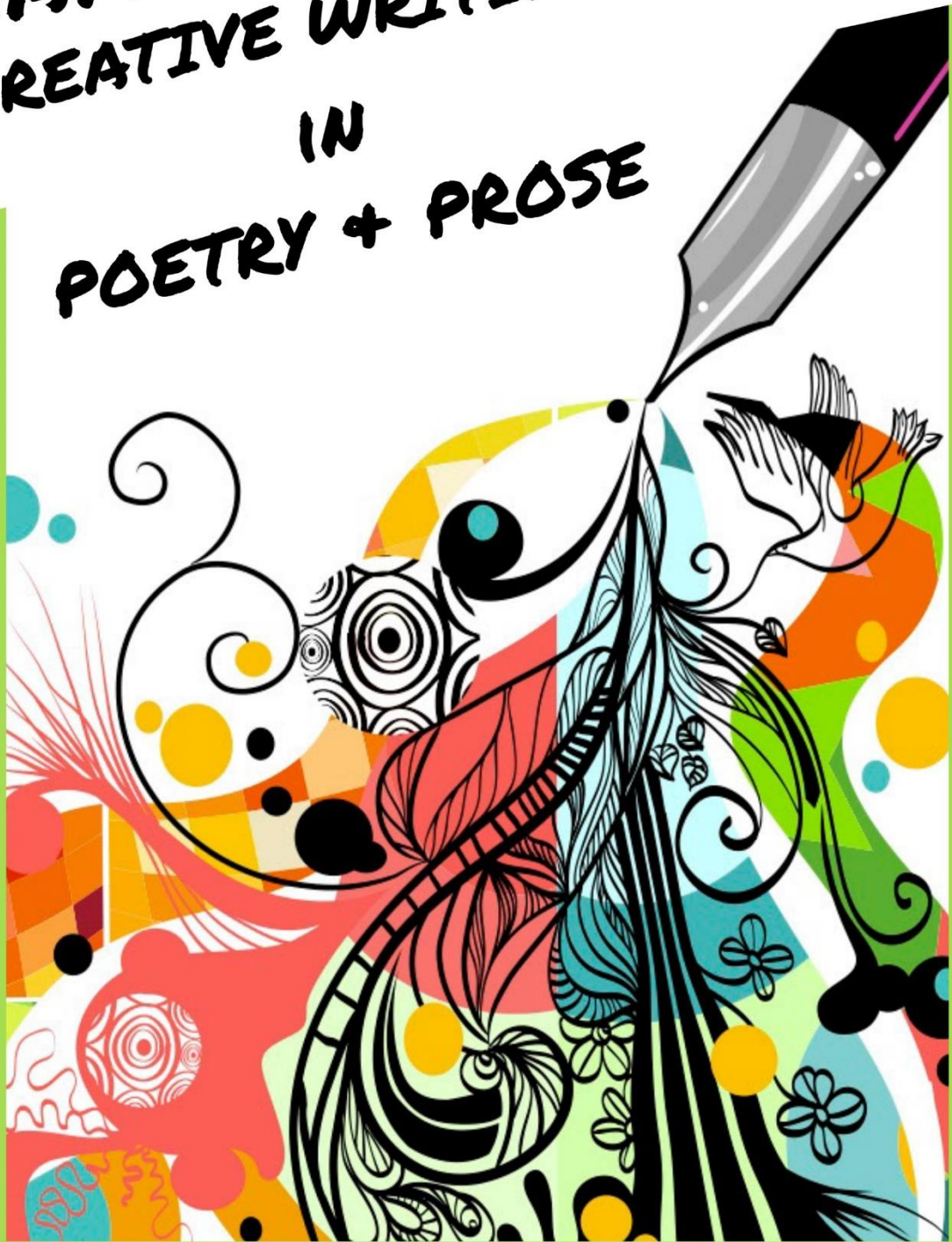


**HAYS ARTS COUNCIL
CREATIVE WRITING AWARDS
IN
POETRY + PROSE**



SPRING 2024



**THE HAYS ARTS COUNCIL
CREATIVE WRITING AWARDS
IN POETRY AND PROSE ~ 2024**

Dear Everyone,

Once again, it was my honor to help judge the K-12 Hays Arts Council Creative Writing Contest this year and to serve as the chairperson in the Fort Hays State University English Department. As usual, this year's entries were of high quality and provided the judges with much enjoyment. It is always amazing to see the imagination of the writers behind these entries. All of the young writers have met the challenge of providing enthusiasm and quality in their work.

I would like to thank everyone who took the time to be a part of this amazing event. Thank you to the students who made the effort to submit their prose and poetry this year. Then, there are the many teachers who supported the dreams of these young students—that support was readily apparent in this year's creative works. 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: Dr. Amanda Stinemetz, Linda McHenry, Dr. Brett Weaver, Dr. Thomas Horne, 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 extensive work and for keeping everything running so smoothly every year.

Writer Louis L'Amour once wrote, "Start writing, no matter what. The water does not flow until the faucet is turned on." That being said, I hope you enjoy the numerous flowing words on these pages.

Sincerely,

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

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The Hays Optimist Club
Friend of Youth

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2024 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	Austin Hann	<i>Sam the Snake</i>	St. Mary's	Beth Edwards
K	2	Charlotte Downing	<i>Blue</i>	St. Mary's	Beth Edwards
K	3	Bentley Lang	<i>Summer</i>	St. Mary's	Beth Edwards
K	HM	Easton Schoenthaler	<i>King Dinosaur</i>	St. Mary's	Beth Edwards
1	1	Ilora Bhoumik	<i>Math ~ Reading</i>	O'Loughlin	Kenda Leiker
1	2	Raewyn Schmeidler	<i>Yellow Is. . .</i>	Roosevelt	Kenda Leiker
1	3	Silas Wagner	<i>Silas</i>	St. Mary's	Megan Everett
1	HM	Jacob Brown	<i>War ~ Peace</i>	Wilson	Kenda Leiker
2	1	Tommy Detrixhe	<i>Power of Greek Gods</i>	O'Loughlin	Kenda Leiker
2	2	Lydia Dreher	<i>Waves</i>	O'Loughlin	Ashley Butler
2	3 (tie)	Eli Baxter	<i>Dinosaurs</i>	Holy Family	Kenda Leiker
2	3 (tie)	Ashlyn Beckner	<i>Blue</i>	O'Loughlin	Shelly Westhusin
2	HM	Brecklynn Fischer	<i>Fall</i>	St. Mary's	Karen Whisman
2	HM	Macie Day	<i>Chocolate</i>	O'Loughlin	Kenda Leiker
3	1	Bostyn Berry	<i>Softball</i>	Wilson	Leslie Karlin
3	2	Brielle Honas	<i>Outside</i>	St. Mary's	Patty Meagher
3	3	Davon Ruffus	<i>War ~ Peace</i>	Victoria	Brooklyn Pfeifer
3	HM	Breckyn Sturgeon	<i>What I Found in My Garage</i>	Wilson	Leslie Karlin
3	HM	Cambree Schmidt	<i>Pumpkins</i>	Wilson	Kenda Leiker
3	HM	Shaylie Gaschler	<i>Springtime</i>	St. Mary's	Patty Meagher
4	1	Laeci Rome	<i>Books Are Your Best Friends</i>	O'Loughlin	Denise Danielson
4	2	Catherine Marintzer	<i>Mountain Sunrise</i>	Holy Family	Teresa Schrant
4	3	James Burrell	<i>The Battle of the Cats</i>	O'Loughlin	Denise Danielson
4	HM	Lexi Peters	<i>Best Friends</i>	Holy Family	Teresa Schrant
4	HM	Charlotte Koerner	<i>Divorce</i>	Holy Family	Teresa Schrant
5	1	Harper Nicholl	<i>I Am</i>	Wilson	Alicia Plante
5	2	Elliott Howden	<i>Oh, the Kingdom</i>	Wilson	Hannah Wince
5	3	Grayson Decker	<i>Classrooms</i>	O'Loughlin	Hannah Wince
5	HM	Rayna LaFond	<i>Predator and Prey</i>	O'Loughlin	Sonya Herl/AJ Wilson
5	HM	Kelsey Robben	<i>Music</i>	Holy Family	Hannah Wince
6	1	Nadia Hernandez	<i>Worm Moon</i>	HMS	Sydney Niernberger
6	2	Kyler Kinderknecht	<i>Umbrella</i>	HMS	Megan Pantle
6	3	Alyvia Kraft	<i>Summertime</i>	St. Mary's	April Pfeifer
6	HM	Addilyn Priest	<i>No Beast, Yet Still No Peace</i>	Washington	Hannah Davenport
7	1	Maia Gray	<i>Nonsense</i>	HMS	Rebecca Kuehl
7	2	Lily Basgall	<i>Love</i>	HMS	Amy Schmidt
7	3	Lily Basgall	<i>The Night</i>	HMS	Amy Schmidt
7	HM	Aimee Barretero	<i>Thank You Mom</i>	TMP JH	Brenda Rose
7	HM	Angela Newman	<i>No More Little</i>	HMS	Amy Schmidt

8	1	Delanie Sanders	<i>Right Where You Left Me</i>	TMP JH	Brenda Rose
8	2	Katie Herrman	<i>The Best Friend</i>	TMP JH	Brenda Rose
8	3	Emma Wasinger	<i>Bakery Lady</i>	TMP JH	Brenda Rose
8	HM	Maddy Dintino	<i>Last Moments</i>	TMP JH	Brenda Rose
9	1	Jacob Seib	<i>Book Poem</i>	TMP	Chelsie Niehaus
9	2	Mattias Marintzer	<i>Sonnet</i>	TMP	Chelsie Niehaus
9	3	Bria Windholz	<i>The Lake</i>	TMP	Chelsie Niehaus
10	1	Emersyn Sander	<i>Put It Down</i>	HHS	Vanessa Schumacher
10	2	Macie Vanek	<i>America</i>	HHS	Vanessa Schumacher
10	3	Ava Erbert	<i>Queen of the Board</i>	HHS	Vanessa Schumacher
10	HM	Ava Erbert	<i>Society Says</i>	HHS	Vanessa Schumacher
11	1	Clare Tholstrup	<i>Woman of Stone</i>	HHS	David Buller
11	2	Kaley Phelps	<i>She Won't Win</i>	HHS	David Buller
11	3	Brett Dreher	<i>O'Flanney McJosh</i>	HHS	David Buller
12	1	Calvin Evins III	<i>The Heartlands</i>	HHS	Kathy Wagoner

2024 Creative Writing Winning Entries ~ Poetry

Sam the Snake

Sam the snake slithers to the steak.
Sam the snake eats the scrumptious steak.
Sam the snake sings a silly song.
Sam the snakes sneaks away.

Austin Hann

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

King Dinosaur

Scary, mean,
Hiding in dark places
Sharp claws cut through the forests
Therizinosaur crashing through the land

Easton Schoenthaler

St. Mary's Grade School
Kindergarten, Honorable Mention

Blue

Blue looks like a beautiful sky.
Blue smells sweet like blueberry muffins
when they come out of the oven.
Blue tastes yummy like a blue snow cone.
Blue feels like the water in the swimming pool.
Blue sounds like waves in the ocean.
Blue is my favorite color.

Charlotte Downing

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

Math ~ Reading

Math
Figuring Numbers
Multiplying Adding Subtracting
Frustrating Happy Upsetting Difficult
Retelling Studying Rereading
Phonics Words
Reading

Iloria Bhoumik

O'Loughlin Elementary
1st Grade, 1st Place

Yellow is. . .

Yellow is the soft sound of butterflies fluttering all around.
Yellow is the crunching sound of fall leaves crumbling under your feet.
Yellow is the thick fluorescent swipe of a highlighter.
Yellow is the warm feel of the sun beating down on you.
Yellow is the calming smell of a fresh tulip blooming in the spring.
Yellow is the sweet sound of a bee buzzing by its hive.
Yellow is the yummy taste of a melted grilled cheese sandwich.
Yellow is the soft, furry hair of a baby chick in your hands.
Yellow is the loud sounds and sights of construction equipment.
And yellow is a calm, happy, excitement in my world!

Raewyn Schmeidler

Roosevelt Elementary
1st Grade, 2nd Place

Summer

No school
Playing
Swimming
S'mores
In the sun
Time for fun
Summer days are almost here!

Bentley Lang

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

Silas

I am small
I am crazy
I am tall
I am cool
I am funny
I am skinng

Silas Wagner

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

Power of Greek Gods

Greek gods displayed much power,
Above us they did tower.
Mt. Olympus is where they dwell,
Ruling over us quite well.

Zeus is a ruler of the sky,
And he is quite a smart guy.
Hera and Zeus are married for good,
Hera is the goddess of marriage and motherhood.

Poseidon is the god of creatures and ocean,
For Aphrodite he had high emotion.
Ares the god of violence and war,
Hades lived under the floor.

The gods put up quite a fight,
When showing their might.
They tried to demonstrate good,
But were sometimes misunderstood.

Tommy Detrixhe

O'Loughlin Elementary
2nd Grade, 1st Place

Waves

The waves shimmer
And sparkle
In the sun.
In the night
The waves dance
In the light.

Lydia Dreher

O'Loughlin Elementary
2nd Grade, 2nd Place

War ~ Peace

War
Vicious, Patriotic
Fighting, Dying, Shooting
Mad, Scared, Kindness, Happy
Calming, Living, Loving
Gentle, Friendly
Peace

Jacob Brown

Wilson Elementary
1st Grade, Honorable Mention

Dinosaurs

Dinosaurs eat one another
I'm happy they are extinct
None survived the asteroid
One type actually flew
Spinosaurus the longest carnivore
Ankylosaurus' had a golf club-like tail
Unusual species all around the world
Raptors used 3-inch claws to attack
So many fossils to dig & discover

Eli Baxter

Holy Family Elementary
2nd Grade, 3rd Place (tie)

Blue

Blue is a sky.
Blue sounds like
waves washing into the beach.
Blue smells like blueberries.
Blue feels like cold water.
Blue makes me feel sad.
Blue tastes like blueberries.
Blue is the Ocean.
Blue is a swim in the sea!

Ashlyn Beckner

O'Loughlin Elementary
2nd Grade, 3rd place (tie)

Fall

The leaves are falling off the tree
I like to jump and play with my dog in the leaves
The leaves are the color of a bee
I like to rake the leaves up in a pile
I enjoy playing in the fall, you see

Brecklynn Fischer

St. Mary's Grade School
2nd Grade, Honorable Mention

Chocolate

Conching machines roll to mix
Heavy when in 100 pound blocks
Often devoured by many
Creamy when warmed
Obviously delicious
Luxurious people used to munch on it
Always brown unless you add something to dye it
Terrific with pretzels
Eager to eat!

Macie Day

O'Loughlin Elementary
2nd Grade, Honorable Mention

War ~ Peace

War
Death, panic
Bombing, killing, dying
Ships, guns, friendship, rebuilding
Trading, helping, loving
Friends, life
Peace

Davon Ruffus

Victoria Elementary
3rd Grade, 3rd Place

Softball

Use the ball to catch and roll
Save the ball out of control
Run the bags make a homer
Hit it out so you can run her home
Like to dance like to sing
After you win make them cringe
Hit that ball to outer space
Make sure you don't hit their face

Bostyn Berry

Wilson Elementary
3rd Grade, 1st Place

Outside

I see the flowers fly through the wind,
Riding on colorful bikes,
Jumping on the trampoline.
Taking long walks around the block.
Cars flying right by,
Birds flying so high in the blue sky.
Sun shining so bright,
Ice cream dripping down your hand,
Playing with your neighbors,
Shooting baskets through the hoop.
Drawing hopscotch on the driveway
full of chalk drawings,
Swinging through the air,
Jump roping up and down.
Going on a picnic.
Yummy, yummy food
because it is my mom's special sandwich.
Drinking lots of water,
Climbing the trees,
Getting all muddy.
Called inside for dinner and taking a shower.
Inside is fun but outside is better.

Brielle Honas

St. Mary's Grade School
3rd Grade, 2nd Place (t)

What I Found in my Garage

A pair of my dad's old junky shoes,
A JetSki almost as old as me,
A rose so old that its petals fell off!
My favorite shirt,
That's it, mom and dad.
An old jug of milk,
Clean your garage!
My favorite jeans,
Oh, come on, mom.
A pair of broken glasses,
Now that's a big fact.
One more thing.
A note from me,
Clean your garage.

Breckyn Sturgeon
Wilson Elementary
3rd Grade, Honorable Mention

Books Are Your Best Friends

Books tell you everything they know,
From politics to why does it snow,
They don't like to be judges,
Since thy certainly don't hold grudges.

Books don't talk smack
Behind your back.
They take you everywhere from
Mexico to the United Kingdom.

They might not always have the best spelling,
And there's no telling
What they think about you,
Life if you're awesome or a smelly shoe.

Books don't care who you are,
They'll still treat you like a star.
So be yourself,
And remember to take a book off the shelf!

Laeci Rome
O'Loughlin Elementary
4th Grade, 1st Place

Springtime

Springtime!
Beautiful days, something new,
so many colors, many things to do.
It's so pretty; never to be a pity.
Going outside, now the sun can't hide!
Playing with friends,
it seems like there's no end.
Eating in the sun,
even when it is rainy it is still fun.
Flowers are blooming,
but I hope Winter is not still looming.
I bet you will have lots of fun,
So, go outside before Springtime is done!

Shaylie Gaschler
St. Mary's Grade School
3rd Grade, Honorable Mention

Pumpkins

Perfect decoration for Autumn
Unique & delicious seeds
Making marvelous pumpkin pies
Perfect for carving
Kooky jack-o-lanterns
Impatient to explore pumpkin patch again
Necessary to spot just the right one
Shocked & surprised. . . there it is!!

Cambree Schmidt
Wilson Elementary
3rd Grade, Honorable Mention

Divorce

It's sad going back and forth,
being separated for days.
Parents fighting, yelling.
A scary thing, it is. . .
seeing Mom on some days
And Dad on others.

Charolotte Koerner
Holy Family Elementary
4th Grade, Honorable Mention

I Am

I am a kind kid who likes sports
I wonder if the world will love me
I hear life whispering in my ear
I see a bright future ahead of me
I want the world to be gentle
I am a kind kid who likes sports

I pretend there is no cruelty in the world
I feel clouds breaking upon my touch
I embrace my grandpa's urn
I worry about violence
I cry about my grandpa who is gone
I am a kind kid who likes sports

I understand things are hard
I say everything will be fine
I dream for a wonderful day
I hope I will leave this world peacefully
I am a kind kid who likes sports

Harper Nicholl
Wilson Elementary
5th Grade, 1st Place

The Battle of the Cats

One cat, two cats, both about to fight,
Everyone in cheerful fright,
No one will win without a fight,
If the only thing they'd do is bite.

A cat with a tree,
Other cat with a treat,
The cat gets tricked,
This cat gets bit.

The fight got too fierce, so they opened the door,
Even though the fight is gone, there is still war,
The other still wanted a big fight,
When the other one got him with a bite.

While they are scratching and biting,
No one seemed to know they were fighting,
Soon they stopped,
With the fight over a guy's pimple has popped.

James Burrell
O'Loughlin Elementary
5th Grade, 3rd Place

Best Friends

Being yourself is hard,
Especially when everyone expects
Something else
Than the true you.
Friends can make you happy with
Really impressive acts of kindness.
If only
Everyone was like that.
Not all friends are good. They
Damage your precious heart.
Seek your very own good friend.

Lexi Peters
Holy Family Elementary
4th Grade, Honorable Mention

Mountain Sunrise

Mist
blows over the valleys.
Ponds glisten pink,
streams run gold.
Cool air nestles
into fields of flowers.
Sun peeks out
through cotton candy clouds
as roses look out
of soft petals.
Dew settles.
Day awakes.

Catherine Marintzer
Holy Family Elementary
4th Grade, 2nd Place

Music

Music to my ears
Makes me vulnerable to my fears
Music, take me away
To a brighter day
Even when I'm down
I know you're around
Humming to a song
That makes me want to sing along
You lift up my spirit
And everyone can hear it

Kelsey Robben
Holy Family Elementary
5th Grade, Honorable Mention

Oh, the Kingdom

As the royal knight fled,
The giants had followed.
They wanted the kingdom,
They wanted what it owed.

Oh, the kingdom,
The Kingdom of Morthelm.
Oh, the kingdom,
Welcome to our realm.

The dwarves welcomed him,
They've heard the stories.
They helped him,
Taking away his worries.

Oh, the kingdom,
The Kingdom of Morthelm.
Oh, the kingdom,
Welcome to our realm.

Soon, the giants caught up,
They would clearly succeed.
But the dwarves would not fall,
That was simply, guaranteed.

Oh, the kingdom,
The Kingdom of Morthelm.
Oh, the kingdom,
Welcome to the realm.

Yet fate sided with the giants.
Dwarven walls were felled,
Homes were destroyed.
The screams of the innocent, would soon, be quelled.

Oh, the kingdom,
The Kingdom of Morthelm.
Oh, the kingdom,
Welcome to our realm.

But, as luck would have it,
The demon Zalhurtal
Would notice the rubble,
And summon a portal.

Oh, the kingdom,
The Kingdom of Morthelm.
Oh, the kingdom,
Welcome to the realm.

And through the portal,
Liked dark dreary fields.
But look on the bright side,
The knight's wounds healed.

Oh, the kingdom,
The Kingdom of Morthelm.
Oh, the kingdom,
Welcome to the realm.

And in the cornstalks,
An elderly man stood.
He was a Chronomancer,
And escape this world he would.

Oh, the kingdom,
The Kingdom of Morthelm.
Oh, the kingdom,
Welcome to the realm.

The group made a deal,
And with the true champion's courage,
They opened a portal.
The shadows parted, with a beautiful orange.

Oh, the kingdom,
The Kingdom of Morthelm.
Oh, the kingdom,
Welcome to the realm.

They entered the real world,
Yet it was before the attack.
No more wreckage,
They were just, at home, back.

Oh, the kingdom,
The Kingdom of Morthelm.
Oh, the kingdom,
Welcome to the realm.

They told the dwarves,
Of the giant's raid,
So, they crafted massive walls,
Titanic ballistas and giant-slaying catapults, they made.

Happily Every After.

Elliott Howden
Wilson Elementary
5th Grade, 2nd Place

Classrooms

Calming format that makes me feel at home
Learning palace of inspiration
Accept responsibility
Stay focused on your work and don't get
sidetracked
Stimulating peers always have your back
Really supercalifragilisticexpialidocious
Own your learning
Open your mind to all the possibilities
Most fun place to learn and work
Study hard and pass the test

Grayson Decker
O'Loughlin Elementary
5th Grade, 3rd Place

Predator and Prey

As I turned the corner,
I immediately stopped
Hoping it wouldn't run away.
I eyed it
As a hawk eyes its prey.
Its plump little body froze with
Pitch black fur standing straight up.
I crouched low
Ready to pounce at the perfect moment.
It knew what I was doing. . .
Then –
It ran out from under the table.
Bump!
My beautiful white hare rubbed against a chair
As I chased after it.
“Squeak!” it cried and scurried frantically.
It was too late –
It had made it to its hidden hole in the wall.
It turned
swishing my tail back and forth
Heading to my purrr-fect bed
. . .Waiting for our next encounter. . .

Rayna LaFond
O'Loughlin Elementary
5th Grade, Honorable Mention

Summer Time

Swimming in the cold pool
Under umbrellas for shade
Moms saying “it's too hot”
My feet are sizzling on the sidewalk
Exercising in the pool
Running to the pool

Time for a shower after the pool
I now feel cool
My armpits are sweaty; it's too hot
Everybody panic because my feet are on fire

Alyvia Kraft
St. Mary's Grade School
6th Grade, 3rd Place

Worm Moon

I mean the birds come out to sing
I mean the worms come out for spring
The winters gone
I leave at the crack of dawn
I only last for two nights
Although I shine as bright as lights

Nadia Hernandez
Hays Middle School
6th Grade, 1st Place

Umbrella

The umbrella protects me.
The umbrella keeps me dry.
The rain stops when the umbrella shields me.
I hear “drip, drip,” up above,
And think what I would do without it.
The umbrella finds a way to do me service.
The umbrella is my friend.
The lightning comes, and the umbrella becomes a hazard.
I am left without a choice,
But to betray the umbrella,
So, I don't let lightning strike.
I betrayed the umbrella in fear it would betray me.
Is this how I repay the umbrella's service?
Leaving it in the rain?
I feel fear without the umbrella, wet and scared,
But I did not want the umbrella to become my enemy.
I became the enemy first so I could survive.
Goodbye umbrella.

Kyler Kinderknecht
Hays Middle School
6th Grade, 2nd Place

No Beast, Yet Still No Peace

One eerie night the wind blew a little more,
The sky was not clear,
The branches not swaying, the birds were not singing,
Nor the owls hooting.
I couldn't sleep like a wee little sheep.

I went out the snug window and into the dark cold night.
All I can make out is a dark and foggy forest with branches that could grab you.
With only a small flashlight
I walk into the eerie and dreary forest.

As I walk into the forest,
I get the feeling that something
Or someone is following me.
I look and see nothing.
I start to burn up.
I turn back I see nothing.
Feeling furbobulus, I continue to walk deeper into the forest.

While I walk, I hear a deep roar.
The roar sounded like a thousand bears shrieking in pain.
I turn around and go pale.
I freeze, there is a 20-foot memrocusla
The beast grabs me.
I start to outgrabe.
I feel a sudden pain in my leg,
The pain feels like a thousand daggers stabbing my leg.

Feeling mimsy unlike a bimsy,
I kick the beast in the eye.
The memrocusla drops me.
Feeling befuddled,
I get up forgetting about the beast.
This beast smelled like a thousand sewer rats.
His beady red eyes darted straight to my eyes;
his yellow teeth pointy as nails covered in drool shows.

I look around to my feet and see a mimsy looking sheep.
I look again and there's no sheep.
I look towards the whimsical beast,
He is nowhere to be seen.
He is not behind nor in front of me and not above me.

I walk back home.
Feeling digubemelled, I get to my house.
I go to sleep and wake up weak.
No beast, yet still no peace.
Just have to confeast.

Addilyn Priest

Washington Grade School
6th Grade, Honorable Mention

Nonsense

Nonsense is made of the blank slate of the brain;
The void of the mind.

The graphs start to misalign
When the hand cramps and declines.

The anarchy begins as the brain boils over.
Nerve after nerve you start to unwind.

The idea has left the brain
in a gibberish incomprehensible.

Scribbles form and block the airway;
The word vomit too fast for the throat.

Like a rabid dog the brain has to channel it
Into thin, hitch-hatched lines across a blank page.

Nonsense is the scatterbrained summary
Of how lovely an artist's brain is.

Maia Gray

Hays Middle School
7th Grade, 1st Place

Love

Take your place.
Beside a space.
It may not be empty, it's not alone.
To you though, it's a beautiful home.
You may be afraid until someone steps into your space.
Helpful, unafraid.
A hand reaches out and fills your place.
Grabbing your arm a smile inches away.
You start to wonder why you feel this way.
Then you remember your place, so far away.
And think why did I have to leave against my own dismay?
You realize that you loved and forgot to take your own way through life.
What a time, you know your heart now rests safe without time to waste.

Lily Basgall
Hays Middle School
7th Grade, 2nd Place

The Night

When day fades to night,
Do you get a fright?
For trillions of years the stars have appeared
The world is so big but never mind will you use this time to un-whine?
Lay in your bed throughout the dim light,
and think about when day fades to night.
You're not the only one that is sitting still on a darkened chair.
The sun will rise and give your mind surprise as night fades away,
Into another day.

Lily Basgall
Hays Middle School
7th Grade, 3rd Place

Thank You Mom

Thank you, Mom.
Thank you for all those days you woke up before the light,
Getting me ready for school even after sleepless nights.
Thank you for my beauty
and in the way that I have grown.
All that you do does not go unseen.
There is nothing in this world that I could do
to ever repay you.
The best thing God could ever do
is giving you to me.
Although you do not see it
Although you do not feel it,
I love you so much, as much as can be.

Aimee Barretero
TMP-Marian Jr. High
7th Grade, Honorable Mention

No More Little

And when you found out what I had done you asked me why I would do that to myself you made me feel guilty as if I wasn't ashamed enough as it was, but the truth is, I felt shame in the entire process of having to grab the blade and dig it deep into my leg to the point where it bled to match the pain I felt in my heart that you caused you laughed about my cuts and said that you'd seen worse so mine weren't a big deal and I began to cry, but you didn't feel as if it was wrong, because you thought your opinion should've been invalid You always felt that way no matter what you called me or shamed me about and although it wasn't fair I didn't know how to express how much it would always hurt me. I can fight it in you, I wish I hadn't, and I knew I shouldn't have after all the things you said to me, that contradicted your actions towards me she doesn't even know the things that I've done to myself, but I know if she did. She would never ever in a million years react like you did. In fact, she would probably drive to my house with flowers in my favorite snacks. Aside with my Starbucks order and reassuring me that this world needs me, that she needs me, she would lay with me and hold me for hours until she made her point more than clear, I'm so happy I had her and I wished I never had you.

Angela Newman
Hays Middle School
7th Grade, Honorable Mention

Bakery Lady

MONDAY

People say bakeries take too long,
whenever breads and pastries aren't slung right over their arm,
but they don't know that everyone in here has a reason not to be so worried
about what lies beyond.

TUESDAY

The walls are full with the brightest of color,
But deep in the back is where the heart stutters.
She works and works all day and all night,
just to make parties fill with love, brighter than a thousand lights.

WEDNESDAY

No one see the struggle and love she puts in,
but her heart is growing thin.

THURSDAY

She continued to work no matter the signs on her door,
no matter the wind, rain, or storm.
She worked through the storms all day and all night,
but she couldn't work through the signs clawing at her door,
which caused her fright.

FRIDAY

The pictures and paintings are coming off her walls as the
Bakery Lady sweeps all through the halls.

SUNDAY

They cut her down and shoved her out because she wasn't,
A factory drowning the sounds of the joyful town down. . .
They may have taken the walls of which she called home,
But they will never take the Bakery Lady's dreams
which we all know she holds.

Emma Wasinger
TMP-Marian Jr. High
8th Grade, 3rd Place

Right Where You Left Me

It's hard to adjust to the space between us
The memories we built so tall and proud,
Now the windows have cracked and it will soon be torn down.
They're now outdated and would take too much work to fix back up,
So they've been pushed to the side and abandoned.

Sometimes they look haunted, just sitting there with cobwebs in between the boards in the windows,
But they're not.

They haven't always been rusted and rotten,
They used to be big and bright, filled with color
With beautiful designs running down the walls,
Built by the two lively kids running down the halls.

For now they're just old memories building up dust in the back of my mind
Nothing about them has changed, nothing but the faint feeling of sadness
I feel looking back at them.

Delanie Sanders

TMP-Marian Jr. High

8th Grade, 1st Place

The Best Friend

It's hard to find the perfect friend,
one that's with you till the end.
I know that I don't have to worry,
because I have you, girly.
You are so loving and caring,
you're always there in the despairing.
You are so trustworthy,
I can tell you of the worry.
You are so respectful,
that you seem to be gentle.
You are so helpful,
we're always successful.
You can be so funny,
you make me laugh like a bunny.
You will always forgive,
it makes me feel like I can live.
You are so loyal,
it's like I'm a royal.
You have so much gratitude,
that you have no attitude.
You are certainly not painful,
and are just like an angel.
Without you, I don't know what I would do,
I absolutely love being friends with you.

Katie Herrman

TMP-Marian Jr. High

8th Grade, 2nd Place

Book Poem

Upon the pages of *The Hidden Oracle's* lore,
Apollo, stripped of divine might, does plead.
A prophecy unfolds shadows at the core
In mortal realms, his destiny he'll search.
Before the climax the whispers of fate encore.

In the climax's grip, fate's relentless hold,
Apollo faces trials both fierce and daring.
God turned mortal, his tale unfolds;
Mounting tensions and prophecies forewarn.
In *The Hidden Oracle*, destiny's tale is told.

Resilient echoes linger, post-climatic fire.
Apollo's mortal trials a transformative heap,
From godly heights he descends entire.
Redemption whispers in the aftermath's choir
In *The Hidden Oracles* aftermath, rebirth's desire.

Jacob Seib

TMP-Marian High School

9th Grade, 1st Place

Sonnet

Through the sky, the light dances in the clouds,
Giving life to creatures of every kind.
In the breeze, I hear the bright warming sound
Of life as in a great, creative mind.

Through the meadow all the deer are jumping;
In the great green trees each bird has a song.
On the log the rabbit's foot is thumping,
Each coming for the time for which they long.

The flower's sweet smell comes anew again;
The buds open up to the newborn light.
Now all the creatures come out of their dens
To find their new world, a beautiful sight.

But in the air is the foreboding scent
Of another year dead, another spent.

Mattias Marintzer

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

The Lake

My favorite place in the world, the lake.
I swear nobody there can feel sadness
Or feel a single drop of the madness.
All we do is lay in the sun and bake.

And they wake up early and stay out late.
Also, we can play any kind of game
And roast marshmallows with a single flame.
Wait for all kinds of fish to take the bait.

Tubing on the biggest waves you have seen,
And building any fun thing in the sand
While listening to my parents' best bands.
Why should anyone look at their phone screen?

Bria Windholz

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

Last Moments

It's weird to think about
how there will soon be an empty space in our home.
It will be different,
Not hearing your paws walk across the floor,
or not listening to your bark when someone comes to the door.

As I cherish my last moments with you,
sometimes I remember things out of the blue.
I remember how you lay in the sun to keep warm,
I remember how you hid under the bed during a storm.

I take pictures of the moments we share,
so that later it's like you're still there.
As I soak in every second I have with you,
I think about how we had something true.
You always knew when something was wrong,
And you always kept me going strong.

You did all this without ever speaking,
and you made us happy even when you were sleeping.
I know your time is limited
as you get thinner,
and your heart skips a beat,
I pray you know how your presence made our family complete.

Maddy Dintino

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

America

The flag wept over our country.
The disrespect,
the anger
reflected upon his image,
was unlike anything he had ever felt.
What had happened to the pride,
people once felt,
while looking at his bright red
and white stripes
and the dark blue box
that contained a star,
representing each of the states.
What had happened,
to the people coming
together during hard times?
His tears fell like rain on a tin roof.
Always able to be heard,
but always ignored,
like his cry was insignificant.
He had once been praised for standing all night long,
being the only one unable to fight this battle,
that was caused by power.
He used to represent power,
and what it meant to be great.
But now,
he was engulfed in the flames,
of those who had not fought to keep him alive.
He was not the only one.
There were many more like him.
Every one of them,
fighting their own battle.
What had happened,
to the people who once felt the need
to give their life to protect thousands of others?
Why had his meaning,
now being diminished
by those who didn't know
what it was like to stand alone all night,
not knowing if he would make it
to the next day.

Macie Vanek

Hays High School
10th Grade, 2nd Place

Society Says

“Go be a doctor, an engineer
Move to the city, you can't make it here
Are you getting good grades?
All perfect straight A's?
Stop wondering and wandering,
That won't get you paid.”
I wish I were smarter, and all was clear
But oh, what a pity that I ended up here
I've been so afraid
That my future might fade
I'm not honoring, but maundering
Through this life that I've made
I may be a doctor, or an engineer
But not for the money, or pride in career
I may not have great grades
Or all-around A's
But this wondering and wandering
Is what really gives life meaning

Ava Erbert

Hays High School
10th Grade, Honorable Mention

Queen of the Board

I am a queen in chess,
And there's something I must confess,
I was known for the way I slid across the board,
And danced with the knights and kings,

But after years in this role,
I'm becoming quite dull,
As I no longer feel so pleased,

I move every which way,
But still day by day,
Everything remains the same,

I'd do all in my power,
To swap with a pawn or a tower,
Just to play a different game

Ava Erbert

Hays High School
10th Grade, 3rd Place

She Won't Win

The words that echo in my head
They aren't the words that should be said

All I hear is that I'm UNLOVED
Emotions come in like a flood

As I face the world that awaits
And realize I love all my traits

Girl in the mirror doesn't own me
Don't you worry just wait and see

These words can leave me astray
Sometimes I feel I will fray

SHE tells me I'm NOT ENOUGH
My head is filled with this stuff

SHE says I CAN'T DO IT which makes me WORTHLESS
I can't refute as I'm left wordless

All I hear is that I'm UNLOVED
emotions come in like a flood

These words are chains that bind me
Then how on earth will I ever find me

If SHE says these words about me, they must be true
SHE thinks she knows me well from her view

I lay as a puddle on the floor
I dig deep within myself for more

While some days I don't shine as bright
I will always be someone's light

As I search deep within
My face begins to lift with a high chin

I realize I am capable to do whatever I set my mind to
And believe success is not far for you

As I emerge from the depths
I stand and take a deep breath

As I face the world that awaits
And realize I love all my traits

Girl in the mirror doesn't own me
Don't you worry just wait and see

I am so much more
I am becoming someone she can no longer ignore

Kaley Phelps
Hays High School
11th Grade, 2nd Place

Woman of Stone

Was it acid rain that snaked down?
Or salt from her eyes to the ground?
Did she ever show them her tears?
For those marks, it must have took years

A woman in stone is so strong
Is that why they drag her along?
To teach her a lesson on life
She's guilty no matter how nice

The tears soaked too deep to come back
Don't they know she's close to a crack?
She closes her eyes, prays for sleep
But all she'll ever do is weep

Clare Tholstrup
Hays High School
11th Grade, 1st Place

Put it Down

Why don't you put your phone down?
You're missing the nice weather
And playing with your friends.
Your bike has set sad the whole summer
And your swings have started to rust.
Why don't you put your phone away?
Your friends are at a party
And you're missing family movie night.
Soon you'll move out and miss
All the fun.
Why don't you put it down?
You're so concerned about
How your body looks on a screen
That you haven't noticed your
Parents grow older and your sister will grow tall.
You spend your time envious of those better off
Instead of getting up and making a change.
Why don't you put your phone down?
You lie in your bed along with tears
Rolling down your face.
Your life is remembered by likes and follows.
Apps and clicks are your only memories.
Why didn't I put my phone down?
I missed my life from behind a screen.

Emersyn Sander
Hays High School
10th Grade, 1st Place

O'Flanney McJosh

I once had a shrimp as a watch.
His name was O'Flanney McJosh.
When I asked him the time,
He'd shout 'round half past nine,
But then I would know it was botched.

Old McJosh just had one single tell.
E'ery time he would lie he would yell.
So when he would shout,
And let it all out,
That's when I'd know it so well.

One day I then had quite enough.
O'Flanney thought he was quite tough.
But when he was boiled and brewed,
And turned into stew,
He realized that I called his bluff.

And when McJosh then sank into the broth,
The pot bubbled and boiled and frothed,
At that point he died,
His head boiled and fried,
And that was the end of McJosh.

Brett Dreher

Hays High School
11th Grade, 3rd Place

The Heartlands

Out in the heartlands, where the fields are wide,
The sun sets low, and the critters hide.
The Midwestern plains stretch out for miles,
The wind howls strong and the prairie smiles.
The fields grow tall, and the skies ARE blue,
In the heartlands, there's a home for you.

The towns are small, but the folks are kind,
The stars shine bright, clear skies all night.
The corn grows tall, and the wheat fields sway,
The cows roam free, and the horse's neigh.
The people here, they work hard and true,
In the heartlands, there's a job for you.

In the winter, the snow falls smooth and slow,
The hearth is warm and the cocoa flows.
The hunting is great and the forage too.
In the heartlands, our beliefs are true

Come summer the lakes are crystal clear,
The fishing is good, and the water's near
The sun is hot, but the breeze is cool,
In the heartlands, there's some fun for you.

The fire is warm, and the whisky's strong,
Here in the heartlands, you just can't go wrong.
So come on down and stay awhile,
The Midwestern charm might make you smile.
The people are kind, and the land is true,
In the heartlands well, there's a place for you.

Calvin Evins III

Hays High School
12th Grade, 1st Place

2024 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	Charlotte Downing	<i>The Magic Pool</i>	St. Mary's	Beth Edwards
K	2	Karsyn Bittel	<i>Bakery Girls</i>	St. Mary's	Beth Edwards
K	3 (tie)	Lyla Nuttle	<i>Mystery School</i>	Washington	Ashley Dusin
K	3 (tie)	Luke Irwin	<i>Saturn</i>	Washington	Ashley Dusin
K	HM	Maverick Southard	<i>Treehouse</i>	Washington	Ashley Dusin
1	1	Brandt Seibel	<i>The Windy Day</i>	St. Mary's	Megan Everett
1	2	Sutton Dinkel	<i>The Pig and the Wolf</i>	St. Mary's	Megan Everett
1	3	Adeline Seibel	<i>Callie, the Adventure Cat</i>	St. Mary's	Megan Everett
2	1	Tommy Detrixhe	<i>The Dragonfly of Hope</i>	O'Loughlin	Kenda Leiker
2	2	Jayden Qi	<i>The Hershey Company Comeback</i>	O'Loughlin	Kenda Leiker
2	3	Oliver Adcock-Smies	<i>How I Feel</i>	O'Loughlin	Kenda Leiker
2	HM	Canon Schoenthaler	<i>A Special Meeting</i>	Washington	Libby Starns
2	HM	Ryken Mayfield	<i>Innertube Adventure Leads to Excitement</i>	Wilson	Kenda Leiker
3	1	Kersee Wince	<i>Book Travels</i>	Lincoln	Kenda Leiker
3	2	Anniston Edwards	<i>The Adventures of Landon the Fish</i>	Wilson	Alyssa Dees
3	3	Charlie Schleder	<i>Learning a Sweet Lesson</i>	Lincoln	Kenda Leiker
3	HM	Brielle Berry	<i>The Talking Dog</i>	Wilson	Peyton Morlan
3	HM	Emma Wichert	<i>Midnight at the Zoo</i>	Washington	Jessica Russell
3	HM	Ember Priesner	<i>The Haunted Hotel</i>	Wilson	Peyton Morlan
4	1	Opal Birdsong	<i>The Long Lost Fairy Goddess</i>	Washington	Hannah Davenport
4	2	Addyson McMillan	<i>The Best Camping Trip</i>	Washington	Hannah Davenport
4	3	Oliver Buckstead	<i>The UFO Adventure</i>	O'Loughlin	Hannah Wince
5	1	Tristan Whitmer	<i>The Core Plan</i>	Washington	Hannah Davenport
5	2	William Reed	<i>My First Pitch</i>	O'Loughlin	Sonya Herl/AJ Wilson
5	3	Elliott Howden	<i>Warwolf</i>	Wilson	Hannah Wince
5	HM	Kincaid Demel	<i>Rocks Committing Felonies</i>	Roosevelt	Hannah Wince
6	1	Arianna Cantrell-Diaz	<i>We Aren't Safe Here</i>	TMP JH	Holly Lang
6	2	Jacelyn Dreiling	<i>Alison's Adventure</i>	TMP JH	Holly Lang
6	3	Annabell Barenberg	<i>Inner Demons Come out to Play</i>	HMS	Megan Pantle
6	HM	Kayla Schmeidler	<i>The Red Button</i>	TMP JH	Holly Lang
7	1	Ashlen Lang	<i>Chip</i>	TMP JH	Brenda Rose
7	2	Andrew Meagher	<i>Dreams</i>	TMP JH	Brenda Rose
7	3	Kaycie Kennedy	<i>The House on 13th Street</i>	TMP JH	Brenda Rose
7	HM	Reagan Staab	<i>Not Yet, But Soon</i>	TMP JH	Brenda Rose

8	1	Thomas Meagher	<i>Pray for the Bear</i>	TMP JH	Brenda Rose
8	2	Piper Simpson	<i>Two Roads Coming Together</i>	TMP JH	Brenda Rose
8	3	Jack Stoecklein	<i>Luck</i>	TMP JH	Brenda Rose
8	HM	Blayden Werth	<i>Run</i>	HMS	Misti Norris
8	HM	Cade Schlautman	<i>The Journal of John</i>	TMP JH	Brenda Rose
9	1	Charles Meitner	<i>Hide and Fire</i>	TMP	Chelsie Niehaus
9	2	Elijah Lang	<i>Isolation</i>	TMP	Chelsie Niehaus
10	1	Macie Vanek	<i>New Mexico Mountains</i>	HHS	Vanessa Schumacher
10	2	Kennedy Walburn	<i>How Did I Get Here</i>	HHS	Vanessa Schumacher
10	3	Jacob Schaffer	<i>A Cow Conversation</i>	TMP	Chelsie Niehaus
11	1	Anne Wintch	<i>Mrs. Flores's Garden</i>	HHS	David Buller
11	2	Morgan Munsch	<i>Not Just Pigs</i>	HHS	David Buller
11	3	Kolynn Denning	<i>The Portrait</i>	HHS	David Buller
12	1	Calvin Evins III	<i>Hunting with a Purpose</i>	HHS	Kathy Wagoner

2024 Creative Writing Winning Entries ~ *Prose*

The Magic Pool

One summer day deep in the woods Leah discovered a magic pool. “Wow!” she said. She thought it was the most amazing thing she had ever seen. Three mermaids were splashing around the magic pool. One mermaid had a pink tail, the other had a blue tail, and the last mermaid had a purple tail. They were beautiful. Leah walked up to the magic pool and asked the mermaids what their names were. The mermaids were surprised to see Leah but excited to make a new friend. They told Leah their names. One was named Seashell, one was named Pearl and the last mermaid’s name was Sparkle. Leah had never seen such beautiful mermaids before. She wished that she could swim with the mermaids. The mermaids told her to dive in. When she touched the magic pool water her legs turned into a mermaid tail! Leah could not believe it. She always wanted to be a mermaid. Leah, Seashell, Pearl, and Sparkle swam around the rest of the day exploring the magic pool in the woods.

Charlotte Downing

St. Mary’s Grade School

Kindergarten, 1st place

Bakery Girls

Once upon a time there was a donut named Miss Sprinkles. Her best friend was a cupcake named Sugar. They were the prettiest treat in the bakery, but one day a new treat showed up. It was prettier than they were. It was a cookie in the shape of a unicorn. It was decorated with pink frosting and sparkles. Miss Sprinkles and Sugar felt sad. They did not like that the cookie was more beautiful than them. Fancy the unicorn cookie walked up to them and said “Hello, I am the queen.” They asked her where she came from. She told them she lived in a magical world that rained sprinkles and snowed cupcakes. She was the ruler of them all and now she wanted to be the ruler of the bakery. All the other treats in the bakery were on Fancy’s side. Miss Sprinkles and Sugar had to do something about it. They waited until the bakery closed and they got a giant glass of milk. They told Fancy they had a surprise. Then she came over. They spilled the glass of milk on Fancy and she started to crumble. “Noooooo,” Fancy yelled. Miss Sprinkles and her best friend Sugar skipped away into the kitchen and never had to worry about Fancy the Unicorn cookie again.

Karsyn Bittel

St. Mary’s Grade School

Kindergarten, 2nd place

Mystery School

There was a girl name Leona. She goes to space and finds a mystery gift. She decides to open it. She finds a cute cat. She names the cat angel. She takes it home with her.

Lyla Nuttle

Washington Elementary

Kindergarten, 3rd (tie) place

Saturn

There was a lion that was on Saturn. He wore a big jar on his head to give him oxygen. While he was there he found a spooky ghost. He scared the ghost off and he decided to stay on Saturn. He did bring a lot of food with him.

Luke Irwin

Washington Elementary

Kindergarten, 3rd (tie) place

Treehouse

Once there was a policeman that got stuck in a treehouse. He went up there to save a dog. He saves the dog but has to find a way down. He wasn't that high up so he jumps. He makes it safely down.

Maverick Southard

Washington Elementary

Kindergarten, Honorable Mention

The Windy Day

One day suddenly the wind blew very hard. I decided to fly my kite. The wind blew so hard it broke my kite. I bought a new one to fly. My new kite flew high in the sky. It flew so high I could not see it anymore. The wind stopped blowing and my kite fell down from the sky and hit me in the face. That's the day my kite gave me a black eye.

Brandt Seibel

St. Mary's Grade School

1st grade, 1st place

The Pig and The Wolf

Once upon a time there were 3 little pigs. One of the pigs went to the wolf's house and knocked on the door. The pig said "Open up!" The wolf replied "Not in my chinny chin!" The wolf stated to boil a pot of hot water. The pig started to climb the wolf's house. The wolf put the boiling hot water under the chimney. The pig jumped down the chimney into the pot and the wolf had pig stew for supper.

Sutton Dinkel

St. Mary's Grade School

1st grade, 2nd place

Callie, the Adventure Cat

It was a hot summer day outside. Callie Cat saw a pretty purple butterfly and she followed it. She kept on following it and then it stopped on a flower. When it flew away she saw that she was in the jungle! She felt kind of scared. She saw a cave and went into it. POP! There was a gorilla! It was black and brown and it was a giant. The gorilla smashed his knuckles on the floor, but he missed her. Callie jumped on the gorilla's back and scratched him as hard as she could. The gorilla ran back into his cave. Callie found her way out of the jungle and found her family. She was so happy to be home, and she never went to the jungle again.

Adeline Seibel

St. Mary's Grade School

1st Grade, 3rd place

The Dragonfly of Hope

Once upon a time, in a forest far, far away, over mountains, over hills, over oceans, there lived a fairy who had set off on a task to save her kingdom from the evil ogre DOOM BOOM! Anybody who heard Doom Boom's evil cackle would become his evil slave to take over the fairy kingdom. So, the fairy set off on the task to get the troll army to help stop the evil ogre Doom Boom. She swam through the oceans. She walked over the hills, and climbed over mountains. During her journey, along came a dragonfly. This dragonfly was no ordinary dragonfly. For when this dragonfly drank nectar, it became strong, big, and much more powerful. However, the dragonfly was lonely and sad. So, the fairy asked, "Would you join my quest to stop the evil ogre Doom Boom from taking over the fairy kingdom?" The dragonfly agreed.

So, the two set off and soon they arrived at the Troll Kingdom. They both asked the grumpy troll, "May we borrow your troll army?"

The grumpy troll asked, "Why do you want my army?" The fairy explained that the evil ogre Doom Boom is coming and if Doom Boom takes over the fairy kingdom, the troll kingdom will be next.

The grumpy troll gives in and replies, "Fine, but only because I don't really like this Doom Boom guy"

The dragonfly proceeds to ask, "OK, but before we go, I will need some nectar packets if you have them.

"Yes, but why do you need nectar packets?" asked grumpy troll. The dragonfly went on to explain that the nectar packets give him power and strength.

Then Grumpy troll replied, "You are in luck! I happen to have a few right here left over from using them as bait for the bugs that I ate." Once he handed them over, they left and joined the army. The fairy, dragonfly, and the troll army prepared and left for battle. They arrived at the fairy kingdom. All the fairies were instructed to wear special fairy earbuds so they could talk to each other and not hear Doom Boom's evil crackle. The troll army, however, didn't need the earbuds because they had bad hearing.

The moment had come, and the evil ogre Doom Boom arrived at the fairy kingdom. As predicted, they fought and fought. Quickly Doom Boom's army was losing ground. But the troll army was also weakening. That's when the dragonfly and the fairy remembered the nectar packets that grumpy Troll had given them. The dragonfly quickly sipped up the nectar and immediately grew and became giant. He used his massive wings to fling the rest of Doom Boom's army as well as Doom Boom himself far, far, away out of the fairy kingdom. The fairy kingdom was saved, and they had hope for the future. The dragonfly took on the role as the protector of the fairy kingdom from then on.

Tommy Detrixhe

O'Loughlin Elementary

2nd grade, 1st Place

The Hershey Company Comeback

It was a peaceful, ordinary night at the chocolate museum. After an hour, the security guards fell asleep. Once they were asleep, the Milton Hershey figure within the museum came alive! “I’m alive! I’m alive!” Hershey whispered to himself, being sure to not wake the guards.

Since he was alive, he pondered the thought of going to his Hershey’s Company to see how it has progressed throughout the years. He couldn’t stand it anymore; he was about to go insane! Then he whispered, “I’m going to the Hershey Company.” But I need to be back before morning.

He realized that he only had five more hours because he had wasted 3 hours just thinking about going. So, he ran as fast as he could possibly run. When he arrived at the Hershey Company, he saw that it had been shut down. It was so devastating that he could not stop crying! So, he took matters into his own hands. Milton was determined to fix it and reopen it

This was going to be quite the task to complete in just a few hours. First, he fixed the conching machines and got them up and running again. Next, he noticed that the roasting machines weren’t heating the cacao beans enough. He turned up the temperature and made sure it was plugged in. Then Milton saw that they were low on ingredients, so he went to the warehouse to grab more cacao beans, sugar, and other ingredients used for his chocolates. At this point he realized he might be short on time. He quickly made a poster and hung it out front that stated, “Job Opening – Now Hiring – Best Company in Town..

So, by the time he hung the sign, it was almost morning. The sun was rising from the horizon. Milton Hershey sprinted back to the chocolate museum. He quickly went to his display case and froze. Just as he froze, the lights flickered on. No one even noticed he had been gone.

That morning, when people drove by the factory, they noticed that it was open and up and running again. People raced to get jobs and started their shifts. Before long, chocolate candy was being produced and packaged. The Hershey Company was a success again!

Later that day one of the museum security guards noticed that Milton Hershey looked a little different than he remembered. Instead of a serious face, he had a great big smile across his face.

Jayden Qi

O’Loughlin Elementary
2nd grade, 2nd place

How I Feel...

Oh hi! I’m just laying here inside a box alongside colorful friends and haven’t moved in the past 5 hours. I’m waiting for someone to pick me up and use me. It’s been so long since I’ve had the chance to skate on paper. If you haven’t figured it out by now, I’m a pencil.

Yay! A human just came by and gave me a hug with their hand and then took me. Here is my chance to go skating on the paper. I can’t wait! Hold on, where are we going? Oh God! What is that thing? Please don’t put me in that meat grinder! Oops, too late, here I go. Hey, stop it that tickles my feet. Oh, now it hurts a little. Ouch! Thank goodness it didn’t last very long, and it gave me new shoes. Finally, I can smoothly skate across the paper. I swish and swirl forming different letters as neat as I can. My favorite move is when I jump up and make a dot when I’m done. I also like when I rub my hair across the paper. I delete words and I get fancy new hairdo in the process.

Just when everything seemed perfect, the human stuck me in their warm, moist cave (a.k.a. mouth) and clenched me with white crushers of death. First of all, EWW this is such a gross feeling and secondly it hurts. Ouch! The human gave me a scar. At this point, I’d much rather go back in my box with my colorful friends. Maybe I’ll have a better day tomorrow.

Oliver Adcock-Smies

O’Loughlin Elementary
2nd grade, 3rd place

Innertube Adventure Leads To Excitement

One day after school, my dad, Derek, asked me and my brother, Tate, if we wanted to go outside and cruise the innertube through the snow. And why would we say no? But my brother said, "I'll come out in a little bit." He said this because he was grinding on the math game IXL. So, I got ready to go. Outside by gearing up in my overalls and coat. My dad and I went to our shed, aka the man cave. Dad grabbed the ladder and lifted the innertube up and threw it to the ground. Afterwards, he started airing it up. Uh oh, we started hearing a sizzle like sound sssssssss. My dad said, "Well Ryken, come put your finger over the hole while I try to find something to fix it"

"Okay, dad," I said. He came out with something called Slime.

"Um...is it slime?" I asked.

"No," he replied.

I knew it was sticky because he put it in the hole and got a wipe. The slime stuck to the wipe. Dad didn't use it right. He was supposed to put it in the air stem of the inner tube, but he put it on the hole. I'm thinking, "Come on, Dad!" Seconds later, he put it in the air stem. He read my mind!" What shocked me was somehow the air pushed through the slime to the hole! I questioned dad, "How did it do that!"

"Don't know," he said.

"Woo Hoo!" I yelled. This innertube thing might really happen.

Then we had to put the innertube in the 4-wheeler, and he drove us to the back yard where, there was 6 inches of snow – true fact. He quickly attached the innertube to the 4-wheeler.

Brother update: Still grinding on the math game.

I hopped on the innertube, and we were off.

In no time at all, "Ahhh!" I yelled happily. My mom was watching from the back porch. After one good minute – I'm just kidding. It was 5 minutes. My dad whipped me over to my mom. He stopped just as I was high centered on top of a huge drift. My mom hollered, "Should I tell Tate to hurry up?"

"Yes!" we shouted. Tate was out in a flash. He got on and he flew so fast. I could barely see him. In about 10 minutes Tate ran into a tree – another true fact. He said that he couldn't see because there was a thin sheet of ice on his glasses. He was wearing them because he didn't want to get snow in his eyes.

Dad let me ride the innertube back to the shop. He tried to smash me into a drift, but I got stuck and then dad pushed on the gas, and I flew a yard into the air – another true fact! This was such a super fun evening; I can't wait to do it again next winter!

Ryken Mayfield

Wilson Elementary

2nd Grade, Honorable Mention

A Special Meeting

It was a nice day, and Canon was driving his monster truck to the airport. The monster truck took up several spaces in the parking lot, but once it was safe, he flew first class to New York.

It was a good flight and Canon ate cake during the 5 hours it took to get there. He saw skyscrapers from the airplane and they were everywhere when he started driving around. Cody Rhodes was signing autographs in one of the biggest buildings in the city.

The line to get an autograph was really long and Canon didn't know if Cody would stay long enough to sign his WWE belt. Canon had to use his special Cody Rhodes shirt to hypnotize him and then he was transported to the front of the line. He was very happy to get his autograph on the WWE belt.

Canon Schoenthaller

Washington Elementary, Ellis

2nd grade, Honorable Mention

Book Travels

My pages are crisp. My colors are bright. I am on a shelf surrounded by other boring books. If you haven't figured it out, I'm a book. My name is "Light". I got bored from sitting for so long. I even had a little dust on me. So I decided it is time to have a look around.

I squeezed myself out from between two books and before I knew it, I was falling through the air and BUMP! I obviously hit the floor. OUCH! Suddenly I was blinded! I straightened my pages and saw that I was surrounded by thousands of books – big and small, tall and short. They were arranged on shelves all over the room. I tried to move. I had to lean all my bodyweight on one side to flip over to move.

Suddenly I was being lifted into the air! I was grabbed by two great big claw-like things. The claws then placed me in a machine with other books. The machine made some ding-ding sounds and then I was taken out of the machine and placed in a black bag and flung over a human's shoulder.

I fell asleep and woke up still in the black bag. Before I knew it, I started bouncing around in the bag hitting my spine and pages on other things in the bag. Once things calmed down, I was taken out of the black bag. I realized it was an airplane. The human opened me up and began to stare at me and all my words. It was a wonderful sensation. After what seemed like an hour, I got put back in the black bag.

It was at that moment that I realized I wanted to be read forever. I hated being in the black bag. It felt like I was trapped and closed off from humans. When the human held me in its warm hands, I felt comfortable and appreciated. I knew I had a purpose and was providing knowledge to someone. It was a great feeling.

This feeling came over me every time the human read me. I didn't want this time together to end. But one day, the human turned my last page and closed me up. I was sad knowing that I would have to go back to the library.

Something better than I could have imagined happened. The human gave me to another human, and I got read all over again. And...as you can guess, life was awesome. I kept getting read by different humans feeling those happy emotions over and over again.

Kersee Wince

Lincoln Elementary

3rd grade, 1st place

The Adventures of Landon the Fish

One cold Wednesday after school there was a fish named Landon. He packed up and started to swim home. Then Landon bumped into a whale! And looked up and saw a massive whale. Then he screamed!

The whale said, "Don't be afraid. I'm friendly."

And Landon said "OKAY.... but what's your name?"

My name is Dom the whale what's yours?"

Landon said, "My name is Landon the fish."

Then Dom the whale said, "Are you from here?"

Landon looked up and realized he was in a whole new town! Then he said, "This is not my town I'm from Shell City!"

Then Dom said, "Well Shell City is to your right."

As Landon was swimming, he bumped into a jellyfish and said "Sorry," then kept on swimming.

When the jellyfish said, "Come here," Landon turned around and swam towards the jellyfish.

Then Landon said "What?"

And the jellyfish said, "Where are you going all alone?"

Landon said, "I'm going to Shell City."

Then the jellyfish said, "Shell City! Are you lost?"

"Yes, but what's your name?"

Then the jellyfish said, "My name is Lucy the jellyfish, "and then Lucy said "How did you get lost?"

“Well, here’s the story. I just got out of school and as I swam home, and I forgot my house was on 3rd Street and swam all the way here,” said Landon.’

“Wow that sounds crazy!” Well, I’ll let you go on your way,” said Lucy.

And Landon swam and then he bumped into a shark! Then he screamed!

The shark said, “Shhhh! I’m nice and my name is Freddy the shark.”

Let me go if you’re nice!” said Landon. Then Freddy released him. The Landon said “Are you crazy!”

“What do you mean?” asked Freddy.

Then Landon lost it! “Well, you appeared out of nowhere then you strangled me!”

“Oh, sorry about that,” said Freddy.

“You know what?” I’ll forgive you,” said Landon.

“Good and where are you going?” asked Freddy.

“Well, I’m going to Shell City!”

“Shell City?” said Freddy.

“Yah,” said Landon.

But where are your parents and what happened?” said Freddy.

“What happened was I just got out of school, and I packed up and headed home when I passed my house and swam here!” said Landon.

“Well then, I’ll let you get home,” said Freddy.

Then Landon bumped into turtle and said something. But the turtle didn’t know what he meant so he just kept on swimming. And then he bumped into a fish. He looked up and realized it was his mom!

His mom said, “I was so worried about you!” Then Landon’s mom said from now on she would be in the pickup line. Then when Landon got home everyone was waiting for him.

They yelled, “Welcome home!” and then they all celebrated that Landon was found.

The next day his mom said, “I will pick you up after school.”

Anniston Edwards

Wilson Elementary

3rd grade, 2nd place

Learning a Sweet Lesson

In Old Dominion, Virginia, there was a baby pygmy goat who lived on a farm with cows, sheep, llamas, geese, and other pygmy goats. This goat was white with coffee-brown blotches on his coat. He had a small black nose and cute blue eyes. Every time he walked; his hooves made a tip-tap-tip-tap sound. His name is Peewee, and his best friend’s name is Layla, she’s a baby llama.

One day when Layla’s and Peewee’s parents were sleeping, feeling board, Layla and Peewee started to wander off from the farm. They followed a grassy path and found themselves in a small town. It looked playful and fun. They could see children, grass, and water. They could also smell something – it was...SWEET! They followed the smell for a few minutes, and the smell got stronger and stronger and – WAIT!

Layla found a purple, shiny, pebble on the ground, it smelled sweet. Then Layla said, “I don’t know what this is, it smells sweet, is it food?” Peewee didn’t know either. Then Layla popped it in her mouth.

“NO!” said Peewee.” Layla contemplated if it was good or bad. Then in a sweet, high-pitched hum, she made a mmm sound. Next, Layla burped, a little burp, and did a little giggle. A few seconds later, she picked up a few more shiny pebbles; one green, one orange, and one blue. Layla quickly put them all in her mouth. “DON’T DO THAT! yelled Peewee.

With her mouth full she said, “They’re good,” as she continued to chew on the pebbles. Afterwards, she smiled with her teeth stained like a rainbow.

They kept on walking and sooner or later Peewee ate a pebble and agreed with her. As the two of them continued their walk, they saw a big building that said HAPPY CANDY in rainbow letters with a mural of a happy sun. There were trucks in the parking lot and sweet smells coming from the building.

“What if that’s where the candy is coming from,” shouted Peewee in excitement. Layla agreed. They walked toward the building in awe and wonder. As they approached the building, they saw a medium-sized hole in the building and slipped through it. They found themselves in the boiler room. Then they found another hole in the boiler room. They peered through the hole and saw....white chocolate, dark chocolate, the tasty, shiny pebbles, and peanut butter pebbles. They each stared with excitement.

Carefully Peewee and Layla entered the mysterious candy room. They see a serious looking human walking around. So...they decided to sneak around. After awhile they found two bags that said ‘Fruit Pebbles’ on the cashier counter.

Peewee, as fiercely as a lion, ripped the bags open. A lady behind the counter, who Peewee and Layla have not seen yet, screamed in surprise. Layla and Peewee gobbled up all the fruit pebbles. Within seconds, they felt very hyper and went wild because of too much sugar.

“Get them guards!” yelled the lady in rage. As Layla and Peewee raced around the room because of being chased, they giggled and laughed. Then when the guards and the two animals ran out of energy the candy-maker snuck behind them and ...kicked them out.

As said as can be, Layla and Peewee walked on that same grassy path all the way home. And as soon as they got home, they snuggled with their parents and told about their adventure. Overall, Peewee and Layla learned their lesson. It’s ok to eat sweets, just not too much.

Charlie Schleder

Lincoln Elementary

3rd grade, 3rd place

The Talking Dog

Once upon a time there was a girl named Annie. She lived in a village named Mooville. She liked to go outside and water plants for her family. One day she went outside to water the crops and corn. So she went to get a bucket of water. And she started to water the crops and corn. While she was doing it a dog came out of nowhere.

“Hi” Annie said. “Where did you come from?” Annie said.

“I lost my family and I need help find them,” the dog said.

“Oh my gosh you can talk!” Annie said.

“Of course I can,” the dog said.

“I have never heard a dog talk before,” Annie said. “I will help you, but first we have to get you inside. We can’t let mom and dad see you. They’re going to freak out! I have an idea,” Annie said. “We can go in through my window.”

“Ok,” the dog said.

Annie said, “Let’s go. You can stay at my house for the night and tomorrow we will go look for your family,” So they went inside through the window.

When they got inside the dog said, “I’m hungry.”

“Okay.” Annie said. “I will go get you some food. Stay here.” Annie went to get the food. She got some nice warm bread and some carrots. “I’m back.” Annie said. “Here is your food. We should probably go to bed now. I’m going to say good night to Mom and Dad, so they don’t come in here. And we have to wake up early tomorrow if you want to find your family.

They went to bed.

The next morning, Annie said, “Are you ready to go find your family?”

“Of course,” the dog said. So they got dressed and went outside to go look for the dog’s family. They brought some nice warm bread, and they brought some smoothies. Annie’s mom and dad were still sleeping. Annie and the dog went outside to look. They first looked at the pond, but the dog’s family was not there. Then they looked in somebody’s backyard. They were nowhere to be seen. Then they looked at a lot of stores, but they were nowhere to be seen. They also looked in a field, but they were nowhere to be seen.

“We should probably go home,” Annie said.

It was getting really dark but then the dog saw something brown drinking from the lake. “Wait a minute I think I found them,” said the dog. So they went towards it. “Mom, Dad, Susie, Layla! We found them!” the dog said. “I can’t believe it!”

They all gave each other a hug, and Annie joined them. Annie went back home. The dog kept coming to visit Annie, and he brought his family.

Brielle Berry

Wilson Elementary

3rd grade, Honorable Mention

Midnight At the Zoo

Once upon a time there was a penguin named Lily. She had two sisters. Their names were Mila and Nellie. They live at the zoo and they all love reading comics. This is because they have one big secret; they are superheroes!

Let me tell you about their superpowers: Lily’s was super-hearing, Nellie’s was super strength, and Mila’s was night vision. They have three big rivals. Their names are Milo, Chuck, and Phern.

One night as the clock struck midnight at the zoo Lily quickly sprinted out of her bedroom and into Mila and Nellie’s room. Lily told her sisters that she was tossing and turning all night because she felt something was off, and she just knew the problem was with Milo, Chuck, and Phern. Just as Lily was telling the girls about her night, suddenly she heard trouble. She told them what she heard and the two gasped. Reader, do you want me to tell you what she said? Ok, ok I will tell you. She heard screaming! Once they heard the news, they ran straight to headquarters. Mila led the group because she was able to see in the dark with her night vision.

Reader, remember back at the beginning no one knew that Lily and her sisters were superheroes? Well, that’s about to change. After changing into their superhero suits at headquarters, they all went to the elephant exhibit where Lily thought she heard the screaming. They found out that it was the rhino gang! The gang was eating all of the elephant’s favorite peanuts! The elephant’s name was Nora.

Nora said, “Lily, Mila, Nellie?”

She spoke. “Uh, Oh” said Nellie.

“Nora, we came here to save you,” said Mila.

“Milo, Chuck, Phern, you guys need to stop!” Lily exclaimed. “Stop being mean to everyone I do not like it ok?”

Lily quickly flew to Verizon and bought a phone while the others distracted the gang. Meanwhile Lily called the animal shelter and the rhinos got taken away to the shelter and everyone lived happily ever after!

The End.

Emma Wichert

Washington Elementary

3rd grade, Honorable Mention

The Haunted Hotel

One day there were three friends going on a trip together. And then they found a big hotel. And outside of that hotel were dead plants and trees. And there were no other hotels available. So, they unpacked the stuff out of the car. Then they walked in slowly. The manager was a zombie! AHH...!

The zombie tried to attack Lily. Finally, they got to their room safely. Then they got really hungry, so they ordered room service, and the power line was down. They heard a loud knock on the door, so they answered it...AHH! Zombie!

They shut the door and climbed out the window and decided to sleep in the car.

“Good idea,” said Luke.

Then they drove off to another town and got another hotel room and again it was still so creepy. And it still had a monster as the hotel would. So, then they checked into their room, and this one was a little better than the last one. It had a way nicer bed and shower and a working phone and a working TV.

Then they looked in the closet and a monster popped right out of the closet! And then they ran out of the hotel.

Ember Priesner

Wilson Elementary

3rd grade, Honorable Mention

The Long Last Fairy Goddess

A 16-year-old girl named Gemma was in English class one day. She grabbed a dull pencil out of her backpack, to which she sharpened it. She opened a sketch book and drew a majestic goddess. Gemma had always drawn things like that for no reason.

“Miss Carter!” Her teacher, Mrs. Fox, said sternly.

“Huh?!” Gemma said, jumping out of her seat. There were some giggles from around the room.

“Quiet!” Mrs. Fox yelled. The whole class went silent.’

The school bell rang, signaling that the school day was over. A gust of relief sped over Gemma, and she dashed out of the room. Gemma had sprinted home, as it wasn’t too far from the school. She sat down at her desk, about to draw until her mom called her downstairs for dinner. She ran downstairs and sat at their table. Her mom put a steaming pot of homemade mac and cheese on the table. Gemma put a large, gooey scoop of it on her plate.

“They need me at work again,” Gemma’s mom said.

“Oh...ok.” Gemma said, devastated.

After Gemma finished eating and did the dishes, she went into the woods behind her house. She brought her sketchbook, so she began drawing a fairy. “Too bad fairies aren’t real.” Gemma said.

Suddenly, a beam of light flashed right in front of Gemma. She jumped off of the log she was sitting on and watched as a fairy emerged from the light.

“Hello! What’s your name?” the fairy asked.

“Uh Gemma, Gemma Carter.” Gemma said, still in shock.

“You remind me of the fairy goddess who went missing one month after her birth. She had the exact same name as you,” the fairy said. “Wait,” she said while flying over to Gemma. The fairy pulled back a few strands of Gemma’s hair to reveal several purple strands in her long, blonde hair. “Oh, my word! I think you are the missing goddess!” The fairy squealed.

“What?!” Gemma said in shock.

“Wait, do you have a golden bracelet with a butterfly?” the fairy asked.

“Yes,” Gemma said.

“Are you wearing it currently? the fairy asked.

“Yes,Why?” Gemma said, confused. The fairy flew over to Gemma’s hand and twisted the butterfly right, then left, and then right again. After the fairy twisted the butterfly, Gemma’s long blonde hair had turned fully purple, and her hoodie and sweatpants turned into a beautiful long gown. “What just happened?” Gemma asked the fairy.

“You really are the missing goddess!” the fairy said with glee. “Oh, I forgot to mention, my name is Roselle,” said the fairy. “Let’s go to the palace, and we can drink tea, and eat lots of delicious food,” said Roselle.

“Roselle?” Gemma said.

“Ooo and then we can go shopping and get loads and loads of pretty clothes!” Roselle said gleefully.

“Roselle,” Gemma said.

“Ooo and then after that we can tell the entire town your alive!” Roselle said, ignoring Gemma accidentally.

“Roselle!” Gemma shouted. Roselle went silent.

“Yes, Gemma?” Roselle said.

“I need to go home.” Gemma said, kind of annoyed.

“You are home, silly!” Roselle said.

“I mean like my house in the human realm, Roselle!” Gemma said, now annoyed.

“Oh, okay. I’ll send you home now,” Roselle said glumly.

“Thank you!” Gemma said. After Roselle sent Gemma home, Gemma returned to her normal life in the human realm, while Roselle sadly wished Gemma would come back. Two years later, Gemma somehow entered the fairy realm again. Gemma looked around and saw Roselle, so she sprinted towards her. Gemma tapped Roselle on the back lightly, and Roselle turned around and stared at Gemma in shock.

“Gemma?!” You’re back?!” Rosell asked.

“If course I’m back!” Gemma said, smiling. Roselle took Gemma to the palace. Gemma was shocked how pretty it was. Then Roselle told everybody Gemma was alive. Everybody in the fairy realm had a huge celebration to celebrate Gemma coming back to the fairy realm. From that day on, Gemma was known as the greatest fairy goddess to ever live.

Opal Birdsong

Washington Elementary

4th Grade, 1st place

The Best Camping Trip

Once upon a time, there was a girl named Mila. Mila was a beautiful girl with blond hair. Mila was at school talking to her friends when her friend Rose brought up a camping trip. Mila really wanted to go, so when she got home, she asked her mom.

“Please, please, please?” Mila asked. Her mom said she would think about it, but she went on “I’ll do the dishes for a week!” Mila said.

“Fine, but you must call me every hour,” her mom said.

“Oh, thank you!” Mila said as she hugged her mom.

Mila walked to her room with a bounce in her step. Once she got to her room, she immediately called Rose. “Rose! Rose! My mom said yes!” Mila said.

“Yay, I’m so excited!” Rose said.

“I have to go I’ll see you at school tomorrow at school,” Mila said.

“Bye,” Rose replied.

The next day Rose and Mila met up at school. “I’m so excited for the camping trip!” Mila said excitedly.

“I know! I can’t wait!” Rose said.

After school Mila rode the bus home and when she got to her house she started to pack. “Done!” Mila said when it was overflowing. Mila heard a soft knocking on her door. “Come in!” Mila called to the door.

Her mom opened the door with a creak. “Ready to go? Rose and her dad are here to pick you up,” her mom said.

“Yup, just one second,” Mila replied. She shoved all her things down into the bag and walked away but she didn’t realize that her phone fell out. . .

“Ready to go?” Rose asked excitedly.

“Yup!” Mila answered. Mila, Rose, and her dad were all walking out of the room.

“Text me,” her mom told her, but she was already out of the room.

Mila and Rose were talking about all the fun things that they were going to do and the s’mores they were going to make. Finally, they made it to the campsite.

“Look how close the forest is to the campsite,” Mila said.

“Yeah, we should go exploring!” Rose said.

Finally, they got there. Rose’s dad set up the tent. Then he said he was going to get s’mores supplies and he told them to stay in the tent. After he left, Mila and Rose snuck into the forest. Mila was very scared.

“I wonder if there are any bears.” Rose said. This just made Mila feel worse.

“Are you sure this is okay with your dad?” Mila asked.

“It’s fine don’t be so scared!” Rose said.

They were walking through the trees and Mila realized that it wasn’t that bad. They kept walking then Mila saw something.

It looked like a person! Mila thought her brain was just playing tricks on her, but she still told Rose about it. “I saw it too!” Rose said.

Then Mila knew it wasn’t her imagination. Mila and Rose were walking farther and farther but the creature was following them. They ran as fast as they could, but the creature was faster.

The figure finally got close enough and they could make out what the creature was. It was Rose’s dad!”

“Dad! You scared us!” Rose said while catching her breath again.

Me and Mila’s mom were worried sick about you two, you can’t just wonder off! Rose’s dad said, “Mila your mom said she texted you a bunch.” Rose’s dad said. Mila checked her pocket her phone wasn’t there...”

Oh, I must have left my phone at home!” Mila said.

Later that day they were making s’mores. “Your mom is going to come to pick you up in the morning tomorrow” Rose’s dad said to Mila.

“Okay,” Mila said. She didn’t know if she should tell her mom that her and Rose went into the woods or not.

The following day Mila was waiting outside for her mom to come pick her up. Mila and Rose were already planning for their next trip. Finally, Mila’s mom came.

“Bye!” Mila said.

“Bye!” See you at school on Monday,” Rose said.

Mila was sitting in the car looking out of the window. Best camping trip ever!

Addyson McMillan

Washington Elementary

4th grade, 2nd place

The UFO Adventure

Once upon a time Oliver and his robot, Blast, were playing with Lego bricks. Oliver was about to finish a creation when suddenly all of Oliver’s toys formed a giant circle in the middle of the house. What was interesting about what happened was that the toys had formed the circle ALL ON THEIR OWN! It was as if a magician had waved his magic wand and made the toys come alive.

“What in the world happened here?!” Oliver yelled. Oliver’s parents sprinted out of their rooms and without knowing about the circle of toys, Oliver’s parents stepped on the lever of a nerf gun. A bullet shot out of the gun and hit a picture that was on a wall in the house. Unfortunately, the picture cost \$100,000!

“Pick up all your dumb toys off the floor or the only thing you will ever do again is chores!” Oliver’s parents said. Oliver explained what had happened. Luckily, his parents believed him. Oliver’s parents were about to go back to their rooms when the house started to fall apart!

A UFO suddenly appeared. It hovered for a few seconds, then landed right in the middle of the circle of toys. Doors in the UFO opened and weird looking aliens stepped out.

“We are from the planet of Kronk, and we have come to destroy earth!” the aliens shouted. *Oh no*, thought Oliver. *Will they really destroy the earth? You are just about to find out.* The leader alien pulled a laser blaster out of his pocket, and Oliver picked up a nerf blaster.

“FIGHT!” yelled the alien. Oliver shot a bullet out of his blaster, and the alien cut the bullet in half with his blaster. Oliver’s parents picked up their blasters and shot. Unfortunately, the alien cut their bullets too. Suddenly, a giant tank came out of the alien’s UFO. It started shooting exploding apples. **Kaboom!** went the apples. Oliver started throwing Legos at the aliens. The tank started shooting oranges and broccoli and erasers and pens and crackers and slime along with all kinds of other things.

“Nothing will defeat us all!” said the aliens. Oliver frantically thought of a way to defeat the aliens Oliver then figured it out. He grabbed a knife and threw it at the UFO! KABOOM! went the UFO. The aliens were defeated!

Oliver and his parents cleaned up the mess the aliens made (including the apples!) then they locked up the house with millions of locks and collected more than 100 knives. They were safe. Or were they...?

Oliver Buckstead
O’Loughlin Elementary
4th grade, 3rd place

The Core Plan

The plan was simple, though easy and unorthodox. It was almost no challenge except that it was happening at night at the core of a planet. We had gotten through security and planned to set the cone on course to our system and then steal it. Big but small at the same time. We could do this, especially since we had been trained for missions like this since a young age. Where we were trained is something I can’t tell you. But we were about ready. All I can say is, it didn’t go well.

Drop off location was here according to the monitor on the dashboard. Which meant one thing, it was time for a planet worth half a galaxy to disappear. If everything went according to plan.

“We jump on three, okay!”

“Okay!” they responded in unison.

“One! Two! Three!”

It was extremely difficult not to wheeze when I got out because of the low air pressure. I was fine in the end, but it seemed 38 felt dizzy because all of a sudden they had put their hand to their stomach.

“You, okay?” I asked.

“Just some sudden pressure sickness,” said 38.

We were still falling due to the large atmosphere and small planet.

All six of us were quiet until we landed using out specially modified thruster boots to land. I thought they were big and old-fashioned though. We landed undetected but slightly rattled so we took a moment to recover. Smoke from the boots were rising which could worry a night guard but would take some time to reach them so we had time.

We began walking to the charting board, it was a massive wall with a small panel with some buttons that looked like they had been polished recently. 19, our tech, began coding in the new destination.

“Done!” Suddenly the planet began to move very fast which startled a few of us who had never been on a fast planet before. We waited nervously as it moved. Little noise had been made by this sudden change of trajectory which had been predicted. “Um, 76 could I look at this route a little closer. I think I could adjust the auto route, so it goes faster,” said 19.

I said, “Sure, just be careful. Okay?”

“Appreciated commander,” as he said that, I checked the monitor and then I heard a loud noise. Then I saw flare near us. “Run!” I yelled my voice cracking as I was kicked by something in the back of the head. Everything went black.

“It was all black and then I woke up here. Okay, that’s all I know...” I said.

Elizabeth thought it over, “You lied to me, yes?”

“No! I-I told you everything I remember about Mission Corza, okay! Where am I and who are you?” I demanded.

“Classified, sorry, but none of that will help you now because you’re going to give me the device. Stay here as I find it without you. Got that?” Elizabeth questioned as she walked away, proud of her progress.

Her hair swayed in golden reflection as the sun shone down outside. The makeshift cell they made was escapable for a unit of the commander’s status but they had planted a tracker on her so they were prepared. The head of the office walked up to Elizabeth, speed walking.

“Elizabeth! You caught them just as planned?” He continued, “Well, if everything is okay... I was watching the conversation, and it seems the core is ready to activate?”

“Not yet. We still have to transfer the core itself,” Elizabeth replied. “The core will reshape our galaxy and nobody, not even a black hole will stop me now...”

Tristan Whitmer
Washington Elementary
5th grade, 1st place

My First Pitch

I remember the first baseball game I pitched. It was a hot summer in Hays, Kansas. I felt very nervous, my heart was pounding I don't think anybody noticed but, it felt like a train was speeding down a track inside of me. Before the game began, we started practicing. Liam at catcher. Brody at first base. Theo at short stop, and me at pitcher.

As we were practicing, I saw all of my family and fans at the concession stands getting their hot dogs and chips. Theo was playing catch with Liam. I looked up, and the clock caught my eye. The timer started – (which meant the game would begin now).

When I glanced at the lead up batter, I got scared. I thought I couldn't do it. Then I went into my slow and steady wind up – back and forth and back and forth, step and **THROW!** The ball flew gracefully through the air like a Perigrine falcon in its stoop. I heard the ball smack with a little pop. (Which meant the ball has hit the catcher's mitt.) The sweat on my face from the hot sun grew larger and hotter as I awaited to hear the deep voice of the college teenager.

Then tall black haired 19-year-old ump grunted, “**STRIKE 1.**”

My teammates yelled, “Good job!” The pressure lessened, and my doubt slowed. I felt comfortable when I got back to the light green wooden mound to pitch the next ball. I went back into my spectacularly short wind up. Back and forth, back and forth, back and forth, Throw!

That same umpire's voice cried over the crowd, “**STRIKE 2!**” I threw the hard white and red baseball to the black geared catcher and gave everything I had, and the ball flew...and flew like a speeding bullet. It went through the air and stopped abruptly at the catcher's mitt. The batter swung like a mad person and missed by a mile. “Yer out,” said the ump.

The next batter looked like a big and very capable player. The ball whipped through my hand quickly. I heard the ball smack onto the turf ground. The ump called it, “Ball!” loudly. I started to feel nervous again like there were butterflies in my stomach. I remembered that I could do it, so when I went into my wind up, I knew what I had to do to lead my team to victory. I threw the hard ball. It hit the catcher's mitt. The umpire shouted, “**Strike!**” and we went on to win.

Even though I did not meet my expectations, I still play today and practice a lot to get great like Babe Ruth, Jackie Robinson, and Willy Mays.

William Reed
O'Loughlin Elementary
5th grade, 2nd place

Warwolf

“Please, wake up, find Father Junrok.”

That’s the first thing young Warwolf Harouh heard for years. Awakening within the grand Ravine of the Eldest, Harouh laid eyes upon a lantern, dark steel contrasted with the ethereal light of the faerie trapped within. Now fully conscious, Harouh, stood up, grabbed the lantern. He woke to hardly anything. He had his fur garments, but the rest of his items --- gone. He realized his Warwolf cleaver was gone.

Suddenly, from a nearby cave, a bloodied ghoul ran at Harouh. Reacting suddenly, not knowing evidently, its soul, got ripped apart. The body fell limp, screeching its final screech; the blue soul was sucked into the lantern horrifically. Its phantasmal form wailed violently as, starting from the legs, it was pulled into the lantern. Harouh would then dub the lantern, “the Sinner’s Cell”.

Continuing through the vast series of caverns, Harouh, came upon more ghouls, though now with Sinner’s Cell, defeating them was easy. He even came upon a hatchet resting on a stone tablet. That implied, there was someone, or *something*, nearby sentient enough to carve a runic stone. That hunch would be proven right. Harouh continued through a cave unlike any other. However, this cave led to a nearby refuge to the war happening, unbeknownst to him. The Haven of the Mourning Hearth.

The Haven provided sanctuary to all people. Whether that be Orcs, Lord Kaynan’s men, or creatures from the Umbral Realm, as long as they did not disturb the peace. All, but those loyal to Adyr the demon god. Harouh then came to the streets of the Haven. People didn’t give him a passing glance; Harouh did the opposite.

He entered the town square, where small shops sold goods, people walked about, gazing at the scenery. He walked towards the door of the town hall and church. Before he could open the door, a man of Oboran origin grabbed Harouh on the shoulder, his blue-gray hand clearly telling Harouh not to open the door.

Harouh said to the man, “Hey, kid. I just want to figure out what is happening. I woke up in that giant ravine close by with hardly any memories.” Exiting the town hall, an elderly man walked.

“Oh, I’m so sorry about that, son. Zorran is just getting ahead of himself. You aren’t supposed to open that door, but you’re clearly not from around here! Please, come inside, I wonder what you’ve been through! If what you said is true, your life is crazy!” Harouh did as the man said.

“Oh, I’m so sorry for my manners. I am Father Junrok; this is my Haven of the Mourning Hearth.” Upon hearing “Father Junrok”, Harouh froze. This was who Harouh was supposed to find. “When I awoke, the first thing I heard was “Please, wake up. **Find Father Junrok**”

“Wait, this, this is you!” Junrok exclaimed. “We had a prophecy. A person from a culture extinct would awake nearby and slay Adyr!”

As that was said, a colossal beast flew down from the sky. In a raspy, ghoulish voice its rider snarled, grinning: “Oh, Adyr! Witness the carnage, I spill blood in your name! Oh, look, a puny heretic. And, what’s that? The lantern? Bah. In case you live, I’ll tell you my name so you can write who killed your friends on their puny graves ‘Kiosasn, the Lightreaper.” Lightreaper yanked the reigns; the great beast he rode on reared back. The flames that erupted from the beast’s paw sent a powerful message to all in the Haven: *Adyr’s judgment is here*. Lightreaper dismounted, felling dozens of men and women, even the children weren’t safe. In cruel irony, he loved seeing the blood the children he murdered spilled.

Eventually Lightreaper tired. Deeming enough, he flew back atop a nearby mountain. The survivors not scorched, not impaled, not crushed, tried to find the others. Some may say surviving a catastrophe is a blessing, but to these people, it was purgatory unlike any. They searched for each other over the course of three days; reconstructed the Mourning Hearth; Harouh swore to kill Lightreaper. He talked to a few survivors, gained as many rations as possible, spare weapons and armor, all he may need for the journey to come. A woman named Eugenie gave Harouha few armaments, a sword and gauntlets. A man, Taro, gave Harouh maps. More and more people wanted to help Harouh in his goal. After all, wasn’t the man who held the lamp destined to slay Adyr and his spawn?

Approaching the foot of the mountain, Harouh came upon a man who introduced himself as Thiek-idur, a pilgrim venturing to the alleged druid priest Briairk. Harouh told Thiek-idur about his goal to slay Lightreaper, stopping his ritual. Thiek-idur knew and told Harouh the route up the mountain.

When venturing across a flimsy plank, bridging the gap across a sharp depression in the earth, it cracked under the weight; Harouh fell into a cave. It felt like eternity, meeting the seldom face, slaying the not so seldom ghoul, ghost, troll or Lord Kaynan's men. All either let Harouh pass, or fell to his blade, in Harouh's quest, avenging his friends, revenging his loss.

Eventually Harouh exited the caves near the peak of the mountain. He walked into a large, flat area. A large caldron, on the highest peak of the mountain, sat, a cruel energy emitting from it. Lightreaper's raspy voice shrieked, "Oh, Adyr! Look who it is! It's our friend! You DID survive! So, tell me, DID YOU WRITE MY NAME ON THEIR GRAVES!?!?" The cackle echoed through the mountains. "Oh it doesn't matter. You're HERE! Which means, you're here to stop me from liberating Adyr! Friend, say hello to Adyr on your way to the Underworld! The rest of the world soon!" More cackling.

Lightreaper dismounted, flourishing his bloodied glaives throughout the air. They engage in combat. Fire hurled, blood spilled. Both were near their end; Harouh remembered something. THE LANTERN! Fainting away from the fight, his hand clenched the handle of the lamp and raised it above his head. Just as he hoped, a transparent blue figure was pulled out of the Lightreaper into the lantern, who fell limp.

Stuttering, Lightreaper said "You think you've won, don't you... The ritual, required, a blood sacrifice...I am glad, to be that sacrifice..." The Lightreaper, despite the life fading from his eyes, grinned. As he died, so too, did his mount. The caldron, contrasting with the death around it, brightened.

BOOOM. BOOOM. Rhythmic crashes could be heard northwestward. Harouh saw it: Giant skeletal monsters, skin hardly cover their bones, arms twice the size they should be, lumbering towards the mountain, and past it, at Lord Kaynan's kingdom south.

Harouh felt himself turn towards the giant caldron. A scarlet beam erupted from the cauldron, hitting the sky. Literally. The sky crumbled, impossibly large fragments, falling from the heavens, cascaded upon the world. Animals ran for cover. Directly from above the caldron, falling from the heavens, was the great god Orian, dead and skinned.

Though before Harouh could die, Adyr catapulted Orion away. Harouh was paralyzed, Adyr spoke. "Remember your origins, when you awoke in the Ravine of the Eldest? Remember, the voice you heard? I awoke you. I, Father Junrok's God. He was my favorite worshiper. I told Lightreaper to attack, knowing you would come here, a necessary sacrifice."

Elliott Howden

Wilson Elementary

5th grade, 3rd place

Rocks Committing Felonies

There is a pile of rocks in someone's backyard, minding their own business. Then tornado sirens started blaring. Then, the warning became reality! The tornado swept up the rocks. From the debris a human-shaped figure was born. Caterpillar eyebrows, bird poop eyes, a cup holder mouth, a phone for a voice, and basalt for a nose. After awhile of it configuring to a human, the rocks had molded together. Still spinning, it barged into a Home Depot. All of a sudden, the phone made a sound.

"PUT EVERYTHING IN THE BAG!" A cloth bag floated into its hand, made of pebbles. And it took a whole bunch of wooden planks. A rock from his body flew towards someone then they ducked, and it hit someone else. Then it barged out of the store and hit a cop with the bag of wooded planks.

The rocks are now in jail for 28 years.

Kincaid Demel

Roosevelt Elementary

5th grade, Honorable Mention

We Aren't Safe Here

I was walking up the hill looking for my bracelet that I had lost while I was playing with my sister. While we were walking, there were so many things running through my mind. I was praying it would be there so Shima wouldn't be mad at me. Then I tripped over something shiny. I thought it was my bracelet, but instead it was a ruby as beautiful as a rose. I was going to leave it but something was telling me to take it, so I did. I got up, cleaned off my knees, and slid the ruby into my pocket then kept walking. Thankfully, I finally found my bracelet. I put it on my wrist and ran down the hill, going home.

When I arrived, I was greeted by my puppy, before going to my bathroom and locking the door. I pulled the ruby out of my pocket and washed it under the sink, drying it once I was done. When I finished, I set down the ruby, took a shower, went down to the kitchen, and ate supper with my parents and sister Mia. I returned to my room later that evening and right when I was about to sleep I heard a scratch on my window. Thinking it was an animal, I thought nothing of the noise and went to sleep.

The next morning, I woke up and got dressed and left the house, going for a run. I went towards the hill and decided to take a different route than usual. As I was going up the hill, I heard whispers and got goosebumps. I shook my head and kept jogging, convinced my mind was playing tricks on me. But I felt as if I was being watched.

Again, I brushed it off and sped up, wanting to head home quickly. About five minutes later I stopped to catch my breath and heard noises. My eyes went wide. I started to get freaked out as my heart pounded. By then I had already reached the top of the hill and decided to go home. When I arrived, I walked in to see Shima crying, and Azhéé by her side comforting her. I asked what happened and found out my sister went missing when she was outside playing in the snow with the puppy. Immediately, I thought back to the rustling I heard in the bushes. I knew something was up. I ran to my room, and laid in bed worrying about my missing sister.

I stared at the ceiling listening to music, trying to think of reasons Mia would have gone missing. It was unusual since we live out in the open, no one lives by us. And then, I had finally put two and two together. Weird things had been happening ever since I took the ruby home. Was it possible that the ruby was causing all of this? I shivered and got off my bed, going to the bathroom and grabbing the ruby.

When I held the ruby, I looked in the mirror and noticed something in the window behind me. I turned around but there wasn't anything there. "Maybe I'm just tired from running," I thought. I looked in the mirror a bit longer until Shima had called my name for supper. I went to the kitchen and noticed how sad she looked, and how stressed Azhéé seemed. I had a new mission; to find my sister, and what, or who, took her. I ate a bit of supper before getting up and leaving. I grabbed my flashlight and went for the hill.

I was terrified, mostly because it was so dark outside. I took a deep breath then went up the hill. I heard rustling. My heart started racing. Halfway up the hill I saw a distorted figure. I backed up a bit and just stared at it. For a second it looked like a deer, but tall and slim with its ribcage visible due to how thin it was. I didn't know what it was, but it didn't seem normal.

I ran back home, dropping my flashlight on my way. I ran to my room and locked the door, sitting on my bed and opening my laptop. I went on the internet and started researching about my house and where it was built. I saw that it was built right by an Indian burial ground. I started doing more research and I looked up what I saw. Something called the Skinwalker came up. It looked almost exactly like what I saw. What if it took Mia?

I ran to the living room and told my parents, but they just stared at me, assuming I had gone crazy. For the next few days I begged for them to listen and call for someone to help. They got upset and grounded me. "Why won't they believe me?!" I thought to myself as I ran to my room.

It's been weeks without my sister and I still haven't found anything. I've heard noises, and when I go up the hill, I hear Shimá's voice behind the trees, but I know it isn't her because Shimá never joins me on my walks. When I went home, I told Shimá we weren't safe in Canada, but she said she was done with my foolishness and told me to forget it. My heart shattered. I got upset and went to my room, doing more research. I decided to sneak out again, and look for my sister.

Once everybody was asleep, I turned on my lamp, got dressed in something comfy, and jumped out the window. I went up the hill and heard heavy breathing near me. I turned around, seeing the same creature I saw last time. Its arms were long and boney and it had goat-like legs. I looked at it in its red sunken eyes as it reached for me. I punched it right in the face, giving myself enough time to run off.

As I ran I heard a growl and shriek as it chased after me. It was so much faster than me and I didn't know if I would be able to outrun it. It almost grabbed my ankle until I kicked it, sliding into a small hole. I heard a girl crying in the distance, sounding like Mia.

Once I heard the creature leave, I crawled out of the hole and searched for the girl. I tried being as quiet as I could while listening to the cries. As I walked, I stumbled across a hidden cave covered in moss. The cries got louder and more desperate the closer I got. I went inside the cave and saw my sister tied up. I untied her and grabbed her. I held her hand and took her out of the cave, dropping the ruby as we ran. I took her home to our parents and explained everything that happened. We both tried to convince them to move to America, and finally they agreed.

Now that we're in America and not at our old house, we're safer than before. I found out that the ruby I had taken belonged to a witch or paranormal being, and the reason the creature went after my family was because I had disturbed the bones on the hill that was an Indian burial ground. As scary as this experience was, all I can say is that I am so glad that we are finally safe.

Arianna Cantrell-Diaz
TMP-Marian Jr. High
6th Grade, 1st Place

Alison's Adventure

Alison lived in the nicest neighborhood in California with her widowed dad, Scott. Alison was very spoiled and got whatever she wanted whenever she wanted, except one thing. She wasn't allowed on their boat. One day Alison was talking with her friends at school and decided to throw a party for her friend's birthday. It was her friend Taylor's sweet sixteen and it had to be special. Alison had the idea to take the boat out with all her friends. They all agreed and were talking about it non-stop the whole day. It was going to be perfect.

When Alison got in the car, she asked her dad. Her dad shut her down right away before she could finish telling him her idea. Alison wasn't used to being told no. She got very angry and told her dad she hated him. They got into a big fight. He tried to tell her why he didn't want her to go out on the water but she wouldn't listen.

When they got home, she stormed up the stairs and locked herself in her room. Alison came up with a plan. She was going to take a smaller boat out. So early that morning around four, she got the boat ready. She brought some chips, candy, and a bottle of water. She then grabbed a bag to put all her stuff in. Alison's plan was to just take the boat around and stay out for a little while, maybe until her dad woke up to give him a small scare.

After a few hours, the sun started to rise and her dad woke. He called for Alison but he got no answer. He thought she was still upset about the other night so he let it go. He was down in the living room when he got a call from work. There was something wrong at his company and he needed to check it out. He went up to Alison's door and told her where he would be, not knowing she wasn't there to hear him. So he gets in his car and leaves.

Alison decided it had been long enough and that it was time to go home. But when Alison went to turn the boat around, it didn't turn. Instead, the boat went forward faster than before, causing Alison to stumble. Alison was fine and got back up brushing herself off and carried on as if nothing happened. She tried to redirect the boat again but this time she hit something. Whatever she had hit caused her to fall and hit her head, this time she passed out.

When Alison woke, she was surrounded by many human-like creatures. She had no idea who or what they were. There was one who didn't look like them though, in fact, she looked like Alison. Alison was more concerned about her being dirty rather than the fact that she was surrounded by some creatures she didn't know. Alison got up and yelled at the creatures, claiming that they kidnapped her. Once she settled down, she told the creatures what had happened. The creatures offered to let her stay until her dad found her. Alison agreed and asked where the finest hotel was. The creatures explained they didn't know what that was and brought her to a teepee made out of sticks with some strange animal skin around it.

Alison's dad finally went home around nine. He brought some dinner home for him and Alison. When he went up to Alison's room, he noticed the door was unlocked so he went in. When he walked in he saw that the room was empty. He started to panic and looked all over the house but she was nowhere to be seen. Scott called the police and continued to search. The police arrived and noticed it seemed as though there was a missing boat. Scott told them all that had happened. The police started searching in the ocean but they had no luck.

Meanwhile, on the island, Alison was learning how to find food and then how to prepare it for eating. Alison was very rude to the creatures but they were patient and kind. Alison started to be nicer to the creatures and even watched and played with all the little creatures. She was happy with the creatures but she couldn't stop thinking about her dad and her friends. Whenever she felt upset, the strange woman, who looked identical to her, would help her. The woman told Alison that her name was Andrea. Oddly, Andrea had also been her mom's name.

Months had passed and it was almost Alison's birthday but it was as if she had just vanished into thin air. One day Scott decided to take matters into his own hands. He started his boat and set out to find his daughter. Scott had no idea where to go but he knew he had to look for Alison. After being out for a while, Scott got a feeling that he should check his late wife's favorite spot. While Scott was heading to the spot, he saw an island. He stopped at the island to take a break. He was only there for a minute when he saw a group of strange creatures running towards him. At first, he thought they would hurt him but they were very kind and welcoming. They told Scott to close his eyes and follow them. When Scott saw Alison, he was bursting with joy, but when he saw Andrea, he was stunned. Was that his late wife?

Jacelyn Dreiling
TMP-Marian Jr. High
6th Grade, 2nd Place

Inner Demons Come Out to Play

It has been two years since the last school accident and they have been awesome, however this year is going to be much different.

"Happy Halloween/birthday Rose!" said Emma.

"Thanks, but tomorrow's Halloween not today," Rose replied.

"Right, sorry I'm really excited," Emma said.

"It's ok, let's just get to class," Rose said.

"Ya don't want to be late" Emma agreed.

School went on as usual with two classes, lunch, and two more classes, at the end of the day everyone went home. The next day Rose went to school and as soon as she entered Emma screamed, "Happy birthday!"

"Thanks," Rose said.

"What's wrong?" Emma asked.

"Nothing, I just have a weird feeling today," Rose answered. Rose and Emma went to class.

Everyone told Rose happy birthday and she got a little annoyed. As the day went on, she felt as if someone was watching her.

"I feel like someone's watching me" Rose told Emma.

"What do you mean? No one's there," Emma replied. The girls then began to walk home. Rose still felt off that entire night. That feeling stuck around for days after, she had no idea what was going to happen until it was too late...

After days of Rose feeling off something unimaginable happened... After school one day she went home and her parents were gone, she figured that they had just gone on a work trip and forgot to tell her. So, she texted her parents and waited for a response but never got one, so she went to bed.

The next day she went to school and Emma, Ava, Roxy, Eric, and three of the teachers were gone. She figured they were sick, but each day more students and teachers went missing.

She continued to push it off, but she started getting worried since the school was almost empty with a lack of teachers and students. The school ended up closing until the problem could be resolved. However, the population in the city was also rapidly decreasing and no one knew why.

Soon everyone in the city was gone except for Rose. Rose became sad and depressed since she had no one to talk to with her friends and family gone.

"Why, why did you take them but leave me?" Rose screamed as she cried.

Rose soon began to think about all the happy memories she had with her friends and thought about the last accident two years ago. The time when all her friends had congratulated her and called her a star but now, she began feeling like a fallen star, defeated by who knows what.

"Go to the school" a voice whispered. Rose began looking around to see who said it, but no one was there. "Go to the school" it said again.

Rose immediately stood up and ran to the school not knowing what would happen once she got there. Rose arrived at the school and stood at the front door looking at it in shock, it was wrapped in thorny vines. The only part that was clear was the front entrance.

“Go in there you will find your answers,” the voice whispered. Rose listened once more and entered the school; the halls were full of the thorny vines.

Rose began walking through the hall to find whatever it was that had her answers. As she was walking through the halls, the vines kept trying to grab her by the ankles and drag her away, she kept kicking and pulling away the vines off her ankles.

Eventually she had gotten to a part of the school that wasn't covered in vines! As she was walking, she saw a light coming from a room, so she started walking towards it, not knowing what she was going to find. She got to the door and walked in. There she found someone that looked exactly like her, but the person Rose was looking at was not her, they glowed in a green, transparent light. Rose thought to herself, “What is this?”

“Who are you?” Rose asked. She got no response, so she asked again.

She heard a voice respond, “she can't answer you.”

Rose looked up to see what had said that and there she saw it, what had been doing this, what had taken all her friends and family. She looked up and she saw Emma, but her skin and eyes were as dark as night. She dropped off the ceiling and said, “Hi bestie!” In a demonic voice.

Rose in shock said, “Emma?”

“Yes, I was so tired of you acting like a queen just because you saved the town!” Emma yelled.

“You think I was trying to act like a queen? If anything, I wish I didn't save the town because I didn't want to be famous at all!” Rose yelled back.

“You still acted like a queen and were being praised everywhere. All you did was smile and wave!” Emma shouted.

“Well, what was I supposed to do ignore them? If you were a good friend, you would've noticed how uncomfortable it made me!” Rose yelled back.

“Unlike you I am a good friend!” Emma shouted.

“Unlike me? No, I am a good friend, especially to you, but you are not, cannot, even be a good friend and be happy for me! Instead, you get mad and jealous no real, good friend would do that!” Rose shouted back.

“I was happy for you until you started taking advantage of it. Then I got jealous and mad that you were abusing the power that you were getting for being a hero, just for saving the town!” Emma told her.

“I wasn't trying to abuse the power; you know that I can't say no when someone offers me something because I have social anxiety” Rose said.

“That doesn't matter because now I have all the power!” Emma yelled.

“No, you have no power, you will never win” Rose shouted.

“Yes, I will!” Emma screamed in anger.

“No, because you will never be as powerful as me. The power of love and friendship is more powerful than anything,” Rose told Emma.

“Aww that's just like you, all about love and friendship,” Emma said as she mocked Rose.

Rose had enough and was about to walk out of the room when Emma made the vines grab Rose by the waist and pulled her back into the room.

“Hey!” Rose screamed as she was pulled back into the room.

“You're not walking away from me this time, Rose,” Emma said.

Rose tried and tried to pull away, but the vines were too strong, and she could not get away.

“Let me go!” Rose screamed repeatedly, but Emma still would not let go. Rose then saw a glowing thorn on the vine. She broke the thorn and the vine turned into one of the people from the town.

“No!” Emma screamed in anger.

“The vines are people from the village,” Rose said in realization.

She started to break the glowing thorns one by one. As she broke them, people started coming back to their true form.

After breaking more glowing thorns Rose's parents came back along with Emma's parents. Together they broke all the glowing thorns and Emma became powerless. As the last thorn was broken, Emma fell to the ground.

After that day everything was different, the entire town had been destroyed and was being rebuilt. However, what happened next no one was ready for...

Annabell Barenberg
Hays Middle School
6th Grade, 3rd Place

The Red Button

I didn't know it was a real bomb! Hold on a second, let me fill you in. So, ever since I was a kid, I have wanted to be an actor, but not anymore. So, here I am, but that's not all. My name is Calista Allani and I am 24 years old. I am currently in Oklahoma City because I have been asked to act in a movie that has to do with bombing. Now, I didn't know that there was going to be an actual bombing!

It all started when it was my 23rd birthday and I just started opening my gifts when I heard a *DING-DONG!* My mom gets up and goes to open the door and she says it's for me. I go over and see a strange man almost looking like an undercover spy standing there. He says that I have been asked to act in a movie. I was so excited when he said that. So of course, I said yes. He told me the address and to meet him there in exactly one month.

One month later I went to the exact address in Denver, Colorado and it looked really suspicious but I just went inside. When I got inside, I saw this really tall, muscular man standing there with the name tag reading Amir. I told him my name and he told me to follow him to this really big office in the back of the building. When I got there I saw the same man that was at my house. He said that his name was Alejandro and told me we were going to get started right away. So, I spent another 2 weeks getting all of my lines memorized, getting my costumes ready and speaking to the other actors. But the weird thing was there was only one other actor and he looked like a ninety-year-old raisin. I tried to ask Amir why there was only one other actor. I didn't know why, but he didn't like to talk to anyone. So, I always got really scared around him. I got a letter saying that we were going to start filming in Oklahoma City. I didn't even know what the movie was going to be about but I was kind of homesick. But this had been my dream since I was nine years old so I had to keep going. We got there in two days but when we got there, there were a lot of construction workers which would be normal for building backdrops, but there were also some tanks! The ninety-year-old raisin told me his name was Pee-Paw and he wasn't too worried about the tanks. It almost seemed like he knew something that I didn't know. Then Alejandro said that the movie we were filming was about an underground bombing and led me down to a really creepy elevator that went underground. When we got to the bottom, I saw a lot of people in green and black camouflage that looked like they knew how to set off a bomb. They asked me if I was ready but I didn't know what they were talking about. They asked if I was ready to set off a bomb. I couldn't tell if they were talking about a real bomb or a pretend bomb but I didn't ask. Alejandro told me where to stand and said that he had a camera that filmed by itself so I would be the only one down there. I asked about Pee-Paw and he said he would be in the next scene of the movie. Alejandro gave me a giant red button and said to press it when I heard him through the microphone after he said action. He went up the creepy elevator and thankfully there was no camera where he could see what I was doing. Therefore, I ran over to the other side, away from the filming camera, and put on some camouflage army gear just in case it was a real bomb and prayed I wouldn't die.

Suddenly I heard him say *ACTION*. I pressed the red button and ducked down. I heard a *TICK-TICK-TICK-TICK* then a ginormous *KABOOM!* After the bomb went off, I don't really remember anything except someone coming down the elevator so I just played dead and hoped for the best. I didn't think anyone saw me because of the camouflage. After they left, I went up the elevator and saw Alejandro paying everyone who was here. So I ran. I think I ran for two and a half hours but I made it to a gas station by a motel so I stayed there overnight. I didn't have my phone. I had forgotten my family's number. Then I heard *KNOCK-KNOCK-KNOCK*.

I opened the door and there was a man in a black suit who asked if I was Calista. I said yes. He told me to come with him so I followed him to a black SUV with dark black tinted windows and there was a police car behind it. I got into the SUV and the police car followed us. We arrived at the police station and went to a room with an FBI agent sitting there. Oddly, Pee-Paw was also there. The FBI agent started asking me a few questions like who was the director, what did he tell me to do, and who else was there. I answered all the questions and he proceeded to tell me that the director had been doing this for years: tracking actors, and forcing them to do his dirty work. They assured me, at this point, that they had a big lead on him and that they should be able to find him now. They sent me in an ambulance and I went to the hospital to make sure that I wasn't injured. It turned out I had a fractured hip bone and they were making Alejandro pay for it. They ended up finding him and he had to pay all of the people he tricked one hundred thousand dollars. He was sentenced to life in prison. I decided after this whole ordeal that I never wanted to be an actress ever again. I love excitement, but this was a little too much for me. Maybe I'll be an accountant instead!

Kayla Schmeidler
TMP-Marian Jr. High
6th Grade, Honorable Mention

Chip

It's 11:30, 30 minutes until I turn 15. Grace is at my house because her mom is on call. We are sitting on my bedroom floor, studying for our science test.

"I can't concentrate anymore!" Grace says, throwing her hands in the air. "Wanna play a game?"

"Truth or dare," I suggest dropping my pencil, "but we have to be quiet, my parents are sleeping."

"Okay truth or dare," Grace whispers, scooting closer to me.

"Dare," I say with my best poker face.

"I dare you to sneak out, with me obviously, to go get ice cream," Grace says excitedly.

I took a moment to think. I've never snuck out before. "Let's do it!"

As we pull in about five minutes later, I have butterflies in my stomach. Then out of nowhere an ambulance comes speeding down the road. I watch in horror as it turns onto my street.

"We should go," I say, getting into the car and starting it.

"I'm sure your parents are fine," Grace says reassuringly.

"No, we have to go," I say, slamming the door shut.

Grace hurriedly gets into the car and shuts the door. I'm in an absolute panic as I pull out.

When I pull onto my street, I freeze. The red and blue lights blind me. Then I see someone on a stretcher in my driveway.

"Do you want me to drive?" Grace questions, reaching to touch my shoulder.

"No, I got it," I say defensively even though I can barely see through my tears.

I pull in before the ambulance leaves. My mom frantically hugs me and asks me where we've been.

"We went out to get ice cream. What happened?" I say in one breath.

"We don't know. I found your father unconscious, so I called 911," Mom explains.

That's the last thing I remember. Now I'm sitting on my bed, and I feel the warm sunshine on my face. My eyes feel heavy; I must have cried myself to sleep.

"Can we go to the hospital?" I ask Mom as I walk downstairs.

"Later," Mom adds. "How about after breakfast?"

"Fine, what do we have?" I say unwillingly.

The moment we walk into the hospital my stomach drops. My mom talks to a very kind nurse that gets us directed to my father's room.

"Mrs. Gannon," a nurse says after we find my dad.

"Yes," Mom responds nervously, playing with her hands.

"Could I see you out in the hall for a minute?" the nurse asks, pointing out the door.

I nod to my mom signaling I'll be fine in here by myself.

After I watch her long, brown hair sway as she leaves the room, I look around. My eyes settle on my father. All I can do is watch him breathe. I can't move.

I don't see her walk in, but I hear her sniffing. I turn around to go hug my mom when she says, "Oh, Addison, you shouldn't have to go through all of this at your age."

"Mom?" I say, trying not to sound worried. "What happened?"

"Your father's in a coma and may not wake up," Mom says, breaking down crying.

At school Grace asks me, "How's your dad doing? My mom checked on him last night before she left the hospital and said everything looks alright."

I can't think about anything. How am I supposed to focus on school when something so scary is going on? Then the bell rings and Grace reaches to touch my shoulder, but I move. The more she tries to comfort me, the more I think about it. The hospital, the ambulance, and his peaceful body slightly rising up and down with every breath.

As I walk to math, I hear my name over the intercom. I head to the office hoping I'm not in trouble.

When I walk in, I see my grandma, confused as to why she would be here and why I was called to the office.

She looks at me with pity in her eyes, and it all makes sense. I collapse to the floor and my grandma comes to hug me.

Next thing I know, I'm hugging my mom and crying at the hospital. We stay like that together for a while.

The doctors won't let us into his room; they say it's not allowed, even for family.

Over the next few weeks, teachers are more lenient towards me with my assignments.

They have all met him and most everyone liked my father.

I haven't seen my mom much. I see her in the mornings before school and most of the time we eat dinner together, but she's been busy planning the funeral. That funeral is today.

I walk downstairs and Mom smiles at me.

"It hurts to look at you sometimes, you know," Mom says sadly. She hurriedly adds, "Because you look so much like your father."

I knew what she meant, and it made me happy to hear.

The funeral was just as sad as anyone could have imagined. Family and some people I don't know stop and hug me. They tell me how sorry they are and how much I look like him. I don't want to see any of them. I only want to talk to one person.

"Grace!" I say loudly as I run to hug her.

Everyone looks at me as I sprint toward her. I start sobbing and notice she's crying too.

I never thought I'd see flowers piled up in a worse way. I don't know what to say when it's my turn to speak. I get up there, and I tell every story I can remember about him. When I'm finally done, it's Mom's turn.

"I miss him so dearly, and I know all of you do as well. But lucky for me, I get to see him every day in Addy," Mom cries.

And with that, the funeral is over and we head home.

As we pull up to our house, I see something brown.

"Is that a dog?" I ask.

"Yeah," Mom says slowly. "I don't know where it came from."

As we get closer, I break down. The dog has my dad's eyes, my eyes.

Eventually we take the dog to the vet and get paperwork done. He's ours now.

I decide to name him Chip. He has a mole under his eye that looks like a chocolate chip. The craziest thing is my dad did, too.

Now any time I miss my dad, I just look over at Chip, squeeze him, and say I love you.

Ashlen Lang

TMP-Marian Jr. High

7th Grade, 1st Place

Dreams

I woke up early in the morning sweating like crazy. My heart was beating rapidly. I had just had a bad dream. I had this dream often, and I didn't know why. I decided to shake it off and go back to sleep.

"Wake up, Benny, it's Christmas!" my mom told me excitedly.

I hopped out of bed and ran to the Christmas tree, which had a lot of gifts under it. I was five years old, and life couldn't have been better. As I opened the smallest gift, I almost jumped through the roof with excitement.

"I got tickets to the Notre Dame game!" I yelled. "Thank you, thank you, Mom and Dad!"

"We knew you would like it," said Mom.

The downward leap in my life started after the morning, though. As I was playing with my toy car, another gift I got, I heard some yelling coming from my parents' room. In curiosity, I crept closer to listen.

"Why did you even marry me?" I heard my mom yell. "Benny's life is great, and you are going to ruin it for him!"

"Benny won't be safe going there, even if it is only a football game. There are a ton of strangers there, you know," my dad argued back.

I couldn't believe it, they were arguing about me. I didn't know what to do, so I decided to take a nap, but then I had that dream again.

"Which parent do you choose to live with?" the judge asked.

I was about to make a life-changing decision. I was sweating up a storm, and my heart was beating faster than a drum.

"I choose....," and then I woke up. I didn't know why I kept having this dream. I wondered if this was a warning, but I just went back to bed.

The rest of the week was a lot of fun, and I nearly forgot about my parents' fight. I got some more presents, and we went to Toledo for Christmas with my grandparents. The second I walked into their house, my grandma excitedly said, "Merry Christmas, Benny!" and gave me a big hug.

We opened presents, ate a big meal, and I played with my cousins. It was a great trip. Even the car trip back to Chicago, my home, was fun. However, that next morning was the worst morning of my life!

I was eating toast with some grape jelly at the table when I dropped my toast on a stack of papers. I was curious and saw that they were divorce papers! I had no idea what divorce meant, so I went to my mom and asked, "What does divorce mean?"

She looked nervously at the table and saw my toast by the divorce files.

"Um, it is when, well um, your dad and I are not going to live together anymore," she finally said.

"Does that mean that I will have to choose between you or Dad to live with?" I asked sadly.

She slowly nodded her head and we both began to cry.

School was hard the next day, and during science class I decided to go to the office and call home to my mom. I told her that I was feeling terrible, and she understood. Soon after, she came to pick me up and we got ice cream.

That night, I couldn't sleep. We were going to the courtroom early the next morning, and I was going to have to make the decision.

Early the next morning, we arrived at the courtroom. I didn't get any sleep. I should've known that my dreams were warnings. Luckily, unlike in my dreams, there was no one there except the judge, my parents, and me.

After a lot of talking, the judge turned to me and said, "Benny, this must be tough on you, but since your Dad is moving away, which parent do you choose to live with?"

I knew exactly what to do. I said, "I choose," I paused for suspense, "Mom!"

I skipped the day of school to pack for the Notre Dame trip. It took a long time to pack, but I finished packing and went to bed for the night.

As I slept, I had a different dream. My mom was super happy, and we were at Notre Dame. I hoped that this was a vision also.

We got up early the next morning and started our drive to Notre Dame. I asked my mom, "Do dreams come true?"

She replied, "Well, I have had a few dreams come true. What was your dream about?"

"Oh nothing," I lied

We finally got there in the afternoon. We went to a few places before going to eat at the Notre Dame Dining Hall. It was packed full of people.

I asked my mom to go to the restroom and when I got in, I saw Notre Dame legend John Williams. I introduced myself and told him that he was taller in real life than on TV. Then I realized that he could help me and told him about the past few days. I asked him, "Will you help me plan a surprise for my mom?"

He answered, "Most people ask for an autograph or something like that, but I will help you with a small surprise."

Later that night, John appeared to my mom and me. I acted surprised. He got us better tickets by the bench, he showed us live on TV so everyone saw us having a good time, and he bought us free concessions. I could tell that Mom was having a good time.

After the game, John said, "You know, this was all Benny's idea."

"Really! That is so sweet!" she said. "Thank you both!"

Back at our hotel room, I told my mom, "I guess good dreams can come true."

She kissed me goodnight, and I fell asleep knowing that I was truly happy.

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

The House on 13th Street

It was the week before Halloween. My friends and I were excited as ever! We've been going out on Halloween with each other since we were practically in diapers! I can't believe it's actually senior year. My best friend, Lilly Byers, and I have been planning Halloween for about a month now.

Every year we do the traditional trick-or-treating then have a sleepover, but we couldn't do that this year. I mean, c'mon, it's our last year all together before we go our separate ways to college. Tyler is planning on going to Harvard; he's super smart. Lilly and Jacob are going to Miami. I mean, heaven forbid they go a day without each other. I, Elle Jackson, am staying here in Texas. Yeah, sounds boring, but I'm actually pretty excited!

Anyways, back to Halloween. We couldn't decide on a costume until Jacob suggested we be ninja turtles. Sounds kinda stupid now that I write this, but none of us had any better ideas, so we just agreed.

As I said, Lilly and I have been planning this for quite some time, so I might as well just tell you our plan. It'll start off like every other year. Once we get out of school, we all meet at Lilly's to get ready. After that, we go get a bite to eat somewhere, then go trick-or-treating. Here's where the plan takes off. Every year, the most popular guy in our school, Nate Brown, has an annual Halloween party. Every year we've been too scared to go since it's kind of an unspoken rule that you have to be cool to go. But this year, I don't care, I'm going to that party!

It's finally the day of Halloween, and I have just arrived at school.

"Hey guys!" I say as I approach Lilly, Jacob, and Tyler at our lockers.

"Elle!" Lilly exclaims. "You'll never guess what I heard."

"What?!" I reply, eager to hear her response.

"Nate canceled his party last minute. Says he's going out of town or something like that."

My heart drops. I was so excited to actually go this year.

"You're kidding," I say.

"I know it's a bummer, but I've actually thought of something even better!"

"What?" I replied hesitantly.

She says, "Do you guys remember that house on 13th street?"

"The one we were scared of as kids?" Jacob asks.

"Exactly!" she says. "I was thinking, why don't we go explore it?"

"No way!" Tyler blurts out.

"What! Why?"

"We could get in serious trouble, Lilly, and I don't know about you, but I still wanna go to college."

"Oh, come on, Tyler, don't be such a bum!"

"NO!"

"Elle? Jacob? I need a little help here."

"Come on, Tyler," I say, "It'll be fun! I promise we won't get caught. We'll go in there for a couple of minutes and come right back out."

"But—" he starts to say as Jacob cuts him off.

"Yeah, sorry Ty, but I'm gonna have to agree with the girls on this one. This is our last year all together, might as well have a little fun!"

"Whatever, fine," Tyler mumbles.

"Atta boy!" Jacob exclaims.

"But if we get caught, I'm blaming it all on you guys."

"Now that's a compromise!" Lilly says eagerly.

The day goes by so fast, and before I know it, the bell rings for us to pack our things up and get dismissed. All four of us are ecstatic! We talk for a bit before we get in our separate cars and head to Lilly's.

Once we arrive at Lilly's, we get in our costumes, take a few pictures for Instagram, then head right back out the door to Jacob's truck so we can get something to eat.

"I'm stuffed," Lilly groans as we walk out of the restaurant.

"Same here." I replied.

"Do you think we can take a quick power nap?" Lilly asks.

"No way! We have to get this party started!" Jacob yells obnoxiously.

"Ugh, whatever."

"Okay, here's the plan," I say. "We go to our usual neighborhoods and trick-or-treat until about 10:30. Therefore, it should be dark, and no one will see us go into the house."

"Sounds good to me!" Jacob replies.

We trick-or-treated for a couple hours, and it was nearing 10:30.

“Guys! It's 10:25, let's go!” Lilly exclaimed.

“For real?” I say. “Oh my gosh, it is. Let's go, guys!”

We start to head to the house when Tyler stops dead in his tracks and says, “Guys... I don't have a good feeling about this. Are you sure we can't just turn around?”

“C'mon, Tyler,” I say, “we talked about this. I mean, what's the worst that could happen? We'll be fine, I promise.”

“If you say so,” Tyler says under his breath.

After walking for about 5 minutes, we finally arrived at the house.

“Whoa,” I say. “This is much bigger than I remembered.”

“Yeah, me too,” Lilly replies.

“Well, what are we waiting for? Let's go in!” Tyler says boldly.

As we walk in, the air feels heavier, and we all start looking around.

“Um guys... did you hear that?” Tyler says.

“No, I think you're just-” But just as Jacob was in the middle of his sentence, a loud thud interrupted him.

“Okay, I heard that, but hey, it's probably just a racoon or something.”

There was a moment of silence as loud footsteps appeared from upstairs.

“Um, Jacob, that doesn't sound like a racoon,” Lilly says shakily.

“I'm going up there,” Jacob says bravely, trying to hide the fact that he's scared.

“Then we're coming with you,” I say.

“Yeah!” Tyler replies.

“Okay, whatever, just be quiet.”

We all walk up the stairs as quietly as we can until Jacob interrupts the silence by yelling, “Hello?”

“Jacob, shut up!” Tyler whispers aggressively.

“Who's here?” a deep voice says from farther up the stairs.

“Wait,” Lilly says, “that sounds like Nate!”

“Nate?” I yell, hoping to hear a response.

As soon as we reach the top of the stairs, we turn the corner and see a hooded figure standing in the hallway.

“Nate, is that you?”

He pulls down his hood and reveals his face, confirming that it is in fact Nate.

“What are you doing here?” Tyler asks. “I thought you were out of town, that's why you canceled your party.”

“Well, truthfully... I just didn't want to have it this year, so I came here thinking no one would find me.”

“Oh, well that makes more sense now,” I say. “Well, we're gonna head out now, nice seeing you, I guess.”

“Yeah, you too.” Nate says. “Do me a favor. Please don't tell anyone I'm here.”

“Don't worry, we won't.” I replied back with a soft smile.

As we start walking home, we talk about what just happened.

“Well, that was weird,” Lilly says.

“Yeah, Nate was acting suspicious.”

“Hey, guys,” Tyler says.

“Yeah?” we all replied back.

“I think this was the best Halloween yet!”

“Really?”

“Yeah! Thanks for making me go. I know I didn't want to at first, but I'm really glad I did.”

“You know, Tyler, Halloween wouldn't be the same without us getting into some type of trouble,” Lilly says.

“Yeah, I know,” he says, chuckling.

We all put our arms around each other as we walk in darkness back to our house, laughing at the memories we've shared.

“You know, I'm gonna miss this,” Jacob says.

“Me too, Jacob, me too.”

Kaycie Kennedy
TMP-Marian Jr. High
7th Grade, 3rd Place

Not Yet, But Soon

Slam. That is the sound my door makes every day. I just do it to try and let my dad know I'm upset with him and still haven't forgiven him.

When I come home from school, I always grab some food and try to stay hidden from my dad because I don't want to see or talk to him. He has a little bit of a temper. Ever since my mom died, he's been this way. Always angry, always drinking. I don't like to think of him as my father anymore.

I go to my room. "Remi!" I say excitedly. Remi is a 3-year-old German Shepherd. My parents got her for me a few years ago. She is one of my best friends. Ella is my best, best friend. We've been best friends since pre-school. She is always there for me.

I decide to clear my head, so I take a long walk with Remi.

When I get back, my dad is passed out on the couch. I miss him, but I'm so angry at him. He has completely faded away ever since my mom's death. He barely talks to me. I think it is because I remind him of my mother. Everyone says we're practically identical. I don't really see it, but I guess everyone else does.

It is a Saturday afternoon, and my grandma comes by to say hi and check on me. My grandma stops by a lot to help, but my dad doesn't like my grandma. I have no idea why. Fall break is coming up soon. We always get a week off. When my grandma comes into the house, she says she has a huge surprise for me. She is taking me to Hawaii for fall break! I'm so excited! I know this vacation will be so much fun.

It is the next day and my grandma and I are in the car on our way to the airport. We board the plane, find our seats, and then before I know it, we are taking off.

When we get to Hawaii we get checked into our hotel and go out for dinner. The next couple days of vacation we spend lots of time shopping and hanging out by the beach and getting suntans. We visited tour sites like cool volcanoes. This was the best week ever. My grandma and I had the best time ever in Hawaii. I really needed this break.

I am excited to go home for some things. I get to see Ella and Remi, whom I've missed very much while I was gone. I can't wait to tell Ella all about Hawaii.

We land and get all our stuff, then my grandma drops me back off at home. I unpack everything and then I take a very long nap with Remi by my side.

I wake up to my dad yelling at someone over the phone. It's my grandma. I hear him say he doesn't want to go to court for this. Then he hangs up. He doesn't want to go to court for what? I couldn't stop thinking about what he said, so I finally decided to call my grandma.

"Hey, Grams," I say when she picks up the phone.

"Hey, Tay, how are you?" she says back.

"I'm good, I wanted to talk to you about something," I say.

"Okay, what is it?" she asks.

"What were you and my dad talking about on the phone earlier?"

"Oh, well, we were talking about you."

I ask why, and my grandma explains to me that she wants to take full custody of me. She said she has been trying to for a while, which is why my dad doesn't really like her. He doesn't want to give her full custody, but why?

I don't know why, but I'm just so tired I decided to go to bed. I wake up and it is a rainy and cloudy Sunday morning. I think today I'm going to talk to my dad and see why he won't give my grandma full custody.

I ask him why he won't give my grandma full custody. He tells me he is worried he will lose me forever, and then he will have nothing left. He says he is trying to be better now. I understand why he feels this way, but I wish that he never got like this in the first place.

I don't know what to do, and I just need a distraction, so I call Ella and ask her if she can hangout. I walk over to Ella's house after she says I can come over. I stay over there for about three hours and just talk to her and tell her everything that is happening right now and of course all about me and my grandma's trip to Hawaii, then I tell her about my favorite show I've been binge watching lately. I just tell Ella everything that is going on; she is the only one who seems to care.

When I get home, I take Remi on a long walk, and then once I get back, I take a nice long hot shower to clear my head and relax a little bit.

Later when I am just hanging out in my room like always, my dad calls me to the kitchen. When I go out there, he tells me that my grandma is coming over and we are going to have a family meeting.

When my grandma gets to our house, we all sit down at the kitchen table.

During our family meeting we talked about what is going to happen now. My grandma is going to take custody of me right now while my dad is getting the help he needs. Once he is better, I will move back in with him if he is able to be my dad again.

Finally, my dad is getting help, and I can move in with my grandma.

Once my grandma leaves, my dad comes over to me. He doesn't say anything, he just gives me a big hug. It is comforting, I can tell it is a hug that is saying everything will be okay. This is the first hug he has given me since my mom passed away. He is starting to feel like my dad again, the one I used to know.

A couple weeks pass by, and I am all packed up to go to my grandma's house. My dad is leaving soon too. We all say our last goodbyes for a while, and then I get everything including all of Remi's stuff loaded into my grandma's car. Then we were on the way to my grandma's house

When we get there, I take all my stuff into the room I will be staying in while I'm there. I flop onto the bed. I'm so relieved about everything. I'm glad my dad is getting help; I miss him.

I look at Remi, and I think she is settled in, too. She passed out on my bed.

My grandma calls me down to dinner.

After dinner I get ready for bed. I get all cozy in my new bed. I can finally go to sleep with nothing to have to worry about except I am thinking about one thing. I am thinking about when I can finally have a good relationship with my dad. Not yet, but soon.

Reagan Staab

TMP-Marian Jr. High

7th Grade, Honorable Mention

Pray for the Bear

Ding!

That's the last bell of the day. The bell that signifies school's over. I used to love that bell, but now I don't. After school comes football practice, the worst part of the day. I'm scared I might get hurt, get laughed at, or won't be good enough. The closer I get to the locker room, the more my stomach is in knots.

I hear a kid trying to get my attention, "Kyler! Are you really playing football this year?"

I know he's trying to mess with me. I just keep walking.

As I'm putting my gear on, I see a kid walking towards me.

"You look nervous, maybe even confused. Most people don't get confused until after practice starts. What's up?"

"Don't mess with me," I plead. Maybe the comments are getting to me more than I thought.

"I'm trying to help you!" he responds.

"Thanks?" I say, still thinking this is a joke.

"I'm Drew," he says confidently, "and I know how you feel."

"No, you don't," I reply, a little irritated.

"I remember my first year. It was a lot to learn, and Coach Gus doesn't make it easy," Drew told me.

So what, I think. Of course, a gifted and natural football starter can say that.

"None of my teammates are going to help me. Football's competitive just like any sport. They want minutes, playing time, not to help me," I sigh.

"I will," he replies with a smile.

"Don't," I answered. Who would leave their career behind for somebody else? Drew's supposed to make a name for himself in football, I'm not.

"I mean, don't leave your career behind for me," I say, feeling a little awkward.

"I know what you meant," he answers with a smile. "Helping you will help my dreams."

"How?" I ask.

"College coaches look for mentors and role models, not just studs," he pauses. "I've been told I have the "stud" part down. I need to be a better mentor."

I don't say anything; I'm speechless.

"You need to stop caring about what people think about you. It's consuming your energy. That fear makes it impossible to do anything else," he says.

“Thanks for the advice.

“If you need anything, let me know,” he affirms. “Now let’s get to practice before we’re late.”

Practice went well. I was better than I thought. It shouldn't surprise me because I’m an athlete. I’m strong and muscular, so I am normally good at anything sport-related. The coaches, including Grumpy Gus, were interested in me.

School was about the same the next couple of days with one exception. The guys started making less jokes about me. There was still the occasional mean-spirited joke, but most were out of fun, not to be mean.

However, on our first day of full pads, Coach Gus made us do Oklahoma Drill and didn’t teach us how to tackle first. He just made us hit and get hit. I was so mad I threw my helmet against the wall.

“Hey, calm down,” Drew said calmly.

“I’m quitting!!!” I scream.

“No, you’re not,” Drew replies, a little cold-sounding. “Things will get better.”

“Why is Grumpy Gus like that? I mean, who just tells kids to hit each other full speed when they don’t know how to hit?”

“A smart, winning coach,” he answers me.

“What?” I scream.

“He knows how to win. The hardest part of football is getting hit. Now that you know what that feels like, you can focus on your tackling form and technique and not the anticipated pain.”

“I’ve never thought of it that way.”

“Wait until Monday when he teaches you how to tackle,” Drew adds.

After our talk, I feel better. Something changed in me. Our next couple of weeks were really fun, and I love football once again!

We’re 3-0 and getting ready to play our fourth game. I show up to practice and notice that something is wrong. Where is Drew? Coach blows the whistle to start practice, and he calls us in for a team meeting, something we rarely do at the start of practice.

“I have sad news,” he said. “Drew suffered a high ankle sprain in P.E. today.” Everybody’s mouth hits the floor. “He’ll be out for about 4-6 weeks. As you all know, we only have four weeks left.” He paused and looked around. “Kyler, take the starting role.” Nobody could speak.

We continued practice like we usually do, but nobody spoke. We all have one question in mind: How’s Drew? Drew’s supposed to go to college, maybe pro. How bad is the injury? Will it affect his future? During a water break, I went to the locker room and texted Drew. He said he was fine and that I should come over after practice.

When I got to his house, I ask, “How are you feeling?”

“Great!” he responds, but I could tell something was up.

“How are you actually feeling?” I ask this time, a little more demanding.

“I’m upset this happened. I should’ve been more careful,” he mumbles.

“It’s my turn to give advice. Everything happens for a reason,” I declare and Drew’s eyes widen. “I don’t know why, but God did this for a reason. Kobe Bryant tore his achilles in 2013. When he wrote about it, he started by feeling sorry for himself. But at one point, he flips his mindset. He vows to himself that he will work harder every day. Then he says he’s so confident, “If you see me in a fight with a bear, pray for a bear.” I paused to let that sink in. “You have two choices: feel sorry for yourself or be the best teammate/cheerleader ever and when the time is right, get back to work harder than you ever have.

“I know, but it sucks. I hate sitting on the sidelines. I wanna play!” he replies, a little irritated.

“I wish it didn’t happen, either, but it did, so you can feel sorry for yourself or be a great teammate and be back to being a stud next year,” I answer calmly.

That whole week I work especially hard. I’m a starter, and I can feel the pressure.

As I’m warming up, fear starts creeping in. I try positive self-talk, and that doesn't work. I try breathing exercises, but that doesn’t work either. As I go out for the coinflip, my stomach is in knots. We win the coin flip and decide to receive.

“Go out there without fear, without doubt, and kill it. Pray for The bear!” Drew yells into my ear.

After that comment, I knew I got this! On our first drive, we went three and out. As I was walking to the sideline, Drew came up to me.

“That’s a great start, PRAY FOR THE BEAR!” he says.

We ended up losing the game 21-14. Even though I am sad about losing, I’m proud of myself and my teammates. We came out there and played as hard as we could. I’m especially proud of Drew. He’s trying really hard to learn his new role of teammate cheerleader.

Ding!

That's the last bell of the day. The bell that signifies the end of school. I used to hate that bell, but now I don't. After school comes football practice, the best part of the day. I used to hate it because of fear, but I've defeated that fear. That's one of my biggest wins this season.

Thomas Meagher
TMP-Marian Jr. High
8th Grade, 1st Place

Two Roads Coming Together

"Libby, come on! We're going to be late!" Libby's mom, Susan, calls. Libby and her mother are getting ready to go on their annual holiday trip. This year, Libby's grandparents had chosen to go to a small island off the coast of Africa, called Madagascar. She was extremely nervous when learning there is a ton of wildlife, but learning there was a spa and ocean access right off the walkway of their resort, Libby was just about instantly interested.

Now at the airport, Libby's mother brought her and her grandparents to the first-class lounge for the long day and a half journey they had ahead of them. Libby was so excited about her trip but was very sad that her dad was not going to be there. Libby's father is a doctor who travels the world helping sick and injured patients in third world countries.

Awakening from her nap, Libby peers out her window to see the luscious green trees of Madagascar below. The pilot comes onto the intercom announcing that they will be landing in just a little under fifteen minutes.

Stepping off the plane was absolutely magical for Libby. Although the long bus ride seemed like a bumper to most of the other passengers, not for Libby. She was thrilled to take tons of photos of everything she saw. It wasn't until they reached their first small village that she realized how poor this country truly was. There were people struggling, starving, naked, and ill. This tremendously changed her point of view for the rest of her trip.

Libby immediately thought how many privileges and opportunities she had compared to these people. Libby and her family were very wealthy, but only because her parents and grandparents had worked hard. Although Libby knew that she had this kind of money, she was determined not to make it her whole personality. Libby strongly believed that everyone was created equally, no matter the amount of money they had.

Immediately after they arrived at their resort, Libby threw off her backpack, threw on her favorite bathing suit, and ran down the stairs to the lobby. "Mom! Why have you been keeping this amazing place from me?"

Libby had always been nervous about what people would think about her outside of school. On this vacation she was determined to leave that version of herself in the past and only focus on having fun in the present. While Libby was reading, she had completely zoned out until a young boy, Jake, approached her, "Whatcha readin' there, mate?"

Libby was startled, "Umm...I...I'm reading Natasha Preston's book *The Island*."

"That book is great! I love all the excitement and urges of mystery," Jake exclaimed nervously. Libby was stunned. She had never met anyone in her life that actually liked to read the same types of books as her.

Jake and Libby spent the remainder of the afternoon talking as they strolled down the shore of the beach. Jake suddenly started sprinting toward the water, while Libby was still at her normal walking pace staring at the sand. Looking up surprised, she then spotted Jake knee deep in the water gently pushing a turtle towards the shore. Libby let out an astonished gasp as she saw this going on. She immediately ran to Jake and helped in any and all ways she could. She quickly approached Jake, looked down, and saw a tangled and bleeding turtle. Libby was scared. She had never seen anything like this in her life. Jake was terrified. Both of them, having blurry vision from the mix of salt water and tears in their eyes, knew instantly that if this turtle wasn't helped soon, he would die.

Roughly twenty minutes later a veterinarian arrived and admitted that the plastic was indeed badly tangled around the turtle and that if the kids had called any later, the turtle might have passed away.

The turtle had been admitted to the island's clinic about thirty minutes away from their resort. Libby and Jake had been begging their parents for days to let them go and see the turtle, and when they finally agreed, the doctor told them that if these kids were to spread the word on how bad littering was, they would be saving even more turtles.

Now back at the resort, Libby and Jake started working on flyers to post on why people should stop littering. This was an amazing first step, but they knew if they truly wanted to save many lives, they needed to go bigger. Jake's father owned quite a few online websites and showed them exactly how they could set up and design one for themselves. They then caught a ride to the local farmer's market and asked for as many barrels as they had. They ended up receiving over fifty barrels, which they then used to place all over the resort so that everyone would have a place to put their trash.

After spending a good amount of time on their project, Libby heard sirens. She and Jake were in shock as they arrived at the beach. Another turtle had been tangled in plastic. They felt defeated. When they had been at the clinic with the first turtle, the doctor had shown them how to safely and efficiently remove plastic from a turtle if they were in need of help. Libby and Jake rushed down to the beach to see the damage. The turtle's fins were not too badly tangled, but still enough that the people working on him were struggling. Jake and Libby jumped into action as soon as they could knowing that they could help.

Libby was so happy that they had done something good. But, when she looked over at Jake, she could tell something wasn't quite right. "What's wrong?" Libby asked with a nervous tone in her voice. "It's just...look." Jake said as he pointed toward the ocean. Libby peered at the ocean. Her stomach dropped. People were not following their flyers or putting their trash in the barrels. They both felt discouraged.

Shortly after, Jake's dad broke the news that they were going to have to cut vacation short, "The fires back in Australia are getting worse by the day. If we don't leave now, we will lose everything."

Libby sprinted to the lobby as soon as she heard the news. Running to Jake, Libby lept into his arms sobbing as she knew this would be the last time they would see each other.

Libby's vacation was also coming to an end because school was about to start back up. They were sad to leave the resort, but it was back to reality.

A few weeks later Libby, Jake, and her dad were having their weekly video chat.

"Hey guys! How's it going?" Libby asked in a cheerful voice.

"I'm amazing! The numbers of patients that have been coming to the clinic have gotten lower every week, which means they are getting the resources they need!" Libby's father exclaimed.

"Almost all the fires here in Australia have been put out!" Jake said happily.

Libby and the boys talked for another ten minutes before hanging up and going their separate ways. Libby's dad was coming home in just a few weeks for good, and Jake and his dad were coming to stay with Libby and her family over spring break! Libby's world was finally starting to turn around for the better, and she was finally ready to make a move and make her mark.

Piper Simpson

TMP-Marian Jr. High

8th Grade 2nd Place

Luck

Today was Monday, the start of a new week. I walked into school and forced a smile.

"Hey, Liam!" Jacob yelled as he ran toward me. "They're announcing the highest scores in our midterm! It has to be you! I mean, you're probably the one person who took studying seriously."

I was right, the moment I caught word of a test or quiz, I'd study until I was sure that getting an A would be easy. The thing I hated was attention. Even from an early age, I had learned how to take the attention elsewhere in any and all situations. So even though I worked hard on my grades and midterms, I didn't need attention brought to me.

After the long bike ride home from school, I finally made it to my driveway. Mom's car wasn't here, but it usually wasn't. My little brother Levi would be home soon, so I decided to tidy some things up.

"Hey, Levi!" I exclaimed as he came through the door. This was my favorite part of the day. Levi was always in a good mood and knew how to cheer anyone up. "Do you have any homework?"

"Just a little bit, I should be able to get it done in 15 minutes," he called out while he ran downstairs.

I decided to get everything ready. Being Friday, it was our movie night. Levi fell asleep during the movie. I decided to stay up until Mom got home, which wouldn't be long. I cleaned all the popcorn and snacks off of the floor and threw a blanket over Levi.

As my eyes were dozing off, I heard the quiet creak of the front door. I got up and saw Mom leaving the doorway into the kitchen. “Hey, Mom,” I whispered, trying not to disturb Levi.

“Liam!” she called out. “You scared me! I heard you got the top grade on the midterm!” she exclaimed. “I’m so proud of you.” I got excited. Even though I don’t like to be congratulated at school, I always talk to my mom about my recent successes.

“Thanks, Mom!” I said while hugging her. I wished her goodnight and went upstairs to my room.

It was another Monday. The weekend went by faster than ever. As I stepped outside my house, a small black raven stood in my way. He stood his ground as I walked closer. He stared at me while cooing three times. Then, he just flew away, disappearing into the branches. I thought it was a strange encounter but continued on my way to school.

I tried to forget about it for the rest of the day, but I kept going back to that bird. Thinking back on it, I feel like I’ve seen it before, but I couldn’t place it.

It was just a few weeks later when it happened again. As I walked out of the school, that raven was perched on my bike handle. I looked around, but almost everyone had already left school. I walked up to it and tried to scare it away. It flew off, but not far enough to stop watching me. I decided to start my way home, trying to forget what just happened.

As I was approaching the turn to my street, I looked behind me and saw the bird still watching me. I turned around and saw a car on the wrong side of the road. That car was coming straight towards me.

I quickly swerved into the sidewalk. My bike got caught on the curb, and I slammed into the hard cement. I laid on the sidewalk and faced the bright blue sky. My head spun, my right leg felt like fire. A few bystanders came over to help me. I didn’t know how long I’d been laying there. Something about my leg made them gasp. I was too scared to look. “Someone call 911!” I heard someone shout. The last thing I heard before I passed out was the distant sirens.

I woke up to blinding lights staring down at me. “Where’s my mom?” I asked.

“I’ve just sent someone down to get her,” the nurse explained. I tried to remember what happened. After school...car going the wrong way...on the sidewalk...the bird! It was there again. Was it just me being superstitious, or was that bird always there when something bad happened?

I waited for my mom to arrive. Then she finally called out, “Honey! I was so worried!” She pulled up a chair and sat beside me.

Only then did I look down to see my leg suspended in a cast. It was thick, white plaster with only my toes sticking out. “Is it bad?” I asked.

“Nothing that won’t heal,” she replied.

That’s when I heard a loud squawk. I turned my head towards the window and saw that stupid bird.

I was allowed to go home a few days later. As I walked into school after my “break,” the stares from others were instantaneous. The sound of my crutches echoed through the hallway. I was trying to move fast, but that’s a little bit difficult with a boot.

When I came home from school, Mom’s car was in the driveway. There was another car I’d never seen before. I knew something was off but couldn’t brace myself for what I would learn.

Mom was sitting with another woman. “Liam, with your recent hospital visit, I...” she paused, her eyes tearing up, “I need a few months to get back on my feet financially.”

“What do you mean?” I asked as my voice became hoarse.

“Levi and you will be going to a foster home for a few months,” she said, half crying. I was in shock. My mouth hung open and my legs were ready to collapse. I ran (as well as possible) out of the door.

I started crying. I didn’t know what else to do. “Squak!” I heard something call. I looked up and saw that stupid bird.

“WHAT!” I yelled out while throwing a pebble at it. It didn’t even flinch. “What could you possibly do to make this any worse?” I stood there with no reaction.

The worst part was packing. What are you supposed to bring? On one end, you want it to feel like home, but also not too much. Nothing could ever replace your true home. Luckily, I still had Levi. He was a mess, but I was strong for him.

We got to visit Mom every week and could always call. We still went to the same school, and seeing J every day really helped.

After what felt like an eternity, Mom finally was able to have us back home. We ran up and gave her a hug. She was outnumbered and squealed from how tight we hugged her.

I heard a familiar squawk. I looked over and saw the raven, but it didn't stare. It slowly flew away, and I could almost swear that it smiled at me. As we walked inside, I knew that it was time to start appreciating everything.

As I walked into school, I put on a smile. Not because I had to, but because I wanted to. I couldn't help but wonder how life was just a game of luck. Then, I realized it wasn't luck, it was how you viewed it. Good or bad, there's always something good that can come out of it. That's what I was going to do, find the good.

Jack Stoecklein

TMP-Marian Jr. High

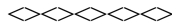
8th Grade, 3rd Place

Run

Running has always been a gateway for me. Ever since I was little, it's all I wanted to do. I always was and always will be the one with endless energy. The person who can run a five-minute mile and be ready to do it again 20 minutes later. Running is something I've always loved. Something I've always been great at. I knew I was good, I knew I could win, but I never could have imagined beating hundreds of kids in a race. A race that lasted three meets, a summer's worth of practice, and thousands of hours of work. A race against every runner of my age in the country. A race not only against others, but against myself. Not just a race, *THE* race. The two-mile at the Jr. Olympics.



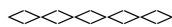
Welcome to Qualifiers, hosted right here in Hays, Kansas. They take the top sixteen, making my mile and two mile a breeze. The 800 was a different story. I qualified in all my events, cutting it close with 15th place in the 800. Everyone I ran against in the two-mile race also ran my other two events. A kid from Hot Feet took gold or silver in all three. This kid was fast! I knew he was going to be the pace setter at the next meet.



Two weeks later, we pulled into the stadium parking lot in Bentonville, Arkansas. The meet was spread out over a span of three days. This time, only the top six qualified. I dropped the 800, leaving me with the mile and two-mile race. I absolutely blew the mile, but that left me determined to qualify in my other event. I sat at our team camp, waiting to hear *'first call for the eleven-year-old boys two-mile'*. Finally, the intercom comes alive with a staticky start.

"Ladies and gentlemen, we are having to stop the meet due to a rain delay. Rain will begin in roughly twenty minutes. We hope to continue within an hour." What! The sky was completely clear. There was absolutely no chance it was going to rain! Until there was. It started pouring in a matter of seconds. We were told to go to the indoor stadium to dodge the storm. But getting there... was almost as hard as my race. The wind blew heavy, bullet-like raindrops at an angle, making me blind. We took off running desperately in the way we hoped was the right one, the windy storm whipping at our faces. Slowly, but surely, we kept trudging on. Until finally, we reached the indoor stadium and the comfort of dry warmth.

After about thirty minutes, they had us lined up on the track. My heart was pounding. There were seven people in my race, that meant I only had to beat one kid to qualify. This may have been the scariest meet of my life. But when the gun went off, I knew I was ready. I knew that I could do it. I ended up placing sixth in that race. It was one of the best moments of my life. I was going to the Jr. Olympics.



After another few weeks of hard training, I dug my spikes into the track. Humble, Texas. Nine o'clock in the morning. 116 degrees outside. And the biggest meet of my life. I'm about to run against 94 other boys. Everything that happened on my road to glory flies through my head. I'm at the Jr. Olympics! I'm petrified.

We're given the whole two-command-start-if-anyone-falls-in-the-first-hundred-meters spiel.

"Hey," the kid next to me says, "good luck."

"Thanks," I reply, "You too." We all take two steps back.

"Runners to your marks!" the starter booms. I hurry up to the waterfall start line, then plant my toes into the soft, red track. It's go time. Deep breath.

BANG! The starting gun echos through the stadium. I take off around the curb. Lap 1 of 8. I near the front, desperate to cut in early. I pass the cut line, merge to lane one, and... I get cut off. I weave my way back up towards the middle. We pass the finish line. One down, seven to go.

Lap two, the decision lap. You either fall behind, or push ahead. I'm still trapped in the middle. I pass someone before the curb. They sprint to get around me. They can't. Back through the finish line. Six laps left.

Lap three, the split-up lap. Everyone falls apart. People all over the track. I get passed. I speed up, determined to keep my place. It's not enough. My beginning speed failed me.

Lap four- Just hang in there.

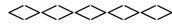
Lap five- Get ready.

Lap six- Here we go!

It's almost a mile and a half into the race. I'm losing energy every second. But I have to keep going. I have to go *faster!* I pass a kid who thought it was a good idea to run in Crocs. Somewhere along the line, he lost a shoe. I want to laugh, but I can't. Not in a race.

Lap seven, the lap of desperation. You just got to keep going. Somewhere, something, gives me a burst of energy. I know I'm not supposed to pass on the curve, but I don't care. Not anymore. This is the Jr. Olympics for crying out loud! It's high time I prove I'm the best! And no one's going to stop me! I ended up passing six people on this lap.

Lap eight, the speed lap. You throw all your energy, all your heart, all your determination, all your training. You throw everything you have into this last lap. This lap where milliseconds can determine if you win or lose.. two hundred meters left. One hundred. I sprint. 50, 20, 10 meters, 3! I throw myself across the finish line. I'm exhausted.



In the end, I got twenty-seventh place. I beat 17 people in my heat. I'm not the best, but I'm not the worst either, and that's good enough for me. Pure determination got me here, and some day, I'll be back. I *know* I'll be back.

Blayden Werth

Hays Middle School

8th Grade, Honorable Mention

The Journal of John

February 28, 11:59 p.m.

I am currently writing from my condo in Kiev, Ukraine. My name is John Valov, and I have three children and a wife. However, I am not happy with them at the moment. We have been arguing about our bakery on the other side of town. I love our bakery! I have spent so much time, money, and energy on the bakery, but all for nothing.

You see, we have been having some financial problems. The roof is slowly caving in, and we don't have much more money to pour into it. The wife and kids propose that I sell the bakery while we still can. They don't know, they can't sell it until they pour their hard work and life into it. Even though I still think we should have the bakery, I made a mistake in what I said and did to my family.

I was furious; I argued with them and said some things I regret saying. I am just overwhelmed with the war that's been going on for a while. We argued and argued until I had enough of it. I slammed the door to my room shut and locked them out. I don't want to argue any longer. I have had enough with what they are saying, so I will just try to get some sleep.

March 1

Scared, it's the one word that defines my mind. I am scared. The Russian troops are everywhere. I knew they would attack sometime, just not so soon. What will they do to me? I look out the window of my apartment; I see the aftermath. I see the troops that bring terror to the city. How could they do this to me? More importantly, how could they do this to my family? My family tried to help me **before** they escaped.

My wife apparently knocked on my door, but it was locked, and I was in a slumber. They had to leave without me. They took the truck and are going to try and make it to Poland. I can't even make it out of Kiev right now, the Russian troops are everywhere. I need to make this place secure.

March 2, 4:23 p.m.

I first filled up a bathtub with plenty of drinking water to last me. I then put the refrigerator over the door to prevent anyone from getting in. I am starting to wonder about the other apartment, as it is the only place I can be seen from my windows. I ended up putting plywood over the window so no one can see me and for safety purposes. I do fear that the other apartment complexes will be attacked after mine, and that I will be the first. I'm going to make an escape plan.

I have come up with an idea that I will catch a train on the opposite side of the city. There is a train that carries resources such as coal and metals that has many open legs of the train. It goes through a station on the opposite side of town. I can't go on a normal train, I think it will be too risky. I am trying to make a plan, but the plywood is covering the window. I think I'll take it off because I hear a lot of stuff outside, too.

Ruin, I only see ruin. The bringers of terror have gotten to the apartment building down the block. Everything has an orange tint to it and a warm light beaming on my face. I see my people everywhere; they scream and cry. I can't help them, and for that I am so disappointed. I see them all, my bakery connects me to all these people. I see a single mother and her toddler run, cry, and scream. They were the same people that had ordered a loaf of bread just one week earlier. I see them, and I feel a deep sadness in my heart. I feel the sadness of a father.

I would have been much better off mentally by not taking off the plywood. I see the madness, the chaos if you will. It brings a deepened drive to me. I have the simple survival need to run. I know I can't protect. We live in a society where words have no meaning, and guns and weapons do all the talking. In this world, I only have one option, to run.

March 2, 11:38 p.m.

I didn't run to the bakery, I walked. I walked not too far until I heard some footsteps slopping in the muddy day through the rain. I started to jog, then I ran, and I ran, and I ran. I ran all the way to the bakery across town, with the occasional stop to hide from an oncoming vehicle. I can't believe I made it here; I have made it one step closer to my family. I have plenty of food here and will most likely stay the night here. I am safe here, except the roof looks worse than ever as it sags low and sags. I will update this journal when I leave.

March 3, 8:00 p.m.

I am walking to the train, which comes at ten. I hope there is an open cart, but if there isn't, I'll try my best to get in one. I am hoping that I can safely make it to the train station, and it is looking really good. I'm almost there, so I shall update you when I get there.

The horn, I heard the horn as I rushed into an empty cart. I thought I would get spotted, as many crows jumped out. The crows squawked and chirped as the sounds echoed in the fresh air. There is a fog, a deep fog that impedes my view. It has a white tint to it, perfect for hiding me in a train.

The train is yelling and sprinting past the still trees. I have a sense someone is watching me. It is most likely because I am starting to see Russian troops driving, walking, and running past the train, but in the opposite direction. I think this is a good thing, as they are going in the opposite direction. We are coming up on another train station that marks the end of the trek. I am hoping that everything goes according to plan.

Pain, the train is being raided. I'm not going to make it. I ran into the trees but didn't make it far. I just want to see my family in my final moments. My greatest mistake was not getting on the train, but not taking my family for what they were. If anyone reads this, never take your family for granted.

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

Hide and Fire

It was a cool Saturday morning and Bella and her little brother Jason were looking forward to a whole weekend away from school. Even though Jason was only six years old and Bella was a few years older they still liked to play outside together.

They lived on a farm right outside of the main town, and there weren't too many people around. Usually around this time the two would go down to the creek and skip rocks or climb trees, but today was different, The creek was completely dried up. Jason suggested that they come up with a new game. Bella liked the idea and asked what he thought. He said they should play a combination of hide and seek and tag. Bella figured since there was nothing else to do she might as well play. She told Jason to hide first and she would be the seeker. Bella closed her eyes and Jason ran into the forest squealing with excitement. It wasn't every day he got to pick what to play.

After one minute of counting, she opened her eyes and went in the direction she heard Jason walk in. "Jason" she yelled, but of course, there was no response. As she was walking, she thought about how peaceful the forest was. The birds singing and the smell of wet grass. She liked it that way but after ten minutes of what seemed to be walking in circles, she yelled "I give up Jason, come on out." but still no response. She was starting to get worried but figured that he probably just thought she was joking. Another ten minutes and still no sign.

All of a sudden, she saw him. Just laying there no more than 20 meters away. She yelled that she found him and thought that they should be getting home soon, but no response. Was he joking or something she thought. But when she went up to him, he didn't move, run or even start laughing. "Are you okay Jason?" Bella said kinda nervously. She shook his body, but he looked pale kinda like he had passed out. "Stop playing around if mom finds out I let them go out in the forest by yourself I'm going to get in so much trouble" But once again no response. Bella checked for a pulse, but he didn't have any. "It wasn't supposed to end like this," She thought, but she couldn't escape it. Everything had gone wrong. The world was in flames around her. And it was all her fault.

Charles Meitner

TMP-Marian High School
9th Grade, 1st Place

Isolation

You're changing and so is the rest of the world. The world is changing and so is everybody else. People are starting to live more and more isolated even though it is much easier to stay connected. When I was younger, long ago, people worked together in harmony, the world was better. Whenever I ask for help now, people scoff at me like I'm crazy for asking. I know I'm old and I like to reminisce over the old days, but recently it has gotten much worse. I feel weird and out of place, like I moved to a new country and don't know the language. I still have a flip phone because I can't comprehend the phones with all the new buttons. I like to keep a clean home, but when I visit my grandchildren, they don't seem to have a care in the world, often leaving sharp and pointy toys all over their floors. It might be the way they are raised now, with the little discipline they receive. I feel so lonely with all the people around me. When I was a kid all I dreamed of was seeing the future, but now that I'm here, it is disappointing. Every once in a while, I meet a nice young person that I can have a pleasant conversation with and it brings me back. The world shouldn't be like this. The world is more stressful than it has ever been, and stubborn people still refuse that fact. The world we are creating is ugly and I'm concerned about what the changes may bring. Everybody is at an all-time low with the number of suicides rising every day. I feel helpless living in a modern world where people are rude and disturbing. I no longer see people walking around my neighborhood, playing with their kids, or having a fun time with their friends outside. Now that I think of it I don't see anybody outside. I hope that I'm the only one that feels this way, so that our future generations can be happy and bright, and not dark and depressing. I don't have much time left on this planet, and I wish I could enjoy my final times.

Elijah Lang

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

New Mexico Mountains

The old west was the place to grow up. Out on the plains, hardly anyone around. It was a great lifestyle for me. I always roamed from place to place, following my herd of cattle and making sure they didn't get stolen.

My earliest memory as a young boy was looking up at the stars after a long day helping my dad on the ranch. The sunset burned a bright, brilliant orange and gold. The clouds looked pink from the sun. The air was hot, but the breeze made it manageable. Oh, how I would give anything to not have a worry in the world, other than what momma was cooking up in the kitchen.

I snapped myself out of my daydream. I had fallen too far behind the herd and some of the cows had gone astray. I mumbled under my breath some words that I shouldn't have as I cantered up to the herd hoping nobody had noticed I wasn't there the whole time.

"You a real buckaroo or not Kit?" Silas yells at me while riding up on his green mare. Lord only knows how he got her. Paid a whole \$20 for that horse. If I were him, I would've just bought two old nags and traded them out every once in a while.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. Shut your trap Si, like you ain't on a mare who's bucked you off more times than you've ridden her. All I hear from you anymore is how sore you are. If either of us ain't a buckaroo it sure as hell ain't me."

Si and I had grown up together. His momma had died when he was only four or five years old. After her passing, his old man became an alcoholic. Lost the house, the farm, practically everything they had to offer. It was a sad situation, having to watch a poor ole boy like Si take care of his messed up in the head old man.

"You know I don't mean nothin' by it, Kit. Just don't let ole Bowie catch you slackin'. He'll make sure you don't do it again."

Bowie was a mean ole son of a gun. He's hot branded men in the middle of the night just for stealin' a slug of whisky without askin' him. I didn't want to know what he was goin' to do to me.

...

Later that night we were all sitting 'round the fire. Breathing in the dust filled air like our lives depended on it. The long, hot days made these cool nights enjoyable. It's one of the many treasures in life, bein' able to find peace in the simple things and not havin' the need of wantin' more all the time. It took me a while to become like this though.

I started cowboyin' when I was ten. My ole man would take me out on the cattle drives with him and let me help him. After I learned a bit, he wanted me to go alone. I was longer than any of the rides I had ever gone on with him. It didn't go too well. I lost almost half the herd. Si wasn't too much help either. He's three years younger than me and has hardly any experience working any kind of livestock. One of these days he's goin' to get himself hurt.

We finished watchin' the sun go down over those big New Mexico mountains and settled in for the night. The fire began to dim, and we were all out like a light.

Rustling was coming from the bushes next to us. We figured it was a hare or a snake or somethin' small. It wasn't the kind of rustling you hear when a pack of coyotes is comin' for your herd.

A few minutes pass and I hear it again. Those damn rabbits are always keepin' me awake.

I hear leather snap. That is a sound you never want to hear in the dead of night. Si's mare had broken loose. She was a crazy one, but I never thought she would be crazy enough to snap split reins tied to a tree. From above we hear a high-pitched screaming-like sound. It sounded like a woman screaming. We all knew what that sound was. A mountain lion.

We all dashed over to our unsaddled horses and untied them from their posts. We tried to get a fire started as fast as we could. It was a moonless night, we could only hear the mountain lion screeching, but we were in the valley of the dead, known for its sounds sounding like they are miles away when they are only a few feet from you.

All hell broke loose. Horses running in every direction, cattle not knowing what to do.

"I HATE THAT DAMN MARE!" Si screamed from behind me.

I ran over to him. He was rolling on the ground holding his rib cage. This couldn't be good. Had he not heard the lion? The leather reins snap? Man this kid could sleep though anything.

"What the hell happened Si? Can you walk? TALK TO ME DAMN IT!" I yelled.

"stepped... breathe... help" Si said gasping for air. I knew exactly what happened. His mare had gotten loose and stepped on his lungs. We were in the middle of nowhere. He wasn't going to last until morning.

I'm glad it was still dark out. Nobody could see the single tear run down my cheek. Si laid in my arms gasping for air. I knew I couldn't help him.

I suspect it was ‘round three or four in the morning when he took his final breath. My heart ached knowing that he was gone from this world. His body is still here, but his soul with his momma.

“Cowboy up” I told myself. It was something he always told me. The next few days I felt numb. The last person in this world who made me happy was taken from me.

...

A few years had passed, but it still hurt like no other. That little mare who killed my best friend was now my pack pony, and Bowie had finally become less of a stick in the mud. There were only three of us buckaroos left, Bowie, Chuck, and me.

I was laying there out on the cliff watching the sun set. The sky burned a bright orange and gold. The clouds looked pink from the sun.

“You paint one hell of a sunset Si” and I closed my eyes and took a deep breath of that dust filled air, finally not wanting him back after all those years I missed him. . . .

Macie Vanek

Hays High School

10th Grade, 1st Place

How Did I Get Here?

Evie was on her way to work as usual. It had been a completely average day so far, and she had been enjoying the warmer weather as she walked. The street to her left was busy, with cars rushing by as people hurried to their jobs. It was a normal morning.

Suddenly, however, she heard a shriek come from somewhere in front of her. Her head snapped forward, her eyes settling on a young woman who must’ve been around her age, standing in the middle of the crowd. Evie rushed towards the woman.

“Are you okay, ma’am? Are you hurt?” she asked, concerned.

“Oh my God, the dog!” the woman shouted, pointing to the middle of the street. Sure enough, there was a medium-sized dog, cowering as cars zoomed around it.

Evie felt a rush of panic shoot through her. Before she could think, her bag was gone from her hands and her feet were carrying her out into the road. Cars honked loudly, and some people poked their heads out to yell at her, but she couldn’t hear them. Her focus was entirely on the dog. As she got closer, she could hear its pitiful whimpers and see it shaking.

She was almost to it, her arms reaching out to grab it. Little did she realize, a car was heading straight for her and the dog. The dog barked a warning at her; its wide eyes were set on the car.

Evie gave one last, powerful stride, almost jumping at the dog. Her arms wrapped around it, the rest of her body shielding it. She squeezed her eyes shut. There were loud shouts from pedestrians telling her to get out of the way alongside the deafening honks of cars all around.

Suddenly, everything went quiet. She remained crouched with her arms around the dog until a voice spoke to her.

“It’s okay now. We’re safe. You can open your eyes,” the voice said. Evie opened her eyes, looking around as she let go of the dog. Everything around her was light and flowy. She looked at the ground, which had turned into clouds. This wasn’t the street she had just been in the middle of. Where was she? Did she die? Was this heaven?

Her eyes drifted up. The dog sat there, staring at her. It lifted its paw, placing it on her knee. And then it spoke.

“You passed our test. Congratulations.”

Evie looked dumbfounded. “What is this—Where am I?”

“Come with me. I’ll answer any questions you have along the way,” it said. Evie complied, rising to her feet and following the dog. As they walked side by side, a thousand questions raced through her head. How had she gotten here? Where was ‘here’? Was she dead? Was this heaven? What did the dog mean when it said she had passed the test?

“I’m sure you’re very confused about all this,” the dog spoke. “Allow me to explain some things. This place is called the In-Between. Many creatures like me reside here, and we go to Earth to help you humans with your lives. I suppose you could think of us as guardian angels.”

“That answers some things, but I’m still confused,” Evie said. “What am I doing here?”

“We’ve been searching for someone like you. Someone who is brave, kind, and selfless. You have proven yourself,” the dog said.

As they continued walking, Evie could begin to see a castle-like structure ahead of them. Even from a distance, it looked stunning. She could make out the golden accents circling the towers, along with a massive stained-glass window in the center of the main building. The In-Between was gorgeous; Evie had never seen anything like it.

“So, what exactly have I proven myself worthy of?” Evie asked.

“There is a vacancy in our ranks now. One of our managers has retired, and nobody is willing to fill the gap. We figured we could try to find a human to fill it, and we believe you would be a perfect fit.”

Evie pondered on the offer for a moment. “If I were to accept, what would happen to my family? My friends?”

“Oh, they’ll be just fine. Time doesn’t pass the same way here as it does on Earth. Nobody will notice your absence. If you do accept this job offer, you would have the power to venture there whenever you wish and visit them.”

Evie mulled over it some more as they neared the castle. It would be tough to leave behind her whole life, her former job, and potentially be alienated from her friends and family for weeks. Even still, she wasn’t very happy or fulfilled by her Earth life. Her job barely paid her enough to pay her rent, her coworkers were awful, and she was always too busy to even spend time with anyone. Maybe this new job would be better for her.

“What exactly does this job need me to do?” she asked.

“Nothing too extreme,” the dog responded. “You would work alongside other guardian angels. Your position, specifically, would have you assigning and overseeing tasks. Collaboration and friendships within a work environment are very important here in the In-Between.”

She thought about it for another moment. This place seemed wonderful; it was a breathtaking, ethereal place, and she would be more than happy to stay here. She was torn, though. If she accepted the job, how long might it be before she saw her family or friends again. Even if her current job wasn’t the best, would it really be worth it to give up her life on Earth for this? She and the dog stood outside the gates to the castle as Evie pondered. Then she decided.

“All right, I accept.” She smiled and stuck out her hand, to which the dog reached out its own paw and shook it. Despite her wariness, she beamed with excitement for what this new job would offer.

Kennedy Walburn

Hays High School

10th Grade, 2nd Place

A Cow Conversation

In the depths of a moonlit night, as a relentless rain poured over the forgotten farm, a sense of foreboding enveloped the isolated barn. The withered wood creaked under the weight of time and darkness, and inside, a pale, emaciated cow stood alone, its eyes glimmering with an unnatural, malevolent light.

A sense of despair washed over Emma, who had found herself wandering into this remote place. The rain outside masked her presence as she approached the cow. She could sense an oppressive presence, something lurking within the frail creature.

"Who are you?" Emma whispered, her voice tremulous with fear. In response, the cow emitted a guttural, inhuman groan, a disturbing mimicry of human speech. Emma took a step back, her heart racing.

The cow's grotesque grin widened, revealing rows of sharp, uneven teeth. It lurched forward, and Emma stumbled backward in terror. The oppressive atmosphere grew palpable, as if the very walls of the barn were closing in on her.

"What do you want?" she stammered, her words barely audible. The cow's malevolent gaze remained locked onto her, and it seemed to be closing in, ready to unleash its dark intent.

Panic surged, and Emma fumbled for the lantern at her side. With trembling hands, she ignited the lantern's flame, revealing the cow's horrifying transformation into a grotesque, otherworldly entity. It was no ordinary cow but a vessel for something far more sinister.

The barn quaked with an unearthly presence, and Emma was thrust into a nightmarish realm of torment. As the rain intensified outside, she could feel the sinister force of the barn drawing her deeper into its grasp.

She realized that she had stumbled into a living nightmare, and the cow, with its malevolent grin, was the guardian of this cursed realm. Emma's heart pounded as she desperately sought a way out of the barn. With every step, the malevolent entity seemed to encroach upon her, its sinister laughter echoing in the darkness.

The rain outside had intensified, blending with the cow's eerie moans, creating a cacophony of horror. Emma fled from the barn, leaving the malevolent entity behind, but the experience haunted her, intertwining her fate with the darkness she had encountered in the forsaken barn. The rain continued to fall, concealing the secrets of the night, as Emma grappled with the horrifying encounter she could never forget. Just like the night in the cabin she would have to face her demons but this time would be the last time. The town was now abandoned, a still desolate shell of what once was. It was now their trap to catch those not aware, and it wouldn't take long for the next one to show up. The ritual had begun.

Jacob Schaffer

TMP-Marian High School

10th Grade, 3rd Place

Mrs. Flores's Garden

Mrs. Flores woke early. She dressed, brushed her teeth, and ate oatmeal. She scuffled out the side door into her beautiful yard, full of multiple flower varieties. Daisies, lilies, tulips, daffodils, littered the flowerbeds. Known for her flowers, people walked by and smelled the sweet aromas and saw the beautiful colors. Back in the day, she won gardening and flower arranging competitions. Anyone strolling by her house knew that an avid gardener lived there.

Mrs. Flores shut the side door of the house and shuffled along to her gardening shed. Her short white hair ruffled in the cool breeze. She couldn't hear the cars passing by her house nor could she hear the creaking of the brown garden shed door as she pulled it open. Mrs. Flores stepped into the shed full of gardening tools. Watering cans, flowerpots, seeds of every kind, hand shovels, etc. adorned the walls. Carefully picking up a hand shovel, a rake, and a watering can, Mrs. Flores slowly hobbled outside. Stopping to look at a bluebird as it sang its special song, a smile appeared on her lips. Memories flowed from a time when she could hear the bluebirds' songs filling her with joy.

She started working in her garden, pulling weeds, watering flowers, and singing to her plants. She had a mother's touch when it came to her garden, and people often saw her working and humming a song. Sometimes the neighborhood kids came and watched this little woman work. When she noticed them, she stopped working and beckoned them to follow her into the house where she always had treats. Mrs. Flores loved when people, especially children, visited her. Even though it was hard to communicate, the kids talked about their day with her while Mrs. Flores tried her best to read their lips and interpret their hand signals. When the children departed, Mrs. Flores happily went back to her garden and began again to take care of her flowers.

As night approached, Mrs. Flores put her gardening tools into her shed. She made sure to securely close the garden shed door and shuffled back to her house's side door, where she said good night to her flowers before heading off to bed. Little did she know that she wasn't just taking care of flowers when she toiled day after day in her garden.

A family of snails lived in her lavish garden, and they thrived from the administered care given every day. At night the snails came out of their hiding places to find food and talk with each other. One night two best snail friends came together and thought of a way to repay the favors that Mrs. Flores unwittingly did for them.

"Hey Rocky!" exclaimed Theo the snail. "How's that tulip?"

"It's delicious," said Rocky chewing with his mouth opened. "I just love how this White-Haired Giant takes care of us."

"She does do a lot for us," Theo said quietly. "I wonder what we do for her?"

"What do you mean?" Rocky asked, moving slowly towards a daisy leaving a trail of slime behind. "We eat these scrumptious plants that she gives us."

"Well, that's the problem. I don't think she appreciates us eating her plants."

"What makes you say that?" enquired Rocky, turning to Theo with his mouth full of daisy.

“I feel bad for destroying all these beautiful flowers that the White-Haired Giant works so hard to grow,” said Theo remorsefully. “Think about it. Every day she works tirelessly to make these flowers thrive, and we come and eat all her good work. She takes pride in her flowers, and we ruin her pride and joy!”

“When you put it that way, I suppose you’re right,” sighed Rocky. “But what will we eat if we don’t eat these scrumptious flowers?”

“Well, for one thing, the White-Haired Giant pulls up those little tuff plants. We could eat those.”

“Theo, are you crazy? Those things taste absolutely disgusting. They taste like feet, and not the slug feet, the people kind,” retorted Rocky.

“I know, but she has taken care of our family for years. We can at least return the favor by not demolishing every plant in her garden,” suggested Theo.

“I suppose you’re right,” said Rocky bitterly. “I guess I’ll sacrifice my tastebuds. It will be hard to convince the rest of the snails though.”

“I know,” said Theo determinedly, “But we’ll find a way.”

Just then Billy, Theo’s cousin, came crawling by.

“Hey Theo, Rocky, you don’t want to be late for snail choir. You better hurry and get your foot moving!” Billy yelled.

“Hey!” Theo happily proclaimed, a light in his eyes, “That gives me an idea.”

“Oh, no!” Rocky whimpered sliding along with Leo, “I hate your ideas. They’re always crazy and insane.”

“What if we sing the White-Haired Giant a thank you song?” Theo clamored excitedly.

“Theo, these giants hate us!” retorted Rocky, “Why would we do that? Do you remember Uncle Robert and the incident with the kid? Sometimes I wonder if you’re losing your shell.”

“Rocky this is one way we can repay the White-Haired Giant,” Theo said stubbornly. “We can sing a thank you song and tell her how terrible we feel for destroying her garden. We can ask for forgiveness and become better snails! Come on, we must move quickly. Choir practice starts in a minute, and we don’t want to be late!”

A couple of weeks went by, and nothing unusual happened. Mrs. Flores tended her garden by day. By night, the snails came up with a thank you song. With the song ready, the snails chose a date to sing to their caretaker.

The big day arrived on a gorgeous sunny morning. Mrs. Flores woke up and did her morning routine. Little did she know what awaited her outside the side door. The snails started lining up and scrambling to get ready to sing their song. As Mrs. Flores opened her door to her garden, she found a group of snails lined up in neat little rows. With a look of surprise on the White-Haired Giant’s face, the snails started singing their song. The pretty little song had melodies and harmonies, filled with gratitude and thanks for the little lady. Throughout the Melodies, there were lines of sorrow and regret for the snails’ actions. The last beautiful line asked for forgiveness. Telling how these snail families would try to become better by changing their eating habits.

Mrs. Flores took a moment to take in this bizarre scene before she lifted up her foot and stepped on the snails’ soprano section, feeling the crumbling of the shells underneath her shoe. She couldn’t hear the snail’s screams or the crunch of their shells as she stepped onto the tenor section. She couldn’t hear the chaos as the snails slid for their lives moving a centimeter per minute. Within seconds, only a bunch of broken shells lay across the ground. Looking around to make sure she didn’t miss any snails, Mrs. Flores walked to her shed to begin her day’s work in the lovely garden.

Anne Wintch

Hays High School

11th Grade, 1st Place

Not Just Pigs

While heading out the door, Bucklin says to her mother, “I am off to work.”

On my drive to work, on this beautiful Sunday morning, my mind wonders if I will collaborate with the little pigs on the farm. From a youthful age, animals, especially those on the farm, sparked an interest in my eyes. Growing up in a small town, in the middle of Kansas, you would think my parents would have animals or pets, but they do not. They do not even like animals. My parents’ jobs include both, working as professors at the only university in Western Kansas. To put things into perspective, from the Colorado border to the small town of Grainfield, Kansas, lies one hundred miles of even smaller towns. Most people hate living in a small town, particularly because everyone knows everyone and everything that goes on. But I love living in a small town, where

I know everyone by name. If you cannot tell by just my thoughts, talking to people comes easy to me. Now, back to my next turn.

I have made the drive out to the farm over a million times. Ever since I could talk, my father knew about the love I shared with animals. Since my early childhood, my father would take me to the Charleston Farm where I could freely run and play with all the animals, particularly the pigs, my favorites. The fondest memory from my childhood kicks off with me rolling around in the mud with all the piglets. My bright red hair became covered in mud, my parents and the Charleston's could not tell the difference between freckles and mud on my face. Oh, the good old days. Wish I could have a few more of those.

Now that we have driven for thirty minutes to the farm, let us locate Charleston. The hardest part of my day includes trying to locate them on this massive farm and my list of things to do. On countless occasions, I spend hours looking for Kim or Tim.

Kim and Tim Charleston never seem to work together on anything. Kim collaborates with the pigs and Tim collaborates with the cattle except on Sundays, and when Kim and Tim both collaborating with the pigs, everyone knows not to bother them. For as long as I could remember, I always found it odd how, just on this one day, they would work together. Kim and Tim also did not want any help, either. Even though I found this odd, Kim and Tim did not like the questions. They feel as if they are getting interrogated. So, I simply did not ask.

I spotted the Charleston laughing at the pigs, so I made my way to the barn to find Marvin and I's lists of things to do for the day. Then I got to the barn, I noticed my list right away, but nowhere in sight could I see the list for Marvin. Unfortunately, farm hands never last here for more than a week. But Charleston always got another hand before the middle of the next week. Personally, I do not know if the Charleston's do not have a good relationship with most of the farm hands or if they cannot manage the Charleston's odd personalities. The Charleston's keep to themselves and hardly ever leave the farm except for Monday mornings.

Now, let us get to the list for the day. First on the list for today: feed the pigs... hmm, especially odd. That does not sound right, especially on a Sunday. Wondering why I needed to feed the pigs, I approached the chest that housed all the pigs' grain on the dark counter of the barn. As I approached the chest, I noticed the dark, damp ground where the preexisting chest lay. Beginning to panic, I ran outside looking for the chest, knowing three of the same chests living on the farm. The alarming part is, I do not know what each chest contains, and the Charleston's made it noticeably clear when I started at the farm not to open anything they did not show me. Petrified, I carefully strolled to the first chest, knees shaking, hands trembling, while trying to grasp the handle from the chest. I could not help but keep looking over my shoulder, making sure no one saw me opening these chests. Once I did not see anyone in sight, I slowly lifted the lid of the first chest. A sigh of relief came over me when I saw the contents of the chest included half empty bags of grain for the cattle. Walking over to the second chest, the sudden onset of my knees shaking sets in as I go to open the next chest. Carefully lifting the lid, feel something behind me. Still lifting the lid, I looked behind me to see nothing, but a couple of rocks stirred up. With the dust settling, I glance into the second chest... shoes, hundreds and hundreds of shoes, all varied sizes, colors, and shapes. Belonging to children, men, and women of all ages. Clean or dirty, it did not matter, but all of them, dirty with blood from the victims they came from. Oh, the blood. Dropping the lid, I stepped back in a hurry, with an icy hand grasping my shoulder, pulling me away from the chest of shoes.

"Oh dear, your eye should not have seen that," said Kim, still grasping my shoulder tighter and tighter. "Tim! Oh Tim, honey, we have an enormous problem."

Kim looks straight into my eyes saying, "You know we liked you here. What a shame to see you go."

Go where? My mind raced through my life. My heart beating out of my chest. The sweet, old Charleston would not think about hurting me or, even worse, killing me. As I stood face to face with Kim, Tim came running around the barn with a shovel. The last thing I felt touching my shocked body, included the cold bloody shovel smashing into my head and the release of Kim's hand. And right at that moment, Bucklin became the next pair of shoes in the Charleston collection.

Years after the disappearance of Bucklin Grace and with the efforts of thousands of people searching for this unfortunate young lady. Five long years later, Kim and Tim's farm came under investigation where they later found the sweet couple, fed over three hundred people to their pet pigs. The authorities linked the disappearances to people in surrounding towns who came to work for the Charleston's. All of this teaches us we cannot just trust anyone on the outside. A person may look like a tender-hearted individual, but at heart, the truth comes out. It always will.

Morgan Munsch
Hays High School
11th Grade, 2nd Place

The Portrait

The wind blew a crisp breeze through Oleander's hometown of Arbor. The chilled October made the town feel ghastly and barren. While the small, populated town held filled homes and plentiful gardens, a long unoccupied house near the edge of the town emitted a mysterious feeling to all the people in Arbor. The house held a reputation as a place of death and grief to all who encountered it. The last known inhabitant of the house, a young woman named Lucienne, disappeared without a trace. Everyone aware of the legend has avoided the house since the incident; nobody dares go near it. Existing for nearly a century, the well-known legend of the house struck fear in all who knew about it. Only the most foolish and uneducated people would dare to dwell in or near this house. Oleander, the most foolish of all, was remarkably educated in the legend of the house; however, he remained a skeptic and, above all else, a fool. Every story he heard of Lucienne's tragic fate only further inspired him to explore. One evening, Oleander's need for truth and adventure plagued his mind. He set forth in the house's direction with no safety precautions. Without telling anybody about his plans, Oleander's journey began; he knew how fools like himself received head shakes and mumbled remarks of, "if only he would listen."

Oleander's first evening at the house fulfilled none of his expectations. He felt that his skepticism served him correctly; he experienced no paranormal or eerie encounters. Despite a rather dull and unexciting expedition, Oleander couldn't halt his thoughts once he arrived home. Although the journey was prosaic, Oleander's mind was plagued by one thing: the portrait. The portrait of a beautiful girl hung in the house. The painting, holding a young woman with long brown hair, captivating blue eyes, and a dagger in her left hand, displayed itself at the forefront of the house's interior. Upon walking through the doorway, the painting greeted Oleander with inviting eyes. The plaque below the painting read, "In Memory of the Beautiful Lucienne." This unique painting captured Oleander's attention with its youthful glow and following eyes. Oleander could describe this painting as nothing other than a diamond amongst rubble. Feeling drawn to the painting, Oleander could not keep his eyes away from it. As Oleander walked through the house, he felt followed, as if eyes in the walls tracked every move he made. This feeling, not disturbing, but protective, accompanied him as he walked through the house. Every time he looked back in the direction of the painting, the painting rocked back and forth slightly. It seemed as though the painting held a hidden person, peeking out to watch him when his back was turned and retreating when needed. He consistently found himself going back to the painting to gaze into the woman's eyes. Something about her eyes emitted light and warmth despite the cold canvas she inhabited.

For the next several days, Oleander made it a priority to go back to the house. His days felt empty and useless without visiting the house. Oleander lived alone in Arbor without any family to call his own. He became addicted to the comforting protection of the house; he felt like he finally had someone looking over him. Lucienne's painting became more lifelike with every visit to the house. Within a week, she no longer retreated when Oleander turned towards her. Within a month, she began to respond when Oleander spoke to her. Oleander's visits ceased to happen; he began to live there. Because he had everything he hoped for in this house, Oleander no longer went outside. The house gave him everything he needed. Although Lucienne was merely a painting, she gave Oleander everything he needed. She kept him company and talked to him about his previous hardships. For the first time, Oleander felt a sense of purpose through this woman that he had fallen in love with. The couple would talk for hours on end. Oleander swore to Lucienne that he would never leave her and wanted to spend his life in this house. He vowed lifelong love and admiration to her. Despite Lucienne being bound to the four edges of the painting, she understood all of Oleander's feelings and related to his stories. For months, Oleander lived exclusively in this house with no outside contact.

After months of seclusion from others and strict boundaries to the house, Oleander and Lucienne's relationship began to change. She no longer responded to Oleander's stories and attempts for conversation; she exclusively wailed and cried for help. When Oleander inquired about her distress, louder sobs and longer screams were his only response. Lucienne howled incessantly, depriving Oleander of sleep. Day four of sleep deprivation approached as Oleander decided he could no longer survive in the torturous captivity. His infatuation for Lucienne had quickly run dry once she could no longer provide him with the attention he yearned for. His skin reflected grey, resembling somebody secluded to a world without sunlight; his sunken-in cheeks revealed the tormenting truth that he had not eaten in several days. As Oleander packed his belongings that he once so joyously moved into this house, he planned his escape. Lucienne, the woman he had once so deeply loved, had become the bane of his existence. As Oleander tried to open the grand oak doors, they would not move as though they had become fused together. Lucienne's screaming got louder with every shake of the door handles. "You told me you would never leave!" she screamed. This harsh reality hit Oleander as he slowly stopped attempting to shake the door open. He swore to her his fidelity and gave his vow to never leave her. In a swift motion, Oleander ripped the painting of Lucienne from

the wall and smashed it onto the floor. The glass shattered across the room as Lucienne came to life and stood up. The dagger shown in the painting scattered across the floor as Lucienne crawled to grab it. The four edges of the frame that had once confined her now lay shattered in front of Oleander. Frightened by Lucienne's now living, screaming figure, Oleander grabbed a fireplace poker from the nearby fireplace. In an instantaneous motion, Lucienne used the dagger to hold Oleander true to his vow of, "till death shall we part." Oleander died trying to defend himself against the mighty dagger that Lucienne held.

Several decades after Oleander's fate, a young woman, Rowena, stumbled across the same house. She came from the village of Sableford, located slightly north of Arbor. Rowena had never heard of the legend of the house; Sableford's distance from the house deemed the legend irrelevant. The eerie feeling of the house reeled Rowena in. Upon opening the front door, she was greeted by a captivating painting: a young man holding a fireplace poker. Below the portrait, a plaque shined with the words, "In Memory of the Foolish Oleander."

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Hunting with a Purpose

Some people think that hunting is a cruel sport, and when done incorrectly or by the wrong people, it can be. However, hunting can also be a beautiful activity that brings you closer to the surrounding nature. In many cases, hunting is also important, from population management to having food in one's freezer or in my current case, pest control. Many types of pests are hunted from coyotes to rabbits. This time, however, it's raccoons who have recently been attacking neighborhood pets. With that, I would like to set the scene of my thrilling hunt with my coonhound Dixie chasing these crafty creatures of the night.

The leaves crackle beneath our feet as we dart quickly through the dense green brush. Dixie leads the way through it while I follow a short distance behind with an old handgun. Stopping for a brief second, she holds her moist black nose against the forage-covered ground. Tensing up, she points waiting for me to close in before taking off and kicking up grass and dirt behind her. A small splash in the distance stands out among the crunching of twigs. Dixie adjusts her trajectory towards the noise and continues tracking. Arriving at the small stream she dives through it while I splash tiredly behind her. The droplets glide off her sleek brown and black coat as she holds her nose to the ground once again. She turns in a circle stamping her paws in an irritated manner; she lost the scent at the stream. "God dammit," I exclaim aloud, "These coons are smart!" Walking back out of the forest, I whistle sharply for Dixie to follow along. The way back is quite apparent from the disturbance made along the ground and lower brush. Emerging from the woods behind the baseball fields, we head back to the house only a few blocks away.

As we arrive at the house, I rinse the soft mud off my beaten work boots and worn blue jeans. Dixie approaches the faucet cautiously to get a drink, knowing very well that she will be rinsed off as well. Holding her by the scruff of her neck, I begin to rinse the mud covering her legs revealing her white paws covered with brown and black speckles resembling dirty socks. After drying off we head inside, and I plop down heavily on the soft recliner, turning on the television as she heads for her food bowl. Like always, she dumps her food out of the bowl to pick out the pieces she finds tastiest before nudging the excess into a flat small pile. Depressing the black arrow on the chair, I recline easily with the faint whirring of the motor. Seeing this Dixie hops onto the footrest, standing unsteadily as the chair finishes reclining, and lays down lazily on my feet. The television buzzes softly in the background as sleep slowly takes me.

Waking up within a few hours, I see the beginning of the sunset set peering through the window blinds. Lowering the footrest, I startle Dixie awake. She gets up begrudgingly and slides down the footrest, stretching her long legs and pulling her claws loosely over the faded carpet. Standing up I feel soreness in my knees from the earlier hunt. Approaching the window, I look out at the sunset getting lower by the minute and prepare to go out again, hoping for better luck this evening. Grabbing the old handgun and a large flashlight off the table, we head out the door and start towards the ballfields.

As we head into the fields, my boots kick up whirling clouds of red dirt that are taken a few feet away by the slow breeze flowing gently over the ground. Once at the wall of the outfield, I reach down and activate the bright blue light attached to Dixie's collar as we sit waiting for the right moment. Peering out over the wall reveals

the very edge of the dense forest from earlier, right where the raccoons come out for the night to scavenge. Now all there is left to do is wait.

The sky darkens and I start to hear rustling in the brush ahead of the wall. Dixie's soft flimsy ears stiffen a bit indicating that I'm not just imagining things. Then, emerging from the dark brush I see small eyes reflecting what little light is left. I hold my breath, placing my hand over Dixie's moist nose signaling for her to remain still. A nose protrudes from the brush followed by a gray face wearing a black mask. Small paws began to crunch forward on the foliage and slowly the body of the raccoon takes shape. As the raccoon prods further out of the forest I press the button on Dixie's collar sending a small vibration into her neck. She tenses up ready to spring into action, her short hair stands almost upright along her neck. Whistling sharply at Dixie, she launches over the short wall landing a few feet away from the raccoon. They both take off as I throw myself gruelingly over the wall and chase after them, seeing only the light of Dixie's collar zig-zagging through the brush. Piercing the blanket of darkness with my flashlight, I trudge quickly after them.

Catching up I see Dixie moving quickly around an opening and dragging her nose along the ground, trying to find the raccoon's scent. Now that she is tracking instead of chasing, I'm able to keep close. She stiffens up so I know we aren't far. Reaching my old handgun, I watch Dixie snap towards a log and dive under. I hear a commotion and out shoots the raccoon, with Dixie close behind. Running after them I see the bright blue glow of Dixie's light bobbing rapidly in the distance but not getting farther. Slowing my descent, a long sharp howl pierces the eerie silence of the night. "She's got 'em treed," I say to myself. Walking up to the tree with Dixie still howling away, I look up to see the masked bandit hissing from above. Releasing the safety, I aim the old handgun at the raccoon. For just a minute I feel remorse towards the creature, however, I feel worse for the neighbor's cats. Firing off two shots, I witness the raccoon fall backwards off the branch, thudding onto the ground and sending up a small cloud of dust. I confirm the raccoon's death to prevent suffering before slinging it over my shoulder. We head back through the vegetation, beelining it to the faint glow of orange streetlights in the distance.

Emerging from the edge of the forest, I come to a stop and the quiet of the night settles back in, broken only by the subtle noise of the streetlights humming nearby. I begin to feel a variety of emotions, the thrilling chase of the hunt and respect for the wildness of nature. "Let's head home," I say to Dixie. With the weight of the raccoon on my shoulder and the presence of Dixie beside me, we begin to make the short walk home, leaving the stillness of the woods behind us. The adventure might be over for now, but the memories of the chase will linger, a testament to the primal dance of man and nature.

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