the teenage handbook



TEENAGE HANDBOOK

2026 EDITION

CONTACT

www.teenagehandbook.com
team@teenagehandbook.com



The Teenage Handbook is advice by teens, for teens, on teen issues. We are proud to present the winning entries from the 2026 Competition for Physical Spaces and Digital Wellbeing.

For the 2026 Teenage Handbook competition we asked teens this question: “How do physical spaces make me feel?”

We received entries from Connecticut to California and even international entries from Kenya to Saudi Arabia. Entries were essays, poems, journal entries, posters, videos, videos, art, photographs and even origami. Teens spent on average 15 hours working on their creation and 88% of entries agreed with this statement: “I feel better about my issue after working on my creative expression.”

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.

Lead
Madeline

Head of Communications & Digital Literacy
Samantha

New Student Ambassadors
Emaan, Rishika, Ebenezer, Ishaam, and Jason

BOARD OF ADVISORS



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Nicole Powell

Clinical Research Specialist, Digital Wellness Lab at Boston Children's Hospital



Azahalia Valdez-Rosas

Executive Director, Future Construction Leaders

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Ebenezer V. (3nd Place)
Ella R. (Honorable Mention)
Srisha P. (Honorable Mention)
Emaan H. (Honorable Mention)

DOPAMIND AWARD FOR DIGITAL WELLBEING

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Rishika C. (2nd Place)
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Abigail G. (Honorable Mention)
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Margaret C. (Honorable Mention)

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FCL AWARD FOR PHYSICAL SPACES

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1ST PLACE

TOBIAS THE FANCY
ISHAAN S.



Tobias Brown had lived at 11 Lancer Street for 5 years, and in all that time he had learned exactly one rule about the house: never use the front door when you were in a hurry. This was not superstition. This was physics, in the loose, deeply personal way that physics worked in Lancer Street, which was that every threshold in town had opinions, and the front door of Number 11 had the opinion that people who rushed through doorways needed to be taught a lesson in patience. Lesson was this: if you went through it fast, you came out the other side agonizingly polite. Not for a minute. Not for an hour. For the rest of the day.

ISHAAN'S FULL STORY AND ARTIST STATEMENT CAN BE VIEWED HERE

TOPICS ADDRESSED

- Spaces Evoke Emotions
- Growth Through Adversity
- Positive Perspective Shifts

"My piece is a story about a man named Tobias, set in a fascinating world where doorways themselves possess emotions that deeply influence the feelings and behaviors of the residents around them. Throughout the month I dedicated to researching and reflecting on how different places evoke specific emotions within me, I discovered something intriguing: the moment we approach a doorway, particularly one leading to a significant location, it seems to impart an emotional signal that resonates within us even before we fully comprehend the scenario that awaits."

HEY CAN YOU HEAR ME?
GIA G.

PAGE 08



GIA'S OIL PAINTING AND ARTIST STATEMENT CAN BE VIEWED HERE

TOPICS ADDRESSED

- Self-Acceptance
- Awareness
- The Role of Sound Atmosphere
- Sounds and Surroundings

"Through the window of the booth, there is a calm, purple sky contrasting the noisiness of the yellow color encompassing it. Audiology booths are a place (or rather, object) that I find oddly comforting and nostalgic because its loud silence and generally claustrophobic space has a familiarity that I cannot find anywhere else. It represents a comfort zone that I must force myself out of. When considering the noise that makes up a physical space, it is something we often don't think about when in reality it is just as important as the space itself.

OUTDOORS SHAPING EBENEZER V.

3RD PLACE

PAGE 09



EBENEZER'S FULL SLIDESHOW AND ARTIST STATEMENT CAN BE VIEWED HERE

TOPICS ADDRESSED

- Finding Your Peaceful Environment
- Self-Love
- Positivity

"I am a bold outspoken spoken word artist unafraid to tackle pressing issues like environmentalism social injustice and gender issues My poetry serves as a platform to amplify voices of the marginalized and exposes the flaws in our society while championing for the restoration of humanity"

HOW PHYSICAL SPACES MAKE ME FEEL
ELLA R.

HONORABLE MENTION



ELLA'S LIBRARY AND ARTIST STATEMENT CAN. BE VIEWED HERE

TOPICS ADDRESSED

- Finding A Physical Sanctuary
- Adding To The Community
- Emotional Isolation

"I feel safe in the back corner of a library. I can read in peace, knowing others around me are unlikely to bother me. At home, I am constantly interrupted by someone asking questions or telling me to do my homework when all I want is to escape this world, this reality . . . I can share the same peace I get while reading with others. I chose to build a little library so that others might also share the peace. It is a beautiful light blue, with silver accents and a cedar roof that stands out. It seems like it was a bird house, but made on a larger scale, and instead of birdseed, there are books."

HOW DO PHYSICAL SPACES MAKE ME FEEL
SRISHA P.

HONORABLE MENTION



Every physical space affects us in a different way. Some places make us feel relaxed, while others inspire us to dream bigger and work harder. For me, that special place is my room. It is more than just a place to sleep it is where I learn, reflect, and remind myself of the future I want to create.

SRISHA'S FULL STORY AND ARTIST STATEMENT CAN BE VIEWED HERE

TOPICS ADDRESSED

- How Surroundings Shape Thoughts
- Finding A Physical Sanctuary

"My piece is about how my room makes me feel ambitious. It is where I study, set goals, and think about my future. I wanted to show that even an ordinary space can inspire someone to work hard and grow. This activity helped me realize that our surroundings influence our mindset, and by keeping my room organized and comfortable, I can stay motivated and focused on achieving my dreams."

THE SANCTUARY OF A CLEAN ROOM
EMAAN H.

PAGE 12



Ever since i cleaned up my room and desk, i felt a lot less stressed from how messy my room and desk were, and now i was able to study with out any stress

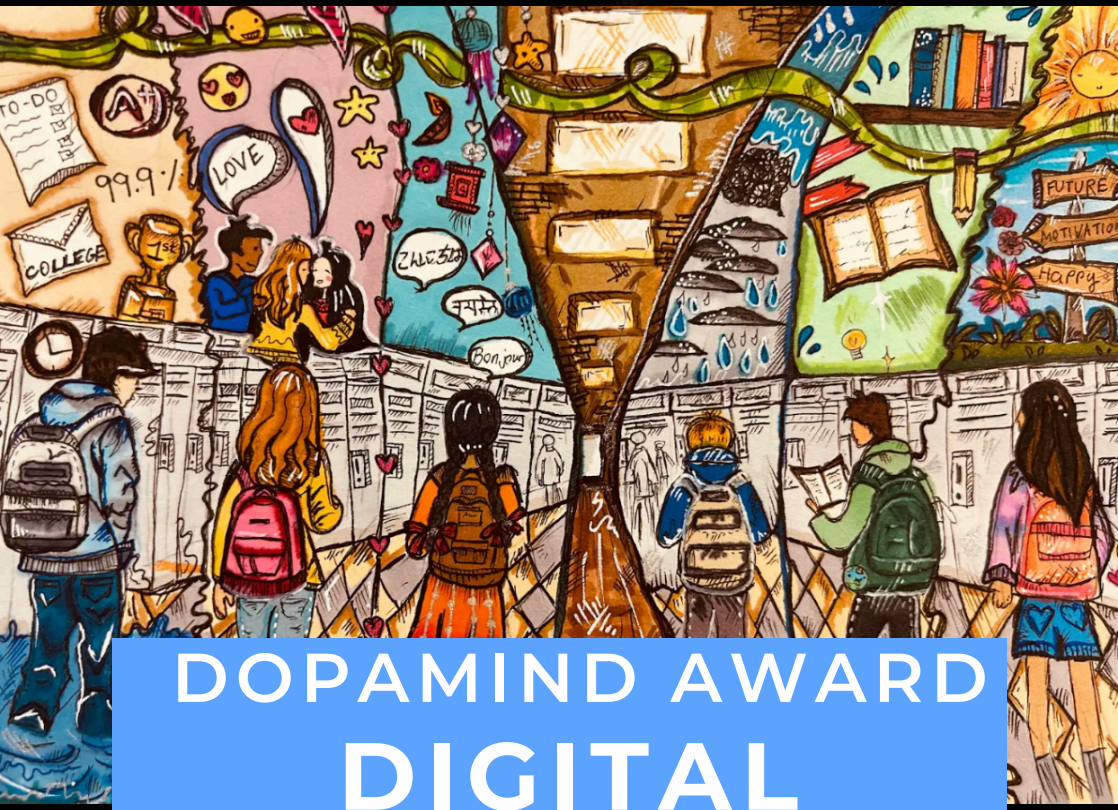
EMAAN'S FULL OBSERVATION LOG AND ARTIST STATEMENT CAN BE VIEWED HERE

TOPICS ADDRESSED

- Journaling
- Change in Environments
- Clearing Environmental Stress

"For my first Act of Purpose, I wanted to explore the silent but powerful relationship between my physical environment and my mental well-being. The problem I chose to address is how easily our personal spaces can become cluttered, and how that physical mess quickly turns into mental exhaustion.
I realized that a chaotic room creates a chaotic mind, making it incredibly difficult to find focus or peace."

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THE GRAVE BLUNDER
JASON B.



"I reflected upon my tens of thousands of chess games grinding online. I realized that my rating mattered to no one but myself. Nobody noticed that I had deleted my account, but many noticed the small things I did to contribute to both my family and community. Rather than ignoring those around me while playing chess, I not only started to spend a significant amount of my time with both my family and distant relatives, but also kept company with seniors who may have felt isolated.

JASON'S FULL STORY AND ARTIST STATEMENT CAN BE VIEWED HERE

TOPICS ADDRESSED

- Environments Mold Thoughts
- Self-Healing
- Family Dynamic
- Digital Health

"Through this piece, I want to address the problems of digital addiction of any form and motivate teens to live in the moment. These thoughts and desires are secondary to what truly counts in life. Rather, physical spaces, like a local park or a cozy living room, should be prioritized to make the best out of the present and the limited time we have. I want teens to understand that they should avoid letting the screens take over their lives, but instead they should spend it on things that matter the most. I hope that the reader can learn from my experiences, and put down TikTok to go out into the world to explore the endless possibilities that physical spaces hold."

THE HALLWAY NEVER CHANGES
RISHIKA C.

2ND PLACE

PAGE 15



RISHIKA'S DRAWING AND ARTIST STATEMENT CAN BE VIEWED HERE

TOPICS ADDRESSED

- Creating Safe spaces
- Unseen Personal Stories
- Finding Positivity

"No one remembers every hallway they have walked through. Yet somehow, almost everyone remembers how it made them feel. When I first read this prompt, I expected to think of a place. Instead, I found myself thinking about people. I realized that the spaces I remember most are not defined by their walls or architecture, but by the emotions, relationships, and experiences that lived inside them. That realization completely changed the way I looked at one of the most ordinary places in my life: my school hallway."

COLORFUL SELF
SAMANTHA S.

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SAMANTHA'S DRAWING AND ARTIST STATEMENT CAN BE VIEWED HERE

TOPICS ADDRESSED

- Self-healing
- Acceptance
- Rejecting Social Approval
- Public Perception

"In a world where people wear clothes that do not show personality and have 'copy and paste' personalities, reject modernity and embrace the weird. Being weird is okay, it shows personality and your own self. Do not let others bring you down because you are being yourself, ignore the "copy and paste" and dare to stick out."

PHYSICAL THERAPY MAIA H.

HONORABLE MENTION



MAIA'S FULL VIDEO AND ARTIST STATEMENT CAN BE VIEWED HERE

TOPICS ADDRESSED

- Discovering Perfect Spaces
- Self-Acceptance
- Finding New Passions
- Identity Exploration

"My piece talked about how running has helped me achieve peace in many aspects of my life, such as how I view myself, my tics, and my relationship with food."

While running, Maia shares how exercise made her feel better: "It was just me versus myself . . . I wasn't comparing myself to other people. It was just me and that was truly so helpful."

HONORABLE MENTION

CRUUUUUNCH.
ABIGAIL G.

PAGE 18



As I knelt to comb fingers through the fluffpuff's golden fur, an invisible blanket settled atop my shoulders. I'd worshipped intellect, success, perfection. But when the twigs were gone, there were leaves. When pneumonia was misdiagnosed, a heightened consciousness of pulmonary embolism was born. When the blood had dried from the shrines, there was gold: I was alive, I was a doctor, and there were more patients for me to treat. There was more sidewalk for me to trek.

ABIGAIL'S FULL STORY AND ARTIST STATEMENT CAN BE VIEWED HERE

TOPICS ADDRESSED

- Mental Exhaustions
- Healing
- Weight of Stress
- Emotional Overload

"In the first semester of tenth grade, I flunked all my finals. I entered winter break feeling like a failure and that all my 2 am study sessions and countless flashcard decks had been for nothing. I channeled that angst into a fictional doctor who feels set back by a misdiagnosis. In the story, he is going on a walk outside, where he encounters a dog who incessantly tries to impress him despite his reluctance to warm up. The dog's perseverance inspires the doctor to look beyond his misdiagnosis and treat it as an opportunity to improve his career down the road."

THE LAST WORKER MARGARET C.

PAGE 19



"My solution is simple: encourage people to pay attention. Photography has the ability to make people stop and notice things they might otherwise overlook."

MARGARET'S PHOTO AND ARTIST STATEMENT CAN BE VIEWED HERE

TOPICS ADDRESSED

- Appreciating Hidden Beauty
- Outside Spaces
- Awareness

"When most people see a bee, they probably don't stop to think about how important it is. I used this photograph to capture a moment that happens every day but often goes unnoticed—a bee collecting pollen from a flowering plant. This image is about more than just nature; it's about a connection between living things and the role pollinators play in keeping ecosystems healthy."

OFFLINE SPACES IMPACT TEEN WELLBEING

"Physical spaces and third places can have a big effect on my wellbeing because the environment around me can influence how I feel. Having places where I can relax, talk with friends, listen to music, study, or just take a break gives me an opportunity to recharge." Escondido, CA

"My solution is simple: encourage people to pay attention. Photography has the ability to make people stop and notice things they might otherwise overlook." Stamford, CT

Teens expressed a remarkable awareness of how attractive and well designed physical spaces affect their wellbeing and emotions. In particular, they naturally understood that third spaces, which are shared common areas, provide opportunities for teens to get off their screens and find offline connection.

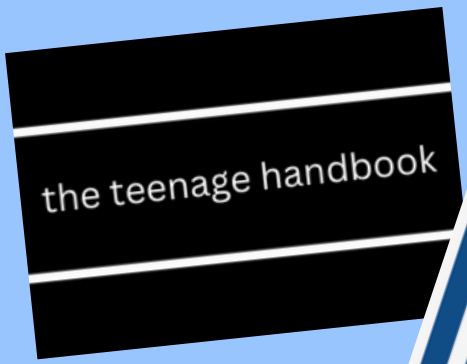
"I discovered that I have control over my immediate surroundings and, by extension, a tool to help manage my mood. My piece ultimately talks about the importance of environmental mindfulness." Saudia Arabia

"What I have noticed is that these online platforms consist of metrics that we often center our own self-confidence around such as yearning for more likes on a post on Instagram. Rather, physical spaces, like a local park or a cozy living room, should be prioritized to make the best out of the present and the limited time we have. I want teens to understand that they should avoid letting the screens take over their lives, but instead they should spend it on things that matter the most." San Francisco, CA

"Third places connect me with communities that share my interests, fostering lasting connections that aid me through difficult times and stay with me for the rest of my life." Riverside, CA

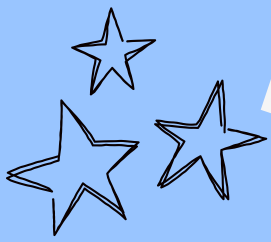
THE TEENAGE HANDBOOK IS THRILLED TO ANNOUNCE AZAHALIA VALDEZ-ROSAS HAS JOINED AS AN ADVISOR

Ms. Azahalia Valdez-Rosas is the Executive Director of Future Construction Leaders, a South Bay native, an executive leader, consultant, and community organizer. She has over 20 years of experience working in education, 7 years in the nonprofit and community leadership field. With an emphasis on helping youth find pathways to career success, Azahalia is passionate about building and expanding on her social capital to better assist those who need the network to grow.





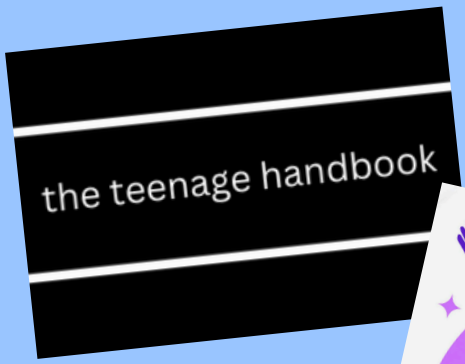


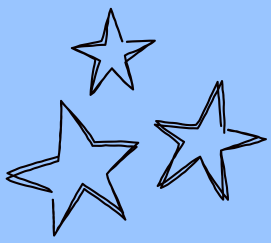


The Future Construction Leaders is dedicated to providing programs focused on educating youth about career opportunities in the construction industry and encouraging them to pursue careers in this field.

THE TEENAGE HANDBOOK IS EXCITED TO ANNOUNCE ITS PARTNERSHIP WITH HUMANITY WONDERS

Humanity Wonders is a teen-centric platform built on the belief that teens are the future of the world & that real change begins within. It follows a powerful “feel good, do good” phenomenon: first fostering inner empowerment through confidence, discipline, clarity, resilience, and fulfillment, and then translating that into outer goodness: kindness, empathy, social impact, community service, and meaningful change-making.









Through books, engaging content, programs, and a supportive community, Humanity Wonders helps teens grow into self-aware individuals who don’t just succeed personally, but also contribute positively to the world around them. It’s not just a platform. It's a movement shaping a better future, led by empowered youth.

SPECIAL THANKS

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

Partial funding from Walmart Spark Good and Costco