the blankets next to my bed.

My mom then texted, "She's a golden retriever and was the last one to be picked from the litter. Just thought you might want to know."

I laid down and fell asleep.

The next day at school, I went up to Catie and Ally to apologize, "I'm sorry for being so distant. When Elana died, it happened so fast I didn't have time to process it. I'm sorry."

"It's okay," they both said smiling.

"Hey, I got a dog," I said as we started to walk to our class.

"What?" they both said.

"Yeah, a golden retriever. Her name is Rosie," I said, showing a picture.

**Delanie Sanders**

*TMP-Marian Jr. High*

7<sup>th</sup> Grade, 1<sup>st</sup> Place

### **Sol Purpose**

Michael Kerreling, a former American astronaut, flew 50,000 feet above the plains of Europe tied to a chair in a Gulfstream jet. His destination had been hidden from him by his captors, who he assumed wanted him for his advanced knowledge of engineering. So far, two muscular men in all black suits sitting across from him had been the only contact he'd had for the past three days since his capture in Berlin, and they hadn't spoken yet.

The twin-engine propeller plane hit the tarmac with a thud three hours later. His captors did a poor job of shielding his eyes with a black cloth bag from the view of a majestic green Soyuz rocket. The bag then fully covered Michael's head, and his window view of the rocket and launch complex was replaced with darkness. Michael was loaded onto a cold metal luggage cart. There was a shudder as the cart was loaded with the other luggage. The cart was then wheeled inside one of the buildings that Michael remembered from his brief window view on the plane.

The cart was guided to an elevator, up a few floors, and finally onto a tile floor. The bag was then lifted from his head, giving Michael full view of the room. The room was dimly lit so as to not give the identities of the men in the room away. One man sat at the head of a long table. He was the one who first spoke, so Michael speculated that he was the commander. He addressed the former astronaut with a thick Russian accent, "Michael Kerreling, if I am correct?"

Michael nodded.

The commander spoke again, "I need something done, and you're the man I have chosen for this... favor." The man then gave a wicked grin as he said the last few words, but then abruptly became emotionless again.

He then spoke Russian to one of the many men in the room and Michael was taken away to another room that had many large windows. Only one person sat in the room. Michael was startled by the fact that the many spoke almost perfect English, without even a hint of Russian.

"Hello, Michael," he said with a grin. "I see you've been given a promotion," the man added sarcastically and cackled as he swiveled in his chair. "I might as well tell you what you're here for. There's a satellite that's drifted out of orbit. This is a minor inconvenience to me, but my commanding officer would not be pleased if it were to enter Earth's atmosphere. That is where you come in. Prepare as you wish, as the launch will be within a couple days." With that the man took a shot glass filled with liquor and quietly left the room.

Michael stared through the large glass windows at the Soyuz rocket with worry. He didn't have the slightest idea how that rocket worked since he had only trained on a Falcon Heavy. After standing uncomfortably as conversations drifted through from the other room, he was brought into another building to be measured for his spacesuit and launch seat. While a small man in a white coat took measurements, Michael made a realization. This mission was obviously dangerous, or the Russians would have used one of their own men.

Michael slept in an empty office that had two armed guards outside. He had only a small cot, so the quality of sleep was not optimal. As he woke, he lay there a few minutes until the guards took him to shower and prepare for the launch that next morning. Michael's day was filled with tests and preparations. His meals were dried rations, and his sleep was the same as the previous night.

On Michael's third morning at the launch complex, he was woken very early. He was strapped into the chair of a military jeep and transported to the launch site. On the way, the driver turned to him and spoke in Russian, "удачи." Then realizing Michael didn't understand, the driver spoke to him again, "Good luck."

Michael nodded.

As the jeep slowed to a stop, Michael was unloaded, helped into his launchsuit, and walked into the elevator. Once the elevator stopped and opened, Michael stepped out of the elevator and onto a platform allowing astronauts to climb into the Soyuz capsule and for easy maintenance. Michael looked out over the launch complex almost two miles away. He said a silent goodbye to the place he unfortunately had to call home for the past few days. As he did that, two Russian Cosmonauts passed him on their way to the capsule. They were obviously not happy to be on this mission, as they didn't even acknowledge his presence.

Michael strapped himself into the capsule, and thirty minutes later, the countdown had begun. As the rocket reached 100 feet, an unfamiliar vibration shook the rocket slightly. He peered out the window and, sure enough, the remains of an explosion lay there on the launch site which was almost completely destroyed. Michael's attempt to panic was cut short as the rocket sped up and left his questions behind.

Michael felt a jolt as the four triangular boosters were jettisoned and fell back to earth. A few minutes later, the first stage booster met the same fate. The satellite could be seen in the distance, but the closer they got, the less it looked like a satellite. Michael was left in a state of shock as he realized that the satellite that they were to repair was not a satellite at all! It was a nuclear missile with solar panels!

As the spacecraft drifted toward the bomb, Michael saw a readout on his screen. They were to direct the bomb to explode near the U.S.! Michael hid his shock from the two other cosmonauts as they used a translator to tell him to follow the readouts.

As Michael suited up, he noticed the one Russian that would stay in the craft could shock him at any moment. The airlock hissed as the circular door opened, and Michael pushed himself toward the bomb. As a cosmonaut followed Michael into the vacuum of space, he'd secretly pointed the missile in the wrong direction, which would fly the missile out of Earth's orbit and away from humanity. The other cosmonaut didn't notice Michael's course change, but the cosmonaut inside the spacecraft did happen to notice the course change. He radioed this information back to his partner on a private channel, one that Michael could not access. Once a few shocks had been sent to Michael, the cosmonaut outside of the spacecraft proceeded to tie Michael's oxygen tube around the tail of the missile. This would not only kill Michael, but also make his death look like an accident.

The moment the rocket engine ignited, Michael felt a tug and attempted to untie his oxygen tube. The rocket proceeded to pull the spacecraft and Michael a few hundred feet until the oxygen tube snapped, and Michael died a painless death.

Negotiations between the U.S. and Russia had been going on for days until CIA operatives revealed the truth. Russia had attempted to bomb the U.S., and Michael had sacrificed himself for the safety of billions.

One astronaut spoke through tears, "He has now completed his goal. It was his sole purpose."  
"No," the other astronaut added, "it was his sol purpose."

**Leo Billinger**

*TMP-Marian Jr. High*

7th Grade, 2nd Place

## The Keys for Things You May Need

I step out of the car and push the door shut. I look up at the giant, Victorian style house, which will be our new home here in Hilleson, Massachusetts. My mom got a job opportunity and brought me and my sister, Kinsey, to this new house, which we inherited from our grandparents.

"It'll be okay." Kinsey says to me. I nod.

"Right. It'll all work out." My mom unlocks the front door and we walk inside. I drop my backpack at the door and look around. There is a big staircase right in front of us. Go left to get to the dining room and right to go to the living room.

"Alright, guys," my mom says, "I have to get to my interview. Your uncle said he left pizza in the freezer if you get hungry. I'll stop at the store on my way home. Kinsey make sure to—"

"Mom." My sister says. "I've got this. And so do you." Our mom hugs both of us.

"I love you both. I'll be home soon!" She says as she walks out the door. It shuts and my sister turns a knob. It *clicks* to show it is locked.

"Alright." Kinsey says. "What do you want to do?"

"Wander around aimlessly and pointlessly." I reply. She grins.

"I'm going to go heat up that pizza." Kinsey says. She turns towards the dining room.

"On second thought," she says, "I'm going to go find the kitchen." I laugh. She walks into the dining room and turns the corner. I walk into the living room and see something amazing. A fireplace. But it is what's above the fireplace that catches my eye. I see two swords hanging crisscross above the brick mantle. I pull a chair over to the fireplace and stand on it. I grab one of the swords and gently lift it off of the hook that is holding it up. I hop off of the chair and examine my new toy. It has a golden handle and a slightly curved, glimmering blade that ends in a sharp point. It has what looks like a small keyhole on the hand guard of the hilt.

"Sweet." I whisper with a smirk. I start swinging it around like I'm attacking something. And then I really do attack something. I might have accidentally just smashed a vase in half, it's shards flying everywhere. Eh, at least it's not the T.V.

"Messer!" My sister yells. "What did you break now?"

"Um... a plastic dinosaur?" I reply. Kinsey walks into the room.

"Why do I have such a reckless eleven-year-old for a brother?" She groans. "Come one, I'll help you clean it up." We get on our hands and knees and start cleaning up the ceramic pieces. As I'm about to set down a pile of shards, I notice something. A very small little sword, almost identical to the one I was messing around with. The only difference is the point of the tiny sword ends in the shape of a key. I drop. The pile of shards on the ground and grab the sword.

"What are you doing?" Kinsey asks.

"I found this key in the pile of stuff." I say. "It'll fit perfectly in the sword!" I slide the key into the hand guard and turn it. The blade glows and takes off like a rocket, pulling me with it.

"Messer, what did you do!" Kinsey cries as she chases after me.

"Wee!" I yell. This is actually really fun. I let go of the sword and it flies out of an open window. I unlock the front door and run after it. After about a minute, it stops and flips so the blade is pointing upside down. The sword slams into a large rock and it splits in half, revealing a golden key.

"What the heck was that?" Kinsey pants from behind me.

"Magic, that's what." I say. I bend over and pick up the key.

"That's impossible." Kinsey replies.

"Got any other ideas?"

"Well, no, but—"

"Exactly. Now come one! Let's see where this one goes!" I run back towards the front door, to find it shut. I look down at the key. It's golden. The door knob is golden. I push the key into the keyhole.

"I want to know how that happened." Kinsey says, defiantly.

"And I want some ice cream, so it looks like neither of us are getting what we want." I open the door and step into my house. Except, it's not my house on the inside. It's an ice cream shop! I run inside and go behind the counter. I start filling a cup full of birthday cake ice cream. I grab a spoon and walk outside by Kinsey.

"How are we going to explain this to mom?"

"We don't aff ooh." I say with ice cream in my mouth. I swallow and shut the door.

"I think it gives you what you want." I explain. "Watch. I want to go to the pool." I open the door, and there is a pool where my floor used to be. I grin.

“See.” I say. Kinsey slams the door shut.

“I want to go home.” Kinsey says. She opens the door and gasps. She steps into our old house.

“Whoa!” I whisper.

“This is not where I thought it would go.” She says. I step in after her and walk down the hall. Kinsey cracks open the door to her bedroom and peeks inside. I look too and see it is completely different. A lady is reading a book on the bed. She looks up at us in shock.

“Go!” Kinsey yells. We sprint down the hall and out the front door. I slam the door shut and pull out the key. I open the door again and walk into our *real* house. Kinsey follows and shuts the door after me.

“I could use some food.” I say.

“You just ate a bunch of ice cream!” Kinsey laughs.

“Yeah, but I left most of it in our old house.”

“You’re kidding.”

“Nope. I am not.”

“Alright, let’s get something to eat.” We walk into the kitchen, and while I’m looking for more keys, I notice something about the microwave...

“Kinsey, look!” I exclaim. “The microwave has a keyhole! And I’ll bet you I know where the key is.” I open the fridge and pull out the pizza box. I open it and pull all of the pizza out. And underneath it all, is a fork combined with a key. I grab it and put it into the microwave. I open the microwave, set a plate inside, and close it.

“Give me some lasagna!” I order it. The microwave lights up and then shuts off again. I open it a pull out a hot piece of lasagna. I pull the key out to use it as a fork. I walk over to the living room, sit on the couch, and turn the T.V. on. Kinsey sits down next to me. I hear the door open.

“I’m home!” My mom calls.

“Hi mom!” I say.

“How’d the interview go?” Kinsey asks.

“Great!” Mom replies “I got the job! What did you guys do while I was gone?”

“Oh, nothing much.” I answer.

“Messer, where in the world did you get that lasagna?”

**Bladyn Werth**

*Hays Middle School*

7<sup>th</sup> Grade, 3<sup>rd</sup> Place

### **Christmas Miracles**

You hear about Christmas miracles all the time, people cured from deadly illnesses, winning the lottery, and dreams coming true. Do they really come true for everyone?

Josh races down the stairs. He’s wearing his old torn-up jeans that Mom doesn't like.

“Hey, Rascal,” I say jokingly as he bounces down the last two steps.

“Breakfast is ready!” Mom says as I get off the couch.

“Be right there,” I respond.

“Ready to go back to school?” my mom asks as she pours juice.

“Yes,” I respond as I finish packing my bag.

“Don’t forget your lunch!” Mom yells as I frantically hurry out the door so I don't miss the bus.

As I step onto the bus, it feels like I’ve entered a new world. I walk through the cramped aisle, the staring begins. I sit down and the chattering booms once again. The talking continues until everyone meets eyes with the bright brick building that will be our prison until Christmas break.

I walk into Jefferson Middle School; it is even more overwhelming than the bus ride. The loud, squeaky bell rings. The sound of footsteps echo through the halls.

The day goes quickly, and the bus ride home was a lot calmer than morning.

I walk into my house and turn around and hear, “Jena, you’re back,” in a squeaky, high-pitched voice.

I turn around and see Josh running towards me. I bend down and pick him up saying, “Hey, Josh, how was your day?”

Mom walks in with a smile on her face, “I got pizza for dinner.”

As we eat dinner, Mom said with a stutter, "I got a call earlier today." The second I heard her say that, I knew the news wasn't great.

"Your father won't make it home for Christmas," Mom says. My heart sank. As the daughter of a Marine, there are always struggles. I've moved around 13 times and have been to so many schools. I moved to Maine last summer, and I was hoping Dad would finally be home for Christmas this year.

My mom notices the frown on our faces, so after school on Friday, she set up a call with Dad for Sunday morning.

Sunday morning we rush down the stairs, ready for our call with Dad.

Josh and I are sitting at the computer as our video call starts to ring. The screen flashes as my dad's face appears on screen.

"Hey, kiddos," Dad hollers.

Josh and I smile brightly, "Hey, Dad. How's it going on the ship?"

We talked about the ship and school.

"Five minutes, Jankings," a voice echoed from off-screen.

"Looks like they need me back," Dad's voice seemed to stutter.

"Love you, Dad. Hope to talk soon," I say as the video call ends. Even though he won't be home for Christmas, I'm glad we got to call.

That night I sat on my bed filling out my Christmas list. As I write things down, the only thing I truly want is my Dad back for Christmas.

The next few weeks went on in a flash. The real excitement isn't just Christmas but also about the days we get off of school. We have about two and a half days left before school ends, so the next few days will be easy.

The bell rings, but you can barely tell with the sounds of footsteps in the halls. I walk into Miss Jonson's classroom, and in the back of the room I see a huge brightly-lit Christmas tree.

"Good morning, students. We're going to do a Christmas activity," she said. "I will pair you up, and you'll make ornaments with a Christmas wish inside."

My partner couldn't have been worse; I was stuck with Carly Shippers, the meanest person I've ever met. She always made fun of people for how they acted.

As we were painting our Christmas ornaments, we sat in complete silence until Miss Jonson noticed and tried to start small talk. We pretty much just grumbled about random things until we were done painting our ornaments. Then it went right back to silence.

"Now that everyone has finished their painting, you and your partner will brainstorm what you would like your wish to be," Miss Jonson announced.

Carly started talking about all of the things on her Christmas list. Many of the things she said were very expensive. I asked her, "Do you always get such expensive things?"

"Yes, my parents give me whatever I want," she replied in a snarky way. I knew her parents were loaded, but I didn't know they were that rich. I was a tad bit jealous.

Miss Jonson said, "Make sure to really think about what you want for Christmas."

Carly turns to me and says, "What do you want for Christmas?"

I thought to myself for a moment, "I'd like my dad to be home in time for Christmas." I stare off into the distance.

"Where is your dad at, is he missing or something?" she said with a concerned look.

"He's a Marine and is stationed on a ship right now," I respond. "What do you want?"

She thought long and hard before she answered, "I want my parents to stop fighting."

My eyes widened, "Oh, I'm so sorry. I don't mean to be rude, but I always thought you had the most perfect life."

"I'm sorry how I've treated you," she says. At this moment I realize that I may have judged her.

"Put your ornaments on the tree and pack up for your next class," Miss Jonson exclaimed.

The bell rang and kids filled the halls. For the rest of the day, I kept thinking how I was so wrong about Carly.

Once I made it home, I tell my mom what Carly said. I finally understood why Carly was so mean to people.

As Christmas came around, I was so excited but also a bit devastated that my dad wouldn't be home.

Christmas Eve night came around. I couldn't fall asleep. By the time I did, it was almost morning.

Josh came running down the stairs screaming, "Did Santa come?"

"Yes, he did," Mom said with a smile on her face.

For the next few hours, we played with some of our gifts and built gingerbread houses. In the middle of dinner that night, the doorbell rang. “Kids, can you go see who that is?” Mom said. Josh and I opened the door.

“Dad!” Josh and I shouted. We ran right over to give him a hug.

“I didn’t think you’d be back,” I said with a smile on my face

“Surprise!” Dad responded with a careful laugh.

All night long we spent time telling stories and drinking hot chocolate; it was the best Christmas ever.

That night was the best night I could’ve asked for.

I know what you are thinking - yay, there was a happy ever-after ending. However, in life there isn’t always a happy ending.

To answer the long-awaited question, do all Christmas miracles come true? No! I may have had my Dad back for Christmas, but we still have to move every time he gets reassigned. We still don’t get to call him a lot either.

For many of the other wishes on Miss Jonson’s tree, they didn’t come true either. For Carly, her parents never stopped fighting and later got a divorce.

I may not believe in Christmas miracles, but I do believe we should never take anything for granted.

**Emma Wasinger**

*TMP-Marian Jr. High*

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

### **The Book**

I’m Timmy Morris. I’m a normal 16-year-old boy, well that’s what I think. To everybody else, I’m a 16-year-old boy that’s paralyzed below the hips. When I was 10 years old, I got in a horrible car wreck that broke my spine right in the middle which ended up never letting me walk again. I’m very lucky that I am still alive.

I don’t have many friends. Really, I only have one friend. His name is Tommy Drexler. He’s the only person that will talk to me. We do everything together at school. There’s also this one girl in school. Her name is Karen Kinderconnect. Karen is the nicest girl ever. She smiles at me sometimes. I guess you could say she’s my crush.

Kids in school aren’t always the nicest to me. Truly they’re not nice at all. One kid unscrewed the bolts on my wheelchair, which they thought would be funny until I was stuck in the middle of a huge high school hallway with no help from anybody. Any name that sounds rude that has something to do with speed or tires, I’ve been called it. Those kids are total jerks, but I don’t let them get under my skin too much. I’m not scared of them. I know they won’t hurt me because you can never beat up the kid in the wheelchair.

As a young boy, I’ve always liked to write. I used to keep my journal with me, and I’d write how my day was going. A boy stole that in the seventh grade. When people would bully me, I’d write about it in my journal to calm myself down.

It was lunchtime, and I sat in my usual spot right in the corner. At the end of lunch I wheeled myself out of the lunchroom as fast as I could so that the big group of boys wouldn’t get a chance to bully me. I got out of there pretty quickly, and I was going down the halls as a poster caught my eye. The poster said, “School Writing contest”. I thought it was perfect for me. I was going to write a story about myself so people could know my story and what I’ve had to go through being paralyzed. I called my mom right away and had her buy me a brand new journal so I could start writing that night.

I got home, and I was so excited. I grabbed my new journal and started writing. I wrote all night until I fell asleep with the journal right by me. A couple weeks pass by, and I’m still writing my story. I had two more weeks to finish.

It was a normal day at school, and I was sitting in the back of class writing my story. One of the boys came up to me and stole my journal! I demanded for him to give it back, but he wouldn’t. He was just going through the pages with his friends, and every once in a while, they’d look over to me and laugh.

Finally the boy threw the journal at me and said, “Nobody cares about your life”.

After what the boy said, I went home and laid in my bed and cried.

After the day at school yesterday, I was even more determined to win the writing contest. I was writing every chance that I got. Those boys could laugh at me all day, but I didn’t care because I had nothing to lose.

After everyone found out I was writing a book, they all started making fun of me. I knew what they wanted to do. They wanted to steal my journal with my whole story in it. I've put many hours into this book, so I'm not taking any chances of getting it stolen.

I've noticed that there's always a boy from that friend group that follows me. I know they are waiting for me to leave my notebook where they can get it. I've never been so protective of something so little in my life.

It was the 6th hour of the day, and I went out of the class to use the restroom. I went down the hall and wheeled into the restroom. Somebody walked into the restroom, and I could tell it was a bigger kid. I recognized the way he was walking. It was one of the bullies! Right then that's when I realized my bookbag was outside the restroom door with my journal in it. I hurried as quickly as I could to get outside the restroom, but I was too late. My journal was gone. I looked everywhere, but I couldn't find it. I asked every teacher, but they hadn't seen it either. Somebody had stolen it.

I had only three days to find and finish my book. I was watching all those boys all day because I knew they had it, but I knew the chances of getting that book back was very low.

The next day was the scariest day of my life. There was one day left until I had to turn in my story. I was up all night thinking about what I was gonna do, and then it hit me! My book was in one of those boys' lockers. All I had to do now was find out which locker it was.

I was sitting in my class waiting for those boys to come in the class because that's when I knew they'd be away from the lockers. When all the boys came to class, I left. I looked through all the lockers finding nothing until I got to the last one. There it was sitting in his locker. I took my book and hurried back to class to make sure I didn't get caught. I made it back into class like nothing happened.

I wrote any chance I got throughout the day. The book was due at the end of the day, and I only had a few paragraphs left. The end of the day finally came, and I was ready to turn my book in. I turned it in, and after that all I had to do was wait.

A whole week went by and the results were in. They had everyone meet in the theater to announce the winner. The other contestants and I got to sit on the stage. I was very nervous, not because I wanted to hear the results, but because the whole school was there. Finally the principal walked up to the center of the stage and stood at the microphone. He spoke about how he was proud of all the writers and all the stories.

He then said, "After reading all the stories, one particular one really gave me the chills." That's when he announced the winner. He said, "The winner of the writing competition is Timmy Morris!" That's when I lost it! I was so proud of myself, and the best thing is that people stood up and clapped for me. I finally felt like I wasn't a ghost to everybody and could now have a voice.

**Logan Baalman**  
*TMP-Marian Jr. High*  
8<sup>th</sup> Grade, 1<sup>st</sup> Place

### **The End Is Only A New Beginning**

After 5 hours had passed on this forever-long flight, I began to get cold feet. Should I even go? I could turn around and fly back the moment this plane lands. It was supposed to be our trip together, but everything feels meaningless. Why did my Alan, the love of my life, have to be taken from me? The only reason I'm really going is because the expenses for this trip had already been paid for before all of this happened.

The cab dropped me off at the hotel. I checked in and got the room key and number. The room was cozy and sweet. I freshened up after my long journey here, and then I took a nap.

When I woke up, I felt refreshed but still stiff from the long plane ride. I decided to walk down to the fitness room to get some exercise. When I was finished, I took some water up to my room and changed so I could get something to eat. The hotel had a small restaurant next door, so I was going to eat there.

I ordered some sort of soup and a small dessert called koeksister. As I walked up to my room, a small brochure stand caught my eye. I went over and picked a few to look through. At least I would get to see some of Kenya. I came across a safari that wasn't that far away. I guess it would be fine to go. There was already a public tour tomorrow, so I wouldn't need to make a reservation.

The following day I woke up so early, so I laid in bed watching Hallmark shows on my I-pad while eating chocolate. Then, I ordered a cab to drive me there. It was only about a 30-minute drive. First, I went to the office hoping there was still a spot left and there was. Then, I went to the back with my ticket to get on the Jeep.



When we started driving the first few minutes, I didn't see anything until the driver yelled, "If you look to your left, you can see zebras."

When I looked, there were tons of them. It was amazing. I pulled out the camera from my bag to take some pictures. As the tour continued, I saw wildebeests, a vulture, and my absolute favorite, a lion. As we continued driving down the path, we ran into another one of the tour vehicles. Both the drivers got out and had a discussion. Was something wrong? They didn't tell us anything. All I knew was that when he got back in the Jeep, he told us we couldn't continue this way, so he drove us back to let us look at the zebras grazing again. When I looked at one of the tour maps in the Jeep, I noticed that we were about to go to the watering hole before we were stopped. I would have loved to see that.

The next day I wasn't sure what to do, so I stayed in the hotel all morning. I thought how amazing the tour was, but I was disappointed we couldn't see the watering hole. I thought maybe I could see it today if I got a private Jeep tour. I went to call the front desk to ask if there were any available today. I first asked if I could get a tour, and she said they were all full today. When I asked about the watering hole and how I couldn't see it yesterday, she told me how a small herd of elephants was in the pathway. Usually, we would have just gone around them, but the baby was sick and being tended to by a rescue facility that shares the land. She also recommended visiting the elephant rescue.

I ordered another cab to drive me to the elephant rescue. When I got there, I walked to the front desk. The lady said there wasn't anybody to give a tour at the moment, but I could look around. She handed me a visitor's badge, and I walked out the back door.

I first walked over to the patio area that overlooked the elephants roaming freely. They were so beautiful. I then noticed another care area that provided shelter for the elephants. I walked over to see what was inside.

Inside were stalls that had a few young elephants in them. First, I walked over to one of the elephants whose name tag on the stall said, Ronnie. I kept walking, and as I walked over to see another elephant I almost skipped one. He wasn't standing like the others but lying down; he seemed really sick. As I was standing there, I was startled when a young man approached me, asking who I was.

"Gracie," I answered, "Gracie Lockwood."

"Are you one of the volunteers?" he questioned.

"No, just a visitor," I said while lifting my badge.

"Oh, I see. Do you mind helping me feed one of the elephants? We're short staffed today," he asked.

"Sure," I said

He then showed me to the elephant. It was a little girl named Sophie. He handed me a bottle of milk. I was a little nervous when I started to feed her, but she drank it right up like a baby would. It was one of the cutest things I've ever seen. By the time I finished, I had the biggest smile on my face.

When the young man was finished tending to the other elephants, he showed me around. His name was Amari. I learned how the rescue works, where most of the elephants come from, and why they're here. He also said the elephants aren't in captivity and can come and go as they wish. I also saw bigger elephants, like a mom named Mandy and her son named Eren. At the end of the day, I didn't want to leave. I had one of the best days, and I haven't had one of those in a long time. On my way out, I saw a paper to sign up as a volunteer. I wrote down my name and checked off the rest of the days I was staying here.

I was so ready to go back the next day. When I got there, I checked in and went to find Amari. First, I helped muck out the stalls and organized a storage room outside. Then, I helped with paperwork inside as it got hot midday. Even though I didn't do anything exciting, it made me feel needed. As the week went on, I did a little bit of everything. Some days I was inside working with Beryl (the office lady) and other days I was outside helping the others. It was nice seeing the kindness it takes to make something like this possible.

Now that it is the last day of my trip, I don't want to leave. I've felt so alone and useless since Alan passed, but being a part of this has brought me back to life. It truly is the small things in life that make up the big things. This feels like this could be my home.

As I was packing, I found a photo of Alan and me on a hiking trip I brought. We were so happy doing the things we loved. I wish I could be happy like this again. At that moment, I knew I'd be back.

**Jules Fleenor**

*TMP-Marian High School*

8<sup>th</sup> Grade, 2<sup>nd</sup> Place

## Tackled By Life

“Ring, Ring!”

Finally, the bell rang and the school day was over. After a long day of classes such as algebra and language arts, I sprinted out of the classroom in a flash. As I was running, Ms. Greene yelled at me to stop running in the halls. I slowed out of respect, but my excitement did not.

I ran all the way to the locker room where we got dressed. I was the first one there as usual. I wasn't exactly first, though, if you count Coach Wright who was having his typical pre-game meeting with the coordinators. I got my pants on and decided to chill out for a little bit and wait for others to show up. Coach Wright was walking out with the other coordinators when he saw me dressed already.

He laughed, “What are you doing dressed already, son?”

“Just excited,” I answered our three-time state champion coach.

He nodded his head with a smile and began to walk off. There I was all alone again.

My family moved to Texas this year when my dad got a job opportunity for his architecture job. We came from Nevada, so the nice, hot weather was no surprise to us. The football was the real thing that came as a surprise. I was excited about it coming in, but I didn't think I would be the varsity starting quarterback. It was nice, but people don't tend to like you when you are new and especially if you start as a freshman. The seniors were the main source of hatred. I hardly let it bother me though.

A couple of hours passed before game time, and it was time for us to go out onto the field and get our first offensive possession going. We started out hot and never looked back, winning our first game of the season.

My best friend Derek and I were walking off the field. All of a sudden I felt this sharp pain going inside my head. The last thing I remember before blacking out was Derek screaming for help.

When I awoke from passing out, I wasn't in my uniform or on the field. I was in a hospital bed in a gown.

“He's awake,” my mother sighed with relief.

The doctor finally came in to greet us, “Hi, my name is Dr. Lend, and I realize you are very confused right now and probably have a thousand questions. My job is to answer those and fix you up.”

“Ok,” I said, almost falling asleep after the events of the day, “so, what exactly happened?”

“We think that sometime during the game you may have suffered a hit which caused swelling in your brain,” Dr. Lend continued.

The thing that bugged me after this statement was I didn't really recall being hit at all. My offensive line was one of the best in the league, and they always kept a clean pocket. I only scrambled if I wanted to.

“So,” Dr. Lend paused as he read his medical sheet full of schedules, “we will run some tests with you here in the next couple of days, but for now you need some rest.”

After that, he walked out without another word. As I drifted off, my parents left the room, and I was all alone again.

The following day the pain in my head worsened. I kept the pain to myself and tried not to show it because if there was one thing I'd learned from football, it was that you shouldn't show your opponents your weakness, and this opponent was my headache. A couple of minutes later Dr. Lend walked in telling me that the tests would be run tomorrow. I was starting to have thoughts that this was a lot worse than just swelling.

The next day as we were about to run the tests, I got into my hospital gown which didn't fit my 6'3" frame at all. As I was walking into the room, I saw the machine for the first time. It was a lot bigger than I expected. Nevertheless, the tests all went well and Dr. Lend said we'd have our results within an hour.

At 2:22, Dr. Lend came into our room with what he explained was good and bad news.

He started with the good news saying, “The tests that were run went very well and we have identified the actual problem.”

This was a red flag for me mainly because this meant the problem was not only swelling of the brain.

“The bad news is that we found a tumor in the right part of your brain.”

I lost it, breaking down crying. My parents also began to cry as they always did when bad things happened. I hadn't seen my parents cry since Grandma died last year. I told my parents I loved them, and then the doctors took me into surgery. The last thing I saw before going under anesthesia was my mom's face. All alone again.

I finally woke up back in my room. I assumed this meant the surgery went well and I was to get rest. Dr. Lend and my parents were sitting in the room. I blinked my eyes like windshield wipers to adjust to the light.

Before I could say anything, Dr. Lend started, “First off, I'm glad to say that the surgery was a success. Also, I want to thank you for your cooperation during these tough times.”

“No,” I stated firmly, “thank you, Dr. Lend.”

He nodded and shook my hand. He began to tear up while my parents thanked him and then he left the room.

My family and I were very excited and couldn't believe what had just happened. My father and mother left to go and check when I could come home. It was at this moment that it hit me that I may never play football again. At this point, though, I was happy to be alive.

A couple of days later, I was released from the hospital. The car ride home was rough because one of the side effects was car sickness, but I was very happy to be home again. I called Derek when I got home to tell him I was ok. He told me that everyone at school had been worried since the game. This surprised me because I didn't think anybody really cared for me until it came time for a sport.

I had been cleared to go back to school on Friday, which just so happened to be the day of our rivalry game against the Bobcats. I obviously wouldn't be allowed to play, but Coach Wright had said it was alright if I stood on the sidelines.

It felt good to be back at school again. It was weird, though, because people came up and talked to me. It came around for game time and Coach Wright had the idea of me running out of the tunnel after the team. He thought that it would get the crowd going. I waited after the team and ran out all by myself. It felt awkward at first, but I figured I'd own it and have fun with it. Just as Coach Wright thought, the crowd went crazy.

When I got to the sideline, Coach Wright grabbed me and said, "They love ya, son."

I was, for once, not alone again.

**Gus Corsair**

*TMP-Marian Jr. High*

8<sup>th</sup> Grade, 3<sup>rd</sup> Place

### **Untitled**

The walk from my house to the bridge was a route I had taken many times before, but it was different this time. Instead of seeing other people on this route, it was empty, and I saw no other living things except plants and trees. The ground, however, wasn't vacant. The path was littered with thousands of bug legs, so many to the point that it made a crunching sound when I walked. I also haven't seen many people in this town since I started seeing these unfamiliar animals.

With beady black eyes and small, black fur-filled bodies, they looked similar to rats. Very similar. I knew, however, that they were not rats. Rats eat anything, but I've seen these "rats" only eat insects. I constantly hear them munching on these bugs in the comfort of my home. Anywhere actually, these rats will stop at nothing to eat bugs when one is near them.

A rustle in the bushes draws my attention away from the bug-leg-filled path and onto a rat trying to climb a tree. I pause in my gait and stare; this rat follows suit. The rat's shiny black nose starts to twitch aggressively, and a small stag beetle crawls toward where the rat's paw is. The rat's nose stops twitching, and their eyes lose their sparkle. An impressively long green tongue swirls out of the creature's mouth and curls around the entirety of the stag beetle.

The stag beetle squeals a high-pitched sound I've never heard before, and then it is pulled into the rat's mouth. The rat crunches the beetle in its mouth, and the green beetle juices fly everywhere; it even almost gets on me. Then it spits out only its legs. Its beady eyes meet mine again; then it scurries up the tree and away from sight.

I am left alone again.

Adjusting my cross-shoulder bag, I continue the route to the bridge. By the time I arrive at the bridge, the sun has long since set in the sky. My eyes are drawn to the stars in the sky, and I notice my favorite constellation, Cetus Eridanus.

Cetus Eridanus is, if I remember correctly, a story about a sea monster sent by Poseidon to eat Andromeda. The monster, Cetus, was slain by Perseus. While Perseus is celebrated in Greek mythology for being a brave hero, Cetus is just a terrifying monster.

Cetus never got to eat Andromeda. It's totally unfair.

Under the bridge, the dark river flows without any imperfections on the surface. I stumble, trying to get closer to the river and look at *my Andromeda*. She was one of the most beautiful women in town- when the town was bustling and full of life, when *she* was full of life. I crouch by her body and examine it.

Perfect skin, perfect hair, perfect everything. What a shame it would be if something happened to her almost perfectly preserved body. Oh, what a *shame* that would be. I reach my hand in the cross-shoulder bag and pull a dead beetle out. Carefully placing a beetle in one of her nostrils, I pull another out, then another. I keep placing beetles until my bag is empty. I end up covering every crevice on her face with beetles of varying sizes. The water begins to stir, and I notice thousands of beady black eyes in the river.

Rolling her body closer to the river's edge, the rats start pulling her in. The tiny black paws sink into her skin and drag her the rest of the way. They manage to pull her to the bottom, and nothing disrupts the surface for a few minutes. Slowly, her body floats up; however, she has no face this time.

I rise to my feet and admire my work. The rest of her is intact, albeit wet from the river water, but intact. I do this because I am Poseidon, and she is Andromeda. Andromeda should have gotten eaten by Cetus; I am fulfilling Poseidon's wish. Adjusting my now-empty cross-shoulder bag, I observe the water. The rat-like creatures have gone under the surface, and the water remains undisturbed.

The walk from the bridge to my house was a route I had taken many times before, and I knew this route by heart.

**Khandi Guzman**  
*Hays High School*  
9<sup>th</sup> Grade, 1<sup>st</sup> Place

### Untitled

To find the greatest treasure of all you must first undergo a treacherous journey, as all heroes do.

First, you must find the entrance. It is hidden well in the safest place of all. Plain sight. The entrance is tucked away among many of its kind, but only one leads to the place you seek. The rest lead to a miserable existence.

After finding the entrance, your journey only becomes more perilous. As you descend into the depths, the world around you becomes darker. The entrance must be closed behind you to keep out unwanted travelers. With every step you take a chill will settle in your bones, creep into your blood, and worm its way up your spine. The shadows will surround you and whisper in your ear.

As you reach the end of your descent, you must tread lightly, for here is where the real danger begins. One wrong step will end in pain and death. The path ends at a vast expanse of shadows and shapes. Here is where monsters live and nightmares are born. You will feel the urge to run. To hide. You must suppress it. The greatest treasure of all is near. To find it, you must turn to the darkest corner of the expanse. Follow your fear. Follow the shadows as they lead you.

Eventually, you will reach a point where daylight no longer exists and joy is a rare delicacy. You will find a room full of nothing but darkness and whispers. This is not what you are looking for. If you do find it, run. No one who enters has ever left. But near this room is another. This is the room where your treasure might lie. But remember to knock. For the thing inside might be angry. And if this thing is not a treasure, but a curse? Then you must hope the shadows will let you leave. . .

**Loren Tervort**  
*Hays High School*  
9<sup>th</sup> Grade, 2<sup>nd</sup> Place

## Station

“Dr. Olexi, report to room 1H in sector 9 please.” The intercom boomed. “Right, we’ll finish this later then.” Olexi said. Vance nodded, knowing it would be at least a week before they were able to continue their project. As Olexi walked to the sector nine access terminal he wondered why the council would need to speak to him. Again. On his way to the terminal, he passed the mess hall, viewing area, data base server room, think tank, and the radiation room. He loved visiting the viewing area where he could watch what he loved most, the vast expanse of the universe. 200 years ago, scientists and engineers alike would be marveling and standing in puddles of drool seeing a structure like this. They sat just at the edge of the event horizon, the point of no return in black holes. To be this close would be like standing at the edge of a volcano on Earth. Earth. The thing Olexi thinks about most. He misses that lush, green, beautiful sphere of life. It had been 78 years since they set out for 6HHB, the system they’re in now. Of course, he hadn’t aged a bit thanks to recent developments in cellular restoration. How old was he again? He couldn’t remember nor could he care. He had more important things to think about. As Olexi approached the terminal it came to life, showering him in waves of green and blue light. “Please scan handprint.” The terminal commanded.

Olexi placed his right hand on the small, grey scanner. It was cold. Everything in the station that you touched was cold. Unless you were in your room of course. A green display popped up on the terminal. “Access granted,” said the terminal. “The council awaits you.”

Sector 9 was different. It was architecturally the same as the other sectors but sector 9 was lined with a strange, black, and shiny material. Every step you took it felt as though it was recorded into the floor. Nevertheless, it wouldn’t be too surprising if it really was recorded, the council was always tight on security. Wherever they went, elite UNUC soldiers followed in short columns. Their black visors reflecting light right back at your face. Olexi hated those visors more than anything.

As Olexi made his way to room 1H, he couldn’t help but wonder why the council wanted to see him. It wasn’t common to be summoned by them as they were always busy marveling at their work. As he was distracted, two UNUC guards noticed Olexi and stopped him. “Identification.” They demanded. Olexi blinked at them. The guards fidgeted with their rifles before commanding him again. “Identification, now.” Olexi complied, lifting his left arm up as if he were looking at a watch. The device on his wrist immediately displayed his information and clearance with the alert, “OLEXI TO 1H – COUNCIL” The guards scanned the hologram, checking it for discrepancies. After confirming Olexi’s clearance they moved aside and waved him through.

“What took so long?” Loha asked. “Your stupid security.” Olexi mumbled. Loha shuffled some papers and cleared her desk.

“Where’s Fervik?” He asked, crossing his arms.

“Away, apparently doing more than you,” She critiqued.

“What have you been doing for the last couple of years, Olexi?” She commanded to know.

“You know it takes longer than *just a few years*.” He mocked. She knew it certainly wasn’t an easy project to complete. He was obviously smarter than her when it came to his field and was a very prestigious scientist and engineer. She knew she couldn’t finish the project without his expertise, and she certainly couldn’t rush it. All she was to him was a powerful politician in a fancy suit. Nothing more, nothing less. Loha viewed him the same way. As someone in a strange, black, and orange uniform. They’d known each other for a very, very long time. They knew each other well and were not afraid to critique one another and criticize each other’s professions.

“You’ve called me down here for this reason already,” Olexi noted. “Why am I here?” Loha shuffled some more papers before getting up and opening a compartment on the left of the room. She pulled out a strange artifact and a small, gray, and silver box. When she set both of them down on her desk the artifact shuddered slightly and the box made a loud thud.

“What... is that?” Olexi demanded to know. The artifact was a fist sized cube with a floating sphere inside. Four dark red rings orbited the pitch-black sphere creating a quiet but distinguished hum.

“We... don’t know” Loha said. “The... uh... black hole spit it out.”

Olexi shuddered. “What is this, some kind of a sick joke?”

Loha walked around the desk to where Olexi stood. “No, if it was, I wouldn’t have disrupted your project.” Olexi stepped back and moved towards a window on the opposite side of the room. He looked through the thick glass at the looming black hole orbiting an enormous star in the distance.

“Spat it out?” He questioned. Everyone knew black holes don’t just spit things out, that would violate the laws of physics that they knew and understood. Plus, the artifact was very clearly not manmade and was most certainly not a naturally occurring event. Something was seriously wrong.

“We’re going to dispatch a team to Proxlima Two,” Loha said, walking back to the silver box. “you’ll be in charge of this task force and are to set up an FOB near the equator where we can conduct more research.” Olexi was severely stunned. He hadn’t been on a planet in many, many, long years and had only led as much as his small team.

“This is a newly discovered planet and apparently, there’s supposed to be life on it since it’s in the habitable zone. If there’s anything large enough for you to see with your naked eye I want you to capture it as well but don’t let this get in the way of your main mission. Go to sector 2 where the hangars and logistics are and you’ll be informed some more.” Olexi was speechless but was undoubtedly excited.

“What about my project?” He worriedly asked. “Vance will take good care of it, don’t worry.”

“Why... why did you put me in charge?” He asked.

“You’re one of the most prestigious scientists and engineers in the galaxy, it was obvious to pick you. Enough questions, go.”

Olexi started for the door when he turned to Loha. “I won’t forget this.”

**Noah Martinson**  
*Hays High School*  
10<sup>th</sup> Grade, 1<sup>st</sup> Place

### **June 17, 2163**

June 17, 2163. Ever since the world was seemingly wiped out from existence, Sydney has been keeping track of the days like a lifeline. According to Sydney’s knowledge, she’s the last person alive. She hasn’t heard any contact from anyone else, and the only people Sydney’s seen is bodies. Thousands of bodies littler once well-populated cities. Abandoned pets who are still alive run around lost, still looking for their families not realizing what happened to them.

Today is June 17, 2163. 286 days since every person on Earth died. Every person except her. Sydney doesn’t know why she’s the only one that survived, she’s been trying to figure it out since day one, but nothing useful as shown itself. But today, Sydney isn’t looking for anything that could help her figure out what happened to the population. She has other plans.

She walks around a deserted city she doesn’t know the name of and scavenges for food. Sydney’s running low and has no wish to die from starvation anytime soon. A lonely store with a half-collapsed ceiling is just across the street. As she walks up, she takes note of the large amounts of broken glass and readies her bat wrapped in barbed wire.

Slowly stepping over the glass, Sydney stalks to each aisle looking for any sign of life, but each one ended up empty. She drops her bat to her side and huffs. The only thing good about all humans being dead is that all of the food in stores are Sydney’s and Sydney’s alone; with the exception of animals, of course.

After grabbing all of the essentials, Sydney grabbed a few small treats for herself to enjoy which was mainly dark chocolate. While leaving the store, she also snatched a matchbox.

Walking back into the blazing heat from the afternoon summer sun, Sydney scouted a good area to take a quick break. She spotted a tall building and with a flat roof, and she started to make her way. By the time she reached the top, the sun was setting. Sydney took in the view and marveled at the pinks and oranges painting the sky from the sun as it said its goodbyes for the night. The sunset was like a breath of fresh air, showing promise for this post-apocalyptic world.

While there was still a sliver a light left, Sydney fished out the matchbox along with a lone candle from her bag. She stabbed the candle into the half-melted chocolate and lit the wick.

Taking a deep breath and she started to sing softly, “happy birthday to me. Happy birthday to me. Happy birthday dear, Sydney. Happy birthday to me.”

Sydney trailed off, a lone tear falling down her cheek as she blew the candle out. She took a bit out of the chocolate and tried not to think of her previous birthdays with her family and friends. Sydney set out a sleeping bag and fell asleep looking at the millions of stars that are no longer hidden from light pollution.

Tomorrow she’ll start back up looking for the reason why almost all humans were wiped out of existence, but for now it’s time for her to celebrate in peace under the stars.

**Keaton Fisher**  
*Ellis High School*  
10<sup>th</sup> Grade, 2<sup>nd</sup> Place

## Timebomb

*Tick. Tick. Tick.*

The clock keeps ticking down, making Adrian slowly go crazy. The worst part is that he couldn't see how much time was left. It could be 5 minutes or 5 hours and Adrian would never know.

His arms were chained behind him to the wall and the bomb was on the complete other side. The chains were digging painfully into his skin, and he could feel something wet around his wrists of what he assumes is blood.

*Tick. Tick. Tick.*

Adrian tried to move to the furthest corner from the bomb, but deep down he knew that his attempts to get away from it would be fruitless. The chains only let him go so far. *I'm still going to die and blow up into millions of pieces.* He thought mournfully.

*Tick. Tick. Tick.*

Adrian closed his eyes and started humming, trying to do anything, *anything*, to drown out that horrid ticking. Trying his best to distract himself from his death that's coming closer and closer with every tick.

As his humming continued, he fully expected for the guards outside his cell to bang on the door to shut him up, but the bangs never came. *Maybe they left to avoid dying from the explosion,* his mind helpfully told him.

*Tick. Tick. Tick.*

*Drip.*

Adrian's eyes snapped open. He looked around him, hoping he misheard a tick.

*Drip.*

"No. No." Adrian repeated, horrified. He tried to look behind him, ignoring the searing pain coming from his neck and shoulder. He caught a glance at his wrists, and to his distain, the blood is steadily dripping flowing down from the cuts, descending his fingers and falling onto the cold, stone floor with an echoing

*Drip.*

Adrian shut his eyes tight and leaned his head forward. The echoes of the timer and the blood was slowly becoming all that he could hear and focus on. He was slowly going insane and a small voice in the back of his head spoke up, *can't this timer tick down faster.*

He was horrified with that thought, but only for a second. It would really do him a favor if the timer did go faster. Adrian gave up hope of being saved, or let out ages ago. He knew this is what his fate was going to be, so what's so wrong with wishing it went by faster?

*Tick. Tick. Tick.*

*Drip.*

*Drip.*

*Drip.*

The blood on his fingers, slowly started to itch. A lone tear fell out of Adrian's eye when he realized the itch. His arms were chained in such a way so he had no way of moving his fingers. All feeling was lost except for the godforsaken itch.

Nothing Adrian did would stop the falling of his blood dripping onto the stone floor. All he could do was sit and slowly turn insane from the

*Tick. Drip. Tick. Drip.*

Even though all the guards left the area, Adrian started to scream for anyone's attention. He didn't care what the guards did to him, just as long as he had *human* contact. Adrian screamed, and screamed, and screamed until his voice gave out. He tried again but all that came out was a pathetic wheeze. From trying to scream again, his throat let out a horrible, dry cough. Adrian coughed for what seemed like hours.

*Tick. Tick. Tick-Tick.*

Adrian's head snapped up at the sound of the bomb. *That wasn't the normal ticking.* He waited a moment to see if he could hear what he just heard.

*Tick. Tick-Tick. Tick-Tick. Tick.*

The timebomb was going faster. Adrian's eyes widened at this realization, it seems his death was a sooner than he originally thought. Adrian started to yank his arms away from the wall, to see if there's anyway he can free himself.

He looked behind him and saw that the hook on the wall was coming loose. Trying his best to ignore the flaring-hot pain his arms and shoulders were screaming at him.

*Tick-Tick. Tick.*

With one last hard yank, the hook shot out of the wall, hitting Adrian in the back. Both of Adrian's shoulders popped out of place when he gave that last yank, and he collapsed on the floor, *screaming*.

Adrian didn't know how long he stayed on the floor sobbing from the pain, but he must've eventually come back to his senses because he heard the ticking again.

*Tick-Tick. Tick-Tick. Tick-Tick.*

And the ticking was faster.

Adrian stumbled to his feet, but immediately fell to a knee from days, *weeks? months?* of misuse. He huffed and tried to stand up again, he lifted his knee and replaced it with a foot and carefully raised his body. Adrian stood there for a minute, slowly gaining his strength before he walked to the timebomb, counting away the seconds until his eventual death.

*Tick-Tick. Tick-Tick.*

Carefully walking around, until he saw the timer he was welcomed with something worse than he imagined.

537:34:28

537:34:29

537:34:30

The timebomb wasn't counting down, no it was counting *up*. Adrian had no idea when this thing was going to blow. It could be in twenty minutes, it could be in sixty-three hours. Adrian had no way in knowing.

In a panic, Adrian ran to the metal door, separating his room from the outside world, and tried to bang on it. His attempt to bang on the door with his dislocated arms, weren't very successful, but the only thing he got was the feeling of a thousand knives stabbing him in both of his arms.

From being hit with unimaginable pain, Adrian's knees collapsed and he fell to a heap in front of the door. Full sobbing, he lightly banged his head against the door in a last ditch-attempt.

Adrian slowly turned around, and leaned against the only way to get to freedom. His sobbing never ceased, and very slowly he slowly lost consciousness. As he slipped away all he heard was the faint

*Tick. Tick. Tick.*

**Keaton Fisher**

*Ellis High School*

10<sup>th</sup> Grade, 3<sup>rd</sup> Place

### **The Water Where We Met**

Deep in the willows of the Eura Forest, I lay in the underbrush and watch the lively nature above me. The gentle hum of the trees and the nearby river lulls me into a trance. My objective in the woods is collecting food for my village; however, the beauty of my planet distracts me.

A crack in the distance reminds me that I must stay alert. Although I remain on my side of the river, the Naiadian side, rumors have spread of violent Moorads, our adversaries, threatening my kind with their crossbows. Picturing their cherry skin and vivid yellow eyes sends chills up my spine. The Moorads cannot touch water or a Naiadian without dying because water is fatal to them. Similarly, we cannot touch them without dying because of their blood, a deadly poison to us.

Venturing towards the river, I let my bare feet perceive the cool, damp mud beneath them. I halt when I see a golden eyed boy peering into the rough water. The Moorad adolescent stands and glances around nervously. Once confirming his isolation, he moves his hand gingerly into the water. His hand resurfaces unscathed, and I gawk incredulously. I gasp and immediately smack my hand to my mouth. The boy's head snaps up in alarm. Though I remain hidden in the vines, I take a cautious step back, about to bolt.

"Who's there?" he inquires.

I freeze.

"I'm not going to hurt you. I know you saw me put my hand in the water. Judging by where your gasp came from, I know you're a Naiadian too," he persists.

I inch forward until he can see my violet eyes observing him.

"How can you do that?" I question, referring to his hand.



He shrugs. “I found out a couple days ago when I slipped, and the water touched my ankle. It didn’t burn me, so I tried to stick my hand in and...,” He repeated the movement to show me the water did not affect him. A normal Moorad would definitely be dead by now.

“Impossible,” I mutter. Then, I realize how dangerous my situation has become. In front of me stands a water immune Moorad; therefore, he can cross the river at any time to harm me. Thinking of my village, I prepare to dart away. His face registers the panic in my eyes, and he raises his hands up in a surrendering motion.

“Wait, I’m not going to hurt you. If you tell your people this, they’ll think that my people are using me as a weapon or spy.”

I narrow my eyes. If I can just make it back to my village to warn them. Who knows how many more can touch water? I will have a long, difficult journey back, especially if I have a pursuer.

“Look, I wouldn’t trust me either,” he says, bringing me back to reality. “But, if I wanted to kill you, you’d already be dead.” He angles his head towards the crossbow near a stump not far from him. How did I not see that?

“What do you want?” I demand.

“I don’t want you to tell anyone about me. I also want to learn about your way of life,” he said sheepishly.

After coming to an agreement, I reluctantly sat on a rock by the river. He sat opposite me on the other side, and we talked for hours about our cultures, traditions, and everyday lives. Although I stayed wary of him, I often found myself trying not to smile. Their lives did not differ so much from ours, I realized. I pondered how our species even became enemies in the first place. Not once did the boy, June, try to cross the river.

Days of the same routine went by. We would perch on our rocks, have carefree conversations, and laugh about trivial things. Two months after we met, I suggested we go on a hike together. June froze; his eyes flashing a look between fear and restraint. Because he can touch water, he can also touch me without dying. However, if I touch him, I will still die. S

“C’mon, it’s just a hike. I trust you,” I say, making eye contact with him.

“I don’t know, Jamie.” A dilemma whirls in his mind. A risky, adventurous hike with his best friend, or another safe, secluded conversation.

“June, I know you will keep your distance,” I urge. He finally complies.

Not long after, we scale up the side of a steep mountain; giggling, teasing, and sweating. In slow motion, my grip slips and I plummet towards the hard ground. I watch June’s helpless expression as he watches me, knowing he cannot help. After what seems like minutes, my back slams into the earth.

The world fades in and out. I see a figure in front of me. The pain rushes in and I groan in agony. The figure speaks in a rushed, worried tone.

“Jamie, are you ok? Say something!” he exclaims.

“June, I can’t move.”

He runs his hands through his hair making it jut at odd angles.

My eyes flood with dreadful tears; I do not wish to die.

“Hold my hand.” I plead with him. “June. Please.”

The torment in his eyes informs me that he will not grant my request. Looking away from him, I shut my eyes and picture the short-lived, joyful life I lived.

Suddenly, I feel a cool hand gently grasp mine. My eyes shoot open to meet his sorrowful ones. His skin stings against mine, and I feel his touch ripple through me.

“Thank you,” I say as a single tear slides down his face. Gazing at the sky, I let myself comprehend his touch, my shallow breath, and the nature all around me. I hear stifled sobs as everything fades out around me.

**Sydney Meier**

*Hays High School*

11<sup>th</sup> Grade, 1<sup>st</sup> Place

## Happiness

“Dear?”

Marcus’ perfect wife called to him from their pristine kitchen. Marcus remained occupied watching the nightly government PSA on the dangers of Happiness withdrawals. Just as the announcement cut back to regular nightly programming, the smell of his favorite dish penetrated his nose.

“Dinner, Dear.” His wife called, ebulliently.

“Just a minute honey.” He called, while inspecting their drapes, which never seemed to need cleaning. Or their couch, which looked just like the day they got it. He felt the fine fiber of the lush loveseat—so soft it almost lacked any friction at all. At this point, the smell of dinner was too enticing to constitute any further delay.

As Marcus wolfed down his meal, his family began their nightly telling of good news. His son acquired yet another top grade in his class, while their daughter was accepted into art school. They each hovered on cloud-nine, just as they seem every night. His wife listened attentively, but the contents of the meal left Marcus confused. The meat, once tender and delicious, began to taste metallic and stale. The Sauvignon 1992 wine that once exploded with rich flavor, grew bitter and rotten. A glance through the dining room door displayed their drapes, which began to seem dull and worn with age. His wife—once glowing with goddess-like beauty—dulled with every passing second.

“Hon, something’s wrong with this.” Marcus stated.

“Nonsense!” She replied.

“Oh dear, have you forgotten to take your Happiness?”

Indeed, Marcus had grown absent from the pill for several hours.

“I’ll be right back.” His wife hurriedly excused herself to fetch him a Happiness.

His wife entered the room and placed a red and blue oblong shaped pill on the table. The pill—prescribed to residents in an effort by the federal government to control so called “Mass Depression”—increased approval of the Prime Minister from 3.3% to 97.8% in just a few weeks. He snatched the pill up and thanked his wife for her infinite kindness. Upon taking it, the food immediately tasted far better, and his wife regained her beauty.

“There now, isn’t that better?” she queried.

“Yes dear, much”

Upon wishing his kids good night and performing his nightly patrol of the house, Marcus climbed into his perfect bed and kissed his wife before their slumber. The conditions of the room set perfect for a good night’s rest, but Marcus lay awake ruminating. He could not shake the feeling that the circumstances of his life remain a façade. Slowly, Marcus drifted off to a sleep filled with turbulent dreams of lies and deceit.

Marcus awoke at the usual crack of dawn—far before the rest of the family—and made his way down the stairs to prepare a pot of coffee. As he waited for the beverage to brew, he instinctively made his way to the medicine cabinet and grabbed a single Happiness from the orange prescription bottle. As he raised a glass of water to chase the pill down, he paused. The water had several black particles floating in a murky haze. He spat the pill on the countertop and dumped the water down the drain. Marcus grabbed the pill and opened the overflowing trash bin which reeked of mold, when a shrill voice called from behind.

*“What is it you think you’re doing?”*

He spun quickly to see a withered woman who only slightly resembled his wife. As panic set in, the house seemed to deteriorate with every passing moment. The paint peeled off the walls as the windows cracked and shattered. His wife seemed to age decades in only a few seconds, as her skin wrinkled, and teeth yellowed. The beautiful golden light that once cascaded through their kitchen window turned an evil crimson while the rancid smell of the trash grew to an unbearable level. His wife screamed something, but the gibberish that spewed from her hag-esq lips remained unintelligible, ear-piercing nonsense. Marcus’

nose began to surge blood as his skin charred from the unbearable heat that came with the light. He *needed* the pill. As he forced his way through the shock toward the medicine cabinet, his world faded to black.

"Dear?" Marcus awoke to a familiar voice "Oh dear you gave me quite the startle!"

His wife grinned down at him as she held the Happiness. Marcus raised his arm and saw that his once charred skin looked as if nothing had ever happened.

"You were looking at me as if you didn't even know me!" she exclaimed.

Marcus couldn't force any words out of his mouth. He could only feel happiness.

**Nolan Dreher**

*Hays High School*

11<sup>th</sup> Grade, 2<sup>nd</sup> Place

### **The Devil's Gamble**

The year is 1935; a man sits at the Casino Royale card table. John Colter is a man in his prime who's had a string of bad games but is in too deep to quit now. One more game, he keeps telling himself, and then I'll pay my debts and move on. A game known as Five-Card-Draw, one that John has played many times before and is quite good at by now. These recent losses, however, have him doubting his skill. A house dealer distributes the cards. Glancing back, John sees no one and examines his hand. A hand with an odd nickname that he recognizes instantly. An Ace of Spades, Eight of Spades, Eight of Clubs, Ace of Clubs, and a Jack of Diamonds—the Deadman's Hand. It's the very hand that Wild Bill Hickok was shot dead holding in a saloon in 1876. Just my luck thought John. Another game I'm bound to lose. This match, however, only puts him further into debt, so he calls it a night. As he's leaving the casino, he gets stopped by security. He owes the house a lot of money, and they're starting to make threats against him if he doesn't pay up. He swears he'll get the money to them by the end of the week. A promise he knows he can't fulfill. "What happened?" he wonders, "Have I lost my touch?" As he walks down the street, a devilishly handsome man drives up next to him in a Series 10 Cadillac with a big cigar on his lip.

"You look like you've had a run of bad luck," says the handsome man.

"If only you knew," says John.

"And if'n I'm willing to make a deal with you?" asks the handsome man with a wicked smile.

"What kind of deal are we talkin'?" Questions John cautiously.

"A deal to repay your debt!" Answers the handsome man coaxingly.

"Well, I might be inclined to accept this offer, granted there's no catch." Responds John suspiciously.

"There's no catch, of course. We will play a game of cards; if you win, I'll give you my fortune," says the handsome man.

"And what if you win?" Asks John nervously. The handsome man lowers his aviators to reveal the fiery pits of hell in the pupils of his eyes.

"Then I shall get something far greater than gold!" Answers the Devil in a low tone. John ponders this opportunity; he knows it's too good to be true. He also knows how the casino operates; they will surely hire someone to kill him if he doesn't pay them. However, he risks much more taking the Devil's deal, but at least he has a chance to live.

"I'll take your deal!" Exclaims John.

"As you say," responds the Devil. "We shall meet here at the Casino Royale tomorrow evening; I will book a private table for us to play."

"Then it's settled." Says, John. As he shakes hands with the Devil, he feels a burning sensation on his hand. John then continues his walk home and ponders the decision he just made. He knows it is his only option. The casino would kill him if he didn't pay off his debt. At least this way, he has a chance, even if the Devil tries to cheat him. Somehow even with these threats, he remains calm and collected, which is essential to winning the game.

When he arrives at his apartment, he lies down to rest and strategizes how the Devil may cheat him. John was an excellent gambler but unknown to all; he was an even better cheater. But John tried to be an honorable man and play his cards fairly. Not to mention the punishments he would endure if he got caught slipping cards in and out of his sleeves. However, the likelihood of someone noticing him was slim to none. He knew that this wouldn't just be a battle between two great gamblers but also a battle between two even better cheaters. John wakes up in the

early afternoon. He takes a sip from his cup of leftover whiskey next to his bed and gets dressed in his red-accented charcoal grey suit and heads off to the Casino Royale.

During his walk, an all-black 1935 Plymouth pulls up beside him offering him a ride.

"Get in." says the driver.

"I am not in need of a ride." Answers John, "I'm not too far from my destination."

"He sent me." Says the driver with a fiery glow in his eyes. John reluctantly gets in the car and sits silently on the ride there. As they approach the curb in front of the Casino, John notices two bodyguards waiting outside, presumably for him. "Mr. Colter, follow us, please." Says one of the bodyguards, "We'll show you to the private table." He arrives at the table and shakes hands with the Devil. Dressed in a fiery red suit, he begins to state the rules.

"The game is five-card-draw," says the Devil, "We shall each get a set amount of chips, and whoever has the most at the end of the night will claim the prize!" John sits beside the Devil as he summons a stout well-dressed dealer. And the game begins. The cards get dealt, and the players regard them. A tense match takes place between them. The tides slowly shift back and forth between the two players, keeping them consistently catching up with one another. Cards slip in and out of John's sleeves and seeming to appear from thin air into the Devil's hand. Creeping comes the end of the night with just enough time for one more game. "All or Nothing?" Questions the Devil. John reluctantly agrees. With the final cards of the night getting dealt out, John regards his hand, and with a straight face, he realizes that his luck has prevailed. "It's all over now!" Exclaims the Devil with his misplaced confidence. His hand laid out on the table. A straight flush, usually a game-winning hand, but still only second best. "You're right!" Answers John calmly, "It is indeed over, but not for me." John then lays his hand on the table, revealing a royal flush, thus winning the Devil's chips and fortune. The Devil lowers his head, for he knows he has lost.

He leads John out to the curb, and seemingly out of nowhere the Series 10 that the Devil had been driving comes flying down the road coming to a sudden stop in front of them—reaching out, the Devil hands John a golden ace of spades, a trophy of his hard and long match as well as the keys to the car containing the fortune inside. As he gets in the vehicle, the Devil bows his head in defeat and reverence to John and begins to walk slowly away. John adjusts the mirror to view the Devil walking away just in time to see him disappear into the shadows without a trace. Driving out into the sunset, John looks back at a chapter of his life he shall not soon see again. And that, my friends, is the story of the Devil's gamble against John Colter. A story known by few but one that will go down with other legends of history.

**Calvin Evins III**  
*Hays High School*  
11<sup>th</sup> Grade, 3<sup>rd</sup> Place

### **Bed and Breakfast Blood**

I suppose some might find my demeanor charming, though others argue a bit grotesque. Many take one look at me and quite literally run the other way; children are easily startled I've learned. Once in a blue moon, however, a nice family or young couple take pity on me. But even these seemingly kind folk have egocentric tendencies; constantly wanting to 'improve' me and making sad excuses for their obtrusive behavior. Personally, I quite like who I am; but what can I do if they disagree? The stories are often my only source of happiness. My favorite one, as I recollect, is one told throughout every generation. The story remains the same—only the characters changing with each telling. Though, most exaggerate the story for effect, much to my dismay. I like to think I have a deeper connection to this story, and I hope to convey this in some manner.

Once upon a time—I understand this start is trite, but, honestly, how else can a proper story begin? Anyways, once upon a time there was a kind elderly couple that owned a quaint B&B in a small town near mountains. For years, the house they occupied watched guests come and go, the elderly couple aging with it. The couple felt connected to the house, and the house them. When the elderly couple both passed away, the manner of the house changed. Since then, no one would buy the B&B, which was perfectly fine with the house. The house knew it would never receive true compassion again, as it had by its old friends.

One day, a young man in a business suit came up to the house, followed by a smaller fellow who seemed to be struggling to keep up.

“Are you sure this was a good idea? I mean you invested a large sum of money into this... this abandoned monstrosity,” the little man gasped out.

“Oh, I’m sure. Soon this sorry house will be flooded with visitors,” the first man decided, and he tugged the ‘For Sale’ sign out of the overgrown front lawn.

In the weeks to come, the house stood helplessly as men with large vehicles and tool belts slowly tore away at its core.

*How did it ever come to this? The house often thought to itself. For years, I have stood here minding my own business, for these imbeciles to just come and tear me apart.*

Months later, the man in the business suit, George, I think, welcomed the first guests in years, a middle-aged man and his elderly mother, inside the newly remodeled B&B.

“Welcome! Welcome!”

George raised his arms in a sanguine manner.

“Oh, this is just lovely!”

The kind lady marveled at the beautiful staircase and décor.

Her son, Alec, seeming quiet in demeanor, merely nodded in agreement. True, the house looked beautiful, but he could not shake the feeling of foreboding that was slowly encasing him. They planned on staying at the B&B for four nights. *A lot could happen in four nights*, Alec thought to himself.

The next morning, as George served breakfast, Alec stumbled into the dining area glancing nervously behind him.

“Are you alright sir?” George asked, raising his eyebrows.

Alec quickly pulled out a chair accidentally hitting the table and knocking a glass over.

“S-sorry, I-I didn’t mean t-to.”

“Oh, it’s,” George flinched as Alec tried picking up the glass bumping another in the process, “fine, really.”

Throughout that day, his mother and George noticed Alec beginning to act increasingly strange, often looking behind him and jumping when anyone said anything. Alec felt as if the house was watching him, waiting. For what he did not know, but he did know something very bad was going to happen, and it would tie back to the house.

Night approached and shadows loomed over the house, seeping into every corner. Despite the guests and nature that surrounded the house, it was eerily quiet.

*A scream cut through the silence.*

The elderly lady quickly left the safety of her room to investigate the noise, and what she saw left her dumbfounded. For there, she found her son knelt over the owner of the B&B, covered in blood.

When the police interviewed the distraught mother, she could hardly give any response as she was understandably confused and frightened. An interrogation of Alec led only to a dead end as Alec had no apparent motive or mental oddity, besides the horrified state he was in from what he had done. Many theories circulated through the community, but only the house knew what truly happened that night. Only the house knew what had driven Alec to commit such a horrible act.

The B&B of course closed, and soon the thrill of such an event died down (pun not intended).

Years went by and every time someone new bought the house, a similar event would occur. That is until one day a young couple pulled up to the once-again-abandoned B&B. The house was prepared for another annoying intrusion but was surprised to see the couple was holding an old painting rather than blueprints and tools. The painting, more surprising yet, was of the house itself when the elderly couple had inhabited it.

“You think we can get it to look like this again?” The girl asked.

“I think it’s worth a shot,” the man slung a bag over his shoulder and started up the walkway.

“You know the history of this house Michael, the murders and such. I know it was once my grandparents’, but what if something-“

“Nothing’s going to happen,” Michael interrupted.

He sighed and pulled his wife to him.

“I promise, everything will be fine.”

For the first time in years, the house felt something other than betrayal and hatred. Rather, it felt gratitude towards this young couple. They felt familiar and safe. A reminder of its time with the elderly couple all those years ago. Perhaps things would be different for the couple. Maybe what had caused the murders to happen was coming to an end.

Afterall, I now have no reason to drive out these owners...yet.

**Evyn Cox**

*Hays High School*

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

### **Blood on My Hands**

It was soft, light, powdered-sugar snow. Fresh snow, a dusting, really. Enough to cling to the countless long, slender blades of prairie grass before being brushed to the ground—curtesy of my brown insulated muck boots—and pressed into the frozen earth, leaving perfect tracks. Like a leopard in its jungle, I’m striding one foot in front of the other, silently rolling heel to toe. Except—this was me, a creek in western Kansas, and a deer I was seeking to find the end of my bullet.

The trail was a frequented cattle path, one the herd on this pasture used to traverse the ground from East to West like their own I-70, staying mostly parallel to the creek. It was frequented by deer as well—by the droppings I walked over and the small sets of crescent moon hoof prints.

Alongside this, the multitude of dry, crunchy leaves on the ground—each a waiting bomb ready to detonate in one misstep—created an impossible challenge: a human’s dull senses and coordination against God’s natural-made, good-hearing, quiet-trotting, smell-you-from-a-mile-away, heightened-sense animals, that, did I mention, survive the wild? *But damn, do I want one. A very specific one that says “make me into jerky” above its head.*

*Pay attention. See them before they see you.*

My eyes snapped through the environment before me, straining to see through the watery tears that gathered against the chill wind burning them. Scan the ground, scan the distance, scan what’s right in front of me. The muscles in my calves tensed and relaxed with each heel-to-toe step, my back in a slight hunch while carrying the steel form of Death in my hands. A 308 AR-15, loaded with the specific, red-tipped ballistic bullets meant to mushroom out in an internal explosion once they contacted resisting flesh—damaging all of the important organs—for a quick, clean end. I smiled despite the thought.

The sun’s rays began to stretch red hues across the horizon, bathing the atmosphere in swathes of orange and purple. The sight was a magnificent contrast: the beautiful face of mother nature, painted red lips dipping down as her glowing orange eyes watched me with a cat’s curiosity—and the life I was seeking to take.

I kept myself dissecting every shadow and movement. Leaves and branches left me flinching from the dreadful crunches like nails on a chalkboard, and it was only after a few more strategically placed steps that movement caught my eye, the perfectly mottled browns of a hide blending in with the natural environment.

I froze, my breath hitching and eyes tightening in a squint to truly make out what I thought I saw.

The pelt moved—exposing the pristine fluffy underbelly supported by narrow, nimble legs. From between two bushy cedar trees, the doe’s head pulled up through a perfect window. It was amazing luck, no thick branches hung between us, and I had a wonderful side profile of her shoulder and flank.

Briefly, my heart sank for what I was about to do.

It was this moment or nothing. Slowly, as to not catch her attention, I shouldered the tactical black AR. The gun was heavy. It took strength to hold it stable. The scope was now a few inches from my nose, and I peered through the magnified glass and into the crosshairs.

There she was—she had spotted me, damn her. She was going to haul ass out of here any second, and I would watch that big bushy white tail bound away, ever the familiar sight. Every second burned more adrenaline through my body.

The doe did the unthinkable. She just sat there. Simply watched me, her big oval ears fanned wide, listening. Her moist black nose twitched, trying to smell my scent in the air. It only drew the moment out longer,

raised my heartbeat more, and kept my breathing off-kilter. *Just shoot her!* I told myself furiously. It was like fate and opportunity planted her there, offering me this first chance at my own harvested meat. Except, this doe suddenly *wasn't* that. She was beautiful, she was life, she was walking flesh with a mind of her own. There was me, standing rigid, pointing a loaded gun through the gap in the cedars, the space behind her shoulder in the intersection of my crosshairs.

I swore a minute passed. My indecision to pull the trigger dwindled. Finally, with her still watching me in all innocence, I let out my breath, flattening my lungs for a more accurate shot, and squeezed the trigger gripped under my pointer finger.

It gave.

One moment, the world was quiet, the birds chirping softly from the branches while watching the scene play out below. Distantly, the water in the creek gurgled gently under the ice. The next, plumes of birds took flight from the trees, and the creek roared to life—literally roared—my ears were ringing from the loud shot, the creek no longer audible except a high whistle tearing through my head. Even the rifle had shoved me.

The whole event only lasted a few seconds. Reality returned as fast as it disappeared. I aggressively strode toward where I last saw the doe—all sense of staying quiet abandoned as I stormed through the loud undergrowth, my feet slipping noisily through leaves and sending soil sprawling.

I scanned for the deer. Swearing I dropped it, the quick memory of seeing her form flop down through the scope flashed through my mind. *Where is she, where is she, where is she*—my eyes roved as I walked.

*There*—my vision fixed on an unnatural mass slumped in the undergrowth. I approached it. Laying on the ground, the doe was surrounded in winterberry shrubs, their delicate red berries light in color compared to the deep dark spread of glistening blood at their roots. Astonishment took hold of me.

I quickly put forth my thankfulness for the deer's life in a type of worded sentence in my mind. It was brief, my thoughts were cluttered, and I was partially in shock. My fingers shook with a slight tremble as I reached for the phone in my pocket and dialed my father.

It rang, once, twice, while I looked at the still features of the doe. How there was a dull look in her eyes and no breath in her lungs. It wasn't the first time I'd seen death.

This time it was different—it was on my hands.

Dad answered on the fourth ring. "What's the word?" he asked.

"I shot a doe," I spoke into the phone. "I need you to bring the pickup." He knew what I meant, that we needed to load it and take it home.

His voice took on a lighter tone, one of excitement for my success. "Amazing job!" he complimented. "Where are you at?" I described to him my location in the pasture—south side of the creek, just past the oil well.

"I'll pull her out to the road, you'll see me." Dad mentioned his confirmation and the call hung up.

I took one last glance at the doe's everlasting sleeping form and grabbed her by the legs before dragging her body through the grass. She was heavy—each step backward became a heave, and the snow bled red where she was pulled. A perfectly limp and lifeless hundred-and-some pound bundle of crimson stained fur.

**Chase Wittman**  
*Hays High School*  
12 Grade, 1<sup>st</sup> Place

### **The Hike to Finch Lake**

Finch Lake Trailhead in Rocky Mountain National Park, also known as the most beautiful place I've ever seen. We had woken up at 5:45 that morning. You could hear the sizzle of sausage, and a tide of smells roll in as soon as you woke. After two pieces of strawberry jam-covered toast, salty eggs, sweet pears, and a bite of sausage, we rushed to the car. On the way out of the house I grabbed a few snacks and shoved them to the bottom of my small bag. It was a thirty-minute drive and the winding highway displayed scenery of unmatched beauty. Listening to the delicate work of the Lumineers and The Manchester Orchestra, I decided Colorado in August is my favorite place of all time.

We pulled into a completely deserted area, except for a singular pearl-white Toyota Camry. Dusty rocks and gravel crunch and grind beneath the Tahoe's tires. The adults rush us out of the car, and we submerge in the leafy green of a forest. Although hiking was new to me, I found myself in the lead. We strode up the slightly inclined and uneven path, composed mostly of flat, pale, brown dirt, and lined with rocks. Occasionally, I stumble

over a rock left amid the path, recovering on the hill makes me feel like a toddler learning to step for the first time. I can't help petting the large carpets of moss that cover the mountain on my right. Feeling each individual cushion spread away then bunch together again. Cold to the touch from condensation, but it's softer than any warm blanket I had felt before. Soon, the trees clear on my left and a breath-taking view appears. In the distance a couple other peaks stand silently, other than a few sparse patches, it's a spiked sea of green. Hills filled by trees with small nearly invisible openings where water pools into small ponds. The evergreens spread as far as the eye can see, coating the ground and reaching all the way to the very tops of each peak. I've never seen something like this. After catching our breath and each of us snapping a couple pictures, we continued. Barely a quarter mile in and my calves started to warm. As small rocks roll under my favorite light pink tennis shoes, I make the incline. For all its life, the forest stayed nearly silent. A slight white noise here and there, like you could hear the trees breathing, or the dribble of a small creek hidden in the rocky mountain side. The serenity brings with it a feeling of joy and peace. Saplings and sprouts shot out of the ground anywhere a rock or spring does not occupy the space. I searched through the growth looking for any sign of other life to no avail. There wasn't a muddy paw print, rustle, a call, or even waste to indicate we did not exist alone in the forest. I think of the white car we saw in the parking space and reassured myself the animals were probably hidden away from the often-occupied trail.

After trudging up the hills, dodging rocks, avoiding mud, watching springs and tiny creeks run, and taking numerous rest or snack breaks, we make it to our first major landmark. At the top of the first three miles, the scenery changed from the dense endless green to the open sky. Up here the visibility stuns me. Unlike the closed off forest, you can see for miles. The path and surrounding land had been littered with unique mushrooms. Each time we trampled past a new species, we debated the toxicity of the fungi and then crushed one open to observe the inside. The shrubbery and trees changed without me realizing it, and now reds and oranges of different plants that see constant sunlight sprinkle the ground around me. Behind me at the top, two large mounds of broken-up trunks and branches lie on the ground; in between them sat a waist high round bush. Now in the open air I feel a slight chill wishing for my layers back. We wait until we can hear the adults and then travel on into what appears to be a downward path leading around a meadow.

The meadow leaned downhill, with the trail wound down around it. You could see the full distance of that segment of the path. Peaceful and shaded, the grassy meadow completely lacked trees. The clouds loomed above, contradicting the bright and sunny start of the morning. The pale, yellow grass waved moving as one with the wind, flowing together the light golden waves rolled until interrupted by the large structures. Tall pieces of blackened or red deciduous trees pile neatly into tipi resembling structures and disrupt the elegance of the field in six locations. The dusty path has become slightly damper, and we leave footprints, almost the only proof we were ever there. As we walked delicately down the path I noticed the calm, quiet feel the landscape brings. Such a serene moment in time. It felt as if the time had stopped yet we continued, wandering through a slow-motion movie. Winding down the trail a new woodland grows closer. Large gray clouds showed up out of seemingly nowhere. As the sky darkens, we enter the foreign grounds.

The new area is completely flat. Flowers and strange leafy plants line the path, as if the woodland laid the flora here to welcome us. Purple and yellow daisies sprinkle the thick green leaves that lay alongside each side. The trees here are thicker, older appearing almost, and the evergreens sit draped in moss. A mocha-brown, small sign screwed to what used to be a tree told us we were about 4 miles in. The lettering engraved had a font that resembled comic sans filled with solid black paint. Progressing through the forest more water sources break up the trail. After winding through the curves in the ever-turning path, it began to wind down toward our lowest point of elevation for the day. Finch lake.

Twisting, turning, and dropping we reached the lake. Taking careful steps after I almost lost my shoe, we gather on rocks to eat lunch. The lake is breath taking. Surrounded by trees that touch only the skyline. Past them in the distance, the massive mountains appear tiny, covered by a foggy layer of clouds. Large rocks line the lake and more cover the bottom, which can be seen all the way to the middle of the lake. I had never seen water so still. Unmoving and silent it sat, ice cold to the touch. Long blades of grass blanket the edges of the water, the only sort of coverage the lake has. The underwater rocks are all orange and smooth seeming. Most appear round and look like they should be soft to the touch. I pad carefully over the blisters in the grass, knowing one misstep could put me knee deep into a muddy puddle. Moving through swamp-like conditions I find footing on a rock, and stone step onto one a few feet from the bank of the lake. Jumping rock to rock I finally picked one with a circumference barely large enough to fit my body and my bag. Jake brings me my turkey sandwich and we enjoy our lunch in a peaceful calm that I could've lived in forever.

**MacKenzie Cunningham**  
*Hays High School*  
12<sup>th</sup> Grade, 2<sup>nd</sup> Place



## The Pungent Demon

I clicked my mechanical pencil absentmindedly, causing lead to inch out of the opening. Once it reached a sufficient length, I held down on the eraser and pushed the lead back. I continued to do this as my math teacher droned on about polynomials. About halfway through the class, someone behind me cleared their throat, causing me to hesitate to click. I turned to look at whoever disrupted me. The suspect was Astrid Flore, an 8<sup>th</sup> grader like me. However, unlike me, she was a popular kid. The most popular girl in our school, to be exact. She looked at me expectantly, causing me to set my pencil down and instead bounce my knee. I typically do a mixture of three things during class: bounce my knee, drum on the desk, or click my pen. Today it was a concoction of all three.

I found myself sighing out loud, causing my eyes to widen as others turned toward me. I put my head down toward the floor, pretending I didn't feel the lingering eyes. I tried to focus throughout the rest of the class, to no avail. I felt Astrid's eyes on me for the duration of the lecture, even following me through the halls. It sent a shiver down my spine. When I finally decided to turn around and confront her, no one was there. Now that I had noticed it, only a few people were in the hallways. Their eyes glazed over as they trudged through the hallway as if in a trance. I hadn't noticed it at first, but a foul odor crept through the hallway. Once the scent reached its peak concentration, Astrid turned the corner, a smile on her face.

What seemed most odd about her at the moment was her smile. It seemed too wide to be human. It looked as if her lips were stretching and were about to rip. As she walked closer to me, the smell became intolerable. I held back a gag, my eyes watering. I caught her eye, her pupils like a snake's. My breathing became fragmented, trying to breathe through my mouth to limit the amount of the stench I could smell. I realized I had stopped walking once she turned the corner, but the other students didn't seem fazed. They simply walked around me, staying silent. Tears were streaming down my face, and bile rose in my throat as she stepped toward me. She seemed taller than usual, peering down at me. A frenzy in her honey-brown eyes, she licked her lips. She opened her mouth to speak, her pointed teeth almost peering at me.

"Children are the easiest to *trick, trap, taste*. Such a shame such a powerful child has no training nor knowledge of the power you possess."

She enunciated each word, leaning in closer every time. I felt as if I were about to throw up from the smell she emitted. As she brought her hand close to my cheek, I spotted someone, or something, moving behind her in my peripheral. No matter how badly I wanted to, I couldn't look away from her face. She was beautiful yet repulsive at the same time. A whistling shriek filled the hallway when she touched me with her hands. The feeling of our skin meeting felt as though hot magma was covering my cheek. The noise wasn't human but a bow releasing an arrow. By the time I'd deciphered the noise, she burst into a cloud of golden glitter.

I coughed and swatted the swirling dust away from my mouth. The smell still lingered but was much more bearable. As I wiped the mixture of sweat, tears, and golden glitter from my eyes, I looked up at who had saved me. To my surprise and delight, my savior was my best and only friend, Kio, wielding a copper-colored bow and a rag over his mouth as a makeshift mask.

"Drats."

He muttered as he lowered the bow, sighing heavily. I found myself able to move once more and ran to him. He embraced me awkwardly, the weapon pushing into my back. He threw it down, hugging me tightly as I sobbed into his shoulder. I muttered incomprehensible sentences into his shoulder, staining his orange shirt with tears.

**Emily Smith**  
*Hays High School*  
12<sup>th</sup> Grade, 3<sup>rd</sup> Place

## Stuck

What is it with books that end terribly and why do they make you feel as if your brain has suddenly gone to war with your entire nervous system? (Why do my hands not feel like hands?) Why are my eyes desperately trying not to close—so I can think about what I just absorbed without the distraction of having eyes? Everything always feels somewhat off, somewhat different, somewhat far away. (I'm worried.) How my hands don't feel like hands; my fingernails don't feel like fingernails. How I understand that the world is such a big place, and I am simply a bug living in the middle of nowhere, with miniscule problems and tiny hands and a multitude of ideas that I have thought but cannot retrieve, and such big feelings. Most people on Earth do not know who I am. Most people on Earth have bigger problems than knowing who I am. I am tired. I don't want to graduate high school, I don't want to leave behind such a familiar yet terrorizing place to be. I don't want to go anywhere. I want to be permanently stuck in my bed with a book in my hands. One I have read before and have enjoyed the ending but I haven't remembered if I have read before. I want to experience everything for the first time again. I want to feel how it felt to walk for the first time. How it felt to read for the first time and actually understand it. How it felt to break my wrist, and wonder if I would ever feel normal again. How it felt to ditch the boy I loved because I wasn't responsible enough to love, only to find him years later—finally ready, finally capable, finally responsible. How it felt to realize that I am not the only person on Earth who has this name, how I am made up of all of the things my ancestors loved about other people. How I am a new, unique, and dumb little person on a huge rock in the middle of a floating planet in the middle of everything and nothing at the same time.

I guess I'll figure it out.

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

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