

Echoes of the Past, Shades of the Future

“To find the value of a polynomial for a specific value of x , you must substitute that value into...” The words faded into a dull echo, and my gaze slipped out the window, where the leaves combined with the crisp blue sky. I stare into the schoolyard, the ongoing green space filled with trees and plants. The food and pollinator gardens that students for our biology and nutrition classes planted reflect the warmth of the sunlight. It is a sharp contrast to the tension inside the classroom.

Inside, the snickers and whispers of the other girls were all too familiar. They were supposed to be my friends, Beverly, Maeve, and Brooke, yet they had discreetly chosen seats beside each other, leaving me to sit alone across the room. They huddle together whispering.

The bell rings, cutting through chatter as everyone quickly stands, gathering binders and devices before rushing toward their friends. Chatter fills the air as groups form and flow out of the classroom. I push my chair in and quickly save my notes on my iPad, gathering my things, but my friends laugh and head out the door without waiting for me.

“Wait, guys!” I panic at the thought of being left alone. By the time I reach my locker, they’ve vanished into the crowd. I hurriedly stuff my things in my locker and grab my lunch, heading to the cafeteria in search of them.

I scan our usual spot, but it’s taken by another group. I peek out the huge cafeteria windows that let in blinding natural light. I don’t find them, and eventually, I give up. Grabbing my sketchbook and pencil and sitting on one of the log seats under a solar flower's shade. I flip through my sketchbook until I reach a crisp blank page.

The sunlight filters through the petals of the solar flower, casting shadows on my sketchbook. I take a deep breath of fresh air, surrounded by laughter that reminds me of the company I’m missing.

As my pencil glides across the page, I capture the fluttering leaves and

intricate patterns of the variety of flowers and the pebbles that form the pathway for water absorption. I draw Vancouver, where I was born and where I am now. I draw what Vancouver looked like before and after the Greenest City action. After pausing the plan for the COVID-19 pandemic, the community took action to persuade the city to restart it. Now that Vancouver is one of the greenest cities, we work to preserve it.

Yet, my thoughts drift to my friends. Despite years of closeness, I feel like an outsider, always a step behind. I reflect on how bullying has evolved. It now hides in social media posts, whispered insults, and subtle exclusions that adults overlook. I tell myself I'm not being bullied. After all, they've been my friends since seventh grade, right?

Just as I'm lost in thought, the sharp ring of the school bell yanks me back to reality. I rise from the log, closing my sketchbook. Looking around for my friend group, hoping to join them again, I realize I should get to Eco Club. The club is meeting today to plan our next Green Day. As I make my way toward the Eco Club meeting, I glance around, hoping to spot my friends among the ocean of students.

"Hey, where were you? We were just in our usual spot." Maeve smirks walking up behind me. Brooke adds, "What are you off to now? Your little eco club? The earth is already good enough." I frown, replying, "We can always take care of the earth." They snicker and push in front of me, leaving me to walk alone. Again.

Arriving at the Eco Club, I'm greeted by the buzz of conversation. "Alright! Today we'll finish our Green Day posters! Let's get right into it" Mrs. Stoneridge claps, and we break into groups. Hanni and Evern quickly gather, and I pull out my iPad and Apple pencil, organizing our poster's sections: gardening, organic workshops, and local farm visits. After editing and adding finishing touches, I hit save.

"I'll print," Evern says as he heads to the printing room and returns with a handful of paper. "Alright, I'll go that way and you guys can split" Evern points and grabs some reusable sticky tack and disappears down the hall.

I take the other route, walking on the rubber floor recycled from tires that seriously don't let anyone slip. I spread each poster out placing the posters evenly throughout the school. As I reach a bulletin board, the bold "Art Contest" notice catches my eye. I read the deadline, April 30th, and realize I only have today and tomorrow to submit. My heart races at the chance to showcase my art, an opportunity to express myself.

As I head back to Eco-Club, ideas swirl in my mind. What should I create? I could draw the forest of trees in our schoolyard, or a scene capturing the energy of Green Day itself. I walk into the classroom with a bounce in my step, and the buzzing energy of the people wash over me.

Then a shadow creeps in. What if my piece isn't good enough? What if no one cares? What if I fail and get the worst score and everyone finds out? I shake my head. As I settle back into the Eco Club meeting, I try to push aside the nagging doubts.

Hanni is already discussing ideas for the next Green Day project with Evern. "Maybe we can get more students involved if we set up competitions!" she suggests enthusiastically. I can't help but admire her energy.

"Hey, what do you think about the art contest?" I ask Hanni, leaning over.

Her eyes light up. "That's a great idea! You should totally enter! Your drawings are amazing"

"Yeah, but what if it's not good enough?" I mumble, the doubt creeping back.

"Forget that! Even if you don't win you'll show your dedication and that you tried your best. Plus there's other opportunities too." Hanni shrugs. I take in what Hanni says.

When I get home, the familiar scent of dinner wafts through the air. After a quick meal, I set up my workspace in my room, pulling out my favourite coloured pencils and sketchbook.

The first lines are hesitant as if my pencil is unsure of where to begin. I take a

moment to breathe, letting the scents of my home settle my nerves. The colourful pencils shimmer under the warm light of my desk lamp, each one a promise of creativity waiting to be unleashed.

I close my eyes for a moment, picturing the refreshing scenes I want to create. The city trees, the busy roads and green rooftops. These images swirl in my mind, waiting to be captured. I envision what I want my piece to look like.

With renewed determination, I press the pencil to the paper and begin sketching the outlines of lush green gardens. The lines flow more confidently now, mirroring the rhythm of my thoughts. I think about how these plants, once little seeds, have grown strong and colourful.

As I fill in the colours, I feel my doubts begin to fade away. The greens of the trees burst forth, the oranges and yellows of the crops glow like tiny suns. I add splashes of colour for the flowers blooming around them, pinks, purples, and whites—that speak of hope and renewal. Each stroke seems to breathe life into the page, transforming my vision into reality.

Time slips away unnoticed as I get lost in my work. The outside world fades, and it's just me and my art. I think about the words Hanni shared, about showing dedication and trying my best. I remind myself that this piece is about expression, not perfection.

A knock raps on my door. I look up from my work and realize it's late. Outside the windows are obsidian black, with only tiny lights breaking the sea of nothing. The only light is the glowing halo around my art piece. With a click, the door opens letting a stream of light through.

“It's late, you should go to bed now,” My mom's head peaks through. I nod “I just gotta finish colouring and I'll get ready” I respond looking back to my art.

It's almost midnight when I finish my drawing. It is a picture of my favourite part of Vancouver, the garden roofs. The drawing features tall buildings with vibrant green roofs. Green vines cascade down the sides intertwining. Below, the urban

scenes blend with flourishing green gardens.

The next morning, I carefully pack my drawing with a protective cover, my heart racing as I walk to school. As I walk into the halls, I don't spot Brooke, Maeve or Beverly, but this time, I don't wait to find them, I head straight to Mr. Stoneridge's class. I walk in and notice Hanni. She walks towards me "Did you finish?" she asks eyes wide. I nod grinning.

I approach Mrs. Stoneridge and hand her my drawing. "Here's my submission for the art contest." She smiles warmly. "Just on time! We're about to hand in our school's submission to the organization. The results will be back around lunch tomorrow." I nod. "Thank you"

The rest of the day passes in a blur. My mind drifting back to my artwork and the potential it could bring. It's hard to focus, and I forget all about my "friends".

Finally, the next day arrives. I feel giddy all morning and rush to school. I don't focus on anything in my morning classes, and when the lunch bell rings, I dash to the cafeteria where half of the school is gathered for results.

"In third, we have Danielle with her outstanding watercolour piece of spring blooming." My heart thumps as I hope to place. The principal continues. "And in second place, for her beautiful representation of growth and nature... we have Karina!" My heart leaps with joy and disbelief as clapping starts. How could I win such an award for just working one night?

With each step closer to the stage, the clapping intensifies, and I can feel the eyes of my classmates on me. I glance down at the polished wooden floor, grounding myself as I approach the podium, and silence takes over.

As I reach the stage, I take a deep breath, the anticipation swirling in my chest. I extend my hand to accept the certificate of 300 dollars, feeling the weight of it in my palm. What the judge says passes in a blur.

I step off the stage, the applause still ringing in my ears, and I catch sight of some familiar faces from my old friend group. Their expressions are filled with

excitement, but there's a current of something else. An eagerness that feels self-serving. I realize they want to pull me back into their circle, not to celebrate me, but to use my success for their gain. They look like they expect me to sit with them, but instead, I take a deep breath and head over towards another group.

As I sit with Hanni, I can't help but voice my thoughts. "I'm so happy to have placed, but I really want to work harder and aim for first next time."

Hanni nods, grinning. "Your art deserves it, and I know you can do it. Great job up there today," she says, giving me a high five.

As I soak in their encouragement, I make a silent vow to myself. I'll practice more, refine my skills, and pour even more passion into my art. Second place in a school event is just the beginning, and I'm ready for the challenges ahead.