

***And We  
Created  
Worlds***

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A LIGHTHOUSE WRITERS WORKSHOP  
YOUNG WRITERS ANTHOLOGY  
VOLUME 13



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## ***Introduction***

After two intense years apart, we can't tell you how good it felt to see our young writers burst through our front doors once again. Despite the continued challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and operating out of a temporary office space, the Young Writers Program served over 2,500 students between our onsite and offsite programming in 2022, a number that instills hope and gratitude in our staff and partners, as we see enrollment and possibility for in-person gatherings rebounding with each new season that unfolds.

This anthology is a collection of the work our young writers produced over the past year, and it may not come as a surprise that this is some of the hardest content I've ever had to read or edit, not because there isn't immense talent here — there is! — but because, as you may find, some of the content is difficult or disturbing. This is why we have included a content warning at the beginning of a piece if it deals with any sensitive or violent subjects, such as bullying, gun safety, death, and suicide. There is no question about it: our kids are going through it. To be frank, I don't know how our young people do it. How they manage to juggle all the things, in addition to navigating the challenges of being a young person on top of surviving a pandemic. Our young writers are wrestling with tough subjects that many adults shy away from, utilizing creative expression as a way to process their emotions and the messiness of growing up in the digital age. Writing proves to be a safe haven and a way to find connection, community, and healing; this is why we've offered programs such as Self-Care for Writers, so that young writers could experience how creative writing can reduce anxiety and come away with tangible coping strategies for the daily stresses of life. We also offered Writing in Color for Teens, a free workshop for teens of color led by local writers of color, and Writing for Hope at the Rose Andom Center, in partnership with their Pathways to Hope program for youth who have survived trauma due to violence.

A key part of this mission of providing a safe haven through writing is remaining committed to leading the way in literary arts for what it can look, sound, and feel like to provide equitable, diverse, inclusive, and accessible creative writing workshops to young writers across Denver and beyond. Now, more than ever, it is important for our young people to have access to high-quality, impactful programming led by instructors with diverse experiences and backgrounds. In 2022, 41% of YWP instructors who led workshops in 2022 identified as BIPOC. 68% of our partner sites served students who are considered at-risk or vulnerable, mostly in underserved or marginalized communities, after-school programs, and Title 1 and alternative schools. With Lighthouse's new building on York Street, we are building a future and a physical space for our young writers to be their most creative, authentic selves.

Despite the darkness, we see glimmers of truth and light in this anthology. We see writers finding balance where there is unease and uncertainty. We see rainbows that come with the rain. We see one hand closed, while the other is open. We see rebellion, restlessness, and perseverance in the midst of daily injustices and microaggressions. As Michael Chang, one of our young writers from this past high school summer intensive, says, "Hope is the one thing that can get us through the darkest of times." Our young people have something to say. I'm so grateful for their words that will get us through the darkest of times. Our young writers continue to teach us about the world we live in and how to move forward together.

—Marianne Manzler, Director of Youth & Community Programs





**Michael Chang**

AGE 13 | ST. MARK'S SCHOOL OF TEXAS

### ***Hope***

I paused and glanced at the harsh wilderness around me. Tiny ice crystals drifted in the air weightlessly, slowly blending in with the thousands of others that had already fallen. It was sometime in winter, stranded in the depths of the Rocky Mountains. I could hardly remember the days since this arduous journey began. So much time had passed trudging through ice and snow. It almost seemed to stand still.

Though still unprecedented, the destructive tempest that caught us so off guard was almost clearly foreseeable. Now, I nearly scoff at our unknowingness. Our unfettered usage of resources was deplorable. The inky clouds looming over the mountains. The first few chilling gusts of wind. All the foretaste of what was to come. But whenever I turn to curse our clumsiness, the images of all of my companions flash into my brain. Our leader's final, heaving sigh before dying. My best friend's last whisper. Those gory memories always seemed to flood my head.

I later convinced myself that lamenting over the deaths of my partners was going to change anything. Just like I did now. Taking a deep breath, I grasped my hiking pole and continued trekking through the thick snow. Where was I to go? There was nothing remotely close to civilization up here. I had lost everything. My compass, map, food; there was nowhere to go other than ahead.

After aimlessly walking for several hours, I stopped and felt my hands. Nothing. I gave a sharp pinch. No register of any pain. A telltale sign of the beginnings of hypothermia. My throat was barely able to croak out a single syllable. I needed fire. I dug my hands into my pockets, in search of the few resources I had. Dry, dead sticks and several rocks. Gritting my teeth, I slowly began to strike the two stones together in an effort to produce sparks. The few minutes I spent rubbing the two rocks together felt interminable. My brain was beginning to feel disoriented, and I started to flash in and out of consciousness. My entire body, all in agonizing pain. Once the sticks caught fire, I

thrust my hands above the fire, and constantly oversaw the fire's condition. Feeling slowly returned to my hands. The tingling sensation in my fingers was almost relieving. Afterwards, I crammed my hands with snow and eagerly lapped at the freezing water.

I extinguished the fire, and mournfully stared at the wispy tails of smoke drifting into the air. It would be my last fire. My last opportunity to revitalize the few ounces of hope I had. I retrieved the two rocks and placed them into my pockets, and wandered forward once again. There was a road somewhere near where I was. I had seen it in the maps I had studied. North of the trail, there was a highway, leading deeper into the Rocky Mountains. Perhaps staying where I had originally been stranded would have been prudent, but there was no use in dwelling on that now. I needed to head north. The weather was far from clear, but survival training has taught me to look for evergreen trees. There in the middle of the forest, a clear divide emerged. Two walls of trees directly adjacent to one another. Barren deciduous trees to the left, and lush evergreens to the right. It was likely a foolish chase: an unachievable goal. But randomly charging into the trees had gotten me nowhere. Reluctantly, I turned right and proceeded to weave through the evergreens.

An hour passed without discovering anything. Then two hours. Every second, my hopes of finding the road were dwindling. I was fully convinced I had made a wrong turn. With my head full of contemptuous thoughts, I failed to pay attention to my surroundings. I took a step—and promptly fell face-first into the bitterly cold snow. My foot was lodged between two rocks. I cursed under my breath. Death seemed imminent. I gave my foot an experimental tug. Nothing happened. It was as if the two stones were slowly trying to constrict my foot. I tried everything to free myself, all to no avail. I started laughing. My situation was so dire; out of all the reactions to choose, why would I laugh?

After all of my perseverance, all of my thinking, I was going to die in the most humiliating way possible. My emotions were in a combination of fear, sorrow, and mortification. My stupidity and ignorance had landed me into this situation. If only I had paid more attention to the survival training. If only I had studied more about the trip. If only I had gathered more fire-building materials. All of my misfortune

seemed to culminate in this one singular moment. I was going to die. The harsh reality sunk in. I could not do anything. The sad, eerie hoot of an owl seemed to be a premonition of my death.

The owl called again, this time louder. It grew louder and louder, before dimming to a low purr. But there was a mechanical tone to the owl. I rapidly stood up. Could it be? The roar of a car. I had to be hallucinating. But it was real. Ahead of me, I saw the headlights of a car. For the first time since the beginning of my ordeal, I felt something I hadn't before. Hope. Hope that I was going to make it out of the mountains alive. I collapsed onto my knees. I felt my bones weakening, but I did not care anymore. My eyelids slowly closed, but I fell asleep with a sense of relief I had never experienced before.

Hope is the one thing that can get us through the darkest of times.

## Isabella Armsworth

AGE 11

### **Look Up**

An apple, I was scared of an apple, it was terrifying when I looked up just for a rotten, old, moldy apple. I didn't want to eat it, but I wanted the trip to the market to be worth it. When everyone won't leave home, the markets are empty, you don't have to pay for food, but it was all moldy. What a sad day.

When I was five years old there were rumors of a horrible beast wandering around the forbidden woods killing people. It was said to be hideous and red, with traits like Medusa. Then on my seventh birthday, the monster came to town, and was almost exactly Medusa.

Some people died when she came into town by accident. Some people were not able to live with their heads down. And some live with their heads down. Medusa's still here, she attacks one house each night. If she continued with the pattern, I would be next. My mother was caught in the first attack, my father too scared to live, and my sister was staying with a friend, the friend's house was attacked.

I am but a 17th birthday year old. I am but a transgender (mainly girl) lesbian. I am but an African American kid who has been through much more than anyone deserves.

In my world people are mistreated, people like me. I'm not willing to bow down to their injustice.

Medusa's coming, it's 8:00 in 5...4...3...2...1...0...

I have my head down. The apple from the market clutched in my hand. I hear hissing.

I hear the cries of injustice, I am not going to look up to not live in the dark, I am going to look up for my mistreated fellows. Look up. That's how you win. Step into the light that will kill you, instead of living in the dark.

I look up.

For one moment I see red eyes.

For one moment I am lost in confusion.



For one moment I see a girl half treacherous and half lovely. I see  
Curses spiraling around her.  
I am alive, she vanished. I am in a clearing in the woods. A scroll  
is gripped tightly in my hand.

It reads:

The final verse  
The humans worse  
The combined curse  
The total they conversed  
A final tale  
The humans fail  
That shall prevail  
And through the veil  
The final q  
That I must do  
The thing, the who  
Were led askew  
The final word  
Everything blurred  
And through I heard  
The song of the firebird

Look up.  
Why did I look up?  
So I could see.  
So shall you

**Ava Henninger**

AGE 18 | McLAIN COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL

***Untitled***

What a silly alligator  
A ridiculous display  
Maybe it's for the best  
Like carving a pumpkin and giving up.

A ridiculous display  
Hard to touch but easy to carve  
Like carving a pumpkin and giving up  
Maybe it will get easier over time.

Hard to touch but easy to carve  
A broken smile  
Maybe it will be easier over time  
Where and how can we find it?

A broken smile  
Let us think  
Where and how can we find it?  
What a silly alligator.

**Lucia Uribe**

AGE 16 | McLAIN COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL

***Untitled***

Today I feel love  
Nothing can stop the skies  
My heart pumps with butterflies  
Nothing can stop the sun from shining.

Nothing can stop the skies  
Butterflies dance in the clouds  
Nothing can stop the sun from shining  
Rain is nothing but a bump in the road

Butterflies dance in the clouds  
The swiftness becomes one  
Rain is nothing but a bump in the road  
With rain comes rainbows

The swiftness becomes one  
It dances in the rain  
With rain comes rainbows  
Today I feel love

***To the girl who sees different figures as friends.***

Is It weird when you talk to them? Do they ever change shapes? Why do you see these figures you call friends? I see you asking questions about the people I see, it's not something in my mind, it's something that is given to people who are open to the ones who believe. No one can really tell when I speak to them unless you are one of the people who are open. I call them friends because they are the ones who help me make decisions on how I live my world. I know you are curious about these things I see but there are things I can't say but things you can experience yourself. I would love to help, I have friends who know the people who help open yourself up to these figures, would you like me to tell you who they are?

—The Girl who sees things, To the one who asks questions.

**Skyler Rogers**

AGE 17 | McLAIN COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL

***Untitled***

The day starts out bright and ends at night  
Chasing my bag like that's the only thing right  
The sun is looking down on me like a light  
My back gets hot like that shit's fire  
Chasing my bag like that's the only thing right  
Looking round me all i see is green  
My back gets hot like that shit's fire  
They doubt me like i'm a liar  
Looking round me all i see is green  
You be tryna mess with the whole team  
They doubt me like i'm a liar  
You really are a fene  
You be tryna mess with the whole team  
You talk to me like you blowing steam  
You really are a fene  
The day starts out bright and ends at night

**Dominic Herrick**

AGE 18 | McLAIN COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL

***Untitled***

Smile, Smile it's a good day  
My problems so far I can't even touch them  
If they saw it stare at them they would never know  
If only they knew how it feels

My problems so far I can't even touch them  
I laugh it off and keep talking  
If only they knew how it feels  
The feeling would flood their body through every pour

I laugh it off and keep talking  
Drowning but not begging for air  
The feeling would flood their body through every pour  
Pills mask the depression, it's a masquerade

Drowning but not begging for air  
It smiles at me, the monster in the closet  
Pills mask the depression, it's a masquerade  
Smile, Smile it's a good day

**Elijah Prien**

AGE 19 | McLAIN COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL

***Balance***

Seeking nothing but balance in my life  
Weighing out my life in my hands  
One hand closed and one hand open  
Scared to alternate hands

Weighing out my life in my hands  
The decisions I make weigh them down further  
Scared to alternate hands  
Afraid to lose strength

The decisions I make weigh them down further  
Sometimes it's against my will  
Afraid to lose strength  
The feeling of exhaustion is overwhelming

Sometimes it's against my will  
I need to keep my hands steady  
The feeling of exhaustion is overwhelming  
Seeking nothing but balance in my life

**Raul Gonzalez**

AGE 17 | McLAIN COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL

***Untitled***

Monarch of monarch, authority of no other.  
With the power of the world, he rules.  
Respecting his might, none dare to oppose him.  
He's somewhat like a god.

With the power of the world, he rules.  
He's what creates or destroys what's in this world.  
He's somewhat like a god.  
Neither good nor evil.

He's what creates or destroys what's in this world.  
Whether it helps or hurts.  
Neither good nor evil.  
As a king, he lives.

Whether it helps or hurts.  
He does what he thinks is right.  
As a king, he lives.  
Monarch of monarch, authority of no other.



**Matthew Rayburn**

AGE 16 | McLAIN COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL

***Articulation of Thought***

You are not born into the obligation of life, you are born to fulfill presence. The process has started, some would call it a monopoly but in every monopoly if you fall in love with the result, you won't reap the benefits of falling in love with the process.

Some say proceeding under certain conditions builds strength, however building the endurance to love and create consistently attributes to falling in love with the process as opposed to the end result. In many forms, strength is temporary. To depend on yourself is the ideal. To depend on the process instead of control it is the reality for many.

**Ayanna Sandoval**

AGE 18 | McLAIN COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL

***Anger Poem***

He makes me feel angry  
Anger is draining only little to say  
Not much understanding to much assuming  
you were the one i trusted most stab in the heart  
My heart aches.

***Sad Poem***

The love we had we had special spots for each other  
In our hearts but today things are different less we talk  
More of our feelings feed away or love ain't the same  
No more late night laughs no hugs no kisses feels like you are miles  
away even though you  
are in another state.

**Gwynneth Reeder**  
 AGE 17 | STARGATE SCHOOL

### ***Land of the Cyborgs***

“We can become cyborgs,” she said.

*But what of the thoughts of others? That it’s dangerous? Inhumane? An unnecessary use of resources? It’s not like those were the minority opinions on Earth, so they’d likely be common for those of the SEV Nera.*

“Karena, please listen. Despite the technology being available on Earth, it was illegal to make cyborgs for a reason. It’s dangerous for the patient, and if it does work out, the cyborg is a danger to the rest of society.”

“So? If we can do what we want, I’d like to be a cyborg. Perhaps if we’re all cyborgs it’ll be easier to build a life on our new planet. We have the resources and technology with us to make it happen, so why don’t we?”

“Karena, we just crash-landed on an alien planet. Yes, we can breathe, and yes, there’s food and water that’s safe, but shouldn’t we be focusing on survival? Building a future for the following generations?”

*It’s not safe. Please, listen.*

*A crowd was forming to watch.*

“Jaliki, that wasn’t a crash, it was a controlled landing. Also, of course I’m thinking about survival. We have food, shelter, water, and now all that’s left is building a civilization to last for thousands of years. I think cyborgs could do that just fine, even with conditions that may be harsher, don’t you?”

“Not if we all die in the process.”

*Shockingly, many of them seemed to agree with Karena. Perhaps the minority mostly ended up on the same ship. Maybe they intentionally entered the black hole...*

“Look, I know we talked about cyborgs when we were on Earth. We loved reading books about them and pretending when we were kids, but this is the real world, not a fiction. We’re not kids anymore. We’re the last leaders these people have, and there’s no way home.”

“We’re not on Earth, either. Jaliki, you don’t really believe that you can stop me, do you?”

“Karena—”

*Karena gave Jaliki a look, and he shook his head.*

“It was worth trying, at least... I didn’t want the people I love and care about to get hurt, but if I can’t, I guess I’ll have to leave and keep myself away so that I don’t get hurt more.”

“Jaliki, wait—”

“Farewell, Karena. Just—protect the kids from this. Protect them until they make their own choice.”

He marched away, holding the hands of two small children. Many in the crowd followed, but about half of them stayed behind.

“We’ll stay with you, Mom,” the two oldest kids said.

*My children all became cyborgs... they made their choice and I made mine. They were lucky—many died, but they did not. I’ll protect those who chose not to... We’re at a disadvantage now.*

The hologram of the scene fizzled out.

“So that’s how the people split, huh?” Willow commented.

“It’s fascinating,” Perceive said. “Such a monumental moment in our history, yet it was just an argument between a husband and wife...”

“Things aren’t always as they seem,” Willow replied, “I mean, we know how this ends. The cyborgs end up enslaving the humans, proving that Jaliki was right to worry. If Jaliki’s speculation was correct, we might not have reached this planet without those wishing to be cyborgs.”

“I wouldn’t even exist,” Perceive said, “at least, not with this name. I’ve lived my whole life as a cyborg, with no concept of normalcy.”

“The past is in the past. It’s time to create a new normal,” Willow replied with a huge smile. “We’re at peace. Let’s rebuild the world.”

“Let’s start on a good note,” Perceive said, “no lies.” They fist-bumped.

**Leo Hickman**

AGE 15 | STARGATE SCHOOL

### **Live**

Adrenaline burned in my veins. My heart thudded in my chest. My calves ached as I continued to squat, drawing in gulps of air. The hair in my eyes skewed my vision, and I was partially blinded except for the striped carpet beneath my feet.

“We’re on.”

My legs shook, the sticks in my hands tapping together because I couldn’t hold still. The leather padded stool creaked as I sat down. Fingers brushed the cool golden metal cymbal. The logo spun, facing me.

The crowd’s whispers lulled into silence. A cough, a child’s murmur. My eyes swept the faces staring back at me, zeroing in on the familiar features of my parents, my grandparents and my sibling.

“We’re Carrying Crust. I don’t know why.” A chuckle arised from the crowd.

My eyes catch on my bandmates’ and nods pass between us. *Play.*

The beginning notes are too familiar. I can count them out in perfect time to the track ingrained in my mind. One, two, three, four. One, two, three, four. One, two, three, four.

“One, two, three, four.”

*Crash!*

My body moved on its own, muscle memory saving me in a moment of desperation because if it had been left up to my conscious mind, my drumsticks would have clattered on the snare.

Each movement was both in slow motion and completely unregistered in my mind. I was playing in front of a live crowd, more than just my parents, more than my classmates.

I feel rushed, pressured. Breathless. Like I had breathed in and held it and now my chest was tight, my vision spotty.

*Crash!* My hands dropped to my lap. A heavy sigh escaped my lungs, relief briefly drowning out my nerves and calming my still shaking hands.

The clapping was thunderous, but ignored mostly, as my bandmates and I reset. When their eyes fell on me again, I gulped. My sticks above my head, four steady taps calmed the crowd.

The single beginning note, again, was too familiar. The beat of the drums was far more simple, steady.

I could breathe.

My eyes flickered between my bandmates, free to look around as I was no longer bound by fear to the face of the snare drum. Muscle memory allowed me the freedom, even as I moved across the rack toms to play the fill, it was easy.

The end of the song approached, playing through the bridge to the final chorus, as the singer nodded to me. The final fill, to replace the fade out in the recording.

The crash rang again, softer and completely unheard over the clapping.

We were frozen on the stage before we all kicked into gear. I stood, and barely bowed, before chasing my bandmates off stage.

Another band filed past, taking their place on stage to play their set. I rounded the corner, grinning, with the adrenaline burning in my veins.

Willa Brink

AGE 13 | HORIZONS K-8

### **Battlefield**

Amirah stood on the battlefield, long black hair blowing in the wind. The folds of her purple cape shifted softly against her pale skin. She gazed at the battlefield, bronze spear sweaty yet cold in her tight grip.

That was it. Her last battle.

She stared at the massacred bodies on the ground, mauled and unrecognizable. She had walked into battle surrounded by friends, and left leaving only the bodies of enemies.

Warriors didn't have friends.

The sky and clouds were now turning shades of dark blue and light pink. Amirah lifted her hands to take off her war helmet, but she paused.

"The time has not yet come, Amirah." The shimmering form of her father—her *dead* father—was hovering near the edge of the battlefield.

"I need you for one more battle."

Amira fought down the bile rising in her throat and nodded.

"Where to?"

"Somewhere very old," was her father's response. She settled her helmet on her head, grasped her spear, and walked back towards the castle, away from the blood, death, and memories.

**Alisha Ashwin**

AGE 9 | MANGINI RANCH ELEMENTARY

## ***Petunia's Adventure***

### **PROLOGUE**

*Once there was a flower garden. It belonged to a little girl named Jessie. Jessie lived with her mom, her dad and her little brother, Michel. They also had a dog, Scott. In the flower garden lived Petunia, Rose, Lily, Daisy, Poppy, Daffodil, and the leaves and grass. The leader of the garden was Sunflower. She lived in little leaves which were openings in a bush.*

### **BORED, BORED, BORED**

*Everyone was happy. Almost everyone. You may think no one would possibly want to leave this flower garden. But Petunia in fact was bored. Bored of standing in one spot. Bored of hearing Scott bark his same old bark. Bored of everything! She wished there was an opening in the gate surrounding the flower garden so she could explore. Even her leaf was bored. They would chat about what they would do. "Hop with the bunnies?" Little Leaf would say. "Yes, and travel the world," Petunia would reply. They had dreamed about themselves in history books. They could picture the headlines: Petunia and Little Leaf, First Plants To Travel The World. And they couldn't stop wishing. The other plants would ask "Why do you want to travel the world? It's better here." Petunia would just reply and say, "I'm just bored living in this flower garden. It seems smaller each day." The other flowers would laugh at her. "This garden is not small. It's just right for all of us." But Petunia would not listen. She and Little Leaf kept dreaming.*

### **CLOVER**

One day when all the flowers had woken up, they saw Jessie and her mom in a corner. Jessie was hopping up and down with excitement. Her mom was holding something and digging up some dirt. Everyone was watching.

"Mommy, do you think it will grow?" Jessie asked her mom.



“Well, as long as you take care of it, give her water and sunlight. Don’t let Scott sniff at her. Make sure it is safe and healthy and then it will grow,” her mom replied.

“Oh, I will, I will,” promised Jessie. She ran in circles around the flower garden and finally laid down on the grass. Two ladybugs landed on her face and tickled her. Jessie laughed and sat up. The ladybugs flew away. Soon, Jessie and her mom returned to the house.

Everybody saw a clover. The flowers were silent. Everyone was silent, even Petunia. Finally Rose broke the silence. “Which flower garden did you come from?” Rose asked.

“I don’t come from any flower garden,” Clover replied. The other flowers walked away uninterested in the newcomer. Only Petunia stayed. Clover looked hurt. “Does it matter whether I come from a flower garden?” she mumbled to herself. The grass followed the flowers’ lead and soon the leaves too. Only Petunia stayed.

“Hello,” Petunia said cheerily.

“Hi,” said Clover, still frowning.

“I’ve never seen a green flower before. Where are your leaves?” asked Little Leaf.

Clover replied, “I don’t . . . I don’t have leaves.”

“Oh,” said Petunia. “Do you wish you could go out into the wilderness?” she asked.

“Of course but it’s against the Clovers’ Law to go there. You must stay within the gate at all times,” Clover replied.

“Well, I guess it’s getting late. Good night,” said Petunia.

“Night,” replied Clover. And they went off to bed.

But Petunia and Little Leaf could not sleep. “Why were the other flowers mean to Clover? We have to get out of here now!” Petunia said. Just then, she spotted an opening in the gate.

## THE ESCAPE

Quietly, they crept slowly in the dark night sky. An owl hooted overhead. Petunia’s heart pounded as she slowly made her way out of the garden. What she saw was fascinating! An owl stared at them in the trees, a flock of bats caught mosquitoes, and night time noises like crickets filled the air. Petunia’s adventure began! They fell asleep.

## THE BUNNIES

The next morning, Petunia and Little Leaf woke up. The owls and bats were gone. The sounds had stopped. They wandered into a forest and watched birds fly and deer munch on their breakfast. They amused themselves by watching ants carry food to stock up for the winter. Watching the ants made them hungry. They wandered off in search of food. Soon they found a family of bunnies sharing cabbages and carrots. There were two big and three small bunnies.

“Excuse me!” Petunia asked politely. “We’re sorry to interrupt your breakfast but Little Leaf and I are very hungry,” she said. “Would you mind sharing some of your food?” Petunia asked hopefully. The mother looked doubtful. She was strict about sharing food with strangers. But before she could speak, a little bunny handed them a carrot and two cabbages. As they ate, the mother asked them tons of questions like where they came from or why they were here. But Petunia always answered calmly.

## OFF WITH YOU! OFF WITH YOU!

Finally, the dad spoke up. Petunia had noticed he hadn’t said a word since they met. “Well, Ms. Petunia and Mr. Little Leaf, I hope you don’t think I’m being nosy but where are your bunny ears and fluffy tails? Your fur and paws? You bunnies are extremely peculiar!” he said. Petunia smiled. “That is because we’re not bunnies,” she explained. “We’re flowers.”

The family froze. Even the babies who were active nonstop seemed to stop chasing each other and froze. A loud voice broke the silence. It was the father. “YOU’RE NOT BUNNIES?”

He seemed to have each word in one separate sentence as he spoke. “THAT’S IT,” he yelled. “OFF WITH YOU!”

The babies imitated him. “OFF WITH YOU, OFF WITH YOU!!!!” they chirped. The mother remained speechless and shocked. Petunia quickly said, “Sorry to bother you. Thanks for the food. It was delicious.” She waved goodbye before disappearing into a patch of leaves.

## **TAILS UP**

“Whew,” sighed Little Leaf as they walked down a path.

“I know!” Petunia said. They wandered along the path stopping now and then to rest under the trees. It was probably 5:02 p.m. when they heard a shout. “Tails up! Hey, you, get back in line. Can’t you see it’s not your turn to jump in yet? No pushing. You’ll all get your turn.” Petunia and Little Leaf followed the sound of the voice. They soon came across a group of skunks. There was one skunk ordering the rest of them around. They were all surrounding a pool.

## **THE SKUNKS**

A skunk with a stripe from her tail to her head was the first to spot them. “Hey, Kyle, Levi, Charlotte! Come here! We’ve got company,” she said. Four skunks surrounded them.

“Hello,” said Charlotte, “I’m Charlotte. This is Levi, Kyle and Elly.”

“Would you like to bathe with us?” asked Levi who had stopped ordering the others around.

“Yes,” Petunia said. “I’m Petunia by the way, this is Little Leaf.”

The six of them waded in the cool water. “This is very refreshing,” Elly said. “Would you like some fruit for lunch? We have plenty of mangos and oranges that we found.”

“Thanks,” Petunia said. Petunia and Little Leaf ate and swam in the water with the skunks.

## **STINK!**

They chatted about the forest and got to know each other. Soon Levi waded into the pool. He asked, “I don’t mean to be rude but where are your black and white stripes? Your fur and tails? You skunks are very strange.”

Petunia answered, “We aren’t skunks. We’re plants.” There was a pause. After a few seconds, “Eww!” Petunia cried. She smelled something like rotten eggs mixed with smelly, unwashed socks. It was the skunks. Petunia jumped out of the water and said, “Thanks for the lunch. It was delicious. Nice chatting with you.” And they left.

## FOOD

Petunia and Little Leaf slumped away. Even the skunks didn't like company! They wandered and crossed a field after a snack. Soon, it got dark. The two looked for some fruits or berries to eat. They were also very thirsty. Operation travel the world was a disaster. Petunia and Little Leaf were doomed. Suddenly, Petunia felt a tickle on her ear. It was a butterfly. She was white with black dots. When she spoke, her voice was sweet and friendly. "Hi," she said. "Who are you and what are you doing here?" she asked.

"We are Petunia and Little Leaf and we are looking for food and water and a place to rest," Little Leaf replied.

## FLUTTER CITY

The butterfly giggled, "I'll take you to my home. It's in Flutter City!" Petunia gasped. She had heard stories, seen pictures, and recited poems of the great Flutter City!!! They followed the butterfly until they reached a hole. The butterfly flew down the hole.

"Wait!" Petunia called, tumbling down after her with Little Leaf at her side. "You haven't told us your name yet!"

"Estherer!" said a distant shout.

Petunia gasped. "*The* Estherer?" she asked loudly.

"Yes," she replied. "Princess Estherer of Flutter City! My mother is Queen Martha!" Soon they came to a beautiful city. There were streets, shops, restaurants, houses and most of all, butterflies. Everywhere they looked! Some were white, some orange, some green, and some blue. They saw Princess Estherer waving to them by a shoe shop. They followed her to a gigantic palace with a bridge over a fish pond. A butterfly with beautiful rainbow colored wings was staring out into the distance.

## OUT

She looked like she was in a completely different world. She looked over at them and smiled. "Hello visitors," she said. "I am Queen Martha Wingdon of Flutter City. This, as you probably already know, is my daughter, Princess Estherer Wingdon."

"Hello," replied Petunia, bowing low. "I am Petunia Lichi and this is Little Leaf Kandre."

The queen smiled. "Lio will show you to your room."

A butterfly with orange wings led them up a big flight of stairs and down a big hall to a beautiful room. There they stayed. They talked about the garden, how much they missed it, and even played a game of Monopoly they found in a drawer. It didn't take long till a butterfly with one orange wing and the other purple to announce that dinner was being served in the dining room. As everyone started eating, Petunia noticed that instead of water, there was nectar in her cup. How could she forget? Butterflies drink flower blood. She decided to not drink anything. Instead, she ate.

As they started dessert, the queen asked them, "I hope I'm not barging into your business but why do you have so many wings? Why do I smell delicious nectar near you? You butterflies are so unusual."

Petunia's heart was thumping. "W-we aren't b-b-butterflies. W-we're p-p-plants," she stammered. There was a long pause.

"OUT!!!! OUT OUT OF MY KINGDOM! GET AWAY! OUT! NOW!!!"

Petunia was already halfway out of the door. She ran down flights of steps, out the door, past a store, through the shoe shop and out of the kingdom. She was tired and went to sleep.

## **ERNEST**

The next day, Petunia and Little Leaf traveled across a field and past a forest after eating some bananas. Soon, they came to a swamp. As they walked across goeey lakes with mud and over mossy trees with thick roots, Little Leaf said, "It is so cold and lonely in this swamp. I wonder why swamps are like that." Petunia agreed, nodding glumly. Suddenly, she tripped on a tree root which sent them flying. They landed on a bumpy rock. "Phew!" Petunia sighed.

Just then, the rock shifted and Petunia saw that they had landed on the nose of a crocodile. The crocodile stared at them with his big eyes. "Hello there," he said with a booming and friendly voice. "I'm Ernest. What's your name?" he asked.

Petunia answered, "I'm Petunia and this is Little Leaf."

Ernest smiled and asked, "What's your favorite food?"

Petunia replied, "My favorite foods are flower seeds and soil."

Ernest chuckled and said, "That's very odd for someone like you.

Are you an endangered species?”

Petunia laughed. “No, I’m not.”

Then Little Leaf joined in the conversation. “What’s your favorite food?”

Ernest answered, “My favorite food is fish, mostly salmon. It’s delicious. My family and friends don’t like salmon but I love it.” Petunia nodded.

### **ACHOO!!!**

Now, Ernest, who was very fond of them, asked, “I hope you don’t think I am intruding, but where is your big green body? And your sharp teeth? Where are your strong legs for swimming after delicious fish and prey? You crocodiles are very, very odd looking.”

Petunia knew what was coming but she couldn’t run off without an answer since it would be rude. So, she replied, “We aren’t crocodiles, we are plants.”

As soon as Ernest heard this, he flung them up into the air and they landed in his open mouth. They were trapped.

Suddenly, Ernest’s mouth jolted. It twisted and turned. His mouth opened. “Ahhh-ahhh-ahhh .... Phew,” the crocodile said. He didn’t sneeze. Then, just then—“AHHH CHOOO!!!” He finally sneezed.

Petunia and Little Leaf were flung into the air again, did a little somersault and landed on soft, squishy grass. The crocodile slumped away thinking that he still had Petunia and Little Leaf yummy in his tummy. Petunia and Little Leaf ran away before the crocodile realized that he hadn’t swallowed them up.

### **HOME SWEET HOME**

After this incident, Petunia was very sad. She felt like she had been missing something. Now she realized it was the flower garden. The garden with Scott and Clover and Jessie. The garden with all her friends. She missed home. She knew the others had been rude to Clover but she realized now that running away had made everyone sadder.

### **HOME WE GO**

She knew Little Leaf felt the same way. Being together meant that their thoughts were in one brain. “Let’s go home.” And home they went. Past

the pool of skunk which was not stinky anymore; down the path and quietly through the bunnies' cottage. Finally, they arrived at the gate.

### **YOU'RE BACK**

As soon as they wiggled through the hole in the gate, a mass of flowers, leaves and grass came to hug them like they knew Petunia and Little Leaf would be back that very moment. As soon as everyone settled down, Petunia told everyone her adventures. Soon she decided to write a book about her adventures.

Eve Gersey

AGE 12 | MOREY MIDDLE SCHOOL

### ***To Be Continued . . .***

*CONTENT WARNING: GUN VIOLENCE*

#### **CHAPTER I**

*14 ½ years ago*

“Kaci, grab your suitcase. Let’s go!” my father called.

I stumbled into the car. My mom and dad were already in the front seat of my mother’s minivan. My mom was reading a magazine and my father was searching the glove compartment. He pulled out a tissue box. I hurled my luggage into the car. My dad turned to face me. A faint smile painted my face with distress. I looked at him once more.

“Kiddo. I promise I’ll be back. I forgot something.” My eyebrows lowered, his voice was a breath of fresh reassurance.

“Okay, Daddy,” I said. He patted my head, transmitting static and frizziness to my hair.

Once he had entered the house, I stared at it, not daring to blink. I waited for his shadow to reappear on the sizzling concrete. The silence was still and a cloud of hope and excitement lay upon my staticky lump of hair. An earsplitting, bloodcurdling gunshot could be heard from the house then a scream followed. I could see from the car that the front mirror had been broken and an aged man stood, silently staring at me. A moment later the screen door slammed and the father I once knew had been shot dead and then shoved through the threshold of the door. His leg held the door open and the same figure appeared in the front door window.

Blood gushed from my father’s chest and his head. It decorated the sidewalk preparing itself for the latest crime scene. It matted down his hair and stained his clothes crimson.

I glanced at my mother in the rearview mirror. Her reflection shone in the sunlight with tears. I looked at her for direction. She snapped



into action and sped away. The jolt of the minivan threw me back from my hope. My dad was going to be absent for the rest of my youth. I craned my neck to get one more glimpse at the house. It felt like an old childhood home, old and not mine anymore. It also seemed grayer and sadder than before. In the middle of all of it lay a bleeding body. I glanced back at my father. He felt like an old childhood home, old and gone forever.

To be continued...

**Maya Csajaghy**

AGE 10 | CORY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

***A Clouded Shower***

The rain poured down on a cloudy day  
It filled the fresh air with dewy emptiness  
The plants get bent with the pressure of the rain that makes them thrive  
The drops of water still remain on the petals

It filled the fresh air with dewy emptiness  
The wheels of the bike go faster and faster  
The drops of water still remain on the petals  
Cool air fills the mist

The wheels of the bike go faster and faster  
Find a smaller umbrella, I don't like big things  
Cool air fills the mist  
The sky's blanket is made of cotton

Find a smaller umbrella, I don't like big things  
The day is ready to rest  
The sky's blanket is made of cotton  
The rain poured down on a cloudy day

**Lila Kessler**

AGE 14 | SYNERGY SCHOOL

***River's Bend***

On this peaceful, windswept night  
The nightingales have taken flight  
Seven stars in the sky; constellations in our eyes  
As river water rushes by

The nightingales have taken flight  
We aren't in the mood to fight  
As river water rushes by  
As the crickets come alive, branches rustle, comets fly

We aren't in the mood to fight,  
By this quiet, crow quill's sky  
As the crickets come alive, branches rustle, comets fly  
Winding whispers were our voices

By this quiet, crow quill's sky  
Hand in hand and soul in soul, the galaxy rejoices  
Winding whispers were our voices  
On this peaceful, windswept night

**Venn Walker**

AGE 14 | WHEAT RIDGE HIGH SCHOOL

***Tree.***

I am tall and strong, bonded to the Earth by countless years of spreading my wings beneath the surface of the dirt.

Despite my strength and durability, you puny little humans still come racing at me with arms outstretched, wanting to pull at me, claim me and buy me, cut me and sell me, make me into pieces of art that you claim are beautiful.

I've seen it all.

I'm more beautiful in my natural state than your sharp, man-made blades can ever hope to make me. You mix me with plastic, chemicals and dyes, trying to preserve my materials when naturally, I would've lived longer than any of you.

My leaves spread high above the ground, cooling the earth below and drinking in all the carbon dioxide your complex human systems can't live with, even though you make so much of it.

You're lucky I can use it.

In return, I give you all the oxygen you could need and yet you still want more. For how evolved your species is, you can't cope with much.

I will forever let squirrels and birds make nests in my branches, homes and families for the spring season. Even the bugs that get squished and killed by you I will happily welcome into my home.

I know that some of them will tear pieces of me, or tunnel into my bark, even kill me, and yet I still allow it because they do it out of necessity,

and you do it out of greed.

**Samara Foster**

AGE 12 | MOREY MIDDLE SCHOOL

**Math**

“Sam I’m sorry, but I still don’t get it,” Sofia says, her face scrunched up in confusion.

“What don’t you get?” I ask.

“Why you don’t like math,” she says matter-of-factly.

“Oh,” I say. And after a moment of silence, her eyebrows raise as if asking, “So...? Are you going to explain?”

“I already told you,” I say, rolling my eyes. “I don’t like it because it’s so.... Uh, I don’t know. Final. Does that make any sense?”

“Nope,” she says, looking around the cafeteria. I nod. I don’t know how to explain it to someone who is very left brained like Sofia. She understands numbers. I understand words. I search for the right way to tell her this.

“Sam?” she asks.

“Ya?” I respond.

“The bell rang, we gotta go.” I nod and follow her out of the cafeteria, still wracking my brain for the right words.

“You good?” she asks, a somewhat concerned look on her face.

“Yup.”

“OK, I’ll see you,” she says as she raises a hand to wave goodbye. I stand there watching her walk to her 8th grade math class. RING. I wince and hurry towards my class. When I get there I sit and try to listen to Ms. Jones’ 6th grade math lesson. But I can’t. I can’t stop thinking about it.

Why do I like words better than numbers? I stare out the window and watch the snowy world outside for all 60 minutes of math. Maybe that’s why I suck at it.

The rest of the day flies by. And when I get home I get out a piece of paper and start to brainstorm. I write, “Why I Like Words Better Than Numbers,” underline it in red pen, and try to start a list. When I’m done I realize I was only able to write one thing. No right answer.

I grab my phone and go to contacts. I click on Sofias name and stare at her profile picture. She's making a silly face. Her tongue stuck out and her eyes crossed. My finger hovers over the call button before working up the courage to call her. My phone rings three times before she picks up.

"Hello?"

"Hey." I say, biting at my nails.

"You need something?" Sofia asks.

"Well kinda. I was thinking about when you asked me why I don't like math," I say, fidgeting.

"You're still thinking about that?"

"Well ya. But that's not the point. I thought about it and I know why I hate it," I say.

"Continue." She sounds interested but I can tell she is sidetracked.

"With writing there's millions of right answers. With math, there's only one," I explain.

She chuckles.

"That's the exact reason I hate writing. You never know if you have the right answer. Anyway, got to go, see you tomorrow," she says and hangs up.

"Bye," I say to my empty room.

I sit on my bed and let out a deep breath. With writing there's hundreds if not thousands of right ways to do it. With math and just numbers in general there's only one right way. No room to be creative. Nothing is up to interpretation. Which is the best part of writing. You could give a hundred people the same writing prompt and not one story would be the same. Everyone has their own way of doing it. Everyone has their own opinion. And everyone is different.

**Kiran Tait**

AGE 12 | ST. CATHERINE'S MONTESSOR

***Bookworm***

Somewhere in the world there's a girl made of books.  
With story spun hair,  
And world weaving clothes,  
There's a girl made with stories in her blood.

With story spun hair,  
Worlds in her mind,  
There's a girl with stories in her blood,  
And imagination in her eyes.

Worlds in her mind,  
Created by hand  
And imagination in her eyes,  
There's a girl with fire in her veins.

Created by hand,  
The worlds of her dreams,  
There's a girl with fire in her veins.  
Somewhere in the world there's a girl made of books.



**Alice Pearson**

AGE 15 | NORTHFIELD HIGH SCHOOL

### ***Cobwebs and Dust***

*CONTENT WARNING: SUICIDE*

The cobwebs gathered on the tables, and the chairs, stretching up the high walls to reach the ceiling, and no one, including myself, ever bothered to dust it off. Sometimes I would even see the spiders, carefully stringing their web, every string woven with precision. I would sit in my backyard, watching the lifeless garden blow in the wind. The petals had ripped from the stems of flowers once so heavenly, yet the cobwebs never broke. They would gather with dew, the sunlight dancing upon their thin strings.

My house used to be in much more pristine condition. The hardwood floors were polished, not a scratch in sight. It was always dusted, mopped, swept, wiped, and tidied to perfection. Growing up my mother, Anastasia, was a bit of a neat freak. She would often have us continue chores long after the house was spotless.

“A clean house is a happy house. Cleaning and organizing is a practice, not a project,” she would scold. So then we would sweep the floors which had been swept only 20 minutes prior, and dust every corner of the then cobweb-free house.

Anastasia spent all her spare time cleaning or tending to the garden. I never took much interest in gardening, but I developed a fondness for one statue in particular. She was positioned in the garden, resting so peacefully. She had a faraway look in her eye and paired with her emotionless stone-cold face and youthful beauty, she was quite the sight to behold. She would be found through heat, storms, snow, and hail, lying in the same spot ever so gracefully. Even though birds would peck at her, rats would burrow under her, she would get covered in bugs, she remained in the garden. Flowers wrapped around her gray fingers, petals fell loose in her silvery hair. The thorns of roses would

brush her skin, never able to break it. She remained still, her stone exterior shielding her from the world that she had seen to be ever so cruel. That too, would one day crack. In a way, it reminded me of my mother.

Richard, my father, was a cruel man, nothing other than a hollowed-out shell of a person, who was filled with pure hatred. When he bothered to come home, he would never take a moment to admire the spotless house. As a child, I remember how happy he was, or pretended to be. The perfect father loved his wife, accounted for his children, and had some humanity left in him. I watched as that humanity slipped, drowning him slowly in a pit of nothingness. I never saw my real father, the one that raised me, the one I love, from the ages of 12-17. The last time I saw him was a winter night. He had come home from work late, as usual, and sobbed in my mother's arms. I still don't know why, but I know he cried, drenching her shirt in his tears, sobbing and wailing for hours. My brother and I never slept that night. Maybe that was all of what was left in him, those tears were the last piece of his soul, dried up on my mother's shirt.

"That job is going to kill him one day," my mother would always say with a sigh.

Anastasia, my brother, and I cried ourselves to sleep every night, the expectations of Richard, the expectations of society, and the impossible standards we held ourselves to had weighed on us. No one in my household promoted emotional vulnerability. So, during the days, we would be the perfect housewife, two beautiful aspirational children, and a wealthy hard-working father living the American Dream until the lights went out, and our secrets were unveiled.

It wasn't until 17 years old when I realized there was never any love in my family, in my house. Richard hung himself in the garage, leaving me to find him with a note that said nothing other than "Fuck you." Consequentially, Anastasia gave up on maintaining the house and drowned her sorrows in gin. My brother moved out, and the moment I turned 18 Anastasia did not hesitate to leave with no word, no explanation, leaving me and the cobwebs that had recently collected.

Through the years they've gathered more and more. The floorboards have warped and begun to curl at the edges, the paint is peeling off the wall, and the statue I once loved oh so dearly is chipping and cracked.

I too no longer can remain living in this house, this house which I believe to have died the day Richard did. Nothing ever belonged in that house, my big, lonely house in which I never felt like more than a casual observer. The only thing that belonged was the cobwebs.

**Sophia C. Newton**

AGE 11 | DOWNTOWN DENVER EXPEDITIONARY SCHOOL |

***Growing in Front of a Sunset***

Life growing in front of a scenery  
New time of day brings the jungle  
The sprout of joy comes from light  
Tiny seeds start a life  
New time of day brings the jungle  
Forest brings a new story  
Tiny seeds start a life  
Small dots write a book  
Forest brings a new story  
Telling the future of the plants  
Small dots write a book  
Circles around the past  
Telling the future of the plants  
Time in life around the green  
Circles around the past  
Life growing in front of a scenery

**Maya McQuade**

AGE 13 | ODYSSEY DENVER SCHOOL

### ***Ocean Woes***

The hot yellow light of the sun blistered against her skin. The heat was almost too much to bear. Sweat rolled down her arms as white clouds rolled across the sky. She wished she could just stand there and watch, watch as the world passed by her.

A swift string of wind brushed against her body, relaxing the tension she felt building inside her. She sighed and narrowed her eyes towards the ocean in front of her. The sun and sky reflected against the glossy water. The shimmer in the water reached out to her in an almost yearning way.

The sound of waves crashing against the rocks under the dock rang in her ears. She shifted her weight onto her other foot, hearing the damp wood creek below her. Mist from the ocean found itself on her skin. She turned when she heard the voice of her brother behind her.

“They said the boat is about to leave.”

She didn’t reply but narrowed her eyes once again at him. She saw him uncomfortably shift in a green, long-sleeved winter jacket, despite it being early June. He wore light brown muddied boots that were tied in an odd misshaped bow. He gripped onto their matching suitcases.

“You’re upset.”

“Obviously.” Her eyes rolled as she replied sharply back, deepening eye contact.

“Look. I know you don’t want to go but mom already signed us up.” He sighed and ran his hand through his hair then over his face. Her eyes wavered slightly

She gritted her teeth and moved her eyes back over to him.

“Yeah, signed us up for summer camp, on an isolated island in the middle of nowhere,” she bit back abruptly.

He stared at her for a second before responding, “I’m not too happy about it either, but as I said. The boat is about to leave, we don’t have a choice.”

“Oh, we have plenty of choices, like, for example, not getting on that boat.”

When he didn't respond she immediately took it as a no. Silently studying his blank expression for a moment they shared a knowing look. Only after a speck of water lightly hit his face did he show emotion.

"To think, she didn't even come to say goodbye to us after signing us up," she bitterly uttered with a hint of anguish in her voice. The endlessly bright sun was covered briefly by a cloud, collapsing the warmth around them into darkness. The wind turned frigid and so did their stares. Her arms twitched from the cold, lifting her fingertips to hug the other arm. The wind blew against her hair, softening her gaze for just a moment. Drawing her cool expression back up, she scoffed and walked past her equally annoyed twin brother.

She walked a few paces before stopping. Her eyes watched the large harbor boat as it filled up with people that looked to be her age. White imprinted letters that spelled M A L L O R Y were plastered on the side of the boat. She heard the footsteps of her brother come up behind her. She groaned and rubbed her hands over her face.

"Just wonderful, we're getting on a boat whose name literally means bad luck. Great."

Her brother started lightly laughing at her annoyed sarcasm. She huffed and strode her way up onto the stairs leading to the boat. She pushed past people and roughly sat down on a wood bench, immediately staring off into the distance to ignore the possible fish guts and hooks that the other side of the bench was littered with.

Her brother, still laughing, joined her up on the end of the boat. He stood next to her and popped a piece of gum in his mouth. They heard someone yell about the boat leaving just as a brief humming noise started.

She felt her throat tighten as the view of the docks distantly shrunk away. All she could think about was the nervous feeling burning inside of her. Just the thought of being stuck, with no control over where she could go, made her want to jump overboard. Taking the vast freezing ocean rather than being constricted. Those thoughts all but faded as the mainland slowly went out of view and the ocean consumed everything around them.

**Max Kroll**

AGE 18 | WEST SPRINGFIELD HIGH SCHOOL

***Halls of our History***

Empty halls of bone and skin  
Morbid on paper, but beauty in presentation.  
Now, hear the halls fill with clamoring footsteps  
And wandering conversations.  
The children awe and ooh,  
Noses to glass and hands to rails.  
Their parents are happily yanked through  
Halls of animals, art, and history.  
Galaxies in stone, stories in fur and feathers  
Surround the comers and goers.  
Monsters of old, frozen in death, only a flight  
Away from whistling earth.  
Children rest and sleep beneath an arcing titan.  
They are surrounded by crying birds  
And singing behemoths.  
The history of the world in mere footsteps,  
But the history of humanity  
Is spread far and wide.  
But all things must end, if only briefly.  
For then, the corridors lay silent until dawn breaks,  
And we may once again wander halls  
Of beasts, stones, stars, and bones.

**Ziva Seller (Comet)**

AGE 13 | VAIL MOUNTAIN SCHOOL

**Gen Z**

You see legs shaking  
You see people biting their nails

You see them slowly drifting away from life  
From friends and family

You see their grades  
Dramatically dropping

You see them hiding in  
their rooms

You see them blasting music

You see the dried up  
Tears on their faces

You ask them if they are fine  
They say yes but are they really

You see them starving themselves  
Because people say lose weight

You see them on their phones 24/7  
Staring at people better than them

You see them fighting with their parents  
Because of their grades

Well this you see  
It is Gen Z



***Invisible***

Sometimes it feels  
Like you're invisible

So many people around  
yet, You aren't one of them  
No one can hear you  
You're muted

Friends leave you to hang out with other friends  
Closer ones  
Better ones

Even though you're the one  
Who puts up with everyone's crap

You live in the background  
Of your own story

***The Stars***

Orbs in a midnight sky

Fire spreading through wildflowers

Some are famous  
Like the Big Dipper  
The North Star

Some shine bright  
Brighter than flare in the sky

Stars are people

When they're alone all their talents show  
When they talk about the things they love  
their heart shines

Some people are shooting stars  
They shine once in a blue moon

They're waiting for the right moment  
Fearful of their own light

When people shine embrace it  
When their powers show embrace it

Those who take the risk  
Shine the brightest

**Elaine Chung**

AGE 16

***boiled rat***

“Vermin,” Grandpa says, holding out a tied up plastic shopping bag.  
inside is

a rat—small and mangy with its ribs poking out—  
scrabbling against its plastic prison.

“Vermin,” I echo.

I stare into its panicked, beady eyes—  
eyes too big for its head,  
head too big for its body.  
its terrified panting wracks its bony body, and  
I can almost see its heart racing out of its chest.

“Vermin.”

I roll the word around my mouth, poking it with my tongue.  
it tastes sharp and bitter, annoyed and disdainful.

“Vermin,” I try spitting at the rat.

I feel like a toothless serpent—  
there is no venom behind that word, though it feels there should be.

the rat claws against the bag, squeaking—begging—for freedom.  
it looks at me,  
pressing its tiny paw up against its crinkly cell.

I look away.

somehow, I cannot stand seeing it—cannot *bear* seeing it.

“What do we do with it?” I ask. “Should we set it free?”

“Vermin,” Grandpa reminds me.

SUMMER HIGH SCHOOL WRITING INTENSIVE

JESAKA LONG, CHRISTEN ALDRIDGE, WHITNEY GAINES, ASSÉTOU XANGO

“We do not *free* vermin.

“We *kill* it.”

my stomach drops.

I feel the rat scabbling inside my ribcage, pitiful and desperate.  
my brain doesn't comprehend,  
doesn't understand that feeling.

“Will it die a painless death?” I ask, scared of the answer.

Grandpa fills a pot with water and sets it on the stovetop.  
he places the bagged rat inside and  
clips the plastic loops to the cold steel pot with clothespins.

the rat doesn't like the feeling of the water surrounding it.  
it scrambles and shrieks, but it cannot escape.

“Will it die a painless death?” I ask, almost pleading.

Grandpa puts on the lid as his reply.  
the burner clicks on.  
it sounds like imminent death.

the water is calm at first, then starts bubbling.  
the rat throws itself against the walls of its execution ground, clawing  
and clawing and  
clawing—  
it has nothing left to lose.

tongues of fire lick the bottom of the pot.  
the water roils angrily.

the rat screams.

the baby in the bedroom wails  
the police siren screeches as they drive past  
the tea kettle shrieks, louder and louder, higher and higher

like it's about to explode—  
like it's about to explode—  
like they want me to hear—  
like they *need* me to hear—

I turn around and clench my eyes shut.  
I clasp my hands over my ears.

I can't listen.

I don't *want* to listen.

I crouch on the ground and I rock back and forth on my heels,  
willing, hoping, begging the noise to go away.

seconds crawl by like hours.

i tentatively unclasp my ears.

and there is silence.  
gut-wrenching, bloodcurdling, asphyxiating silence.

and somehow, the silence is far, *far* worse than the noise.

Grandpa was the one who boiled the rat, but its blood was on my  
hands too.

**Oz Donald**

AGE 12 | D'EVELYN JUNIOR/SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

### ***Fireflies***

I watched as the sun set. Its beautiful glow casting colors of pink, orange and red across the vast empty sky. The grass now turning a sparkling yellow and the leaves on the trees into a rich gold. As the sun deepens its colors across the sky, a flock of birds flies past, their wings strong and powerful, following the direction of the wind.

A small pond sits just in front of my feet. Its waters are a stunning reflection of reality itself. And though there isn't much to reflect in the clearing of grass it manages to find a beauty in the emptiness. A certain feeling indescribable with words. Only something you can experience yourself. For the only word that comes close to it is home. A feeling of comfort and softness in reality. A feeling that makes you let your guard down. And that feeling only comes to a few that experience it.

The sun hovering over the horizon bursts into flames of orange and red. Making it seem as if the world were on fire. But it wasn't. And even if it was you wouldn't care. For the silence is so breathtaking it makes you stand still. Taking in every beauty of the world. Every aspect of peace. Every moment of joy seems irreplaceable.

This is my island. But it isn't truly mine. It is the world's. Everyone's to enjoy. Everyone's to relax on and find peace. But for now no one can seem to find it. My little island seems useless to others because of all the conflict. The conflict seems to be the only thing people care about. But conflict is like gasoline. When you pay too much attention to it you realize too late that you threw in a match.

A small deer exits the small forest and walks into the clearing, its mother not far behind. The two pick a spot to sleep and lay down. The soft fur turned to a crisp brown in the dying sun. The grass covered them in a cage of protection, almost like if it didn't then they would be attacked. And it seems that everyone thinks like that. Dwelling on the negative possibilities when they aren't likely to happen. And even if there is a chance, you need to know one thing.

These people are strong. And the same goes for you. People don't understand how strong they are. And sometimes it feels like you are just a burden to everyone. But just know how strong you are, think about it every day you wake up, every time you find doubt consuming you. You are stronger than you think.

The sun sets. The shadow of darkness covers the island. Making the cool breeze colder than before. But on my island, you can join me. And we can watch as the stars light up the sky. Their far away glow seems impossibly close at this time of night. Bright little lights that guide the eyes on a journey of wonder. And just when you think the stars are dying, you see a little twinkle.

That's when you see the fireflies. A yellow glow seems to create a path for you to follow.

We get up and follow it. Their small lights follow you on your journey through the forest. The leaves twinkle and reflect a wavering version of their own reality. And it seems that they are just as human as we are.

We reach another pond. But this one is a lake. A vast expanse of water, almost like an ocean displayed right in front of us. We sat down by the shore. Foaming edges of the water reach for our feet but stop just before it touches and falls back to the lake.

The breeze turns warm. A cozy feeling of home that seems to pass by us.

A thin layer of mist begins to cover the lake. A foggiess that makes it difficult to look past. You reach out, but grasp at nothing. The breeze turns cold again.

"What are you searching for?" I ask.

"Someone to help pull me into the light," you say. A feeling of emptiness was starting to fill up your heart. Suddenly a hand holds yours, and light begins to pour in through the other side of the fog. The hand pulls you as you stand up and walk to where it is pulling you. You stop, and turn around. "What is on the other side?" you ask.

"Follow the fireflies."

Jona Siverly

AGE 17

### ***The Place Where The Birds Go***

If you have ever seen an amber sky all alight with summer glow, you have seen what it's like in the place where the birds go.

There the air is sun-blessed, ripe wheat sweet, and the wind is full of heat thermals that lift their winged riders aloft as gently as the ocean swell lifts sail-winged boats. It is a quiet place, cloud muffled, with all the music of the world—all the daybreak greeting and dawn draped calling—hidden in deep pockets of white and waiting to be found. There is no land, no earth to catch wings, break, batter, and bruise hideous the gentle things. Nothing to be thrown against or crash into. No more reason to fear or suffer. No more to ache.

All fly as they wish. Though some must learn first to spread bent wings and broke backs. The little ones to stand on straight legs, unclench twisted feet. But they will, here they will. The brown-eyed babies learn to fly. They will walk, breasts of soft plumage ruffling in the wind, to the edge. They will perch, with a ballerina's balance and an ever strong strength, right on the lip of the sky. Their wings will unfurl, slower than kites catching wind, more sure. They won't look back. Their legs will fold as carefully and perfectly as origami wishing cranes. They will float on the breeze, lifted by warm breath, cupped by the clouds. Then they will fly. As they always should have.

In the place where the birds go their wings will be as nimble as williwaws, as quick as instinct. And in the open air, they will be free.



**Julia Clark**

AGE 13 | D'EVELYN JUNIOR/SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

***Who am I?***

Who am I you say  
I'm not anyone I say  
A person trapped inside their mind  
A no one with possibilities  
I'm not anyone I say  
A person who has yet to figure out  
A no one with possibilities  
And yet the possibilities are endless  
A person who has yet to figure out  
Who they are and what they are  
And yet the possibilities are endless  
I'm still imagining to this day  
Who they are and what they are  
I'm still imagining to this day  
Maybe... I am someone.  
Who am I you say

***The Night Sky***

The shooting stars  
Are falling like rain  
Pitter pattering  
Onto the planet  
Are falling like rain  
The soft sound awakening me  
Onto the planet  
It goes  
The soft sound awakening me  
Onto the ground  
It goes

The stars have landed  
Onto the ground  
The stars have landed  
I awake to a sight  
The shooting stars

### ***How to Swim***

Pick a stroke that fits your style, any of the four  
Butterfly, do some dolphin kicks, and push your arms back, forward,  
and around  
Backstroke lay on your back and do some flutter kicks, wind your  
arms like windmills, up, back,  
down, around, and repeat  
Breaststroke, go on your stomach and do some frog-style kicks, for  
your arms do the same, out,  
in, forward, glide, and repeat.  
Freestyle, lay on your stomach and start up with flutter kicks, your  
arms will follow, down, push,  
up, around, and repeat  
Pick the easiest for you to start  
For you'll master it in no time  
For swimming is the best of abilities

**Riley Sanders**

AGE 9 | SWIGERT ELEMENTARY

***Fortune***

Only the Brave can conquer Fear,  
for Bravery is always near  
And if you believe, so will we,  
for believing lays in you and me  
But Fear finds a way to nestle in your bones,  
and deep down inside, you can hear its tired moans  
You can understand that being Brave  
will never send you to your grave  
For being Brave can be peaceful and quiet,  
but sometimes it can start a riot  
Troublesome worries float through the mind,  
and all Bravery does is push them behind  
Bravery lays in only the wild,  
for Fear makes its home in the mundane mild  
And Bravery gives the chance to change,  
but Fear only want to take and exchange  
But all Fear really wants to be taking  
is hope, or love, or something you've succeeded in making  
And here I am, right beside you,  
taking your hand, and helping you through.

**Adrija Jana**

AGE 18

***murky depths to democracy***

a Murky cauldron of feelings  
 Frothing, Bubbling  
 Simmering for centuries. Yet  
 not quite Daring to overflow  
 one more pinch of explosive. added. One  
 more lash of the whip  
 Once more arsenic hands grasp our hearts  
 cracked lands and Cracked minds-  
 dim light of the oil lamp  
 eyes & wounds glow bright  
 whispers of silence corroborate  
 “WE won’t swim anymore in this river of pain!”  
 foot by foot step by step  
 against the torture, disrespect  
 against the ones who snatched our lands  
 trampled upon our dignity and love  
 and so we fought for Freedom sweet  
 freedom that came in fountains of Sweat and Blood  
 blood that still dries on walls  
 blood that colonisers stepped on as they left-  
 and freedom came with something more  
 Democracy, and trains full of  
 bodies of those who once laughed and lived  
 as our country was torn apart  
 into two blood torn enemy lands  
 those once of the same heart  
 Now had their soul shattered apart  
 and hated as they once loved.  
 and yes freedom did come  
 A burst of light in a sea of dark  
 but as it came it showed us all

the scars left by the “azaadi ki jung” (fight for freedom)  
 and yes freedom did come  
 and tired minds and battered souls  
 Democracy was what they finally chose  
 and as we cheer for democracy once more  
 Remember, it was not easily brought-  
 so treasure it well so you know  
 Blood and Sweat. and Cold  
 prison jails  
 Shackles and Massacre  
 and walking miles on a bed of thorns  
 and the destruction of what we once held dear  
 and then as the cauldron finally overflowed  
 the end of an era, and that was how democracy was fought for.

### ***the stray tendril***

one hot summer afternoon  
 afternoon when I couldn't walk further a step  
 a step beside appeared  
 appeared offering me a ride, a rickshaw  
 rickshaw pulled by a father, carrying a daughter home  
 Home was where I also wanted to go  
 go home but my home was just a house  
 a house of long dead feelings  
 Feelings that dared to rise  
 Rise as the daughter's laughter came alive in her fathers words  
 Words that inspired just a single tendril  
 Tendril of feelings that I immediately squashed  
 Squashed like a solitary blade of grass trying to rise underfoot  
 Underfoot like the way he squashed mine and my mother's hearts so  
 many years ago

***from the Edge of Darkness***

*to the Edge of the Void*

They respected the land  
The land provided for them  
Freely they lived, in the lap of nature  
The most pristine, beautiful, savage form of nature.

The treated the forests as home  
All creatures as brethren  
They cultivated for themselves, took only what they needed  
And lived in harmony with the natural world.

Soon came people from outside  
To claim the “untamed” land as their own  
They pushed and pushed them to the corner  
Some wiped out, some repressed.

And the Originals, the Aboriginals  
Saw as the home they had cultivated and nurtured  
Being destroyed by selfish greed  
And the demand for “development”.

And not only their home  
Their culture, their faith, their beliefs  
Their painstakingly built heaven  
Became a sacrifice on the altar of this “development”

*Which never really reached them.*

But they did not sit quiet  
They fought with all they had  
To protect all they cared for  
Alas! “Development” was far too powerful

*They were backed into a corner.*

Backed into a corner they were  
 For centuries and beyond  
 Till the world finally started waking up  
 Till conscience finally started waking  
*And recognised them as ordinary humans, citizens with a Right to rights.*

By then the “untamed” land  
 Had been claimed totally by the ones who came  
 And they wished to “make amends” for the wrong done

**Amends through the label of “FNMI”**

They did their best to “make amends”  
 A bit of land here  
 Some reservations there.  
 but they forgot

**The Prejudices, Biases, Injustices**

They forgot the wrongs to their heart, their mind, their belief  
 They forgot the prejudices that still existed in society  
 They forgot that reservations could give them the material right  
 But could not protect them. from the

**Stigma and Abuse heaped on them**

The time of repression might have ended  
*OFFICIALLY*  
 But the wounds, the hurt the memories  
 Remained,

they **haunted and hunted**

Till the *injustice*

**Old and New**

Mounted to an overwhelming peak  
 Leaving no space to breathe, no way out

**No ray of light**

Pushing pushing pushing them to the edge

Backing them, yet again

Till they are compelled

*To go over the edge.*



**Max Kutner**

AGE 13 | DENVER SCHOOL OF THE ARTS

### ***Forging the Colors of a New World***

There is one type of magic that is not of wand or fantasy. It is art that has woven together the loose strings of our history, and behind that art there is color. When my lips of flesh brush the metal lips of my instrument, and when I play a note, color spreads like ink through this gray world, blossoming on the blank features. The colors are a kaleidoscope that is of jagged triangles, brilliantly colored to reflect the sanguine tune of my playing heart. I am lifted up, for a moment, for one minute of freedom. Then reality intrudes again.

I opened my eyes and took in the featureless room around me. I slowly took apart my flute and placed it in its case. I closed the wooden lid with a loud thunk, the sound seeming strange in the uncanny silence of this new gray world. I parted the white curtains and looked out at the street. People passed in a hurry to get nowhere in a rush to get nothing done. But they were not people—people would be able to think and to dream and to create. The eyes of these new humans were gray and thoughtless, without the color of those who wondered and dreamed. There were few who dreamt any more. Those who passed wore clothes blank of passion, absence of color. The crowds were clones to the mysterious being called Sovereign Vermilion.

Sovereign Vermilion appeared one day on the plain of bones, the battlefield where our new world was formed. Sovereign Vermilion came with glowing eyes beneath a cloak as white as the moonlight that used to guide our ways. When Sovereign Vermilion took a step all of the dynamic colors of the barren warlands drained. That was the beginning of this new world. But against all odds his power did not touch eight minds, these eight were not clones to Sovereign Vermilion's barren dreams. I was one of the eight. Each of the eight had a different creative element in their control, such as music, my creative talent. But the Eight were crumbling. Years ago, the eighth, the oldest, disappeared.

I looked up at the sky; the clouds and heavens seemed to be one in

the same. Both were a shade of gray, as if a vacuum had sucked out all of their bright hues. The buildings seemed to pierce the sky in a vibrant palette of the most dreary colors possible.

I closed the curtains with a sigh and trudged to the bench where the girl with purple eyes slept with rasping breaths. Her purple eyes stood out in this gray world, foreign and dangerous. I lay a hand on the child's chest where a deep wound brought pain to her face with every breath. Pulling the blanket from her body I took off her shirt and looked at the white bandage, scarlet with blood. Carefully I untied the stained fabric strips and pulled it from her pale chest. After covering the cut again I pulled her shirt over her head and laid her to rest once more. I gazed at her pale features, with a dark hue of gray mingled on her skin. I stroked my fingers through her silky soft hair which was a dark gray but not fully black. I tried to imagine what she would look like if there was color seeping through her veins but with my mind trapped in this gray world I could not think. I put my hands over my eyes and then chided myself for not noticing the obvious about the girl and who she was.

The bell ring continued, calling us to the center of the City of Idée Fixe and then continued on, one low beat after another. At the center of the colossal city was the Capitol building. This building was an octagonal stone tower, twisting into a massive point at the top which held up the clear dome that entrapped me. On each side of the massive building there were large black doors that were as simple as a blank canvas and yet elegant in their own way.

I looked at the crowd around me and tugged my hood down over my eyes. On the steps up to the west side of the Capitol there was a podium standing, its black color reflected in the polished white stairs. I raised my head only slightly — I was searching for someone in the crowd. This task was nearly impossible because the whole population of the city of Idée Fixe was gathered on the gray pavement that circled the Capitol.

Where was she? And Hue? Ah! There they were standing together at the back of the crowd, looking conspicuous in their plain, colorless hoodies.

“Why do you think Sovereign Vermilion gathered us here today?”

I whispered to Hue as I walked forwards to stand with them.

“It’s either an announcement or a public execution,” piped up Pixie as she leaned forward to look at me.

Hue and Pixie were my two older siblings. Hue’s creative element was art. His eyes flashed at me from underneath his hood. They were iridescent, flashing in a painting of all the colors, whereas Pixie’s glared at me from red irises. Pixie had the creative element of magic, and though her talent was special, her curling pink horns, red wings, and scarlet tail was hard to conceal within the loose fabrics of a sweatshirt.

Sovereign Vermilion walked up to the podium, his alien soldiers followed him, their electric spears held in clawed hands. His white cape fell over his black suit.

*Red* eyes watching from under the hood as pale as bone.

Ersel Serdar

AGE 14 | CHERRY CREEK HIGH SCHOOL

***Excerpt from Vengeance***

“Tuesday afternoon, March 23, 1486.” Today. What are days, even? A way to count time.

Time is irrelevant.

The world is loud, even in my box, a “mile” underground. What are miles, even? A way to count far. The loud is especially bright from that one. He calls himself Doyle. Why does everyone call themselves something? It’s a way to remember the unmemorable.

The only good sound in the world is my typewriter. The sound looks like a pleasant curve. The paper’s odd rippling is fine too, I guess. But all other sound is bad, so I live in this box. I try to keep the sound out. I do. But there’s just so much of it. It always leaks through, like the pale anxiety that Doyle is feeling. There is nobody around him. It is only him and his bright grey walking. I can also hear the snow falling around him. It sounds like the ants, but quieter. I hate ants. There are just so many of them, but people are worse. People have more noise and they have minds and personalities. So I use my typewriter to block it all out and forget it.

The place Doyle is going is full of people. They are all wrapped up in their own little worlds. Their way to remember this completely unmemorable town is Balruan. It’s on a big bright line, which is quieter today. But the little swimming fish in the line are loud. They are filled with an orange fear of the quiet white parts. But the line (a “river”) is important. The giant blue and grey things carrying loud people and lots of their things go down the blue line. They take the things and give them to people, and the people then go and make noise in different places. Then some people end, and the rest turn red and make more noise. The people call it “war” and it is close to my box. I want it to stop so I can have quiet, so I tell Doyle and Akse and Jeraia and Menno and all the others to go and destroy the noise hubs (“towns” and “cities”). And then everybody can end each other, and the noise

goes away. I've ended many wars this way.

Although it seems like the people figure something out and make another war.

Doyle is there now. He is in a place with a few other noise people. One of them shines orange. The others glow pink under the load that they are carrying. I decide to listen to the orange one and make some noise ("write") on my typewriter. It is relaxing. I also have the papers fluttering, which adds to the noise. The lights are very calming and therapeutic. I can hear the ink and the words drying. They glow.

Doyle makes the black noise. The town shines orange, and then everyone ends. But two of them are still orange instead of ending. I listen. One is the same person as before. His name is Arda. I decide to let him be. The other is someone else. I decide to let him be, too. It seems like the people are green with "worry" for each other, and also purple. Let them resolve that green. The purple will motivate them to resolve it. I don't care. They'll end soon enough for me.

The days go by. Like I said, time is irrelevant. I can listen to any point I want to. It is now "Wednesday evening, July 27, 1492." I am curious about Arda and I try to find him. Oh dear. He has turned bright red. I listen closer and he is trying to find Doyle. I send Akse to find Arda.

Arda is on something that shines purple. It is the thing called a "horse." They are very purple for each other. But Arda is overwhelmed by the red. He is only red, as far as I care. I did not send Akse to find him for no reason. Arda survived Doyle. Only a few other people have done that. He is important and I begin to get an idea why. I look for the other orange person, but I don't find him. He must have ended. That's too bad. I look back and Akse has ended some people. He is orange and has released a big black thing, and Arda is on the stairs. I decide to listen to Akse's mind. He is very orange, as always. There are big black things in him.

I tell him that Arda is important and he shouldn't be so orange. He is as orange for you as you are for him, I say. But Akse does not listen. He is young and immature. Of course he will not listen. I tell him again. He thinks that Arda will end him. I tell him that that is ridiculous and that he would end Arda before Arda even had a chance of ending him. Akse shines a bit red at me. Oh well. Akse is young.

He will eventually stop being so red. Arda shines a very bright orange. Akse also shines a very bright orange. The red has been forgotten. They exchange their orange, make noise, and neither of them have ended. I tell Akse he was not supposed to do that. He becomes redder. He then tries to tell me something but the black things come out instead. Oh dear. He does not make noise out of his mouth (“talk”) because the black things in him do the talking for him. And when he tries to sleep, he only sees the black things. Jeraia is also filled with black. So is Doyle. So am I. They call it their Curse. I don’t understand that word, so I describe it how I hear it. It is big and black.

Arda is now in another place. He becomes reddish orange (he was yellow with “curiosity” before), and decides to go after Jeraia. He goes until he is very close. He then becomes a faint red, but he sees something about Doyle and becomes fully red. I tell Jeraia to go and attack him. She needs to lead him here. She says okay. He turns orange again, but then red and he begins following her. He becomes yellow for a while, a pale red, and then even yellower. There is some orange again. He leaves the horse and enters the Catacombs. Jeraia is waiting for him. Doyle smothers the lanterns in black. Arda is very orange. I bring him to a tunnel outside of my box. He opens a door. It is very brown and painful to listen to. Akse, Jeraia, and Doyle are there. Arda burns red. Jeraia stops him and they go into the tower.

I am alone with my typewriter again. Arda is making some noise even though he is Asleep.

It is then I realize why Arda is so important. He shines black in his sleep and it makes me turn orange.

Natalie Joy Roberts

AGE 15

***The beginning...***

A homeless person stood on the sidewalk staring at his shoes trying to muster up the courage to look at the lines of cars waiting for the light to turn green, his cardboard sign held loosely in his grasp. A young boy stood by himself waiting for his mom to come back from the bathroom across the street. He had a toy t-rex held in one chubby fist and a red balloon in the other. He was playing with the t-rex and wandered into the street. The light still hadn't changed. The homeless man saw the tiny boy and gasped. Dropping his cardboard sign he ran into the oncoming traffic just as the light turned green. He scooped up the boy and ran from the huffing and puffing cars, barely making it to the other side of the street before they were whizzing past. The mother stood speechless as the man brushed off the boy and handed him his t-rex toy. Two men in business suits also witnessed this kind act, but took it in an entirely different way. They grabbed the homeless man and shoved him to the ground away from the boy. The mother, as if broken from her trance, raced to her son, dropping to her knees and hugging him. She grabbed his hand and started leading him away when the boy broke free and walked to where the homeless man was dusting his knees as he stood. He handed the homeless man his t-rex toy and let go of the red balloon. He then ran back to his mother who hurried him away. The homeless man stared at the small toy in his giant hand. He smiled and crossed the street and picked up his sign and sat down. The red balloon drifted away, carrying on a light breeze.

The End.

***Diary entry: Number 1: The aftermath...***

People have accused me of being fake. I threw everything away — my friends, my school, my good grades and most importantly my life. All for a single chance at revenge. While I did not mean for others to get in my way, throwing them to the wolves, so to speak, was my way of protecting them. Perhaps they don't see it in that way but at least I tried and that's the important part. This isn't some pity party, I know that one day my past will haunt me, but I have never regretted my decision. Although at the risk of sounding cliché my new life has no idea what dark history it played a part in. Let me explain: my brother two years ago was murdered. Albeit I am only sharing a piece of my untold story in hopes that you, and you alone, will know why I did what I did. There were different paths I could have taken; despite that, I chose this one. Here are the known facts plain and simple. My brother was twelve when he died. He went up to a cabin with a bunch of his friends and older siblings. On day three, we got the call, my brother had disappeared and turned up dead. Oh the police investigated and claimed there was no dirty play. But I know better, his so-called friends played a part in his death and I would do anything — pardon — I did everything to make sure they paid in blood. Oh, I didn't kill them if that's where your mind went. I did something far worse to the 12 boys who murdered my brother 2 years ago. Now they will live regretting that day they decided to enact revenge for the rest of their pitiful lives wishing they hadn't messed with fate. Whereas I thank fate and destiny for aiding me as I fought for my brother. But the new life I have is so sickly beautiful I wish my brother was still here to see the chaos I reaped for his benefit.



Zoe Church

AGE 12 | McAULIFFE INTERNATIONAL MIDDLE SCHOOL

### ***Scars of the Dark***

My dark cloak swished behind me, concealing my body and the glinting of the bow tucked beneath my arm from the lanterns that lined the alley I crept down.

The moon, bathed in silver and pearls, was white against the calliginosity of the night. Murky clouds obscured the stars that would ordinarily flicker across the sky and it made my job all the easier.

Ervan had called upon me for this mission, his thought that I didn't have enough experience yet. *Lady Pierce*, he'd called me. I smirked. Oh, how wrong he was.

My footsteps were inaudible, and I approached the building, a dark, shadowy structure that twisted up from the ground. Families and enemies alike milled around the entrance and walked into the brightly lit hall while I stood, shrouded by shadows, hidden by an outcropping of houses. It could have been me, laughing along with the richest merchants in town, if only I hadn't been selected for—

Anger flared within me, and with no difficulty or hesitation at all, I drew back the arrow, an explosive tied to the tip. Nothing—they'd done nothing to stop my transformation. It would be so easy to demolish them all.

That's when I heard it. A small noise, an almost soundless whimper, that drew my attention away from the destruction that lay in my arms. There, resting in the window of the building that would soon burn down, was a tiny child, bundled in blankets to protect her from the cold.

From my vantage point a couple feet away, I tilted my head, face blank and devoid of emotion. She twisted her body around and kicked at the air, crying out once more and pulling at her short brown hair. Two figures, illuminated by the light in their room, strode past the child, shushing her and picking up papers. When she turned, her bright blue eyes wandered to meet mine. I gazed back into them, and

the innocent-faced girl in the midst of a world so dark and corrupt stilled and smiled.

And I could have sworn that somewhere deep within the walls that I forged out of lies and deception, a flame flickered in reply. A voice, so familiar and yet not at all, sounded in my head, the faintest memory of a caress.

*My Koralyynn*, the voice whispered, warmth dancing along my spine. *Be brave.*

*Bravery. Kindness.* A mockery of the childhood I could never have after I was snatched from my mother's arms. An ache, buried so deep in me that spread through my entire body until I was burning with passion and anger. A Hunter, beast of the dark was what the Collectors wanted me to become. They came in the night, stole me away, and turned me into the monster I was now. The girl that believed in bravery, in kindness, in good was stamped out so quickly she had no chance of survival. When you're immersed in the darkness for so long, it starts to leave pieces of itself within you until you become something else entirely.

And it was because I could never have it, and this child before me could, that I pulled the string taut with ease, and released the arrow. But not before looking away from the girl whose chance I had ruined as well.

When the flames started, and the screams rang out, I didn't feel it. Smoke rose and choked the air, but I couldn't feel it. Someone pushed past me, tears streaming down their face and crying out for a child who would never return and I didn't feel it.

Except the girl, the one who sought out my gaze and dared to meet it, lingered. The child with the blue eyes that burned accusing holes into my soul—I felt that.

But when I turned and walked away, fire dancing into the dark, something inside me snapped. That night, I left the fire and my humanity along with it.

Sara Templeton

AGE 13

### ***Defiance***

The heavy footfalls of soldiers filled the marketplace in the absence of the usual chatter. Not a living soul dared to venture to the market that day; nobody was that foolish — at least that was what the soldiers believed. Still, their self-crowned leader was stubborn and thorough — and paranoid. He sent one hundred men to search every nook and cranny of the area, and search they did — overturning stalls, checking in every crate, even smashing delicate pottery. Any unlucky fellow who was hiding was bound to be found and executed, for fear that they might be trying to stop the ruler's plans for that particular day.

Fourteen-year-old Olivia Grace knew this; in fact, it was all she could think about. However, her eight-year-old sister, Amara, had dashed to the marketplace the second Olivia had turned her back. Olivia had sprinted after her, but Amara was small and could squeeze into places Olivia couldn't. It had become a wild, hopeless chase, with Amara easily ducking through alleyways and Olivia needing to find long routes around, and just as she could see her little sister again Amara would disappear into a house or shop, and be gone in a second. The little girl kept this charade going all through town, until Olivia was gasping for air and her cries for Amara to stop became whispers only she heard.

Olivia usually would not be this panicked. Her neighbors were kind and would return Amara when she slipped from her older sister's supervision. Today, however, every citizen who valued their life refused to take a step in the direction of the marketplace. According to the explanations posted all over town, the marketplace would be used that day for an execution stage. Lists of prisoners had been sent out the day before, and many people were already mourning the deaths of their criminal relatives. The only two people in the town to ignore the directions, even if it was an accident, were the Grace sisters.

When the older sister realized which direction Amara was running,

her exhaustion was replaced with desperation, and that desperation was joined by panic and fear. She propelled herself forward, putting every ounce of strength into catching Amara. Fifty yards turned to forty, then thirty. At twenty, Olivia started to yell again, screaming her sister's name, begging her to stop. Unfortunately, Amara thought it was only a game, and kept speeding forward.

Bitter and rather colorful phrases shot through Olivia's thoughts, but she dismissed them. Ten yards away.

"You can't catch me!" Amara gloated happily.

A flash of armor ahead caught Olivia's eye. A soldier from the invading territory, Asasia, was standing nearby, and Amara was hurtling towards him.

Five yards. Four. Three. Olivia lunged, tackling her younger sister. Both of them toppled to the ground, one laughing, one looking fearfully up at an approaching soldier.

Olivia hauled her giggling sibling upward. "I need you to be quiet," she hissed in Amara's ear. "Please, Amara. This is important."

Amara's giggles faded away, and she mimicked Olivia's stiff posture as the soldier stopped a couple feet from them, sword drawn and eyes watching for an escape attempt.

"Would you like to tell me," he said, his words whispered but his tone quavering with anger, "what exactly you are doing at the edge of the marketplace, when the entire city has been ordered to keep away from this area?"

Olivia's heart rate must've been breaking records. *If only my feet moved as fast as my heart*, she thought. *I would've caught Amara and survived through the day.*

"Well?" asked the soldier.

Before she could craft a clever lie, the truth came spilling out of Olivia's mouth.

The soldier shook his head at them. "What is your full name?" he asked her.

"Olivia Rose Grace," she responded.

"And yours, child?" The soldier's face turned in the direction of Amara.

"Amara Reese Grace," she said honestly. Olivia silently thanked whatever deity ruled over Earth for making her sister obedient just this one time.

“Grace?” he asked. “As in...Seil Grace?”

“He’s my older brother!” Amara exclaimed happily.

No, *Amara, no!* Olivia had to bite her lip to stop from crying those words. Their brother had run away two years ago, when the Asasian invasion first started. The two Grace sisters had found out why when his name was on the list for “Execution for Conspiring Against the Government”, along with the names of the other members of the resistance group who called themselves Defiance.

The soldier didn’t seem upset or mad, but the opposite. His mouth bloomed into a creepy grin. “I’ll get promoted for this,” he mumbled to himself. “Congratulations, girls, you’ve gotten your names added to the lists for execution today.”

Tears sprang to Olivia’s eyes, and she squeezed her sister’s hand, hard. “Please, sir — she’s only eight and she doesn’t know any better—”

At that point, Amara interrupted her older sister, anger rising in her like a tidal wave. “I did know better,” she protested. “I do know better. And I also know that Asasian filth like you has no place in Arin, in our country!” The fierce child stomped on the soldier’s boot as hard as her little body could muster.

The soldier gasped in pain and retracted his foot. He snatched Amara’s wrist into his hand and started dragging her away. She kicked and fought, but was small and weak. “It’s now or never, Olivia!” Amara screamed. “Now or never!” Olivia could hardly comprehend her immature sister being so brave.

The eldest of the two sisters stood motionless for just a second, staring at her younger sister being dragged away. Then she leapt into action. She lunged for the soldier, scratching him, and yanked her little sister from his arms. “Stay away from my sister!” Her instruction came out as a scream. She kicked the officer hard in the stomach, and when he doubled over, she hit him on the head. Then she ran, dragging Amara behind her, dashing away as fast as she could.

“How’d...you do...that?” Amara panted as they ran.

“I’d let myself die a hundred times before letting someone hurt you,” Olivia responded.

The soldier, though crippled with pain, was trained to outrun the fastest men alive – the two sisters were no match for him. Olivia, however, recalled her chase with Amara. The little girl would be able to escape from the soldier, if merely by hiding.

“Go,” Olivia hissed in Amara’s ear as the fast-falling footsteps behind them grew louder. “Hide. I’ll be right behind you.”

Amara didn’t doubt her sister; she ran faster than she ever had before, dashing into the twisting rows of buildings and ducking out of sight. The roar of footsteps was now deafening, and Olivia twirled around. If she was going to be caught, it wouldn’t be running away. She would stand her ground. *Be brave, like Seil*, she told herself. *Be courageous. Be what you always wanted to be. What can you lose now?*

The soldier grabbed her wrist and started yanking her back to the marketplace. “You people never learn,” he bellowed. “We’re more powerful, more advanced, and more important than you, and you still insist on resisting. So what’ll you do when we silence you, then, huh?”

Olivia stopped in her tracks, pulling her wrist backward and forcing the soldier to stop in his tracks. *Be brave*. “We’ll find a new way to be heard,” she snarled in his ear, and then she pulled him forward and drove a knee into his stomach.

The soldier groaned and doubled over, his grip going limp. He collapsed to the ground, and Olivia drove a fist into his nose. A sickening *crack* emitted from the bone, and the soldier lay still.

Olivia looked at the marketplace, where prisoners were being lined up for execution. A sharp blade glinted in the hand of the executioner. Hundreds of lives would be lost, unless...

“Now or never,” she mumbled to herself. Then she dashed forward, screaming one single word to the defeated, hopeless prisoners — “FIGHT!”

**Kate Bestall**

AGE 17 | EVERGREEN HIGH SCHOOL

***Memory Graveyard***

I could lock your love away  
and swallow the key.

I need to keep  
a part of *you*  
inside a part of me.

I'll bury you in my chest  
and never let you out again (a ribcage is a fitting name)  
weave the bars closer together,  
maybe that'll  
protect my heart a little bit more.  
if I trace  
every  
individual  
bone

I could find each memory of everything  
most people forgot.

There are 24 ribs  
in the human body.

There are far more than 24 people who haunt me.  
If the lover is the one who waits,

I am not the lover,

but I'll always be the one who remembers,  
even as I walk away from people,  
even as I move on with my life.

I still look for you in every airport.

I stare at every person I pass,

examine jawlines

& cheekbones

like an artist,

paint over their faces

to make them look

like you.

& I can still taste your heartbeat

& the crickets' song of summer

five years forlorn,

lick my lips and try to erase

memories I don't know what to do with anymore.

If you could look

inside my head, you'd understand,

if you could cut it open,

inspect

the ants crawling under the bark,

if you could hold my brain between your two fists,

just sit

next to me

for a moment,

just listen,

listen—

All I can say is

I treat my brain

the same way I treat my suitcase.

Stuff it up with everything I need

and plenty of things I don't,

useless objects of sentimental value,

more books than I could possibly read on a four-day trip,

*everything* for the imagined circumstance of an emergency—

do you think this memory might be important later? I'll keep it just in case.



**Leah Kupersmit**

AGE 11 | McAULIFFE INTERNATIONAL

### ***Moving***

I fidgeted in my seat, watching the clock on the wall. After what seemed like an eternity, the bell rang. I jumped out of my seat and grabbed my backpack. All around me, my classmates did the same. We ran out into the hallway, where some of us went to the bus and some went to get picked up. I went toward “parent pickup” and pushed open the door. I looked down from the balcony... there! My Nanys and sisters, waiting for me. -Hola mi niña, ¿cómo estás? “Hi there, how are you?” My Nanys asked me. -¡Muy bien! “Good!” I responded. I climbed into the car and we began driving. -¿Cuándo vamos a ver la casa? “When are we going to see the house?” I complained. I fidgeted in my seat. Finally, we arrived. I hopped out of the car and ran over to my parents. “Hi Mom! Hi Dad!” I remembered how, about a week ago, in my 5 year old brain, I thought that I had packed all of my things, something that grownups do all of the time. I felt older. I smiled.

**Zoe Thomas**

AGE 13 | MONTESSORI SCHOOL OF DENVER

## ***The Sprite and the Shapeshifter***

### **CHAPTER ONE**

It was a blazing hot summer day. The Shore City marketplace was full to the bursting with crowds of people. Nellie was sweeping out the piles of dust and dead shadowfaye that had gathered under her stand when a man dressed in an elaborate cape walked up to her.

Sparkling jewels decorated his long pointed ears. A matching shimmering band wrapped around his silvery-blue wrist. Nellie wondered if it was real gold.

“How much is that?” he inquired, pointing at an ornate pottery piece she had acquired during her travels to the northern cities. It cost 20 shells, but this man looked wealthier than most of Nellie’s customers.

“30 shells,” she answered instead.

He nodded and began to measure out the money.

While she waited, Nellie noticed the small girl standing behind him. Nellie smiled.

“Is that your daughter?” she asked.

The girl’s eyes widened.

The man looked confused. “Wha-” Then he spotted the girl. “Hey!” he shouted. “That’s mine!” The girl broke into a run. The light caught on something clutched in her hands. Nellie recognized it as the gold bracelet the man had been wearing. He chased after the thief, and soon both were swallowed by the crowd.

Nellie shook her head. He should have known better than to flaunt his riches in the Shore City market. She was just annoyed he’d forgotten to pay.

## CHAPTER TWO

Count Xavier of Graypeak was on a mission. He and his cousin, the Count of Archford, had been sworn enemies ever since the roast beef incident when Xavier was three. In the twenty-five years since then, their hatred of one another had only continued to fester.

The Count of Archford had recently bragged that he had the finest pottery collection east of the Everwood. Xavier was determined to change this. He considered sabotaging his cousin's collection, but that was too risky. No. Xavier would win fair and square.

So he'd dressed in his finest cloak and jewels and set off towards Shore City, where one-of-a-kind artifacts from far and wide were traded in its famous marketplace. After hours of wandering the streets with no avail, he'd found exactly what he was looking for. A beautifully decorated bowl made from clay from the Wildcliff River. The only thing that the Count of Archford didn't have in his collection.

But then that no good thieving stupid little twerp had taken his gold wristband that the Count of Archford had given him after Xavier won a bet. He loved to flaunt it around him. If he lost his wristband, having a superior pottery collection would mean nothing. He chased after the thief, shoving his way through the crowd of peasants.

"Gotcha!" he cried, grabbing her by one of her antlers. She turned to stare at him. Then she disappeared. Xavier stumbled back, startled. A small bird flew away in her place. He squinted. It had the same leaf dappled antlers as the girl did. Xavier gasped. "A shape-shifter!"

## CHAPTER THREE

She landed on top of a laundry line. The bracelet was still clutched in her beak. It was a lucky catch. Normally it would be twice as hard to get something half as valuable. She flew down into a back alley. Most days she would spend more time searching but this would buy her enough to survive weeks. She shifted into a cat. If anyone saw her they would think she was one the many strays that roamed the city streets.

She entered the small space created by a pile of boxes. There lay her few possessions: a few bobbles she planned to sell in the morning, a couple of ratty blankets, and... She reached into the groove in the stone wall and it fell into her paw. A silver locket with shapes of tiny leaves carved into the rusting metal surface.

*We found you under a rowan tree. Just you and this locket, wrapped in a thin blanket in the snow. We couldn't leave you, so we brought you home. And that was the best decision we ever made.* Rowan's parents' words echoed in her mind. She shook her head. They were the last people she wanted to think about right now.

Instead, Rowan thought about that day. The rich guy had seen her shift. He probably hadn't understood what he saw though. Who would expect a shapeshifter in the middle of Shore City?

She inspected the gold band. Wow. She had never seen anything like it. She squinted. There was something written on the inside. Rowan stalked out of the boxes. She shifted into a tall humanoid and raised it to the light. PROPERTY OF THE NOBLE HOUSE OF ARCHFORD was inscribed on the inside of the wristband.

Rowan froze.

That guy wasn't just rich, he was part of one of the noble houses.

The noble houses that had tracked her down as a child.

Who had made her parents rich in exchange for handing her over to them, an offer her parents had accepted in a heartbeat.

Who Rowan had escaped from and had been in hiding from for the past four years.

The noble houses would stop at nothing to find the last shapeshifter.

**Andy Green**

AGE 12 | SOUTHERN HILLS MIDDLE SCHOOL

### ***The Day My Sister Was Born***

Just five, I was going through one of the most important moments of my short life: my sister was coming into the world. The date was March 17, 2016. I was small but curious about what the day was to bring. I was pretty excited. I was too little when my brother was born to remember, so this was especially exciting. My grandmother and grandfather drove me and my probably confused little brother to the hospital, through the snow.

When we finally arrived, we got out of the car where my parents and new baby were. The trek through the hospital seemed unrealistically long, but it was probably just my very interested mind, itching to see my baby sister. Stepping into the room, I quickly walked to the far side and plopped down on the couch that the hospital has in this room. My mother was holding something swaddled completely in blankets, and I was smart enough to know that the thing in question was a new human being. My mom looked exhausted; this was her third baby and, thinking about it, I was sure it didn't get easier to deliver each one, especially since my siblings and I were all born by way of C-section. It was all over now, though, and her joyful recovery had begun. She greeted us ecstatically, and then I was invited to come meet my little sister. Stepping cautiously over the tile floor, I made it to the bed, where I bent over to hug mom, and then stood up to look at my sister. I could only see her face, and I couldn't call it a pudgy baby face, because she has no "meat on her bones." It was adorable, though. It was hard to believe that this little thing was my sister, but I liked it. And then came the best part of the whole day. My mom asked me if I wanted to hold my sister. I, very excitedly, responded yes.

Looking back on this day, I often find and stare at a picture of me holding my sister, my brother holding her, and then both of us at the same time. This day was a very important moment in my life, and one that I will never forget.

SUMMER MIDDLE SCHOOL WRITING INTENSIVE

HAKEEM FURIOUS, TWANNA LATRICE HILL, SYDNEY FOWLER, CHRISTEN ALDRIDGE

Hana de Queiroz

AGE 15

**Artemis**

When I was newly born I knew.  
I asked a favor of my father and though he didn't understand  
(How could he, god of the sky, with so many wives?)  
He loved me and he granted my wish.  
I knew my love was for the forest,  
For my brother, the shining god, lover of the spotlight,  
For my mother, chased by Hera's wrath  
The victim of my father's polygamy.  
Even for my father, flawed though he was  
For Orion, my friend, chasing beasts across the waves.

But my love could never be for a singular man  
My heart was full. No room for romance.

I stalked the forest with my silver arrows,  
Bringers of a painless death.  
I hunted not for the pleasure of the kill,  
As my half-brother Ares did  
I hunted for the feel of the forest beneath my feet,  
For the company of my virgin companions,  
Who like me sought a life free of love.

I am romanticized with my symbol, the moon;  
With my dark, cold, "unwomanly" self.  
But in a world obsessed with marriage,  
I, like my sister Athena, swore against its steely grip.  
I am a lone wolf, teeth bared  
A wise owl, claws poised  
A brave woman, bowstring taut.

Huxley Evans

AGE 11

***Dark side of the ocean***

The ocean,  
Bitter, cold, resentful,  
Killer of men,  
Destroyer of boats,  
Thief of sailors  
Horses,  
Manes spraying foam  
Riders cracking their wip,  
Merciless  
Engulfs you  
With no way out  
A giant,  
Hungry,  
Selfish  
Green  
With seaweeds blood  
Blue  
With the flesh of fish  
Red - brown  
Dead bodies of sailors  
Ships  
Thrown against rocks  
Toys  
All fun and games  
So much bigger  
So much better  
Be humble  
Or else...

Giada Serafini Gillespie

AGE 12

### ***Tournamenta***

Prompt: “I see so much of myself in you,” she said quietly. “It frightens me.”

Ever since I became her best friend, it seemed I felt like a mirror of her soul, her face, her mind. It was such a strange feeling to be a mirror. She had black hair that was always curly and down in her face. In school, we had been friends since we were 13. But I felt as if life without her was impossible. Her topaz skin matched mine. The only thing that differed from our two appearances was our eyes. Mine blue, hers brown. In the year of dust, we had been selected to be the Travelers of Tournamenta. Tournamenta was a festival of growth. We wore leather robes with hoods of brown silk over our dark hair. We both wore Maniko jewels on our collarbones on chains of thin gold. Our lips were dyed with plum and cherry paste. The year of soil was 5089. Last year. This year is the year of dust and a new decade, 5090. I am turning 15 on the first of the Tournamenta. I woke up to Catora singing. “Okio mia oko koy mia.” Wake morning, bright lovely morning. The song Mamia sang to me as a waking song. “Oko mia, toci lunar sliov, joni toci nita beynik.” Bright morning, the moon sleeps, leave the night behind. I awoke. The smell of Rabnir in the air. I pull off my silks and wrap a gahi robe over my silk undergarments. I walk into the kitchen and see Rabnir in the frying pot. Rabnir is a crispy bread with cheese and spinach blazik, which is like a puree. I see that Mamia is wearing her Tournamenta gown or Rewde. She smiles at me. “Happy Birthday, Miko Bricko dayos!” I smile and nod. “When is the rabnir going to be ready, Mamia?!” Jacki walked in the room, his black hair tousled and perfectly messy. “Soon,” Mamia said. Papa jogged in through the back door. “Ara! Mi amor!” I smiled at his birthday dance. “Papa, we aren’t allowed to speak other languages on Tournamenta!” My dark coily hair bounced on my shoulders as I

SUMMER MIDDLE SCHOOL WRITING INTENSIVE

HAKHEEM FURIOUS, TWANNA LATRICE HILL, SYDNEY FOWLER, CHRISTEN ALDRIDGE



joined Papa in his dance. A few minutes later, when we had finished eating, I had to get presentable. Mamia shooed me into the bathing room and started the water. I took my robe off and sank in, the rose-scented water swirling.



### **About the Authors**

**Adrija Jana** is a passionately creative writer based in India. She mostly creates poetry pieces based on her personal experiences as well as social issues she is passionate about. Her work mostly revolves around protest against period poverty, marital rape and advocating for freedom of choice, apart from emotional self-lived experiences. She is inspired by writers such as Margaret Mitchell and Nayyirah Waheed, as well as the minutiae of everyday life. Apart from being a writer, Adrija is also a Spoken Word Artist, Theatrecian, Filmmaker and creative researcher, and all her work is woven together by common themes. She believes that creative pieces that let the innate imperfection shine through truly touch hearts. You can reach out to Adrija or read more about her work on Instagram: @adrija\_jana2004 Alice Pearson is a sophomore at Northfield High School who enjoys writing short stories and poetry.

**Alisha Ashwin** is a 4th grader at Mangini Ranch Elementary. She likes reading fiction and fantasy books and loves to sing. Andy Green is a twelve year old writer from Lafayette, Colorado. When he is not writing, he really likes reading, playing with his two little siblings, and playing baseball. His favorite genre to write is realistic fiction. His all-time favorite book is the seventh *Harry Potter*, but his favorite author is Rick Riordan. He attends Southern Hills Middle School in south Boulder.

**Ava Henninger** is a 12th grader at Mclain. They love to read, write, and do art.

**Ayanna Sandoval** is a senior at McClain High School who works and goes to school.

**Dominic Herrick** was a former foster kid and expresses his past and troubles as a rapper and songwriter. He fell in love with poetry through his music and acting.

**Elaine Chung** is a curious, imaginative writer who enjoys witty, descriptive writing and losing herself in her own thoughts. She has been dabbling in writing for 7 years having been enamored with it since

she was 9. She has also been playing piano for the last 12 years. Her interests include creative writing, taekwondo, studying Chinese, and playing songs by ear.

**Elijah Prien** is a senior at McLain High School. He enjoys art in all forms that they come in, and is willing to take every opportunity to express himself through art.

**Ersel Serdar** is a tenth grader at Cherry Creek High School. He enjoys writing and reading sci-fi and fantasy.

**Eve Gersey** loves writing and hopes to publish many page turning novels in the future. She loves to spend time reading with her family, crocheting, swimming, and rollerblading. She is excited to go into 6th Grade at Morey Middle School.

**Giada Serafini** Gillespie is an author who lives in Denver, Colorado. She loves watching Naruto and hanging out with her super awesome Pug and French bulldog.

**Gwynneth Reeder** is an 11th grader at Stargate Charter School. She likes reading fantasy and sci-fi and eating chocolate.

**Hana de Queiroz** is a sophomore from Reno, Nevada. She writes short stories, novels, and poetry about all that is magic and whimsical. When she isn't writing, she enjoys reading middle grade novels, listening to music, and drawing.

**Huxley Evans** lives in Hillsborough, California, with his sister, mom, and dad. He loves art, songwriting, playing piano, and fashion design. He has written many short stories, including "Shrink," and "The Guard." You can find him at [HUXLEYEVANS.COM](http://HUXLEYEVANS.COM).

**Isabella Armsworth** is a sixth grader. They like writing poetry and fiction.

**Jona Siverly** is a 12th-grade homeschooler. She likes the early morning, her cat, Nimbus, and descriptions in writing.

**Julia Clark** is a 7th grader at D'evelyn. They like to draw, write, play games, and hang out with friends and family. Julia's favorite colors are pink, sage green, and grey. They like to write poetry the most.

**Kate Bestall** is a senior at Evergreen High School. Other than writing, she spends her free time dancing and playing the violin. Her favorite color is blue.

**Kiran Tait** is a seventh grader at St. Catherine's Montessori. She likes action movies and K-Pop.

**Leah Kupersmit** is a 6th grader at McAuliffe. She plays violin and piano, and also does many sports. She enjoys reading and writing.

**Leo Hickman** is a sophomore at Stargate. They have been writing as a hobby for five years. They also play the drums and enjoy baking.

**Lila Kessler** lives in San Francisco with her mom and her cat, Beetle. She's an 8th grader at Synergy School, where her favorite subject is Language Arts. She enjoys reading and writing poetry, spending time in nature, and baking cakes. One of the best books she's ever read is *The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green.

**Lucia Uribe** is an 11th grader at McLain High School.

**Matthew Rayburn** is a junior at McLain High School with a whole lotta money.

**Max Kroll** is a senior at West Springfield Highschool. He enjoys fantasy, sci-fi, and free verse poetry. He lives in Springfield, VA, with his mother, father, brother, and two dogs.

**Max Kutner** is an eighth grader at Denver School of the Arts. He loves music and reading. His favorite genres to write in are fantasy, poetry, and movie scripts. Max has played flute for six years and loves creating stories, music, and art. Max received an honorable mention in the Tattered Cover spooky story competition and has been featured in the Celebration of Poets book. Max would like to inspire his readers to always remember to forge the colors of a new world, because only together can we create a revolution!

**Maya Csajaghy** is a fifth grader at Cory Elementary School. She likes poetry, non-fiction, fiction and art. In the winter, she likes to ski race. She loves to travel around the world. She also likes to play sports and spend time with animals, including her two cats.

**Maya McQuade** is an eighth grader at Odyssey Denver school. She enjoys reading, writing, and drawing/painting. No matter where she is, you can always find her carrying a book.

**Michael Chang** is a rising 8th grader at the St. Mark's School of Texas. In his free time, he enjoys playing ping pong, doing math problems, and of course, reading books and writing. He discovered his love of books early at the start of his 3rd grade year.

**Natalie Roberts** is a young artistic writer. Based in Denver, Colorado, she spends her time divided between drawing, painting, and writing.

**Oz Donald** is a 6th grader at D'evelyn Junior/Senior High School. He likes to write fantasy and dystopian and likes to eat sushi.

**Raul Gonzalez IV** is in the 12th grade.

**Riley Sanders** is a creative fifth grader at Swigert Elementary. You can either find her with her nose in a book, or clacking away (aka also known as typing!) a new story on her computer.

**Samara Foster** is a seventh grader at Morey Middle School. In her free time she enjoys hiking, reading, hanging out with friends and family, and writing!

**Sara Templeton** is in 7th grade and loves to write, especially when she's working on a fantasy or dystopian piece, and the longest story she's ever written was about one hundred thirty Google Docs pages, equivalent to just under two hundred twenty novel pages. She has been doing Tae Kwon Do for over six years and is a first degree black belt. She's played basketball for Lady Falcons Elite for as long as she can remember and loves the sport.

**Skyler Rogers** is a senior at McLain High School and has a hectic life.

**Sophia C. Newton** is a fifth grader at Downtown Denver Expeditionary School. She likes poetry, fiction and nonfiction.

**Venn Walker** is a ninth grader at Wheat Ridge High School. They enjoy writing powerful, evoking pieces, and hanging out with their two cats!

**Willa Brink** is an eighth grader at Horizons K-8. They enjoy writing dark poetry and starting stories that they never finish. They hope to spread awareness about LGBTQIA+ rights through their writing.

**Ziva Seller** was born Friday the 13th, in November. She played soccer but now is playing basketball. She lives in Vail and goes to school at Vail Mountain School. Ziva is going into 7th grade. She has always been into writing but in the last year she started writing poems.

**Zoe Church** is a seventh grader at McAuliffe International Middle School. Creative writing, reading, and anything artistic have always been her passions. Whether it's writing poetry, sci-fi, dystopian, or fantasy, she loves it all. Zoe also plays volleyball, soccer, and does theater in her spare time. She hopes to learn more about creative writing and further her passion into something meaningful.

**Zoe Thomas** is an eighth grader at Montessori School of Denver. In her free time, she enjoys reading, writing, drawing, and horseback riding.

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