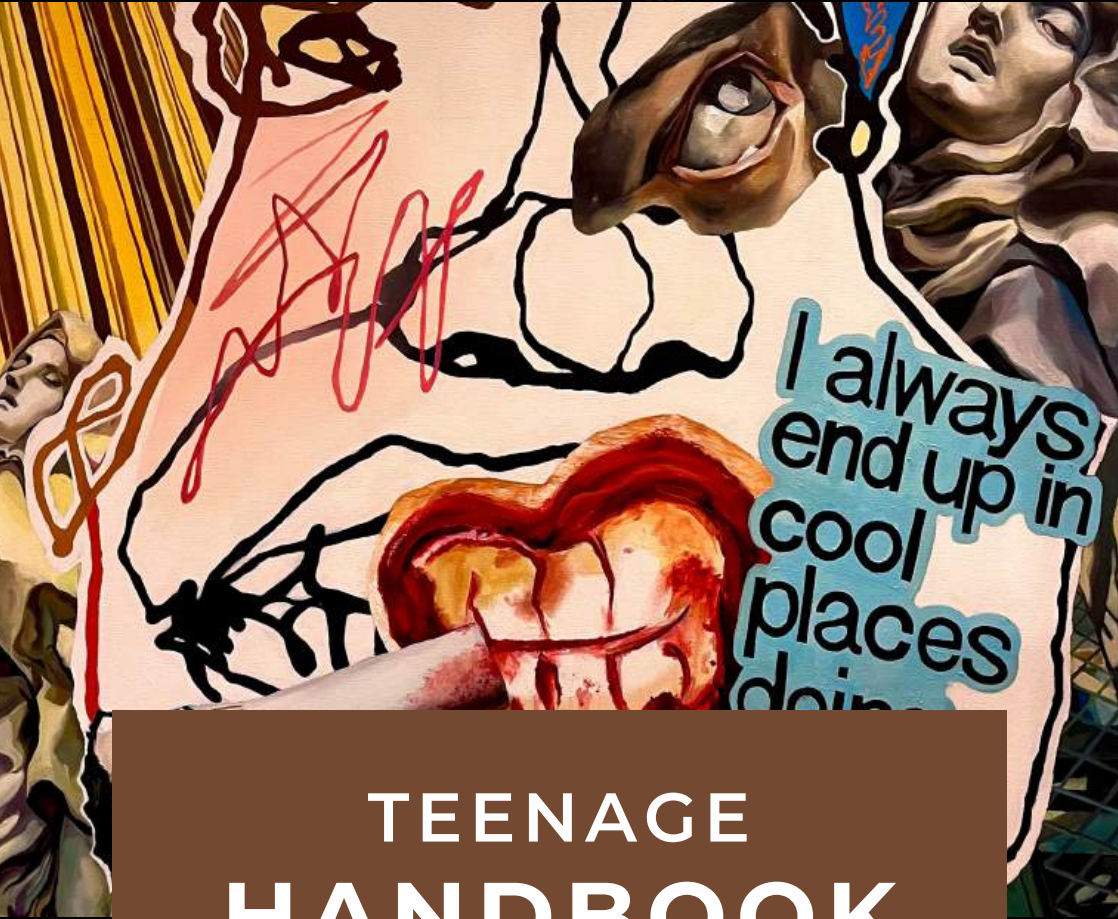


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the teenage handbook

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# TEENAGE HANDBOOK

2024-2025 EDITION

## CONTACT

[www.teenagehandbook.com](http://www.teenagehandbook.com)  
[teenhandbookproject@gmail.com](mailto:teenhandbookproject@gmail.com)



**The Teenage Handbook is advice by teens, for teens, on teen issues. We are proud to present the winning entries from the 2025 Competition by topic, media, and division.**

We noticed entries for the 2025 Competition were noticeably darker and expressed feelings of pressure, uncertainty, inadequacy, and loneliness.

Perhaps this is from the impact of social media allowing easier comparisons, or the higher expectations of being a student in an AI world. The flip side is that entries also talked about teens finding strength internally from within and externally from others. We hope the Teenage Handbook enables teens to find and develop their own strength to help themselves and each other.

# MISSION STATEMENT



**The mission of the Teenage Handbook is to  
use technology to help teenagers  
successfully navigate into a healthy adulthood.**

**The Teenage Handbook Competition encourages teens  
to digitally journal and accumulate a collection of  
creative expressions by teens, for teens, on teen issues.**

Founder  
Jeremy

Head of Marketing to High Schools & Fundraising  
Madeline

Head of Marketing to Middle Schools & Digital Literacy  
Samantha

Student Ambassadors  
Avani, Isabella, Jack, Shining

# BOARD OF ADVISORS



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# TOPIC AWARDS

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## CONTACT

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[teenhandbookproject@gmail.com](mailto:teenhandbookproject@gmail.com)

## IT'S US AGAINST THE WORLD MATTEO S.



**“No matter how you look, love or feel, you should ALWAYS love yourself for who you are. Another interesting thing I learned from my therapist is that in order to love others, you need to love yourself first because how are you going to be able to love them if you can’t even love yourself first.”**

I've experienced prejudice and bullying because of my ethnicity, and I wanted to include that truth in my story, not as a call for pity, but as a reminder that self-acceptance matters more than outside approval. My identity has shaped my perspective, and I want others—especially young people—to feel seen and understood in their own struggles.

Writing this essay helped me reflect on how far I've come and who I've become. More than anything, it's a message to other teenagers: you are not alone. You don't need to hide what hurts or pretend to be strong all the time. Your story matters, and your growth is valid—even if it's slow.

### FULL ARTIST STATEMENT

Matteo's full artist statement can be viewed here:  
[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Rv3WCIIInzcYr6veQMvNNR-KjLkzDM\\_S/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Rv3WCIIInzcYr6veQMvNNR-KjLkzDM_S/view?usp=sharing)

### FULL STORY

Matteo's story can be viewed here:  
[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Rv3WCIIInzcYr6veQMvNNR-KjLkzDM\\_S/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Rv3WCIIInzcYr6veQMvNNR-KjLkzDM_S/view?usp=sharing)

### TOPICS ADDRESSED

- Self-Acceptance
- Challenging Stereotypes

## ROSEBUSH AIDEN T.

PAGE 08



**"For the first time, the gardener embraced wholly and sincerely her, the brunette. The gardener never once more returned to water his ashes, and the brunette needed nothing more than the swimmer and the sans-rose rosebush."**

I wrote this poem to bring light to the nuances of living as a transgender lesbian, particularly in the contexts of love and family. Many people assume transgender people are straight, while there are both more bisexual and queer transgender individuals than straight transgender individuals. I also wanted the poem to serve as a reminder that even if internal conflicts seem endless, life eventually reaches a lull.

I hope this poem can not only raise awareness for those struggling to explore their identity, but also remind us that no matter what our struggle is, we are not alone in struggling.

### FULL ARTIST STATEMENT

Aiden's full artist statement can be viewed here:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1WcKOzsaBIXx1NAskI8sCuOtoISi7VLI7/view?usp=sharing>

### FULL POEM

Aiden's poem can be viewed here:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1WcKOzsaBIXx1NAskI8sCuOtoISi7VLI7/view?usp=sharing>

### TOPICS ADDRESSED

- Gender Identity and Transition
- Internal Conflict
- Healing and Accepting

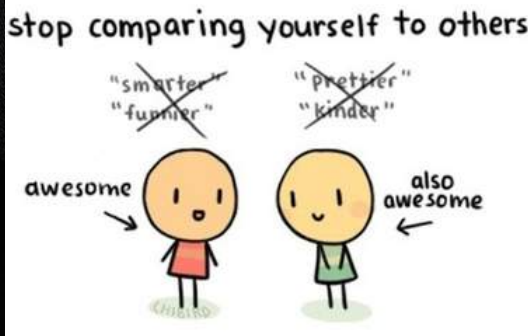


# STOP COMPARING: YOUR BODY IS YOUR OWN JOY SOPHIE J.

## SPORTS AND BODY IMAGE

PAGE 09

**"The only person who could save me was myself. I removed those toxic beauty standards from my life and focused on my own development. Without the thoughts of others flooding my mind, I could flourish, become the beautiful flower I was meant to be without toxic pesticides suffocating me in my growth."**



My piece uncovers the pain and rejection every adolescent feels once they hit puberty. That soul-crushing fear of not being good enough and doing everything in their power to change that. But with each social expectation, those teens fall deeper into the rabbit hole of self-hatred. Every glimpse in the mirror causes them heartache, every social media post they see pushes them further into their mind. Comparison is the thief of joy, they say, but what if there was never any joy to begin with?

### FULL ARTIST STATEMENT

Sophie's full artist statement can be viewed here:  
[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1rVd7FMTm8r4zUCNZ\\_dGmpgoc\\_kYZCsJw-/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1rVd7FMTm8r4zUCNZ_dGmpgoc_kYZCsJw-/view?usp=sharing)

### FULL ESSAY

Sophie's full essay can be viewed here:  
[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1rVd7FMTm8r4zUCNZ\\_dGmpgoc\\_kYZCsJw-/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1rVd7FMTm8r4zUCNZ_dGmpgoc_kYZCsJw-/view?usp=sharing)

### TOPICS ADDRESSED

- Body Positivity
- Self-Love

# A RANDOM GIRL'S JOURNAL ENTRY DARINA P.

## DIGITAL WELLNESS

PAGE 10



**“You know, loneliness itself is a very odd feeling. As if you are sucked into or rather consumed by a void that you created. It is a mixture of anxiety, despair, desire to share the darkest part of your soul, and a droplet of hope. The hope itself feels quite ridiculous and empty.”**

I wrote this piece to help teens who struggle with loneliness and to show that it is okay to feel the pain that comes with it, rather than trying to push it away. The story is written as a letter-like journal entry because I wanted it to feel more real and relatable. It is inspired by an actual friendship break-up I went through and the feeling that hit me after it. Loneliness is a problem that many teens experience, and it hurts a lot; however, it is often overlooked or dismissed.

### FULL ARTIST STATEMENT

Darina's full artist statement can be viewed here:

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/19Dmzp4ruWUj0mWRQm2wbWe\\_gbP3EkMVg/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/19Dmzp4ruWUj0mWRQm2wbWe_gbP3EkMVg/view?usp=sharing).

### FULL STORY

Darina's story can be viewed here:

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/19Dmzp4ruWUj0mWRQm2wbWe\\_gbP3EkMVg/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/19Dmzp4ruWUj0mWRQm2wbWe_gbP3EkMVg/view?usp=sharing).

### TOPICS ADDRESSED

- Friendship and Loss
- Emotional Isolation
- Growth

## THE GIRL IN ROOM THREE OLIVIA J.



**"That night, when the new girl fell asleep, the girl in room three took out her journal. She only wrote a couple words, but she felt comfort. Something she hadn't felt in a long time. The next morning, she finally talked to the new girl. They sat by the window, watching the cars go by. Not talking, only enjoying each other's company. The room didn't feel so empty anymore."**

The core problem I'm addressing in this piece is emotional isolation. Something often overlooked in medical care, especially for younger patients. When you're chronically ill, people focus on your chart, your numbers, your medications. What's harder to measure is the loneliness, the identity loss, and the exhaustion of being "the sick one." My story doesn't solve that with a miracle cure. Instead, the solution is empathy: one child reaching out to another, not with answers, but with presence, art, and imagination.

### FULL ARTIST STATEMENT

Olivia's full artist statement can be viewed here:  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Pa-KDQ7Hkho1M48xDI-dZXakI5khwi96/view?usp=sharing>

### FULL STORY

Olivia's story can be viewed:  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Pa-KDQ7Hkho1M48xDI-dZXakI5khwi96/view?usp=sharing>

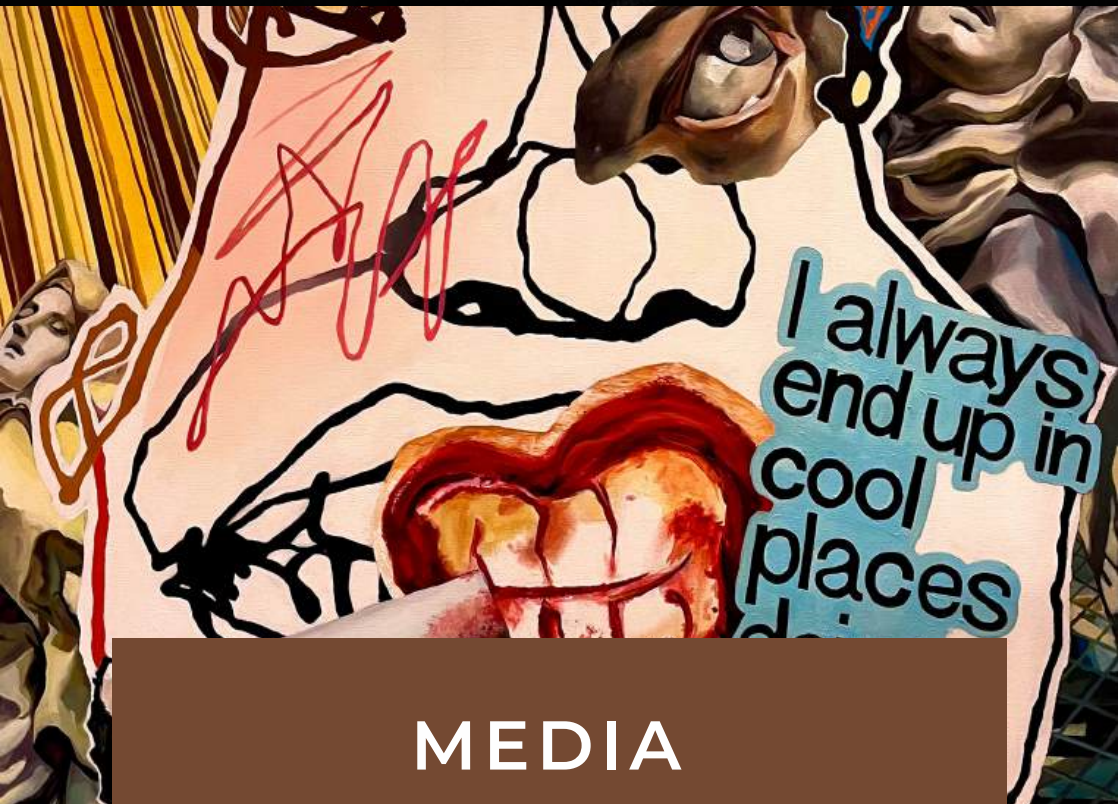
### TOPICS ADDRESSED

- Emotional Isolation
- Human Connection
- Empathy

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# MEDIA AWARDS

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## CONTACT

[www.teenagehandbook.com](http://www.teenagehandbook.com)  
[teenhandbookproject@gmail.com](mailto:teenhandbookproject@gmail.com)

## WHAT ABOUT ME? ISABELLA M.



**"I needed someone, I needed some sort of support. In that moment of helplessness, I had no one to turn to and couldn't ask for help because I knew my brother needed it more. My mental health didn't matter anymore, my brother needed all the help he could get. I was shoved into the background of someone else's pain, and left to pretend like I was fine."**

I wrote this piece because it's important to focus on your mental health, no matter what anyone else in your life is going through. Sometimes, it's okay to be selfish. That doesn't mean ignoring the people you love, but it means remembering that your pain matters too. I spent a long time pushing my emotions aside because my brother was struggling with anorexia, and I didn't think I deserved to feel anything.

No one ever talks about what it's like to be the sibling. You're expected to be strong, understanding, and quiet. But that silence builds, and I wanted to break that silence. The problem I wanted to address is the idea that pain only belongs to the person who's visibly hurting. We often forget about the people quietly holding everything together in the background.

### FULL ARTIST STATEMENT

Isabella's full artist statement can be viewed here:  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1t8lwIjW9gImewT120sOiVuXYcAZNngih/view?usp=sharing>

### FULL STORY

Isabella's story can be viewed here:  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1t8lwIjW9gImewT120sOiVuXYcAZNngih/view?usp=sharing>

### TOPICS ADDRESSED

- Self-Healing
- Family Dynamic
- Mental Health



## COOL GIRL JULIE L.



This oil painting “Cool Girl” explores metaphorical wandering, anxiety, and self-assurance through a variety of collaged paintings surrounding the sketch of myself in the center; yet, they demonstrate my artistic interests and aesthetic choices.

The eye looking upon the “Ecstasy of Saint Teresa” reveals the emotion of distress and my hope and desire for such happiness and joy. By choosing to paint the same sculpture on the background of the left side, it reinforces the crave and aesthetically embraces the painting as a whole. The text in the piece displays my wish to overcome and sedate my lasting anxiety through an affirmation.

### FULL ARTIST STATEMENT

Julie’s full artist statement can be viewed here:  
[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1l21LeJjddGOIR1LAvI\\_ucSUHjZF95lQb/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1l21LeJjddGOIR1LAvI_ucSUHjZF95lQb/view?usp=sharing).

### FULL PAINTING

Julie’s painting can be viewed here:  
[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1l21LeJjddGOIR1LAvI\\_ucSUHjZF95lQb/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1l21LeJjddGOIR1LAvI_ucSUHjZF95lQb/view?usp=sharing).

### TOPICS ADDRESSED

- Self-Assurance
- Anxiety
- Pressure

## THE SPRING INTO ACTION LUCAS L.



When people think of origami, they often picture something small, and simple—a paper crane made in a few minutes, maybe a flower to decorate the front page of a card. I disagree. For me, origami has never been just a pastime. It's a conversation with the paper, a careful negotiation between my brain, vision and the LIMITS OF QUANTUM PHYSICS—maybe a bit too much there.

In the modern world, origami has found its way into places people rarely imagine— NASA uses it to fold massive solar arrays into spacecraft, doctors adapt its geometry to create expandable tubes that inflate human blood vessels. This is why I believe origami isn't just an art form; it's a bridge between creativity and innovation.

### FULL ARTIST STATEMENT

Lucas's full artist statement can be viewed here:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1YQaGjfgn3Gm7KdxzzhImpy30PSpDRGFO/view?usp=sharing>

### ORIGAMI

Lucas's origami can be viewed here:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1YQaGjfgn3Gm7KdxzzhImpy30PSpDRGFO/view?usp=sharing>

### TOPICS ADDRESSED

- Artistic Process
- Creativity
- Self-Expression

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# MIDDLE SCHOOL

2024-2025 EDITION

CONTACT

[teenagehandbook.com](http://teenagehandbook.com)  
[teenhandbookproject@gmail.com](mailto:teenhandbookproject@gmail.com)

# BEAUTIFUL DEEP DOWN ELIZABETH D.

# ART OF PROBLEM SOLVING 1<sup>ST</sup> PLACE

PAGE 17



**"When I make mistakes or act out of line I begin to doubt myself. First I wonder if I was ever right. Then, it becomes a battle between myself, until I have little to no self worth."**

Teens around the world are bullied daily when they need it most. They are bullied for many reasons including, their appearance, actions, race, or religion. I, like many other teens, have felt worthless and insignificant. Sometimes we feel as if we are only as good as the worst others see in us.

The thing that inspired my painting Beautiful Deep Down occurred when I was feeling inferior to the world. I saw those lines on the canvas and poured my soul into it. Reminding myself that we are all beautiful deep down despite our errors. The dolphins and fish in the depths of the ocean are beautiful. Just like us. We are also Beautiful Deep Down.

## FULL ARTIST STATEMENT

Elizabeth's full artist statement can be viewed here:

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1kXKQ2XWaEx3ny89\\_D6vVWdIS\\_o2GTVhR/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1kXKQ2XWaEx3ny89_D6vVWdIS_o2GTVhR/view?usp=sharing).

## FULL PAINTING

Elizabeth's painting can be viewed here:

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1kXKQ2XWaEx3ny89\\_D6vVWdIS\\_o2GTVhR/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1kXKQ2XWaEx3ny89_D6vVWdIS_o2GTVhR/view?usp=sharing).

## TOPICS ADDRESSED

- Self-Acceptance and Love
- Universal Beauty
- Self-Worth



## THE BRAIN RISHIKA C.

PAGE 18



As a teen, I've often felt like my mind is constantly working — thinking, worrying, dreaming, remembering. In my artwork, I visualized the brain as a city under construction — busy, overwhelming, yet full of potential. Each section of the brain is designed like a district, representing different emotional experiences teenagers go through: overthinking, anxiety, friendship struggles, memory overload, and hope for the future.

This piece was inspired by my own feelings of mental exhaustion from school, social pressure, and trying to live up to expectations — both from others and myself.

### FULL ARTIST STATEMENT

Rishika's full artist statement can be viewed here:  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1W5DL3PXRYPK0KCDZgWodPflz2RIb7Q3N/view?usp=sharing>

### FULL DRAWING

Rishika's drawing can be viewed here:  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1W5DL3PXRYPK0KCDZgWodPflz2RIb7Q3N/view?usp=sharing>

### TOPICS ADDRESSED

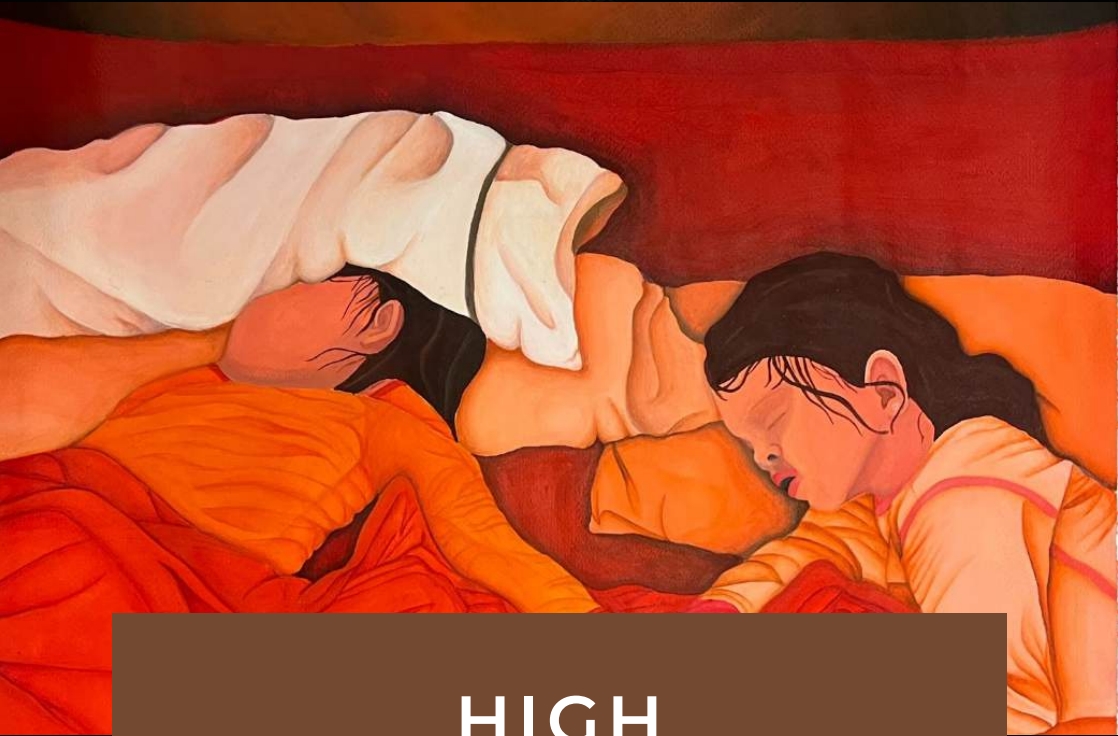
- Mental Health Awareness
- Healing
- Mental Exhaustion



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# HIGH SCHOOL

2024-2025 EDITION

CONTACT

[teenagehandbook.com](https://teenagehandbook.com)  
[teenhandbookproject@gmail.com](mailto:teenhandbookproject@gmail.com)

## UNSEEN LIGHT IN THE SILENT NIGHT SHINING S.

PAGE 20



**"I can't breathe. No, I am breathing, but I am not getting any air. My head is starting to feel empty, and I squat down so I don't fall on my face. The cold lid of my water bottle holds my head up as tears stream down. Why here? Why does this have to happen right here? This is the worst spot. They know how weak I am now. Everyone knows."**

I want people to understand that life can be difficult, and we all have our own problems that can sometimes overwhelm us, But there is always someone supporting you, even if you don't realize at first. When you feel alone, reach out to someone close to you.

We should all appreciate those close to us who care regardless of when we need that care, and help them in turn. This giving, no matter how small of an act, has helped me tremendously in getting through the hardest times of my life, and also preventing something similar from occurring again.

### FULL ARTIST STATEMENT

Shining's full artist statement can be viewed here:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1HXBTokaxrK0v5xgPActCqotutVdwGT9m/view?usp=sharing>

### FULL STORY

Shining's story can be viewed here:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1HXBTokaxrK0v5xgPActCqotutVdwGT9m/view?usp=sharing>

### TOPICS ADDRESSED

- Weight of Stress and Expectations
- Emotional Overload
- Vulnerability
- Self-Worth

# EMOTIONAL REFUGE INÉS A.

FINALIST

PAGE 21



**“To me, this piece speaks of emotional refuge; the kind of comfort that only certain people in our lives can offer us. As a teenager, life often feels overwhelming. There are pressures: academic, social, and personal. This painting is my way of saying: it’s okay to need comfort, It’s okay to miss the simplicity of childhood, and it’s okay to long for moments where you didn’t have to carry so much on your own.”**

## FULL ARTIST STATEMENT

Inés’s full artist statement can be viewed here:  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1qhHuYV5805wRjceLGoTBji5szge-SYdo/view?usp=sharing>.

## FULL PAINTING

Inés’s painting can be viewed here:  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1qhHuYV5805wRjceLGoTBji5szge-SYdo/view?usp=sharing>.

## TOPICS ADDRESSED

- Nostalgia
- Emotional Resilience

# ADAPTING LONELINESS XINRAN Y.



**“It’s about finding the balance, and I believe I can find it.”**

I think growing up made me realize that there are a lot of people in the world (I know, crazy) and if we zoom out to see the earth, I am just a little dot on it, or maybe not even a dot, maybe you can’t even see me if you zoom out a lot.

Another lesson that I’ve learned is that even if they judge me for not being with my friends, I shouldn’t bother. Others’ negative judgements will not benefit me, and I shouldn’t feel bad because of those.

## FULL ARTIST STATEMENT

Xinran’s full artist statement can be viewed here:

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1lfADiYCBUp-scgwZo-\\_qrE1KKNyMhLfu/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1lfADiYCBUp-scgwZo-_qrE1KKNyMhLfu/view?usp=sharing)

## FULL STORY

Xinran’s story can be viewed here:

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1lfADiYCBUp-scgwZo-\\_qrE1KKNyMhLfu/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1lfADiYCBUp-scgwZo-_qrE1KKNyMhLfu/view?usp=sharing)

## TOPICS ADDRESSED

- Emotional Resilience
- Fear of Judgment
- Loneliness

# THE PUPETEER SAMANTHA S.



**"I want to address awareness to those who have anxiety, big or little, and how school and peers can really bring out the worst in people, because even if you have everything you need, you still may not be able to escape the strings of anxiety. "**

When anxiety gets the best of you, you can't stop it, it makes you succumb to this identity you don't want to associate with. This identity is displayed in front of other people who are all watching you, maybe even silently judging you and helping you to become a worse version of yourself. Maybe they're not, maybe it's the anxiety that deteriorates your thoughts, causing you to automatically think they're judging you and causing your view on people to worsen.

## FULL ARTIST STATEMENT

Samantha's full artist statement can be viewed here:

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KY\\_uJpvjVeyVxVSU3tFcclb0i4RvRkdX/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KY_uJpvjVeyVxVSU3tFcclb0i4RvRkdX/view?usp=sharing)

## FULL STORY

Samantha's story can be viewed here:

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KY\\_uJpvjVeyVxVSU3tFcclb0i4RvRkdX/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KY_uJpvjVeyVxVSU3tFcclb0i4RvRkdX/view?usp=sharing)

## TOPICS ADDRESSED

- Anxiety
- Mental Health
- Awareness



# IDEAL TEEN GIA G.

## FINALIST

PAGE 25



**“I wanted to make something bright and cheery at first glance, until you notice that the girl on the cover holds her brain in a pan. It is supposed to visually show the saying ‘my brain is fried’ after overworking yourself. “**

I feel that teens are still seen as kids but with more responsibility, so I feel like there is a kind of common feeling of overwhelming. There is a feel the need to sacrifice our mental health in order to please others or achieve success, which is seen as ideal.

### FULL ARTIST STATEMENT

Gia’s full artist statement can be viewed here:  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1qW292yNU0bX-d3TAiP86bFeTW6Dr5rJZ/view?usp=sharing>

### FULL DRAWING

Gia’s drawing can be viewed here:  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1qW292yNU0bX-d3TAiP86bFeTW6Dr5rJZ/view?usp=sharing>

### TOPICS ADDRESSED

- Mental Health Awareness
- Self-Worth

# ONE'S TRUE SELF KANOKO T.

## FINALIST

PAGE 26



**“The mirror, itself, is a symbol for looking at one's true self. It's something we all do several times a day, sometimes unconsciously but at this age, that moment is amplified. We question ourselves who we are, who we will be, and whether or not we're enough.”**

### FULL ARTIST STATEMENT

Kanoko's full artist statement can be viewed here:  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1EIJMG9yHwKusioLnIICcFe4YSu5rvteD/view?usp=sharing>.

### FULL PAINTING

Kanoko's painting can be viewed here:  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1EIJMG9yHwKusioLnIICcFe4YSu5rvteD/view?usp=sharing>.

### TOPICS ADDRESSED

- Pressure of Expectations
- Emotional Complexity
- Society's Standards

# DIGITAL JOURNALING BENEFITS FOR TEENAGERS

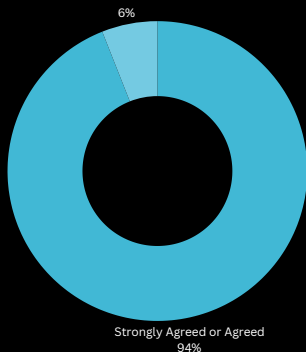
*"Writing this essay helped me reflect on how far I've come and who I've become. More than anything, it's a message to other teenagers: you are not alone. You don't need to hide what hurts or pretend to be strong all the time. Your story matters, and your growth is valid — even if it's slow." - Bucharest, Romania*

*"I didn't sit down with a plan or an outline, I sat down with everything I had buried. I wanted this piece to sound like me, finally saying the thing I've been holding in for years, and hopefully helping someone in the same shoes." - Long Island, New York*

## Insight 1:

Digital journaling was unequivocally beneficial to teens who participated in the Teenage Handbook competition.

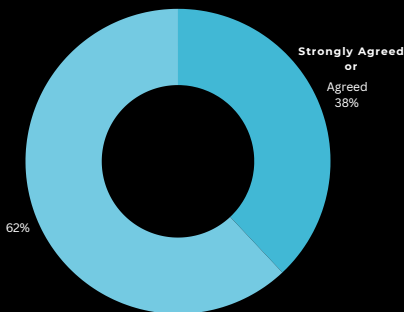
**94% of participants** strongly agreed or agreed with this statement: "I feel better about my issue after working on my creative expression"



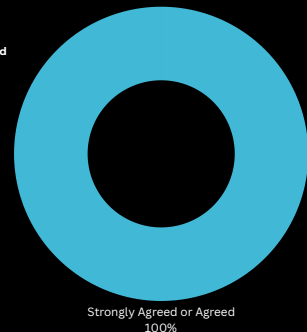
"I feel like this creative process of digital journaling has helped and benefitted me through this specific problem"

## Insight 2:

Interestingly, only **38% of teens** said they would have liked additional resources **before** starting their journaling. But **after** journaling, **100%** said they are now more likely to reach out for help or resources on subsequent issues. Journaling is not only helpful in of itself but also encourages teens to be more willing to reach out for help in the future.



**Before** the Teenage Handbook:  
"I would like like to have seen additional resources about my issue before working on my creative expression."



**After** the Teenage Handbook:  
"I am more likely to reach out for help or look for resources on other issues I face in the future"

# SPECIAL THANKS

our minds  
matter

 **AoPS Academy**  
Art of Problem Solving

**DOPA**  
**MIND**

**ARTS** A REASON  
TO SURVIVE



  
**BOYS & GIRLS CLUB**  
OF CARLSBAD

**Media Arts**  
MEDIA ARTS CENTER SAN DIEGO

  
san diego county office of  
**EDUCATION**  
FUTURE WITHOUT BOUNDARIES

As seen on Lady Gaga's Born This Way Foundation's digital blog

**channel kindness**  
A Project of Born This Way Foundation

Recognized by UNESCO Clubs Worldwide Youth Multimedia for  
Sustainable Development Goal 3: Health and Wellbeing



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the teenage handbook

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