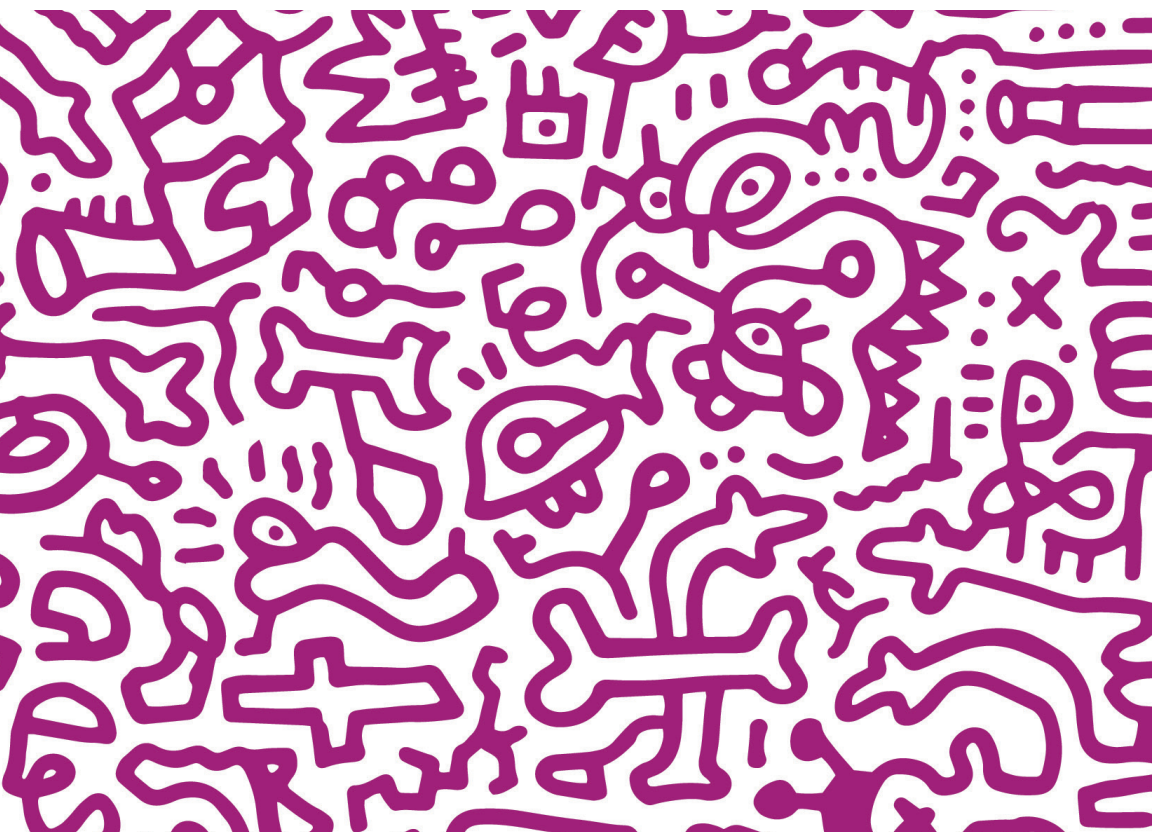




**WE READ**

**YOUTH VOICES**



**Summer 2023 Anthology**





**we READ**  
**YOUTH VOICES**  

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**WRITER'S CONTEST**

**2023 Anthology**

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**All pieces are published with original spellings, capitalizations, and punctuations. We respect the growing practice of our young writers, the authenticity of their mistakes, and their bravery to write and submit an original piece in their own voice.**

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# Foreword

by We Read Youth  
Ambassador  
Madeleine Bohn

We were pleasantly startled at the number of young writers who submitted a piece for this year's Youth Voices anthology. Crafting any piece of writing is, each time, a unique journey. I am delighted that so many youth writers chose to embark upon it.



Reading through the many ways this year's theme was interpreted, I was struck by the creativity I saw. These stories may, on the face of it, seem like a scattered starburst of ideas. As with a starburst, when you look closely, you will find a common thread that connects each piece to a prevailing theme — one of moving forward together. The different paths writers took reflect just how many voices and stories and interests exist in this wonderful community all at once. This anthology is, to me, a beautiful melting pot where very different stories of human experience (and rabbit, and dog, and other creaturely experiences) fit like puzzle pieces into one collective narrative. At the same time, each story maintains its individual distinctness.

I am honored to be a part of a project that brings youth voices to the forefront. Your voice is one of the most powerful tools you have. Make good use of it.





# The War of A Million Years

by Diya Dhawal, age 15

At first I avoided her. She looked mean as she towered over me, her dark curls and aggressive face hiding in a corner while kids around her talked. It was my first day in a new district; I was here to reinvent myself, not help loners in a corner. Our teacher tried to introduce us, and we scanned over our All About Me sheets to find something in common.



Later that day, we sat near each other in orchestra, her face remained indifferent and mine remained hopeful. The next day, for either racist reasons or pure fate, the teacher sat us together in French. By another coincident, by racism or by fate again, we were sent to deliver a note to the 5th grade wing. Teachers have all kinds of technology to communicate with each other, but our teacher chose two awkward brown kids to deliver a pink post-it across the school. Both of us just transferred to the district, so we had no idea where the 5th grade wing was, and we were both awkward kids, so polite conversation was all we could muster as we walked circles trying to find the 5th grade wing. In orchestra the next day, we started polite conversation.

Neither of us can remember when the lines of awkward conversation blurred into full of friendship, but soon we were inseparable. We made up jokes and laughed so hard until people behind us thought we were crazy, we would turn around our respective lunch tables and talk, we would walk to the buses after school together every day. Until one day, she joined me at my lunch table, and my life was perfect. We shared stories on how our past friends had hurt us, and she was the first person I called my best friend. We were texting each other non-stop, her on her iPad and me on my phone, we would walk laps around the 6th grade wing before class started, and when teachers wanted to know where she was, they'd ask me.

When COVID hit, it hurt every part of me not to walk with her and talk with her and to not see her face every day. Then came Eid. She was Muslim; I was Hindu/Sikh. She invited me to her family's Eid party, my parents were reluctant to let me go, but I went, and there a tradition was born. Every year after, I went to her house for Eid, and I even brought my grandparents, whose lives were torn apart by Partition. Pakistan and India were warring countries, who were we to be in the forbidden friendship, but my grandparents went to the Eid party, and they became fast friends with her family.

By our friendship, and walking around the school every day and our passing of notes on pink-post its in orchestra and french, we had bridged a river of hate. Wars happened between the countries we called home, and there we were, laughing at my house. Because of our friendship, our families are rid of hate for the other. Because of our friendship the wounds that Partition and the Britishers left were healed. Because of our friendship, the war between Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims that dated back to the beginning of time, had ended with us. The hatred our ancestors had for each other was now replaced with the love we had for each other. Our kids will grow up with hearts filled with love instead of hate. Our friendship brought peace to a war of a million years.

But after Eid, disaster struck. By build up miscommunication, and angry words and piles of small things, the ocean that was or friendship dried out until there was a puddle left, and now there's nothing but dry sidewalk where once laughter echoed the room. We still talked freshman year, commenting on each other's Instagram posts and sharing laughs in orchestra until each interaction became scarcer, and we walked past each other in the hallway like we didn't know each other. I had lost a lot of things in my life, but nothing compared to her. I was already empty, but losing her made me a hollowed-out shell, and I spent freshman year wishing that I was walking laps around our new school with her, hearing her opinion on our teachers and watching the Pakistan vs India cricket matches with her.

Somewhere in my heart, I know there's a version of our friendship that goes on. I know that somewhere, my family goes to her house for Eid every year of our lives, and eventually her family comes to Diwali too. I know that somewhere, we both get married on the edge of our countries in Karachi, bringing peace to yet another war, like we always dreamed of. I know that somewhere, our kids will grow up together and their hearts will be filled with nothing but love. I know that somewhere, our laughter still fills the room during the India Pakistan game and during Bollywood movies and on the bus ride home. I know somewhere, our bond is so strong that not even a million years of war could break it.

My heart aches for the friend I lost, for the stranger she has become, because once we were family. I saw her sister as my sister, and her curls were as familiar as mine. Our friendship created a family, healing wounds, bridging aggression, replacing hate with love. The hate between India and Pakistan killed love, but our friendship killed that hate and brought love. We may pretend that we are strangers now, but the bond we forged brought peace to a million generations ahead of us.

# The Strength To Move Forward

by Hazel Krueger, age 11

Angie felt like her heart had been ripped in two by her mother's harsh words. She was overwhelmed with a flood of emotions and could feel her own life slipping away as she helplessly replayed the conversation in her mind. Her eyes were stinging, and her body felt like lead, weighted down by the sting of unjust accusations and smothering misunderstandings. Angie frantically searched for an escape from this suffocating situation, but no matter where she turned she encountered another brick wall.

Angie took a deep breath and forced her thoughts away from the hurtful words of her mother. She had been feeling overwhelmed ever since the argument, but now she was determined to focus on the present and make the most of what life had to offer. She reminded herself that she was a freshman in college, living in the dorms, and had so much potential ahead of her.



Angie stepped into the spring sunshine and walked toward the campus buildings. She could feel the sun's heat on her face, and she breathed deeply into the morning air. The grass felt cool beneath her feet, soft and wet with dew. The trees surrounding the quad held a dozen shades of green, an ocean of color stretching to meet the blue sky. Waves of birdsong washed against her ears, gentle music that told of a new day beginning. She was back at school, finally living out her dream.

As Angie walked, she thought about the powerful emotions she'd experienced while talking with her mother. She thought about her mother's words, and how hurtful and unfair they had been. She wanted to be angry and lash out, but she knew that wouldn't help her situation. She wanted to be understanding and forgiving, but at the same time, she wanted her mother to understand her and take the time to listen to her.

Angie thought of all the times she had tried to empathize with her mother—to try and understand where she was coming from—and of how her mother never seemed to return the favor. She felt like her mother didn't truly see her for who she was.

Angie sighed and decided to put her thoughts aside for the time being. She was determined to make the best of her situation and not let her emotions get in the way of her dreams. She walked into the student center, ready to start the day.

The student center was bustling with activity, and students eagerly discussed their classes, projects, and plans for the future. Angie felt a little overwhelmed by it all, but she also felt like she was where she was supposed to be.

Angie walked to the cafeteria and purchased a cup of coffee. She sat at a table and began to sip it slowly, watching the students around her. She noticed a group of freshmen who were discussing their futures, and a feeling of envy started to settle in as she listened.

Angie was struck with a sudden realization. Everyone was in the same boat, trying desperately to find their place in the world. While some were succeeding others, were fighting an uphill battle with all of their might. A flood of empathy washed over her and the immense weight of all their struggles settled on her shoulders like an avalanche.

Angie knew that if she could put aside her hurt and learn to empathize with her mother and others, she could find the strength to move forward. She knew that if she could learn to forgive, she would be able to find happiness and peace in her life.

As Angie tossed her empty coffee cup into the trash can, a small smile tugged at her lips for the first time in what felt like a lifetime. She was finally beginning to find hope again - it was a fragile thing, but she knew it was there. Taking a deep breath, she stepped out of the student center and into the crisp morning air, feeling an inner strength growing within her that would help her make it through whatever adversity crossed her path.

She decided to do what was right and gathered up all of her courage inside of her. She took the bus home and focused on the colorful blurs of cars passing by. When Angie got home, she walked to her mother and started talking. Despite all of their differences, Angie let out a breath and collected all of her understanding. And so did her mom.

# Time

by Eliza Thwing, age 13

It was a normal middle school day. Me and my two friends were working on our Humanities project and cutting out some photos. Everyone was laughing and talking. The teachers were trying not to fall asleep. Everything was fine. We were all fine. That's when the fire alarm went off.

Beep, beep, beep! Beep, beep, beep!

The teachers looked at each other in confusion. It was clear: This wasn't a drill. I stood up being one of the last out, everyone was already running out the door. Once in the hall, you could smell and see thick black smoke. It felt like we were in the mists of a violent thunderstorm. Teachers were yelling instructions but all I could hear was the constant beeping of the alarms. Confusion and fear hitting me like a hammer.



I scrambled around looking for Elena and Graham in fear of losing my only friends, but with all the bodies it was all a blur. Inhaling smoke I could feel myself getting dizzy. I looked around desperately for help, everyone else was already down the stairs or heading for the doors. With no teacher in sight I looked around for a closer shelter. Red, yellow, and orange flames all around me. The fire had already made it upstairs.

I made a run for the stairs but my legs gave out, collapsing before I could make it. I tried to get back up. I needed to, if I were to survive. As I tried to get up, the floor collapsed under me. Everything went dark, everything was gone.

\*\*\*

I couldn't remember what happened. All I knew was I was hurt and scared. After that day Elena and Graham wouldn't leave my side. Everyone acted like I was a little kid. It worked because I felt like one. I never left my mother and friends' sides. Every other day I was in the hospital for another check up. I hated all the gained attention. And trauma.

\*\*\*

Two months later I stood outside the burnt down school. I felt the burn on my arm that still hadn't gone away. Elena put her arms around me. Tears filled my eyes, the thought of that day, that moment. I felt so helpless, lost all over again.

It felt like I was all alone in that hallway again. Trapped, alone. They said that I was found under the collapsed ceiling by a firefighter. That no one knew where I was. They thought me dead. Gone, forever.

Elena gave me a tight hug. "I'm sorry. We should have stayed together." Tears slowly fell down our cheeks. I was lost for words. I didn't know what to say, so I cried instead. I was a wreck ever since the fire. I cried all the time. I couldn't be in a hot room alone. I hadn't been in the kitchen for months! It was like I was trapped in time, never able to leave. No matter how much I tried.

The community gathered in front of the burned down building. It felt wrong for the sky to be a brilliant bright blue. It felt wrong for the birds to be singing and for people to be talking and laughing. It all felt so wrong.

Our head principal stood on the stage in front of a wooden pedestal. She had her light brown hair in a bun and wore a long stunning black dress. "If everyone could settle down now, we'll get started." My mom and sister came beside me. Mom put her arm around my shoulder and my sister held my hand.

"This fire was a tragedy. Students were injured... We weren't prepared." She implied softly into the microphone, looking at me. Her eyes felt soft and saddened. "The fire, caused by a student in our lab, burnt our school to the ground." She said as she looked over to her left, at the remains of the school. "This was a horrible mistake. And it won't be forgotten. We will rebuild and continue to learn from our mistakes. The student was talked to and dealt with." She said looking down at what must have been the kid and his family. They looked ashamed, abashed.

"We are grateful for how fast the first responder showed." She waved at the firefighters in the back with a worried face. "Even though this was... a horrible mistake we can't just cancel the future. We must look forward and rebuild, together, as a community." She said as she revealed an AI drawn photo of a new school.

The school wasn't the same. It clearly was going to be made for more of a modern generation. But even the parents seemed to like the newer look. What they didn't like was moving forward. "How do you expect us to just... forget, huh? People got hurt! And you want us to leave that behind?" A parent behind me angrily yelled.

The head principal looked down at him, understanding his anger. "I understand many don't want to brush off our shoulders and move on. But if we get stuck in this... time loop of replaying this event in our head, we won't be able to move forward. We'll be time's prisoners."

Those words stuck with me. It was like she was explaining everything I had been thinking and feeling. Everyone else around me seemed to understand because they all nodded and whispered.

The principal then turned to the next big picture. This picture was of a hallway in the front of the school. "This is where we want to showcase the students who were injured, and the people who would like to help us move forward." This seemed to change the parents' mind behind me because when we got in line to help he was there too.

The rebuild was long and tiring. It took us two long years, making me a sophomore. When the front hall was finally done, it read:

How the people of West Town moved forward as one.

# Upside Down

by Olivia Lubcke, age 9

Kansas, June 1934

## The Beginning

The news was already there. I could not change anything.

This morning Pa called me down to breakfast in a jittery- like tone. I smelled eggs and bacon as I walked into the kitchen, something Pa would only prepare on special occasions. As I walked closer I saw that there were also rolls, flap-jacks, and fruit salad. Why did Pa make all of this?



“What is this all about?” I asked, even before saying thank you.

Pa seemed to ignore me as I asked the question, sitting down in his old wooden chair on the hard, dust-filled ground. I sat down too, trying not to displease him by asking the question again. As I stared down at the food in front of me- wondering why Pa had already placed it on the plate for me- I started to put it all together, the food, the ignoring, all for one reason: home. When we all finished our food, we being me, Pa, Mama, and my two sisters Adaline and Corrie, Pa finally spilled the beans.

“I have some news to share. We’re moving to Virginia!”

Everyone stared in shock except Mama. I could tell by the looks on their faces that I was the only one that was scared to move.

Pa said that starting tomorrow, we would have 4 days until we moved so I would have time to say goodbye to everyone, but it’s not the people I’m worried about losing, it’s me.

## 4 days until the move

Pa has been trying to assure me that everything is going to be just fine. He has been trying to convince me that the Dust Bowl is not right for the family anymore. He has been trying to tell me that Virginia is something better for us. I’ve been listening, but not necessarily believing. Whenever Pa says those things, I think of the word escape. And then for one second, I feel as if the world is not putting itself on my shoulders.

Pa has been up in his room more often, and I think it's because he is packing already, but maybe not. Yesterday I saw a mountain of sand pile out of his room in a heap. Then I had a thought. Maybe, just maybe, that was the sand that he put his shells from the shore in. And maybe, just maybe, he was emptying it so that he would not have to think about the past when we moved to Virginia. And maybe, just maybe, he was a little scared, too.

“Everything is going to be just fine,” he says. “ Trust me.”

### **3 days until the move**

Trust. A word half its meaning. A word that you can never rely on. A word I think of when I find a hermit crab, trusting its shell only for it to leave its back, the hermit destined to find a new one.

### **2 days until the move**

I feel better now that I know that Pa is a little scared too. He seems fine, but his flinches tell me otherwise.

Today we were in the Lindsey's apple orchard, picking the last of their apples. I was almost done with tree number 4 when an apple fell. I was about to pick it up and put it in the basket when I saw a rabbit scamper out of the bushes. It looked at me with full eyes, like it knew my pain. Then I saw it. The rabbit did know my pain. She had witnessed it herself. I had felt bad about moving, but now, I realized that I was moving with all these people that could help me. We would be doing this together- as a family.

With that, I gave the rabbit the apple.

### **1 day until the move**

Today we had dinner with the whole family. I felt like I had seen a light and I had found everything I needed to tell my family that I was scared to move.

There were 5 dishes on the table, each one more lucky than the last to have. Potatoes, rolls, cranberry sauce, salad, and a turkey from Wisconsin.

After we ate I said to my family,

“Everyone, I'm, I'm scared to move.”

Then they all looked at me with loving eyes and said

“We are all here.”

### **The move**

“Umber, time to go.” I hear Mama say.

I hop in the car, ready for a new adventure.

### **The End**



# Together We Move

by Ronav Vasanth, age 9

I will start off by introducing myself like in every other story. My name is Vijay Kumar. You can call me Jay for short. I was born in Agra city, June 5, 2012. I lived there for 12 years. I am currently 12. I didn't have much growing up. We had our small house, our tattered soccer ball and our dad's job. We counted on our dad's job to get food. We still went to school like other kids. I had always used our money wisely. Unlike other kids, I didn't spend it on candy, toys or anything of that sort. I only spent it on very very crucial and important essentials for my family. My father just found a job at a company, but he has to move to San Francisco, United States. I was really sad though. I had to leave my friends. That's what I thought but, my friend, Arjun's dad got the same position in San Francisco! I couldn't believe it. We chatted about it all day long. I couldn't wait. I researched about San Francisco. It was a very beautiful place. It looked like paradise. I loved the pictures. I wanted to go there right now!



{After four weeks}. Yes yes yes! We were finally moving to San Francisco! There was an issue. We were moving to Half Moon Bay but my friend was moving to Concord. I was very sad when we went to the airport. The beautiful bays of San Francisco left my mind. I could only picture dark skies and hard rain.

{1 week passed}. Honey, you got a phone call from Arjun! Yes yes Yes! I couldn't hold my excitement. I screamed HELLO ARJUN!!!!!!!. Lower the volume shouted my dad from his call. Sorry, I said. I have been waiting so long I thought we would never talk to each other ever ever again.

I know right?! Said Arjun. We chatted for hours about the flight and our new houses. Did feel kind of sad but I realized we may not be there for each other physically like we used to, but we will be there mentally.

# She

by Monona Faasualie, age 12

We all come from the earth  
Everything started with Her  
We all started with her  
Does it really matter  
If it didn't come from her?  
He, She, They  
Why can't we just be  
Just  
Be  
People  
Humans  
Living  
Here  
Why does everything come with a price  
A price to pay  
We are separated by these prices  
Too expensive  
Too cheap  
I'm sick of paying  
I don't wanna pay unless  
Unless it's to her

Sunrise  
Sunset  
She leads our days into nights  
Our wrongs into rights  
But how many wrongs will she correct?  
She's tired  
Sleep  
Sleep is what we all crave

What about her?

Our bodies  
Our bodies like the hills  
Flat  
Wide  
Tall  
Short  
Brown  
Tan  
White  
Black  
Red  
Yellow



She created those hills  
She created us  
She gave us life  
Time  
Wind  
Sky  
Water  
And in return for that?  
We destroy her body  
We destroy her breath  
We destroy her  
Her  
She  
She is finished  
Done.

I wonder if she'll give us a second chance  
A chance to redeem ourselves

To fix our mistakes  
To right our own wrongs  
I wonder if she is telling us we need to come together  
Come together to resolve our flaws  
To bail our blunders  
To fix our faults  
We all make mistakes  
That's what makes us human  
Living  
Breathing  
Sleeping  
Enjoying  
Its okay to make mistakes  
But will you stand up for yours?  
Will you take honor in correcting it?  
Will you even correct it at all?  
We all make mistakes  
But how many more can She take?  
We shall sit under our own vine and fig tree  
But where do we sit once all the vines and fig trees disappear?  
Maybe,  
Just maybe,  
Instead of the vine and fig tree being a granted thing,  
Maybe  
We have to grow our own  
Plant and sow the seeds  
Water and trim them  
Then maybe  
We will all have our own vine and fig tree  
That we earned ourselves  
Not from Her

But from us

We move forward together  
Connected as a community  
Tight like the twisting vines climbing a wall on an abandoned building  
Maybe  
Maybe She is giving us a ladder to reach to the heavens above our heads  
Maybe that ladder leads to something better  
An ideal world  
Her wish  
We can work together to create that world  
Without using Her vines to hoist ourselves up  
By ourselves  
She needs rest  
Sleep  
Sleep is what we crave  
Being human is what we crave  
Being mortal is what we crave  
Being  
Is what we crave  
Why not be together while doing it?  
If we aren't together,  
Why be at all?  
Why suffer  
and slave  
and sorrow our days away  
Without a shoulder to cry on?  
To help  
To guide  
She is all of our guides

But what will we do when She is gone?  
Will we sit there and sob?  
No  
No we won't  
We will stand up  
We will join hands  
We will lift the people who cannot stand on their own  
And maybe  
We will lean on each other  
Lean despite our differences  
Our color  
Our age  
Our gender  
Our language  
Who we love  
She wanted us to love all  
If not then why would She make nature everywhere we are  
Nature is in the sky  
Nature is in our cities  
Small sprouts pushing their roots through concrete cracks on busy sidewalks  
Resilient, despite being stomped and squished under hurried folks feet

All  
Day  
Long  
They still try to sprout  
They spread their seeds  
Wishing  
Hoping  
That someone else would be as brave as them  
To start a forest in a big city seems unfathomable  
Crazy

Insane  
But if it was, why do they stay?  
Why do the birds  
The trees  
The squirrels  
The pigeons  
Why do they stay?  
If not to attempt to build a home  
A place to go  
A community  
Why shouldn't we be connected like the roots of the trees that surge through  
the soil under our feet  
I want us to be  
You want us to be  
And most importantly  
She wants us to be  
Why else would She build our planet like this?  
Why would She do the things she does  
Why would we have the urge to connect  
That's what makes us human  
Living  
Breathing  
Sleeping  
Being  
Done.



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# **Ages 9 and Under**

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# Ella's Adventure

by Eleanor A. Martinson, age 7

Ella, the snow wolf with teal eyes, has two parents that like to boop her snoot, but she does not like it very much. So she goes on adventure, up Mt. Everest.

She has a grappling hook to help her, but no other gear. She uses a single tooth, which she never brushes, to trigger her grappling hook. She wooshes up the mountain until she hits her paw on a grey rock sticking out of the mountain.

She has a bad bruise, but she meets a Veterinary Wolf. Seeing Dr. Ellen's Wolf Paw Clinic makes Ella very happy because she gets a paw scooter with a remote and special Ski Mode to help her up the mountain. Ella gets a cast from Dr. Ellen to make her paw feel better.



Then she goes up the mountain a little more. She finds the snow and triggers her paw scooter's Ski button.

She makes it to the top of the mountain.

Then she belly slides down Mt. Everest. "Weee!" she says.

About half-way down, she spies a penguin snack and says "Ooh, a yummy penguin!"

She eats the penguin with one chomp.

She makes it to the bottom of the mountain with her snack and goes back to her parents.

She tells them all about her adventure, and asks them "Please don't boop my snoot anymore. Instead lets go on an adventure to find more penguin snacks. I know just the place."



# The Black Cats

by Eleanor Hansel, age 7

Once upon a time, there were two black cats named Miso and Jinx. And there was a person named Weird Guy. Weird Guy was mean. Weird Guy was trying to capture the cats.

One day, Miso and Jinx were playing in a forest.

But then, Weird Guy came. "Come here kitties!" Weird Guy said. The cats were very scared. So, they ran behind a tree.

"What should we do?" asked Jinx.  
"I don't know," replied Miso. Weird Guy yelled  
"Where are you!?"

"Nowhere, ha ha" Miso whispered.  
"I found you!" said Weird Guy.

And just like that, the cats were captured and put in a cage.

"Come on, why?" said Jinx.  
Miso and Jinx felt something hard beneath them so they started digging.  
And then, after a while, they found a treasure chest!

"We have a treasure chest," said Miso  
"How did you find that!?" said Weird Guy.  
Weird Guy opened the cage and grabbed the treasure chest.  
Miso and Jinx jumped out and scratched Weird Guy, then took back the treasure chest and put Weird Guy in the cage. Miso and Jinx went back to the forest and lived happily ever after!

And after that day, Weird Guy never tried to capture them again.

**THE END**



# Diana y su Amigo el Zorro

by Fiamma Soria, age 7

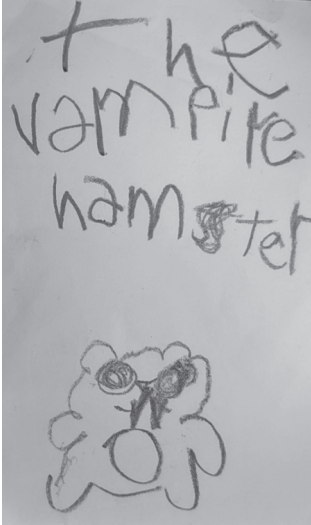
Había una vez una niña llamada Diana que vivía en una granja. Una noche tranquila de verano vino un zorro y ataco una oveja. A la mañana el papá de Diana se dio cuenta y dijo “hay que matarlo” pero ella dijo “¡no! el zorro solo quería comer, no le hagas daño”. A la hora de comer Diana dijo que no tenía hambre. Cuando parecía que iba a poner su plato a lavar, de verdad puso su comida en una bolsa de cuero y dijo que iba a dormir. Diana se fue al cantero de las ovejas. Ya era de noche y estaba muy oscuro. Diana sacó todas las ovejas y puso la comida en el piso. Después se escondió atrás de un árbol y esperó silenciosamente. Luego vino el zorro, olió la comida y en un minuto empezó a comer. Cuando terminó de comer Diana se acercó poco a poco hasta que el zorro tomó confianza y lo pudo acariciar. El zorro le dijo “perdón por lastimar tu oveja”. Pasaron unas semanas y un día el papá de Diana le dijo “nos vamos a mudar”. Diana estaba triste. Cuando se estaban por ir, escuchó una vocecita que venía del bosque y decidió seguirla, cada vez le hacía entrar más y más al bosque. Detrás de un viejo sauce se encontró con el zorro y entre lágrimas le dijo que se iba a mudar. El zorro le dio una roca con forma de corazón y le dijo “esto te va a dar buena suerte y te va a ayudar a conseguir amigos en tu nueva ciudad”. En ese momento, Diana escuchó a su mamá que la llamaba, le dio un abracito al zorro y se fue corriendo.



The end

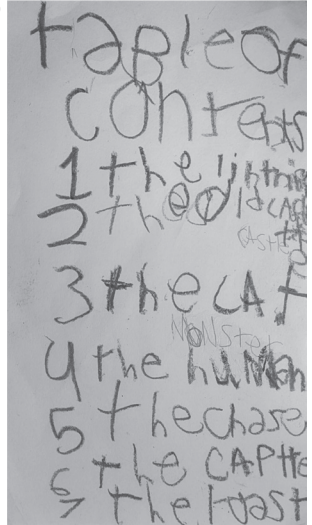
# The Vampire Hamster

by Kitsy Quinn, age 7



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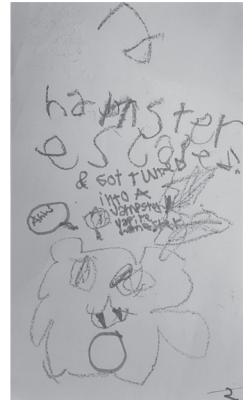
1. THE LIGHTNING
2. THE OLD CASTLE
3. THE CATS
4. THE HUMAN
5. THE CHASE
6. THE CAPTURE
7. THE ROAST



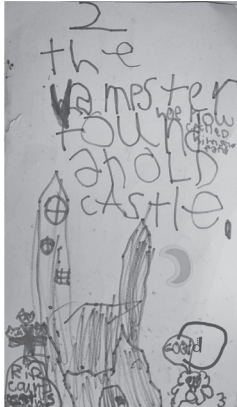
1  
On a dark and stormy night...



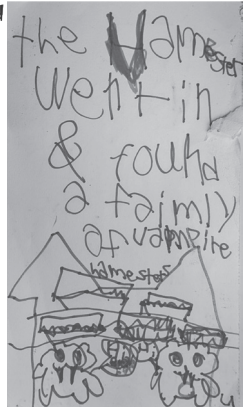
a hamster escaped and got turned into a vampire hamster or vampster.



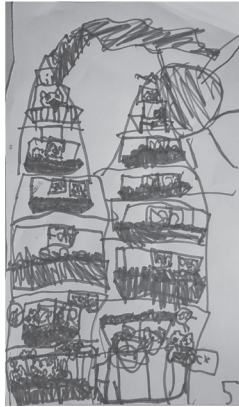
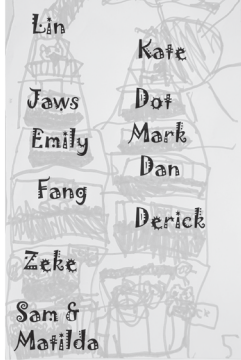
2  
The vampster, who now called himself Fang, found an old castle.



The vampster went in and found his family.



Fang went in and found his family, see below:

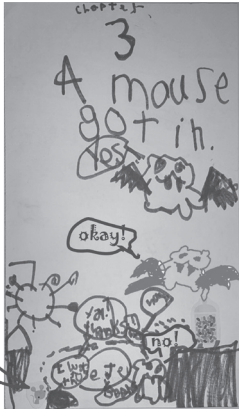


He walked around and met his family, they had a welcome home party with cake and jellybeans!

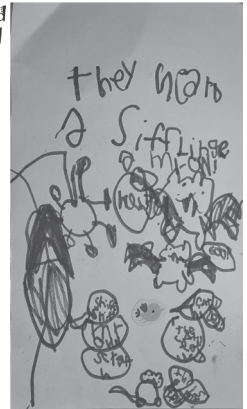


3

A mouse got in. Kate the vampster unscrewed the jar of jellybeans! also the dad vampster did not want the mouse to have the jellybeans.

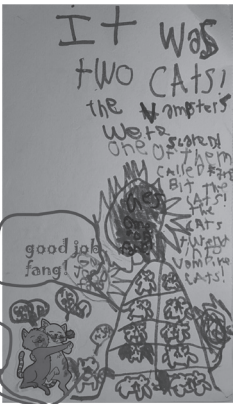


They heard a sniffing and a mrow! a bird flew in and told them it was cats!



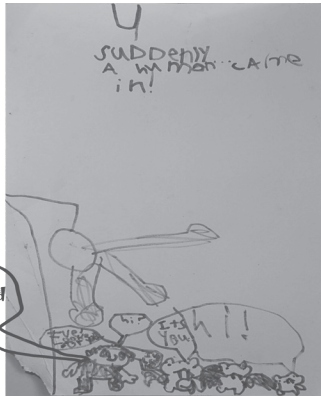
i want those jellybeans!

It was two cats! the vampsters were scared! fang bit the cats! the cats turned into vampire cats!

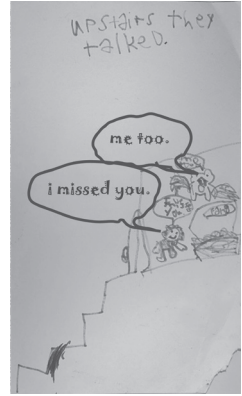


4  
the human, who had lived with fang, came to visit them at sunset.



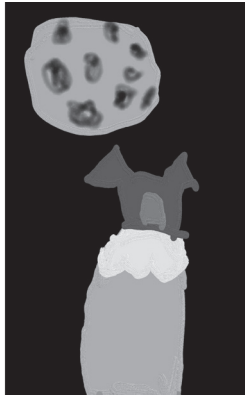


upstairs in fangs bedroom  
they talked.



5

at night, the cats sniffed a  
monster mouse somewhere  
in the castle, and they all  
chased it.



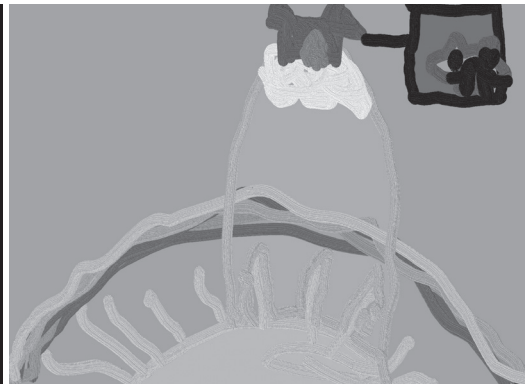
6 & 7

they chased the monster  
mouse all night and finally  
caught it! and they roasted  
it! the human helped roast  
it!



THE END!

view of the  
vampster castle at  
night.



# Fire and Ice

by Ezra Saalman, age 8

discrimination,  
hope,  
change,  
respect,  
discrimination

bad  
overcomes  
good

but we don't  
fight fire  
with fire

we fight fire  
with water

discrimination  
with  
hope,  
respect

and then  
change comes

discrimination  
stops

water  
overcomes  
the fire

hope  
and  
respect  
we see  
every day

peace  
we breathe  
in the air

the streets  
flood  
with  
responsibility

for caring  
for our world

people  
care for  
people

they  
are set  
free

we admire  
the changers  
that killed off  
the disease

we are vaccinated  
for this again

we know  
how  
to overcome

we know  
how  
to keep words  
in our heads

we know  
how  
to not hurt  
emotionally,  
physically

restoring  
thankfulness  
from our world

words  
turn into  
phrases

phrases  
turn into  
sentences

sentences



turn into  
paragraphs

paragraphs  
turn into  
books

books  
turn into  
series

series  
turn into  
inspiration

inspiration  
for new changers  
in a new plague

the cycle  
repeats

changers come

changers go

they make  
the world  
a better place

after a while  
diseases  
don't  
come

we trap them  
in cages  
they cannot  
come out from

groups of changers  
get larger

we conquer  
greater skills

diseases mutate

so do we

# Two Countries that I Love

by Maryanne G. Hernandez, age 8

Mexico is different from the United States  
Different languages

In Mexico we only spoke Spanish  
Here in the U.S I speak Spanish and English

In Mexico, a lot of people do not use cars,  
they just walk.  
Here, we have to drive almost everywhere.

Many Mexicans love spicy food, and we don't  
eat spicy food too often here.

Calaveras de azúcar there and sour licorice here  
Even the parties are different!

In Mexico, there are clowns, carnaval and lots  
of jumping around.  
Here there is dancing, eating but no surprises.

School is very different.

Buildings look old there, but new here.

Mexico and the U.S. use similar languages and eat similar foods.

I have family in both places.

It's important to respect different cultures and languages.

I am so happy that I have a big, loving family in two different countries!





# Dragons' Temper Tantrums Solved

by Maya De Coster, age 8

There once was a girl named Maya, who was on a beach (I'm talking about the ocean) searching for big and pretty shells and oysters so she might find pearls. As Maya looked for shells and oysters, an unusually sparkly oyster caught her eye. When the sparkly oyster touched the air, a bubble-looking, rainbow-shining beautiful staircase appeared! The staircase seemed to go up forever. Maya wondered what was up there.



Maya decides not to tell her parents about the staircase and just goes up. When Maya reached the top of the staircase (about an hour later) Maya saw she was on a stone walkway. If Maya took one misstep she would fall. Maya tried to not look over the edges, afraid she would fall. When Maya looked in front of her she gasped, for she was looking at the most beautiful castle she had ever seen.

Maya walked up to the castle with no hesitation, then knocked on the door. No one answered, so she just walked inside. She saw two dragons playing tag with fireballs. Maya couldn't believe she was seeing dragons. "Hello! Who are you?" Maya called. One dragon, a pink dragon said, "I'm Emma. The green dragon is Jade."

"Hi, I'm Maya," she responded. "Do you know where all this smoke is coming from?"

"Dragons," Emma explained. "We lose our temper easily and need a good place to breathe fireballs. We started the Canadian forests on fire - by accident. All dragons love to breathe fire balls, especially when they are mad. It doesn't affect us, because our scales are fire proof, weapon deflective, magic proof, and anything else proof." Maya found out that dragons cause most huge natural events; often caused by big feelings.

"I have an idea," said Maya, "but I need to go down to earth. Next time I come I'll need all the dragons together. I'm counting on you two. Okay?"

"Okay," answered Jade and Emma together. Emma said, "But why?"

"I have a plan to help you stop losing your temper. I'll explain when I come back," Maya said.

"I'll fly you down," volunteered Emma. Emma flew Maya down, and as they flew, the staircase disappeared.

“We need to visit Arizona,” said Maya once she had hidden the oyster in the ocean again and gotten back to her parents. Her parents looked puzzled, but Maya explained what she had learned from the dragons. Her parents understood and booked tickets on the next flight to Arizona, which was in an hour - they packed really fast!

When they arrived in Arizona, Maya unpacked in her own room and put a “Do Not Disturb” sign on the door. Then, by coincidence the hotel was close to where the governor lives. Maya snuck out of her bedroom window, found the governor at her home, and convinced the governor to give the dragons a space in the desert to blow fireballs. The governor offered to bring together a group of people that would be willing to show them safe places to breathe fire (not around humans!).

Maya and her parents returned to the ocean. When they got there, Maya went and got the oyster. She climbed the stairs again, found Emma and Jade, and asked them to meet her that night with the rest of the dragons.

That night, while Maya’s parents slept, Maya went to meet the dragons. She asked them to fly to the closest desert in Arizona, and explained why. Maya flew on Emma’s back. When they got there, Maya signaled the group that wanted to help. She explained to the dragons and people that the people would help them find good places in the desert where it was better to throw fireballs. Each of the dragons took a member of the group on their back and flew to a different part of the desert that they could use. After visiting the safe locations, everyone met back at the original desert.

Maya said to the dragons, “Every time you get mad, think of hot, gooey marshmallows.” And the dragons asked what marshmallows were, so Maya bought some from a 24/7 camping shop, toasted them, and the dragons and helpers had a feast of marshmallows. Each dragon wanted more, more, more! They worked on their temper so they didn’t get mad anymore, but when they did, they knew where to throw their fireballs (in the desert).

The End!

# Empathy Shown in Gymnastics

by Sawyer K. Devine, age 8

Ally shows empathy to Sawyer

This story happened at Madison Turners on Monday January 1st 2023. One day a girl named Sawyer was at gymnastics and a girl named Ally came over and said "I am Ally, is this your first day?" "Yes" said Sawyer. Then Ally showed Sawyer the way around and they got to work. Day after day Sawyer tried to get better but it was really hard to get better because she had no lower body muscle. One day Sawyer looked really sad and then Ally came over and said "it's okay you are great at gymnastics." Then Sawyer said "I don't think so myself." Then Sawyer had a gymnastics competition. She was really nervous but she pushed through it. At the end she was so proud of herself because she won 3 gold medals! And after that she was a better gymnast she's been.



# The Cat and the Bunny

by Sofie St. Clair Tregre, age 9

One day a cat got out of his house. In the house, this cat was George. Outside of the house? George was wild. And bad things happened when George was out of the house. And today, George was feeling very hungry. Very hungry indeed. And that day when George was out of the house, he was craving a juicy bunny.



Bunnies were very big, and George was very hungry. And the thought of eating a bunny, oh, how George loved it. And now, his imagination smelled bunny, and now? So did his nose. It was coming from a thicket. And, how George needed that bunny. George peered into the thicket, and what he found? It was the juiciest bunny he had ever seen! George licked his lips, and then pounced. "Ahh!"

"Please don't eat me!" the bunny pleaded. "I'm just trying to live!"

"Well sorry for you, I am very hungry, and you look very yummy." George said. "Why don't we compromise?" asked the bunny.

"Compromise?" asked George.

"Yeah!" said the bunny. "Compromising is when you make a deal with someone, about something, so you each are happy!"

"Okay!" said George.

"Well, what I want, is food, because I am very hungry." George said.

"And, what I want, is to not get eaten." the bunny said.

"Oh, and one more thing, I do not want the disgusting food that my humans give me." George added.

"That makes it a bit more difficult, but we can work with that, and I feel you. The food humans give you is disgusting." the bunny informed George.

"So, basically, you want food but you can't eat me, and you also don't want the food at your house?" the bunny asked George.

"Yep. That's pretty much it." George told the bunny.

"Anyways, compromise aside, what is your name?" the bunny asked George.

"It's George." George told the bunny. "what's yours?"

"My humans called me Queenie, but out in the wild I call myself Winnie." winnie told him.

"Okay. now that we know each other's names, back to the compromise" Winnie said to George.

"Well, if I can't eat you, who can I eat?" asked George.

"What if you ate an animal that's already dead?" Winnie asked George,

"Even if they are a little disgusting?"

"I guess I could try." George said.

"Okay. let's find you a dead animal!" Winnie exclaimed to George.

So all afternoon they searched and searched for a dead animal, and finally, when the sun was starting to set, they found a delicious looking dead bunny. And they were both very happy with their compromise. And after that? They became best friends.

The end.

Oh, and one more thing, they both lived happily ever after, and were together forever.

# My Friends and I

by Alison S., age 9



## My friends and I

I've got a lot of friends  
And we have similarities and  
differences! I wrote a poem  
About some of them. Here it goes!

I have a friend named Naddy  
she has no daddy  
I used to be  
confused,

But now it is all clear  
and we are still here.  
that is my friend named Naddy.

I have a friend named Clair,  
She has a wheel chair.  
She may be different  
but that makes no dent  
in our friendship.

I have a friend named ~~them~~ them  
They're a they them  
I like them all the same  
and I have no shame  
because all my friends are different  
~~and that's what makes them~~ And that's what makes them  
SPECIAL!

Alison Sweatt

# Moving Together in the Forest

by Cristina Martínez Juárez, age 9

The earth is slowly dying from pollution.

In honor of Earth Day, my classmates, friends and I were moving forward together in the forest.

We made tiny groups of 2-3 people  
We helped one another find a piece of a drawer, bag of yellow liquid, and wrappers that all represent people leaving garbage behind.

Not thinking about what it would do to the environment.

We decided to stick together like glue,  
More and more people decided to join to pick up trash from the earth.

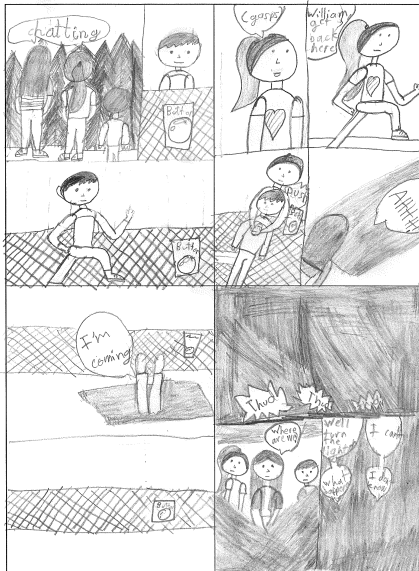
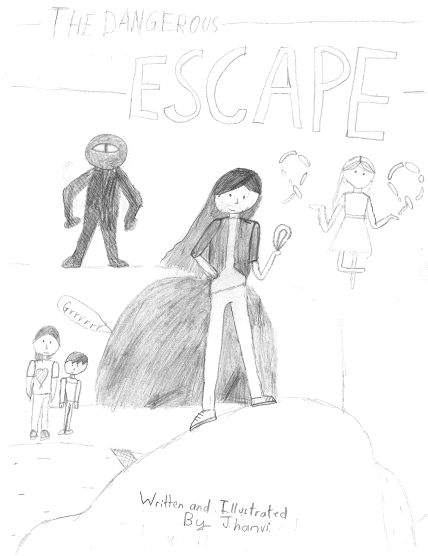
Even though it was a small act of kindness, we cleaned up a big space.

Moving forward together in the forest.

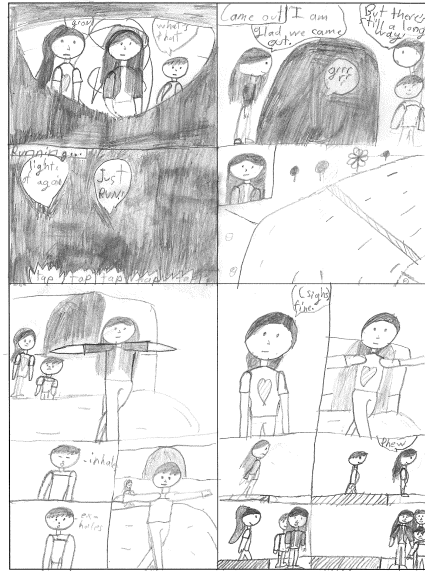


# The Dangerous Escape

by Jhanvi Reddy Annekalla, age 9



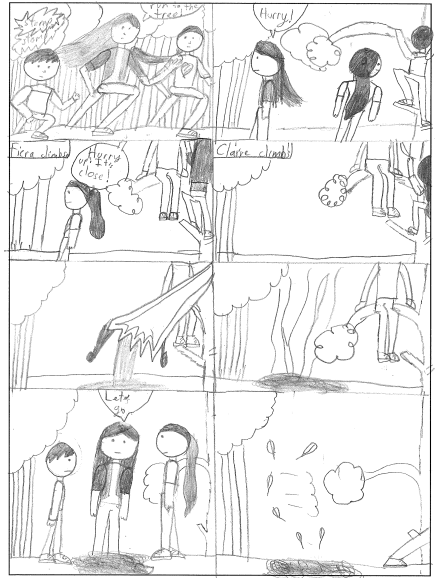
\*Chatting\*  
 (gasps!)  
 William get back here!  
 AHHH!  
 I'm coming!  
 Thud! Thud! Thud!  
 Where are you?  
 Well turn the light on,  
 what happened?  
 I can't, I don't know.



\*Groan\*  
 What's that  
 Come out! I am glad we came out.  
 \*grrrrr\* But there's still a long way.  
 Light off again! Just Run!  
 \*inhales\*exhales\*  
 Sighs. Fine.



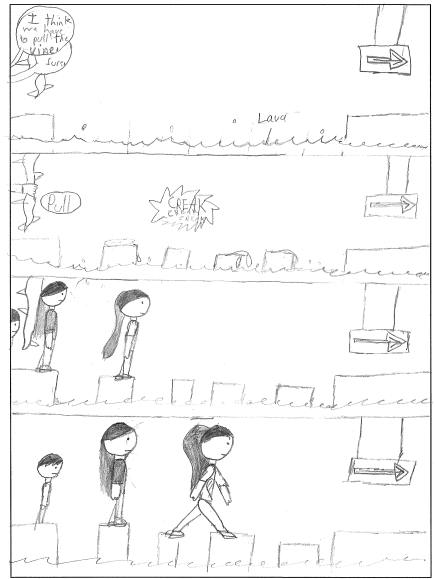
Walks and walks  
 Rumbles, rumbles  
 Uh - oh!  
 We better run!  
 Running... \*stomp\* stomp\*  
 Climb a tree!  
 Few minutes later... there're a tree!  
 It's coming!



\*stomp\* stomp\*  
 Run to the tree!  
 Hurry!  
 Fierra climbed  
 Hurry up it's close!  
 Claire climbs  
 Let's go!

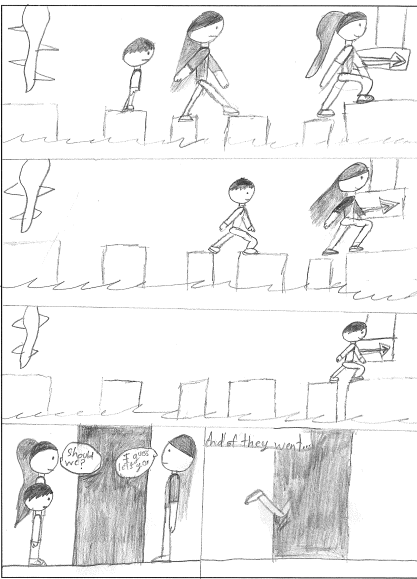


This doesn't seem right.  
 Come on it's fine.  
 Claire walks a few steps...  
 Claire come back here!  
 See I'm all....  
 Right... Run!  
 Phew  
 And then... How big is this place?  
 Lava ->



I think we have to pull the vine.  
 Sure!  
 Pull! \*creak\*

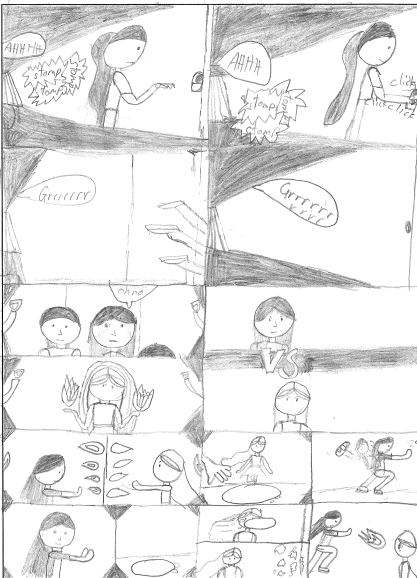




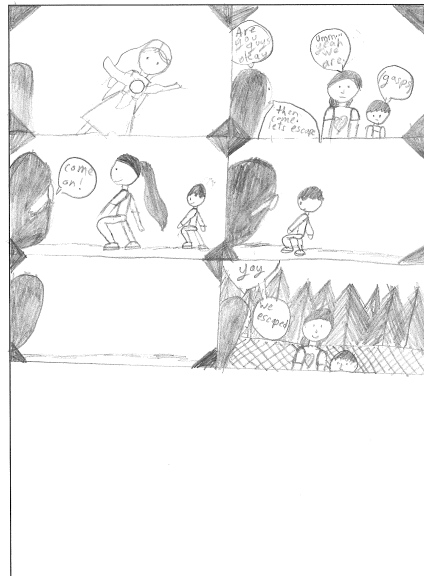
Should we?  
I guess let's go.  
And off they went...



Woah  
Fiera makes some light.  
I found a paper.  
It's the lamp. We need to get the lamp!  
"I glow in light and am useful in the night. I am like a tree with a vine, but am all a line. What am I?"  
Claire, you go get the lamp while me and William distract the beast.  
Got it! Go!  
\*Grrrrr\* AHHHHH!  
\*Grrrrr\* What just happened?



AHHHH! \*stomp\* \*stomp\*  
\*stomp\*  
AHHH! \*stomp\* \*stomp\*  
\*stomp\* \*click\* \*click\*  
Grrrrrr  
Grrrrrrrrr  
Oh No!



Are you guys okay?  
Umm... yeah we are.  
(gasps!)  
Then come. Let's escape  
Come on!  
Yay we escaped!

# The First Day

by Liliana Quevedo, age 9

At Timberlake school, there was a new girl coming. Lila wanted to make the new student happy, so she made a plan.

When the new student came two days later, she invited the new girl into the school. "Welcome to Timberlake Elementary! What's your name?" she asked welcomingly.

"Rachel. Nice to meet you! And thanks for the warm welcome. On the first day at my other school, no one gave me a warm welcome. I'm just glad I got one this time!"

Lila showed Rachel around the school, and asked her to be her friend! Rachel said yes, and they were the best of friends!

Whenever a new kid came to Timberlake, the girls walked up to them at the front of the school and gave them a warm welcome!

After a while, they had a whole group of warm-welcomed friends at Timberlake.

The End



# Making the Rules Together

by Lincoln Inda, age 9

Disagreeing at recess,

Arguing about the rules of soccer,  
Slide-tackling with cleats,  
People getting hurt,  
Going to the nurse,  
Talking about the rules,  
Making new rules together,  
Clear expectations written down,  
Assigning new team captains everyday  
Playing fairly without injuries

More playing time

Kind words like, "Good shot!"  
Laughing and having fun!





a pack of wild mushrooms came to life. They stared at me and were advancing toward me. "ALLIY!" I shouted. "I NEED help!" I heard a response from Alliy. "I NEED help to!" "ARE GIANT ALIVE MUSHROOMS ATTACKING ." I asked. "NOPE! THEIR DOGS!" Alliy answered. I quickly slipped away from the mushrooms and tried to get to Alliy. I followed the barking sounds. I saw the dogs and Alliy. I quickly threw a ball that the dogs could get. Alliy isn't that bad after all. Alliy looked at me and apologized for the marble run incident. "It's okay," I said. Then we apologized a little more for the other incidents we had. "Do you have a map," I asked Alliy. "I always have one in my pocket," Alliy told me. "Shoot! I think the dogs took it." "There's nothing best friends can't do together," I told Alliy. Alliy smiled. We walked out of the forest as best friends!

# Moving Forward Together

## by Shriya Kondoju, age 9

Moving forward together. You might be thinking, “What does that mean?” Well there are a bunch of ways to explain, so sit back and listen closely, as I answer your simple question that has an exceedingly large number of answers!



The most effortless way to say it is, in the future we want to move forward with every culture and not just fight over our differences, the color of our skin or our language, but the way we are alike. We all are similar one way or the other. We all count on each other, and if we help each other and put our differences away, that is how we all will pursue the world together.

Let's pretend the world is a race. Those in the lead of the race come back a bit, and those who are behind in the race, catch up. Every culture should all be in one line having each other's backs.

We all have to understand each other and their perspective. We can't always think from our perspective, we should put ourselves in each other's shoes!! Let's have compassion and help each other! Having empathy, helping each other, that is what can make the world better. As John C. Maxwell said, “Teamwork makes the dream work!”

Let's say that you and your best friend, Kate, were working on a science project. You missed a day of school and Kate decided to work on the science project while you were gone. When you came back, her pictures were printed in black and white and everything was dull, which was nothing you expected, you envisioned it to be more colorful. You were so mad. Instead of losing your temper, you decided to ask her to explain her thoughts and perspective behind what she did. Once you worked everything together by redoing it and getting both of your ideas in, the project came out as a success. In the end, you both learned that if you put each other's ideas and understand each other's perspectives, everything becomes a success.

In conclusion, if we all put our effort into our jobs we can really change the world. If we all have empathy and compassion we can really change the world. If we put our minds together, we can do amazing stuff. And what I am mainly here to say is that we are going to move forward, together.

# What Makes Us Shine

by Syd Richards, age 9

We are not the same,  
But that is no reason to blame  
Because our differences make us dream,  
They make us dream like the suns got its beam  
We can be strong and rise together  
Don't put your head down or feel under the  
weather  
We'll acknowledge our love  
Because it helps us rise  
No one's empathy dies  
For a starter  
Start reaching farther  
Then the world can design,  
We all have our differences, and that is what  
makes us shine.



# Move Forward

A song by Taylah Lewis, age 9

Stand up for one another.  
Care for each other.  
We're all equal.  
We all have rights.

Chorus:  
Move forward.  
Move forward.  
Move forward together.  
Let's move ahead!  
Let's be brave!

Keep the world clean.  
Keep the world green.  
Do your part.  
Plants trees.

Move forward.  
Move forward.  
Move forward together.  
Let's move ahead!  
Let's be brave!

We all want peace, no war.  
We've got to work together.

Move forward.  
Move forward.  
Move forward together.  
Let's move ahead!  
Let's be brave!





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# Ages 10-12

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# Differences

by Lily Nguyen, age 10

Differences might make choices or life harder, but this story shows that differences can also bring us together and see similarities. With this story, Lucy shows differences are what brings people together and forward.

Hello, I'm ten years old (almost eleven) and my name is Lucy. They named me that because it sounded like lucky and they thought I was lucky. I beg to differ. Call me ungrateful, but it's true. My mom has been having a hard time keeping my brother, Jamie, happy. He says he's been having a hard time in first grade. He also says that he won't go to first grade unless he gets a popsicle before school, but my mom won't allow it so she's trying to negotiate other ways for him to get to school.



The point is, she spends all her time caring and fussing over Jamie and completely ignoring me. My dad on the other hand, works 8am to 6pm so he's always drinking his coffee, working on the computer barely saying hi to me. "Dad, what are we having for dinner?" I said one late night. My dad ignored me so I went to find my mom.

"How about you get two desserts at dinner?" Mom said hopefully. "NO! I want popsicle before SCHOOL!" Jamie shrieked. My mom sighed warily. I just rolled my eyes. I completely wanted to stay out of this, but my mom saw me and said those dreadful words, "Come in Little Lucy." I rolled my eyes again. "Mom, what did I say about calling me Little Lucy." When I was in third grade, I was the shortest in my class by 2 inches. And my class was short. My parents said I would soon have a growth spurt, but to everyone's surprise I didn't. Ever since then, everybody calls me Little Lucy.

"It's time for school!" Mom yelled from downstairs. I was already up and I quickly got my school clothes on. Jamie groaned and moped all the way down the stairs. He grabbed a popsicle from the freezer and headed out towards the bus. I thought mom was going to say something to Jamie, but she stayed behind watching us go. I dipped my head in disappointment. Your coddling him too much! On the bus I saw Maria and her gang of friends. She was the most popular, loudest, and tallest person in our class. I admit I was jealous of her.

Our first class was the amazing science class. Our science teacher, Mr. Griffon, said, "Today we're going to have a project with partners. Random partners, might I add." Everybody groaned. "The project is... MAKING A VOLCANO!" some people cheered, but most groaned again. "Okay, Henry and Layla, Josh and Lila, Cooper and Jack, and Lucy and Maria." NO WAY! I thought alarmingly.

Walking towards her was dreadful. “So, have you made a volcano before?” I said awkwardly. Maria shook her head. I looked at the instructions and read it out loud so Maria could do what I said when I read it. “We need to make the volcano mold with the clay that we have.” Maria quickly patted the clay into a well-shaped volcano. When she was done, she accidentally dropped the rest of the clay she had in her hand.

“Oops!” When she was walking forward to grab it, Cooper looked at her and said, “Try to catch it!” He kicked it underneath our table. Maria gritted her teeth. She tried to grab it, but the table was too low and she wasn’t small enough. “Here let me help.” I spoke softly. I easily reached under and grabbed it. Maria murmured a thanks. After the mold was done, Maria read out loud, “Pour one fluid ounce of vinegar.” I poured it, but some of it fell onto our table. My cheeks blushed with embarrassment. “I’m going to get a napkin.” I walked over to the napkins, but it was way too high for me. Maria saw me struggling and reached for it. “Thanks.” I said gratefully. Maria said, “You know, you’re not so bad.” “Thanks, I guess.”

We presented our volcano and Mr. Griffon loved it! “Your volcano is so good that I’m going to keep it in this room for next year!” Maria smiled happily. “Thanks for helping me, Lucy.” “No, thank you for helping me.” I said back. And that was when I realized that even though Maria and I were different, we made a great team.

The End

# Minnie and Mollie's Monarch Adventure

by Evie Powell, age 10

Minnie and Mollie are searching for nectar, but their predators can be anywhere. They have to be ready to defend themselves. In this story you will read about Minnie and Mollie, the monarch butterflies, as they search for food and encounter predators. Your first choice sets the scene. It's up to you to help them survive. YOU CHOOSE the path they take through their adventure.



Minnie and Mollie are hungry and almost out of food. Mollie is a young monarch, she just came out of her chrysalis. Mollie is 1 day old, which is around age 10 for a monarch butterfly. The typical lifespan of a monarch butterfly is 2-6 weeks. It's time for Minnie and Mollie to go find nectar. Monarchs live in meadows, fields, and forests. Minnie and Mollie live in a meadow between a forest and a field. Do they (1) go to the forest, or (2) go to the field to find food?

1. They decide to go to the forest. They've been searching for nectar for almost three hours and Minnie and Mollie are tired. They decide to start heading back to the meadow. Minnie starts to flap her wings, when she hears a noise. She looks back to see Mollie screaming face to face with a faded red bird. Minnie's heart starts pounding. Minnie thinks for a second, Does she (3) squirt the predator with poison or (4) grab Mollie and go to the nearest tree and camouflage?

2. They chose to go to the field. Minnie and Mollie have been looking for nectar for over 16 hrs and they're getting tired and hungrier. They decide to give up and start to head back to their home in the meadow. Minnie starts to flap her wings to begin the journey when suddenly Mollie sees the grass start to move. Minnie pauses and looks back at Mollie, when out jumps a blue bird!!! Does she (5) squirt the predator with poison or (6) grab Mollie and camouflage into the tall grass?

3. Minnie thinks poison is a safer route. She flies up to the bird, pushing Mollie out of the way. The bird looks at Minnie confused for a second, and pauses. The bird is surprised and terrified when Minnie suddenly starts squirting it. Minnie won't stop until the bird is drenched in gooey poison. When Minnie finally stops, the bird drops dead to the ground. The butterflies won. She looks over to see Mollie singing on a big mound of flowers. She fills up on nectar and heads back home to the meadow.

THE END

4. Minnie thinks camouflage is a safer route. A couple feet away is a tree with yellow orange leaves. It's a perfect hiding place. She quickly heads over to Mollie, grabs her by the wing, and flies as fast as she can. She flies away as far as she can with the bird at her tail. Suddenly the bird stops, too tired to keep going. She starts to go back by the tree so they can safely get away from the predator. They make it. Thirty minutes later, Minnie peeks out. The bird is GONE!!!! Minnie and Mollie survived. They rush out to find loads of flowers and nectar. Mollie hurries to fill up and go home.

THE END

5. Minnie thinks poison is a safer route. She starts to fly as fast as she can so she can squirt the bird before it swallows Mollie. Minnie's heart is racing. She flies over the tall grass and beautiful flowers. It was time to strike. She's now face to face with the bird. ATTACK!!! "Keep going until the bird is soaked," she thought. When she stops, the bird pauses and then drops dead to the ground. Minnie beats their predator! She looks over to see Mollie jumping for joy over flowers full of nectar. They quickly fill up on nectar and head back.

THE END

6. Minnie thinks camouflage is a safer route. She quickly scans the world around and sees that the tall grass is an orangish color from the sun. She flies over as fast as she can with Mollie. They made it! They decide to wait and hide a little longer. Fifteen minutes pass, and Minnie pokes her head above the grass. The bird is GONE!!! They survived. She looks over and sees tons of flowers and nectar. She grabs them excitedly and heads home.

THE END

# Brighter in Numbers

by Hannah Lovejoy-Paulson, age 10

One star shines bright enough to light up a house,

Fifty stars shine bright enough to light up a community,

One thousand stars shine bright enough to light up a state,

One million stars can light up a country,

One billion can light up the sky.



# 3 Seconds

by Layla Tracy, age 10

3 seconds is all it takes to change the earth and its ways.

3 seconds, and all this eruption feels like it's creating disruption.

If you take the time, the earth has been alive for one day. We have only been here for three seconds and we have made all this change.

(Solar power) That sounds great! But do we use it often? No! (there are other ways)

We think we know the feeling of freedom but the feeling of freedom is just a philosophy until we make it a reality, and we can do that by listening to Me.



# A Quest of True Friendship

by Maddy Pierce, age 10

Once upon a time, there lived a boy named Alamanen. He was granted power from the gods because he valued friendship above all else. Before he died, he created a dangerous cave beside a volcano as a test of true friendship. He became a powerful spirit-warrior who guarded the cave. Only a pair of true friends would be able to open the cave and access its treasure.



## Ala

I'm a huntress who goes by Ala. I use a silver bow and arrow to hunt and wear a light blue tunic with green thread. I always hunt with my partner and best friend, Haley. She hunts with a knife and has dark black hair, a perfect contrast to my golden locks. We have faced so many challenges together. I can't imagine life without her.

"Ready?" I asked. "Ready," said Haley. We were on a rocky mountainside with very few trees and no water. We climbed a little bit further up the mountain. "What's that?" asked Haley pointing. "What's..." I asked, but Haley cut me off.

## Haley

"We're being followed," I whispered. I felt so strange. "How can you tell?" Ala whispered to me. "I don't know, I just feel a strange presence behind that bush," I whispered back. All of a sudden, something jumped out from behind it. There was a big, muscular man and he looked dangerous. He wore thick armor that looked like it was made of iron.

## Ala

I grabbed my bow and arrow, ready to fight. I saw Haley grab her bronze knife. The man's armor was strong and my arrows couldn't pierce it. But just then, "Wham!" a bronze knife flew through the air and knocked off his leg plate. I saw my chance and grabbed a poisoned arrow that puts you to sleep, and shot at the man's bare leg. He fell to the ground.

## Haley

Ala walked up to the man, bent down, and started looking at him, investigating his armored body. I decided I should help her. "I had no idea you had such perfect aim with that knife," Ala told me. "I didn't know I could do that," I said. "I think I found something," Ala said, her blue eyes on a symbol on the armor. "The armor is symmetrical, look for the same symbol on this side but over there," I looked at the spot Ala was touching and saw the symbol of an erupting volcano. We pushed down on the symbols together and a hidden compartment opened on the armor. Inside, there was a golden key studded with diamonds.



**Ala**

I couldn't believe it. We had found the Key of Destiny. I took the key in my hand. I knew this was the key from the story of Alamanen. "This is way too easy," I said. "What do you mean?" asked Haley. "This is the Key of Destiny, we just defeated the spirit-warrior," I said. Just then, there was a rumbling. My golden hair was shaking rapidly. Haley grabbed my hand so hard her knuckles turned white.

**Haley**

"Boom!" lava shot out of the top of the mountain and into the sky. I ducked but knew it wouldn't help against the lava. Out of the corner of my eye I saw Ala, ducking like I was. I noticed the key in our hands was vibrating, then a silvery blue dome went around us. I also saw the wave of lava come in our direction, we were done for. I waited for the scorching pain of lava on my skin. But nothing happened. I looked up and saw the silvery blue dome was a shield.

**Ala**

I saw a shield protecting us. It rose and took us with it, forming a full sphere. We were flying! It carried us closer to the volcano. When we landed, I saw a door in the side of the mountain with a golden keyhole. We put the Key of Destiny into the hole and the door disappeared! "Come on Haley, let's go inside." We slowly and carefully walked inside. "Holy man!" we said. There were piles of gold! As Haley and I both saw the treasure, we looked at each other. I said, "Guess what the greatest treasure of all is?" "What?" replied Haley. Then I pointed to a word made out of solid gold in the center of the cave. It said: FRIENDSHIP.

# Empathy

by Madisin Olivia Bullis, age 10

People say empathy is to be kept safe

But the truth is you must know that in people  
you need faith

When let down the only thing your empty heart  
has is space

Your heart leading across your chest it will  
finally start to pick up the pace

When You meet someone the same

You know it's better to relate then to become  
only fame

When your empathetic

You feel like someones very own heart medic

Empathy

Is a key that everyone needs

It's starts so small to just say hi it's like the seeds

Compared to a big tall tree

But empathy is huge like the sea

Empathy starts small like knowing what it feels like to be out of place

But then it turns to knowing what it's like to live a harder life and to go a  
different pace

As a fact to know

There are so many places to go

But first you must not think to reach for the stars

But to reach for someone and help them reach for empathy and get rid of their  
scars



# Chestnut

by Nora Irene Moran, age 10

The night before a migration was always a busy time. Birds were aflutter chittering and chattering with each other about their plans. Everyone was excited... except a shy little finch named Chestnut.

Chestnut was hiding in her hammock in the little home that the Finch family shared. She was hiding because she was scared. She didn't want to fly to Mexico. She didn't want to leave her best friends, Clover, Dilly, and Marshmallow Lop. She liked the quiet of the Big Oak, where many different kinds of animal families lived in harmony.



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The next morning, Chestnut had butterflies in her stomach. She had never migrated before, and she really didn't want to leave her best friends for a whole winter. Her brother, Rowan, was coming of course, but none of the mammals.

"Chestnut dear," said her Mum, peeking into her hammock, "It's time for roll call, come on, there's no need to be nervous."

Chestnut smiled because she loved roll call for birds... since they all had their own unique sound, when their name was called out, they tweeted their own special song. Chestnut, who loved music, was always happy to go down for roll call. But this time, she didn't want to go.

"Okay," she told her Mum.

After her Mum left, she quickly pulled back the fern curtains and flew out her window. She was very hungry, but she could already see the birds lining up. The leader dove, whose name was Peace, was calling their names out. She looked down and saw a blackberry patch. She thought she could grab a couple berries before they left — she needed her strength to fly.

She dove down to get the berries, but she plummeted into the patch and couldn't get out. She started calling. She twisted her wing to pull herself out, but her wing got caught on a thorn and scraped.

"Ow, ow, ow!" she called.

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At that moment, the birds had finished roll call, and they took off into the sky. No one had noticed that shy little Chestnut wasn't there.

Chestnut didn't know they had left, so she just stayed there calling for help.

Thirty minutes after they had taken off into the sky, Rowan Finch looked around and noticed something... bad.

“Chestnut?!” he called out, swooping up from the back to look for his sister. “Chestnut, where are you?” he said, his voice shaking.

Rowan had migrated once before. He was a year older than little Chestnut. Rowan knew what he had to do. He flew as fast as he could and stopped right in front of Peace.

“Peace!” Rowan called in alarm. Peace turned around and motioned for the birds to stop... they all hovered in mid-air. “Peace, we left Chestnut behind. She can’t survive the winter on her own. We have to go back!”

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It had been an hour and Chestnut was crying in the middle of the berry patch. She knew they had left by now. But then something amazing happened.

“Chestnut! Chestnut!” she heard a familiar voice call. It was her brother.

“Chestnut, we came back, don’t worry!”

“Rowan, help me, I’m stuck! And my wing really hurts. I think I broke it!”

Rowan reached down and gently lifted her out, setting her on the patch of moss beside the berries.

“I can’t migrate, I can’t move my wing,” she said.

“We know, and we can help you,” he said.

Mrs. Finch came flying over and wrapped her arms around Chestnut, “Oh Chestnut, I’m so sorry we didn’t realize you were stuck.” She grabbed a piece of wild melon and gently wrapped it around Chestnut’s wing.

Then, all the other birds came flying over with a weaving made of grass, large enough for all the birds to hold with one of their wings or one of their feet, and they all grabbed hold of little loops sticking out of the weaving. Rowan gently lifted her and set her on the weaving.

“Umm... what are y—” Chestnut started to ask.

But then all of the birds lifted off at once, and she was in a flying hammock. She loved soaring over the trees. She wasn’t scared anymore because now she knew all the birds around her would help her and support her with whatever she needed. And she would do that back for them.

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They arrived safely in Mexico, and on the way Chestnut discovered that her favorite fruit was pineapple.

# Hockey Season

by Sam Kube, age 10

It was a cold day in the Canadian winter. It was almost 5 below. He was walking and kicked snow off the path into pure white banks of powder. The wind picked up to an immense speed and howled around him pressing in. He felt like he was becoming two dimensional. He remembered his snowstorm survival skills. He dove trying to escape the wind tunnel. Crashing into a bank, and was sucked back in the crushing weight of the storm. An ice shard zipped by and cut his hand. A chunk of debris smacked him upside the head; everything darkened. He soon forgot light; there was only darkness and that was all there ever had been. When he awoke, light burned his eyes. He saw a popcorn ceiling and a room with curtains like a hospital. Pain flashed from his arms through his wrists to...



Nothing

He felt nothing below his wrist.

He lifted his arm; pain flashed through him like a red hot wire. He screamed. People in doctors coats ran in carrying medicine. After a couple seconds, he felt a needle stab into his arm and everything gained a dreamlike quality. The blizzard played through his mind over and over like a broken tape on repeat. But the pain continued until finally he steered the dream in the right direction. He was in a compartment about 5x4 feet filled with frost. The floor fell under him; he was falling into a dark void. A second before he hit the ground, he awoke with his eyes closed. "I'll wake, and I'll be in my bed at home. It's only a nightmare," he thought. Extreme pain woke him. Finally, he had the courage to look. Soon he wished he hadn't. His hand was gone. He would have rather lived without knowing that it was gone. He was horrified. His mind soon directed to the pain in his leg. He attempted to stand. He was in the hospital for a week with one day of winter break left and his hockey team had a game. He needed to warm up using only one hand. It wasn't proper form but he'd need to manage. He couldn't shoot, handle the puck, or play in the game because of his hand.

They almost lost to the worst team in the league. All because of me. He believed. As he replayed the game in his head they were down one his teammate passed... shot missed, foul, then power play, then at the end of the game they scored twice and won. The next day he was back at school. He had a test but couldn't write. As he was walking to the bus the night before his big hockey game to make or miss the playoffs. He wouldn't have even had time to yell before there was a thud in the back of his head. He didn't even feel it.... Until water, freezing, water seeped through his hat. Before he lost his hand he wasn't

the most popular kid in school, The bullies left him because they didn't have much to pick on because he was a normal kid. He turned around and it had to be a coincidence, they were on the exact hockey team he would play tonight then he heard an almost muffled yell. He turned. Something bright white flew through the air and smacked him in the face then he saw who was throwing them. The kid who was throwing them was on his own hockey team. He heard shouting "we'll get you back tonight." The voice was from his teammate. He had almost forgotten they were on the same hockey team. He ran to the bus. The ice gleamed in the spotlight. Before the game one of his teammates gave him a well crafted cardboard hand "it'll help steady your stick." When the puck dropped the other team took a shot blocked by the goalie. His team got a break. SCORE!!! Later it was nearly the end of the game 1-1 his team had a power play. Pass back. Passing up to him the cardboard hand fell. He closed his eyes, he felt a sharp jab right above his skates. He tripped. The puck flew, all he heard before he hit the ground was "GOAL!" He awoke in an ambulance, his hockey team around him. An hour later they left the hospital and got hot chocolate. His teammates were congratulating him. It warmed him even more than hot chocolate.

# New Country

by Sofia Velazquez, age 10

I walked into school shyly. It was my first day at this school, you may be asking what happened at my last school, well, I loved my last school, it was great and it was an escape from my house. You may be asking why, well, my parents fought a lot, a lot of times my dad would come an hour late and my mom, she would be spending the night in jail, anyway my parents finally got a divorce but I had to move now I live with my dad in Venezuela, where there was barely english and I couldn't really understand any of the language. I was hoping that there would be someone that spoke English, to translate but when I walked into school I heard an unfamiliar language everywhere I went. "Hi, could you show me around?" I asked a boy. "¿Qué dijiste? No me puedo entender," said the boy. I got mad. I looked at my map and everything was labeled in spanish. "Mira esa chica nueva, mira tan diferente, no creo que ella hable español." said a girl in the corner talking to her friends. I couldn't understand her, but she was looking at me and she had a laughing tone so I was pretty sure she was making fun of me.



I walked to the principal's office. When he saw me come in he took out his phone, I saw him using google translate. He typed something in Spanish and then a robot voice said, "how are you?" I took his phone and swapped the languages, then I typed something in English. Then the robot says, "no muy buena." The principal took his phone back and looked something up. Then he gave me a map of the school with English labels. I took the phone out of the room and went to my class. I sat down and opened google translate and I typed -give this to the principal- then the little robot said "Dar esto al director" The teacher took the principal's phone, "gracias," she said walking off.

I moaned as all the kids started talking in Spanish and chatting their faces off while I sat there wondering how I was ever going to get through the school year without knowing any Spanish, and my dad wouldn't have nearly enough time to teach me so I could be totally bilingual.

I pretty much took an open eyed nap the whole day. And when it was pickup time my dad was 45 minutes late, he had a new job and he was working really late at night till early in the morning. When he finally picked me up, he was on the phone and also talking spanish. I suddenly lost my temper. "At least say hello!!!" I screamed as loud as I could. "mande , I mean what, ugh Lila, I'm trying to invite our neighbors over." my dad said annoyed. I sat back in my seat and moaned. When we got back to dad's house I ran inside. And went into bed and took out my phone and tried to learn Spanish on my own but it was really hard. Then there was a knock at the door. I got out of bed and went to see my dad open the door.

“Hola!” he yelled excitedly. “ hola donde esta este, Lila?” asked a woman at the door. Then a man and two kids walked in. “hola! ella allí está Lila?” the girl asked, pointing at me. There was a smaller boy next to her. “Si!” my dad said. I slapped my head and the girl came up to me. “Hola!” she said. Which by now I knew meant hi or something. I walked back to my room. “Privet? Bonjour? ... hello?” the girl asked. Saying hello in a lot of different languages but only one that I recognized. “Do you speak English?” I asked. “A little,” she said a little off key in the English accent. “You don’t speak spanish?” the girl asked. I shook my head. I heard a bunch of Spanish coming from the kitchen that made my eyes twitch. “Hey!” the girl said, “What if I teach you Spanish and you teach me English,” my face lit up. “That’s such a great idea! I could just kiss you.” I said, “what’s your name?” I asked. “Maria,” she said. After weeks of practicing I was singing a Spanish song next to Maria under a tree. “Hey,” she said, “you owe me a kiss!”



# When It Rains, Make a Rainbow

by Cora Gregory, age 11

## Anna

Ring! Anna looked up at the school clock. She had three minutes to get to class. “Anna!” jeered Miles, “What’s in the notebook? Unicorns? Fairies?” Anna ignored him. In her sketchbook, were obviously sketches. Anna loved sketching animals. She would sketch her dog, but he wouldn’t sit still. Anna arrived at her locker, and hung up her dark purple backpack. What did Miles know? He’d never been able to score even a C in art class. Anna walked into class, with a secret. She had submitted a sketch to a drawing contest.



## Connor

Connor sat at his desk, twiddling his thumbs, waiting for the bell. Just as it rang, Anna came in with a notebook tucked under her arm. Connor’s jaw dropped, as she sat down and opened it to a page. There, was a beautiful dragonfly, its wings so startingly real, Connor thought it could jump off the page. The colors were perfectly blended. Connor looked at his own sketches, which looked like mud to the dragonfly. At recess, Connor saw Anna with her sketchbook. “Hey,” he said, “Your dragonfly is beautiful. I want to draw like that.” Anna smiled. “You can.”

## Lyla

It was only when Lyla saw Connor and Anna sketching together when she realized she wasn’t the only one who loved drawing. She took her notebook and walked over. Connor was watching Anna draw a beetle and trying to copy her. “Hi,” said Lyla, “Can I try?” Anna smiled. “Sure,” Lyla showed Connor and Anna drawings of her cat, Petal. They seemed to like them. Lyla spotted some trees by the playground, waving in the wind. She put her hands up to measure, then put them back on the paper. “Perfect,” she thought, for the first time, not alone.

## Anna

That night, Anna looked at her computer. There was a new e-mail.

**Anna, we are pleased to inform you that you have won the drawing contest by far with your amazing dragonfly. We have mailed you the 1,000 dollars, and hope you enjoyed entering.**

**Sincerely, young sketchers contests**

Anna screamed into her pillow. She’d done it! “What’s all this noise?” asked a sleepy big sister Clare. “Nothing. Just dropped something heavy and it scared me.” Clare walked away. Anna jumped silently with fierce delight. Wait until she told Connor and Lyla!

### **Connor**

The next day, Connor walked out to recess with his sketchbook and sat on the bench to wait for the girls. He'd improved with help from them a lot. Lyla was first. "Hi," she greeted Connor, before looking at some trees by the playground and beginning to draw. Anna suddenly burst out of the school and almost screamed, "Connor! Lyla! I entered a drawing contest a week ago! I found out last night. I won!" Connor grinned. "That's awesome!" Lyla looked thoughtful. "I entered that," she said suddenly, "I got ninth and 300 dollars." Connor smiled. "You should enter a contest!" Lyla suggested. "Um-well," said Connor uncertain. "Okay,"

### **Lyla**

Lyla made it her mission to help Connor win a contest they found online. She invited the others over, and they found a rabbit nibbling grass that he could draw. The girls went inside to get snacks. They ate ice cream and drunk juice while Connor drew. Lyla went out to check on him. Her jaw dropped. The rabbit seemed to be alive, the grass was really waving, the bugs were really squirming. "Is it good enough?" Connor worried. Anna came onto the deck and gasped. Lyla nodded silently, and Anna stared at the paper. "Wow,"

### **Anna**

Connor won the contest of course. How could he not with the amazing beyond words rabbit? Anna decided to show her family her sketches. She found her dragonfly, took a deep breath, and went to the kitchen. Her Mom, Dad, sister Clare, brother Ethan, and baby sister Lilly were eating lunch. Anna cleared her throat. She gave her notebook to Mom, who gasped, and gave it to Dad. The same happened the whole way around the table, (except Lilly, who just stared). "I entered a contest, and won," announced Anna. The awkward silence broke. Anna was crushed by hugs.

### **Epilogue**

"It had to rain today," complained Connor, as the trio sat in Lyla's living room. "Of course it did," said Anna. "I purposely scheduled this on a rainy day." "Huh?" said Lyla. "Why?" asked Connor. "So we could see... this!" Anna led the others outside. There, was a large, double rainbow.

# The Concept of Forward

by Cecilia Ann Myers, age 11

The concept of forward,  
In many degrees,  
Language,  
History and Philosophy,  
The dictionary says that forward,  
Is a direction,  
As well as a progress-type of perception,  
The direction of forward,  
Can be at a goal,  
Or in which direction is a soul,  
Forward is progressive,  
Not slacking or late,  
Although these are true,  
Some postulate,  
Forward is equity,  
And it does show,  
But sometimes with others,  
Forward is slow.  
Forward can be hard to find for some,  
But somehow hides in everyone,  
Forward is moving to distress,  
But is held off by people who suggest,  
That forward is against a group or person or place,  
Or the environment or somebody's race,  
Forward is none of these things,  
Progress never disgraces or demeans!  
Forward some say,

Is keeping the future bright,  
For others but some say that Forward is a fight,  
For what is right or true,

And others think Forward should have preferences,  
There are many references to this idea,  
But it is not at all correct,  
That is not Forward,  
That will never be,  
That shall never be,  
For if Forward had preferences for some,  
That would mean inequity for everyone!  
Additionally I have to say,  
That some presume Forward,  
Is patient and kind,  
Forward isn't,



They jump out and speak their mind,  
They don't wait for freedom,  
They jump up and demand it,  
Forward is powerful and strong,  
And loud and proud,  
So you can hear their sound.  
The concept of Forward,  
Is a direction,  
A fight and a cry,  
A story to tell,  
An idea often misinterpreted,  
A thing that's worth it,  
The concept of Forward,  
Is try.

# Forward Is...

by Aubree June Ghaboussi, age 12

Forward is more than direction  
Forward is also my friend  
She pushes me on  
To sing my song  
And never let it end.

Forward is more than a mindset  
Forward is a coach, too.  
She stops me when  
I'm about to descend  
Into a sea of blue

Forward is more than a statue  
Forward is also a common trail  
We work together  
For the better  
To help one another not fail

Forward is more than movement  
Forward is inspiring, too.  
We'll start out small  
And accomplish it all  
to see all our goals through.

Forward isn't always straight  
Forward is diverse, as well.  
To rise above,  
With the power of love.  
Accept others breaking out of their shell.

Forward is more than a symbol  
Forward is also our dream  
To keep going  
And keep living,  
No matter how bleak it may seem.

Our dream is to get there together  
To go and explore the outside  
Listen to your heart  
And then we may start  
To move forward with friends on our side



# End This Hate

by Josiah Tekle, age 11

War and violence everywhere  
Yet politicians, they don't care  
So it's up to us to stand together  
Otherwise we'll be trapped forever  
All this hate and all this violence  
I really wanna shout, "Just be quiet!"  
It might be dangerous, so please beware  
But will you join us, will you dare?  
For we have a chance to change the world  
We'll end the Earth's problems, and be free as a bird  
Together we'll flutter, together we'll fly,  
And we won't stop 'till we touch the sky.



# The Solution

by Lauryn Warnke, age 11

It all started that Saturday night in May when Mrs. June was cleaning up plastic. At first we watched the old woman try to pick up all the trash, but she couldn't. Then my brother Thomas stepped in.

We lived in a city that was very gross and polluted. Me and my brother used to go to the beach and plastic would be everywhere in the sand and in the water. We would watch people throw their plastic water bottles on the ground and walk on like it was normal. Dead sea animals would wash on shore strangled in plastic or they ate a plastic wrapper. People would never walk around or bike and would always use a car, even if where they needed to go was only a block away,



Until Mrs. June came along.

She lived in the gray house on the corner of 54th st. Occasionally she would come out of her house to water her garden, but then she would go back inside, until one day when she watched someone dump their trash on the ground. Something changed in her then. She went back inside, then came back out with work clothes on. She put on blue gloves and she held a plastic bag. She swooped around the neighborhood picking up as much trash as she could, filling up bag after bag. But even after she was tired, there was still so much more to do. Me and Thomas had watched her every move, from picking up a candy wrapper to a whole fast food meal dumped on the street. Thomas was very interested in what she was doing.

“Can we help her Cynthia?” He asked me.  
Should we help her?  
“I can’t see why not.”

She sat on a bench and drank water. She had piled up trash bags on her lawn, we didn’t know what she was going to do with all of them.

“Excuse me miss, do you need any help?” Thomas offered kindly.

“Yes, that would be very nice.” She sighed in relief.

Me, Mrs. June and Thomas swept around the neighborhood, cleaning the streets. Other kids saw us and stared, until one little girl approached us.

“May I help too?” She asked, her mother watching from a few feet away.

“Of course you can help us.” Mrs June replied.

Eventually, we had a big group of people picking up trash. We were starting to make a difference. The neighborhood was already beginning to look better, but Mrs June wanted it to be perfect.

“If we have a lot of people willing to help, then we should take advantage of it.” She said.

Mrs. June formed a club called The Solution. Every week a big group of people would gather and do something for the environment. One week they cleaned the beach, another week they set up solar panels for people’s houses. Our town began to look different from how it had before, the air had become breathable again, people had changed for the better.

After about a year of the club existing Mrs. June became sick. Everyone was hoping she would be fine, but the worst came. The shock of her death was surprising for a lot of people, but she was 84. The members of The Solution had suffered a major loss, and the world lost a great person that day. Thomas was changed forever and grieved for a long time. A community garden was planted in remembrance of Leena P. June at the park, and now every day I go to take my brother to the park he asks,

“Cynthia, can we please pass Mrs. June’s Garden on the way back?”

“Sure.” I will always say.

So next time you see a pretty garden in a park, or throw trash on the ground, remember someone worked to get it the way it is. What impact do you want to make? How do you want something to turn out? When a bad impact is made, it gives an opportunity for people to come together and work to make it better. Good actions for a better world can only be made when people work together. If everyone comes together and does their part, changes can be made. Opinions can be changed and things can improve. The only way changes are going to happen is if we put effort towards it and conquer the challenge.



# Forward Is...

by Abigail R. Meisenbach, age 12

Darkness,

It can engulf everything in its path,  
But it can also cover up,  
What you don't want to see,  
But you can't fix it if you can't see it,

So then there is light,  
And you can see everything,  
It might not look pretty,  
But now that you see it,  
You can fix it,

So you find a place to start,  
It might be small,

But it will lead to becoming beautiful,

Better than it was,  
Better than it ever has been,  
And once you see in that light,  
You have to keep ahold of it,  
And never let it go,  
Through the rough,  
And more,  
You will keep it,

And maybe someday be the light,

For someone else,  
Lost in the dark.

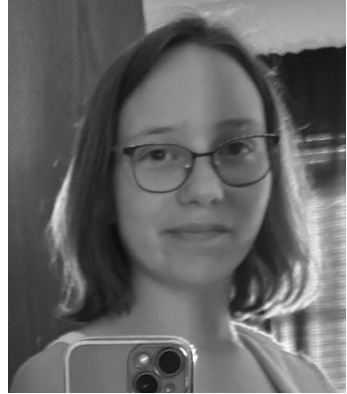


# apART

by Liss Siebel, age 12

I bolt out of my classroom and head to the art room the second I hear the first chime of the bell. I get there and sit right down in the corner with my desk before Mrs. Markens -the art teacher- realizes I'm even there. I grab my sketchbook and start sketching out a random drawing of a flower field.

"Mr. Carens," Mrs. Markens started, "I didn't even realize you came in here," she chuckled. I just kept drawing flowers as my friends started pouring into the classroom one by one, almost like soup flowing into a bowl. My friends who are in the club are in sixth grade and seventh grade. These friends' names are Jamie, Oliver, Isla, Sadie, and Delilah. They started walking in and sitting down in their seats. We don't actually have assigned seats but we tend to sit in the same ones each time.



Five minutes later before Mrs. Markens starts, Delilah stands up, "I need to use the restroom," Delilah says in her elegant little voice, then walks out.

"Okay guys we might as well start now," Mrs. Markens announces a minute or so after Delilah had walked out.

"But we have to wait for Delilah!" Isla exclaims, her and Delilah are best friends. "Oh yes, we'll give her five more minutes before we start back up on decorating teacher cards." We all wait about what could've felt like an hour. We were just sitting in dead silence waiting and waiting for Delilah to get back, but she doesn't.

"Well everyone I say we just start and when she comes back in she comes back in." Mrs. Markens states.

"Well I'm worried, I'm going to go see what's up. She might have gotten locked in the bathroom," Isla states in a nervous tone. She walks out before anyone has time to give a response.

They all started to draw, while I sat in the corner just starting to color the field I had finished sketching. A lot of time goes by with no sign of life coming from out the door, It's three thirty when we all started and now it's ten to five. Our art club goes late but I like it, I find it calming, it gives me time to draw.

"Am I the only one who's worried about the girls?" Sadie set down her pencil, walked out before anyone could stop her, and closed the door behind her. Another ten minutes go by and somebody stands up again, this time being Oliver.

"It's been too long since they left, if they're playing a prank I'm going to be mad." He says, walking out again and towards the girl's bathroom. "Are you guys in there?" I hear him sorta shout. No response, then no movement. I thought I heard a scream, but I hear a voice in my head on occasion anyway, so I brush it off.

After a long time, I'm starting to get worried myself as it's almost time to go home, it's almost six o'clock.

"Ok, it's been too long, I'm getting anxious waiting for them, I feel like I'm going to explode!" Jamie states in his anxious tone, "Mrs. Markens, could you come with me so we can check all of the bathrooms?" He asks, also because he knows the nicer bathrooms are upstairs and that might be where they are.

"Sure, I suppose it has been-" she checks her watch, "Oh my, it's been over an hour. Of course I'll go with you Jamie, I didn't realize it was so late. Brody, are you going to be ok if I step out for a moment?" She asks me.

"I think I'll manage," I respond back in a teenage back sass voice.

"Ok, we will be back in five minutes at max." She states. They then walk out.

Now I'm alone in the art room, sitting in my seat drawing a cute dog in the field, running to its home. I got so into it I didn't realize the time. It was now five after six. "Oh god mom's probably getting nervous," I say out loud. But the thing is, nobody heard me.

I was alone.

They should've been back by now, all of them. Their pieces of art are just laying out on the tables, their backpacks, binders, and purses are just sitting there. Where were they? I slowly grab my things and head to the door leading into the hall. I open the door, and the hallway was silent, it was dark and eerie as well. I walk past the bathroom and hear no sound. I even peeked inside the boys bathroom to see if there was anyone in there. Nobody. But then suddenly I hear a sound coming from the outside of the bathroom and I turn to see who... or what was making that sound.

My head is out of the bathroom now and staring down the long dimly lit silent hallway. The voice inside my head is telling me to run, for some reason it's playing music that would play in a horror movie. I can't move, I stare and stare, I feel like crying, I am waiting for the thing to move, I want it to move, to disappear. I feel frozen in my spot, I want to start crying. It's wearing all black if it's actually wearing clothes, it also has blue and red eyes, and it's staring back at me. And then I notice it's holding something up. Two things actually. The drawing I made of the dog. I stood in fear, I only just left the room, it had to have been watching me, there wasn't enough time for it to have gone in without me noticing it, or hearing it. But the worst thing of all, was the second drawing it held up, something more terrifying than you thought you would ever see in your life, I was definitely crying now. It held up another drawing, with all my friends, and Mrs. Markens, the terrifying looks on all of their faces, some of them, even crying. The thing drops the picture I made and points at me. I try to run but I can't move at all, I'm scared and petrified.

I know what happened to me now, the thing has trapped me.

# Better Together

by Ella Lord, age 12

Someone once told me to learn from the past,  
so I scrutinized every mistake I made,  
and did the opposite,  
even if it was wrong.

Someone once told me to live in the moment,  
so I savored every second,  
no matter how hurtful.

Someone once told me to look to the future,  
so I planned every detail of my life,  
leaving no room for creativity.

Someone once told me friends were more  
valuable than gold,  
so I hung onto them tight and showered them  
with love,  
just as they did to me.

When I'm around them,  
we learn from the past,  
live in the moment,  
and look to the future,  
together.



# Dear Brother

by Lucy Greenfield, age 12

Dear Brother,

I am settled on my back in the lonely alleyway. Mother and Father are still at work. They seem to always be there. I look up. I see you. You are looking down at me from the stars. It is almost as if I witnessed a glimpse of your smile. The moon gleams and I want to reach up and grab you from the sky, but I know such a feat would be impossible. I need you. I need you to help me with my schoolwork and to heal my wounds. I need you to be there after school and whenever I need someone to talk to. The grief is too unimaginable. Only you could help me live through the pain.

Love,  
Sister



Dear Brother,

School is difficult. My grades are poor and everyone laughs at me. They make fun of me for having no brother and parents that don't acknowledge me. I want to remember that it is only to support me, but occasionally, I forget. I wish you were here. If you were here, you would save me from the kids at school who don't know the whole story. About the accident. If only the driver had been paying attention to the road that night. That horrible night. If only I had you. If you were here, you could make up for all the friends I have never had. If you were here, you would make up all the sleepless nights I spent wishing that you were still here.

Love,  
Sister

Dear Brother,

Yesterday was hard. I hate days such as those. The days that put a draining weight on my back. The worst part is that the weight isn't real. It is the weight of words. Heavy words. Painful words. Words that make me want you back even more. The kids at school are cruel. Mother and Father don't care. They are at work too much to even notice. I don't even remember the last time we sat down together for a meal. Phone calls are practically worth gold. The only thing I can do is dream. I dream that tomorrow will be better. I dream that the kids at school are kinder. I dream that I can talk to you one more time.

Love,  
Sister

Dear Brother,

Today was better. I met a friend. A real one. A friend that cared about me and tried to understand my pain. She was a sweet, shy girl that just moved here. She sat by me. No one had ever even looked at my table before. It felt nice to get noticed. I told her about you. I told her about the accident. About Mother and Father. About everything. She comforted me and said if there was anything she

could do to help, she would do it. It was almost as if those heavy, painful words had been lifted off my back. The weight was not as immense. It felt nice to have someone who cared. Someone who listened. Someone who understood.

Love,  
Sister

Dear Brother,

Again, I lay beneath the sky. I feel better. It feels pleasant to say that. School is so much easier with a friend. A true friend. The mean kids are still there, but the noise feels a little less overwhelming. Mother and Father are still at work, but it feels a little less unbearable. My bad grades feel manageable. I wish you could meet her. I wish you were here, laying beside me, looking up at the night sky.

Love,  
Sister

Dear Brother,

Today was another difficult day. A boatload-of-homework day. A can't get everything done day. A disgusting day. I have too much on my plate today. My parents don't understand me day. They are at work for too long day. A lazy day. A tiring day. A draining day. I want you back day. I'm glad I have someone to be there for me today.

Love,  
Sister

Dear Brother,

I feel okay. Today was acceptable. There's nothing much to complain about. Yesterday I had my very first sleepover with my friend. It was pleasing. I like not being alone. I like having someone to talk to. Most of all, I like having someone to listen to me. I miss you. I wish you were here. Though, having a friend makes me feel like I can move on. I want to move on. For that, I wouldn't exchange anything for. Thank you, Brother.

Love,  
Sister

# A Light Under The Door

by Vivian Kaufman, age 12



The smell of eggs wakes you up.  
Your alarm clock tells you that it's 12:03 am.

A light under your door urged you out of bed. Your curiosity aided your interest in the smell of eggs.

Mother never made breakfast anymore. Certainly not three minutes after midnight, and certainly not since your father had left that night. Walked out into the night and never came back.

Mother never looked happy anymore, and yet she was standing out in the kitchen holding a pan of eggs, smiling.

Father was standing next to her.

You were speechless. Not many people can find words once you come out of bed to find your smiling mother and your supposedly missing father.  
Your mother looks at you, her eyes somehow making you sit down. You pull out a chair and sit down, a plate of eggs suddenly on the plate that hadn't been in front of you previously.

The smell of eggs suddenly stops, your mother's grin swiftly begins to transform into a menacing smirk, your father beginning to disintegrate.  
You want to scream, yet you find that you cannot.

You want to find out what happens next, and yet your eyelids begin closing.

Everything goes black.

**12:02 am**

Your stomach screams as you sit up, still terrified.

There is still a light under your door, the same light that guided you out of bed what feels like a year ago. Somehow, you remember everything that happened in that situation that you don't know how to identify. You remember it clearly though parts of it fade in and out.

Like you did last time, you turn around in bed to see your clock telling you that it's 12:02 am.

Before, it was 12:03.

You continue lying in bed for what feels like forever even though when you turn back around it's still 12:02.

You sit up and count to 60. When you lay back down, you see 12:03 briefly before it flashes back to 12:02.

As much as you want to scream at the top of your lungs, as much as you want to start running away and never stop, the light is calling your name yet again. Your legs listen to its call, despite the fact that your mind is yelling at full volume to go back to sleep.

It's very difficult to sleep in a situation like this.

You make the decision to get out of bed, go to the kitchen and eat as quickly as possible in an effort to see what happens if you eat all the eggs.

Maybe this was all just some sick game. A game where to "win" you must finish all the eggs on your plate without being shaken by your oddly happy mother or father that shouldn't be standing in your kitchen holding a pan of unsalted eggs.

Once you are a few steps into the kitchen, your mother's oddly smiling face greets you again, the dad that should be missing standing at her side, this time, he is holding the pan.

Your mother grabs the pan from him as he begins to disintegrate. You start motioning to your plate in an effort to get the eggs on your plate as soon as possible.

Your mother nods and shovels some eggs onto your plate. Once the eggs rested on your plate, she took a few steps back and froze.

Not shaken enough to lose your appetite, you shovel eggs into your mouth as if that would solve the mystery being presented.

You've come this far. You can't stop now. You don't want to stop now. And yet somehow your head hits the floor.

Everything goes black.

**12:01 am**

You wake up yet again.

You bolt upright, a pounding headache beginning in your exhausted brain. Remembering your progress, you practically jump out of bed.

Once you reach the kitchen, you notice the pan of eggs sitting alone on the table. Nonetheless, you begin shoveling eggs into your mouth, the absence of your parents hiding in the back of your mind.

As you begin to put the last few eggs on your fork, a new fear is uncovered deep in the darkest part of your mind.

You look around at all the clocks visible from the kitchen. They're all counting down in unison, the smaller hands ticking together.

If it was 12:01 now...  
What would happen at midnight?

**Fin.**



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# Ages 13-18

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# Numbers

by Aanya Pandeya, age 13

“Alright everyone,” Mr. Hallbott says. “I have created a new project for all of you to work on,” he says in his usual morning booming voice. “Your task for this project will be to create a robot that can do some type of artwork. It can be drawing, painting, pottery, anything you can imagine. You will have a total of ten school days to work on it and this project will be done in groups that I will assign you to.”



100 percent of the class groans at the hearing of this. Assigned group projects are what I estimate to be 92 percent of freshmen in high school’s biggest nightmare. I highly prefer to work alone. Especially after moving to this new school in Seattle and concluding that roughly 92 percent of the kids in my grade have nearly zero idea what they’re doing in any of their classes. You may think that I’m wrongly judging these people and I shouldn’t do so after today being my third day at this school, but I highly doubt that I’m wrong.

“The first group will consist of Archana, Daehyun, Emiliano, and Nala.”

I fight every urge to form a disgusted face as I walk over to my group. Feelings of vexation wash over me. I refuse to believe that me, Nala Carver, probably the best at robotics in this whole class got partnered up with the people who’s grades in robotics have not done them any favors. I sit down as I flick one of my dark colored braids out of my view.

“Hey team,” Emiliano says as Mr. Hallbott continues to list out all of the groups. “I know we’re gonna make the best robot. Our team looks promising.”

*Promising. Sure.*

Mr. Hallbott passes out all of our materials. Once our group gets the materials, Archana instantly grabs one of the gears and starts inspecting it. I estimate that she only knows around 31 percent of what we’re expected to know in this class.

*Why is she even here? She would do better in an easier class.*

“So Daehyun, I’ve heard that you’re really good at drawing and artsy stuff,” Emiliano says as he takes some of the markers that we were given and hands them to Daehyun. “You should take over the artsy part of this project.”

Daehyun nods as he shows a small smile. He appears to be a shy person. I estimate that shy people only amount to 44 percent of what a person who is not shy does in life.

"I'm good at building things," Archana says. "I could build the robot."  
"Cool. You'll do that. I'm really good at coding robots, so—"

I stop Emiliano in his sentence. "I think that I should take charge of the coding part. I estimate that my coding abilities are roughly seventy percent better than yours, which makes you quite the average person in terms of coding. After all, I've been praised for my outstanding computing skills all my life, so I believe that I can do all the coding that's needed for this project. I could probably do the entire project myself. I can just do all the work if you guys want."

Daehyun, Archana, and Emiliano all stare at me with hard, judgmental, and hurt eyes.

"Wow," Archana says coldly. "I guess you're super confident in yourself."  
"Yeah," Daehyun says. "Confident enough to bring down everyone else."  
"Oh, please," I snicker. "You're just mad 'cause I'm right."  
"Anyways I think me and Nala will work on the coding," Emiliano says.

I believe that they think of me as 100 percent cocky, but I couldn't care less. I simply put them in their place as people who are 62 percent stupid, 30 percent sensitive, and 8 percent good enough to work with me.

I take all of the gears and tools and start building the robot. I take out my school laptop and open the programming software and start typing the commands.

"You made a mistake," Emiliano says.  
I scoff. "There's a five percent chance I'm going to make a mistake in coding."  
"No, look," Emiliano retorts as he points to a line. "You typed the command wrong. And you could use a much more efficient command. Like this one."

Emiliano turns the laptop towards him and starts typing a command that I have never heard of before.

"There, now it's gonna do the same thing, but better and more efficiently," Emiliano says as he runs his fingers through his fluffy brown hair.

I study the code as I purse my lips.

*Wow, okay. Maybe I was wrong after all about this kid.*

When I look up from the computer I see Archana building the robot in a more intricate yet useful design. The arms of the robot are longer and the hands appear to have a better grip.

"Do you like this design?" Archana asks, but she's not asking me, she's asking Emiliano.

Emiliano nods and smiles in return.

"There must be an eleven percent chance of that working," I scoff.

I look behind me to see that Emiliano has finished all of the coding. Emiliano hits the run button and before I know it, the robot has a marker in its hands and is drawing on a piece of paper.

“I guess it fell by eleven percent,” Daehyun says.

“Wow!” Mr. Hallbott says as he walks over. “That’s quite the robot. And you finished everything already?”

Emiliano nods with pride. “Yeah we did finish everything. We moved through all the struggles together.”

The rest of my group talks with Mr. Hallbott as a wave of guilt washes over me. My fingers flutter at my sides as I ponder the belief that if I had said my words differently, this project would’ve 100 percent gone a different way.

# We Shall Overcome

by Isaac Hall, age 14

Suicide.

As I walk from the choir room the rumor starts to whisk around the school. It reaches all ears. I see people looking around in disbelief, this girl in the corner of the hallway, crying her eyes out and surrounded by her friends. As I walk to the lunchroom the eyes of the people seemed to get moist. I arrive in the lunchroom to a silent homogeneous, yet isolated, cry of the students and teachers.

I block out the pounding of reality, blocking out my pounding heart as I make it through the lunchroom to my table. I sit and open my lunch and dump out the things I've had day after day. Ham sandwich, a bunch of grapes, a bag of chips.

A party of two, their eyes dry, comes and sits down across from me, speaking excitedly. I eye them suspiciously; their dry eyes.

They each open their lunches simultaneously, and, still talking, they look over at me. I try to avoid eye contact with them, but they keep peering my way, into me. "Dude," he says, looking at me, but speaking to the others, "he just wen' up last night, took out his fat'er gun and shot hissself in the head. Dead instantly."

"But how do you know?" the other one asks.

"I 'oun't know, musta' heard it 'round, stuff spreads like butter in this town... It sad, t'ough, a good man he was." Silence wrapped around the table; all of us looking down at our food. I forget their dry eyes.

"But," I ask, "Why? Why did he do it? He had us, didn' he?"

"Sometime 'us' int' enough. He musta' needed some'tin' more."

"But how?" I argue, "He was the most popular on' here, in t'is school; he had a profound impact on us and the whole community. On me."

"I ownt' know. A man does crazy t'ings, ending his own life." Threw his teeth he sucks in his breath, "Well, t'at his choice... I gotta go," he says, throwing out the scraps of his lunch as I push mine away.

I stumble through the rest of my day, unable to concentrate, for my thoughts came to one thing: why did he do it? He had us, and he was popular, I do not comprehend why people take their own lives, but him? He was strong in his values, and would not let go of his principles even when the whole school was letting their moral character slip by— though I didn't agree with some of his— I respected his integrity.



The whole town was proud of him; the best football player, basketball, and tennis; the best in the choir, and a straight-A student, the one person, they said, that would do something meaningful in their life. They had grandiose ideas for him, and looked upon him like a king, though he never let it get to his head. He walked around, six-three, helping anyone who asked for it, bringing anyone up out of the ashes of depression. Though he needed to bring himself up.  
Why?

Why? At home, my parents try to comfort me by asking if I need anything, but I move on, saying, "No, I am fine." I sit in my room in calm confusion until the call for dinner comes. I trudge downstairs, shove food around my plate, then drag myself back up to my room, pushing the door behind me as I flop onto my bed, letting the door close with a click.

I take my basketball from my nightstand and lay it on my chest. I start to toss it up to myself again and again as I think: why had he done it? It was not fair, didn't he think that it would affect us; his family, his friends; the school, and the community? I started to throw the ball faster.

Of course he did, he always would think things threw, and think of other people before himself.

But did he? In what way would this be better for him, or anyone? There was no good reason. I start chucking the basketball.

But he is still gone.

I grab the ball, and stair up to the ceiling. I then let the ball down to my side and let out a deep, trembling sigh. Why.

Why... I get up from my bed when I hear someone marching up the stairs in her high heels. She knocked on my door. "Honey, your choir concert is in five minutes," she says softly.

I bring my head up from my pillow, "Okay," I say in the most collected voice I can muster. So I get on my church clothes, and, five minutes later, I walk down the stairs, where she greets me with a hug, and a whisper in my ear, "It okay."

I push past her and out the doors into the cold night then hop into the car, with her husband in the front, tapping his finger on the wheel; his foot on the gas. He wouldn't look at me. She finally came out and we drove off in silence back to the school. I enter the bustling auditorium and take my place on stage. I see her with him, and she smiles at me, then we start our first song. Then our second. Then our third.

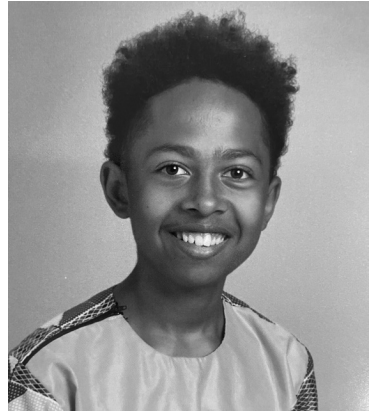
But before we sing it, the teacher walks up to the microphone. "Thank you," she says. "Our last song has a deeper meaning because of the recent... events that have happened." She starts to get choked up. "This is for the remembrance of..." She stops in time and makes her way to the piano, then takes a deep breath, then cues us off.

My eyes and mouth remain closed as I take a deep breath. Why, rung out in my head, but I silence it as I join the sea of voices and tears, both in the audience and on stage, singing, "We shall overcome. We shall overcome. We shall overcome, someday."

# How My Time in Sierra Leone Made Me the Person I am Today

by Izon Zale Thoronka, age 14

When I was eight, I got to spend time in my father's village in northern Sierra Leone, West Africa. This is where my father was born, under a tree. This experience taught me things about others - the people of Kasasi Village, as well as new things about myself. The experience shaped my priorities in life, and made me realize where my values lie: Respect, Resilience, Compassion, Community Strength, Collective Wellbeing, and Truth.



The first day we arrived in Kasasi Village, we were greeted with mangoes, oranges, and a djembe drum entrance. After the warm welcome, the kids took me to the soccer field behind the local school, and we played until dusk. While we were playing, I realized something: Even though we grew up differently, and even though we did not speak the same language, we were still alike in many ways, and we respected each other. That evening, tired and sweaty from soccer, I took a bucket bath with water from the pump that had been heated on the fire. Then, my sister and aunt asked if I wanted to go to an African dance party. Not only was I excited, but I had only heard stories about how fun and entertaining these parties were from my older sister, who was born in Sierra Leone. She was not lying! There were people dressed up in Africanas (traditional African attire), and music playing loudly on speakers that were hooked up to a generator. We danced, drank bottles of soda, and overall had a blast!

The next day, I went to the school to deliver the books and supplies we brought with us; the students were happy to receive them. Later, a traditional healer took me and my family into the forest to find a medicinal plant my dad was looking for. She showed us different trees and told us what they were used for, such as eye infections and "run-belly" ('diarrhea' in Sierra Leonean Krio). I was amazed by how natural, free, and safe it made me feel. It even made me forget about my former fears of malaria! And the mangos were delicious, picked straight from the trees! I got to eat an abundance every day. It was like a mango playground.

My favorite part of the trip was the day I helped mobilize over 100 kids for a garbage clean up. The goal was to collect as many bags of garbage as possible, for prizes. It was a communal effort. We also hired local carpenters to make wooden latrine covers, to keep flies and bad smells away. After the garbage competition, we walked around the village to place the wooden slabs over the outdoor latrines, which were holes in the ground.

That night, as I laid under my mosquito net, I thought about the people of Kasasi. I admired how happy and fun-loving they were, regardless of limited resources. I thought about how cherished and important nature is for them: from the medicine in the forest, to rainwater for drinking, to the firewood used to cook food. This lifestyle made them more united and free. They were less worrisome than people in the U.S.; not always scared that something bad was going to happen. Instead, they focus on each day; a simple life, but they are happy. They are not trapped by society's limits. People do not fear walking out their door or getting shot or arrested because they are Black. Everyone takes care of each other. People are nice and everyone feels part of the shared culture, like family. It is not to say they do not have arguments, but they do everything as a community, including problem solving, so that everyone can move forward more easily, together.

What I learned about myself is that I enjoy being in a communal and free society. I felt respected and treated equally by everyone. I had so much fun that I forgot about things like electricity, electronics, and technology. I was well occupied and there were always kids to play with. They taught me games that did not require money. We played soccer every day with soccer balls made of plastic and string, and another game with plastic slippers. They have natural, open spaces to run around in, like playing a virtual reality video game with a map of the forest, with new things to discover every day. This is unlike the US, where everything costs money, and everyone is busy with technology, organized sports, and full schedules; there is never enough time. I also learned that I am flexible and able to live in different environments. Even though I had to go to the bathroom in a hole in the ground (which was a little scary), and I found a scorpion in my bucket bath water, and we had to collect water from a pump, it was just part of the routine.

The significance of this trip is how it shaped my values of Respect (for elders, for the environment, for each other), Resilience (to poverty, disease, hunger), Compassion (for a kind society), Community Strength (working together), Collective Wellbeing (taking care of each other), and Truth (staying true to yourself, knowing what you need to be happy). The time I spent in Kasasi Village made me realize these important values. It made me proud to be a Limba. It made me want to express my African heritage more than I used to, and to tell people about my experiences in my dad's village and in Sierra Leone. When I look at pictures from the trip, I reflect on the lessons I learned, and think about how I will apply those lessons to the rest of my life.



# The Monster

by Megan Ngo, age 14

The girl never acquired the fondness for hunting like others had. Others in her village liked to chase rabbits armed with fur and blades of grass with their silver glocks. They were cruel and had a ravenous appetite for power.

The villagers liked feeling powerful. They liked having the weaks' fates moldable in their fingers like soft clay.

They were predators to all but the monsters of the forest, rumored to be so savage that their ruthlessness rivaled the villagers' alone.

The girl preferred to stay away from both guns and the game.

But tradition is the most binding thing one can be sentenced to. And this tradition was as straight as an arrow's shaft. Young villagers were tossed into the forest to hunt and would only be allowed back into the safety of the village once they hunted their prey.

The forest liked little children, luring them into its dark clenches with optimistic bird songs and mysterious creatures. Liked little children so much that the forest kept them in it forever. Most children died at the dark mercy of the forest. Only the wittiest and cutthroat survived.

The girl was neither witty nor cutthroat.

But she was determined to survive.

"Your prey is a monster," the villagers demanded. "We want a forest beast."

The monsters were the only thing powerful enough to be a threat to the villagers. As long as they thrived, the villagers would not be the sole users of power, the false apex predators. The monsters needed to go, so they needed to be killed.

And they wanted little children to do so. Little children were ridden with imagination. If anyone could hunt and kill monsters, it would be children.

Fatefully so, at the end of the month, the girl traipsed into the dark woods along with her peers, a gun, large and shiny, clutched in her tiny hands.

The group split up soon after, spreading throughout the woods like a tree spreads its branches.

Day slipped into night without a sign of a monster.



The girl never slept, never released the gun from her desperate grasp. Fear did not allow her the privileges of relaxation or sleep.

Just behind her, a monster wasted no time hunting its prey. The monster was a curious creature, with an impish look about it- unkempt hair and wild claws. It crept through the bushes silently until it caught sight of the girl, stiffly leaning against a tree. The monster bared its teeth and pounced.

Instantly, the girl raised her arm skyward and fired the gun. The night erupted with a single *bang*.

The bullet flew up, hitting only the night sky.

The monster froze at the sound, stunned into stagnation. Its teeth were still menacingly bared, its stance at ready, its claws lifted off the ground.

But the girl wasn't scared. She wasn't witty, or cutthroat, but she was dangerous. The monster had teeth, swiftness, and claws, but the girl was armed with a killing machine.

She knew power when she saw it. She aimed the metal sights at the monster's head.

And she dropped the gun. She never belonged in the village, and unlike the other children, she never belonged *to* the villager's ideas.

Who needed them anyway?

The monster crept away. Before disappearing into the woods, the monster looked back.

In a silent understanding, the girl cast one solemn look back into the direction of her village. If she did what she wanted to do, she would never see the people she knew again.

The village would never understand her. The girl had no desire for purposeless hunting, the girl did not share the villagers' desire for blood.

And then, the girl moved forward, never looking back again.

-----

The girl and monster weaved swiftly through the trees, cloak and fur, fate and the wind behind them. It didn't matter what direction they were going in— North, South, East, or West. All that was important was that they were running forward, moving in their right direction.

And they were. Because they were doing it together, neither of them was hunter or prey, just friend to friend.

# The Map of Life

by Saanvi Kondoju, age 14

The map of life unravels many paths  
It grants the gift of freedom as to which  
path to choose  
You may go left, you may go right, you may  
go ahead  
But never go back  
Never look back into the darkness of the road  
Look forward

The ethereal future, the halcyon days, the  
quintessential life you always dreamed of  
Is awaiting you

Step one foot forward and feel  
JUSTICE

One step closer to...

No longer poisoned by the ability to see color  
amongst others

No black, no Brown, no White

We see human

We find the beauty in our tints and shades

We admire our lineage for the culture they preserved for us

Feel the blood, sweat and tears of

Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, Rosa Parks

And many more brave souls in heaven

One step away from...racism

Move forward

Step one foot forward and feel

EQUALITY

One step closer to...

A graceful man

A mighty women

We see The prince and his brave warrior princess

We see The princess who rescues the prince from the evil stepmother

We see The princess who saves the kingdom

We see The princess who slays the demon

We love everyone and need everyone

Feel the blood sweat and tears of

Malala Youfazai, Susan B Anthony, Ida B Wells

And many more sprightly souls on the earth

One step away from...sexism

Move forward

Step one foot forward and feel

CONNECTION

One step closer too...

The warmth of two hands uniting

We hear the hearty laughs at the dinner table



We feel the world illuminate in the light with the ebullience of children playing  
The affection for others so deep in our hearts  
We see the old couple walking together on the street  
We await the Friday night movies fighting over the blanket  
We remember the summer grilling evenings  
The first mother new fondness for newborn baby  
The new father caressing the tender face of his first child  
Love is in the air  
We have love for all  
Whether big or small  
One step away from...isolation  
Move forward

Step one foot forward and feel  
SERENITY  
One step closer too...  
The fiery rage of a war cooling  
No point in setting our world aflame

Love your enemies  
Forgiveness  
We see the pride of a soldier returning home  
We respect the honor of a soldier in whom was cut from their path to grow old  
We acknowledge the difference between us  
The promised glory gave us nothing but grief  
No need for violence  
Feel the blood sweat and tears of  
Our beloved soldiers, Jane Adams, Mahatma Gandhi  
One step away from...war  
Move forward

Step one foot forward and feel  
GREENERY  
One step closer to...  
Morning dew left on a petal  
The sun's rays blessing us from above  
We hear the callings of the birds  
We see the dappled light in the forests  
We see the shadows of the trees  
The air revives our lungs  
The flowers blossom  
Finally allowing us to absorb its beauty  
Feel the blood sweat and tears of  
Greta Thunburg, Isra Hirsi, Jane Goodall  
One step away from...climate change  
Move Forward

The map of life promises a journey to destiny  
Come with us  
Move forward

# One of One

by Sridhar Thiru, age 16

In a world divided, where lines are drawn,  
There blooms a force, a bond that can't be  
undone.

A tapestry of empathy woven with care,  
Where unity arises, love grows beyond compare.

The bridge that spans our divide,  
It knows no borders, no colors, no race,  
Embracing all souls with unyielding grace.

For when we listen with hearts wide open,  
Barriers crumble, and hatred is broken.

In the face of adversity, we stand as one,  
Bound by empathy's threads, we can overcome.

Hand in hand, shoulder to shoulder, side by side,  
We march forward, with a greater goal in mind.

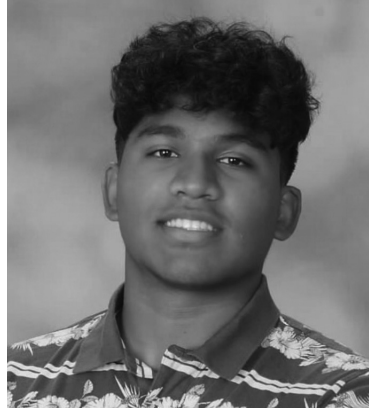
Diverse voices harmonize, creating a symphony,  
Celebrating differences, forging unity.

For love ignites a spark within each soul,  
A recognition that we're part of a greater whole.

Grasping diversity, we can paint the world anew,  
With growth as our compass, we can forage through.

So hope be our beacon, our guiding star,  
Unifying our hearts, no matter where we are.

Together we'll rise, hand in hand we'll thrive,  
Bound by only fate, forever alive.



# Quick as a Bunny

by Toby Scott, age 16

Creeping quietly around the field's tall grass, Ashraf began to lower his body onto the ground as he extended his back legs upwards. He extended his nails, and tensed his arms. With his eyes centered and focused on his prey, he loaded himself up, perked his ears to the left and right, and in one smooth, slicing motion, he had the rabbit hanging from his jaws, his teeth sunk into its soft flesh. The rabbit's blood trickled down Ashraf's chin, and with a soft final squeak, his body fell limp under Ashraf's bite force. Ashraf unstiffened, and pulled his nails out of the dry dirt. He trotted happily with the rabbit's corpse still dangling from his maw, and he wagged his large, bushy tail all the way home, with splatters of dark maroon falling from his dampened lips.

As he entered his owner, Ulf's, house, Ashraf gleefully spat the deflated rabbit's corpse onto the paneled floor by the entryway. Ashraf often felt lonely, and even though Ulf wasn't always kind to him, Ashraf desperately needed company. Poor company, Ashraf thought, is still company nonetheless. As he panted in excitement, Ashraf wondered whether or not he would get an extra treat for his accomplishment, and his wolf-like jaws salivated. He could hardly contain his excitement when Ulf came into the home. As Ulf opened the door, Ashraf gleefully circled the corpse with a grin on his face. Unfortunately, Ulf's angry eyes turned an infuriated black when he saw the rabbit's now dead body.

"Ashraf!" Ulf exclaimed. Then, Ulf grabbed his cane and swung at Ashraf's nose. Ashraf cried out, and his tail dropped between his legs. Ashraf's large eyes welled up with tears as he slowly lumbered outside, taking the rabbit's body with him, to avoid making Ulf even more violent. Ashraf dug a small hole, and with his snout throbbing and bloodied, he buried the rabbit and covered him with the loose dirt. He made his way to the shade under the big Oak tree, and collapsed with his paw on his nose. Ashraf knew he wouldn't get dinner because of his behavior, and so he spent the afternoon hungry and guilty. He had only tried to please Ulf, Ashraf thought. It felt like Ulf couldn't ever be pleased, and Ashraf was as lonely as ever, with tears and blood streaming from his face.

The next morning, Ashraf saw another rabbit. This rabbit was the color of caramel, but had wisps of white fur. He moved slowly but gracefully. As he collected berries off of the bush near the tree, Ashraf rumbled "I should kill you." The rabbit stared at him, and Ashraf continued: "I should chase you, pounce on you, and sink my teeth into you." The rabbit gave Ashraf a pensive look. "Then why don't you? I am old, and my legs are worn and frail. You could most certainly catch me, and I wouldn't be able to escape. While I do not wish to die, there is nothing in my power that would be able to stop you. Why, then, do you not hunt me, as dogs do?" Ashraf thought about it for a moment. "You speak like a wise creature," Ashraf remarked. "However, if I killed you, my owner would be infuriated. He would beat me again, and I would once more go another night without dinner. I am domesticated, and in the grasp of my owner. If I disobey him, he may kill me. Besides, you have not wronged me. My hunger is for company, not food." The rabbit came closer to him. "Why don't you leave him? If he beats you and violates your instincts and starves you, why shouldn't you

escape forever?" Without missing a beat, Ashraf said: "Because he loves me, and he's all that I have." The rabbit stared at Ashraf intensely. "Very well, then. But know that minimal love and insubstantial care is not all you are deserving of. I am wise, dog. I see your value. You are greater than your master, for you have love of all creatures." Then the rabbit ran away, and Ashraf lay in contemplation.

The next day, Ashraf found the rabbit, once more for scavenging berries. "Rabbit," Ashraf said. "I have thought about what you told me, and I wish to desert my owner. However, I need a family, love and food. May I join your family?" The rabbit stared at Ashraf emotionlessly. "No," he stated. "A dog cannot mingle with rabbits. You are a killer of mine, just as you showed two sunsets ago. I struggle to avoid predators- I shall not bring one into my home." Ashraf's face fell into a depressed droop. "But why, rabbit? I promise I will not eat you. All I ask is for love and food. I only killed your brother to satisfy my owner, and I no longer serve him. I am not predator, rabbit. I can be your defender." The rabbit considered Ashraf's remarks. "You have challenged my wisdom, dog. There is no reason for me not to trust you, aside from the fact that you are dog and I am rabbit. You and I shall live together, and with luck, prosper may come."

For the months following, Ashraf and the rabbit lived together. Ashraf played with the rabbit's children, and he helped to ward off predators. In exchange, the rabbit loved Ashraf, and he allowed him to be loved by his family, as well. Together, Ashraf and the rabbit ate soft berries, grass, and scraps of trash. The food was not as consistent as had been with Ulf, but when it was found, it was delicious and lovely. Food found together, with community and with love, always tasted better than even the finest food served from a hand of hate. Their differences did not matter, Ashraf decided. Why did he have to chase the rabbit, and the rabbit to flee him? He and the rabbit loved each other, and that was all he needed.

# Rainbows and Unicorns

by Claire Morgan, age 18

Feelings are so touchy, so flimsy. I still have a hard time interpreting them or caring. People just have too many and one of them is in play at all times. I always imagined how exhausting that would be. I'd been alive for 12 years, and I had never experienced a feeling. At least not ones that are useful in this emotional society. I am Dorothea Bordman and I couldn't feel anything. You know that feeling when your hand has been in a bucket of ice cold water for a couple minutes, you take it out and it's like you've taken out someone else's hand. That is what my heart felt like, my chest was numb and I never really knew why. I always thought something was wrong with me. Everyone else had feelings why didn't I? Up until a few months ago I would've wholeheartedly called myself a sociopath of sorts, but that would make you void of feelings for your whole life. And in January, I felt something...



“Okay class, we have a new student, Rose Gilligan. Welcome Rose!”

The young pretty girl came to the front. She was small, had golden brown hair, and a mole on her right cheek about as big as a M&M. As soon as the kids in my class laid eyes on her, the room was filled with light chuckles. The new girl instantly covered her mole. I cocked my head to the side, her face was tinted red and her eyes were watering up. I had been trying to learn how to interpret other's emotions ever since my doctor's visit in August. I couldn't put my finger on which one the golden girl was feeling, so I decided to ask her after class.

“Rose?”

“Um yes?”

“What was that earlier?” She looked confused.

“What was what?”

“Your face. It looked sad but a weird kind of sad.”

“Weird?”

“Yes. I haven't seen anything like it. Why did your face look like that?” After I said those words, a teacher interrupted us.

“Dorothea! That is not something you should ask another person. I'm so sorry Rose, Dorothea is one of our challenged students.”

I rolled my eyes; teachers never liked to talk about my “condition” in public, but they loved to call me every name in the book when we were alone. Heartless, stone-hearted, inconsiderate, cold-blooded, and nasty piece of work were some of the lovely names I was given besides Dorothea. If I felt anything, they might have hurt my feelings.



Rose looked even more confused as the teacher pulled me away, so I couldn't scare her anymore. The next day Rose came up to me this time.

"Dorothea?"

"Hello."

"I was wondering, why did the teacher call you a challenged student?"

"I'll answer your question if you answer mine from yesterday."

"Deal." I smiled.

"I have a condition where I can't feel emotions."

"No emotions? Not happy, or sad?"

"None of the above, little Rosie."

"Wow, I've never heard of that before."

"Most people haven't. Now your turn."

"Oh...yesterday people were laughing at me so I felt a little, I don't know, embarrassed?"

"And what is that?"

"I guess I just was ashamed of myself because people think I look weird." I scoffed. "What was that for?"

"I guess it seems silly to me why you would care about stuff like that."

"It's not silly, everyone feels embarrassed at one time or another." I laughed.

"Sorry, I guess not everyone."

"It's alright, Rosie. Emotions are overrated." This time, she scoffed.

"No, not the good ones. Happiness and excitement are beautiful."

"Seems like the bad ones are all anyone feels anyways. I'm good with how I am."

"What if I taught you?"

"What?"

"You heard me. How about I teach you to feel happy and you teach me how to not care what others think?"

"Not possible Rosie. It's a medical condition, not something that can be cured by rainbows and unicorns." She rolled her eyes in a weird upset way.

"Maybe if you stopped thinking that your condition defined you and tried then you could feel a little something!" She stormed off and my eyes widened.

"Wait!" She turned around. "I guess it wouldn't hurt to try, but don't be too disappointed when it doesn't work, Rosie." She smiled. Man, emotions could turn quick. I might be a bit in over my head on this one.

"Deal." She liked that word, and actually she liked a lot of things. Over the next few weeks, we both helped and got to know each other. She became a part of my daily routine. I'd get to school, and talk to Rosie. Go to class, talk to Rosie. Go to lunch, eat with Rosie. We were borderline best friends, except we only talked to help each other.

One day, I was sitting at the lunch table waiting for Rosie, but she never showed.

I was curious so I went looking for her, and I found her outside with a group of our classmates surrounding her. I crept closer.

"What a weird mole, you freak!"

Rosie stood tall, just like we practiced.

"Yeah, that looks like a turd on your face!"

She stood even taller.

"You're so puny. So small."

"Is that why your dad left, huh?"

Rosie cracked, but luckily for her some teacher dragged them away. Rosie was left to sob. I went up to her.

“Rosie! You did it! Why are you crying?”

“Because it hurt, Dorothea!” She cried harder. I found a sinking feeling in my chest, something foreign. My eyes felt wet and my lips quivered. I sat next to Rosie and cried with her, she heard my cries and looked up, stunned.

“Dorothea! You-you’re crying!” I smiled.

“I guess your pain is my pain, little Rosie.”

She hugged me. I felt the sinking feeling go away when she hugged me. But it wasn’t numb like before, it was light and fluffy, like a unicorn.

# About the Anthology

The 2023 **We Read Youth Voices Young Writer's Contest** is a collaboration between Madison Public Library, Forward Madison FC, and the Wisconsin Book Festival with funding provided by the Madison Public Library Foundation.

Young writers across Madison were encouraged to submit stories on the theme of Moving Forward - Together. We invited youth to submit any story, poem, song, illustration or piece that celebrated empathy, seeing things from new perspectives and coming together as a community, and we were overjoyed to see that more than 140 youth submitted to the contest this year.

This anthology represents the highlights of those submissions, judged by a panel of Madison community writers and advocates for youth. We sincerely thank all of the writers who had the courage to share their voices with us: you are truly an inspiration.

# THANK YOU JUDGES

Andrew Wheeler-Omiunu  
and Madeleine Bohn



AGES 13-18

Ollie Schaal  
and Kadjata Bah



AGES 10-12

Casem AbuLughod  
and Kiersten Kansteiner



9 + UNDER

We want to thank our panel of community judges for their hard work in carefully reading and considering each submission. Our judges represent a wide swath of the literary community here in Madison:

- Madeleine Bohn, our youth ambassador for the writing contest and the former City of Madison Youth Poet Laureate
- Andrew Wheeler-Omiunu, Forward Madison FC Midfielder
- Ollie Schaal, Briarpatch & Teens Like Us Councilor
- Kadjata Bah, Journalist at the Simpson Street Press and 2023 Youth Journalist of the Year
- Casem AbuLughod, A Senior Teaching Artists at Whoopsocker
- Kiersten Kansteiner, a Bilingual Resource Teacher at Nuestro Mundo school

***We appreciate your help in judging the many submissions we received!***

# A New Dawn

by Olivia Castro, age 10



sniff



Ha! Look Mom. I got it!



Good Pandora, let's go show the clan



Ignore them



gulp



??

Oma she did it, it's time.



gasp!

He's right. Pandora's star ceremony is tomorrow at noon.  
I believe she is ready.  
father!  
Jedi...



That night  
Grrr  
Ha! This is awesome!



Mara! Nala! Bed time!  
Hmf. Okay  
Guess we gotta go.  
Hurry up Nala!



Hey Pandora, you excited?  
Oh. Hey Chen. I guess



Crash!  
Something's wrong!  
the bell!



Shhhh. A lone wolf.  
Stay low.  
Mom, what's happening?



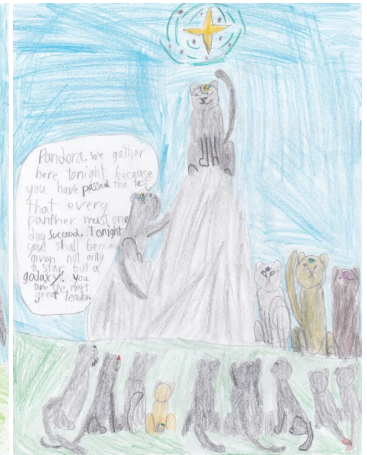
Why are you here  
wandering wolf pup?  
I... I... My (pant) pack (pant)  
was captured by Humans!  
I'm asking for help!  
Help? Hah! You think we'll  
help you!



I'm not so sure...!  
ROAR!!!  
AHHH!!



What happened?  
She escaped - but the  
others are still after her.  
Now let's clean up for your  
ceremony.



Pandora, we gather  
here tonight because  
you have passed the test  
that every panther must  
one day succeed. Tonight  
you shall be given not  
only a star but a galaxy.  
You are the next  
great leader.



Finally, I thought they'd never fall asleep. Library time!



What are you doing here!  
I have nowhere else to go.  
Oh I'm sorry!  
It's fine. I was a fool to think we could go back.



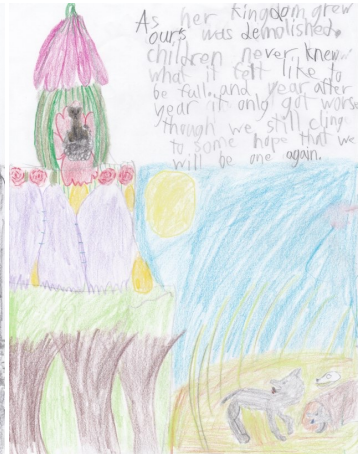
What do you mean?  
Long ago, when the world was still young...



The planet panthers and the wandering wolves lived in harmony. But then Queen Sheeret came to power.



She wanted more than we could give her, so she took our hunting grounds.



As her kingdom grew, our's was demolished. Children never knew what it felt like to be full and year after year it only got worse though we still cling to some hope that we will be one again.





I'm so sorry.



Hey, we never got properly introduced. I'm pandora and you are... Diana.



Wait, so you'll help me get my pack back? 'course I will! I'll meet you here tomorrow with two friends.



Why drag us out here? Don't complain Mara.



There you are! I was worried... who are they? Oh! Diana meet my friends Nala and Mara. Guys this is Diana. Hizzz Hi!



zzzzz Mara....



AAH!  
Mara!  
Hee hahahaha!



Hmf  
So anyway, Diana's pack  
got captured by... humans!  
The council won't help her...  
so we will!



What are you doing?  
So then Mara, you enter  
here and we'll....



Why didn't you tell me  
sooner!  
Chen! We're trying to find  
Diana's pack. Please don't  
tell!  
Oh, it's ok!  
\*tremble\*



I forgive you, but no more  
secrets.  
No more secrets. I'm sorry  
I thought you'd tell  
Now, where do I go?



All right people, you all  
know the drill. Mara, you  
distract them. Nala, stand  
guard. Diane, get the  
wolves. Chen and I will  
unlock the gate.  
nod nod nod



Meowww!  
Get back here you hen  
eating nuisance!  
That's the signal!



Got it!



Diana, why are you here?  
Everyone, come!  
No time to explain.  
Follow me!



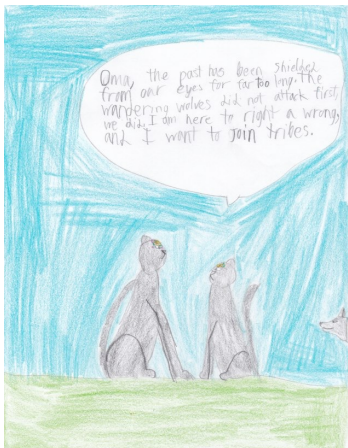
Get to the river, just get to  
the river.



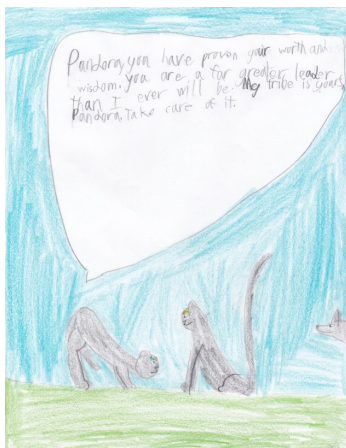
purr  
pant pant pant  
Everyone here?  
Yep



What if they don't listen?  
What if I get kicked out?



Oma, the past has been shielded from our eyes for far too long. The wandering wolves did not attack first, we did. I am here to right a wrong, and I want to join tribes.



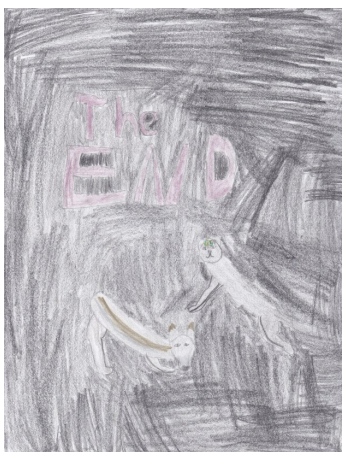
Pandora, you have proven your worth and wisdom. You are a far greater leader than I ever will be. My tribe is yours Pandora. Take care of it.



Thank you. But I believe if this forest is to come to true peace there should be two leaders, one panther, one wolf. I choose to rule with Diana. She'd be perfect  
What!



Merooooo!  
tonight, I pass on my leadership to Pandora and Diana. To our new leaders.. Haza!



The end.





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