

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



SPRING 2022



**THE HAYS ARTS COUNCIL
CREATIVE WRITING AWARDS
IN POETRY AND PROSE ~ 2022**

Dear Friends,

To my excitement, it was my honor to help judge the K-12 Hays Arts Council Creative Writing Contest again this year. Also, it was my privilege to serve as the chairperson in the Fort Hays State University English Department for the contest again this year. As usual, this year's entries were of high quality and provided the judges much enjoyment. Speaking for myself, it is always fantastic to see the creativity of those who enter. 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 numerous teachers who enkindled the imaginations 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: Linda McHenry, Dr. Perry Harrison, Dr. Camilo Peralta, Dr. Brett Weaver, Dr. Cheryl Duffy, Dr. Matthew Smalley, Lisa Bell, Dr. Lexey Bartlett, Dr. Eric Leuschner, Dr. Sharla Hutchison, and Sharon Wilson. Also, a special thank you is due to Brenda Meder for her tireless hard work as usual.

Writer Neil Gaiman once wrote, "The one thing you have that nobody else has is you. Your voice, your mind, your story, your vision. So, write and draw and build and play and dance and live as only you can." I hope you enjoy the numerous enthusiastic voices on these pages.

Sincerely,

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

The 2022 Creative Writing Project was made possible through the funding support of



The Hays Optimist Club
Friend of Youth

**The Hays Arts Council is supported, in part, through operational funding from the City of Hays
and through Youth Arts-in-Education program funding from the
Robert & Patricia Schmidt Foundation**

2022 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	Ty Flax	<i>Grandpa and Me</i>	Washington (Ellis)	Stacy Befort
K	2	Katie Ziegler	<i>Goldie</i>	Washington (Ellis)	Stacy Befort
K	3	Eli Baxter	<i>Marshall</i>	St. Mary's	Beth McDougal
K	HM	Brecklynn Fischer	<i>Mac 'n Cheese</i>	St. Mary's	Beth McDougal
1	1	Jade Whitmer	<i>My Dolphin</i>	Holy Family	Kenda Leiker
1	2	Ainsley Haas	<i>The Best Time of Your Life</i>	St. Mary's	Megan Everett
1	3	Eleanor Hickel	<i>Fall</i>	St. Mary's	Megan Everett
1	HM	Lawson Fox	<i>Snow</i>	Holy Family	Ann Weber
2	1	Tristan Moore	<i>My Family</i>	O'Loughlin	Sam Pixler
2	2	Allie Rupp	<i>Books</i>	O'Loughlin	Shelly Westhusin
2	3	Henry Tostenson	<i>Rhyme Guy</i>	O'Loughlin	Shelly Westhusin
2	HM	MacKayla Karst	<i>Snake</i>	O'Loughlin	Ashley Butler
2	HM	James Burrell	<i>Being a Shoe</i>	O'Loughlin	Ashley Butler
2	HM	Liam Feldt	<i>Dad's Chevelle</i>	Washington (Ellis)	Kelly Hansen
3	1	Ruby Ma	<i>Frog Persuasion</i>	O'Loughlin	Kenda Leiker
3	2	Ruby Ma	<i>Tomb of Darkness</i>	O'Loughlin	Kenda Leiker
3	3	Colt Crough	<i>Leopard's Tail</i>	Roosevelt	Kenda Leiker
3	HM	Juan Coca	<i>Hefty Hippo</i>	Roosevelt	Kenda Leiker
4	1	Adalyn Nilhas	<i>Ode to the Rainbow</i>	St. Mary's	Peggy Seibel
4	2	Braden Unrein	<i>Ice Cream</i>	Holy Family	Teresa Schrant
4	3	Riley Whited	<i>Winter</i>	St. Mary's	Peggy Seibel
4	HM	Jalynn Hammersmith	<i>All About My Feelings</i>	Victoria	Jeanne Brungardt
4	HM	Nadia Hernandez	<i>Paris</i>	O'Loughlin	Alicia Knight
4	HM	Judah Bloom	<i>Winter</i>	O'Loughlin	Alicia Knight
5	1	Maggie Downing	<i>Gaping Stares</i>	St. Mary's	Jackie Baxter
5	2	Taryn Boydston	<i>Snowstorm</i>	St. Mary's	Jackie Baxter
5	3	Lydia Hickel	<i>Wind, Rain, and Thunder</i>	St. Mary's	Jackie Baxter
6	1	Allison Stecklein	<i>Seasons</i>	HMS	Sydney Niernberger
6	2	Carson Kraus	<i>Sunset</i>	Holy Family	Jennifer Howard
6	3(tie)	Lydia Balthazor	<i>Fun Chinese Night</i>	Holy Family	Jennifer Howard
6	3(tie)	Hannah James	<i>Black and White</i>	St. Mary's	April Pfeifer
6	HM	Frances Bittel	<i>Beach Day</i>	Holy Family	Jennifer Howard
7	1	Kasaara Wiebe	<i>The Cold Beach</i>	Hays Middle School	Melissa Treinen
7	2	Raegan Allen	<i>A Bad Dream</i>	TMP-Marian Jr. High	Brenda Rose
7	3	Hannah Werth	<i>A Cloud of Colors</i>	TMP-Marian Jr. High	Brenda Rose
7	HM	Sam Krannawitter	<i>Growing Old</i>	TMP-Marian Jr. High	Brenda Rose
7	HM	Rebel John	<i>One Last Blossom</i>	Hays Middle School	Melissa Treinen

8	1	Lindsey Hernandez	<i>New Life</i>	Hays Middle School	Megan Beiker
8	2	Eli Stein	<i>Video Games</i>	TMP-Marian Jr. High	Brenda Rose
8	3(tie)	Brooke Befort	<i>The Other Girl</i>	TMP-Marian Jr. High	Brenda Rose
8	3(tie)	Arianna Ayarza	<i>The Differences</i>	TMP-Marian Jr. High	Brenda Rose
8	HM	Reghan Byer	<i>Too Close</i>	TMP-Marian Jr. High	Brenda Rose
8	HM	Jenna Brull	<i>Intentions</i>	TMP-Marian Jr. High	Brenda Rose
9	1	Alivia Sellens	<i>the sun loves the moon</i>	Hays High	Lisa Renz
9	2	Catherine Schmidt	<i>Medusa</i>	TMP-Marian HS	Chelsie Niehaus
9	3	Caleb Marintzer	<i>King Midas</i>	TMP-Marian HS	Chelsie Niehaus
9	HM	Shalee Gottschalk	<i>Aphrodite</i>	TMP-Marian HS	Chelsie Niehaus
10	1	Emily Whyte	<i>alone</i>	Ellis High	Sarah Tomsic
11	1	Jay Jarboe	<i>Of Dandelions</i>	KAMS	Independent Submission
11	2	Eileen Veatch	<i>Made of Glass</i>	Hays High	Jaici Simon
11	3	Eileen Veatch	<i>Refine, Reshape, Retry</i>	Hays High	Jaici Simon
11	HM	Jordin Myers	<i>The Stories I Am Told</i>	Hays High	Vanessa Schumacher
11	HM	Mackenzie Hagerman	<i>Far From Guilty</i>	Hays High	Jaici Simon
12	1	Sarah Fay	<i>Finding my Roots</i>	KAMS	Independent Submission
12	2	Lainey Hardman	<i>Above it all</i>	Hays High	Kathy Wagoner
12	3	Elliott Cox	<i>The True Problem</i>	Ellis High	Sarah Tomsic

2022 Creative Writing Winning Entries ~ Poetry

Grandpa and Me

Checking Cows
Welding in the shed
Riding the tractor
Breakfast at the restaurant
I miss my Grandpa

Ty Flax

Washington Grade School
Kindergarten, 1st Place

Goldie

Barking at the mailman
Sniffing trees on a walk
Doesn't beg for food
Loves to chase all birds
Labradoodle

Katie Ziegler

Washington Grade School
Kindergarten, 2nd Place

Marshall

There once was a dog named Marshall
Who loved to eat treats and play
All through the day
He ran through the hay
Until he got so tired he had to go and lay.

Eli Baxter

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

Mac n Cheese

It looks tasty
It sounds bubbly
It smells good
It feels squishy
It tastes cheesy

Brecklynn Fischer

St. Mary's Grade School
Kindergarten, Honorable Mention

My Dolphin

My dolphin is really cute.
And not at all mute.
Swimming with friends in the sea.
Doing acrobatics filled with glee.
Sharing caught fish together.
In the calm weather.
This is just another day.
Far away from the bay.

Jade Whitmer

Holy Family Elementary
1st Grade, 1st Place

The Best Time of Your Life

Play in the rain
Watch the rain fall
Spring is so nice
The rain goes drop drop drop
Jump in puddles
The best time of your life

Ainsley Haas

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

Fall

Leaves fall down
Air is cool
Jump in leaves
Play outside
Carve Pumpkins
Halloween is near

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

My Family

My mom is like ice,
she is always cold.
My dad is like the sun,
he is always warm.
I am like a hurricane,
I bring destruction everywhere.
My baby sister is like thunder,
when she is angry she screams.
My other sister is like lightning,
when she is mad she strikes back.
My dog is like snow,
she is white and always shivering.
My family is like a storm!

Tristan Moore
O'Loughlin Elementary
2nd Grade, 1st Place

Rhyme Guy

Once upon a time
there was a guy
who likes to rhyme.
If he meets a bear,
he does not care.
If he thinks
up a pun,
it is not fun.
And he is a . . .
Rhyme Guy.

Henry Tostenson
O'Loughlin Elementary
2nd Grade, 3rd Place

Snow

Snow
Cold, beautiful
Spinning, twirling, flying
Make a snowman
Ice

Lawson Fox
Holy Family Elementary
1st Grade, Honorable Mention

Books

When I open my books
a new world opens too!
I'm a . . .
Mermaid,
Dragon,
Fish,
and me riding a dragon,
but then
my new world comes to an end.
I open a new world.
I have begun
another journey.

Allie Rupp
O'Loughlin Elementary
2nd Grade, 2nd Place

Snake

I wonder what
It's like to have heat vision
To slither through
The grass to feel
The wetness
And to eat all
The bugs
Snakes
Are so misunderstood
Because they are
Protecting their baby

MacKayla Karst
O'Loughlin Elementary
2nd Grade, Honorable Mention

Dad's Chevelle

Comes to pick me up after school
Hope it's mine someday
Everyone smiles when we drive by
Very nice ride
Excitedly waiting each journey
Leaving room for it in the garage
Love the time with my dad
Every friend wishes it was theirs

Liam Feldt

Washington Grade School
2nd Grade, Honorable Mention

Tomb of Darkness

Dark and mysterious inside the tomb,
Going into a box of doom.

Jewelry and gold,
Weary and old.

Golden shrines were found,
Safely hidden underground.

No brain, no liver,
Making me shiver.

Statues as hard as rock,
As it makes me gawk.

I feel like I'm paralyzed,
Knowing King Tut was prized.

Ruby Ma

O'Loughlin Elementary
3rd Grade, 2nd Place

Leopard's Tail

My tail helps tell my mood,
When I want food.
Waiting for the perfect prey's arrival,
While working for survival.
My tail is used like a rudder,
Helping me turn like bouncing off rubber.
Using my tail for balancing is key,
While stashing my meal up in the tree.
Knowing I've finished my day,
It was fun hunting prey.

Colt Crough

Roosevelt Elementary
3rd Grade, 3rd Place

Hefty Hippo

Hippopotamus, hippopotamus, my big, hefty guest,
But their extreme speed's known as their best.
He stomps around in search of food,
When frightened, he's in a bad mood.
A large predator, stronger than man,
In the summer, he won't need a fan.

Hippopotamus, hippopotamus, big and fat,
Not much could hurt him, not even a baseball bat.
All of them are shiny bald,
Compared to humans, what they do is uncalled.
Modern things they do not own,
They belong in a natural zone.

Juan Coca

Roosevelt Elementary
3rd Grade, Honorable Mention

Frog Persuasion

They hop and ribbit on the Amazon floor,
Eating one bug, wanting more.

Frogs are cute, with big eyes and all,
Finding a mate while croaking a call.

Golden dart frogs shoot a poisonous dart,
While the Rhacophorus (flying frog) flies like a work of art.

Now that I've told you,
Do you want a frog, too?

Ruby Ma

O'Loughlin Elementary
3rd Grade, 1st Place

Being a Shoe

Ow! Ow! Ow!
Sniff Sniff
Ugh
Your feet
Smell horrible!
Go wash your feet
And stop
Getting me muddy

James Burrell

O'Loughlin Elementary
2nd Grade, Honorable Mention

Ode to the Rainbow

Thank you rainbow for being so bright
and right
You are so high
In the sky
I know everything colorful is due
to you
All my dreams come true
when I see you
dancing high
in the sky
so bright
and right

Adalyn Nilhas

St. Mary's Grade School
4th Grade, 1st Place

Winter

With a friend
In the frozen crystals
No school today
Too much snow
Every day is fun
Running in the sun

Riley Whited

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

Paris

Paris is expensive
It tastes like crepes
It sounds like rushing bakeries
It looks like the Eiffel Tower
It makes me feel enchanted

Nadia Hernandez

O'Loughlin Elementary
4th Grade, Honorable Mention

Ice Cream

Ice cream in a bowl,
Ice cream in a cone,
Ice cream any way I want
As long as it's my own.
Ice cream can be sticky.
Ice cream can be sweet.
Ice cream is delicious!
It's my favorite treat!

Braden Unrein

Holy Family Elementary
4th Grade, 2nd Place

All About My Feelings

I am calm when I am building legos
I love my pets and my family
I hate when my brother plays his
trombone when I'm reading
I am sad when my pets die
I like going to Oklahoma
I am happy when I'm with my family
having fun
I am excited for when I start volleyball

Jalynn Hammersmith

Victoria Elementary
4th Grade, Honorable Mention

Winter

Winter is white,
It tastes like hot cocoa
It sounds like Santa Claus,
It smells like fireplaces,
It looks like falling snow,
It makes me feel cozy.

Judah Bloom

O'Loughlin Elementary
4th Grade, Honorable Mention

Gaping Stares

I'm sorry I have left you, but it was time for me to go. But this time I've spent with you, has made me happier than you will ever know. These years you'll spend without me, it's best that I'm not there, because everywhere I go, I'm followed by other's gaping stares. You'll be ok without me, I'm in a better place, I'm living up in space. But one thing I won't know is if in the morning the sun will rise to shine on your beautiful, blue, teary eyes. A single tear rolls down your cheek, the stain it will leave is a reminder of me. I hope that you're okay, I used to be able to dry your tears with my sleeve, but now that I'm gone someone else will have to do it other than me. Please, please don't replace me, I will always be there, but now I won't have to deal with other's gaping stares.

Maggie Downing

St. Mary's Grade School

5th Grade, 1st Place

Snowstorm

Squirrels are stirring, racing against time and wind.
The sun and clouds are quarreling as the storm moves in,
the wind and trees rhyme with worry and the great sea comments on such
movement from the beaches.
The land is swept with white glittering snow,
the sun and clouds have settled over the hills and yonder,
they will wait for the warm season to dance in the sky and until then they will
enjoy the thick blanket of snow and let the wind have its fun.

Taryn Boydston

St. Mary's Grade School

5th Grade, 2nd Place

Wind, Rain, and Thunder

Wind, as if a fan in the sky had just been turned on, blew across the plains.
Rain pouring like a waterfall in the Amazon rainforest. Thunder booming in the
sky like someone is playing a drum up in the dark gray sky. A storm is coming.
Wind, rain, and thunder are coming to war. It will be a big battle. Houses will
surrender and bow. Trees will try to fight, but fail, and break, and shatter into tiny
pieces. The animals will flee the battlefield. The only thing that will remain in this
storm, are the plains that are as flat as a sheet of paper.

Lydia Hickel

St. Mary's Grade School

5th Grade, 3rd Place

Seasons

The winter sky all in white
Kids playing in the snow
Parents inside watching movies
All covered in blankets

Spring coming around flowers bloom
Kids picking flowers
Parents watching them grow
Joy fills the air

The hot sun blazes down
Kids learn to swim
While parents hang and chill
Fireworks go pop! While kids go “Wow!”

School came around
Kids make friends
Parents relax
Leaves came through

It’s winter again
We’re one year older
One year stronger
One year taller
And one year better

Allison Stecklein
Hays Middle School
6th Grade, 1st Place

Black and White

Dragons in love is a beautiful sight.
The black and white scales glistened in the moonlight.
Night and light furies soaring high with the moon.
Off they go together happily ever after.

Hannah James
St. Mary’s Grade School
6th Grade, 3rd Place (tie)

Sunset

Summer nights have the most beautiful sights.
Under the large pale moon we sit.
Nestled in our sleeping bags, lying on the cool grass.
Sunset slowly sinking below the horizon.
Every night is a different arrangement of vibrant colors.
The sunset is the most breathtaking element of nature.

Carson Kraus
Holy Family Elementary
6th Grade, 2nd Place

Fun Chinese Night

Chinese New Year
Giant Dragon Flying Through The Sky
Smoky Smell Of Fireworks In The Air
Festive Chinese Music Throughout The City
The Taste Of Rice, Fish, And Noodles Galore
The Feeling Of Red Pockets With Money Inside
Chinese New Year

Lydia Balthazor
Holy Family Elementary
6th Grade, 3rd Place (tie)

Beach Day

The blinding sun at the beach
Swinging on the swingset
Collecting seashells on the sandy shore
Surfing on the swift water
Snow cones and sherbet
Relaxing in the radiant sun
Flying a fun flower kite
Finding fish with friends
Tired from the terrific day at the beach

Frances Bittel
Holy Family Elementary
6th Grade, Honorable Mention

The Cold Beach

His eyes so bright,
Pretty sky blue,
If only I had flew,
Or known he was so right.
His hair I can't explain,
It's like the waves,
He still reminds me of the beach,
If only I could reach,
We would still be together,
But nothing lasts forever.
The times wouldn't have changed,
If the ocean didn't rage,
He was my friend,
He was endless.
I was the galaxy above,
That is why we are apart,
Forever and ever apart,
But those nights I will forever hold,
Are not yet getting cold.
My heart is still in pain,
Every time I hear his name.
So we are forever lonely,
Waiting for the warm gaze,
Of each other's face.
But now those nights are getting cold,
They are now very old,
And they are in history,
In my memory.

Kasaara Wiebe

Hays Middle School
7th Grade, 1st Place

A Bad dream

As I go to sleep, I think of what my dream will be.
My heart is racing and I can barely see.
I'm **falling**
falling
from a tower high
And **Monsters** creeping by my side.
Creepy crawlers enlarge in size
I **Scream**, I **cry** everything is a surprise!
I wish, I wish this **bad dream** would end,
even though it's all pretend.
Running in the forest away from the **Wolf**
I hope I will not get hurt.
Thinking I'm safe, but not anymore
the floor is
b r e a k i n g
some more.
Every **creature** and **goblin** is coming for me!
I wish, I wish this **bad dream** would end,
Even though it's all pretend.

Raegan Allen

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

A Cloud of Colors

Do not say goodbye,
For I must go on.
Way up in the sky, look for me in the colors.
I have not left you, I'm simply in the rainbow from above.

Please look after my love,
And tell her I watch her every day.
I try to let you know with signs, I never went away.

I see you wish your days away, wanting me to come back home,
but don't, live your life, laugh, be free, and enjoy.
Next time we can sit and talk for a while.

Even though, I'm no longer here,
I know I have caused you great pain.
But I'm forever in your heart,
Until we meet again, by the rainbow.

Hannah Werth

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

One Last Blossom

One more
And only one more
One more petal has fallen
One more life was taken
Before the sun has hidden for the stars
Before they come and find me

The blossoms will bloom in the spring once more
And the fire will continue its spread
A field of flowers are waiting for you, but not for me
By the dawn of the last harvest moon, they will have me slain

One last time we may dance in the moonlight
Under the stars the blossoms will fall into Asmodeus' hands
The blossoms will be his vessel of lust
Only one more blossom

How I wish I could see one night
But the guards are here, showing no mercy
Our love was forbidden
But once you have drawn your last breath
We can reunite

Until then...

The Winter will soon bloom onto our land
Like an Algerian Iris flower growing delicately in the midst of Spring
Hiding none of its beautiful lavender and gold elegance
And you will be able to endure such sights of decadence

While I will travel through fields of thorns
And force myself through a forest of fire and ash
And this fate I will accept
As long as I know that you are happy
I am happy
Forever and forever more I will love you, even if I'm not there

Rebel John

Hays Middle School

7th Grade, Honorable Mention

Too Close

You've gotten too close.
You stepped into my boundary,
into my space bubble.
My breathing becomes heavy and rapid,
my hands start shaking,
my vision is blurry from tears.
You've gotten too close.
The air is heavy,
There's a sinking feeling around me,
the walls are morphing around me,
as if they're going to cave in.
You've gotten too close.
I can sense you all around me,
I am trembling under your touch,
my hands are clammy.
You've gotten too close.

Reghan Byer

TMP-Marian Jr. High

8th Grade, Honorable Mention

Growing Old

There is one thing in life we all do
We all grow old now this is true
I've heard from people much older than me
That you get aches and pains and it becomes harder to see
You'll likely slow down and forget things you once knew
Honestly, there isn't much you can do
There is no reason to run and hide
Aging will find you no matter how hard you try
But the best part of aging is the knowledge and wisdom you gain
And the experiences and memories that will always remain
So try to enjoy life along the way
And remember, it will come to an end one day

Sam Krannawitter

TMP-Marian Jr. High

7th Grade, Honorable Mention

The Differences

Days aren't always filled with light,
Nor are you always able to fight.
Things aren't always the same,
Yet people find a way to shame.
Light, dark, thin, big, straight, gay.
Discrimination shouldn't be this big
Yet those little looks,
The remarks,
Movements.
I hate how this happens to children, adults, my friends, my siblings, and me.
It hurts.
I hope days could be filled with light,
And people can fight for what is right;
but in the end that's how it's always been.

- The broken lives

Arianna Ayarza

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

New Life

A seed can bring hope in new life.
Like an infant in its mother's womb.
When it starts to sprout the sun beams with joy.
Such as a mother's child beginning to show.
The happiness of seeing the first petal,
Is like the baby's first kick.
Knowing your flower just needs one more rain,
Or one more month until new life is here.
As the last petal unfurls, nature's newborn is here.
The loud screams fill the room, for the mother's life is here.
The sun smiles down at its little flower.
While the mother smiles down at her little girl.

Lindsey Hernandez

Hays Middle School
8th Grade, 1st Place

Video Games

Stress relieving,	Fun, and my friend
The Virtual worlds will	keep your mind off that one thing
Until night has been	brought to an inevitable end
You know you're having	fun when you lose you are still laughing
When your friends join	the mix it makes it all the better
Because it makes	winning a whole lot sweeter
So, what do we	spend hours on at a time
VIDEO GAMES and	it's not a waste of time
We make memories	that last a lifetime
And That is why	We Play so many
VIDEO	GAMES

Eli Stein

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

Intentions

I want to be a kind person,
maybe I'll start tomorrow.
I want to go read a book,
but I'll just watch just one more episode
I want to eat healthier,
but I'll just eat one more.
I want to go to the gym and work out,
but I don't feel like getting out of bed.
I want to get my homework done,
maybe I'll do it in a few hours.
I want to be more productive,
I'll try that tomorrow.
I have so many intentions,
why isn't it so easy?
I should go read my book,
but I keep on scrolling instead.
What do I have to sacrifice
to live this perfect lifestyle?
When will I learn to accept myself,
for who I am and who I'll never be?

Jenna Brull

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

Medusa

I was born of creatures from the sea,
But as a human child, they raised me.
My sisters were born with serpent features;
They were lovely and wondrous creatures.

My golden hair was long and thick,
But no man in town was my first pick.
My idol was the goddess of wisdom.
I became her priestess and made a system.

The words of townsfolk angered the goddess above.
Posiden came down to rid me of my self-love.
I was cursed by Athena and no one could love me;
My eyes were the last thing they would ever see.

I lived alone in the abandoned temple;
They tried to hunt me and I was not gentle.
Time after time, day after day,
Only one was ever close enough to slay.

My reflection was hideous, it made me draw back.
The soldier held up his shield and made an attack

Catherine Schmidt

TMP-Marian
9th Grade, 2nd Place

The Other Girl

My heart can only bleed,
Their words cut so deep.
If only they could read,
The girl that sleeps beneath.
The girl that sweeps,
Sweeps others off their feet with her beauty.
But that girl stays underneath, hidden by the mask of cruelty.

They only pay attention to my first impression,
Driven away by cruel eyes.
But beneath the makeup and depression,
My second side shines bright,
Much like the stars in the deep blue sky.
But the stairs I climb are too steep.
Lost in the dark night,
The other girl sleeps.

Brooke Befort

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

King Midas

Happiness comes at a cost,
and those unwilling to pay will see
that soon all they love is lost,
and their happiness begins to flee.

I am a rich man,
Very rich indeed.
I only eat the finest ham,
and I only ride the finest steed.

But I have found,
That a king's riches,
Comes out of the ground.
(Or made by witches.)

So this I pray,
To never dig again,
And still get my way.
And with a touch, gold I will gain

But what has become, of this blessing of gold
It has turned my heart stone cold.

Caleb Marintzer

TMP-Marian
9th Grade, 3rd Place

the sun loves the moon

the sun kept everything alive
she was the almighty ball of light
for twelve hours a day
bringing warmth and life to our earth
and the entire galaxy adored her

but the sun loved one, and one only
seen only on occasion
she was the most perfect thing the sun had seen
for billions of years
she loved only the moon

“oh, the moon” she would cry to the clouds and wind
the moon was powerful in hidden ways
captivating the sky while the sun was resting
with secrets only the sun knew
because they whispered across the empty air

she would stay up all night
admiring the moon’s work and listening to her night song
they kept everything in this orbit together
she watched the moon guide the tides
and illuminate the night sky with her beauty

the moon loved the sun just as much.
they needed each other’s love
so different, yet just the same
they were different works of art
perfectly curated for each other

of course, they had storms
large and terrifying ones
where the sun would hurt the moon
not meaning any of her words.
she still loved the moon, always.

“the forbidden love”
the stars would cry at the moon
but they didn’t mind
it was hard for anyone else to understand
they were made for each other

it always seemed like they had just missed each other
just a minute too early or late
majority of dusks and dawns spent alone
until people gathered everywhere for an eclipse
to see them meet once again

“and you my love, deserve the world”
the sun would carry on
day after day
and love the moon beyond compare
she’d give everything to be with her

“and you my love, deserve the world”
the sun would carry on
day after day
and love the moon beyond compare
she’d give everything to be with her

the moon showed the sun true love
and showed her how to love herself, and her work
and one day, they will get their happy ending
“i love you, my moon”
the sun whispered as she disappeared behind the horizon, once more.

Alivia Sellens

Hays High School

9th Grade, 1st Place

Aphrodite

Breaking free from the blanket of waves.
I was born from the turquoise warmth of foam and sea.
From the beginning my affection saves.
Carried upon the skies to Olympus where I feel free.

Fall under my spell and you won’t deny.
The dazzling gift of my euphoria.
Even the earth flowers at my reply.
Do not let me deceive you, it may ignite your dysphoria.

Beware of my envious snare.
Betray my tender wit and my envy will haunt you.
I know what I want, I don’t settle just anywhere.
So hypnotize me as I do to you.

Hephestus was forced upon me.
My heart goes cold at the thought of him.
True love can only come to be.
For Ares fills my heart to the brim.

Shalee Gottschalk

TMP-Marian

9th Grade, Honorable Mention

alone

alone.

adjective, meaning “having no one else present.”

adverb 1: on one’s own.

adverb 2: indicating that something is confined to the specified subject or recipient.

alone has many different meanings.

my definition is to have no one.

not “no one present”, but just to have no one.

i’ve always been alone.

no one’s quite understood me.

my family?

definitely not.

my friends?

nope.

in every school I’ve been to, I’ve never had a specific group.

i’ve found that I don’t fit in.

i don’t talk to people,

meaning, I don’t have super close friends,

meaning, I am alone,

“to have no one”.

i’ve always felt like I’ve had no one.

there are many flaws to look at in my face,

flaws in my words that I speak so rationally,

that naturally make people avoid me.

it’s hard to be the type of person everyone else is.

Emily Whyte

Ellis High School

10th Grade, 1st Place

Refine, Reshape, Retry

Squeezing my tummy

Making scissors with my fingers.

The bruises they leave

Always lingers.

Cutting off portions.

Cutting off slivers.

Crying oceans.

Crying rivers.

Maybe one day

It will finally work

But until then

I repeat it like clockwork.

Eileen Veatch

Hays High School

11th Grade, 3rd Place

Made of Glass

If women’s bodies were

Made of glass

It wouldn’t matter

If they had mass

For if women’s bodies

Were made of glass

Wouldn’t they

Be an hourglass?

But even if women’s bodies

Were made of glass

Would they even be

Safe from the harass

Of a man believing

He is entitled

To a woman who may

As well be “untitled”

Eileen Veatch

Hays High School

11th Grade, 2nd Place

Of Dandelions

Deep in a grassy meadow,
Lay a land where dandelions and wildflowers grow,
An untamed place feral creatures often go,
Where the sun warms the cold earth.
Beneath a patch of woven green weeds,
There's rotting wood just possible to see,
With a padlock lost to rust.
Upon lifting the hatch and climbing inside,
One would find a woman once brimming with life,
Her clothes are torn, dirty, and spent,
Preserving her eternal struggle and strife.

She awoke on a cracked stone floor,
Filthy chains keeping her contained,
She stared for hours at the desolate cellar door,
Her wrists rubbed raw by her ancient restraints.
She pulled, and tugged, and screamed to be saved,
But no amount of effort enacted change.
Her arms were slick with blood when someone finally came,
A terrible man who appeared like a bloated pig's carcass,
Fleshy and covered in layers of grime,
A normal man if it weren't for the scent of death that followed his wake.

The woman's voice spluttered out,
And was replaced by that of a feral animal,
She used every bit of strength, refusing to fall,
But was helpless to the repeated pain.
After a few days little of the woman remained,
Brown blood had dried into the stone,
Her spirit was unable to stay.
Today flowers grow in its place,
And beyond that rotten hatch,
Walks a man who thinks his secret is safe.

Jay Jarboe

Kansas Academy of Math & Science
11th Grade, 1st Place

Far from Guilty

"Mr. Muerte, how do you plea?"
"Your Honor, I promise you I am innocent.
Killing that man was not my intent.
The fault here does not fall on me!"

They made me do it,
For by them it was devised.
Besides, the man did not fight back.
He was merely the author of his demise!

Sure, I pulled the trigger,
Yes, I shot the gun,
But I gave him a way of escape.
The man did not even run!

I was merely an accessory,
For I was not the mastermind.
I assure you I am far from guilty,
The blame is not mine!"

"Mr. Muerte, how asinine you sound.
How dare you try to fool me!
Stop denying your responsibility,
As for this the guilty are renowned!"

Mackenzie Hagerman

Hays High School
11th Grade, Honorable Mention

The Stories I Am Told

I am trusted with people's troubles,
Their fights, their annoyances, their worries, their stress.
I am left with many memories, stories, and details that nobody else can know.
Can anyone help me?

I am told stories of how people have ended their lives,
For they have forgotten about those that love them, care for them, know them.
I am left to be the only one who is telling them that their lives are ones worth living
That their lives will always be worth living.
Can anyone help give them another day? Can I help them?

I am told stories of what parents have done to my friends,
What has been done to them, said to them, and how they're afraid of what might happen to them.
I am left to think about how people we're supposed to trust with anything,
The ones that should always have our back, and the ones who are supposed to protect us
Are turning into the ones causing the most trust issues, causing lack of support, causing bruises.
Can anyone help them? Can I help them?

I am told stories of what my friends do to themselves,
The pain they're feeling in their head is overflowing onto their bodies.
I am never going to be able to understand their pain,
Their decisions, their thoughts, their struggles.
I am always here to help,
To listen, to advise, to support.
Can anyone help them stop? Can I help them?

I am told stories of what people will do to be wanted,
Their desperation to be someone that people want, someone that can feel power, someone that is accepted.
I am never going to understand these desperations.
These desperations of fake love, fake friends, fake fun.
I am left to be the one who these people use, entrap, and slander.
Yet these people are always the ones who need to the most help,
The most support, the most people to listen, the most people to care.
Can anyone tell them? Can I help them?

I am trusted with so many stories.
So many stories I bear, so many stories that are never to be told again.
I am told if I tell these stories, the trust will be gone.
Can anyone help them trust me? Can I help myself?

I am told stories of people's sickness,
Sickness they have in their heads, sickness in their bodies, sickness they must live with.
I am told that their sickness can't be cured,
Can't be stopped, can't be saved, can't be helped.
If nobody can help, can I?

I am told stories of loss,
The loss of someone, something, anything they love.
I am told nobody else wants to help,
Wants to support, wants to protect, wants to bear their troubles.
Seeing these people lose the things they love gives me sickness.
If they are lost on their own, what will happen?

I am told these stories, where people are crying out for help.
People cry out to me for help, support, love.
People need me to be someone who will listen, who will care, who will keep their stories safe.
I am left to feel like I am powerless,
That I can't do enough, that I can't change anything, that I can't help.
I am tied up in so many stories, so many secrets, so many troubles.
If I don't help them, who will?

I am told everything is just fine, and that there is nothing to worry about.
I know this is not true.
Nothing is just fine, and there is everything to worry about.
Nonetheless, we are expected to put on a mask every day and lie about what we know,
What we hear, what we feel, and the secrets we hold.
Nonetheless, we are expected to bottle up these feelings, these stories, these secrets,
To the point where people are no longer looking forward to tomorrow, and instead, trying to last just one more day.
How can everything be fine with these stories that I am told?

Jordin Myers
Hays High School
11th Grade, Honorable Mention

The True Problem

It pulls me in, convinces me I need it.
I scroll and scroll and endlessly compare.
My once perfect life becomes no longer good enough,
And the things I didn't care about become my biggest desires.

I've grown up in an age of social media.
It has created amazing things.
Allowed for connections and inspiration in more ways,
But it has also caused unrealistic expectations in the lives of its users.

Every day we are bombarded with the lives of other people.
They come across as happy, fulfilling, exciting lives.
While we are left feeling useless.
So, we put up a front, to make others feel the same about us.

I don't believe social media is the problem, I believe we are.
We are the ones editing the photos,
Posting everything we do,
Portraying our lives to be more than what they are.

We are the ones who choose to compare rather than be grateful.
We make the choice to follow the unrealistic pages of success.
Despite knowing in our heads, we still choose to believe in our hearts.
We believe we aren't good enough, we aren't seen, we are unheard.

How would we change if social media was used differently?
If the users chose authenticity over perfection?
If we chose to not compare our lives to those around us.
I think we all would be a whole lot happier!

Elliott Cox
Ellis High School
12th Grade, 3rd Place

Finding My Roots

I'm familiar with the taste of blood,
Sharp and metallic, in my mouth.
I spent the greater portion of my youth biting my tongue,
Holding back the anger bubbling inside of my soul.
I know better than anyone else just how damaging that is.
How the fury, with nowhere to go, turns inward.
How instead of anger for the comments I received on things beyond my control,
I feel anger for the way I was born.
Tearing myself apart as the days continue,
The shreds of my being on the floor, washed away with my tears.
As the years pass and the days go by,
Finding myself has been the toughest thing I've encountered.
Trying to piece together what I can,
An impossible puzzle.
The fragments of who I once was held together by the ties from those I hold close to my heart,
Each string pulled taught with meaning, with love, with worry.
The madness I felt all those years ago still simmers in my heart,
But I know now,
The part of me that feels angry, that feels hurt and upset,
Is a part of me that will always love me most.
It would be a shame to use it for harm, wouldn't it?

Sarah Fay

Kansas Academy of Math & Science
12th Grade, 1st Place

Above it All

Your hands reached out to me
I grasped on hopefully.
Your eyes looked deep into mine
I knew we were going to cross the line.

We had been friends for awhile
But something between us flowed like the Nile.
A bond this great could never be broken
I held onto you like a golden token.

The feeling of love seeped in so fast
I knew in my heart this had to last.
Our memories and moments were ours to own
I wish I knew my heart was only out for loan.

The times spent close became dark and cold
Soon there was no more love to hold.
I guess you fell out quicker than I fell in
Why did I think it was smart to let this begin?

Now I know you from our past
I guess our friendship now won't last.
All these memories flood my mind
But unlike you, I can't just leave things behind.

I know one day it won't hurt to see you and her,
but right now life is one big blur
so as you reach for her hand, and she begins to fall
makes sure you love her, above it all

Lainey Hardman

Hays High School
12th Grade, 2nd Place

2022 Creative Writing Awards ~ Prose

Gr.	Place	Student	Title of Work	School	Teacher
K	1(tie)	Katie Ziegler	<i>My Best Friends</i>	Washington (Ellis)	Stacy Befort
K	1(tie)	Liam Nuttle	<i>My Adventure</i>	Washington (Ellis)	Stacy Befort
K	2	Adler Keller	<i>Lego Man House</i>	Washington (Ellis)	Stacy Befort
K	3	Remington Henman	<i>It's a Girl's Sport</i>	Washington (Ellis)	Stacy Befort
K	HM	Eli Baxter	<i>Paw Patrol</i>	St. Mary's	Beth McDougal
K	HM	Trinity Hancock	<i>The Dragon Sleepover</i>	Washington (Ellis)	Ashley Dusin
1	1	Jade Whitmer	<i>Magic Berries</i>	Holy Family	Kenda Leiker
1	2	Kersee Wince	<i>Uni Learned His Lesson</i>	Lincoln	Kenda Leiker
1	3	Ellie Pritchett	<i>Astronauts</i>	Washington (Ellis)	Kelsie McMillan
1	HM	Ainsley Haas	<i>A Pink Hat</i>	St. Mary's	Megan Everett
2	1	Griffin Dietz	<i>The Lesson</i>	O'Loughlin	Kenda Leiker
2	2	Theron Walters	<i>Carl's Search for Food</i>	O'Loughlin	Kenda Leiker
2	3	Oliver Buckstead	<i>Max and the Amazing Robot</i>	O'Loughlin	Kenda Leiker
2	HM	Kelton Legleiter	<i>The Great Discovery</i>	Holy Family	Kenda Leiker
2	HM	Parker Desaire	<i>Call Me George</i>	Washington (Ellis)	Kelly Hansen
3	1	Aubrey Hickel	<i>The Leprachaun and Animals</i>	St. Mary's	Patty Meagher
3	2	Juan Coca	<i>Party Dilemma</i>	Roosevelt	Kenda Leiker
3	3	Grayson Decker	<i>The Sled Trip</i>	O'Loughlin	Denise Danielson
3	HM	Morgan Ferland	<i>Martha the Lunch Lady</i>	St. Mary's	Patty Meagher
3	HM	Judah Albin	<i>Laser Tag</i>	O'Loughlin	Denise Danielson
4	1	Adalyn Nilhas	<i>The Monster Living in My House!</i>	St. Mary's	Peggy Seibel
4	2	Alexavier Merriman	<i>German Owl Troubles</i>	Washington (Ellis)	Ashley Rohleder
4	3	Kyle Yates	<i>The Lonely Pine Tree</i>	St. Mary's	Peggy Seibel
4	HM	Charly Amrein	<i>The Child's Quest</i>	Washington (Ellis)	Ashley Rohleder
5	1	Lydia Hickel	<i>Aces</i>	St. Mary's	Jackie Baxter
5	2	Ellee Lang	<i>The Big Storm</i>	Wilson	Rebecca Summers
5	3	Taryn Boydston	<i>There's Gold at the End of Every Rainbow</i>	St. Mary's	Jackie Baxter
5	HM	Oliver Jenek	<i>Cat-Astrophe</i>	Washington (Ellis)	Holly Lang
5	HM	Alayna Bickle	<i>The Terrible Christmas Eve</i>	Wilson	Rebecca Summers
6	1	Bladyn Werth	<i>The Irish Egg</i>	Hays Middle School	Gabrielle Otte
6	2	Emma Downing	<i>Quirious</i>	St. Mary's	April Pfeifer
6	3	Lena Smalley	<i>Vacation at Middle Eau Claire</i>	Hays Middle School	Sydney Niernberger
6	HM	Shiloh Gaschler	<i>Grayscale Existentialism</i>	St. Mary's	April Pfeifer
7	1	Joseph Zolnierz	<i>Draco</i>	Hays Middle School	Amy Schmidt
7	2	Mattias Marintzer	<i>The Mark of a Hero</i>	TMP-Marian Jr.High	Brenda Rose
7	3	Elijah Lang	<i>No Way Home</i>	TMP-Marian Jr.High	Brenda Rose
7	HM	Macie Herrman	<i>August</i>	Hays Middle School	Amy Schmidt

8	1	Savannah Clingan	<i>Jumping Off Mountains</i>	Hays Middle School	Meagan Englert
8	2	Savannah Waldschmidt	<i>New Beginnings</i>	TMP-Marian Jr.High	Brenda Rose
8	3	Brayden Gilmore	<i>Change of Mind</i>	TMP-Marian Jr.High	Brenda Rose
8	HM	Addison Watson	<i>Overcoming Challenges</i>	TMP-Marian Jr.High	Brenda Rose
9	1	Keaton Fisher	<i>Time</i>	Ellis High	Sarah Tomsic
9	2	Lilian Elstun	<i>Fall the Father</i>	Ellis High	Sarah Tomsic
9	3	Keaton Fisher	<i>Why</i>	Ellis High	Sarah Tomsic
9	HM	Shaylee Smith	<i>August 6</i>	Ellis High	Sarah Tomsic
9	HM	Natalee North	<i>Thoughts</i>	Ellis High	Sarah Tomsic
9	HM	Breanna Seiler	<i>Insomnia</i>	TMP-Marian HS	Chelsie Niehaus
10	1	Hannah Klein	<i>Unspoken</i>	Hays High	Vanessa Schumacher
10	2(tie)	Tridon Mitts	<i>Lunatic</i>	Ellis High	Sarah Tomsic
10	2(tie)	Christian Burkholder	<i>The Hunters</i>	Hays High	Vanessa Schumacher
10	3	Hailey Klein	<i>The Hiders</i>	Hays High	Vanessa Schumacher
10	HM	Ben Zimmerman	<i>The End</i>	Hays High	Vanessa Schumacher
11	1	Natalie Loftus	<i>Dry</i>	TMP-Marian HS	Travis Grizzell
11	2	Natalie Loftus	<i>Juveniles</i>	TMP-Marian HS	Travis Grizzell
11	3	Chelsea Herrington	<i>Ms. Albrecht</i>	Ellis High	Sarah Tomsic
12	1	Sarah Fay	<i>A Mother's Devotion</i>	KAMS	Independent Submission
12	2	Meghan Zweifel	<i>Lost Souls</i>	Ellis High	Sarah Tomsic
12	3	Sarah Fay	<i>Love Transcends Form</i>	KAMS	Independent Submission

2022 Creative Writing Winning Entries ~ *Prose*

My Best Friends

Once upon a time there was a unicorn and a horse. The unicorn's name was Flower because it was as pretty as a daisy. The horse's name was Crystal when she ran, her mane would shine in the sun. They met on their first day of school and loved playing with each other.

One day they went to school and the teacher said we have a new student and her name is Sunny. She was a brownish/yellowish horse that was very fast! When it came to recess time Flower and Crystal asked Sunny if she would like to play with them. That made Sunny smile and the three of them played tag. They were running so fast Sunny did not see the big bush and ran right into it. It knocked her down and broke her leg. She was in so much pain. We tried to make her feel better, but she couldn't stand up.

The teacher called the ambulance and the principal helped put Sunny in the ambulance. Flower and Daisy were really worried and were wondering if she was going to come back to school. The Vet told the teacher she was getting stronger, but had to stay with her mom and dad for two more weeks.

When she finally came back to school the whole class was happy to see her! She still had a hard time walking because she had a white cast on her leg. At recess time everyone helped her walk and played with her. We didn't run around, but decided to play Slow Motion tag. She thanked us for being such good friends.

Katie Ziegler

Washington Grade School
Kindergarten, 1st place (Tie)

My Adventure

Liam is my name and I am six years old. I am a nature person who loves to explore. My dad and I went to the store to get binoculars to see the wildlife. I was hoping to see a moose, frogs and mountain lions with those binoculars. We packed water bottles, walking sticks and plenty of food in the pickup. We were ready to go on our adventure. We walked and walked, my legs were so tired. I fell over a rock and skidded down the hill.

Dad said it was time to find our campsite, so we stopped to put up our tent. I heard a bugle noise, I turned around and saw a big, huge moose! It was so close I didn't even need the binoculars. Dad told me to put the food on the table so the raccoons would not get it. We also had to be careful not to put trash on the ground or the bears would come to our tent.

When it started getting dark I wanted my dad to stay real close to me because I could hear an owl in the trees. We had so much fun telling nature stories and roasting marshmallows. The best part was looking up in the dark to see millions and millions of stars!

Liam Nuttle

Washington Grade School
Kindergarten, 1st place (Tie)

Lego Man House

Once upon a time there was a Lego Man who was medium sized. He needed a pet and went to buy a dog that was gray and white. He named it Shepherd. The dog was made out of Legos and he fit right in the Lego Man's car. They went straight home so he could show his pet his nice Lego house. When he got to the house it was on fire, a huge meteorite hit the house and burned all the Legos to the ground. Thank goodness for the Lego firetruck. The fireman got there fast to put out the fire. The smell of plastic Legos was terrible!

The Lego Man was very sad, but his dog was so happy to be with him. They decided to build another Lego house. He decided to put signs all over town to donate Legos so he could build his house. People were so nice, he had so many Legos donated that he was able to build a huge house with a garage for his car. He even had enough Legos to build a dog house and a fence around his house. He also was able to build a dog park around his town. Every dog in town came to visit and it made him feel so good to give back to his town. The mayor decided to change the name of the town to Lego City!

Adler Keller
Washington Grade School
Kindergarten, 2nd place

It's a Girls Sport

In my family we all like to wrestle! This was my first year to go out for wrestling. Mom and Dad were excited and signed me up. I had to buy wrestling shoes and my dad made me a black singlet. This would make me look strong since I was the only kindergarten girl out for wrestling.

Sometimes I am too tired to go to practices, but my brother says you have to practice if you want to get better and compete. There is one other girl in my class that is older and we wrestle each other at practices. I have pinned her a number of times. This makes me feel good and happy.

The time finally came to go to other schools and wrestle. I was a little nervous, but excited to see how well I could do. The only problem is my hair is so long that it gets stuck in my headgear and that hurts. The first time I wrestled I lost and I did not get a medal. My brother said to keep trying and you will get stronger. My second time I wrestled I lost again! I wondered why these girls were stronger than me? They were older than me and I didn't think that was fair.

The biggest wrestling meet was coming up and there were over 500 kids. I saw my mom and dad, grandma and grandpa in the stands to cheer me on. This time I finally won a medal, 4th place! The next meet I received a gold medal. It really paid off practicing so much. It was a great day for my favorite girl's sport.

Remington Henman
Washington Grade School
Kindergarten, 3rd place

Paw Patrol

One day at the Paw Patrol Tower, all of the Paw Patrol Pups were hanging out. They were planning to go on a big trip. They wanted to go to North America and see all the landmarks like the Statue of Liberty and the Space Needle. They got into their car to leave South America, but Paw Patrol Pup, Marshall, did not want to go on the trip. Marshall said "I am not going to North America. Landmarks are so boring!" They left without Marshall. After the rest of the pups left, Marshall started to feel sad. He was missing his friends and he wished he would have gone with them to North America. Marshall decided to order a pizza instead of feeling sad. He ate all of his pizza and then decided to run to catch up with the pup's vehicle and see the landmarks with his friends.

Eli Baxter
St. Mary's Grade School
Kindergarten, Honorable Mention

The Dragon Sleepover

Once there was a dragon and a girl at a sleepover and they were best friends. The girl was scared because it was her first sleepover. The dragon helps her get over her fears.

Trinity Hancock

Washington Grade School

Kindergarten, Honorable Mention

Magic Berries

Once upon a time there was a ton of unicorns living in a castle and a unicorn hunter who lived nearby in a small brick house. One night the unicorns were having a big party and eating sweets (like they always do). In all their fun, they didn't realize how loud they were being. Meanwhile, the unicorn hunter was sleeping in his brick house when he heard the loud sounds from the party. "Who is making all that racket?" he said. Then he remembered, he lived close by to the unicorns. "I bet it is those pesky unicorns!" he said. "I need to get rid of them!" Just like that, he was off to his mission.

While the unicorns were partying, the unicorn hunter busted in. "I'm going to stop this noise once and for all!" he yelled. The unicorns froze and quickly all hid. Unfortunately, the hunter was good at playing hide and seek and he found all of the unicorns within minutes. Then one of the unicorns remembered the MAGIC BERRIES! So, she snuck out, got the magic berries from the berry bush very quietly, popped one berry into her mouth, and then came back. When the unicorn returned, she was now invisible.

She easily handed all of the unicorns a berry and in a flash they all turned invisible! The hunter couldn't believe his eyes. The unicorns were right in front of him and now they were gone! He started looking around the castle. "Where did they go," he shouted.

After looking for them for 15 minutes, the hunter stopped and pouted. Then he grumpily said, "Someday I will catch them!"

The unicorns remembered the MAGIC BERRIES from that day on. The berry magic only lasted a few hours, but it worked great every night they partied. The unicorns kind of felt bad for the hunter since they had tricked him, so one night they decided to give him a break. Instead of partying, they cleaned the castle and kept the music off. This way the unicorn hunter could sleep. It was weird, but good for the unicorn hunter.

Jade Whitmer

Holy Family Elementary

1st Grade, 1st place

Uni Learned His Lesson

Once upon a time there were two Mustang horses named Dud and Umbrella that lived in the grassy meadow. The horses had two colts named Uni and Bunny. The family was out grazing in the meadow on the fresh grass when Uni, who was always getting into mischief, scampered off into the forest.

Uni was kind of excited to be exploring the forest on his own until...he got caught by a thief. The thief quickly lassoed him around his neck and then hopped on top of him. The thief rode Uni to the edge of the forest where the thief's dad was waiting. The thief's dad then horsenapped Uni and took him to their kingdom. Once they arrived, the men pushed him into a stable where they cut his mane and put a muzzle on his mouth so he could only drink water.

Meanwhile, Uni's family realized that Uni was nowhere in the meadow. His family searched in the forest and spotted Uni's tracks in the mud. The tracks led the family to the nearby kingdom. They searched further until they finally found Uni in a stable behind the thief's home.

When Uni saw his family his eyes watered, and he was in shock that they found him. Uni was desperate to get out of the stable. He wanted to go back home to the meadow. They just had to make a plan to help him escape.

Uni's family decided that Bunny, his older sister, and their dad would distract the thieves. Meanwhile, his mom gathered two pieces of wood and pushed them into the stable so that Uni could prop the wood above him to protect him from getting hurt. Then his mom pushed the stable with her hooves one at a time, but it didn't work. Then she used both hooves and with all her might pounded against the stable. The stable fell and Uni escaped.

The family quickly scampered away. Finally, Uni learned his lesson not to wander off into the forest ever again, unless you are helping someone.

Kersee Wince

Lincoln Elementary

1st Grade, 2nd place

Astronauts

My dog and I want to go to space. We really want to be able to fly. We built our rocket ship out of metal from the trash. We got in the rocket and blast off. When we get to the moon, we decide we want to stay so we'll just live in the rocket ship. After 9 days we get tired of being on the moon so we decide to go back home. But the rocket ship was stuck to the moon! My dog and I worked and pulled and pushed our ship right out. We finally made it back home and slept in our own beds. We were really tired!

Ellie Pritchett

Washington Grade School

1st Grade. 3rd place

A Pink Hat

Once upon a time there was a little girl that got a hat for her birthday. She always took care of her hat. The girl wore the hat everywhere she went. One day she lost the hat on the playground. She started to cry and told her mom. She asked mom "Where is my hat?" Her mom said "I don't know, check everywhere." The little girl told her that she had already looked everywhere. She decided to go back and look one more time and finally found her hat. She ran to her mom and said "Mom, I found my hat!" Her mom said "I told you if you looked again you would probably find it." The girl thanked her mom and they started walking back to the house together.

Ainsley Haas

St. Mary's Grade School

1st Grade, Honorable Mention

The Lesson

The story starts out on a planet called Xpollz. The aliens living on this planet were celebrating a birthday of one of their own. They danced, played ring toss, played hide and seek, pinned the nose on the alien, opened presents, and ate cake. The party was in full swing, when all of a sudden a monster from another planet stormed the party and squashed the cake. Frosting went everywhere and the games were ruined. The aliens were in such shock that they just froze. The monster in a low, deep voice said, "Your party shall end. There shall be no more fun." The alien leader questioned the monster as to why he did this to their party. Then he wondered if the monster was just jealous or whether he really just didn't know how to have fun.

The alien leader immediately picked up the colored rings and placed them in the monster's hands. The monster wondered what he would do with them. That's when the alien said, "Try to throw them on the pole. If you get it on the pole, you get a monster stuffed animal to take back to your planet." The monster hesitantly tossed the rings toward the pole. With each toss, he became more willing and really liked it. A small glimmer of a smile crossed his face when he won the monster stuffed animal.

Next, the alien leader handed the monster a pin with an alien nose on it. Again the monster looked confused. The alien then blindfolded the monster and spun him around. "Now try to pin the nose on the alien," said the alien. The monster went for it and the nose ended up on the paper alien's hiney. Everyone started laughing and the monster ripped his blindfold off and tried to keep a straight face, but it was just too difficult. He busted out laughing at the sight.

From that moment, the monster asked to play some more games with the aliens. The aliens agreed to let the monster stay and join their party. The monster had never had so much fun in his life. When the party was over, the monster learned an important lesson that happiness is so much better than being angry and he asked the aliens to invite him to the next party...and they did.

Griffin Dietz
O'Loughlin Elementary
2nd Grade, 1st place

Carl's Search for Food

Once upon a time there was a coral reef as peaceful as a rainbow. Everyone sang dun dun dunununn dunununnunnnenn all day. But one day Carl the Shark decided to invade the coral reef because he had not eaten in a couple days! That would fill up his stomach. So, he told his mom he was going out to eat.

He started swimming to the coral reef. Once he got there, all of the fish immediately noticed and they were very scared. So, they all went into their caves and crevices and tried to not get eaten by Carl the Shark. Even though most of them scattered to their hiding spots, this didn't stop Carl. He still invaded the coral reef searching in all directions for something to eat.

Right then, before his eyes, Carl spotted a striped crown fish. Oh, how Carl could already taste the delicious bite. He started to sneak up on the clown fish, and then he opened his mouth ready to chomp down on it. But...right before he could bite down, he heard his mom's voice, "STOP Carl, what are you doing? You can't eat our friends in the coral reef! What are you thinking?"

Carl froze immediately, and glared at his mom and said, "But I am hungry and haven't eaten in days!" Carl's mom then explained that he should eat away from that area of the reef because they are their friends. Carl understood and made his way outside the reef where he started scavenging for his snack. After all, he was starving!!!

Theron Walters
O'Loughlin Elementary
2nd Grade, 2nd place

Max and the Amazing Robot

Max, a high schooler, loved building robots. He started building a robot for a contest due the next day. He didn't have much time! Max opened up the kit and saw directions for each part of the robot. There were thousands of parts, and he didn't know if he could put it together in time.

First, he built the arms and legs, then the body, and finally the head. He was struggling to put the parts together. Sometimes, he felt like there must be pieces missing. He could barely attach the head to the body! He was running out of time. There was only 30 minutes until he had to go. He shoved the robot's head harder onto the body...click! It finally went on! In ten minutes, his robot was done.

He turned it on. Beep! The robot didn't react. He looked to see what the problem was. He opened up the battery pack and it was beeping like crazy and flashing red. Oh, my goodness the battery was dying fast! It had to charge yet. "Now what?" shouted Max. "I have to leave! There are only 15 minutes until I have to be at the competition," Max yelled out loud.

Max quickly plugged it in and went outside while it charged. He could see cars going to the contest. He felt like he was going to explode inside. He was totally stressed and worried he would be late. Max felt like he assembled his robot for no reason, but he continued to wait outside.

Later, he went back in, and checked his robot's battery. The light was green! It was charged! He still had 5 minutes to spare. He jumped into his car and drove off and arrived at the competition in time.

The contest was starting! Max quickly put his robot in the ring and began the obstacle course. His robot overcame the challenging barriers and after all that work, Max's robot won! At the end of the contest, the judge gave him a 1st place medal. "Yay! He shouted, I'm so glad I never gave up."

Oliver Buckstead

O'Loughlin Elementary

2nd Grade, 3rd place

The Great Discovery

There was a fossil hunter who he worked for the museum. One day he was fossil hunting in the Plains of Kansas, and he found some bones sticking out of the rocky ground. At first, he wasn't sure if it really was bones. As he took a closer look, he realized that it definitely was bones. He just wasn't sure what it belonged to. He needed to dig further, but it was getting too dark to see well.

The next day the fossil hunter went back to the same spot, and found another bone next to the first fossilized bone. Immediately, he started dreaming about becoming famous for discovering this fossil, whatever it might be. It took him days of digging in the hot sun until he had collected all the bones he could find.

The fossil hunter was thrilled, yet tired from all the digging. His hands were hurting from all the blisters. Even though he was done, he still had more work to do. Now he needed to figure out how the bones went together. After days of putting the bones together, it finally hit him. He had just discovered the first complete T-rex fossil.

The fossil hunter displayed his T-rex in the museum and soon became rich and famous! People came from all over the world to see his fossil!

Kelton Legleiter

Holy Family Elementary

2nd Grade, Honorable Mention

Call me George

Once there was a boy named Carter he loved to explore the woods and mountains with his dad and his friends Jake and Cade. Once they found a portal. All they had to do was for all three of them to bow while they said when and where they wanted to go. Carter lived in a cabin with his mom and dad. His friends lived in cabins right next door. So they were neighbors and they went to the portal and then traveled back in time to when George Washington was president right after the war ended. First thing they did was bump into George Washington and he said, "Are you lost little ones?"

"Yes Mr. President," Carter responded. He could barely speak. He whispered, "It is such an honor to meet you sir!"

President Washington said, "Call me George. What is your name?"

Carter introduced himself and his friends. President Washington asked the boys if they were hungry and invited them to join him for lunch. By then it was around 2:30 and time to go back through the portal and to their houses.

That might be when Carter's mom sent him to bed, his mind couldn't stop racing about what a great day he had. He and his friends were the luckiest kids ever.

Parker Desaire
Washington Grade School
2nd Grade, Honorable Mention

The Leprechaun and Animals

One day a little boy was walking in the forest. His name was Joe. Joe was picking berries from the bushes when suddenly he heard a thunderstorm coming. Joe had no shelter or parents, his parents died in a car crash and his house was an apartment, but he got kicked out because he didn't have parents. Now he lives in the forest all by himself. He has the animals but he is kind of alone.

He was using sticks and leaves the animals helped too. He went in and fell asleep. When he woke up the monkey was on his lap. He went outside and saw this weird looking creature. He said to the creature, "What are you doing?" The creature said, "I'm looking for any person." Joe said, "I'm a person." The creature said, "Come with me."

Joe went with the creature. He told the animals to stay in the shelter. After awhile they arrived at a small hut. Joe didn't know that the creature was going to do something to him. The creature stepped toward a big pot. He said "I will turn you into a leprechaun." Joe didn't know what that was, but when he went back to the shelter the animals did not know what happened to him. They did not recognize him. Joe told them he was the first leprechaun. The animals understood so they didn't run away.

Then suddenly, a giant pot of gold appeared out of nowhere. They had enough money to get stuff to build a house. So, they built a house and lived in it. They had a lot of money left over so they bought some stuff to put in their house and to sleep on. Joe and the animals were rich for the rest of their lives. Whenever it rained the pot of gold would rainbow out.

Aubrey Hickel
St. Mary's Grade School
3rd Grade, 1st place

Party Dilemma

It is Derick's 5th birthday, and he is very excited about his party which will be on Sunday. As he is getting ready to leave to go to the park, he suddenly overhears his grandma say to his mom that there is a problem with Derick's birthday plans. Derick immediately put his ear against the back door to eavesdrop. He didn't quite understand what the two of them were saying because their voices were muffled, but he was pretty sure he heard his grandma say that they forgot something for the party.

Derick quickly shoved the door open and barged in. He yelled, "Can't I go with you guys to get 'the something' for my party?"

His mom replied in shock, "Umm, why were you eavesdropping, Derick? This was supposed to be a surprise. I suppose you can go with us, as long as you behave."

They all loaded into the car and started driving to their uncle's house. He was the one that stored the cotton candy machine that they had forgotten to get earlier. When they arrived, they saw a bunch of stuff missing. His house was empty, and the door was rusty. They closed the door behind them and walked in. They looked for the cotton candy machine but didn't find it. So, they decided to leave at that point.

Derick went for the door to leave and tried to open it, but it was stuck. Derick tugged on the door a second time. But still, the door didn't budge. The three of them search for a different way to get out. Derick tried opening the window to see if he could jump out. The windows couldn't be opened either. There was so much dirt piled up in the crevices of the window that it wouldn't budge. Derick, very frustrated, then went back to the door and started banging himself against the door over and over again. Unfortunately, the door

wouldn't move an inch. At this point, feeling exhausted and defeated, Derick gave up and worried that they'd never get out.

Just as Derick had given up hope, he noticed a small hole in the dark corner of the living room. He went over and inspected the hole. It was mostly dark inside but there was a glimmer of outside light shining through. Derick immediately assumed that this might be their way out of the house.

Derick knew he needed to find a way to make the hole bigger to get inside it. His grandma and mom search around the dark room for a tool to use to break the wall. Then out of nowhere, Grandma spotted a shovel propped up in a closet. She handed the shovel to Derick, and he started pounding on the wall to make the hole bigger. With each strike of the shovel, the hole expanded. On his last big swing, he heard a spraying sound. Hot water rushed out of the hole flooding the living room. There wasn't time to think, the three of them quickly scurried through the water toward the light inside of the knocked out wall. On their way out, Derick spotted the large pink cotton candy machine tucked away in this secret area where all the pipes were located. He couldn't believe his eyes! There it was! Given that cotton candy machine was too large to carry, the three of them grabbed a side and carried it out of the house together. Not only had they escaped the uncle's house, but the party was now going to be a success since they retrieved the cotton candy machine.

Juan Coca

Roosevelt Elementary

3rd Grade, 2nd place

The Sled Trip

“Crunch!”

The snow under the quickly moving sled crunched as I went faster down the hill. Grandpa watched as I slid down. I wiped out at the bottom of the steep hill. I grunted as I hauled the dark blue round sled up to where grandpa stood.

“I did it,” I thought after I yanked the 5-pound sled up the hill. I watched as Kirsten slid down the hill.

Jack and Kirsten were at the bottom of the hill when I swirled around in a circle while plummeting down the 50-foot hill. I wondered what they were doing.

When I checked with Jack. He told me, “Throw a snowball at Markus.” I said I would. Markus is my cousin, and I wanted to try to hit him. When Markus came down all of us threw a snowball at him, but only Kirsten's and Jack's snowballs hit him.

After a while, I got tired and went inside for about 30 minutes. Suddenly I heard a noise. I went outside to see what everyone was doing. I saw them sledding and wanted to do it some more.

I put on my jacket, boots, mittens, and hat and joined them outside. I went down the hill 3 more times. Then everybody got tired. We went inside for some hot chocolate with candy canes in it.

Grayson Decker

O'Loughlin Elementary

3rd Grade, 3rd place

Martha the Lunch Lady

Do you think a lunch lady would fight with kitchen utensils? A lunch lady named Martha was cooking for the school when somebody broke in. Martha grabbed her spatulas and pots and started to fight. The person who broke in was the worst person ever. The whole school cheered for her.

Later that day she was on the news. She said, “No matter how bad someone is I will fight.” The next day ninjas broke in. She grabbed her spatulas and pans. Martha smacked them in the face and the bottom.

She was on the news again. She said, “My spatulas helped me!” The next day nobody broke in because they were scared of her. She was happy. The day after all the bad guys broke in. She needed help. The students grabbed spatulas and pots and pans. The students won!

Morgan Ferland

St. Mary’s Grade School

3rd Grade, Honorable Mention

Laser Tag

Rat, A, Tat, Tat!

I ducked under the couch. My papa had just fired his laser gun at me from up on the stairs!

Luckily, he had missed, and I took aim at my brother. Then I fired at him. It was right on target. A life disappeared from his plastic chest plate, and he had only one left.

I was at my grandfather’s house. He had just picked my brother and me from school. Once we had gotten to his house, we started to play laser tag downstairs. I ran up the stairs where my papa was hiding. I made it up, but I lost a life in the process. Then I hit him with my plasma blaster, took out a life, and then retreated behind the couch.

I switched to the machine blaster and hit my brother again to take him out. My papa came charging out of his hiding spot. I took aim at him to win the game. He then congratulated me on my win, and we raced upstairs for more.

Judah Albin

O’Loughlin Elementary

3rd grade, Honorable Mention

The Monster Living in My House

My name is Suzy Mitmore and I am 10 years old. And there is a monster living in my house! He smells bad and he sings lullabies so he can go to sleep. Sometimes he tries to make pancakes, but the pancakes are green with expired syrup on top. And after that the kitchen looks like a green tornado with expired syrup went through it. One more thing he sleeps under my bed! He snores and growls like a bear and when I wake up in the middle of the night to use the bathroom he screams at the top of his lungs “Go back to sleep!” So you can see I have a crazy beast living in my house. I have asked my parents to call animal control 100 times this week! Although he is not an animal he is a monster, with humongous paws, yellow teeth and neon green fur. He has 10 arms! Well I don’t know if they’re arms, legs or tentacles but they’re something. Anyway, the thing I hate most about this neon green monster with humongous paws living in my house is that he eats people when he is angry! Last week it was my brother and the week before was my grandma! And who knows, I might be next! So I’m determined to get the monster with neon green fur and humongous paws OUT OF MY HOUSE!

I decided I was going to get the monster living in my house out! But how? I have never heard of anyone trying to get a monster out of their house. There is only one thing to do...look on Google. Hey, Google knows everything, but my dad says Google gives false information. NOT TRUE! Anyway I found a way to get rid of the monster, on my own! Okay my plan was to wake up super early and get the peanut butter

out of the cabinet, and then spread it under the bed. Then he would smell it and hit his head and go unconscious. Then I could wake my mom and dad up and they could take him and put him in a box and ship him to another country. Easy peasy!

Okay, it is 12:00 at night and I'm on the counter trying to find the peanut butter in the cabinet. Oh no we don't have any peanut butter! I have to think of something...JELLY! Let's see if we have any jelly. We do okay. I have the jelly, and now all I have to do is spread it under my bed then he'll hit his head and go unconscious. Then he will be shipped to another country. I'm creeping into my room where the monster lays under my bed. Okay, I'm spreading the jelly under my bed. OH NO... it is dripping! He woke up! I better hide...YES he hit his head! Okay now I have to wake my mom and dad up! "Mom and dad wake up. I got the monster! Come on."

"NO! Go back to bed.:"

Dang, okay now it is all up to me to put him in a box and ship him to another country! Yes I got his foot! Wait, I need a box. Okay I got a box and I'm shoving the monster in. All I need to do now is ship him. Oh I better tape up the box. All done now to ship him.

The next day it was time to ship him. Oh I better call the people to come pick him up, 911. "Hi, I would like you to come pick up a monst....package.

"I'm sorry we do not pick up packages.

The next morning, "Mom, how do I ship a package?"

"Well you just take it to the post office, why?"

"Because I need to ship something."

"Ok go put it in the car and we can drop it off."

After 3 hours it was time to go. "Ok mom we can go."

"All right, hop in."

I was happy to say goodbye to the monster! Finally there was NO monster in the house.

Adalyn Nilhas

St. Mary's Grade School

4th Grade, 1st place

German Owl Troubles

One day, in Germany an owl named, Christhalius, was watching other birds fly and then watched an airplane fly by. Suddenly, one of the birds saw Christhalius, and then all the birds flew over to Christhalius. Then they asked her to fly with them. She said no. Then the birds realized why they never saw Cristhalius flying around, It was because she couldn't fly.

One of the birds said, Christhalius can't fly!" Then all of the birds started laughing at her. "Ha ha!" laughed one bird. "Hee hee!" another bird also laughed. Christhalius tried to escape, but she wasn't fast enough.

Fortunately, another bird saw Christhalius and flew over to help her. After getting help, she thanked them. The bird said his name is Mason, and she said her name is Christhalius. Cristhalius told Mason that she couldn't fly. He tried to think of a way she could fly, but he didn't know how.

The next day, Mason found a way for Christhalius to fly. He told her to stretch her wings out, rotate her wings at a 45-degree angle, and then push forward and jump off a high platform. Christhalius followed his instructions and was able to fly! Well, sort of fly. It was more like a glide instead.

Mason helped Christhalius practice flying every day. Each day, she would get a little better. Soon, she was flying on her own.

Finally, Christhalius could be free of being bullied. She could do all the things that the other birds could do. She really enjoyed flying with her friend, Mason.

Alexavier Merriman

Washington Grade School

4th Grade, 2nd place

The Lonely Pine Tree

Once upon a time there was a tree that had no friends. He was lonely because he was the only pine tree in the forest. Then a fox came along. The fox was looking for food in the forest. The tree said “hi.” The fox just walked past the tree. A rabbit came along looking for the fox. The tree said “hi” to the rabbit. The rabbit hopped past the tree. The tree was very sad because neither the fox or rabbit talked to him. The fox and rabbit felt bad for not being nice to the friendly tree. All of a sudden the fox and rabbit came back to the tree. They said they were sorry for being rude. They asked him to be friends with them, and then they all had a party.

Kyle Yates

St. Mary's Grade School

4th Grade, 3rd place

The Child's Quest

Once upon a time there was a child named Bailey. She woke up to her parents missing. She was confused. Her parents wouldn't leave her. She ran to her neighbor's house. They tried looking for them around the house, but they found nothing. Bailey was scared and confused.

Bailey's neighbors took care of her until she had a plan. A few days later, she set up a search party for her parents. She hoped she could find her parents. Bailey's friends joined to help her. Bailey was super excited, but there was one concern, there were only children helping with the search party. Bailey's friends told her it would be good with just kids. Bailey was uneasy that there weren't any adults, but she trusted her friends.

Bailey's friends wanted to start the quest, but first they needed supplies. Their supplies were water, crackers, blankets, pillows, and lamps. The quest started tomorrow. Bailey's friends told their parents, and their parents were ok with it. Bailey was ready.

The next day, Bailey and her friends left in the morning. They were tired, but they wanted to find Bailey's parents, so they kept going. A few hours later, one of Bailey's friends collapsed on the mountain ground from being so tired. Everyone was helping Bailey set up a soft spot with blankets and pillows for their friend to lay on. Bailey walked around the mountain to find someone to help her. Luckily, she found a woman in a blue gown. Bailey ran to the woman and told the woman what happened to her friend. The woman walked with Bailey down to her friend. The woman gave the friend medicine.

Thirty minutes later, her friend was better. The woman left after her friend woke. An hour later, Bailey and her friends started walking. The friend that collapsed was perfectly fine. On their walk, they saw some cows. The cows made noises at them. They all laughed.

The next day passed. The friends kept walking and looking for Bailey's parents. At about midnight, they found somewhere to sleep. They found an old cottage in the woods. They slept there for the night. In the morning, one of them woke up and saw a grizzly bear. They woke up the others, packed, and crawled away in panic.

Soon, the friends found a gigantic lake. They swam to the other side of the lake. There they found a cave with torches and dungeons. They even saw guards. They were thinking Bailey's parents were in there. They knew they had to get into the cave, but they didn't know how.

Just then, they noticed that there were people delivering large boxes. Each friend hid behind a box. They were able to sneak inside behind the boxes without the guards seeing them.

In the cave, the friends saw many people of all ages. They were so shocked by all the people that they forgot to stay hidden. They got caught by a female guard and were put in the dungeon with random people.

The group of friends made their way to the back of the dungeon. Sitting on the floor in the back was Bailey's mom and dad. Bailey was sobbing she was so happy she found her parents. They collided into each other's arms and made a plan to escape. Bailey suggested that they save everyone in the dungeon.

The next day, the friends started to put their plan in place. They called the guard over to their dungeon. The friends told the guard that one of their friends was sick. While the guard was distracted, one of the friends

grabbed the key from the guard's black old boot. The guard couldn't see anything wrong with the friend, so he walked away.

Once the guard was gone, the friend with the key unlocked the gate, and everyone in their dungeon escaped. Before the friends left the cave completely, they unlocked all the gates to let everyone out.

Everyone had to be very careful not to be seen by the guards. They all made sure to stay in the dark and close to the walls. Everyone had to be very quiet. Thankfully, everyone made it out of the cave. Now they just needed to get home.

Bailey's parents and her friends spent the next hours retracing their steps. They swam across the lake and laughed at the cows making noises. Soon it was nighttime, and everyone was tired from running.

The group found a place to rest in a field. They slept the rest of the night. The next morning, they woke up at sunrise and started walking. They saw the mountain that their friend collapsed on and remembered the woman that helped them.

Soon it was noon, and everyone was starving. However, they didn't have any food, so they just had to keep walking. Luckily, Bailey saw the woman that helped them before. Bailey thanked her for taking care of her friend. The woman invited them into her home. She made carrot stew.

The group had to leave soon after they ate. A few hours later it was getting dark. They kept going until they could barely walk. They laid in a huge field with lots of hay bales to rest for the night.

The next morning, everyone was exhausted. No one slept well on the ground. Everyone stretched and gathered their things. The group started walking again. Soon, one of them saw the village they lived in. They were so happy! Everyone ran faster than they had ever run before. Their hair was flying all over their heads as it blew in the wind.

As the group got closer to the village, they saw the villagers. The villagers cheered and hugged the missing parents and the kids that found them. Bailey was glad to have her parents back. The village celebrated with balloons. The night came fast, and Bailey went to sleep, dreaming peacefully.

Charly Amrein

Washington Grade School

4th Grade, Honorable Mention

Aces

Part One

"Chelsie, for the last time," My dad said at dinner. "You need to improve your grades."

"Mark, easy. She is trying her hardest." My mom stopped my dad before he could blow his top.

"That's no excuse. I had A's in kindergarten."

"Chelsie is having troubles because Mrs. Peacock makes the work extra hard for all the kids."

"I don't care one single bit. All she has to do is study, study, study. That's what helped me."

"Chelsie, please go upstairs. I'll be there in a few minutes."

"Uh, no, we are going to finish this conversation."

"Chelsie go upstairs now."

I quickly walked up the stairs and slammed my door behind me. I can't believe my dad thinks I have bad grades. I have A's and B's. Sometimes I get my parents, then the next thing I know is that they are talking gibberish.

To calm myself down, I opened my drum kit and started playing. I knew dad was gonna come upstairs and yell at me for playing them in the house. But I didn't care. I didn't care at all. Because they don't care about my needs and my hobbies. No one does.

Part Two

I stood on the blacktop, staring at my new shoes. They were the worst color ever, pink. I can't believe I let my mom buy my shoes. I'm old enough to do it myself. At least I got to choose my clothes. I wore my overalls with my skull shirt with all the fire in the background. It's my favorite outfit. I always wear it on special occasions.

"Yo, Greenwood. What are you doing on my turf?"

Oh no. I knew this day would turn upside down the moment I came here.

“Oh nothing, Princeton. No wonder you are called that. You are treated like a princess.”

“At least I shower!” She turned around and slapped her friend’s hands.

“And at least I’m stronger!”

“Who said...” I punched her right in the nose. Maya fell straight to the ground. I honestly didn’t feel at all bad. Come on, it’s Maya Princeton. She’s the biggest brat in school.

Before I could hit her again, I saw teachers looking over this way. I ran from the crime scene to my locker. I hoped the day would be better. But, my wishes never came true.

After school, I ran to my house and up the stairs to my room. I cried into my pillow. That whole day was a disaster. I just wanted to make some cool friends. But I’m a lone wolf. And lone wolves stay lone wolves.

Part Three

“A new kid will be joining us today,” said Mrs. Peacock. “Her name is Veronica. She just moved here from Annapolis. Can you believe it? All the way from Maryland to Chicago. We must welcome her nicely.” She paused and looked at me. “Ok class. Here she comes.”

A blond girl walked in. She was wearing a rock shirt with long ripped jeans. So far so good. The only thing I didn’t like about her was that she had a pink and purple strand in her hair. Yuck! I hope she stays away from me.

During recess, I decided to write in my journal. I like to draw skulls, fire, and something that nobody knows about. I like to draw emojis. Not even my best friend knows. Well, she will never know because she left to go to Hollywood. I’m really mad at her. I hope she moves out of the country.

Just as I was about to finish my fire emoji, the new girl came and sat by me. “Hey, that’s a good fire emoji,” she said. “You must be a good artist.”

“Please leave me alone,” I said as I stood up and walked away with my things.

“Wait a sec!” She tripped and made me bump into Maya. We all fell to the ground, and my journal fell open! Everyone was looking at the fire emoji I drew. Everyone started to laugh at me. I turned all red and tears started to form under my eyes.

“Well, well. Little Chelsie likes to draw fire and school faces. And it says here that she likes Josh!” Josh was the cutest boy in school. I can’t believe I liked him. He was the one pointing at me and calling me a loser.

I grabbed all my stuff and ran away from school. I ran the whole three blocks home. I didn’t care if they were gonna come look for me. They wouldn’t even care one bit. I’m gonna make sure I never go back.

Part Four

Remember when I said that I was never gonna go back to school. That was a lie. I’m still at school. But I’m allowed to work outside the classroom, because all the kids start to make kissy noises when I’m in there. And whenever the new girl starts to come near me, I run away as fast as possible. She was the one who caused all this. I will never speak to her again.

During lunch, somebody came over to me and started to make the kissy noises. Since he wasn’t paying any attention, his tray hit my head and I fell to the floor.

All I can remember was all the lights and the sounds of people running. When I opened my eyes, the light blinded me. I tried my hardest to see where I was. I finally saw the school nurse standing beside me. “Oh thank goodness. You are awake. Here, take some water.” I took the water she offered.

A few seconds later, I saw a familiar person. It was the new girl. And beside her stood Maya! They were both talking to the nurse asking if I would be ok. What? I tried to stand up, but I fell to the ground. Maya and the new girl came over to help me up. What is happening? I got away from their grip.

“Chelsie, let us help you,” said Maya. “I’ve never hated you. I just pretended so my friends wouldn’t think I was a geek.”

“Yeah, and I’m sorry I made everyone dislike you”

“You guys are missing P.E. for me?” I still couldn’t believe they did this for me. I’m really happy I have some people that will talk to me.

Part Five

Hey guys! Wanna get ice cream?"

"Sure. I would love some," said Maya. "What about you Veronica?"

We finally remembered the new girl's name. It was Veronica.

"Yeah sure I'll have some."

Finally, I have some friends at this awful school. I'm still getting made fun of, but I don't care.

"By the way guys, what are we going to call our band?"

"How about, Aces?" said Maya.

"Yes, that would be great!" said Lea.

"Come on, I still want that ice cream."

I walked off into the distance repeating our band name. Aces. Aces. It was perfect. And it suited me. I'm finally living the dream I wanted when I was a girl.

I kept repeating our band. Aces, Aces.

Lydia Hickel

St. Mary's Grade School

5th Grade, 1st place

The Big Storm

Ahh, freedom at last. I was relaxing on my couch, binging a recently released show. I was located in the downstairs living room which was the best room in the house. It had no windows so it made me feel safe because I couldn't see out anywhere which meant nothing could get in.

I was trying to get some sort of relaxation, as earlier that day, my mom had stepped in and harshly handed me a list of gruesome chores that were never ending. I was basically sweeping ceilings and searching for atoms of dust.

"I mean she's got to be out of her mind!" I hissed to myself. Yet, I had still managed to get it all done with a second of sunlight left.

After eating, showering, and getting ready for bed, the time had passed by in a wink. I had barely any free-time that whole day! Plus, tomorrow was the first day of school, so I'd be overwhelmed with homework.

Has time sped up? In the day while doing chores, the time had went by so slow. I was like a snail, moving my hand side to side as I cleaned the bathtub. Now, during my hard-earned free time, the time was racing towards my bedtime." I barked angrily.

Still, as usual, I plopped down on the couch, as I was still lounging in the living room, kicked out my feet, and rested my head in my hands. I fumbled with some buttons on the remote before it popped on and my favorite TV series started to play. Soon, I saw the main character slop on a mound of mac n' cheese into a cerise bowl. Only two minutes in and I'd already stopped the show. Not because the show was boring, but because I was now craving something after seeing the delicious meal on TV. As I started to lean forward to get up, I remembered suddenly that we had just eaten supper not too long ago. I laid back again and decided to skip past the scene with macaroni to resist the urge of cooking up some for myself.

"Dream of something else," I told myself. Well, now I dreamed of chips, so I was craving food once more.

"Alright, it's a few minutes before I usually get my snack, but let's just go and get it now since my bedtime will be earlier," I babbled, finalizing my snack fiasco.

Remember when I had said earlier the living room had great features, one being that it blocked out most surrounding noises? Well, right as I stood up, a loud boom shook through the house, and I could hear it in the quietest room!

I ran into Mason's room, who's my brother, and asked if he had heard the loud noises too. He said he had, and that we should check for anything out of the ordinary.

As we cautiously shuffled upstairs, Mom ran in and exclaimed, "I'm glad you're both up here. Get your snacks swiftly and I'll check to make sure all the doors and windows are tightly secured."

Instead, as my mom went zigzagging through the house, slamming everything shut, I sprinted towards our big, sliding, glass door and saw our fence shaking.

In the meantime, the power line was sling-shotting itself back and forth, lashing this way and that, so much I thought it might fall apart to shreds.

As this was happening, my mouth became the shape of an O and I turned away, trying to comprehend everything. There was a high chance of a tornado occurring. Mom's frantically trying to get prepared, and I was standing there, shocked at the sudden situation. I didn't want to focus on the storm, so I ran towards the couch and flipped a blanket on top of me. I tried to refocus my attention to something else, but I couldn't think straight for a second.

"First day of third grade!" I cheered wearily. "School will be great," I reassured myself.

I tried to envision tomorrow, walking into school as a third grader! Exciting, but there was one thing that was disturbing in my vision; the school was overflowing with murky water! I started screaming louder than a lion's roar, not only because my school was spewing with water but at the same time my house went pitch black.

"Mom!" I sniffled.

"I'm coming!" she retorted. "Here's flashlights. I made sure every opening in this house is secure."

Well, all I could do was wait. Wait out the storm with no light and a destruction zone outside. I just knew it was going to be a long night.

"Come over here," Mom broke the silence. "This window lets in some light."

Mason and I shuffled towards the window, looking out for the wreckage in our yard.

Right before my eyes, our fence fell down in a flash, laying there lifelessly. In a sudden rage, I felt the need to yell.

"I can't, I can't, I can't! This is the worst experience of my life!" I started to storm out.

"Sweetie, we're doing everything we ca--"

Yet, she didn't finish because I had already sprinted out, ran behind Mom's bed and closed my eyes, blocking the sounds out. Not long after, Mom and Mason came bounding in. Mom hugged me and handed me a snack.

"You two pray, and I'll find something comforting," Mom assured.

My brother and I prayed while Mom fumbled with some wire. She whipped it up so high that I had to peek over and check out what she was looking for. She was messing with the lamp cord and right then, the lamp's light popped on.

"Did you do that?" I questioned.

At the time, I thought my mom was secretly magical, but I walked around the house and saw all the lights were on. I also realized that it was past my bedtime. It's good that school had been pushed back a day due to the weather we experienced.

As I finally closed my eyes to get a good night's rest, I thought about the big storm. I thought we'd be trapped, our house would become a public swimming pool, and every single window and door would be bashed open, but clearly, I had just over thought it and didn't have an assiduous mindset.

I sure did have my doubt. For example, whenever our fence blew down my first thought was now our backyard is open to destruction. Now, this isn't true at all, you see, our neighbors had put up the fence again in no time at all and, apart from that, none of our property was severely damaged. I had just convinced myself that everything would be horrible and ruined. Just me, no one else.

In my short time left before bed, I realized how negative I've always been. Not only the vibe I gave off, but also my mindset. I always looked for the worst in any situation, but never looking for anything positive. From that day on, I wanted to change, to give off a happy and joyful vibe, to think positively. Not only that, but I also wanted to make it a goal to share this new positivity with others, to see their face light up once they've experienced the magic of it all.

My newest rule, and what should be yours too, is that positivity is always the best route to go.

Ellee Lang
Wilson Elementary
5th Grade, 2nd place

There's Gold at the End of Every Rainbow

Part 1

Do you know that disabled kid in the mall you see everyday, selling the world's best caramel popcorn for a living? The kid with the crooked foot and odd nose with an extra long thumb. That girl who is afraid of what people will think of her, the girl who just needs a friend in the world. That's me. I'm Pauline *that* kid. My friends call me Paula, I mean that's what I would want them to call me. Not that I have any friends.

I'm fifteen. I lost my parents six years ago when I was nine. They got on the city bus and never came back. I soon discovered later that the bus hit a truck and exploded. Pretty harsh. But I found my mom's old recipe for caramel popcorn, and started a business.

People that come to the mall adore my mom's popcorn. I earn about ten dollars a day. I put half of the wad in my savings can, and half in the peanut butter jar labeled spendings. I live in a sideways turned dumpster behind the mall. It's one of the longer ones, it says Rob and Murphy Dump It Inc. on the side. I've got a cardboard box for my few pairs of clothes, an old flashlight, my money jars, and an old photo of my dad.

I struggle to get by. The business people who walk past me always stop for a moment to look at me, they'd rather not have me be part of the mall.

Part 2

"H...hiii, Gerdie?"

"Nice to see you again, Pauline. Long time no see."

"Y..ye...yeah," I said.

Gerdie is my only friend and my best customer. She was in Nevada on a tour for three weeks. She's a fortune teller, a really good one. I've never asked her to tell me my future, because I was too afraid. Afraid that my future will be a disaster. So, I guess I've got one friend, but she's like in her sixties. Gerdie knows not to say too much to me or I won't understand because of my disorders.

"I got a gift for you, Pauline."

"Wow, th...thanks!" I said enthusiastically.

She pulled out a big green envelop, it was bigger than my hand. She handed it to me. I dropped it. I felt so embarrassed as she picked it up and shook the mud off.

"It's okay, dear. Now open it!"

I ripped it open, eager to find out what was inside. Inside the big green envelope was one thousand dollars! This could *change* my life forever.

"There's more!" Gerdie said.

And there was. I dug down into the envelope, and I pulled out a plane ticket to New Hampshire! I didn't know what to say, I was speechless.

"I...I...don't...thank you!" I said. "B...but b...but I can't g...go." My stuttering got worse as I went on.

"Well, you don't have to go by yourself. There's actually two tickets, so you can bring a friend!"

"If y...you'd like to, I would love to take you, if th...that's fi...fine." I said, shyly. "But I still want to th...think about it. Gerdie you're the best!" My eyes burned, I couldn't keep myself from crying. The tears came hard, like a waterfall. "Thank you, oh thank you. I'm so b...blessed to have y...you, oh thank you! Hugh ahh ha haa ugh!" I sobbed.

"Look at yourself! Wipe up your tears dear. No need to cry, you're fifteen! Don't worry about it, take your time and think about it. But keep in mind the plane leaves on the sixth."

Part 3

The next morning I woke up feeling like a new person. While I was waiting for the mall to open, I started to pack my bag for the trip. Yes, I am going to New Hampshire with Gerdie, and it's my final decision!

Pop! Pop! The popcorn tumbled in the machine like clothes in the dryer. I reached over for the brown bag and started to fill it with caramel popcorn. I dropped some on the floor, so I bent down to pick it up, then hit my head on the counter.

"Ouch! Gosh!" Then I watched my whole stand fall flat to its side. I heard someone on the corner say "m...m...my po...p...p...popcorn! Not funny.

"Sh...shut up! Jerks! Then I heard them cackle like they were gonna die of laughter.

A tall woman came over in a rush. She had long strawberry blond hair that can down to her waist. The woman was wearing a soft blue blouse, with white jeans, and her hair down, rolling on her shoulders like gentle waves.

“Pauline, dear, oh my! What a mess! Let me help you.” The woman said.

Something about her smile had me light up inside. Her face was so familiar, so kind and welcoming.

“How do you know m...my name? And what made you rush over here so quickly? Wh...where have I seen you b...before...?”

“Oh dear, you’re so smart. I’m...oh my. Don’t you...?”

“Sorry! That must have been very r...rude of me.” As soon as I threw my questions out, I wanted to pull them back in as quickly. Then I saw her smile. “Mom?”

Part 4

My arm was around my mother. It didn’t feel right. Was I supposed to forgive her for abandoning me or give her a hard time? She only wants the best for me, she has a whole entire house just waiting for us. Us. That’s the problem. Is there an us? She left me in the streets! But she *was* injured in the crash. What if she couldn’t get to me, what if none of this was her fault. Deep down inside me I feel like I had just met my fairy godmother. Part of me wants to forgive her. She’s the *only* person who loves me and won’t judge me because I’m crippled. The other part wants to tell her how good she must have been feeling while I was down here. The only thing I had was two dollars in my pocket, living with packrats. Oh shoot, if she came down here to tell me that, I’d have to keep on like this. I would have been jumping around with excitement just to see her.

Why is this so hard? Why can’t I just speak to my mom? Tears slowly rolled down my cheeks, I could feel my face getting redder.

“Why are you crying?” She wiped the tears off from under my eyes.

I started to worry, my adrenaline building up. Was she going to get mad? I don’t remember her personality. I don’t remember *her*.

“We’ll have to go get a blood test. They want to know for sure that I’m your birth mom.”

Silence.

“I hope you can forgive me. I will understand if you can’t or if it will take you a while. But Pauline, I’m really sorry. I didn’t have a lot of choices when I was in the hospital. It takes a while for a person to get their feet back on the ground.”

I didn’t say a word. I knew this.

“I’d like to g...go home. I think I can forgive you.”

“I love you Pauline.”

“Paula,” I said.

“Right. I love you Paula.”

Taryn Boydston

St. Mary’s Grade School

5th Grade, 3rd place

Cat-Astrophe

One day in a tiny cat town, disaster was about to strike. No one knew that because the town’s only criminals were locked up in jail. What the town didn’t know was that they were planning an escape. Officer Fluffy was in his office when he heard alarms going off. He knew the cats had escaped. Officer Fluffy ordered all the pawfficers in the building to chase after the criminals.

Hairball, the leader, got in the front of their truck and floored it. Toe-Bean, the hacker, disabled all the traffic lights to buy them some time. Meanwhile Maine, the muscle, was in the back of the truck surveying to see if the fuzz was on their tail.

Once they got to their base they started planning the different ways to get money. Maine suggested they could take a helicopter and rope up the bank and bring it to their base. Everyone thought it was a great idea but Hairball asked how they would get a helicopter. Toe-Bean said he bought a helicopter when they stole the money from the museum.

Once they flew their helicopter over the bank, Maine went down and attached the ropes to the bank and the bank started lifting up. The bank was at their secret base and their mission was complete. They were so happy they partied for many weeks.

What the cats didn't know, however, was that the fuzz had found their secret base because Maine thought it was a good idea to set off fireworks. At night they heard the sirens of the police cars in the distance. In an instant they were out of bed and while they jumped off the bed they broke the meowtress!

Once they were in their truck they made a break for their other secret base. On the way their truck got a flat tire on the side of the road. They knew that the fuzz was nearby so they jumped in the nearby catnip field. The pawlice had driven off thinking they were still on the cat's tail, but they weren't. They lived on catnip for many days until Toe-Bean decided to work on the truck. It took one week to fix the truck but once they were on the road they went back to their secret base.

They returned to their secret base that turns out, wasn't so secret anymore. They raced to their helicopter and grabbed the truck with the helicopter's ropes. They flew as fast as they could to another base that actually was a secret. Once they got to it they felt relieved. One thing they didn't do was party because they were scared they would get caught. After that they robbed many stores and by robbing I mean stealing the building and taking it to their base.

Oliver Jenek

Washington Grade School

5th Grade, Honorable Mention

The Terrible Christmas Eve

"Good boy! Good boy! I laughed as me and my cousins played with Abe, my grandparents' dog. We all got into his pen, and he licked us and licked us and licked us! All of the sudden, FLOP, Abe fell on all of us like rocks falling down the side of a mountain. We pet him and gave him a tummy rub.

"Abe, you're on my stomach!" I moaned.

"Abe, get off. You're really heavy!" Maddy yelled.

I remembered a time when me and Abe were running in a wheat field, and all of a sudden I fell. Abe had run over to me and started licking me and barking to get someone's attention.

I loved Abe.

Abe was a white chocolate lab and was about 135 pounds. Once, we had to lift Abe into a truck, and it took 6 people. But in his defense, we were all girls and were not that strong.

The next day, I woke up, a smile still on my face as I thought of all the fun we had with Abe yesterday. We all started getting ready for the day. Then we broke out into a half-angelic, half-screaming rendition of 'All I want for Christmas is You.' We were all so peppy, but sadly that feeling wouldn't stay that way for long.

Before we went upstairs, we played some games like sharks and minnows, tag, and hide-and-go-seek.

We came upstairs. All the adults were outside. But for some reason, they all had tears running down their faces and were sniffing.

"What's going on?" Maddy questioned.

"What happened?" Reagan and Alexis questioned.

"Are you okay?" I worried.

Nana looked at us with tears in her eyes. She was trying to hold them in. "Abe went to a better place," she choked.

At first, I had no clue what she was talking about, but then I realized she was saying Abe died. My jaw dropped open. I started crying.

Logan came up and asked, "Why are you guys crying?"

"Abe died. He's gone." I said. I clenched my fists, my body was tight, and my face was as red as a tomato. I didn't know what to do. The thing was that I was also sad.

I asked if we could see Abe before we all went and buried him at grandpa's farm. Abe was wrapped in a fuzzy blanket. His ears were floppy, his nose was dry, and his eyes were shut. Papa took the blanket off, and I jumped in the truck.

"Abe!" I cried. I hugged him and pet him even though he was dead.

We all got in the truck. I decided I was going to sit in the back with Abe. Maddy, Logan, and Elizabeth sat with me. I pulled Abe up onto me and folded up like a piece of paper. We all huddled up like a football team, except we sat instead of standing.

"It's going to be okay," Logan said. We all started singing our special song....

"It's going to be okay. We never have to worry because we have each other." I whispered.

We all got out of the truck. Me, Logan, Elizabeth, Maddy, Reagan, and Alexis lifted Abe out of the truck and over to the hole that was dug. We all hugged each other said goodbye to Abe and laid him down in the wet, cold dirt. We put dirt on him until the hole was covered. We got some sticks and tied them with rope to make a cross. We stuck it into the ground, and some of my tears tumbled down my face and onto the cold, hard ground. "Bye Abe," I whimpered.

The grass was wet, the sky was dim, and the forest was pitch black. The birds swooped down to catch their dinner. It was very foggy, and it smelled like citrus and rain combined. I stuck my finger in the dirt and spelled 'Abe.' We will always have memories of Abe, and I realize that even though he is in the ground, he will always be with us.

"I love you, Abe," I whispered. We got in the car.

I looked back through the window and said, "Bye, Abe." And we drove home.

Alayna Bickle

Wilson Elementary

5th grade, Honorable Mention

The Irish Egg

I ran, but to no avail. I thought of hiding, but it was pointless. I debated giving up, but why would I ever do that? I could hear screeches behind me. The Winged Gecko's were closing in on me. After all, I did steal their egg. Not many people know these creatures exist and if you tell someone about them, they won't believe you. They're incredibly hard to track down and have only been seen in one place in the world. The lush forests of Ireland. Irish Winged Gecko's are very intriguing, indeed. Take a normal sized Gecko, multiply it by four sizes, put a few spikes along its back, and add some wings. Even though they're winged, they can't actually fly. What they can do, is glide at immensely high speeds. They come in various shades of blue, green, yellow, and white. They're quite friendly, but very protective. So, you can imagine they didn't take lightly to me stealing one of their eggs.

I was bounding through the woods, trying not to trip over tree roots and rocks. I saw something bright yellow streak passed me. I let my focus fall and started looking for the gecko. Almost instantly, I tripped on a tree root. I was able to catch my balance, but the egg flew out of my arms. I started panicking. I dove forward and caught the egg at the last second before it would have slammed into the ground. I scooped the egg against myself, and in the moonlight, I saw a small crack. I continued running. All I had to do was get out of the woods. The Winged Gecko's were also very secretive about their existence. They normally stay away from humans. They don't find us, we find them.

Something sharp clipped my arm. I realized that another gecko had streaked past me. But I didn't stop this time, I kept running. Then, something slammed into me. I fell forward, and the egg shot out of my grasp. I looked up in time to see one of the geckos launch off a tree and catch the egg. I pushed myself up with force that I didn't even know I had. I dove at that gecko slowly gliding to the next tree. I ripped the egg out of its clutches and sprinted. I could here it's cry behind me. With only a few feet away from the end of the woods, I threw myself forward into safety.

I don't live too far away from the woods so it didn't take too long to get home. When I reached my yard, I found it right how it was when I left. My second floor window open, and a branch from the tree that I had turned into a fortress resting gently on the windowsill. The tree itself was amazing. With the help of my dad, I had made ramps and platforms, even a pulley system. As I walked up the first ramp, I felt the egg shake against me. I continued walking, and it continued shaking. Then, there was a *crack* sound. I looked at the egg and saw a huge crack on it. I

sat down between two thick branches I like to read in. It cracked again and a little, spiky tail popped out. Then an arm and a leg and finally, a head. The eggshell pieces fell to the ground. In my hands was a gecko with little wings and a thin zigzag line right down the middle. The left was a blue-green color, and the right was a cream. It looked up at me with yellow eyes, squeaked, then and yawned.

“Hello.”, I whispered, “I think I’ll call you... Blight! You know, because of your colors.”

I set Blight on my shoulder and climbed through my window. I sat on my bed and gently sat him on my lap. He climbed around a bit before settling down on my knee. I looked at my desk and saw my green dragon lamp and numerous drawings of Winged Gecko’s. But I wouldn’t need them anymore. Now, I have my own.

Bladyn Werth

Hays Middle School

6th Grade, 1st Place

Quirious

As I peeled open my banana at lunch, and took a bite, I quickly realized that I wasn’t allowed to eat until my surgery was over. I had already swallowed, but I made a beeline to the trashcan to throw the rest of the banana away. I was beginning to regret agreeing to get lunch anyway, so my friends could pick off my plate. *Please, Margot.* Rebecca had whined. *You know they barely serve enough food. Plus, I’m extra hungry today, because I was late, and had to skip breakfast.* Trish had contributed. Finally, I had agreed, but begged Rebecca and Trish to supervise me, and not let me eat anything. But of course, Rebecca had to stay after class, and Trish got easily distracted.

I threw my banana away, and marched back to Trish, my face red with annoyance.

“I told you to not let me eat anything!” I said, expecting her to feel awful, but instead she just turned and looked at me, cookie crumbs outlining her mouth, and casually said, “That’s your responsibility, not mine.”

While that most definitely would have been true in some cases, I had paid for food I wasn’t even gonna eat, so my friends could feast on it, while perfectly good, scrumptious food was dangled under my nose. The one thing I had asked them to do for me was not let me eat. How hard could that be, when you’re paying attention? *Cough* Trish.

“Do you know how serious this could be?” I pressed, now raising my voice.

“I’m sure it’ll be fine. What’s one measly bite of a banana?”

I thought about Trish’s words while mom drove me to the hospital for my surgery. *Yah*, I thought as we pulled up into the driveway. *Everything’s gonna be fine.*

Well, once I was in the surgery room, ready for my operation, kind eyed nurses walking by my side, I started to think maybe it really was gonna be okay. *Modern medicine vs. 1/8 of a banana? Pff. I got this.* I had never been so wrong.

I woke up feeling dizzy, and sickly. I was still in the hospital of course, but something was different. I was the only one in the room, the lights were off, and I heard not a sound from outside in the hospital. *Weird.* I thought. From what I could go off of, from when I first arrived at the hospital, they were always noisy, emergencies everywhere you looked. Now, it was so quiet you could hear a pin drop... and that’s how I heard it. How I heard and saw my door creak open. At first I was relieved. *Oh, it’s the doctor, he’ll release me soon, and I’ll get to go home.* But it wasn’t the doctor... it wasn’t **anyone**. As my door slowly opened, I saw none on the other side. Who could have opened it? At that moment I wasn’t curious as much as I was frightened. This was creepy. Like a ghost story or something. As I stared at the open hallway beyond my door, someone turned a corner, and started running towards me, as fast as a race car. The person was unrecognizable due to the sage cloak draped over their shoulders, hiding their face.

I was terrified. I started screaming, pleading, “Don’t hurt me! Please!”

Finally the mystery person reached my room, slowed down, got to my hospital bed, and laughed. The mystery person took off their hood, and... it was Rebecca. At first I almost didn’t recognize her. She looked the same, except for pointy ears, and ash gray hair. Insults started forming like clockwork in my head: *I trusted you! And You’re a traitor!* But of all the burns I could’ve gone with, I chose: “I got you lunch, and **this** is how you repay me?!”

But then Rebecca started smiling, and I got the idea that this was a misunderstanding.

“Listen, Margot. I was gone at lunch for a reason.”

“Yah. You had to stay after class.”

“No. I knew that if I was gone, Trish would let you eat, and that’s exactly what I needed to have happened.”

“What?!” I screamed. “You **wanted** me to eat?! What about my surgery?”

“Well, here’s the thing. If you eat at a certain time before a surgery, and you still get the operation... something happens. Something I can’t quite put into words.”

I narrowed my eyes.

“Try.” She sighed, but gave in.

“Now that this has happened, you’re different. Like... not exactly human anymore.” I started to speak, but she shushed me. “Please, wait until I’m done. You’re like... not human, not an alien, not a monster... you’re like a umm... like a creature now.”

“I’m a... a creature?” Rebecca just nodded, looking down at her shoes. At that moment, I realized that Rebecca probably wasn’t her real name.

“Your name... what is it?” I asked.

“That information is classified to you until you are shown the truth.”

“What’s the truth?”

“Since you are now a creature, you must go to a place for people like us. It’s called...” She paused.

“What?” I asked, feeling frustrated.

“Before I am able to share this with you. I need to know that you won’t tell anyone.”

“I WON’T TELL!” I screamed. Curiosity was taking over me, and I wanted to know so badly about this.

“Very well... It is called Quirious. We must go there now. It is not safe for us in the human world. If we stay too long, our true forms start to reveal themselves. That is why folks in the medieval times believed in witches.”

“When are we going?” I asked excitedly.

“Right now.” Rebecca said. I smiled, unplugged my medical equipment, got out of the hospital bed, looked in the window, and nearly passed out when I saw my reflection in the glass: I had choppy, shoulder length gray hair, and twisted horns in my scalp. Rebecca smiled like she remembered the first time she had transformed.

“C’mon.” She said, “Follow my lead.” She then touched the tip of her horns, and muttered under breath, “Quirious, One wind, one earth.”

I did the same, and suddenly the room started to spin. My vision went black, and I was now getting motion sickness. Then, it settled, and I was gasping for air. Rebecca was by my side, but we weren’t in the hospital room any more. We were sitting on a grassy hill, overlooking a meadow of buttercups, irises and tulips. It was faint, but in the distance I saw something: a palace. It was gold, and silver, with a massive spruce drawbridge. A banner was hung over the middle of it. I was having trouble reading it, but then Rebecca did it for me.

“It says ‘Welcome new arrivals, to Quirious. Please enter.’”

Emma Downing

St. Mary’s Grade School

6th Grade, 2nd Place

Vacation at Middle Eau Claire

The moment the car was parked, I rushed outside towards the dock. Barefoot, I felt every step as my feet flew across the surface of the soft grass, smiling at how nice each breath of fresh air felt to my lungs. The moment I reached the dock I slowed down, stepping on the cold, rough metal until I reached the edge. I sat down and dipped my toes into the cool, smooth water, sending ripples from the spot where my feet now swayed as if caught in a light breeze.

I sat there for a few minutes, admiring Middle Eau Claire Lake. I needed to truly appreciate the beauty of this place. It was incredible, all the colors, different shades of blues and greens all mixed together yet somehow stayed separate. The way the delicate, glassy surface could reflect the tall, mighty trees surrounded the lake was truly a sight to behold.

I was watching in awe as a majestic bald eagle flew overhead, when I heard a familiar noise from behind me. I turned to see my mom.

“I thought I’d find you here,” she said. I smiled at how well she knew me. “Why don’t you jump in?”

Oh no, I thought. She's gonna make me jump in.

"Mom," I said as I looked her in the eye, "I love you and all, but there is no way you can get me to jump in. I mean, you're not even in the lake yourself." As I finished, I saw the look in her eye and the grin on her face and groaned. *Now she's gonna-* "UGH! Mommm!" I yelled when a wave of water coming from where she landed in the lake engulfed me.

The cold was overwhelming at first, and soon I was shivering. However, she had convinced me. *I can't believe I'm- yes I can.* Recklessness taking over, I sprinted off the edge of the dock.

The lake was unmistakably cold, but I didn't regret it one bit. The look on my mom's face warmed by heart; I hadn't seen that many times. It was pride and love mixed together. It made mom look beautiful. *I'm already used to the cold, too.* Soon enough, I hopped out to tell my sister to join the fun as well. The day went by quickly with endless activities to do outside. From exploring the nearby forest, picking raspberries, paddle boarding, or jumping on the bongo, we were busy. By the end of the day, we were worn out.

Dinner was delicious, after all, hunger is the best sauce.

"So are you girls ready for the cruise?" my dad asked us. Robyn and I exchanged glances. *Cruise?* I thought. *What cruise?*

"Oh, that's right! We didn't tell you! We're taking the pontoon out on a sunset cruise tonight!" my dad replied. Though I was exhausted, I looked at my sister Robyn and grinned.

At sunset, we all boarded the pontoon and my older brother took us out to the center of the lake. Though the lake was still and quiet, the sky was alive with colors that were somehow both fierce and timid as they danced across the orange-streaked sky. The colors performed until the final curtain, the sun, went down.

After the sunset, my eyes returned to the earth. Even with very little color other than black, there was a certain beauty about the place. The night whispered secrets, none loud enough to hear, and the water's depths were hidden from sight. The mystery of this was terrifying and beautiful. Too soon, it was over. I went bed exhausted, but satisfied.

I awoke early the next morning with a feeling that today was going to be a good day. I got out of bed and stretched. I looked outside and was surprised to see the sun up so early. I itched my arm and walked out into the kitchen. My nose sniffed the smell of bacon, the sun was hot on my back and I heard the voice of my mother in the living room. I felt something soft and fluffy on my leg and I looked down to see my beautiful dog nudging me with her head. I smiled and scratched behind her ear. Then I scratched behind my ear. *Man, I thought, I am really itchy!* I shrugged it off and walked into the living room.

"Good morning, Mom!" I called in her direction.

"Is that my Lena?" she asked. That's my mom's way of saying good morning. She turned in her chair and gasped. I whirled around to look behind me, but there was nothing there.

"What?" I asked, confused and a little worried.

"**Lena!** Have you seen yourself this morning?" When I shook my head, she pointed toward the bathroom and practically yelled, "Go look in the mirror!"

Obediently, I ran to the bathroom and looked in the mirror. Now it was my turn to gasp. I was covered, head to toe, in big, itchy, red bumps! I rushed to the living room to Mom.

She was saying, partially to herself, partially to me, "It'll be lake itch for sure." I grimaced when I heard that. *Lake itch*, I inwardly groaned, *How did I get myself into this?*

"Oh, Lena, I'm so sorry! You got it bad! And it's my fault, too," she sighed. But no way was I going to let her pin this one on herself.

"No way, Mom! This was not your fault! How could it have been?" I retorted.

"Lena, I made you jump in before you had put lake itch cream on!" she exclaimed. *She has a point there*, I thought. However, I was resilient and would not give up.

"If I had remembered to put it on before I jumped in, this could have been avoided. Also, you didn't *make* me jump in. I jumped off my own accord! See, this is my fault much more than yours." I took a deep breath after talking so fast. Unfortunately, Mom didn't seem convinced. She was about to talk when I said firmly, "Stop. It was just an accident, and it already happened, so let's just drop it." To my relief, my mom agreed.

The rest of the day was miserable. Nowadays, whenever I look back on this day, I get a good laugh. Needless to say, from that day forward, I have never, ever forgotten the lake itch cream and I probably never will again.

Lena Smalley

Hays Middle School

6th Grade, 3rd Place

Grayscale Existentialism

The gloomy, bleak days stretch endlessly across the barren expanse of the lonely life I lead. I perform tasks as if lost, all but in a haze of boring routine. Every morning I get up to face the undoubtedly incomprehensible days ahead. The days open their gaping mouths to form a long, stretching cavern of never-ending gray before me. Without the slightest hint of hesitation, I jump into the damp, bleak cave.

In vain, Normals would call it “Just another day at the office!” to try to put a light spin on the vast majority of days for “Average Joes”. But Normals do not understand the true nightmare most soulless creatures lead. Day after day, slaving to superiors, only to drudge away with no progress whatsoever to our names.

I fall into the routine of a lame, brainless creature and am spoonfed my robot-like program for the day. It’s almost like my brain has been permanently tinted with unsureness of my place in society. Some would compare it to being in a room filled with smoke, coughing and hacking as I feel blindly for the door.

This life pollutes the oceans of creativity, and quenches my world of sunlight, until I breathe no longer. My soul is a concentrated block of carefully measured cement. I only get so much, and when I do, it’s cold and hard, like an anchor dragging me down.

Many of my experiences with human interaction follow suit of the gray that clouds my mind. Bothersome at first, never-ceasing, but when I grow accustomed, it is pleasingly numbing, and distracts from the pain of the abyss that is life.

Over time, the gray fades to black. At first, I was scared of this downward spiral induced by interaction with humans. Of course, Normals understand the sensation of fear, but this is something different entirely. This is rooted in the pit of my stomach, making my heart beat faster at the very thought, until I feel I might explode, and realize, I haven’t been breathing. In fact, it’s almost as if my brain over-generates the information needed to function during these “spirals”. And so, consequently, it results in a “mental blackout” of sorts.

Gradually, I come out of the spiral, not exactly climbing, but content, lying half-dead where I am in life. I believe it’s like treading water. Not drowning, but not exactly swimming. I eventually tire of treading. I sink into the inky, black water, never to resurface.

The black doesn't stray that far from the gray. The black is cold, a new addition to the numbing. I suppose I feel slightly more aware of my life, of the routine. Waking from a faint, black spots swim in my vision from the realization that life isn't as it should be.

But it’s too late for an epiphany! The water has frozen over! I try frantically to burst through the ice. I scream in the vain hope that someone hears my plea.

Water fills my lungs, burning my throat like acid as I try to break out of this mental prison. As I sink lower, I think of all the missed opportunities as the hands of the other zombified suffering drag me down greedily.

But always just as I lose hope, some miracle comes along. A silvery voice, like a ray of sunshine cast down from the heavens in this bleak, cold world, melodically says, as if in my ear,

“The simulation is over. You may open your eyes.”

Shiloh Gaschler

St. Mary's Grade School

6th Grade, Honorable Mention

Draco

I was sitting at my desk, reading a book. The battle was 200 years ago, being hardly relevant. However, with modern battles being mammoth starships broadsiding each other with torpedoes. Short range tactics are still necessary, as they had a effective range of 5 miles. I was immersed in the book when my Holo-Screen flashed a message. I tapped it and read the headline. D.R.A.C.O was out of containment. It was eating stars as fast as it could reach them. Hundreds of stars have already been eaten. I grabbed some cash and went to the space port.

When I arrived I shoved the cash in the ticket machine and it belched out a 2 way ticket. I walked to a shuttle and fed it into the slot. The doors opened up and I said “Far system, Now.” The automated voice replied “Did you say Lar system?” “No I said F-A-R” I countered, pronouncing Far. The portal machine spun up beneath me. I always hated this part. The pod dropped into nothing. Everything seemed unmoving and dark. In reality I was traveling at hundreds of times the speed of light. When I arrived I cursed under my breath. It had already gotten here.

I looked around the planet. Apart from the light from other stars and the harsh, blinding glare of electric light, it was pitch black. I turned on my night vision. I saw people stumbling around, unable to see. I started helping them to buildings that had lights coming from them. I saw another person doing the same thing. We worked in silence. When the last person that was on the streets was inside, we sat down. I looked out to a field. All the plants were starting to shrivel up. "Whats upr name?" He asked. I replied, "Jeff. Whats yours?" "Bob." "We gotta catch that thing." I said.

As we walked around we found a old deep scan station. Now the technology was much smaller this would still work. We stepped inside. I flipped on a light and took off my helmet. The machinery was old and dusty. When we tried to power it on it was no use. We walked to the nearest house, and we walked in. The inhabitants of the house stepped back in shock, until we said "It's ok, we aren't going to hurt you." This calmed their nerves. We asked them "what direction did it go?" They replied, pointing in the direction of Baker system. "That way." We said our thanks and walked out. We ran to a shuttle and overrode the controls and took off.

As we sped to Baker system we started talking. "We are going to need an army," said Bob. "I know," I replied. "Where are we going to get one," Bob questioned. "The citizens of Baker would gladly pick up arms and fight, plus, the Imperial Warship squadron is currently stationed there to refuel." What if they say no?" He questioned. "While you were asking that family about the whereabouts of D.R.A.C.O I sent out a message calling all the citizens to arms. They all said yes." "Well," Bob replied, "now we have an army."

As we arrived we were greeted by thousands of military-grade soldiers and hundreds of thousands of citizens. They directed me to a scanning station. As I walked in it was already up and running. They needed my help. Every object had its own serial number. I pointed to the number D36ix. "That's him." I said. "Then lets go get him!" They cried. Soon a chant had began in the crowd. "DEATH TO DRACO, DEATH TO DRACO!" I quelled the crowd. Then I gave a speech. "Today, D.R.A.C.O's wrath will end. Many of us will not make it home. I hope you all realize that. However! If we let it continue its wrath millions will die. Even the Sun, the almighty star that brought life to our planet, will perish. Those of you who are about to embark on that ship," I pointed to the NeverLand, a troop transport. "are the bravest souls on this planet. Millions, no Trillions are counting on you! So I say come aboard. And fight." My speech roused the entire crowd, Dare say the entire planet, into a jubilant roar.

After that most of the population boarded the ships. Bob, Admiral Fischer and I were the heads of the operation. As we moved on an intercept course to D.R.A.C.O I discussed its weaknesses. It is a machine, not a living beast. When we arrive we will drop onto its exo-skeleton and we just need to start smashing the coolant spires. They are about the size of a building, but they are made of a very fragile material. It will release drones to defend it. Once the towers are down it will be unable to move until its drones repair it. Then we need to infiltrate and destroy the reactor. This will disable its shields and we can begin bombardment. Fischer distributed this info to all his ships. "Lets do this." Bob said, suiting up.

I saw D.R.A.C.O for the first time. About as big as a continent. I stood there, taking note of its cooling towers. Already, it sensed the ships incoming. I saw drones buzz out of their hangers. The Valiant started firing. Then the Centauri. Soon all the ships were firing at the drones that were buzzing in. One got winged by a shot and was sent spiraling out of control. It hit another causing a blinding explosion. The gunmen couldn't see the next one, that came out of the explosion. It hit the Centauri, and a flash of light enveloped it. I heard over the radio "We took a hit! Engine room is destroyed!" That's it. I thought. I turned on my microphone. "All units attack!" I yelled.

No sooner then I said that than all the drop ships disembarked. When we landed I lead my division to the nearest cooling tower. "Form a circle around the civilians!" I ordered, while I took a shot at a drone. Soon the tower had collapsed and I swung my rifle like a club, smashing a drone. We repeated this process until all the towers were gone. I found the reactor door. I went in. Every one followed. There it was. It was radiating with heat and light. I saw a worker drone press a button that said Release. Then the reactor was moving up. The doors started to close. I ushered everyone to the exit. "GO! GO! GO!" I yelled, and everyone started to leave. Then I saw that it was almost to the Baker star. I ordered "begin bombardment." I ran to the drop ship, but before I could reach it a drone grabbed me. It threw me to the ground. I brought my rifle up to try and block its attack. Then an explosion erupted a few feet behind it. The explosion threw the drone. Then more explosions started all around me. I looked up. A torpedo was coming right at me. I tried to run away but it hit me in my back sending me flying... then the world went dark.

Joseph Zolnierz
Hays Middle School
7th Grade, 1st Place

The Mark of a Hero

My name is Chawowski Zwickenbob. Odd name, right? That's just one of the odd requirements of our island.

Humans didn't always live on this island. A long time ago, they lived on giant continents until a war broke out in which humans used all of their weapons to obliterate the enemy.

We are ruled by a king, and everyone but the king lives and dies normally - except me.

When I was 12, I was chopping down trees for firewood when one fell the wrong way and came crashing towards me. I held up my hands in fright, and suddenly the tree flew back, knocking down some 20 others on its flight. I tried to run in fear but found that I couldn't because I was floating. I never told anyone of my super powers for fear of what might happen if I did.

I slammed the door to my house as I started the daily trek to the training center. Training was the normal, boring class, and I was glad when done. I packed my sack full of my training equipment and started to head away.

Before I got to the door, I realized I'd forgotten something and rushed back to get it. To my horror, I saw a boy being dragged off by three soldiers in full uniform. I wanted to help him, but I knew I couldn't without using my power, so I stayed hidden in the shadows.

That's when I saw a big chest sitting on the ground. I waited for the soldiers to go away, then crept up to the chest and used my heat power to melt the locks. I carefully opened the lid to find tons of documents. I pulled out one and started to read it.

The whole document was about an invasion. We were trained for the sole purpose of conquering the lands. The most surprising thing was that the paper said that the king had the power of 20 men and could only be hurt by a few means. This meant that I wasn't the only one with super powers.

After reading and studying, it hit me that I was the only one on this island with a chance of stopping the evil plans.

I had studied the defenses of the castle and the army tactics while reading the papers and knew enough to get me to the king's chambers where I would try to force him to stop the plans. The trip to the castle would take about two hours, so I decided to get going.

My thoughts were interrupted as I saw the big, spiked walls of the castle. I slowly snuck around to the edge of the wall, staying behind the few trees and carefully used my power to fling a soldier from farther over into some others to cause a commotion. Sure enough, three of the already small band of five soldiers at the edge ran over to help the others. I quickly sprinted to the edge and took out the remaining two soldiers with a good punch to the face. For once, I was glad to have training sessions.

The giant wall loomed over me. I knew I had only seconds before I was spotted and caught, so I quickly burned some hand and foot holes in the wall with my power and started to climb. I heard someone yell from below and felt an arrow whiz by, missing by inches.

I started to run to the tower that would lead me to the king's chambers. All that stood between me and the king was a vast hallway. It may have looked harmless, but I knew from studying the plans that it was riddled with traps.

I took one step into the room. The tile under my foot was pushed in, and a dozen arrows streaked at me from the wall. I jumped forward as far as I could while trying to deflect the arrows with my power. Unfortunately, as soon as I landed on the next tile, it gave way along with a bunch around it, leaving a pit beneath my feet.

My instincts took over on the fall down, and I subconsciously pushed as much energy to the floor as possible. Suddenly, I started to slow, then began to rise. I was flying by pushing myself off the ground with my power. I flew out of the hole, then shot across the remainder of the room, dodging spears, axes, and other nasty surprises. I finally made it across the room and blew right through the door.

There the king radiated power, and his giant muscles and perpetual scowl told you not to mess with him.

"Well, Chawowski," he growled in a surprisingly clear, powerful voice, "I didn't expect you to come this far. Now that you're here, I might as well end you."

I was caught off guard that he knew my name and my plan, but I kept my face straight and responded, "I came to stop your invasion."

With that, I ran toward him and pushed out with all my power. To my dismay, he raised his hand with a bone chilling laugh, and my shimmering wave was absorbed into it.

"You don't seem to have much power over me!" he laughed. He pulled a long, sharp sword from his belt and advanced on me. I frantically looked around for something to defend myself with and finally found another sword on the wall. I lunged at the sword and raised it in fright.

With that, he leapt at me, his sword in a deadly arc to meet my spent body. I was too tired and injured to even raise my sword. I knew it probably wouldn't do anything, but I shot out a fire bolt at the king. To my surprise, it pushed him back and burned his hand. He grimaced in pain.

I started to shoot rays of fire as fast as I could, and the king tried to block each with his sword, then started to dodge them. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw the king quickly raise his sword and bring it down hard. Time seemed to slow as his sword plunged forward, and I felt myself tense up for the blow. As my defeated body tried to prepare, all of my power seemed to leap to the top of my skin. I had nothing to lose, so I let all of my energy I had ever stored out. I could feel the great heat and immense power, but I felt it in me. For a few seconds, I was power.

I slowly looked around, taking in what had happened. A big pit was burned in the ground where I had been standing, and everything in the room was burned. The king was gone, most likely incinerated, and with him his rule.

I slowly let the fact sink in that I was king since I had killed him in a duel. Unlike the evil king, I wouldn't let the power I held go to my head. I would be a good ruler.

I know that kings have important jobs, people and whole lands to deal with every day, and it may make them think that they are unlucky, but I think this will work out for me. Maybe no one will remember me a long time from now, but I will have put a mark on them. A mark of a hero.

Mattias Marintzer

TMP-Marian Jr. High

7th Grade, 2nd Place

No Way Home

I'm Nathan Goodwell. I'm 12, and I live in Oklahoma City in a foster home.

Mr. and Mrs. Lopton are my foster parents. Mr. Lopton is an old, gray-haired man and is about 6' tall. Mrs. Lopton is also skinny and tall. She is also old and always wears pants and a purple shirt.

I had real parents, but about two years ago they died on the way to my grandma's house in a car crash, and I have been stuck here ever since. I got here when I was 10 and have been planning an escape, and today's the day.

You may be asking yourself where I would go, and to answer your question, I'm going to my grandma's.

My grandma is very nice, and the only memories I have of her are amazing. I can still smell the perfectly baked cookies. My grandma has no idea that I'm still alive, but it is my dream to make it to her.

Back to the escape. I live upstairs, and my window leads to the roof, so I plan on setting up the ladder when I take the trash out. When everyone is asleep, I will sneak out and run to the woods.

I'm bringing a bookbag with a lighter, pocket knife, beef jerky, water, and a bow and arrows. I'm also bringing a tent and sleeping bag.

It was almost midnight, so I open the window and climb out. Now that I'm on the roof, I am going to climb the ladder down and make a run for it, but as I am climbing down my water on the side of my bookbag fell out and made a loud bang, so I hurried down and ran.

As I was running, I heard Mr. Lipton, "Boy, you better get back here!"

After I ran a distance, I stopped and heard sirens, so I jumped into the bush and hid as they sailed past me towards the house.

My grandma lives in Austin, but it's late so I set up camp and fell asleep.

"What is that feeling?" I woke up to a wagging tail hitting my face; it was a dog! I didn't see a collar, so I assumed it was a stray because it was also very skinny. I named the dog Max.

Max seemed to be interested in my bag, so I reached in and grabbed a piece of beef jerky, waved it, and threw it in his mouth.

I came up to the next town with Max following me and saw a state map, so I wanted to see if I was close to Texas.

I told myself, "This is going to be a long journey."

While sitting on a nearby bench enjoying some jerky and water, a man screamed out for everyone to hear, "That's the kid on the news."

When I heard this, I bolted with Max on my side. The man tried catching me, but I was too fast.

I woke up the next morning, packed the tent, got Max, and continued walking. My legs started to hurt from all the walking,

Max and I walked for days, struggling to find things to eat along the way or finding places to stop and wash up.

One morning, after the tent was packed up I did not feel so great because I saw a patrol car and there was no way he would not stop to ask me questions.

When he saw me walking next to the road, he pulled over and got out. When he got out he asked, "Why are you all alone out here?"

That's when I think he realized because he kind of mumbled, "Wait a second."

When he said this I could feel every muscle in my body tense, and I felt like throwing up.

He took steps forward so I ran as fast as I could, and he followed. Max was by my side and he was 30 feet behind me and gaining.

He was getting closer, so I had to do something. I tried turning, but he got even closer then I heard growling and a bark. Max had tackled him to the ground and ripped his shirt and ran back up to me.

I have never run this fast, and it felt amazing with the wind in my eyes getting them watery and my lips drying.

I was not in the clear, yet because I rolled my ankle in a hole, I dropped to the ground. I screamed the loudest I ever had then I hit the ground head first and passed out.

I woke up in the backseat of a car with bars, and I instantly knew where I was.

I was still confused because I didn't know how I got there. I decided I should ask the man where I was.

I said hazily, "Where am I?"

He responded, "Austin, Texas."

I got up and looked out the window, I was happy and sad.

I saw the Dairy Queen that I went to with my grandma, so I knew she had to be close by.

I had to get out of the car. I figured I'd ask for some air then when he rolled the window down, I would jump out and run.

The strangest thing was that he turned onto my grandma's street. Then he slowed down, and I saw the yellow porch and white hand rails and I knew.

The patroller pulled over to a stop right in front of the house and told me to get out. He unlocked the door, and I stumbled to the ground. I hadn't realized that my ankle still hurt, but he came to me and helped me up.

When we got to the door, I was both thankful and suspicious. Then the door opened.

"I've been waiting for you, young man," my grandma was standing in front of me, I could smell the freshly-baked cookies in the kitchen.

I have dreamed of what I would say many times, but none of them felt right.

The only question I had was how she knew I was coming. It was almost like she read my mind because she then said, "This kind officer said that you were alive and that he would bring you home."

Then the officer said, "My name is Jim, and I'm your uncle."

He then said that he thought I was dead, then he saw me on the news and tried to find me. All he wanted to do was bring me home.

I asked why I never heard of him from my parents and he told me, "Your dad did not like me much after we got in a fight about 10 years ago, so he would not let me see you."

Then I asked about Mr. and Mrs. Lipton and he went on to say, "They wanted to get rid of you after you ran, and they gave up full rights."

My Uncle Jim then said, "The dog's at the vet; I dropped him off before I came here. I was thinking we could keep him."

I felt like this was a fairy tale because things seemed to all be going perfectly.

My grandma said, "You can sleep in the guest bedroom, and I will handle the legal stuff so that you can stay with me."

I went to the guest bedroom and layed down. I felt like I'd found my new home.

Elijah Lang

TMP-Marian Jr. High

7th Grade, 3rd Place

August

“It was the first day of school and the second day of August when it happened. School had just started, and our lives had changed forever. It was the first time I had mourned, the first time I had realized how hard life was. It was probably the hardest thing that had ever happened to me. But it's important we remember these things. Right?” (Samantha’s journal. 8/10/2047)

Sam peddled into the driveway of her house and noticed an unusual amount of cars. She opened the front door and was surprised to see her best friend, August’s mom and dad. “Hi?” She said, confused. They just looked at her sadly. Then Sam’s mom walked in, looking like she had seen a ghost.

Liam looked down at the piece of paper. It was August’s face, she was smiling, wearing her favorite outfit. Liam realized he would never see her again, never see her smile, never hear her laugh.

“I remember the day I was told about August’s death. There was no visit from August’s parents, no teacher telling me after school. I found out when I went to my father’s work. I remember walking into the hospital and seeing my father walking out with a grim expression. I asked him what was wrong, and then he told me. “We couldn’t save her.” She was in a car accident on the way back from vacation. She was almost home too. But unfortunately, the choice of one drunk driver sealed her fate.” (Liam’s Journal. 6/2/2047.)

Time passed slowly, as the man spoke, about August, her accomplishments, her talents, her dreams. But he really didn’t know her, Jessie did, they had been best friends forever, since first grade. Jessie looked up from her lap, she hadn’t even had the courage to look in the direction of the coffin. So, she looked in the audience, she saw Liam next to his parents. She saw Sam in the back row, next to her mom. She saw Taylor, with her older brother. Then Taylor turned to look at her, Taylor’s blue eye’s gazing at her. Do you wanna go outside? Taylor mouthed to her, Jessie nodded and slowly got up, following her.

Liam turned around to see Taylor and Jessie getting out of their seats and walking out the door. He raised his eyebrow and looked for Sam. She was sitting in the back row, watching as Taylor and Jessie left. Then she looked at him and vaguely gestured to the door, should we go too? She mouthed. Liam nodded and turned to his parents. “I’m gonna get some air,” he whispered.

“I can remember the day of August’s funeral like it was yesterday. I remember how I felt that day. Knowing that she was gone and I would never see her again. Grief is a strange feeling, something that no words can ever describe. It was the first time I ever experienced it, and I was only 15 years old. I could barely handle the stress of an upcoming test when I was 15. But that’s life I guess, if it knocks you down, you get right up.” (Taylor’s Journal. 4/18/2029.)

Taylor leaned back on the bench that Jessie and she were sitting on. She closed her eyes and just felt the cool breeze of the wind against her face. She tried not to think of anything that had happened in the last week.

“What are you guys doing?” Liam asked. Taylor opened her eyes, Sam was standing next to Liam. Taylor leaned forward and looked at Liam and Sam.

“We just- Well, I just,” she paused, “I couldn’t be in there anymore.” Liam nodded and looked at Sam, she nodded too. Liam and Sam walked over to the bench, Liam sat down, and Sam leaned against the wall behind them. After a few moments of silence, Jessie started to speak.

“I, I, I can’t believe she’s gone.” They all nodded as a tear dripped down Jessie’s cheek.

Liam sighed and looked at all of them. He got up off the bench, his hands in his pocket. Taylor knew what he was doing, he was always like this. Determined to make things right, he was kinda the leader of their group.

“We should head to the den, none of you look like you can go back in there, I know I can’t.” They all nodded in agreement. Jessie wiped the tears off her cheeks and stood up.

“Okay,” she said, “let’s go.”

The den was a treehouse in the backyard of Liam’s house, it was basically their hangout. It was decorated with bean bags, posters, and a big carpet in the middle. Each of them sat down in their bean bag, green for Taylor, red for Liam, blue for Sam, yellow for Jessie, and purple for August

Jessie stared at the empty beanbag and thought of August and the fact that she would no longer sit there.

“So,” Sam said, as she looked over at Taylor, “what do we do now?” Taylor shrugged.

“I don’t know,” she said.

“Why don’t we talk about August, like memories of her, and stuff,” Liam said. They all nodded.

“That’s a good idea,” Jessie said quietly. Taylor looked away from Sam and smiled.

“Ya, that is.” So they talked, they took turns sharing their memories, the good, the bad, the embarrassing, and the funny. They told stories of sleepovers and times in class. They each shared memories. They felt happy, it was something each one of them haven’t felt in a long time, it felt good. They all knew that August would be proud.

After they were done telling stories Liam had suggested that they go see August, one last time. It was raining when they left the treehouse. So, by the time they got to the cemetery each one of them was soaking wet.

Sam opened the gate to the cemetery, Liam and the rest of them followed her in. After walking across the water-soaked ground they finally came across August's grave. Liam squatted down and read the grave marker. August Johnson: 2007-2022.

Liam turned around to look at his friends, Jessie was on the verge of crying, Sam and Taylor were holding hands, Taylor's head resting on Sam's shoulder. Liam looked back at the tombstone, leaning up against the grave was multiple flowers and in the center of it all was a picture of August

Jessie squatted down and put down a Cornflower. It was August's favorite flower, but it was the only Cornflower by her grave.

Liam followed Jessie as she stood up and looked up at the cloudy sky. Jessie took a few deep breaths "You know," she said, "August always loved a cloudy sky."

"When August died I was devastated. I mean, we all were. But, it took a real toll on me. The week leading up to the funeral was probably the hardest week I've ever had. But, when Liam, Taylor, Sam, and I met up on the day of the funeral, and when we went to The Den, that moment when we all just talked, I felt a sense of relief, I didn't think about the pain of August's death. I thought about her memory, and the short legacy she left behind. And that is what's important when you lose someone. Think about what impact they left on the world, even if it is small." (Jessie 's journal. 10/4/2042.)

Macie Herrman

Hays Middle School

7th Grade, Honorable Mention

Jumping Off Mountains

It would have been better if I could go right away. If I could attach my harness, fix my helmet, pray to God, and jump over the edge, riding down the hill on the long zip line, but I couldn't. I had to wait for my partner to decide if she wanted to go or stay. The instructor had already gotten me set up on the side of the platform opposite of the stairs, and was now talking to her, letting her know it was entirely her choice. Meanwhile, I stood with wobbly knees, watching the trees sway and clouds move in the gorgeous scenery.

My stomach churned, part of me wanting to get off this too high tower as fast as possible, and another part wanting to fly over the woods. Either way, I wanted to jump. All I was waiting for was my partner. It was the hardest thing I've ever done.

If the hike didn't kill me, the whining would. I understand, of course, why she's nervous. However, saying every other second that she's "really scared" or that she "doesn't want to regret it later and should go" gets old real fast.

"Hey, Emmie," I told her at one point on the walk up, "don't overthink it. It'll be fun and safe, more pros than cons."

She only sighed and nodded before saying, "Yeah, you're probably right. Thanks, Savannah. I'm just really scared." Our walk became silent after that, Emmie still nervous but hopefully feeling better. The quiet allowed my mind to wander. I started to imagine wonderful and impossible things. Things that could only happen in fairytales.

What seemed like hours later, we reached our destination. A tall, old, rickety tower loomed in front of us, with a staircase that led up to a platform and the beginning of the zip line.

"Oh, boy," I muttered to myself, my fear of heights kicking in. Beside me, Emmie let out a small whimper. Before I could lose my confidence and head back, I took a deep breath and imagined riding down it, seeing the nature that we had just walked through. My nerves calmed a bit, but not enough to trust the ancient tower, yet.

"Look," Emmie said, pointing to a table to our right, "there's a water cooler." We both went over and got a drink, tired from the steep hike. Water was a good distraction from fear, but we needed to go. The next group was almost to the tower also. We couldn't stall any longer. Emmie and I began to climb the aging stairs, up towards the zip line.

Halfway up, we heard the sound of harness on wire, and looked up to see two of our friends on the way down. "Go, Leah!" I called to one of them.

“Woohoo!” Leah cheered back. I couldn’t help but grin at her excitement. She is the type of person that would rather jump out of an airplane without a parachute than give up her spirit. That’s why she is one of my best friends. Leah can’t live with the boring moments.

Emmie and I watched her ride down with her partner. Once they were over the field below, a bright orange rope was thrown to them, and they were dragged over to two ladders to be let down. “That’s what’s going to happen to us,” I said, still looking down the hill, “*when we go.*” I turned to give Emmie a look that hopefully said, *because you can do it and will do it.* She responded with a small smile and a shrug of her shoulders.

Above us, a voice said, “Next!”

Before Emmie could say anything, I called back, “Headed up!”

When I reached the top of the stairs, I couldn’t help but gawk at the view. In the distance, far away from where I stood, the sun was close to setting, causing the sky to create a palette of alluring, delicate colors. However, the angelic clouds and colors couldn’t keep me from looking down. Fear hit me as I glanced over the edge and apprehended just how high the tower was.

“Hello!” a woman said to us, the owner of the voice earlier. “Are you girls excited?”

“Oh, absolutely,” I replied, still staring at the path underneath us.

Behind me, Emmie admitted, “Not really. I’m still trying to decide if I want to or not.”

“That is perfectly fine. I know, it’s a scary thing to do, but it is entirely your choice and it’s never too late to back down. Can you tell me your names?” the instructor said. Her questions and comments seemed quick and impatient, as if she had been doing this all day, which she probably had. Emmie and I responded nervously with a “Savannah” and an “Emmie”. “Alright girls, how about I get Savannah set up while Emmie chooses what she wants to do. Does that sound good?” We both nodded, too nervous for any more words.

It took about ten minutes after I was ready to go for Emmie to make her choice. She was going. While the instructor lady connected her harness, I could’ve sworn I heard Emmie mutter to herself, “More pros than cons.”

Finally, it was time to jump. I took a deep breath, smelling the trees and inhaling the sky. The sun had moved little, but the clouds had formed new shapes and designs. I tried to memorize the view, to save it for a not-so-good day. It was on three that Emmie and I jumped off the mountain and started to fly.

Dear Reader,

Once upon a time, I climbed a mountain. It was tall and crowded with trees, but I was determined to make it to its summit. I walked with the chattering wind, who was quaking with fear the closer we got to the top. During the hike, I would often turn around to gaze at the setting sun behind me. The bright star would tell me, “You can make it! You’re almost there!” It didn’t take long before the sun’s message rang true, and I was on top of the world. The sky celebrated for me, engulfing the heavens in illustrious colors that could only be created by nature.

The quivering wind had followed me and was now more a storm than gentle air. “It’s alright,” I tried to sooth her. “Just enjoy the beauty. We’re *there.*” The wind listened, but didn’t understand. Didn’t understand that *there* is what I came for, whereas she had come for the ride.

The time came when the wind was ready. I stood at the edge, terrified but eager. I jumped. Once upon a time, I jumped off a mountain.

Savannah Clingan
Hays Middle School
8th Grade, 1st Place

New Beginnings

Today is my first day back to 5th grade in three weeks. These past few weeks have been really hard for me because my mom passed away from cancer. I don’t know how my peers will treat me since I haven’t been to school, but I hope they are nice. I haven’t even seen my best friend Rylan since Mom’s funeral, either, and I’ve barely talked to him. My teacher keeps telling me she’s told my classmates that I have been through something really hard and they need to understand, but I know they don’t care.

As I pack my bag for school, I hear my dad yell, “Alec, you’ve got five minutes before we have to go!” I yell back, “Okay, give me a second.”

I throw my chromebook, notebooks, and textbooks back into my backpack. I grab my bag and throw it across my shoulder as I slowly walk down the stairs. I walk into the kitchen and see burnt toast. I grab a piece off the plate and take a bite.

My dad says, "Sorry, buddy, I know your mom made the best toast."
I roll my eyes. "It's fine," I say as I throw the toast back onto the plate. He wasn't lying when he said Mom's toast was the best.

"Dad?" I asked.
"Yes?" he said, annoyed.
"I'm worried about school; I don't want to go."
"Why not? Your classmates will understand."
"I hope," I say quietly. I look over to the wall and see a family picture of Mom, Dad, and me. I miss Mom a lot.

"You ready?" Dad asks.
"I guess," I say as I roll my eyes.
On the ride to school I was super nervous because I didn't want the kids to bully me, and my dad this morning wasn't much help. As we pulled into the school drop off line, I saw Rylan and he ran over to my car.
"OH MY GOSH! YOU'RE FINALLY BACK!" he yells excitedly.
I say "Yep! But I'm really nervous."
"Why? I'll be here and everyone is excited for you to come back." he says.
"Yeah, but no one will understand," I say quietly. He looks a little upset, but then he motions for me to come with him. I grab my bag and hop out of the car.
"Bye, Alec! Have a good day!" my dad says. I look at him and roll my eyes. I turn back around and look at the school and Rylan. He looks so happy for me to be back.
I look down at the floor and walk toward the front doors, getting sweaty as I get nearer. My head is pounding. I reach for the door and as soon as I open it, I see a huge banner on the ceiling, "WELCOME BACK ALEC! WE'VE MISSED YOU!"

As soon as I see that, my first instinct is to run. I sprint all the way down the hall to the bathroom.
"ALEC! COME BACK!" I hear Principal Evans say. I turn around and see her and Rylan chasing me. As soon as I get to the door, I swing it open, run into the handicap stall, and start to cry. All I want to do is go home.
"Why would they even do that or think I would like that?"

About ten minutes later, I hear a knock on the door and someone come in. I really hope it's not one of the teachers or Rylan.
"Alec?"

It wasn't my teacher or Rylan. I open the stall door slightly and look out; it was my dad. I open the door all the way and walk over to him.
"What are you doing here?" I ask confused.
"Hey, buddy! It's okay," he says as he walks over to me. I rub my eyes and look up at him.
"You want to go home?" he whispered as he squatted down to my level.
"Please," I say quietly.
He stands up and walks over to the door, opens it and motions me to follow. As we get to the front doors, I see two janitors taking down the banner. My dad checks me out for the day. As I walk to the car, I look in the back of the car and I see my dad's research notes spread out all over the back seat.
"I've been struggling with work, too. It's hard without her," he said as he looks down at me.
It occurs to me that I never stopped to think that Dad might be struggling with Mom's passing, too.
As we get into the car, all I can think about is how much I miss my mom. She was my best friend and the only one who understood me.
"You know they meant well with the banner, right?" Dad says.
"No! Why would they even think that?" I yell with anger.
I turn to look out the window. As we turn into our driveway, I grab my bag and open the car door. I run up to my room, crawl in bed, and cry.
About an hour later, I hear a knock on the door.
"You okay?" Dad asks.
"Not really," I reply.
"I know we don't have much in common, but I did play basketball like you when I was in high school." I couldn't believe him. My nerdy dad played a sport?
"Really?" I ask.
"I know it's hard to believe, but I was pretty good," he said while laughing.
As soon as he leaves, I look under my bed.

“FOUND IT!” I say under my breath as I get up and run down the stairs.
“DAD!” I yell excitedly
“Yes? You okay?” he sounds worried.
“I found my basketball!” I say excitedly. “Do you want to play one on one for a little while at the park?”
He looks at me with the biggest smile and says, “DUH!”
I laugh and run out the house. We go over to the park across the street. I start to dribble and he takes the ball and shoots a three pointer. SWISH! My mouth dropped.
“I still got it!” he says, smirking.
“I guess you weren't lying,” I laugh.
We play for about an hour, and Dad ends up beating me.
“That was really fun, even though I lost.”
“I had a lot of fun too!” he says.
“Thanks for being there for me this whole time, even though I have been kind of a jerk,” I say.
“It's okay. I know it's been really hard, but we have to be her for each other,” he says.
“I'll work on that,” I say.
He smiles at me and says, “You have to step up your game if you want to beat me!”
I smile and give him a hug. Then I go upstairs to bed.
My dad comes in and says, “Goodnight. I had fun today.”
“Me too, goodnight.” I say.
I smile and think about all the times I had fun with Mom and Dad. I readjust my bed and pillows and drift off to sleep.

Savannah Waldschmidt
TMP-Marian Jr. High
8th Grade, 2nd Place

Change of Mind

If I asked you what the most irritating sound in the world was, I'm sure we'd have different answers. For me, it's the blaring sound of an alarm clock.
“David,” Mom yelled every morning, “are you up?”
I never replied. I used it as my second alarm, signaling me to get out of bed and ready for school. The first destination was always the pantry - the place of junk food, joy, and happiness.
Stuffing my mouth of white powdered sugar donuts, my mom and I were out the door to school and Mom's job. She didn't enjoy her job much, not because of the people or her income, but because she had to do a lot of traveling. She hated not being around, but I always made sure she knew I understood she was doing it for us.
She was a single mom with an overwhelming job and a stubborn teenager. She did her best, she always had. I'd never met my father, but as a kid I always dreamt of meeting him; that was before I knew. As the years went on, Mom told me the truth about what had happened. It crushed my heart; I experienced a feeling of anger and rage I'd never felt before. My mom and I were all that we had, and for me, food.
School was never fun, I never enjoyed running during PE or learning the core subjects during the long hours. The desks were all too small, the lunches were too little, and the building's hallways felt miles long. I never understood the point of sitting in a classroom for 40 minutes over and over and calling it educational.
Before Mom dropped me off, she asked me to walk to the grocery store and get a few things after school. Not too bad of a task, but there was a small problem, how far I had to walk to the store. I wasn't built for that distance.
Twenty minutes in, I drug my feet across the dirt roads. Behind me, the school was still in sight, but the grocery store was nowhere to be seen. Deep breaths and short breaks were given to myself. Sweat poured down my face and body; I felt miserable. My mind begged me to stop and turn around, and I seriously considered it.
So I did. I sat down on the side of the road breathing heavily, chugging the water I had. I grabbed my phone out of my bookbag along with a shirt I used for PE and wiped the sweat off my face and arms. I called my mom. While I waited for an answer, I layed back in the grass, looked up into the blue sky, and was hit with a sudden

emotion. I hadn't felt that since I found out about my dad. I was filled with anger that turned into sadness. Tears filled my eyes before I even realized what was going through my mind.

...

I heard the wheels rumbling on the road coming straight toward me. Of course I knew it was Mom; I've memorized a lot of normal sounds over my life. I felt the tense emotion between Mom and me. Not a word was said until we pulled into the parking lot of the grocery store.

"Go," Mom said, handing me a twenty dollar bill. "Get what I asked you to get this morning."

I replied, "Yes ma'am."

I felt horrible about not being able to get this stuff by myself in the first place. I felt sick, not physically but mentally. Disappointment, that's what it was. I was disgusted with how that sorry attempt to walk to the store after school went.

On my way to get the things on my list, I passed the snack section. I attempted to walk past it, but I couldn't. I peeked through the aisle, looked it up and down, and walked out empty-handed because my mom was mad at me enough already. I handed the cashier the twenty, he handed me my change, and I headed for the door.

Still, dead silence the whole drive home. It felt too awkward to even say anything to her because I could tell the frustration she had towards me. I understood; she had every reason to be upset with me. I was upset, disappointed, and disgusted with myself.

My mind was overwhelmed with thoughts. Tears filled my eyes for a second time. We finally arrived home. I opened the door, grabbed the groceries, and headed in the house. Once I put everything away, I walked past the pantry, past my bedroom, and past Mom straight to the bathroom. I made eye contact with myself in the mirror.

Realization is key. After a few hours locked in that bathroom, me and myself had a long conversation. It was real, raw. I learned more about myself in those few hours in front of the mirror than I have in a whole week of school. I learned all of the things I was too scared to face before, but the time had come to accept the reality of the situation I'd put myself in.

Change was necessary. The desks were never too small, the lunches were never too little, and the hallways were never miles long. It was me. I'd become so numb to the reality around me. I needed and wanted change. I just had to get past the hardest part, which was getting started. It sounded easy in my head, but until I took the first step, it wasn't reality.

I came up with a game plan and figured out my end goal. Everything centered around dropping the weight. The only problem was all the habits I'd built up over time. Breaking habits is a difficult task; it's a test of how strong you are and how capable you are to say no to the things you know will impede progress.

My mind was made up. I had to be real with myself and admit to the lies that had distracted me all these years. I was so blind to the truth that I had no idea what I had become, and I hated myself for it. I didn't really hate myself, but I hated the decisions I'd made to go this far downhill. The scene was set, the camera was rolling, all that was left was the creation of this movie, my movie.

One mile became two, which eventually became three. My feet throbbed and my mind begged me to stop just like on my walk to the grocery store six months ago. Time passed, and I was headed toward my goal. I felt great and was proud of myself for how far I'd come. Running created multiple new goals during this journey of change, and I'd been working really hard at distance running without stopping. Four miles now, the town was in my view.

"Almost there, David, almost there," I told myself over and over.

As I continued to run, I talked to myself out loud. It helped me stay focused and prevented me from stopping because I knew that once I stopped, it'd be ten times harder to continue. What started out as a struggling, out of breath teenager not able to make the short trek to the grocery store had turned into a determined, motivated teen pushing himself past five miles. All I had to do was keep moving, my eyes set on the goal.

Brayden Gilmore
TMP-Marian Jr. High
8th Grade, 3rd Place

Overcoming Challenges

As I'm running down the court with the ball, I look up to the other side of the court to see Sophia wide open. The score, 62-63 and all we need is one more goal to win in 2.7 seconds. I throw the ball up to Sophia, and she goes up for the lay up. The basket is good, putting us up 64-63 right at the buzzer.

The crowd goes wild as the announcer shouts, "TMP has won the game in just 2 second. They are going to the championship!" Everyone jumps up and down letting their happiness show.

This game might not have been the championship game, but it was exciting knowing we are going to the championship. Ever since I found out I had cancer, I haven't been able to feel the joy I've felt today, knowing I helped lead my team.

The next morning I had another cancer appointment causing my stomach to drop. Even though my cancer hasn't been getting worse, I still get nervous about these appointments.

When my mom and I got to the doctor, Dr. Johnson greeted us, "Good morning, ladies."

My mom and I gave him a friendly smile and watched as he showed us charts of my cancer.

"If you look here, it shows us that your x-rays are getting better, meaning your cancer is getting better."

"So I'm cancer free?" I asked Dr. Johnson eagerly.

"Not quite, Hailey, but you are getting there."

I pulled back my blonde hair and let out a big sigh. What if my cancer never fully heals? My mom placed her hand on my knee knowing I was worried.

"Thank you, Doctor," my mom says while grabbing her purse.

While walking to the car, my mom gives me the sad, droopy look she always gives me after appointments. Even though my cancer is supposedly getting better, I know my mom worries about me, and I don't blame her. On the way home, there was no noise other than the radio and the traffic outside.

"I've been meaning to ask you, Hannah is throwing a party for the team for their big win last night," I told my mom. She usually doesn't let me do things after games because it could affect my health, so I was expecting to have to beg.

"That's fine, honey. Just be careful and call me if you feel sick."

Surprised she said yes, I called Hannah as soon as I got home. After I listened to her go on about the party for a bit, I started to get dizzy. "Hey, Han," I interrupted, "I'm starting to feel a little sick. I'm going to go, but I will see you at the party tonight."

I hung up the phone and got up from my desk to go tell my mom that I'm not feeling well. Before I got out the door, I stopped myself. If I go tell my mom, I may not be able to go to the party. I turned around and laid down on my bed and started to doze off.

Waking up from my nap, it was about 6:00. I hopped out of bed and felt perfectly fine, brushing away the sickness I felt earlier. As I got changed, I got a text from Sophia saying she was here, so I ran out outside shutting the door behind me.

When we got to the party, I got out of the car and the sickness was back. I leaned on the front of the car putting my hand on my head hoping the dizziness would stop.

"Are you okay?" Sophia asked.

I didn't want to ruin the night, so I told her I was fine and made my way inside.

"Hey guys," Hannah greets us, "are you feeling better?"

"Yes, I'm okay," I gave Hannah a gentle smile so I wouldn't worry them.

A few hours passed by. Everything was going amazing until the sick feeling was back. The dizziness caused me to not even be able to stand right, and all of the sudden I fell. Everything went black.

When I woke up I looked around to see that I'm in a hospital room. My mom gets up from her chair and runs over to me.

"How are you feeling, honey?"

Before she gave me the chance to answer, she wrapped her arms around me and gave me a big hug.

"You're awake," Doctor Johnson walked in the room saying. "We have some news for you, it's about your cancer."

I looked at him nervously, "Is my cancer not getting better after all?"

"No, that's not it, your cancer is getting better just like we said, but Hailey," he hesitated a little bit, "the medicine we have been giving you for your cancer is what's killing you."

The room goes silent, my mom trying to be strong for me but letting a few tears slip. I sit on the hospital bed letting no emotion show. I know if I even try to say something, all the tears I'm holding back right now will let go.

"Hailey, with your condition, I'm sorry but you can't play sports anymore," Doctor Johnson lets out.

After a few moments of silence, I look over at him.

"One more game?" I whisper. "Please just let me play in the championship game and I'll be done."

"Hailey, you can't," Doctor Johnson started to say.

"Please," I beg, "all I'm asking for is one more game."

He lets out a big sigh as well as the words he knows he will regret, "All right, one more game and that is all."

Walking out of the hospital I look up at my mom expecting the same look I get from her every time, but instead she grabs me and holds me tight and whispers, "I love you."

"Welcome to the 2021 state championship, we have TMP-M vs Hoxie," the announcer shouts.

Walking onto the court dribbling a ball, I thought to myself, "Alright, this is my last game, I have to play it like no other."

We all run over to our bench after warm ups to hear the coaches game plan, "TMP on three, ONE TWO THREE TMP," we all say.

The crowd is going wild, basket after basket is being made. After the first half, the score was 42-40, Hoxie ahead. We all walk into the locker room, heads hung, upset we weren't up after the first half.

"Don't hang your heads, but we need to pick it up if we want to win," Coach explained.

We walked into the gym with our heads held high and ready to win. Once the second half started, we started off strong. We made baskets we needed to, but so was Hoxie. About 50 seconds left, and it's 73-75, Hoxie up still.

"Time out!" my coach screams. "You guys can win this, but you have to run a play."

He drew up a play and we went back onto the court. With five seconds left, Sophia passes the ball to me for a three, and I throw the winning shot up.

"The shot is good, TMP is state champs!" the announcer yells.

Everyone came over to me, but before I could celebrate, I blacked out. I fell. Hard.

"That is the story of how my last game went before beating cancer," I say to my therapist with a smile of proudness

Addison Watson

TMP-Marian Jr. High

8th Grade, Honorable Mention

Time

Tick. Tock.

Time. A peculiar thing, isn't it?

The Egyptians created the concept of Time before even 1500 B.C. and since then, humans have used it every day of their lives.

1500 B.C. roughly three-thousand, five hundred and eight years ago.

Tick. Tock.

Hipparchus decided that a full day would be twenty-four Hours. He based it on twelve Hours of light that occurs in the day and twelve Hours of darkness that occurs at night.

Tick. Tock.

Thirty-one million, five hundred and thirty-six thousand Seconds.

Five hundred, twenty-five thousand and six hundred Minutes.

Eight thousand and seven hundred, sixty Hours.

Three hundred and sixty-five Days.

That's how many Seconds, Minutes, Hours, and Days occur in a year.

Tick. Tock.

Julius Caesar, created the Julian calendar in 46 B.C. Julius determined that a year would be three hundred and sixty-five Days, with the exception of leap years which takes place every four years, which adds an extra Day to the calendar.

Tick. Tock.

Despite all of this, do we really need Time? What is the sole purpose of Time? After all, it was technically humans who created it, so could humans be able to destroy it?

Time isn't something you can hold though. Yes, you can hold a clock or a watch, but you can't hold Time Itself. So, how does one destroy Time? Would it be destroyed if everyone just stopped using it all at once? Would Time be really be destroyed if everyone collectively stopped using it? I don't think Time could be destroyed if everyone just stopped using it. People would still have a sense of it, humans could simply look at the positioning of the Sun, and have a rough idea of what Time it is.

Simply, no, I don't think you can destroy Time itself. It can be removed, but not permanently eradicated.

Tick. Tock.

The purpose of Time. What is it? Who decided that at eight in the morning was when humans needed to be at school or at work? What was the purpose of that Time choice? Why couldn't it be nine? Ten?

Eight.

Funny number isn't it? Eight is when humans need to be at work or school. Eight Hours is also for how long they are there.

Eight.

The number of building. But also, the number of destruction.

The eighth planet from the Sun is Neptune.

Eight is very abnormal indeed. Eight hundred eighty-eight is the number of Jesus, a truly special number.

Tick. Tock.

Who was it that decided that Time was important? Is it important? Has the very thought that Time might be important, been engrained into humans' brain ever since they were born?

Is Time really a social construct? It was created by humans, so it very well could be. Someone could simply ignore Time all together and live exactly how they want, whenever they want, without worrying about Time being an issue.

Is it logical or an inherently a good idea? No. But at that point will they really care whether if it's illogical or not?

Tick. Tock.

When someone says 'the beginning of Time' are they really referencing to 1500 B.C. without knowing?

Because technically Time was created in 1500 B.C. but before that; who knows?

Most people think that 'the beginning of Time' is the Big Bang or before the dinosaurs, but if someone is talking about history that long ago, I prefer the term '*before the creation of Time.*'

Tick. Tock.

'Before the creation of Time'

The birth of the universe. The Big Bang. Thirteen point eight billion years ago, the universe rapidly expanded.

Oh, there's eight again. Hello, eight.

The first and most important expansion the universe had ever experienced. The creation of Us.

A few billion years later, the creation of Time.

A few billion years later the arguably most important thing was created.

Tick. Tock.

Time Travel.

Is it possible to go back to the beginning of Time? Time Travel has been a thought in humans head for countless of years.

Humans have not yet figured out how to use Time Travel to travel years into the past or future. Will they ever find a way to go back in Time? They say that Time Travel could be a possibility, years into the future.

Or unbeknownst to the general public, Time Travel could already exist, and be possible. The faster you move through space, the slower you move through time.

Time Travel already exists, and it's already possible. The astronauts that live on the International Space Station, they are moving faster than people on Earth. Astronauts in space are aging slower than people on Earth.

It's not a drastic jump in Time, but it's more than humans ever thought was initially possible.

Tick. Tock.

Time. A wonderful thing isn't it?

Tick. Tock.

Keaton Fisher

Ellis High School

9th Grade, 1st Place

Fall the Father

Click, Click, Hiss, "Come on," *Click, Click, Hiss*. "Dame the fire." The sun gleamed on the blades of the sled as he tried to light the oil again. *Click, Click, Hiss* was all that greeted him once more.

Click, Click, Click, Hiss He knew that grumbling and groaning about it was not the true thing to do but the oil just would not light and the cold sun would not last in the icy plains. A cry from the small bundle tucked against and among the pelts of the silver moon hound and its sled. He needed to get this fire going now for his son.

Click, Click, Click, Click, Hiss, not now not as the sun sets and the monster of cold's claws sink deeper, and the freezing wind's whips sting at what little skin is exposed. There was warmth in the black metal of his pauldrons and gorget. But the cold quickly took it in its sunset hunger.

Click, Click, Click, Click, Click, Hiss, he prays to the Ancient Gods that they let him and his son live. He never thought about this when he was younger there was almost no need in his hunt for they had each other to care to the fire. Winter had gone silent not very long ago he knows the hound will keep him warm.

Click, Click, Click, Click, Click, Click, Hiss, there where many ways to make a fire but this far north there was no wood. The Ice Plains are flat and are mostly ice the rest is snow. There is no safe place from the whips of wind. The sled, hound, and his own armor the only protection from it.

Click, Click, Click, Click, Click, Click, Click, Pop. The oil had started its popping the sign he had learned from the elders and cooks was the beginning of the oil burning in to a fire, at last.

Lilian Elstun

Ellis High School

9th Grade, 2nd Place

Why

The media tends to romanticize and downplay pain, especially emotional pain. At first, I always thought that emotional pain really couldn't hurt that much. At least not nearly as much as physical pain. I've broken multiple bones, and the pain doesn't get any better the more you break it. The first bone I broke I was seven-years-old and I thought that was the worst pain imaginable.

I didn't realize how wrong I was until it was too late.

People think that emotional pain is pretty, and it can be ended in just a couple days. Those who think that, are either: the most short-minded people to exist or have simply never experienced loss. Emotional pain, is ugly. It's scary. It feels like you're dying ten-times over. It feels like your heart has been ripped out and forcibly put back into your body.

That is what I was feeling in that exact moment when I walked into my shared room. I walked in, and looked up. My heart immediately was violently ripped apart and tore out of my chest. Only, it wasn't put back. My breathing stopped, and I didn't even have it in me to scream. A strangled sob tore out of my throat and I collapsed to the floor.

My mother heard my sob and walked into the room, until seconds later when she was in the exact same state that I was. I wasn't focused on her though. All I felt was pure unbridled grief. The more I processed the situation though, that grief never subsided, though a new feeling emerged.

Rage.

Hot, scathing rage flared up in my chest. Along with one question; “why?” Why would he do this? Why would he leave me here alone? Why would he leave me to fend off for myself? He promised that he would be with me every step through my childhood. He *promised*. And I trusted him to keep that promise. How could he do this to me? What caused him to do this to me? Why did he think that this was okay?

That’s when the screaming started. A horrific scream with combined rage and grief crawled out of my throat. I punched the floor until my hands hurt, but the screams never ceased. They only stopped when I had no screams left to let out. Raspy, weak, painful sobs were the only thing that remained. A piercing headache stabbed at my brain from the sheer amount of crying and screaming that happened.

I could barely hear my mother calling an ambulance, but we both knew that it was no use.

He was gone, and he wasn’t coming back.

The next few days after my brother’s death went by in a daze. The pain I felt on that day, was still there, but I knew that the brunt of it was hiding. It was hiding from the world because I made it hide from the world. The tremendous amount of grief and anger that I was suppressing was like an inactive volcano that was waiting to erupt. It was only a matter of time.

The more time that went by, whether it was weeks, or months, it never got any easier. Our birthday was here, and I officially passed him in age. I was finally older than him, like I always wished I was. He stayed sixteen while I passed him at seventeen. I spent that day in solitude. I didn’t go to school or even leave the guest bedroom.

I no longer went into my actual bedroom. Mom had to move my stuff into the guest room, while my brother’s stuff was never touched. And it ever will be again.

As even more time went by, the grief made room for the anger. Loss changes you. I got rageful. I got bitter. I was no longer the same kid that was easily excited about a new movie trailer that just dropped.

With the loss of my brother, I lost myself. I became everything my brother didn’t want me to be. He was the nicest person you’d ever meet, and he was always pushing me to be better.

I shut my friends out, my temper shortened, and my grades dropped tremendously. Mom’s worried that I’m going to fail high school. The first time she talked to me about that, I yelled at her.

Later that night, I heard her crying in her room. I should’ve gone in and apologized, but I never did. With the loss of my brother, I was also losing other people around me. I wasn’t the same person that I was a year ago.

Grief is ugly. It’s ruthless. It doesn’t care who you are or what you’ve done. It will grab you by the ankles and drag you under. It suffocates you. It’s never ending. It kills you, from the inside out.

Keaton Fisher

Ellis High School

9th Grade, 3rd Place

August 6

It was the year 1945 when the United States dropped an atomic bomb on Japan, killing millions of people for generations. During the time of the war, I lived in the country side north of Nagasaki, one of the towns that got bombed, I could remember it like it was yesterday.

Running down the stairs, I hurry up and grab an apple and put on my shoes, lacing them up as fast as I can, I run through the house not wanting to be late to school. “MEIIII” my grandma yelled at me from the couch. “Yes, grandma?” “don’t run in the house, never the less with your shoes on!” rubbing the back of my I apologize, before turning around and walking to the door. As soon as I was out of the house I grabbed my bike from the garage, and started pedaling as fast as I can, as it was already 7:58. As I bike to school I think I’m thankful that my parents weren’t there, or I would have got scolded for waking up late. As I bike to school at a moderate pace since I’m already late, I might as well take my time. As I’m peddling I hear something over my head I look up, seeing what look like a rocket, looking at it with curiosity, but continuing to pedal. Moments later the little rocket had traveled over me and was heading towards Nagasaki, not knowing what it was I continued to pedal. After a couple minutes go by a big bomb sound went off, getting scared I turn around and head back to my house pedaling faster than I ever have before. Once I’m in the front of my yard I throw down my bike and run inside, looking for my grandma. Finding her in the front room sobbing as she watched the news, when she sees me she wraps me up in her

arms a little more relieved than before. Not knowing exactly what's going on I ask her "What's going on grandma, before she could answer though the news person said "the United states attacked, dropping a nuclear bomb down on Nagasaki and Hiroshima". Dropping to floor I start to cry thinking of my parents who are at work in the city.

Shaylee Smith

Ellis High School

9th Grade, Honorable Mention

Thoughts

It's a beautiful day out, sunny, flowers blooming, and farmers harvesting. But these days my house is cold. I haven't been upstairs in months, but today I see the sun shining through her room. Her room left exactly the way she left it was calling me. I walked slowly upstairs wondering when my pain would go away. As I get to her room I smile because it reminds me of her smile, but then I remember how she was aching. Tears start to fall and I tell myself to not cry. I lay in her bed hoping I'd get whiff of her, but nothing came. I slid my hand under my head beneath her pillow. My hand touches a notebook with stickers all over it. I pull it out only to realize what I have found.

"This is it. This is my last hurrah and my last letter I'm going to write. I have filled this diary with details of painful thoughts and sometimes happy memories. After a year of therapy and constantly feeling like I'm getting nowhere, I feel I need to decide on my future. As I write this I sit in front of my mirror all alone in my room. "Who are you Faye Greensburg," I say to myself. I say this because I often get asked this question by people who think I should have my entire life mapped out and strategically thought out. I should know who I want to be, but when I ask myself starring at my own reflection I can't help, but want to cry. How should I know who I want to be when my very own friends make me question my self-worth. How should I look at myself when all anyone cares about is self-image these days. I thought things would get better, but they only got worse.

I go to school and everyone stares at me like they want to say something, but are just too afraid. I wish they'd apologize, but what would that do. The damage is already done. Making fun of how someone looks or what they wear changes them. It changed me. I was sixteen when I started hurting myself, at first it hurt, but after the first few times it started to feel good. Watching the blood drip down my wrists onto the floor made me feel sick, but somehow it makes me feel better about it all. It releases the pain I have. I had always hoped that one day I would just be happy with myself and stop caring what others think, but that's easier said than done.

I know the kids at school want me to ask for help. How could I though? They did this to me. How could I let my family know what's going on? I look at my little sister and I pray she never looks at herself the way I view myself. Maybe if my stomach was flatter, if my face wasn't so round, and I didn't have manly legs, maybe then I'd like myself. Starring into the mirror now I wonder what it would be like to have blonde hair or to not have acne. I am just obsessed with rewriting my image. I want to be someone everyone wants and wishes to be around, but at the same time my thoughts tell me I'd be better off not here at all. Maybe I am. Maybe I should leave. I love my family and I know they're trying to help me, but I can't keep going like this.

In all honesty today is the first day I've looked in the mirror in a while. I try to avoid my reflection at all costs. Mirrors show all my imperfections and remind just what everyone thinks of me. "Big Faye," "Fatty Faye," "I like all of you...you're perfect being thick." I am at war with myself and with everyone else. Who will win? I know the answer, but I know it will hurt. So, as I finish this letter I stare at myself saying goodbye to the girl I don't want to be. I don't want to be her anymore."

I started flipping through Faye's diary to find more answers. How could I be so blinded to what she was going through. I am her mother and I didn't notice enough. For the rest of my life I will wish I would have said things differently and done more. I allowed my daughter to think she was alone. I should have told her she was beautiful, that she was smart, that she was inspiring, strong, and had a contagious smile. For the rest of my life I will lay in her bed wishing I had one more day to tell her she was loved.

Natalee North

Ellis High School

9th Grade, Honorable Mention

Insomnia

It was a little strange, the silence. You'd think that living in a big city there'd be lots of background noise. There's not. We moved here a few years ago and I'm still not used to the silence that fills the air in the night. It's almost haunting in that nature. Even my music can't drown out the overwhelming silence that's suffocating me. That's keeping me from sleeping. I told Dad I'd try, but it doesn't seem like sleeping is going to happen anytime soon, and I have an art show tomorrow. The pills are stuffed in the bottom drawer of my dresser. I make sure to read the prescription and take the correct amount so that I don't suffer a hospital trip like last time. I don't think my dad could handle that again. Chucking the pills back dry, I settle into my bed and get ready for a fitful sleep.

Frequently I wonder why the world shuts off at night. Do human's brains just turn off when the sun goes down? Why when it's dark does human kind decide it's time to sleep? This is the time we should be most vigilant, the time we should look for the monsters that can hide in the dark. Night is when we are most vulnerable. I can't afford to take the pills tonight. I have to be ready. Anything can happen at night, under the cloak of darkness. My dad has to sleep, but it's okay. I can stay awake and warn him if something is coming. I have to take a history test tomorrow, but I won't be taking any more tests if I'm seven feet under. I decided not to take the pills tonight. The sleep wasn't worth the nightmares, even if I did get a 91 on that history exam. Tonight will be a night of tossing and turning. I want to sleep tonight. Maybe if I try hard enough it will happen. Sometimes, pretending is almost as satisfying as the real thing. But then again, it doesn't matter in the morning when I look at the hollow eyes staring at me from the mirror.

Sometimes I can fill the silence with the stroke of my pencil or the sweep of my paintbrush. Sometimes inspiration comes at the dead of night. Or maybe in the dead of morning. I can't even remember. The only thing I can see is my drawing. The pictures in my mind become reality, becoming immortalized on the page. A way to never forget. Sometimes I think that I've forgotten your voice, of the feel of you stroking my hair, the praise you doled out without abandon, the day you died, but I will never forget how you looked. The way the ground shook with a tremor only I could feel, or the way the air went stale, or the way your eyes looked at me, for reassurance that I was alive, even though you were bleeding out on the street. An image that will be burned in my brain forever. A brand that I never lose, can never lose. You will live, even if you didn't survive, because I will never let them forget. I just have to finish this stroke, this sweep. Even if I couldn't save you that day, I will save you now.

Breanna Seiler

TMP-Marian High School

9th Grade, Honorable Mention

Unspoken

It all started with a simple word. All I wanted was to help. There I was in my third-grade class watching my best friend, Lily, being pushed to the ground. She did nothing to deserve this, yet it happened day after day and there was nothing I could do about it. Rage filled in my body and the words rushed to the tip of my tongue, held captive by the rules of society. I wanted nothing more than the yell and scream. Instead, I stood there watching, until I couldn't anymore.

In a sudden burst, I cried, "Stop!". The four-letter word was minimal, but enough to make the room fall silent and their eyes turn towards me. Heat rushed to my cheeks and immediate regret pulsed through me. I look towards my teacher for her disapproval.

"Adelyn, to the office. Now.", she scolded. It was then I knew something had to be changed.

Now, here I was, one day till my eighteenth birthday. The single most important day of my life. The leaves crunched underneath my feet and the breeze flew across my face, leaving my hair in a wild tangle. I walked home with my head held high with hope, as I anticipated the words that would soon come. I opened the door and fell into the same routine I went through every day. Set my shoes by the door. Greet my parents with a silent smile to ensure them I had a good day. Give a small chuckle to my older brother, Tyler, as he playfully punched me in the arm.

"Hey, Addy! Dinner will be ready in ten. Do you have any homework tonight?", they questioned, although they never received a response. This was part of the routine, it was comfortable. My head shook and my feet followed the path to my room. As the door shut behind me, I quickly set my bookbag down and hurried over to my

desk. Excitement rushed through me. This was by far my favorite part of the routine. I opened the wooden drawer and there it was. I warily picked up the worn piece of paper and delicately traced my fingertips along the edge, studying the words on my page. I looked over my shoulder at the closed door. I turned around to face myself and locked eyes with the girl in the mirror then checked to door again. I had to be sure. I took a deep breath and tediously began my speech.

“Adelyn, it is time to eat,” my mother interrupted. I stuffed the paper away, put a smile on my face, and greeted the rest of my family. Dinner went as it always did. The aroma of the warm meal overflowed the room. The sound of forks scraping plates intertwined with the small talk of my parents and brother. I made sure to take mental notes of their conversations and the way their lips produced their words. My mind raced with ideas and things I longed to say, none of which escaped my mouth.

“So, Adelyn, you have a big day tomorrow. Are you excited?”, Tyler asked. A smile crept across my face, *more than you know*. He continued to prattle about the importance of the government rules, which stated that children should not speak until the age of 18. The same rules that had trapped me for so long. No one knows when these rules began, I just knew I hated them.

“You know, I think it’s a great idea. The rules I mean. You get the *opportunity* to learn from your peers and mature before you say something you might regret,” he lectured as he stuffed his face with the bland chicken, “I hated it when I was your age, but now it just...makes sense.” I looked down at my plate and rolled my eyes at this idea. *If only he knew*. Once the conversation had subsided, I ran my plate under the water of the sink and returned to my room. I began on the next day’s assignments, leaving my door ajar. I attempted to stay focused, but my mind wandered to other things. My eyes glanced to the paper laying neatly on my desk. I hastily stood up and recited the speech I knew word for word, giving up on focus. I pronounced the words the way I studied my parents and teachers did. Over and over, I repeated the dangerous words. *Tomorrow is the day. The day I get to make a change*. I woke up bubbly with excitement. This is what I had been waiting for. I practically skipped to the kitchen. Like normal, my mother stood brewing her morning coffee and my dad lounged comfortably on the sofa. However, today was different.

“Happy birthday sweetheart!”, my parents sang in unison with a smile plastered to their faces. They awaited the words to spill from my lips, but I saved them, replacing them with a thankful grin. I turned to look at Tyler, awaiting a cheerful birthday wish, but nothing came. Instead came the overbearing knocks on the front door, silencing the excitement in the room. The door flew open with a surprising force. My parents whipped around, and I broke my stare to look at the guests who accompanied the doorway. Confusion swept my body as I discovered standing there were two large men in black suits. They held stern faces. My eyes searched the gentle faces of my parents, and finally Tyler. Nothing. The room remained deadly silent.

“We are here for Mrs. Adelyn Miller,” their cold voices echoed through the room. A gasp escaped my lungs and my hand shakily raised, indicating that was me. The men in one swift movement walked simultaneously and grabbed my arm with a forceful tug. I felt their fingertips digging into my skin. Hot tears ran down my face and fear sent me into a panic. Through the blurred vision of my eyes, I scanned the faces of my family for answers, stopping at the sly look on Tyler’s face.

“I am so sorry Adelyn. I had to do it. I just can’t trust you,” he said as a seemingly fake apology. It wasn’t long before it clicked. *My speech. The door I failed to close. He heard me. The illegal words I let slip out*. A sob broke out and I crumbled to my knees. Even if words could describe the betrayal I felt, they were cut short. The men dug further into my arm and pulled me away. My tears cried for help as my family remained emotionless. The door slammed shut behind me and the world felt dark and cruel. My words remained unspoken.

Hannah Klein

Hays High School

10th Grade, 1st Place

Lunatic

Ba-Ping! A text from my friend. I picked up my phone, and checked it.

>“Hey! Apparently, the moon is gonna look super cool tonight! Can’t wait to see it!”

I went to my news app, and sure enough, a special type of moon was supposed to appear tonight. The Lavender Moon, said to happen once every 200-300 years. *Cool, I’ll check it out*.

Ba-Ping! Another text, this time from an unknown number to me.

>“Do not look at the moon tonight. Trust me.”

I decided not to answer, probably some sort of scammer or something. I texted my friend instead, saying “Yeah we can see it together, should be cool.”

Ba-Ping! *Ba-Ping!* *Ba-Ping!* Three texts. All from the same weird number as before.

>“DO NOT IGNORE ME”

>“SEE? I’M NOT LYING” Attachment – www.lunaticmoon.org

>“LOOK AT THAT WEBSITE”

What a weirdo... I tapped on the link to the website. It took me to a horribly formatted, obviously hastily thrown together site with a few paragraphs of text and 3 images. The images were extremely old paintings depicting crowds of people staring up into a purple-ish night sky. All three of the paintings were made by different 18th century artists. I skimmed through the text, it told a story of a special type of moon known as the “Lunatic Moon” that was lavender in color and caused all to look into it to go into complete lunacy soon thereafter. Those who do look at it are trapped staring for the whole night.

I exited out of the site and texted the weird number back.

>“That’s just some weird folktale, besides the moon tonight is called the Lavender Moon. Not the Lunatic Moon. Leave me alone now.”

I blocked the number.

Ba-Ping! A text from another unknown number.

>“They are one and the same. I’m warning you. Don’t look into the moon.”

I blocked that number too. *Don’t tell me I’m having to deal with a stalker now...*

Ba-Ping! I frantically looked at my phone, relieved when it was a text from my friend.

>“I’ll meet you at Spruce Park in 30 minutes then!”

Ba-Ping! Unknown number...

>“Do not go to Spruce Park.”

I texted back.

>“Stop texting me! I’ll call the police.”

They texted back.

>“I’m helping you. You’ll never even know who I am.”

I blocked the number, and got ready to see my friend.

I arrived at Spruce Park and looked around for her. I was running a little late and the sun had already set, the moon was rising slowly over the horizon. I finally saw her, she waved at me and I ran up to her.

“You got here just in time! Look! There’s the moon!” She turned around, and looked straight at the moon.

And then I noticed something was wrong. Her eyes went wide open as she was staring, her arms limp by her side.

“Anne?” I ran up to her and shook her arm. “Anne! What’s wrong?” I tried to move her head away from the moon. No matter how much I moved her, she just swiveled her head to continue staring at the moon. I shoved her to the ground. She stood up, and just continued staring.

Ba-Ping! Unknown number.

>“I told you.”

I texted back, my panic rising.

>“What’s going on? Who even are you?”

Ba-Ping!

>Just go to main street and look around.

I did as he said and walked over to the nearby main street. Much to my horror, the sidewalks were lined with people all staring at the moon, just like Anne was.

Ba-Ping!

>“I’d seek shelter if I were you.”

I looked up from my phone, freaked out by that message. All the strangers on the sidewalks were now staring at me with the same wild eyes they had on the moon. After a few seconds of standing there in fear, I began running. I could hear a stampede of feet slamming into the ground behind me... I was being *chased*. I finally saw my car parked right outside of Spruce Park. I unlocked it while running, threw open the door, and slammed it shut just as the people reached me.

They were just standing outside of my car. Out of every window I looked out of, they were just standing there, staring with wide eyes.

Ba-Ping! Unknown number.

>”Just reverse out of there, they’ll move out of the way. Go to the warehouse on 22nd Street.

I did as they said. I reversed out of my parking spot, the crowd slowly moving out of the way as I did so. I drove down the street, everyone I passed by, even children and elderly people, they were *all* following me at a slow walking pace. As soon as I get out of the car, they’re sure to chase me down.

I finally got to 22nd street, and saw the old, abandoned warehouse.

Ba-Ping! Unknown number.

>”Just park and sprint to the doors. I’ll open them for you.

Again, I did as they said and parked next to the building, immediately opening the door, and sprinting towards the building. I could hear them chasing me again. The huge sliding doors to the warehouse opened just a crack, and I slipped my way in. They shut behind me.

There was nothing inside the old building besides a man standing in the middle, illuminated by purple light spilling into the warehouse through a massive hole in the roof.

Ba-Ping! Unknown number. I looked at the man standing there, doing nothing, and then looked at my phone

>”Wrong warehouse, too late for me to help you now.”

I looked back up to the man who was now sprinting towards me.

Tridon Mitts

Ellis High School

10th Grade, 2nd Place (tie)

The Hunters

“This is the third one this week,” Cara said plainly as she scanned the warehouse. The culprits had left before the Hunters arrived, but everyone knew who had done it. 83 of the 700 cases of valuable ammunition had been stolen, and all that was left were the tarps that had once covered them. Other than the lack of supply, there was no sign of the gang. “Garrett, you can put away your weapon. I reckon it’s no use now.”

As always, Garrett listened to his commander, and holstered his sidearm. He was a thickly built man, with a heavy Southern accent that alluded to his family lineage of ranching. He had joined the Hunters five years earlier and had quickly become Cara’s friend and go-to deputy. “We need to get back to the station. Standin’ around ain’t gonna get us anywhere.”

Cara was silent for a moment, still processing the loss of expensive bullets. Finally, she agreed. “Let’s head out, then.”

They stepped out into the humid night and climbed into an aging Chevrolet truck. They zipped through empty fields on gravel roads, past solar farms and into the parking lot of a high school. At least, what Was a high school before the bombs hit. They strolled into an office where a short and thin man with glasses was hunched over papers. Garrett spoke first. “Joseph, it’s lookin’ bad out there. At least a ton of our bullets are gone from the warehouse.” Joseph looked up.

“That ain’t good. Any leads?”

“One suspect, maybe,” Cara said.

“Is he in custody?”

“Yes.”

Then, as if on cue, a pair of hunters dragged in a man with long greasy hair and a tacky moustache. He was quietly shoved into a chair. “Stay here,” one of the deputies said. The suspect rolled his eyes.

“Well, go ahead and state your name,” Cara said as she crossed her arms.

“Name’s Tim.”

“Okay, Tim, what’s goin’ on tonight, bud?”

“Nothin’.”

“Right. If it was nothin’, then why’d my guys here find you lurking around the warehouse?”

There was no answer. The suspect appeared suddenly interested in a cracked floor tile.

“Ight, well either you talk or we can send you to work at the HazDump,” Garrett said frankly.

“Fine. I may have helped steal some o’ them cases.”

“Alright, that’s a start,” Joseph said. “Who were your buddies.”

The suspect glanced up, then fixated his eyes back on the floor. “Nobody.”

Cara was not impressed in the slightest. “If it was nobody then why is \$20,000 worth of supplies missin’ from our warehouse, huh?”

The suspect mumbled something about Korea and the Contraband Market.

“What’s that?”

Garrett was almost amused. “Don’t mumble, kid. You’re not infected with Tox Fungus. Speak up.”

“We were gonna sell the stuff on the Korean black market. Happy?”

“Not exactly. Don’t suppose you could just tell me where your pals went, huh?”

“I ain’t tellin’ you squat. Let me loose and I’ll point you to ‘em.”

Joseph laughed. “You really think we’re stupid, don’t ya. You can try everything. Go ahead. Just remember that we’ve seen a few things, boy.”

Garrett suddenly felt his heart rate skyrocket. He collapsed breathing heavily, pulling on his own wiry hair.

“The heck’s up with him?”

The suspect’s question could not have been delivered at a worse time. He realized this as he caught death glares from everyone else in the room. Cara and Joseph helped Garrett into a chair.

“PTSD?”

That was all Joseph said, all he had to say, and he already knew the answer. Garrett was nodding vigorously through tears. Cara had seen these panic attacks many times. She had been told why that Garret’s family had been taken by bandits one night when he was just six. They had beaten and tortured his parents, set fire to their house, and driven off with their victims, all while Garrett lie under the bed. He had escaped through the second floor window and ran through the fields of wheat until he had reached what was once the city of Austin. That was the night he had sworn revenge on the bandits, part of the same gang that had stolen the supplies. Garrett’s panic attack quickly became one of extreme anger.

He strode over to the suspect and firmly placed a beefy hand on his chest. “You listen to me. Your associates are responsible for what’s up with me, so unless you want me to give you a reason to talk, why don’t you just start on your own?”

The sudden outburst proved immensely effective. “Alright, alright, jut chill out, dude.”

The suspect spilled out everything he knew, which admittedly wasn’t much. All he could tell them was that his accomplices had fled through a wheat field, and he only knew their entry point; directly behind the warehouse. With that, Tim was locked up in what was once a janitor’s closet.

“Well, thanks for the panic attack,” Cara said with a smile. Garrett couldn’t help but smile back. They walked out to their truck and sped off, back to the warehouse They pulled around back to where Tim had told them they would find the entrance. A chain link fence with razor wire coiled on top was the only thing that separated them from a vast expanse of red winter wheat. A chain link fence that would have to be cut to make an escape.

“Maybe they had Kevlar gloves,” Garrett suggested. But Cara shook her head; the razor wire would have been deformed, and the coils in front of their eyes looked exceptionally neat. He knew it too but was too caught up in his memories. The old farmhouse, the barn, the cows. The smell of barbeque on the grill...and the sound of the beautiful red door being blown open with breaching slugs, and the screams of his mother and father as they were (strangely) taken into the basement of their own house, never to be seen again.

“I’m sorry, that wasn’t my brightest suggestion ever,” he managed to say. Then it hit him.

“Cara,” he said, “is this farm connected to where I came from?”

“Yeah, why?”

The memories came storming back. He remembered the irrigation pipes under their fields, how they only filled with water when being used. He remembered why the bandits took his parents into his own basement. He remembered his father telling him to never use the emergency irrigation entrance.

“I think we need to go digging,” he said.

Christian Burkholder
Hays High School
10th Grade, 2nd Place (tie)

The Hiders

Today is a Monday. Today is the twenty-second of the month. But most importantly, today is my sixteenth birthday. Birthdays aren't specifically important to me; they are happy yet the same every year. This year, however, was different. I woke up to the smell of fresh bacon and warm, maple-scented pancakes. Breakfast is delicious but I can't seem to think of anything but the letter sitting on the table waiting to be opened. *To Amelia Jones, important mail.*

"What do you think it'll say?" mom questions. "Surely, you will be a seeker, just like the rest of us, and when you get home, we will celebrate extra this year!" I gave a short smile, but I couldn't help but wonder. What *would* the letter read?

"Pack up your bag, we are going to be late!" My brother, Tate, rushed around the corner. He punched me in the arm. "Oh, and happy birthday."

I stuffed the letter in the bag, careful not to let it crumble, and ran out to the car "What if I'm not a hider?" I question trying to conceal the silence in the car. "You will be. Everyone in the family is." Tate says like he didn't even need to think about it.

School seemed even more lifeless than usual today. "Happy Birthday Amelia!" Sarah ran up and hugged me tightly. Sarah was a seeker, like the rest of my family. "Is it in yet? Hider? Seeker?" her eyes begged me to tell her more than I could. I pulled out the letter, still perfectly sealed. "Oh, come on! Don't you want to know?"

I sighed, "I don't know. I'm scared." Amelia's wanted to say something but couldn't form the words.

In history, Matthew was gone. His empty seat brought a weird sense of somber to the room. Mr. Adams began his daily lesson, just as he did every other day. The words became an incomprehensible mummer. My mind raced. The image of the letter laying lifelessly in my bag kept running through my mind.

"Amelia, the answer?" Mr. Adams boomed, interrupting the chaos of my thoughts. "I, uh, I don't know." My face felt hot. "May I use the restroom?"

All eyes turned to me as I left, hot tears filled my eyes threatening to spill over. The hallways felt eerily empty. My shoes clicked against the cold tiles. As soon as I was surrounded by the safety of the bathroom walls, I pulled the letter out of my jacket. *Open it, Amelia.* My hands shook as I tore the paper. Careful to not miss anything, I read each word over and over.

In order to account for an increased population, you should be assigned a hider or a seeker. A seeker's sole job is to find hidiers and eliminate them. Failure to fill the role will result in punishment carried out by the law.

My heart stopped and everything felt heavy. *Amelia Jones, 16, HIDER.* I read it again. And then again. My knees felt weak. It couldn't be.

It wasn't until the bell rang, I realized how much time had passed. I caught my breath and collected myself. *How would anyone know I was a hider? How could they?*

I was greeted by the ringing sound of Sarah's voice. "Hey! How did it go? Did you open it?" I hesitated, "You were right, I had nothing to worry about." I could see the excitement in her eyes. "Of course, I was, aren't you glad that's all over now?" "

"You have no idea," I beamed with forced enthusiasm. Except, I could feel it wasn't over. It was only the beginning.

The rest of the day was a blur. Some greeted me with happy birthdays. Others stared, their eyes begging questions about my letter.

When I walked outside, I was greeted with a lash of cold air and a deep grayness. "Hurry up Mel, I want to go home!" Tate called from the car. Usual. "Seeker, right" he questioned before I even had time to adjust my seatbelt. "Yes". I could only hope he couldn't hear the shakiness in my voice. I hated lying to him. I wanted to tell him everything. How I was a hider. How weird I felt. I wanted to ask him what that meant for our family. But I couldn't, I couldn't let anyone know.

The car ride home felt longer than ever. The silence filled with Tate's rant about his history teacher and how he forgot his lunch and had to eat cold cafeteria food. Oddly enough, I enjoyed this sense of normalness.

When we finally arrived home, I was greeted with the most awful, yet comforting singing ever.

"Happy Birthday Amelia! This one has to be extra special" my dad cheered wrapping his warm arms around me. "You have to tell us all about it, but first, supper!" my mom echoed.

I didn't have to walk to the kitchen to know what she had prepared. The warm aroma of grilled steak and cheesy potatoes fresh out of the oven filled the house. Dinner was normal. Dad complained about work and the ways of hidiers. Mom went on to calm him and change the subject talking about dinner and how nice the weather was. Tate was too busy stuffing every bit of food in his mouth to get a word in.

“Who’s ready for cake?” my mom questioned not looking for an answer. Out of the fridge, she pulled the most beautiful cake I had ever seen. I couldn’t help but wonder how long she had spent making it. Intricate flowers of blue and pink laced the edges of the cake. *Happy 16th Amelia* traced the middle in handwriting I had grown to love.

My thoughts were interrupted. “You know how much your mom and I love you right?” my dad blurted. The timing seemed odd but genuine. I gave a smile back, soaking in the moment.

“Go ahead, take a bite” my mom begged. I couldn’t help but notice everyone was staring at me. The cake was buttery and smooth, yet something tasted off. It was in the moment, filled with happiness and despair, I realized it was too late. I heard the fork clash against the plate. It all made sense. Why I ate my cake alone, the cold stares. The sound of a monotone birthday song became distant. My vision faded into complete darkness. Hiders were hiders, seekers were seekers.

Haley Klein

Hays High School

10th Grade, 3rd Place

The End

When I woke up, I could feel the cold cement floor through my sleeping bag, and my body felt stiff and sore. I looked over to Oscar and saw that he was already leaned up and looking around.

“How did you sleep?” I said gruffly.

“Terrible like usual.” Oscar said in a whiny tone. “Levi, I’m so thirsty can we open up another bottle of water?”

I wanted to say yes because I hated seeing him suffer, but I knew that we only had enough rations for about ten more days.

“I’m sorry, Oscar, but you’re going to have to wait another hour or so,” I said. I could tell by his expression that he was resentful, but he silently agreed and let it go. He knew deep down that I always did what I thought was in his best interest.

“I’m going back to sleep. Wake me up in an hour,” said Oscar. I decided to get some more sleep too since there wasn’t anything else to do. I closed my eyes and took a deep breath, but my body ached, and all my mind could do was race through a trail of worries a mile long. My dreams felt more like nightmares lately. Filled with depopulation conspiracy theories that I’m afraid have come true.

Life hasn’t been the same since the incident. Now day and night, the temperature is freezing, and you can only make faint outlines of your surroundings. None of this ever would have happened if the protocols the government gave us to follow worked.

It’s just been my brother, Oscar, and me for a while now since our parents died in a car accident, or so we assumed. Our parents were both scientists and had been away on a work trip to help the government make important calculations. We weren’t allowed to know the details of where they were because it was top secret. The morning after the accident, my phone rang with an unknown number showing up.

“Hello?” I said.

“Check the spot.” *Click*. Dial tone.

“Mom? Mom!” She was gone, but I knew that was her voice. I felt a wave of relief pass over me because I knew then that our parents were alive. I also knew where “the spot” was. She always put important things in the same place: the loose ceiling tile.

“Oscar, come quick!” I hollered. He rushed into the living room where I was.

“What?” said Oscar. I was already on my way to the tile, and he was right behind me. I pushed it to the side and sitting on top was a note. It had coordinates on it: 38.8792 degrees North and 99.3268 degrees West.

“What is it?” asked Oscar.

“It’s coordinates to somewhere... we can research tomorrow,” I said, “It’s getting late.”

The next morning the government notified people about the incoming meteor. They said that it was going to hit our planet in exactly nine days. That means the meteor would hit on June 16th, 2033. Hearing this made things come together, and I knew my parents were trying to warn us and help protect us.

The government spoke of how they calculated the exact impact point, and they had already begun to build huge bunkers thousands of miles away to put all the people in. They grouped the people together by age and put

them into four different bunkers. The first bunker was 7-17, the second was 18-30, the third was 31-65, and the fourth was 65+. Any of the children that were below six stayed in whichever group their parent was in.

“But why would they separate families?” Oscar said, when hearing the plan. He squinted his eyes, as if he could see right through the plan to the truth. It didn’t make sense to separate families if the purpose of the bunkers were to keep everyone safe and then let them come out after the meteor hits. Our parents instilled an investigative nature in both of us, but Oscar also got the smarts to back it up.

“Levi, come look at this.” Oscar said. I went over to the table and looked at his computer.

“What is it?” I asked.

“It’s the coordinates for the meteor. I just calculated them myself, and it looks like it’s going to hit almost directly on top of the bunker locations!” said Oscar.

“Let me take a look.” I reviewed Oscar’s calculations... even though I wasn’t ever as bright as he, I could make out the equation. “I can’t see anything wrong with it.” Oscar was right.

“But if my calculations are correct, then out of all the geniuses and mathematicians that the government has, they all got them wrong?” said Oscar. I thought for a few seconds on if it was even possible for them to all get it wrong.

“I don’t think that this was a mistake,” I said slowly, not wanting to believe my own words.

“But why would they purposely miscalculate to a location where they are putting everyone in danger?” said Oscar.

“I’m not sure yet.” I said while shaking my head.

“What are we going to do then?” asked Oscar.

Shuttering, as if that was the only way the words would make it out of my mouth, I said, “We’re not going to go near those death traps, Oscar...”

“Go grab Mom’s note,” I said. I researched the location; it was right by my grandfather’s old lake house.

“We need to go there!” I said, “I can feel it.”

The night before the government was set to take us to our bunkers, we left for the lake house. We followed the coordinates until we saw a small circular shaped door poking up from the ground. We looked at each other and both knew what we had found: Mom’s location.

“This is what mom wanted us to find!” Oscar cried. We opened the door and saw the stocked supplies. We both climbed in knowing it would be a few weeks until we saw daylight.

BOOM.

...

“Oscar do you want some water now?”

“Yeah I’m really thirsty—”

He was interrupted by loud bangs on the door. Both startled, we looked at each other and crept towards the door. I cracked it open, and a haze of dust and smoke entered through followed by the muffled sound of my mom’s voice. I flung the door open, and my mom came in wearing a white suit.

“MY BOYS!” Mom said passionately as she grabbed both of us.

“Where’s dad?” asked Oscar.

“We helped find the location of where the meteor would hit and, when we found out what the government was planning on doing, we tried to escape,” Mom said.

She sighed and took a deep breath. We both knew the answer before she said it. “Your father sacrificed himself so I could continue our plan to save you. We tried to stop them, but the government’s plan to depopulate this side of the earth worked. Boys, put on these suits to protect you from the smoke. There’s not time to waste. The real war begins now.”

Ben Zimmerman

Hays High School

10th Grade, Honorable Mention

Dry

The sky was white and faded, engulfed by the gray February weather. Myla briefly wondered just how many days this year would look the same, as this haze of clouds had become the default of the dry Kansas town she lived in. That was one way to describe it, dry. Not only did rain pour from those clouds maybe once in a blue moon, but also the consistency of her everyday life there was, undoubtedly, dry. The place could have been a ghost town, with how little action it saw. Myla's life felt like an old cabinet, riddled with dust and maybe a few paintbrushes. That was what she liked to do, paint. It was a therapeutic outlet, where she could scream about how much or how little she felt, but no one except her could decipher the words. They were written in her own, abstract language.

Sure, she had other interests. They all fell under the same umbrella: unachievable. That word could be used to describe anything that involved creativity. Theater, music, even writing. It was all so competitive. All things that she was great at in her graduating class of about fifty. However, if she were to ever approach these interests in a professional environment, she'd be flattened by a six-foot-tall brick, brandished with that million-dollar word: *AVERAGE*. That was all she would ever be. In every sense of it, that word would be the title to her biography. She could see it then, *Painfully Average: the Untalented Life of Myla Green*.

Untalented. That was another word she loved. Myla's mindset carried the weight of a billion rocks, all dull and gray, just like her. You see, she hadn't been gifted at birth, or blessed by the God she never cared to believe in. In her eyes, everyone that excelled at anything ever had been just that: *gifted*. They were a natural. That wasn't Myla. There was once a time, as a small child when she wasn't good at anything. In fact, there were far more things she was bad at. Learning to read took her longer than anyone in her preschool class, and it wasn't until eighth grade that she finally knew all her times tables. Nothing came naturally. She had to build up from nothing, carefully pasting each brick on top of another. After all, Myla's interests were all things she was decently good at. She always got a good part in the school play, and she never had to worry about her grade on an art project. However, there was a time when she couldn't do any of that.

As a kid, she produced countless videos of her singing every *Disney* song that had ever graced the screen. Those videos haunted her. It was clear she wanted to sing, but couldn't. So, she worked at it for years, and by the time she was sixteen, she was alright enough to sell it to her parents, who couldn't tell the difference between high school theater and Hollywood. However, she knew so many people, even at her school, that just had something she didn't. There was a quality to their voice that was more smooth, inviting. It was natural on them. Myla eventually located the difference between them, and her. They had never been bad at it. Even as a small child, their singing voice came naturally. They were the children that kindergarten teachers beamed at and said, "They're gonna be a star one day." She wasn't a natural. She was superficial.

It was the same situation with her art, as there was once a time when she couldn't even produce a comprehensible image on paper. It was all chicken scratch and messy fingerprints. The difference is, that even at seventeen, she still couldn't draw. Sure, painting was simple as spelling her name, but the drawing which had to take place beforehand never came without major assistance. Even at the level she was at with drawing, it was once underground, with no means for talent in sight. It was all developed with time.

Myla didn't like to think about this, so she brought her attention back to the world around her. The muscles in her legs had tightened since she left school, begging to explode with each step she took. She had never been an athlete, and it was prominent why. Even a short trip up some stairs could leave her throat burning. The only reason she had been walking home from school was due to her losing car privileges the week prior. Perhaps deliberately attempting to harm oneself by speeding into a tree was a behavior that just might scare your parents half to death. So, driving wasn't an option anymore. She wasn't quite sure why she did it, she just had those urges from time to time. They'd come out of nowhere, just beckoning her toward the edge of that undeniably alluring cliff. Maybe it was a test of her faith. At least she won every time, getting a surge of hope at the last second. Those were the few moments she realized she actually wanted to live. They were intoxicating. Maybe that was why she kept doing it. Myla had never gotten access to drugs, so those few seconds when she changed her mind were euphoric. A strong, enticing cure-all.

That change in heart may have left her unscathed, but her poor, elderly Buick was totaled. She wasn't too disappointed, it wasn't like she would be allowed to use it for at least another few months anyway. That twenty-four hours she'd been forced to spend in the hospital weren't too draining. She was just asked a plethora of questions she couldn't really find an answer to.

So, there she was, walking home. Maybe it was a good thing she'd almost died. At least now she could drink in the environment on all sides of her as she walked, trying to give it some overthought meaning. Perhaps she

could flirt with it in some painfully long, over-analyzed essay. One thing she *could* do was heighten her senses, feeling everything around her with just her eyes. It was refreshing.

Even through the rubbery soles of her shoes, she could sense the jagged concrete, sculpting the texture of the sidewalk. She had found herself on a neighborhood street, eerily devoid of people. At least this left her alone to feel the sharp, rocky air grope against her scalp, sending her hair into a frenzy. The wind she'd come so accustomed to had latched onto the snow which flew about the previous evening. Kansas loved to do that, cling to winter for as long as it found possible. The interesting thing about this wind was how it taped to the ground, never rising much higher than a few inches from the road. The snow settled like a ghost, flattening over a cold lake on a humid morning.

Myla wondered how long it had been since she lifted her eyes to the sky, as it had grown significantly darker. The clouds had become smoky in the presence of water. *Water?* Birds danced across the sky as they searched for shelter from the rain.

Rain, huh? Myla thought, as she removed her jacket and held it over her head. Perhaps *dry* wasn't such a great word for that tiny Kansas town after all. Maybe one day it could be prosperous if it's just given the time, learning its own land before submitting to the wintery depression.

Natalie Loftus

TMP-Marian High School

11th Grade, 1st Place

Juveniles

“On August 20th, 2084, vulnerability engulfed the walls of the government building in Xeopoitan, Capitain. Despite vast security, trained to kill, there was a breach. Five individuals worked as a team to orchestrate the attack. This became the first of four invasions taking place over the following year. Officials are unsure if the attacks were random, or meticulously laid out. Hysteria is rising today, August 12th, 2085.”

Revai halts his reading of the newspaper, remembering that the 12th was two days ago. After flattening the paper on the rotting, pinewood table he crosses to the kitchen. The words yank him backward, but never fully settle in: *Tomorrow's the day.*

Sour perspiration and cedar are odors they have become accustomed to in the aged wine parlor Revai and his team burrow in. The softened floorboards shriek at every step Revai takes. The “kitchen” they've scraped together consists of a sunken countertop and a spruce cabinet, holding metal cups and an extensive air supply. As he scoops one of the dented cups, the door flies open.

The coppery metal of the entryway clangs, sending speckles of horse flies into the ceiling. Rain clutters in, slapping the wood. Sure enough, he turns to see Yvae enter, drenched. Her distressed eyes are wide, with yellow-white irises. The curls on her head are almost stark black, reaching past her jaw. She smiles sheepishly.

“I was out looking for Keorg, which *you* had me do, I'll add,” she enters, raising her hands defensively.

Revai's attention returns “Well, any word?”

Cocking her head, she relaxes to a frown. “Nah, looks like he skipped town.” Revai drops his head, knowing why. “Not surprised, you could tell he was unsure about tomorrow. He doesn't wanna die for this.”

Revai's head snaps up, sending his blood bubbling into his neck. “None of you are gonna die, okay?”

There's a chirp from the hall. “Vae?” Ingre pops into sight, eyes strobing between them and the open door. “We have enough mold already, please keep this shut.” Her voice is naturally bossy, but there is gentleness there. She needs to forcefully push her shoulders into the metal to make the door comply. Finally muffling the tearing rain, she sets her eyes upon Yvae. “Keorg?”

“Exactly as you suspected,” Yvae responds, “long gone.”

Ingre pulls herself from the door, gliding towards Yvae. “Well, it's understandable.” She gazes carefully at Revai. “The plan's a stretch. I mean, the outcome's unpredictable.”

“Once someone takes a stand, others tend to follow,” Revai takes a moment, considering her pessimism “Maybe days, months, or even years later, but it's hard for them to contain themselves.”

In the living room, there's a soft rustle. Grotan has woken up. “Ya know,” he stands, filling his short stature, “we always pull through, plus I don't see myself dying too soon.” His persona reminds Revai of being a kid and not really worrying. If he cannot imagine something happening, it won't. Life is that simple.

“Anyway, our mission is in five hours.” Revai is not as confident as he sounds. “You all need rest, and Yvae needs a shower.”

“Just got a free one, man” she chimes in.

They travel rooftops, hiding in the sky, armed with one crossbow each. It seems few remember this weapon. Revai discovered it in what his father left behind. He held onto it after researching the old nation once called the United States.

The government building resembles a fortress, an insidious place to hide. Revai knows just who they are hiding. President Ryzuk had traveled there recently to implement a new bill that would clear the streets of “juveniles” like Revai and his friends. They have nothing but willpower and brains, and Ryzuk hates that.

They’re atop the building next to their destination. The space between them is hollow, just waiting for some idiot to fill it up. Luckily there are four idiots.

Yvae jumps to the nearest windowsill. She’s the first breach, careful not to alert anyone below. She scoots her crossbow beneath the glass. A door opens as someone enters. Without hesitation, she releases, aiming at their neck. She’s deadpan, focused yet terrified.

The group follows her into a closet, lined with documents. They file into the hall with precision, careful of nearby security. Formation is secured as Ingre skirts down the north end of the hallway and hides. Her hands entertain a long, thin knife as a guard appears.

As he approaches Ingre’s hiding place, she silently shoves the weapon into his neck. She takes a moment, appearing ill, and turns to the stairs. In moments, she has disappeared.

Revai, Yvae and Grotan, edge towards the far, southern exit. They eventually reach the slick, marble stairs and ascend silently. Revai scans the tall, ribbed doors as he searches hungrily. Suddenly, there it is. A silver plate atop an intricate door frame. He had seen the words melted onto the plate many times before: *Advancement Office*. Behind that seal is Cearval Ryzuk, their prey.

The lavish satisfaction, however, can’t set in. A sound tickles Revai’s left eardrum – gunshots, clashing sporadically. His heart skips so hard it knocks his brain sideways. Ingre is alone downstairs. She is trapped in a tight mess of bullets, teasing death.

Grotan remains still, while Yvae jumps. Her head flies in every direction, whipping her runty ponytail. Eyes gripping to his, she stares at Revai, numb.

Ingre was left unprepared. Yvae starts for the stairway, expression stiff. Revai grabs her, but she summons the strength and rips away from him. Her eyes are crazy with fear, sclera reddened. Turning away, her voice is stern. “I know what I’m doing.” Her steps stutter as she darts for the staircase.

At a loss, Revai stares back at Grotan, whose expression has softened. “I don’t know what to do” are the only words he can get out. It all flipped upside down before the heat was even on.

“Yeah, that’s understandable,” His hopeful tone is unbelievable. The morning light coming through the widow glints in his eyes. “Look, I’ll keep you covered so you can get in there,” He motions towards the Advancement Office. “And don’t worry, I’ll be fine.”

Revai believes him. As Grotan turns a corner and disappears, he gazes at the door. He can end it all right now. Four steps later, he feels it in his stomach. A bullet. A guard is standing at the end of the hallway. Worries tear through his brain tissue: *What happened?*

More shots zip towards him before he can count the guards. Maybe four? Revai is skilled, dodging before stumbling into a side room. Luckily, it’s empty as he struggles with the window. It eventually pries open.

He dives onto the windowsill, entertaining the thought of splatting onto the concrete. Recognizing the window they used to get in, he takes a chance and jumps down. The pain in his stomach is unbearable, but he doesn’t linger on that. They had come to an agreement long ago: *If the mission fails, just get out. Meet at the parlor*. Therefore, he springs across, back to the office building. After grounding himself on the roof, he breaks North, away from the scene. He can’t breathe until he reaches the parlor’s safety.

Revai sits all day waiting for his friends to stumble back, roughed up with tears in their eyes. These thoughts result in nothing. As the sky stretches black, they never return. He swears the stars are a bit more visible tonight.

Natalie Loftus
TMP-Marian High School
11th Grade, 2nd Place

Ms. Albrecht

The keys under my fingertips ring gracefully as I press them, with the technique of a hundred skilled pianists. Beethoven's 'Moonlight' Sonata, what used to be my favorite piece. The familiarity of healed calluses on my fingertips falsely ache as they move, reinventing the same familiar notes to play. Music has always been a noteworthy part of my life. I was taking piano lessons at only 7 years old, with my first and only tutor, Ms. Albrecht. I remember how excited I would get, watching her hands move across the piano at an alarming, yet gentle rate. Her red hair flowing delicately down her shoulders, moving with each key she'd press. Her hands were long and slender, with the perfect fingers to find each note. She was my favorite person in the world. My childhood idol. Her family asked me to play the piano at her funeral a couple years ago, when I was 16. I played her favorite piece, and I spent years perfecting it, hoping one day to show her, preferably when she was alive and breathing. I took too long to figure out how the piece worked, and I was unfortunately never able to show her in person. I know she was watching me though, even after her untimely death. I remember messing up one or two of the notes while playing at the funeral, due to my vision fogging over with desperate, unforgiving tears. They spilled onto the keys as I played, a cold and harsh reminder of her death. Ms. Albrecht watched me practice for years, she taught me all that I know. And now, as I sit here playing her personal version of Chopin again, I'm missing her. I'm missing my childhood. My life before college, before work, before the losses, big and small, that I've gone through. My mother claimed I was a prodigy, and that I needed to go to school for my music. I tried, however it made my favorite hobby, my life's work, a stressful mess. I lost the passion that I so dearly loved, the excitement I would get every time I would perfect a piece, the electrical feeling when I was able to start studying a new song. I lost all of it. So, I dropped out. My mother was devastated. And, for a very long while, I didn't play the piano. That was the worst time in my life. I felt incomplete, my hands didn't fit around a pencil or a mouse like it did around a book of sheet music. My fingertips felt empty, without a couple calluses or band-aids on them. Today was the first day I restarted the piano. I don't know why I wanted to. It just came to me, the day beforehand fading quietly and out of notice. I remember an hour earlier, I was staring at the piano, trying to conjure up a way to find the last note I left off on. After two long years of not playing, I finally started up again. The excitement rushed down my arms, and out of my fingertips. I feel complete again. Alive, even. A bead of sweat falls off of my forehead as I finish the piece, almost out of breath. I smile as I lift my hands up slightly, before graciously striking the last note. I take my first deep breath, and I start laughing. Tears form in my satisfied eyes, and I continue to laugh, remembering this wonderful, nostalgic feeling. Once I calm down, I whisper to myself, the words quiet but rapturous; "That was dedicated to you, Ms. Albrecht. Thank you – for everything." I go to stand up, before hearing clapping from behind me. My head whips around, the air in my apartment going silent, like it froze in time. The hallway in front of my door is pitch black. I guess I played until the sun set, and I must've forgotten to turn the lights on beforehand. My window gave off just enough of the full moon's light to show me the keys I wanted to play, and that was all I needed. Everything around me is almost dream-like, hazy and cold. As I stare into the darkness, regretting my decision, my hands start to shake. I am desperately aware of the fact that I live alone. I own no pets, I have no roommates. The stranger's footsteps ring quietly onto the wooden floor, as they continue to clap. "W-who's there?" I ask cautiously, my voice quiet and shaky. The clapping stops as the person hiding in the shadows is finally revealed.

"Oh, Amory. You've learned so much. Come with me, my young prodigy." Ms. Albrecht whispers, opening her arms. Her voice is painfully nostalgic and sweet. Her previously red hair is now a soft gray, wrapped loosely in a bun. She starts to hum a song from Swan Lake, and all of a sudden, I am a child again. My hands small and chubby, my clothes untucked and simple. I get up from my piano with haste, almost tripping over my elegantly-padded stool. As we embrace, the song she was humming starts to play around us, almost joining us in our comfort. My vision goes black; however, I don't mind. I am here with Ms. Albrecht. The brief, quiet sound of a heart monitor frightens me for a moment, threatening to pull me back to reality, but I pay no attention. I refuse to leave Ms. Albrecht, as she once left me. The monitor is almost unnoticeable. I hum along with my beloved tutor, my life seeming to flash by with every note. I think I may have achieved everything I could've ever wanted. I hope my mother isn't too upset with me after this. She was the one who wanted me to start piano, the one who introduced me to my tutor, the one who had so many hopes for me. My piano starts playing in tune with my hums, and I smile. I will never forget the hands in which I used to play the piano so gracefully.

I don't pay any attention to the quiet heart monitor it as it flatlines, but to the music that abruptly stops along with it.

Chelsea Herrington
Ellis High School
11th Grade, 3rd Place

A Mother's Devotion

“Good morning Channel 9 Watchers, I’m your host Janet Greeves with a shockingly sad story of how a mother’s love transcends species. Stay tuned for more.”

Lilith leans across the coffee table for the remote, having to brush away garbage from last night’s binge. Rubbing her eyes, she turns the TV up to hear the news and stands to get a glass of water after stretching. Lilith was never one for news broadcasts but some mornings she would get the urge to try and catch up on the world as it continued to move around her, while she stayed motionless in grief. Usually, she just tuned out most of the time, but the introduction for today’s show had her captivated, as did any other article or anecdote relating to mothers.

“Yesterday on 7th Avenue, a taxi driver blinded by the rain was driving as usual. Yet there was one thing he failed to notice on his usual route. A small kitten, lost and frozen in fear, sat in the middle of the street in a downpour and sadly was hit by the taxi. The driver immediately pulled over, noticing something wasn’t right, and realized what happened. The interesting part of the story though, is how the assumed mother cat suddenly appea-

The blaring of Lilith’s phone rang through her empty apartment. Caught off guard, she choked on the pitiful breakfast of slightly charred sausage and burnt eggs and picked up while trying to drink some water to clear her throat.

She coughed a hello into the phone.

“Hey sweetheart, I was calling to check in on you. Are you doing okay? Nothing bugging you at home? I remember you telling me that you had a rowdy neighbor last time you visited,” her father responded.

Taken by surprise, Lilith clears her throat for the umpteenth time to placate her father’s anxiety. She spins a lie, telling her dad that nothing was wrong, and she was doing fine on her own again. She takes an extra moment to really drive the point home so that he wouldn’t try calling again later that night.

“I promise dad, everything’s okay here. No rowdy neighbors, no episodes, nothing like that. I’ll call you again tomorrow, okay? I need to get back to work, I love you.”

With that she hangs up and sighs, head in hands. She returns her attention to the TV again, hoping she didn’t miss too much.

“Multiple people tried moving the mother cat but were not successful. You’d think she wouldn’t want to sit in this storm and would return to the rest of her litter, but it was as if she were glued to the ground! Many of those on the scene describe the mother as distraught and tell us that she was yowling as if being hurt, here check out this clip from a bystander.”

The screen changes to show a poor-quality video, the camera unsteady, but the video didn’t matter. All that did was the heart wrenching cries of a mother who had just lost her baby.

Lilith’s eyes begin to water, her mouth hanging open taking ragged breaths as she tries not to lose her composure. It doesn’t work, and sobs escape her. She falls to the floor in front of the table, grasping her shirt. Keening over, she only sobs harder and harder, as the sound of the cat plays through the room. Her mind is a mess of thoughts as memories are dug up from the boxes she tried to bury them in, never expecting them to flood back at once.

The memory that hurts the most, though, is the sour look on her face as she sat through the funeral. Her mother was in front of her, lying silent in eternal rest, and Lilith felt nothing. There’s not a day that went by afterward where Lilith didn’t think about how she wasn’t grieving her mother. How she loved her mother dearly, but at the end couldn’t even shed a single tear. She hasn’t stopped feeling guilty even when she returned to her apartment in Seattle, leaving behind a family whose pain she seemingly didn’t share.

Up until now, Lilith just wallows in self-hatred and depression for many reasons, with a call from her worried father. She swallows her tears and calms down for a moment, her shirt wrinkled and wet from her wailing. Her mind races through the memories of her mother and just how much she loved her. Years of birthdays, graduations, boyfriends making bad first impressions, all lost the day she died.

Lilith stands wearily, her breathing uneven and her vision blurry from tears. She will love her mother boundlessly, but cannot forgive her for one stupid, stupid reason. Lilith will forever blame herself for it, a simple request for ice cream the reason her mother is gone forever. All she wanted was some chocolate ice cream, it was stupid, stupid, stupid, Lilith thinks to herself. Her mother driving home, smiling and happy thinking about her little girl and how happy she’ll be, caught off guard when a truck swerved into her lane. It was too sudden, too quick. She hit the truck head on and died on impact. At least that’s what the police told her.

Lilith is still too sore from her emotional wounds to understand a mother’s love, a mother’s devotion. Just as her mother went all the way to the store late at night for her, the mother cat in the street wouldn’t move, devoted

to grieving her baby and staying next to it as long as she had to. Lilith's mother would have done anything for her baby to be happy, and she would never, ever blame her.

Sarah Fay
Kansas Academy of Math & Science
12th Grade, 1st Place

Lost Souls

Starting senior year without my best friend was kinda weird. I didn't have the same friend group, I didn't feel comfortable like I usually did. I left my best friend and my best friend left me. Everything is different, I don't sit with anyone at lunch anymore, I don't talk to anyone, just me walking down the halls on my phone or sitting in the bathroom during lunch because I don't want to go in the lunch room and eat with one to talk to. It's all different, Avery isn't here to sit with me and talk to me, and I'm not there to talk to Avery anymore. I texted Avery, wishing for a response that will never come in. I didn't know exactly what I was thinking when I texted her, she's dead its not like she could respond. I wish I could get the response I was hoping for, just to assure me she's still here, just hiding maybe but I didn't get the text, no call, no nothing. She's gone and I have to accept it. She's not coming, she's now just here mentally, not physically. Avery was my light in the dark and life without her just is not the same. I wish I could just see her smile one more time, get one more bug bear hug from her; the ones you get when you know someone loves you; or just to see my best friend one more time. I didn't think losing Avery would ever happen, we were friends since grade school, she was always there for me, losing her never felt like a possibility. But now that possibility is my life, I'm living my worst nightmare. I have never not seen her at least once a day. I don't want to be living this life without my best friend here, but I know I have to do it for her, I have to have my 21st birthday that we planned when we were 12, I have to go skydiving on my 18th birthday in Hawaii, I have to buy my own bus and live in it while traveling the United States. I have all of these things I have to do, with no Avery to do them with. My Avery is gone and there's nothing I can do about it. I want to walk down the New York streets late at night at 23 years old drunk with Avery, I want to buy an apartment with her when were in college, I want to live in the same retirement home with her, I want to do all these things with her, but I can't with no Avery. I sit in my room crying at night scrolling through pictures on my phone, photos of us at the park, or the beach, the lake, amusement parks, you name it we have a picture there. I wish I could relive all of those nights, and get to see Avery again. I wish I could fix the night she died, I wish I could've helped her, I wish I could've stopped the drunk driver. I wish I could've grabbed her out of the car before she got hit. I wish I would've been in that car so that I died instead of her. I wish none of this happened, but it did and now because of a stupid drunk driver, my best friend is gone. Avery and I built up this beautiful friendship, and because of a drunk driver that friendship is gone. Everything was taken from her, now Avery sits lifeless, waiting to be buried 6 feet under, where no one should ever be. I beautiful 17-year-old girl, killed by a drunk driver, lifeless at the scene.

Meghan Zweifel
Ellis High School
12th Grade, 2nd Place

Love Transcends Form

The Moon and Sun are fated lovers. Together for billions of years, living in a perfect balance. They complement each other in both characteristics and appearances. The Sun, bold and bright, loud and energetic, the source of most life on Earth. The Moon, soft and subtle, gentle and calm, the push and pull of the tides. They are made for each other, yet in the Earth's eye, they rarely meet. Only on the rare event of a solar eclipse, do the two embrace, catching up on lost time. The Sun would say,

“How long has it been this time?”

And the Moon would respond,

“Far too long, in my opinion. I wish I could hold you every day.”

They would sit in silence after, soaking up the feeling of comfort, for they know it’s soon to end. With tears in their eyes, they would hold one another, being torn apart once again.

Their story will not always be so consistent. Any which way you think about it, one of them will always be the first to go, and heartbreak ensues. The two celestial bodies in our system who have loved each other since the beginning of time, are not immune to erosion. Erosion is but one of the natural orders of the universe, in that everything has it’s time. It cannot be delayed nor avoided.

The Moon in all her beauty, is a natural satellite of Earth, bound only by invisible strings. She has no set lifespan, unlike the Sun.

As a star, the Sun is bound to die. She is not invincible, nor is her life endless.

These celestials in our breadth will continue this cycle for billions of years, but what is a billion years to something so divine?

The Moon speaks softly to her beloved who lay in her arms. Tears would fall down her cheeks onto the face of the Sun.

“Why must you leave me so soon? If only we had more time. If only we had eternity.”
She would get no response.

In the end of it all, the aftermath of the Sun’s death would result in the destruction of the solar system. The Moon would know the bittersweet release of death, and the surrounding area would become the grave of the longest love story.

Sarah Fay

Kansas Academy of Math & Science

12th Grade, 3rd Place

haysarts
council



112 E. 11th Street. . Hays, Kansas 67601
785-625-7522 . www.haysartscouncil.org