

Skipping Stones

A Multicultural Literary Magazine

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Vol. 36, no. 1

Mar.-Aug. 2024

Women in S.T.E.M.
Nature
Unity in Diversity

"Girl with Dukhu" by Austin Liu, age 16, grade 11, British Columbia, Canada



Emotions: Art by Sabrina Xu, age 16, New York.

"I am Chinese American—with my dad coming from Beijing and my mom from Chongqing. I spoke Chinese fluently before I spoke English, yet nowadays I speak fluent Chinglish at home. I value my family, my grades, and my future. I want to make my parents proud of me, to be able to look them in the eye and tell them that all the time, energy, and money they spent on me was not a waste, so I want to be a doctor, an anesthesiologist, to be exact. Of course, this meant that I put enormous pressure on myself, to get the best grades, to do the best extracurriculars, and to be the best that I could be so I would be able to give myself the greatest chance to make my dreams come true. Halfway through junior year, all of that built-up stress, frustration, and fear came crashing down. I had frequent mental breakdowns, outbursts, and late-night crying sessions. This became the basis of my drawing, which depicts the emotions that I felt going through junior year, as I was slowly engulfed by the darkness of tests, college, and expectations looming over me."



Save Water, Stop Pollution - Our Only Solution!

"Water pollution threatens the animals and even our own survival. Pure water is a precious and increasingly scarce resource today. The purified water is contained within a ringer, symbolizing the limited supply of clean water due to Pollution. Pure water is the only thing that has kept the turtle alive; without it, many marine life creatures will disappear. We must take responsibility for our actions and act fast before it is too late..."

—Yeonwoo Kang, age 17,
Seoul, South Korea.



“Resilience” by Arianna Shaprow, age 12, grade 7, Nevada.

“Resilience” explores the African Diaspora and chronicles the struggles of the vibrant, defiant members of my family. In the midst of our tragedies, my ancestors were able to find peace and navigate the rough terrain they had to traverse. They were slaves in Holly Springs, Mississippi. After the Emancipation Proclamation, they migrated to Chicago for more opportunities. In Chicago, they had to endure racism and segregation, which negatively impacted their employment. My great grandmother became a maid at a hotel and raised 13 children. She had to endure an endless cycle of poverty. Much of our history was lost, because we were stolen from our homeland. Even though our cultural identities were dismantled, my ancestors found comfort in music, stories, and our love for one another. We are resilient, and we are survivors. I know that I am a survivor, because I am here to tell you my story.

We were taken
from our homelands
our prosperity and sense of community
stolen from us
our families torn apart
cultural identities dismantled
forgotten...
forced to work all day
beneath the blistering hot sun
dehydrated and burned out
bruised knees, scraped elbows
wounded from whips
desperately yearning for a way out
but their cries were never heard
They locked us
in an endless loop of poverty
mental illness
disease
and depression
from Holly Springs, Mississippi
and the shackles of slavery
to Chicago
seeking independence
and “liberty”
this was the journey of my ancestors
We were never freed
after the Emancipation Proclamation
never freed
from generational trauma
and pain
rejected
from schools
unable to receive the education
that we deserved
Oppression
Segregation
Stereotypes
and racism

Poverty naturally followed
Haunting us...
A never-ending maze
with no exit
only dead ends.
My relatives suffered
rat bites and tuberculosis as babies
gunshot wounds and addiction as adults
no money for doctors
unstable living conditions
poor ventilation
never knowing
what’s next...
Surviving paycheck to paycheck
Food stamps, welfare
Evictions and discrimination
13 of my aunts and uncles
lived in a tiny apartment
5 slept on a single, soiled mattress
a drumline of tragedies
Many of them
broke the cycle
my grandmother became the first African
American female Assistant District Attorney
in El Paso, Texas
scholarships and hard work paved her way
My mother is a survivor
of PTSD and panic attacks
a single mother who cares for me
with unwavering love
We don’t know
much of our history
or where in Africa
we come from
The knowledge of our history
was stripped away from us
buried deep in our family’s past
it remains a mystery...

One thing that will never
be taken away from us
Is our culture
We have created
a rich culture
Through centuries of oppression
our coping mechanisms
soothed us
comforting melodies
gospel
jazz
blues
and soul
What do we have?
We have our imagination
We redefine and reframe
To make us sane
documents detail our ancestors’
stories
Defiant
And bold
full of vibrant characters
riveting music
and soulful dishes
When I am fearful
I remember to be courageous
I remember I have ancestors
who were beaten and lynched
My ancestors were
Slaves
Survivors
Refugees
Migrants
This is my lineage
This is my history
We are resilient
Resilient survivors



—Arianna Shaprow, age 12, Nevada.

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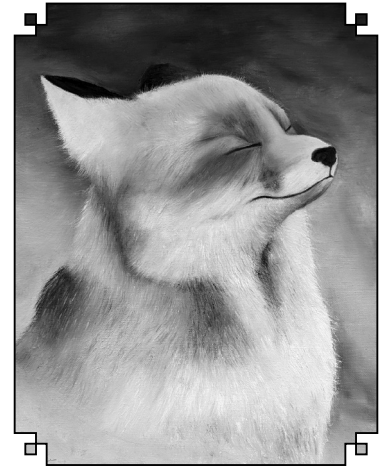
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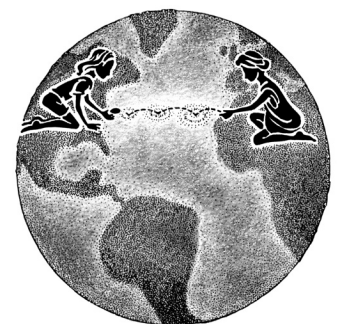
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Skipping Stones is a nonprofit children's magazine that encourages cooperation, creativity, and celebration of cultural and linguistic diversity. We explore stewardship of the ecological and social webs that nurture us. We offer a forum for communication among children from different lands and backgrounds. *Skipping Stones* expands horizons in a playful, creative way. We invite you to send us your creative art and thought-provoking writing.

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"Pancake Ice"

As seen from the bridge of an oceanographic ship in the Antarctic Ocean *Photo by Paul Dix, Oregon.*

On the Cover: **Girl with Dukhu**

Through this bold illustration of a black girl wearing a traditional head wrap, "Girl of Dukhu" highlights the beauty of African people in today's society. Through years of repression of African Americans, society has become ignorant towards the richness and diversity of African cultures. This piece serves as a reminder to celebrate and preserve the value among all cultures.

—Austin Liu, grade 11, British Columbia, Canada. Austin is an aspiring artist from St. George's School in Vancouver, B.C. With a deep-rooted belief that the world is a canvas waiting to be transformed, Austin is determined to leave his own unique imprint on it. Fuelled by his passion for arts and design, he aspires to create meaningful community engagement within the world of arts, fostering connections and inspiring others along their own immersive creative journeys. Also see pages 34-36.

First Place Winner: The Seamstress and the Mystery of the Argonaut

This is the story of Jeanne Villepreux-Power. Similar to Cinderella, it is the story of a poor girl who rose above her birth—a girl who did not lose a glass slipper and marry a prince, although she did make a dress for a princess. Moreover, it is the true story of a seamstress, a naturalist, and an inventor—a woman who defied the norms at a time when women were excluded from the sciences and shaped her own path for exploration.

Across the millennia, since before the Bronze Age, the Argonaut^{*} had traversed the marine expanses of the globe. Her distinctive appearance of large eyes, two webbed sail-like arms, and intricate spiral shell, combined with her Lilliputian size, made her an object of great wonder and curiosity.

She swam leisurely across the seven seas, preferring the surface waters to the rocky depths of her tentacled cousins. Perhaps it was because of this fact that many wondered at her elusive and secretive existence, including the likes of Aristotle himself—even as the shy creature never lingered long in one place.

Now, at the dawn of the 19th century, a girl named Jeanne was born in a small rural village in France. She was the eldest daughter of a shoemaker and a seamstress, a small household that survived on a tight budget. Although Jeanne received no formal education, she learned to read and write. Despite her humble beginnings, she was a girl of great curiosity and big ambitions.

When Jeanne was 18 years old, she firmly set foot on a course to Paris to become a dressmaker, traversing the long road of more than 400 kilometers.

In this global hub of culture, fashion, and the arts and sciences, the young woman was exposed to society as she had never seen before. Her long journey had taken her to a place abounding with ideas of innovation and sophistication; she was not only broadening her horizons as an intellectual mind, but also expanding her aspirations as a young woman of no fortune or name.

As a seamstress assistant, over the course of a few years and thousands of dresses, Jeanne found a small name for herself in her exquisitely intricate work. She gained national renown as the crafter of the Italian Princess Caroline's wedding gown. The commission

brought her into high society, where she met and married English merchant James Power.

In the City of Light and Love, Jeanne had stepped into a world of golden opportunity, and found romance, too.

The newly-wed couple moved to the harbor-city Messina, on the island of Sicily, where Jeanne devoted her newfound time to her studies. She pursued reading works of geology and natural history, and in the mild Mediterranean climate, her enjoyment of the outdoors moved her to explore the island's natural landscape.

This is where the paths of Jeanne and the Argonaut would cross.

As Jeanne carefully observed the flora and fauna of Messina—collecting samples and making sketches as a self-taught artist—she found herself near the ocean time and time again. Often, Jeanne would walk near to the shoreline, and soon enough, she found herself wading into the waters themselves, pulling her long skirts in with her. It was there that she encountered the Argonaut for the first time.

At the heart of the Argonaut's intrigue was the mystery of her shell—for centuries, it had been discussed why only the females of her species had a shell, whether she had created it herself or had obtained it from another (like the hermit crab), and how she could possibly detach from the object unlike any other mollusk. But given her evasive nature, all struggled to crack the Kraken's code.

Now, faced with this mystery, Jeanne was determined to uncover the secrets of the Argonaut.

Unlike those who had come before her, as well as her male contemporaries, Jeanne soon came to the realization that it was unlikely that she would be able to discover the true origin of the Argonaut's shell by studying preserved specimens. She needed to observe the living mollusk itself.

So she put her skills of innovation to work, first creating offshore systems of cages (some of the world's first offshore research stations), and eventually developing the glass aquarium in 1832. In her home-turned-laboratory, Jeanne was able to bring home live specimens of the Argonaut to observe.

The Seamstress and the Mystery...

One day, she was amazed to see that a baby Argonaut was building its shell in front of her own eyes. It was concrete evidence that the Argonaut indeed formed its own shell, and nearly from birth, too.

As Jeanne continued her experiments, she asked a question that no one had considered before: what would happen if she pierced the shell of the Argonaut?

From there, she discovered that not only could the octopus repair its shell using its own substance (forming a scar-like patch), but also by using external objects, or “spare parts.” Others had declared it impossible before, but here was undeniable proof of the astonishing engineering abilities and intelligence of the Argonaut.

An unbelievable and unprecedented discovery.

Jeanne’s inventions, her experimental process, and her discoveries had changed the landscape of marine biology forever. Perhaps it is fitting that the female Argonaut’s mysteries were only uncovered by a woman. And like that creative little Argonaut, whose delicate shell had stood unchanging even against a millennia of change in the world, Jeanne’s innovations stood to serve generations past her own research and experimentations.

Let both of their stories be an inspiration to young female scientists, researchers, and inventors, and a testament to nature’s wonderful and creative mind.

French seamstress-turned-scientist Jeanne Villepreux-Power was the pioneering inventor of the aquarium and its systematic use for studying marine life. As a cephalopods researcher, she was able to prove that the Argonauta argo creates its own shells. Villepreux-Power was the first female member of the Catania Accademia Gioenia.

**The argonaut, despite its popular nickname of “paper nautilus,” is NOT a nautilus. Instead, it is a type of pelagic octopus, specifically a member of the genus “Argonauta.”*

—Lily Yao, age 16,
Sophomore, SEHS, Oregon.

Second Place: Marian Diamond

Every time you learn something, your brain changes. It could be a skill, a problem you solve, or just getting through an unfamiliar experience. During any of those, your brain builds new connections, or strengthens old ones—especially if the new skill is repeated. Today, we know this happens at any age, not just through adolescence. It also should continue throughout life, to enrich the brain and keep it healthy as it ages. For this knowledge, we can thank one of the scientists who suggested the idea in the 1960s and changed the way we think of the brain: Marian Diamond.

Diamond was born in Glendale, California on November 11, 1926 as Marian Cleeves, the last of six children. Her father was a physician, and her mother had previously taught Latin. Diamond grew up with her family in La Crescenta, and when later asked to describe what kind of child she was, according to her autobiography, she always replied “very independent.” Though her siblings were often afraid of their strict father, Diamond was not, and was usually nominated as the one to ask him if they wanted something. Her bravery became especially valuable later in her professional life. Diamond’s mother, who regretted not continuing her education and job, encouraged her to get and keep a profession, even after having children, something she ended up doing. Before that, of course, there was her education: Diamond attended Glendale High School and Glendale Community College before transferring to University of California Berkeley, where she eventually became the first female graduate student in the anatomy department. Post university her achievements only continued.

Since the time she saw a human brain at the Los Angeles County Hospital while with her father at age fifteen, Diamond knew what she wanted to study. She was in awe that the three-pound organ had such incredible potential, later calling it “the most miraculous mass of protoplasm on this earth and perhaps in our galaxy.” After her degree, she researched at Harvard, became the first woman to teach science at Cornell University, and finally returned to lecture at Berkeley. During this period in the early 1960s, she worked with a research group to find evidence of brain plasticity, her idea that the brain could change (and improve) with



experience. She researched with rats, giving one group toys and companionship, and leaving the other without. The enriched group consistently showed cerebral cortexes that were 6% thicker. When the experiment was done over a longer period of time, the enriched rats lived longer. Eventually, Diamond's breakthroughs in brain plasticity cemented her as a founder of modern neuroscience, though they were controversial at first. Other scientists in the 1960s were opposed to her ideas. Previously, it was believed that the way the brain grew was genetic and fixed after a certain point. Diamond challenged this with her evidence, and she changed neuroscience.

After her neuroplasticity breakthrough, Diamond continued to research and teach. She first showed the differences between the cerebral cortexes of male and female animals in 1983. Later in the 1980s, she added to her neuroplasticity research with experiments on older rats—the results still showed that environment matters. She believed we should take advantage of neuroplasticity to continue sharpening our brains as we age, suggesting five points: diet, exercise, newness, challenge, and love! Additionally, Diamond studied Einstein's brain, and found more glial cells than average. This paved the way to the new study of glial biology, changing the idea that glial cells "did nothing." Diamond was not only a scientist but a teacher. She worked at UC Berkeley for over half a century, where she was a beloved and inspiring professor, known to carry a preserved brain around in a floral hat box and joke with her students: "When you see an old lady with a hatbox, you never know what's going to come out!"

In Diamond's lectures, many students were women. But this was not the case when she was in school. At that point, few women entered science at all. In the 1960s, the scientific community could be misogynistic. Once, when presenting her research at a meeting of hundreds of people (mostly men), a man stood up after her talk, yelling "Young lady, that brain cannot change!" Diamond was confident about her work and replied simply that both her experiments showed it could. Still, criticism was common. "It was an uphill battle for women scientists then—even more than now." Diamond wrote in a book she coauthored with Janet Hopson in 1998, *Magic Trees of the Mind*. According

to Gary Weimberg, who made a film about her, she faced a lot of challenges because of her gender. Besides the amount of skepticism, she sometimes had her name left off of research papers. However, he said she didn't like to talk about it—she wanted her focus to be science. That was her job and passion. Still, Diamond was proud of her achievements as a woman, and she inspired many others to follow in her footsteps. One student, Wendy Suzuki, said that the day she saw Diamond unveil her hat box brain was the day she decided she wanted to be a neuroscientist—and she did.

Throughout history, women have been discouraged from participating in science. The general belief for hundreds of years was that women were intellectually inferior, which even Charles Darwin wrote. Even as it was disproved, the precedent it set remained, and women are often not credited for their work, or excluded from doing it at all. Though it is much better now than it has been, we should acknowledge the bias instead of ignoring it, so we can continue to work on ending it.

Marian Diamond is only one example of great women in science—there are many others, even if they



weren't well-known. The number of women in science will only increase, as we learn more about these role models who paved the way for girls today.

—Olive Passaro, age 17,
SEHS, Eugene, Oregon.

Third Place: Orange Peels

When most of us see orange peels, we see trash. The more environmental among us might see the potential for compost. Some might even see the potential for a bittersweet treat called marmalade.

But when Karia Nirghin saw orange peels in 2015, she saw the opportunity to solve food insecurity driven by one of the worst droughts in South African history.

When the drought hit, Karia was a 16-year-old schoolgirl in Johannesburg, South Africa. She remem-

“But what if I just try?” Karia muttered to herself.

bers vividly the first time that she was confronted by the devastating effects of the drought. As her family began a road-trip across the nation, she saw the beautiful land, usually so lush with life, crumbling beneath their tires. She drove past wildlands whose ground was so brittle that all wildlife had fled from lack of food. She drove past farms, their dry, rocky soil unable to produce much more than a few feeble crops.

There was a tangible sense of hopelessness as Karia drove through the drought, and Karia could feel it creeping into her bones. The dry wind seemed to whisper softly in her ears, *there's nothing you can do*.

What could she accomplish if even scientists and professionals had cowered in the face of such destruction?

But what if I just try?, Karia muttered to herself. When she got home, the images of drought were still fresh in her mind. Karia pulled out her laptop and began googling ambitious questions, like *how to stop a drought?*

The googling led down rabbit-hole after rabbit-hole, each solution seeming as impossible as the next. Meanwhile, many people were still hungry for food that South Africa's drought-stricken farms couldn't produce.

Someone had to come up with a solution!

Kiara's determination to help others was sparked three years earlier, when she contracted a severe case of life-threatening bacterial meningitis, taking her out of school for months. She became consumed by issues affecting her nation—issues like rhino poaching, education, food insecurity, and drought. When she had recovered from the infection, Kiara had a new determination to make her nation a better place.

And so, that day, Kiara was researching drought solutions. She clicked on an interesting-looking website about something she had never heard of before—a material called super absorbent polymers, or SAPs.

As Kiara soon found out, SAPs are like little sponges that can absorb hundreds of times their weight in water—the stuff used in diapers. When SAPs are applied as a powder on soil, they absorb and store the water that would otherwise run off, creating minuscule pockets of water that can be used later.

The only problem, it seemed to Kiara, was that SAPs were unenvironmental and expensive. The chem-

icals degraded the soil, and the price point made SAPs inaccessible to struggling South African farmers.

The solution seemed simple, obvious even. All she needed to do was create an environmental, cheap version. Kiara could feel hope returning to her like a breath of fresh air, as she began reading academic journals on the subject.

At a molecular level, SAPs are made up of long strings of polymers shaped like coils. When dry, the polymers coil tightly together taking up minimal space. But when wet, they uncoil and expand to absorb hundreds of times their weight in water. SAPs also contain essential gelling agents to store the absorbed water as a gel.

As Kiara soon realized, SAPs are made up of everything that orange peels happen to naturally contain. Kiara felt her blood rushing in excitement.

Snatching an orange from the kitchen table, Kiara hurriedly peeled it. Her hands trembled as she carefully grated the pithy crust.

With a fine powder of orange peel, Kiara wondered what she should do next. Should she bake it? Boil it? Leave it out in the sun? How could she avoid damaging its delicate internal structures?

And so the months of experimentation began. Kiara tested every method she could think of, yet each failed experiment chipped away at her excitement. Maybe it wasn't so simple. Maybe she should just give up and leave the experimenting to the scientists.

Each time, the orange peels seemed to hold the water for only a little while, before releasing all the water, without forming a gel. The pectin wasn't working, and Kiara was out of ideas. She felt like giving up.

In later years, after Kiara had won many prestigious awards for her invention, she reflected that, “coming back after a failure is as important as trying in the first place.”

So as her orange peel mixtures failed, Kiara didn't give up. Months later, she looked around her kitchen counter again. Her eyes lingered on an avocado that was beginning to over-ripen in the fruit basket.

What if I use the oil in an avocado peel to bind together the orange's polymer coils? With significantly less of the excitement she had felt at the beginning of her experimentation, Kiara grated up the avocado skin and added

it to the solution, sighing. This was her last idea.

Kiara carefully poured water onto the powder. Her eyes widened. It was working! She couldn't believe it: the water had gelatinized into a smooth, thick mixture, just like it was meant to.

With newfound excitement, Kiara tested it against commercial, chemical SAPs. Incredibly, her invention was even more effective at retaining water. The invention was so simple that farmers could create it themselves out of common household food waste. And it could improve food security tremendously.

With her invention of a biodegradable super absorbent polymer, Kiara didn't single-handedly end a drought. She didn't solve climate change. And yet, her inspirational determination created a simple solution where even professionals had failed.

When most of us see a natural disaster or other complex issue, we feel powerless.

The more compassionate among us might feel an illogical pang of guilt. Some of us might even turn our eyes to ease the pain of compassion.

But what if we weren't afraid to try?

—Anna Dillon, SEHS senior, Oregon.



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Sept. 26, 2023

—Arun N. Toké, Editor & Publisher

There is one smell in this world that is unlike any other. But you have to wait for it. It's musty, but it's also crisp at the same time. The smell can't be described in words, but it does have a name. It's called petrichor.

My third-grade teacher had read a book called, *The Smell of Fresh Rain* by Barney Shaw when she came across a word she had never heard of. She wrote it on the word wall in class under the letter P. I was the first to notice but was too shy to ask about it. We had just come back to school after Covid held us up at home. She later explained that petrichor was the word for the smell that comes after the rain. She said it is most noticeable after long dry weather with no rain.

I never thought much about it until the next spring. It hadn't rained in a while and after it had stopped, I went outside as soon as it was dry enough. I smelled something weird in the air that was oddly good. It was musky but fresh and sharp at the same time. It smelled kind of like grass and dirt mixed with rain. I went inside to search for what the smell was. I found the word petrichor. When I saw its definition I remembered the word from third grade. I also found the origin which is 'petra' or stone in Greek and 'ichor' which is golden fluid from the veins of immortals in Greek mythology.

I had never imagined that it would really smell that good. I thought my teacher was crazy when she told us it actually smelled good. If you want the real deal, you wait for it to rain after it hasn't for a while. I used to love the scent of vanilla cake, but you could just smell that whenever you wanted. Petrichor is special because you have to wait for it. The most valuable things are the ones you have to be patient with. Just like you have to wait for it to rain after a long dry spell for petrichor, we had to wait for Covid to settle down, before being able to go back to normal.

Petrichor is a truly amazing smell. It's a smell that you have to wait for but it's worth it. I understand why the people who created the word petrichor put 'ichor' into it. It really is golden and priceless.

—Yuvica Ratneshwar, age 11,
grade 5, New Jersey.

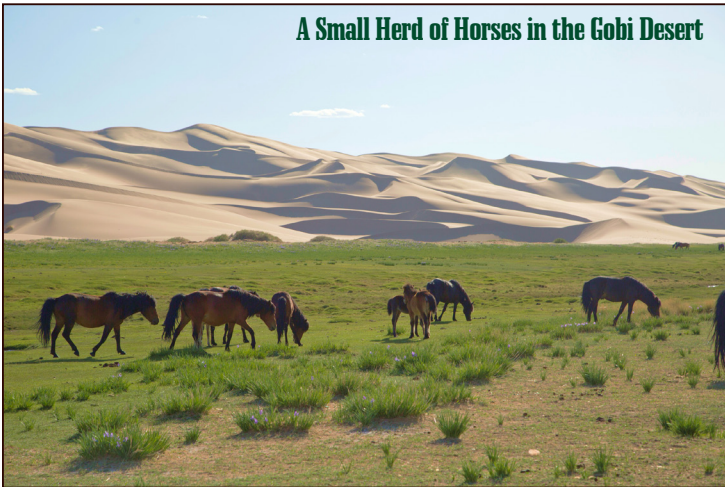


A Glimpse of Mongolia

By Steve Thoemmes, Oregon



A Ger (Pronounced "Gear"), Traditional Mongolian Yurt at Turtle Pass, Southeastern Mongolia



A Small Herd of Horses in the Gobi Desert



A Double-Humped Camel in Northern Mongolia During Winter



A Golden Eagle Hunter



A Rural Mongolian Family

Fireworks at Park GreenLake

The car ride felt much longer than usual. Park GreenLake was not far away from Jerry's house; around an eight-minute drive, yet it felt like thirty. Maybe it was because his mind was drifting away. He was wondering about the lake that the managers had closed just a few weeks before. He knew that it was the best spot to go fishing, at least until the metal fence had appeared around the edge of the water. Jerry knew that even if they had never admitted it, everyone was still curious.

This was why he was going to find out. The asphalt skid on the rubber tires as Jerry got out of the car and climbed past the barbed fence. Although he had expected a new update to the lake like a dam or maybe even another lodge, he had not expected a dumpster filled with a sea of garbage! A new set of tubes was resting on top of the once glimmering water and almost half of the lake had been filled with old food, plastic, and even clothes! A few unlucky fish lay on top of the garbage pile, with swarms of flies coating their bodies. A truck passed by a newly paved road. “Dumpster Jack” was printed on the side of the faded metal. It stopped by the tube and dumped a new wave of vile smells which filled the air within a twenty meter radius.

Jerry was still staring in horror and walking back blindly. He was not well known for his beliefs on nature, but even he knew that this process was no way to treat the environment. Disgusted, he walked back home thinking about why someone would create such a monstrosity.

His mom called him up to bed, a few hours later.

“Jerry, It’s already eleven! Come upstairs!”

The continuous clicking of his keyboard was driving her nuts, and she needed to have some quiet.

Jerry was in the living room with his computer, trying to search up the results of human activity in the environment. Images of turtles stuck in nets, creatures stranded on top of mountains of plastic and old soda cans, and the effects of deforestation on nature all popped up onto his screen.

Finally, “Coming!” came Jerry’s reply. Fortunately, he had just enough time to open up his blog and post a few new images that he had found on the web and he

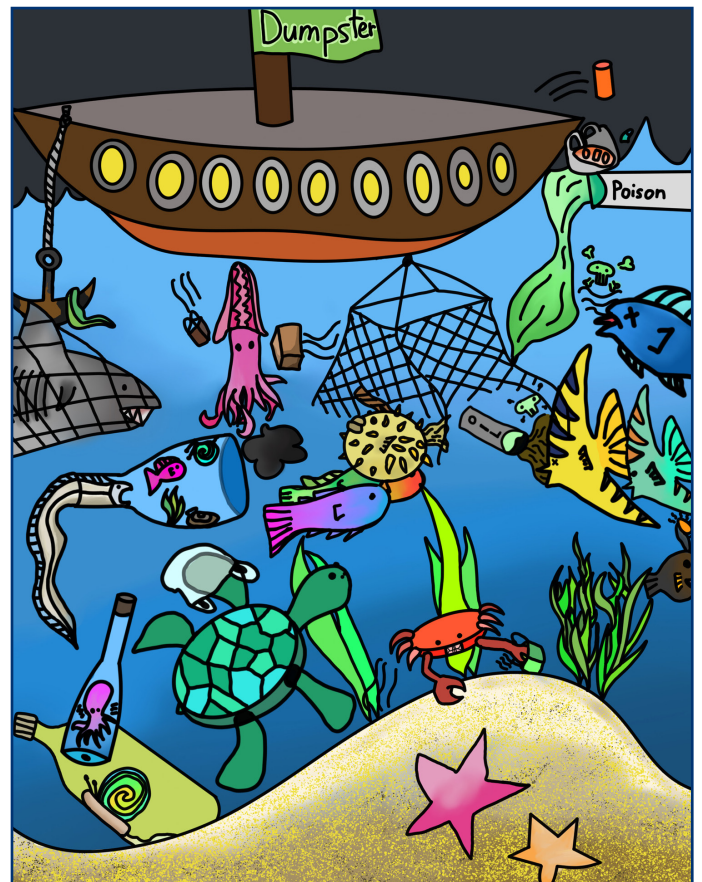
had taken at the park in the afternoon. Those were not enough to end the humans' negative impacts on nature, but they could help a bit. His Chromebook slammed shut as his mom stood before him. She did not say anything, but she pointed with her hand. Up. He would have to see his views in the morning. Right now, his mom was right. He needed to get some sleep.

Jerry woke up the next morning feeling refreshed. He was lucky that it was a weekend and not a school day, otherwise he would not have had time to check his post. Three people had viewed it. Two had responded.

“Oh My God,” read one. “This is terrible!”

The other one was not as nice. "Nature is meant to be used up. Why bother looking at silly pictures like these?"

A sharp pang of subtle anger filled Jerry's brain. He immediately blocked the negative responder from his account. "This did not make sense! Why would so few people actually notice that nature was in danger?!" He knew that this was probably the reason why the Earth



“Eating Trash” by Benjamin Kwack, age 11, Illinois.

An Orca in the Hudson River

was so polluted. At ten in the morning, he made up his mind and signed up for a spot in an organization meant to help clean up the garbage that was well known for being littered all over Fireworks County. Hoping that he had made the right decision, Jerry sighed with relief. At least this would help the town a bit.

Only a few teens like Jerry were at the meeting. The rest of the people consisted of around seventy adults, but only about ten kids. Half were there because their parents had forced them to, but the rest were like Jerry, willing to help end negative impacts on nature.

On the first day there, everyone was handed a trash picker, used to help pick up garbage, and most of the other teens complained. Jerry wanted to complain, too, but still picked at the litter after remembering the lake. After a few hours of work, he had to stop because of homework. He knew that doing his homework always had to come before what he wanted to do, but he still felt a little guilty for not being able to help out more.

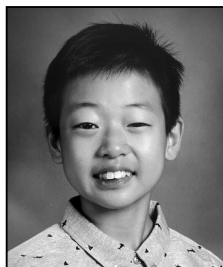
His bike groaned as it strained the weight of both his long bag filled with garbage, and the weight of Jerry. He needed to finish his homework and get back to work. But then he looked at the time. Five o'clock. The other workers would end at six and after he did homework, it would be seven.

He was not prepared to give up the time that he could have spent helping clean his town. But then, he couldn't really do anything if he did not finish his homework. Jerry sat at his chair as he got home, pondering about what to do.

Twelve Years Later...

Jerry stood before his new headquarters. He was now 27-years-old and the CEO of his own environmental preservation group. It was an organization that accepted donations from other people and used it to clean up the trash in not only his town, but now the entire state!

As he plopped down onto the table and stared outside into the giant group full of volunteers, he smiled. Jerry's Cleanup was a small start, but held a big opportunity.



—Benjamin Kwack, age 11, Illinois.

At Columbia University in New York, college freshman Alex Smith was taking a walk in the Riverside Park. He was noticing the green grass and the saplings growing in the spring. He also noticed that the road was not stone anymore, it was more friendly gravel. Alex had no intention of disturbing the singing birds, or to interrupt the ants that were building their own underground cities.

As Alex was nearing the Empire State Trail, he saw his three best friends: Zach Brown, Isabella Ember, and Caitlin Child.

"Zach! Isabella! Caitlin!" Alex called, running up to meet them.

"Oh, hello Alex!" Caitlin said excitedly. "You won't believe what I saw just an hour ago!" The other two greeted him with looks of bewilderment at Caitlin's energy. Isabella was very interested in robotics, and Zach was always talking about basketball. Caitlin was entirely devoted to nature.

"You won't believe it, but I saw an orca leaping out of the Hudson," she announced breathlessly, like a child who had just received a bag of candy.

"Wait a minute, do they even have those in rivers?" Isabella wondered, nodding her chin towards the Hudson River, which was glowing magnificently in the light of the sun.

"Yes," Caitlin said, her eyes widening dramatically.

"I don't think orcas live in the Hudson River," Zach interceded. "Those things live in the oceans, not rivers."

"I saw the orca, Zach!" she pushed him playfully. She suddenly got serious. "According to one of the Nat Geo issues, orcas were driven here by the fishers and the hunters chasing them in the ocean. But I hope you're right. I don't think it can survive in the Hudson with all those fishing nets and plastics."

"We can find out with my underwater robot," Isabella suggested. "I just need to get it."

"Yeah," Caitlin agreed. "Maybe I'll be able to catch another glimpse of the orca."

"Fat chance," said Alex and Zach in unison, as two tractor-trailers roared by, dropping a stench of diesel, and making several trees quiver as birds took off. =>>

The orca shook its fins and tails, creating a powerful current...

“Let’s meet at that riverbank at the Empire State Trail, so I can go get my drone,” Isabella said.

Isabella hurried to the Mudd Engineering Building, where all the robots were stored. On her way to the building, she thought about the orca, all the while fiddling with her iPhone, which was her controller for the drone. When she arrived, she grabbed the lightweight robot, a yellow and black clad piece of engineering. It had two propellers, two arms, and one tray, all designed for underwater endeavors. She then walked towards the Empire State Trail, on the bank of the Hudson River, where her friends were waiting.

“I’ve got it,” she yelled across the courtyard once she was within earshot. She ran the remaining distance and plopped down upon the grass,

“All right, let’s get started,” Alex declared. Once they had navigated the labyrinth of wires and managed to plug the controller into Alex’s Mac, Isabella started the drone.

“Caitlin, please help me place it into the river,” Isabella requested. “Oh, and Zach, help me load the controller.”

Both friends obliged. They placed the yellow robot into the water.

“Whoa,” they all said. “What is wrong with the riverbed?”

“Reverse,” Caitlin suddenly said, grabbing Isabella’s shoulders. Isabella reversed the drone. Ahead, to the left, was unmistakably a large orca. It was apparently trying to dodge all the fishing nets and harpoons, and it already had several scratches. The four friends gawked at it for what seemed like hours, admiring it. The orca shook its fins and tails, creating a powerful current, enough to shake the robotic drone’s view.

“Okay, I was wrong,” Zach declared immediately. “Orcas do live in the Hudson.”

“There’s so much trash down there,” Alex noted. “There’s a tire under that wooden bar, and—ugh. That cigar is just plain disgusting.”

Suddenly, Isabella sent the underwater robot rocketing towards a black and long creature.

“Careful!” Caitlin cried. “That could be a sea snake! It could smack the robot off course!”

However, as the drone was sent closer, it became clear that the creature was not a snake, but in fact, a salamander.

“That’s a marbled salamander, one of the unofficially endangered species!” gasped someone. Surprisingly, that someone was Alex, not Caitlin.

“If the marbled salamander isn’t living in the wetlands anymore,” Zach suddenly spoke.

“Then humans must have destroyed their habitat,” the others finished his thoughts.

“Hold on,” Alex said, quickly searching something on his iPhone. The others waited until he was finished. “Here are some of the endangered species in the Hudson River,” Alex said. He continued, “These include, the Shortnose Sturgeon, Lake Sturgeon, the Pugnose Shiner, the Round Whitefish, and the Bluebreast Darter.”

“That’s not some, that’s a lot of endangered animals,” Isabella corrected Alex. She wondered, “And nobody is protecting them? People should pay more attention to endangered animals!”

“And all that trash,” Caitlin chimed in. “I wouldn’t like to imagine how much trash is in the Pacific Ocean.”

Alex watched two elderly grandparents and their grandchildren playing frisbee with their Labrador.

“I hope that salamander will still be around when our grandchildren are in college,” he said thoughtfully.

—Adam Li, age 12, grade 6, New Hampshire.



Peace in Palestine And Israel

We invite you to read our special feature: “**Searching for Peace in Palestine and Israel**” on the website. It was published 1 January 2024.

P.S.: Our digital content is always free for all!

Entering Earthworm World

It's easy to see which earthworms are sick. They are either pale or fading instead of pink or light pink. My friends and I leave the healthy ones alone because we don't want to injure them, and we don't want them to get close to the sick worms and catch their viruses. We don't want to catch their viruses either, so we wear gloves and sanitize our hands.

Recess is lame. There is not much to do on the blacktop. You can toss a ball around, draw with chalk, or play hopscotch, but none of this is interesting to me and my friends. Instead, we go to the end of the blacktop, where the grass is. There are two trees there. One has a root popping out of it, and we use it as the sides for the houses we make for the earthworms. We use the root because we only want to use natural building tools, so we don't harm the environment. Inside the houses, we put leaves for food and comfort. Sometimes we put in little pieces of velvet too. They came from a piece of fabric I cut off from a dress. I think the worms love it ardently. One of them rolled around in it.

I started working at the worm shelter in October 2022, one month after I came to my school in New York. We moved here from Long Island, and I only already knew two girls in my third-grade class, but I was excited to make more friends. When I saw a girl standing on an unstable rock on a patch of grass by the blacktop and told her to be careful, she said, "I'm crushing leaves for worms. Want to help?" I exclaimed that I did. Two weeks after that, I became co-head of the shelter. Working with other kids to build worm homes made me feel like I had friends.

We make other buildings for the worms besides houses. There is a hospital, nursery, and a platform for worms to play on. Sometimes we make mud for the worms. We put them in the mud to give them a relaxing mud bath. They swim around and seem elated. It is important to give them good food, so we take pieces of soft evergreen leaves and rip them up. I think I've seen the worms nibble on them.

Across the Earth, lots of earthworms are dying out. They are important because they make the soil rich and

then it is easier for plants to grow. Their poop has lots of fertilizer in it that also makes it easier for plants to grow and be healthy. If we didn't have earthworms, there would be hardly any food for us to eat. Fruits and vegetables wouldn't grow. The predators of earthworms, like birds, would become extinct. This would affect us because many of those predators are what people eat, even though I am a vegetarian.

I will always help an animal if I can. A few weeks ago, there was a baby squirrel that fell from a squirrel nest onto the field in my school, and it was whimpering. I gently put a fuzzy leaf on it to make it warm in the cold weather. It was only about 2 inches tall, so the leaf covered most of its body. Once I got into school, I told one of the teachers about it, and she said one of the adults would try to help it find its mother.

I have a stuffed animal squirrel in my room, plus other stuffed animals too. There is a cat, tiger, dragon, mouse, stingray, fox, canary, koala, giraffe, and two bears, plus a panda. I read about these animals and other animals at school and at home, and how to help save them. I don't eat fish or beef because I don't want to cause over-fishing, and raising cows produces a lot of methane that goes into the air. If the air becomes too polluted and we also cut down many trees, many animals will lose their homes, and the air won't be fresh. Then lots of people won't be able to survive, especially infants and old people.

Helping the worms is just my first step. There's a lot left to go. Scientists think that more than 100 animal species are going extinct every day. Many animals are in need of homes, food, and water. Whatever it takes to keep them healthy, I'm going to do it.

—Keva Jain, age 9, grade 3, New York.

"...The best thing about this (third) grade is that we do different science projects. At the beginning of the year, we did a unit on endangered species and we did things to help them. When I grow up, I would like to be a veterinarian because I would help dogs and other animals stay alive when they are sick. But I haven't decided yet. I might also be a doctor, a singer, or a volleyball player."



Six Poems by Sixth Grade Students

Lawrence Middle School, California.

Afghanistan

My heart was warm
When I arrived

I see my cousins
and hug them tight

The air was crisp
In the heart of Afghanistan

I shed a tear
It's been so long
Since I've been here

They showed me their rooms
And help me unpack
It feels good to be back

I get ready for bed
Under the sheets is where I lie
Cozy and comfy without a doubt
It feels good to be back

—Megan Azizi.



"Pink Camellias"

Photo: Arun Toké, Oregon.

Feeling Good with the Rain

School can sometimes be
stressful

But not always
As long as I got my friends
Nothing can really go wrong
School can't go wrong
as long I feel good
For example

The rain makes me feel calm
Hanging with the people
In the rain
As we splash each other
All I hear is
Splash splash pow
splash splash pow
Never gets old.

—Itzel Narvaez.

Moving to America

Long ago, I came to America
I couldn't say a thing except hi
I couldn't understand the words dancing around me
I couldn't make friends
Bye, still, can, school, leaf, city...
You, maybe, time, are, the, see...
None of it made sense

But, soon everything made sense
The words stopped dancing and stood still
I can say words and speak freely
I will live happily ever after

—Alanise Torres.

Road Trip Window

It was a long day in the car,
I had entertained myself with the window,
Man I loved the wildlife

I looked at the birds' wings flapping and breaking the air
with a swish

Swish. Swish. Swish

I smelled the greenery
Sniff

I breathed in the nice pine smell

My mother began to speak

"Darling are you okay?

You've been looking out of the window for a while now."

I could tell that she was concerned about me but I was
perfectly fine

"Oh mother I'm fine. I just really like the scenery."

My voice was excited and happy but still calm

My mother continued to talk
but my eyes never left that road trip window
I didn't want to miss a single animal in this beautiful world

The air filled my nose
I felt myself flying and touching the flowers and the grass
I flew high with the birds
now I know how they look down on the ground below them
I admired the birds
I even felt jealous

I loved this road trip window
it was amazing
I can't wait for another road trip.

—Paris Rollins Moore.

First Day or School

Summer started June 9th.
It was now August 14th,
The first day of school
My heart was beating out of my chest
Why was I so nervous? *Boom!*
My parents drove me up to the gate. *Boom!*
I heard children and music surrounding me. *Boom!*
The butterflies in my stomach swarming around
That was until I saw my friend
Suddenly, the feeling went away
Everything was alright
We walked to our homeroom classes
She's in a different class than me though
But I was alright
I walked into the classroom
The smell of books and pencils consuming me whole
I sat in my seat
Everything was alright.

—Aniyah Temple-Droughn.

Loved One

One time at home in March
The horrible news made my eyes water
Water not just from my eyes but from everyone in the house
Tears everywhere
Cries here, cries there
Cries everywhere
Thump, thump, thump
That's what I felt and what I heard
Thump, thump, thump
I felt a lump in my throat
As I was devastated, I heard voices in my head
Telling me it was all my fault
Once it was the funeral
I couldn't even be there
I wasn't even with her at the hospital
If she saw this, I want to tell her
I'm sorry. Sorry for not being there
Hopefully, you live well in heaven.

—Ellie Phan.

I Have Two Names

I have two names; a Chinese name and an American one. My Chinese name is Peixin (沛心) meaning *pure heart*. My American name is Joy. My parents named me that because they want me to be happy.

My Chinese name is the one that is official. It's written all over my legal documents. On first days of school, when the teacher calls roll, I'm always last, because my last name is Yin (尹). But I always need to correct them, "I go by Joy, though." Sometimes, the teacher forgets and keeps calling me Peixin. And sometimes, I hear laughs and giggles from my classmates. I feel guilty to say, that sometimes, I feel a bit ashamed for having a Chinese name. So, when someone asks me, "What's your name?" I always tell them to call me Joy. When the substitute pauses while taking attendance, it's always me. When I write my name on my computer or phone, it always gets autocorrected. It's almost as if the universe hates my name.

My American name is what they call me. When my family moved to the U.S., my parents gave me my American name so it would be easier for people to remember me, and for it to not be awkward and embarrassing for me every time someone pronounced my Chinese name wrong. My American friends all

know me as Joy. I feel connected to the name; I feel like it's me. Yet, I always get reminded of my real name.

But after three years of living in my hometown in China again, my feelings towards my name have changed. In China, my classmates and teachers all called me Peixin (pronouncing it perfectly!), and I was normal for once. In school, I was able to improve my Mandarin as well (a hard process, but worth it!). During that time, I also felt more connected to my culture, and learned more about it, although I sort of missed my American name and identity.

By now, I've accepted the fact that both of my names are part of my identity. Different parts of it. And I've embraced my Chinese name more. Especially after I saw many Asians at my new international school use only their Asian names.

My two names are two parts of my identity—living together in harmony, forever and always. 🌸

—Joy (Peixin) Yin, age 13, student in grade 7, Mexico. She adds: "Born in Wuhan, China, I have also lived in California for five years. I speak and write Mandarin Chinese and English but I am also trying my best to learn Mexican Spanish. I've always loved reading and writing."

Peace Within, Peace in Our World

Peace is the path we take for bringing growth and prosperity to society. It is the absence of mental stress or anxiety and also having harmonious relations, freedom from disputes (that lead to violence).

Peace in our world today is determined by the kind of behavior we exhibit to our neighbors. Just like what happened between the Russians and Ukrainians. Surely, the conflict could have been settled in a peaceful way without shedding of blood.

There are some things we need to do as occupants of this world for peace to reign. They are:

- Committing ourselves to nonviolence
- Supporting nonviolent solutions to global problems.
- Speaking up for a healthy planet.
- Demanding reductions in military expenditures.
- Practicing courage, forgiveness, patience, acknowledgement and graciousness in our everyday life.
- Educating people; calling out people when you see them being sexist, racist, etc.
- Meditating and inviting others to meditate.
- Studying nonviolence, ADR (*Alternative Dispute Resolution*), conflict management, and so on.

Why is world peace so difficult to achieve? Is it possible to achieve world peace? Sometimes I ask myself such questions because currently our world faces daily wars, murders, and devastation at the hands of “peace-keepers” killing to promote peace. German philosopher Immanuel Kant proposed a plan for Perpetual Peace in 1795 to shine a different perspective on the communications between human societies, and to offer a detailed plan to achieve world peace.

I have promoted peace in my community by not participating in any violent attitude, and in fact by being a peace maker.

I also join groups that have peace or social justice mission in order to reap the benefits of mutual support and collective actions, sometimes I donate money and also my time to it.

I treat others the way I wish to be treated because the Golden Rule says it all—with empathy, tolerance and peace. This principle teaches to love yourself and love others.

Not fighting with violence is what I do: I do so because peace can only be brought through free-will, dialogue, empathy and forgiveness. I don't stoop to the same level as someone who is violent and thus break the vicious cycle because this can't change anything.



It is a crime to categorize terrorism as a religious phenomenon, and to single out/stereotype certain groups of people.

As a Christian, and also as an occupant of this planet Earth, I pray to God and also fast sometimes, praying to Him to grant us peace in this world.

Peace is very important in the growth and prosperity of the entire global community. With peace, we are able to have more social cohesion and interaction that are beneficial to everyone. 🌸

—Ezechinyere Adaeze Deborah, age 13, Anambra, Nigeria.

Is Our Language the Language?

We think that our language is the language,
When we watch the crow on the wire.

His shrill voice we cannot hear;
Pleading for needs identical to ours.

That we choose to ignore,
As we care more about ourselves than the crow's carrion
And the crow pities his cousin the turkey
For with November's chill and a shot he'll be gone.

We think that our language is the language,
When we water the plant on our sill.
It never complains if you shut it in the dark.
Stretching for the light through the cabinet door.

We forget in time that it is there.
As we care more about ourselves than its own need for light
And the plant pities the crops of wheat.
For why grow if you are destined for a pound of powder?

We think that our language is the language,
When we witness others in pain.

They never did anything to earn any of this,
That we didn't do unattended.

Yet we never act upon their suffering,
As we care more about ourselves than their plea for help.
And the pained pities the one to live with guilt.
For their pain is temporary, but the guilt is permanent.

—Laurel Aronian, age 16, New York.

Belonging

I am swarmed by bobbing black fabrics, clanging gold bangles, sandalwood *ittar* whirlpools, and alien tongues volleying in the corridor. Arabic, Urdu, Farsi, Yoruba, Turkish, and Malay mix with each other, blending into a single harmonious buzz as women kiss each other on the cheek. Once, twice, three times.

I am sandwiched between my mother and another aunty as they embrace. Aunty bends down and squeezes my cheeks, cupped in oddly smooth wrinkled hands, the tassles of her red, satiny *hijab* grazing my head. Her breath smells of *paan*, or betel leaf.

Teenagers disappear around corners carrying armfuls of *samosas*, *koshary*, and basketballs, making their way to the courts in the back. They argue loudly about who the best player in the league is, and it seems to me to be the most important debate in the world. I am dazzled by their sparkling white, Egyptian cotton *thobes* draped over their brand new Air Force Ones. I whip my head back and watch them over my shoulder until the very last shoe disappears through the swinging glass door.

Rounded *kufi* hats rush by with glistening, curly beards dripping from ablutions. Hands shake hands and more hands and more hands. Have you ever tried to cut through a sea of shaking hands and tidal waves of *Assalamo alaikum*s? It's impossible.

Mothers, flanked by children, all perfectly impish, laughing white teeth, bump past me. A rapid fire of loving rebukes follow and the children are now taking off their shoes, stacking them one on top of the other on top of the other, pushed up against the door to the prayer hall. I hop over the mountain of Spiderman Crocs and leather sandals as I make my way into the prayer hall.

The plush, royal blue carpet fills every cranny in between my bare toes as my mother and I scavenge the hall for the perfect spot. It's heavenly fluffiness. I drop to the floor and press my forehead into the carpet, allowing its coolness to wash over me. I feel only peace as I reunite with my maker in whispered invocations.

The booming *adhan** reverberates everywhere—plaintive, urgent, ancient: "Hurry to the prayer. Hurry to success." Everyone lines up, shoulder to shoulder, soul to soul. Each a different color, strangers in country, siblings in spirit. Belonging means knowing no one and everyone at once.

They prostrate together; they are One. 🌸

—Isa Hasan, age 13, California. **Adhan* is the Islamic call to prayer.

Let it Have Meaning

Let it have meaning
When the thunder comes
Earth beating to the echoing drum of its beat
it will have meaning
the skies will alight
the rain will breathe life into the earth
and it will have meaning
When the fires light
Forests ravaged by the enraged flames
it will have meaning
the death will clear way for new growth
the ash will nourish the ground
and it will have meaning
When the darkness rears its head
Mind flooding with thoughts of escape
i can find no meaning
tears staining satin pillowcase
dread escaping, breathed in by those around me
there is no meaning
Let sufferings occur
allow my soul and spirit to perish
my body crucified,
all i ask
let it have meaning

—Bansi Balar, age 17, high school senior, Texas.

Seasons

All seasons so pretty, so many nations,
Different cultures have different celebrations!
Winter is chilly, bitter, and cold,
Light iridescent snowflakes covering the road.
Many cultures celebrate
Christmas in the winter.
In the spring blooms an amber daisy,
Soon dandelions sprout like crazy.
Summer, all sunny and carefree,
Throw yourself a pool party.
In America we celebrate Labor Day.
In China they celebrate the summer solstice.
Fall becomes spooky,
Knock on doors for Halloween candy,
In Germany people celebrate St. Martin's Day.
All seasons so pretty, so many nations,
Different cultures have different celebrations!

—Abigail Sun, age 10, grade 4, Illinois.

Mariana on the Night Shift

Mrs. Benton called out from the front of the classroom. “Are you with us, Mariana?”

Mariana lifted her head from her desk. She had fallen asleep in history class. How embarrassing!

“Sorry, Mrs. Benton,” she murmured, sitting up straight.

A boy giggled. Abby, who sat next to her, leaned over. “Don’t worry,” she whispered. “Everyone falls asleep at least once in this boring class.”

History class wasn’t boring to Mariana. She loved learning about the past. Mrs. Benton made history interesting by talking about ordinary people, not just presidents and other famous men. This week, they were learning about Dolores Huerta, the labor leader who helped farmworkers earn better pay and improve their living and working conditions.

The lunch bell rang, and Mariana walked slowly out of the classroom.

“Are you okay?” asked Abby, coming up from behind.

Abby lived down the street from Mariana’s uncle and aunt, Tia Luna and Tio Miguel. Mariana had been staying in their house since the summer.

Mariana yawned. “I guess so.”

“My dad said he saw you at the factory the other night,” Abby said. “Were you visiting your uncle?”

Mariana’s uncle worked at the cereal factory, just like Abby’s parents. Her mother worked in the office and her father drove a truck for them. Almost every family in town had someone who worked at the factory.

“Yes,” Mariana lied.

But she could hear her mother’s voice. “Never lie, *mi hija*. A lie always comes back to bite you, like a mosquito.” Suddenly, she missed Mami, who lived in Mexico City, many miles from Mariana.

The two girls sat at a picnic bench. Abby began eating her lunch, but Mariana wasn’t hungry. She took a deep breath.

“I wasn’t there to see my uncle,” she said. “I work the night shift.”

“The night shift?” Abby put down her sandwich. “You’re not even fourteen! My mom said I can’t work until I’m sixteen.”

“My uncle got me the job. I help pack the cereal on

the line,” said Mariana. “It’s easy.”

“Easy” was another lie.

The first hours of her shift weren’t so bad. Mariana pushed bags of oat squares into cereal boxes as they traveled past her on the conveyor belt. An older worker helped Mariana if she fell behind. But, by 11 PM, her feet hurt. Her back ached. And her head pounded from the noisy machinery. She still had three hours to go.

Before Abby could ask more questions, Mrs. Benton walked up them.

“Can you come see me after school, Mariana? There’s a book I want you to read.”

When Mariana stepped into Mrs. Benton’s classroom, her teacher asked her to sit down.

“I hear that some of our students are working at the factory!”

It was true. Mariana had seen a half-dozen other children working the night shift. Mariana felt like she might cry. Her uncle had told her not to talk about her job to anyone, and she’d already told Abby.

Mrs. Benton quickly said, “You don’t have to answer. I just want you to know the facts. It’s not safe—or legal—for children your age to be working in a factory. There are labor laws that protect children. The laws were written to keep children safe from harm.”

Mariana looked down. Her right thumb was bruised from two nights ago. It had gotten caught under conveyor belt. She overheard someone say Mariana was too small for the job.

Mrs. Benton pulled a book from the shelf. On the cover, a girl stood at a conveyor belt like the one at the factory.

Mariana put the book in her backpack. Ever since she started working, Mariana could barely finish her homework, much less read extra books. Luckily, today was Friday, her day off.

That night, Mariana read stories from history about a farm girl who operated a loom in a cotton mill, a boy who worked in a coal mine, and a boy who sold newspapers in New York City. A shiver went up her back when she read about the girl catching her finger in the cotton loom. “Even though laws protecting children from unsafe work were passed in the 20th century, child labor continues to the present day,” she read.

"Never lie, mi hija. A lie comes back to bite you, like a mosquito!"

Tio Miguel woke her up early on Saturday. "I got you a day shift today," he said. "Hurry and eat your breakfast."

Mariana sat down at the kitchen table. She stirred her scrambled eggs, thinking hard. Her teacher's words—"It's not safe or legal"—kept swirling in her head.

But the problem wasn't so simple. Tia Luna had hurt her back while lifting heavy boxes at the factory. She hadn't worked for a whole year. The family needed Mariana's help to pay the bills. Still, there must be another solution.

Mariana put down her spoon. "I'm not allowed to work at the factory. I'm not old enough. It's the law."

"What?!" Tio Miguel's coffee cup spilled. "I need you to work. Otherwise, you can't stay here."

Mariana touched the angel on her necklace. Mami had given it to Mariana when she left home. The angel made her feel strong. Maybe Mariana would be a writer when she grew up. A writer like the one who wrote about the mill worker, the coal miner, and the newspaper boy. To be a good writer, Mariana couldn't fall asleep in history class.

Tia Luna rushed into the kitchen. "What's all the arguing about?"

Mariana told her the same thing she had told her uncle. She added, "I fell asleep in class yesterday!"

Her aunt's eyebrows went up.

"She's right, Miguel," she said, briskly wiping up the spilled coffee. "Mariana is a smart girl. She needs to be awake at school. Anyway, my back feels a lot better. I'm ready to go back to work."

Tio Miguel sighed deeply. "Life is not easy. All I want is to pay our bills."

Tia Luna hugged Mariana. "We love having you here. We made a big mistake. From now on, your job is to go to school."

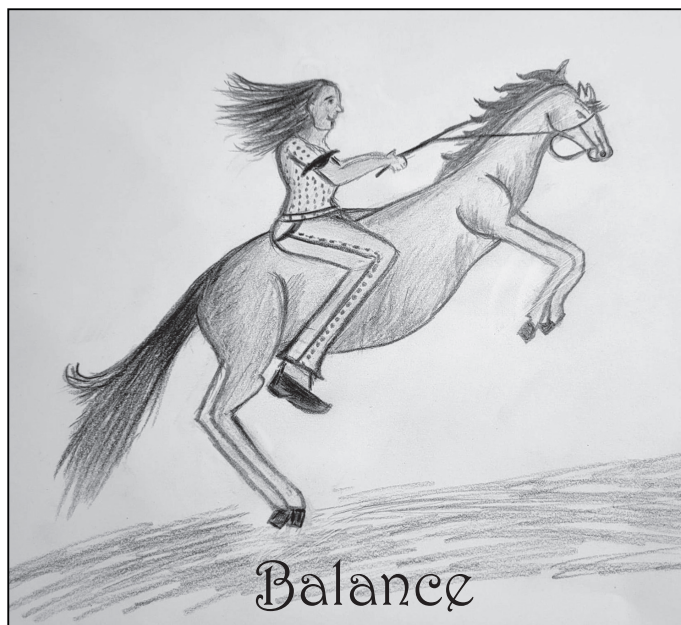
There was a knock on the door.

Abby held her soccer ball under her arm. "Can you practice soccer in the park?"

Mariana looked at her aunt and uncle. They smiled and nodded.

Grabbing her cleats, Mariana ran out the door. "Yes, let's go!"

—Ann Malaspina, author and educator, New Jersey. Ann has published many picture books and nonfiction books on social issues, including on the important issue of child labor. Please visit: <http://www.annmalaspina.com> to learn more about her literary work.



As the wind weaved through my black hair,
Flying in the golden sunshine,
A sudden gush of independence rushed at me.

On top of my slender caramel horse,
I measured north to south, east to west,
All painted with a rural landscape.

I was on top, on top of my mighty world,
I could have done anything!
Yet, riding along with my jovial spirits, I felt something.
A ball of fear knotting up in my stomach.

Freedom and Independence were new, they were fresh.
Alas, they did not come free!
In front of me, loomed a bridge,
A bridge between Protection and Freedom

While protection offers security,
It's also a locked cage.
While freedom demands responsibility,
You are the person you choose to be.

And then there is a balance between the two.
As on my slender caramel horse,
I ride free, the gentle strap safely protecting me.

—Aadya Agarwal, age 12, New Jersey. She adds: "The inspiration for my poem came from a horseback riding adventure I went on while vacationing in India this past summer. The entire experience filled me with a range of emotions of independence, confidence, fear, and anxiety and my attempt to balance it all in that moment. It was truly an experience that I will never forget and something that unraveled an important question about freedom and responsibility for me."

Student Poems of Hope, Faith, and Love

Faith

Trust me life.
I trust you.
If you don't
I have no one
to turn to.
You're all I've got,
the only one I know,
without you, I have
nowhere to go.

—Glennie Llano.

Poems of Life

People think we are put on
Earth for no apparent reason.
They are wrong. Life is not
meaningless. Life has meanings
that people don't see. Life
does pay, but others don't see,
there is a light, somewhere if
people have hope, we will find
it. Somehow. Life is good.

—Perry Backman.

Break Away

I try to break
away from that dream
I had. I try to just
come out of it. I wish
I can just break through
and away from that dream
everyday.

—Gregory Kettles.

A Glass of Milk

A glass of milk,
Shining like the sky,
As white as the snow,
And cold like the breeze,
Goes down your throat,
Everything you thought,
Now is nothing.

—Angel Monserrate.

The Fall

I fall through
a big hole
full of feelings
I am yelling
I look down
and it is
unlimited,
endless,
eternal,
boundless,
everlasting,
I keep falling
straight down
down and down
like a boulder
down a mountain
I look and see
the ground
coming
up to my feet
and I go right
through the
bottom
and the only hope
is to live and fall,
fall and live.

—Anthony Rivera.

Song

a robin
sings by
a dead tree
it sings and
sings and
never stops

—Nicole Hernandez.

Cool Wave

Cool wave
of sky
splashing
above me

—Weiyu Liu.

River of Love

As it flows, slowly
through the valley, in
the peaceful morning,
the animals come and
bathe in its waters and
drink some of its tasteful
cool, and then the river
flows away in the light,
as the warmth of the sun
reflects upon it!

—Tammy Hogan.

A Walk in the Garden

I walk into the garden
birds chirping in the air
and flowers blooming at my feet
unlike the real world
where no one is at peace
here autumn leaves fall
and the crisp breeze
sends birds flying about
and a shiver down my spine
only to enclose me in warmth
for here in the garden is peace

—Jessica Contreras.

Join Together

Join together all as one
That's what the world should become
One big whole person

—Angie Cosme.

Peace

I am at peace with the world,
Concentrating on the soft sounds of music,
Silence is all I can hear.

—Francisco "Cisco" Rosado.

Dove

white and golden
bursting light flying high
wings streaming through the heavens
driving to God with all his children

—Michael Ruiz.

Poems of Hope, Faith, and Love

Colors

Another day to pray
to days of glory
days of suns
days of prayers
whispering to day or night
of splendid colors to shine

—Michael Ruiz.

Love of Night

Silent night the wind across
the open plains my eyes look at
the sky no one is here the wind
is in my face the love of the night
is in me

—Karl Moody.

Great Peace

crystal love
open night
you sleep
your entire life
soft tender and free
you look more to future days
bold speed flies you to celebrate
our golden mystery
you were born to live in the world
called imagination
the young great spirit world
spurring our lives

—Dennis Berrios.

These poems were written by my fifth and sixth grade students at P.S. 16K in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, New York. Steve Braunstein, the principal, was open to the idea and challenges of teaching poetry to inner-city students.

In the beginning, my students thought I was “nuts,” as one student mentioned after the program got rolling. Why would you want to teach us poetry? They just didn’t get it! My hope was that they would learn to like, love, and appreciate their own “creations” that came from the mind, thoughts, and heart. I believed the poetry would “open up” the classroom for peaceful encounters with new worlds. The overall poetry reading and writing program was eventually called, “The Inner Cities Poetry Arts Project.”

—Jeffrey Pflaum, (now retired) teacher and educator, New York.

Poetry Reading and Writing

As an introduction to poetry reading and writing, I taught my students how to examine or contemplate their inner experiences through my EI/SEL program called, “The Contemplation Music Writing Project.”

In simple terms,

1. I played music (students’ choice) for 10 minutes. They closed their eyes during this time while listening, and contemplated inner experiences: feelings, thoughts, and ideas.

2. Next, the children wrote for 10 minutes about what they experienced inside their minds and imaginations.

3. Afterwards, they read the “contemplations” orally to classmates for 10 minutes or whatever time allowed.

4. Discussion questions followed each student reading: What experiences were described: feelings? thoughts? ideas?

The contemplation periods (2 or 3 times a week) set up some key elements and reasons for studying poetry: self-and-other-awareness, self-motivation, and self-reflection.

Contemplation can be done first thing in the morning, before lunchtime, or at the end of the day. I usually had my contemplation lessons right after lunch because the kids returned fairly “wild” from the cafeteria to the classroom.

The purpose of this contemplation time was to “sensitize students to themselves and each other,” with the hope that their newfound inner peace would create a calm, more relaxed, and positive classroom. Ultimately, this would enhance learning in all subject areas.

—Jeffrey Pflaum, educator, New York.

Betrayal

Betrayal, a word so bitter and cold
A stab in the back, a heart turned to stone
A trust once given, now broken and old
A bond once strong, now shattered and sold
The sting of betrayal, a wound so deep
A hurt so profound, it cannot sleep
The memories linger, the pain so real
A betrayal so cruel, it cannot heal
The world may move on, the pain may fade
But the memory of betrayal will never be made
A wound so deep, a scar so wide
A betrayal so profound, it cannot hide

—Siah Giji, 13, has South Indian heritage, New York.

Nature Art by Students in Lane County, Oregon

“Every time I paint, I feel so focused, and I am able to put all my attention on the painting. Being surrounded by the peaceful environment of my painting class can easily take my mind off things, and it can be a reset for my mind if I’m feeling stressed.”

—Sophie Myrick, age 11.

How I Teach Art

I love teaching art! Art can be an expression of all that is best in the human soul—love, light and joy.

I keep my classes small so that each student receives individual mentoring, and I can address each one’s needs. For new students I have a six-month program of drawing and painting skills, which are reinforced during the process of work on a painting. I seek to maintain a positive, supportive environment and to impart encouragement and enthusiasm.

I put great emphasis on personal choices, from the subject if a painting and its compositional structure, down to which type of brush to use for each effect. I don’t insist on any particular style of painting, but only on the integrity of the whole—composition, color harmony, etc.

I am always awed by the overwhelming beauty that emerges on my students’ canvases, and their delight as they learn skills to enable them to create the visions in their hearts.

Each student’s painting (*see pp. 25 & 26*) is based on a photo of a scene in nature, mostly from old calendars (and a few from online sources). Ava Vivek’s painting is based on a woodblock print by Hiroshige, a famous Japanese artist who died 1858, but she used her artistic imagination to modify it.

I invite you to visit my students’ *Year of the Dragon Exhibit** currently on display at the BaoBao House restaurant on Park Place in Eugene.

—Stephanie Tsuchida, art teacher, Oregon.

* In Chinese Zodiac, 2024 is the Year of the Dragon.

PS: None of these titles or statements were suggested by me. A majority of them have cited stress reduction as the source of their enjoyment of art. What kind of a society have we created for our children?

Remarks by Artists (*Artwork on p. 25*):

Featherlight by Ishika Chakraborty, age 16.

“Art is one of the most versatile forms of self-expression. I love to paint because I love the way an image or an idea can come to life. There is something very soothing about putting color on a canvas.”

Snowball by Mackenzie Campbell, age 13.

“I love animals and I like to paint them. I love mixing and painting colors. Painting helps to relieve my anxiety.”

Violet Loves Sky by Cathy Qin, age 15.

“Painting is a story told through paint strokes. My life is the paint I use. Those paint strokes paint my life. I like seeing my life on canvas.”

Galloping Horse by Ayush Chakraborty, age 11.

“The reason I like painting is because it is interesting and creative where you can make whatever you want.”

Bliss by Xiya Lin, age 17.

“I like to paint because of the different snapshots of life that I can capture in one instance from brushes and paints. It also provides a time for me to focus on art instead of the stress from school.”

Painted Bunting by Amelie Malone, age 10.

“I like to paint because it is calming and fun to do.”

Silver Bass through Wading Lilies by Ella Kim, age 13.

“I enjoy painting because of the flexibility it creates, the ability to create anything with no limitations.”

Artworks on p. 26:

Early Morning in Spring by Ava Vivek, age 10.

“I like art because it is calming.”

Water Spirit by Annabelle Zhang, age 12.

“Painting is a safe space where I feel at ease. I can express my true emotions through art and use my imagination freely.”

Honey-spilled Sunset by Maitri Makina, age 10.

“When painting you’re free to do your most creative ideas! When mistakes happen you can make it a style.”

Wishes by Summer Yin, age 16.

“My favorite thing about painting is the process. For me a painting never starts out looking good. You have to be perceptive and really patient, and you eventually come up with an end product. It’s all about trusting the process and persevering, but the result is very fulfilling.”



"Featherlight" by Ishita Chakrobarty, age 16.



"Snowball" by MacKenzie Campbell, age 13.



"Violet Loves Sky" by Cathy Qin, age 15.



"Galloping Horse" by Ayush Chakraborty, age 11.



"Bliss" by Xiya Lin, age 17.



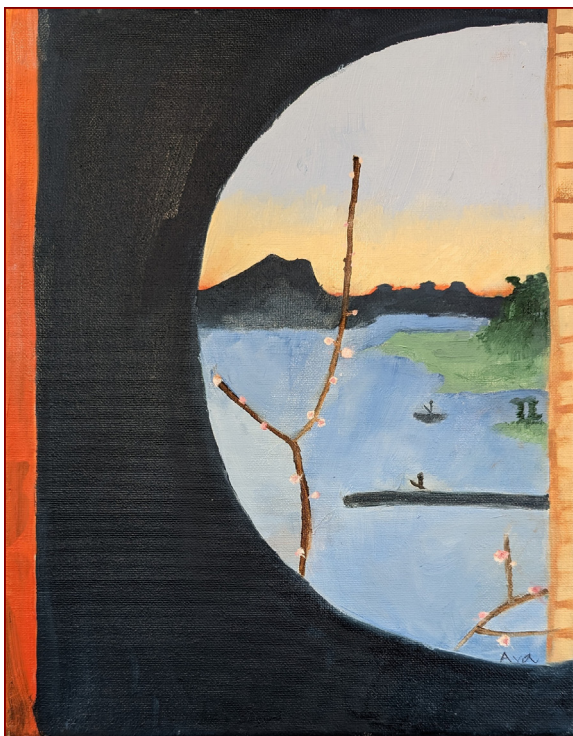
"Painted Bunting" by Amelie Malone, age 10.



"Silver Bass" by Ella Kim, age 13.

More Art by Students of Stephanie Tsuchida

Please see p. 24 for details.



"Early Morning in Spring" by Ava Vivek, age 10.



"Wishes" by Summer Yin, age 16.



"A Deer in Snow" by Sylvia Wu, age 9.



"Water Spirit" by Annabelle Zhang, age 12.



"Honey-spilled Sunset" by Maitri Makina, age 10.

Butterfly

It's the antennae, then the wings, then...flight.

It slowly took off, the blue velvet-like sheen on its wings reflecting onto a large red enchanting flower below it, so intense; the obsidian-like eyes silently gazing at the sky that was inferior to its blue, disdainfully glancing at the flowers below, and slowly swaying in the soothing breeze.

"Hello, I should call you 'Number 86'...Oh no, let's call you 'Flutterby'," a young girl smiled at it. Her blonde hair and turquoise eyes blended in with the flowers, looking very natural and pretty.

"Oh, this blue Spangle butterfly turned out to have successfully emerged. I had thought it was a damaged butterfly. Having seen you take care of it day and night, I couldn't bring myself to tell you." Her father came to her side, "You know, in order to prevent these butterflies from becoming extinct, we can only evolve them into higher predators. Well, because their habitat on which they depend has been taken away by those despicable interest-driven people. Anyway, hopefully we did not over-evolve them."

"What does that mean?"

"Nothing, but we should go home for dinner. Let's go." The girl reluctantly followed her father out of the hexahedral simulated breeding greenhouse.

Not long after they left, Flutterby began to fly steadily. Its eyes slowly fixated on a praying mantis, which was also staring at it. As if provoked, the praying mantis pounced over with its sharp scythes waving fiercely. Flutterby took advantage of the airflow created by the scythes with just one slight flap of its seemingly frail and thin wings, dodged the fatal blow, and landed behind the mantis. It then plunged its proboscis into the head of the mantis and began sucking. The praying mantis twitched for a moment before falling to the ground, its scythes still swinging helplessly.

Soon, the first batch of butterflies was to be released into an artificially simulated natural environment. They came to a beautiful hillside and brought many newly emerged blue Spangle butterflies in boxes. "Don't be nervous. This area has been equipped with a well-devel-

oped defense system. If the results are not satisfactory, we can easily eliminate them all. But the simulated environment here is no different from their habitat. Come on, let's get started."

The little girl nodded and prepared to gently open the lid with both hands, her palms sweating profusely. But just before opening the lid, she asked softly, "If the results are not satisfactory, is killing them all the only choice?"

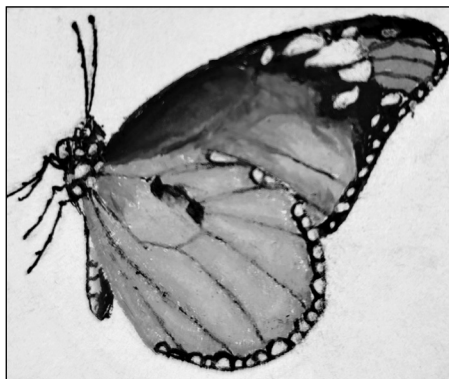
"Oh, rather than saying we are killing them, it's more like natural selection."

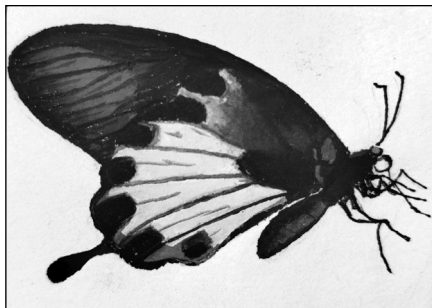
The little girl reluctantly opened the lid, and the blue Spangle butterflies flew out continuously. In the company of sunlight and breeze, they flew towards the forest, lake, hillside, and stream. Up close they looked like slow-moving blue elves and from far away they looked like a large piece of blue silk rippling with the wind, slowly disappearing into the distance. The little girl smoothed her windswept hair and watched them leave.

"Oh, so sorry, I really didn't expect them to have such a massive outbreak. Hmm...Okay, I'll be right there." The little girl's father hung up the phone and anxiously prepared to leave. The little girl asked curiously, "What's wrong? Need my help?"

"Oh, the experiment results were terrible. They completely disrupted the ecological balance of that area. But it's okay, you wait at home." After that, he kissed her and left.

As soon as the little girl's father arrived at the release site, he pressed the backup restart button. Time began to speed up, and then the butterflies began to reproduce in large numbers. Billions of blue Spangle butterflies densely covered every tree. The meteor shower made up of them in the sky searched for the trace of any prey. Whenever found, they would frantically wrap their prey. Their sharp proboscises pierced the prey's body like needles and the blood that splattered on their wings made their wings full of blood-red eyes. Their larvae ate almost all of the leaves and dense black-red larvae wriggled together, even cannibalizing each other. But it didn't take long for the reproduction rate of prey and host plants to slow down and a large number of butterflies





starved to death...The blue Spangle butterflies were eliminated by natural selection. And this process only took a few minutes.

The little girl saw that her father's face was very pale when he came back. Her father said weakly, "I'm sorry, we may have to terminate this experiment." The little girl's eyes welled up with tears. "Oh no, why? There must be a solution, right? Right? Please, please!"

"I'm sorry." Both were silent, "Time to go to bed, okay?"

In the afternoon, when her father went out, the little girl quietly ran into the greenhouse to say a final goodbye to the butterflies. Flutterby gently stopped on her fingertip. It was so beautiful and charming, and then she was shocked to find that Flutterby was pregnant! The little girl bit her lip and took a deep breath, quietly taking it out of the greenhouse. "You can go. Although I don't know if this is right..." But Flutterby didn't leave, as if waiting for her to make a final decision, "Before I change my mind."

Flutterby gently flew up and headed towards the sunset. Through her tearful eyes, the little girl seemed to see the blue light on the butterfly's wings and the orange light reflected by the sunset meet to create a fireworks-like pattern of brilliant colors, dancing with the wind in search of light.

Underneath the angelic face of Flutterby, a devilish smile loomed. 🌸

—Richard Siyi HE, age 17, high school junior, People's Republic of China. Richard adds: "I am obsessed with biology but also love writing. My favorite places are butterfly gardens all over the world (unfortunately, Beijing's Colorful Butterfly Garden has gone). I am trying to breed butterflies and their host plants in the hope of protecting endangered butterflies."

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1. Rain Watch

Thunder makes me wonder
When the next lightning
Bolt will pass
Bringing a bright flash
I dash
For cover
The monsoons are back
Crashing upon my tin
Roof
Grateful to be
Out of the spring rains
I watch the steam
Rising suddenly from
The village square
Where
The shouting returns
And shoppers yearn
For low deals on everything
From calabashes to
Spinning wheels

2. The Touch

Like petals
On a brilliant flower
My color will not
Rub off
Her light and
Momentary touch
Innocently criss-crossed
My arm
Causing me no harm
When I became aware
Of what her
Young hand was actively
Doing
Revealing her lack of
Worldly experiences
With people of a
Different heritage
It was a lesson we
Both explicitly needed
To learn
That brought about blooming
Feeling of friendship
Fragranced with respect

—maggie d., African American poet, Washington.

What's On Your Mind?

The Spice of Heritage

In third grade, a girl said with a howl,
That the food I brought for lunch was smelly, foul,
I felt so ashamed, how I wanted to run and hide,
That night, I wished I could leave my culture aside.
For years and years, I tried to comply and blend,
Concealing the parts of me that I thought would offend,
Far deep inside my heart, I knew that it wasn't right,
To abandon my heritage, without offering a fight.
Slowly but surely, I began to see,
That the beauty of my culture was always present in me,
From the food that I ate to the clothes that I wore,
To the tales of my homeland and the music that I adored.
I've learned to embrace my olive brown skin,
The hair so thick and hazel that I share with my kins,
To stop my own contempt of this huge part of me,
I realized I had to stop worrying, and let my culture free.
Now I look back on that stormy third-grade day,
And I can't help but smile, knowing that I've found my way,
I've learned to love my culture and tradition,
It fills my heart with joy to spread this mission.

—Nidhi Nadgir, age 15, grade 10, California.

The Meaning of Small Things

It is the small bird's call, she whispered, as they beat
down upon her window ledge
It is the skipping of a stone along the crisp cool water
of the frozen lake
It is the brilliant shine of a tortoise shell
and an acorn top that makes the perfect hat for a fairy
or a gnome
It is a frog sitting in a puddle bathing in the mud,
waiting for spring
A fox calling her pups in the misty night
The wonder of waking in the night as a storm rolls by
and the downy snowflakes as they fall on the silent eve
These are moments that matter
These are moments that mend our souls
—Mara Bella Occhuiizzo, age 9, Virginia. She loves to
be outdoors. She enjoys hiking, bike riding, and is an avid
reader. She spends time turning her poems into songs.

The Pressure Cooker

In the halls of high school, the pressure is real,
As fellow teenagers panic, and strive to meet society's ideal,
How will we reach success when we are not allowed to fail?
The anxiety and stress trumps all, leaving teenagers to flail.
Every grade, every club, every social scene,
Everything becomes part of a competitive routine,
And those who fall, who can't keep up the pace,
They are swallowed, left behind in the frenzied race.
The expectations are high, as is the cost,
As the pressure to perform often leads to exhaust,
It seems as though every mistake, each setback,
Feels like an avalanche, breaking one's back.
But we need to remember, amidst the stress,
That there is more to life than academic success,
We need to take in each moment, don't let experiences get away,
Each one of us is special, no matter what they say.
We are all unique, with passions and dreams,
These ideas can't be captured by society's schemes,
So let us all break free from the pressure's hold,
Let's find our own paths, fearless and bold.
For high school is just one chapter in our story,
And we shouldn't let it define our glory,
Instead, we should learn, grow, make mistakes,
We must embrace the journey, no matter the stakes.

—Nidhi Nadgir, age 15, grade 10, California. Nidhi is the founder and president of the Creative Writing Club at her school. Her poems express her thoughts, experiences, and things she has noticed.



1. Bright But Sad

The thin flower droops
With purple out yellow in
Charming and ready
But crouching with their head down
The tired flower drifts out

2. The Green Leaf

The green leaf is strong
With yellow dots around it
The happy leaf beams
It is smooth on the outside
And smells like nature inside

—Charlotte Chang, age 12, California.

My Happy Place

The all-consuming monster that is anxiety has ruled over my mind for my entire life. Growing up “shy” is cute, but staying a quiet, on-edge shell of a person loses its charm with age.

“Just take deep breaths, count to ten,” my mother would say.

“Calm down, it’s nothing to get worked up about,” my father would say.

“You can’t avoid everything that makes you a little anxious, Keira,” my teachers would say.

Nothing they said worked; anxiety comes as naturally to me as breathing, and no amount of deep breaths or mental perseverance could calm the storm once it decided to hit; those who say otherwise have never experienced such a dreadful feeling.

I started therapy in my freshman year of high school, due to my parents growing worried when I was getting too old for the “cute, shy little girl” routine. Dr. McBride was the first to understand that my anxiety was a real disorder, not just a little emotion I had to overcome. I was prescribed medicine, and she gave me a place to talk about my issues. She understood me, more than anyone else. She listened to what I had to say and validated my emotions, and understood.

Then, she offered a coping mechanism that worked for me.

“Find your happy place.”

What a cliché. Just like the deep breaths and counting to ten, I assumed this to be another useless measure that others thought helped with anxiety, yet held no merit. The extent of my anxiety tended to cause depressive episodes, so, originally, my “happy place” was only my bed, where I could curl away and hide from the real world. Warm, cozy blankets surrounding me seemed like absolute bliss, when, realistically, they sprung me deeper and deeper down a lonely spiral.

“No, Keira, find the place. The place where worry does not exist, where it is impossible to feel unsafe or insecure. That’s your happy place.”

It took some time to think it over, but I soon came to the revelation that I was capable of being happy outside of my bed; in fact, I could be even happier.



Ever since then, whenever I’ve gotten too stressed or worried or sickly anxious to cope with my everyday responsibilities, I take a moment to imagine myself in a field full of wildflowers, with birds chirping quiet songs in my ears, sunshine warming my skin, fresh flowers surrounding me. Around the field would always be a forest, which granted me a sense of safety, symbolizing that the unknown could surround me all it wanted, but I still had my beautiful space, one that belonged to me, and to me only.

The fictional safe haven I created in my imagination is represented by this image, which resonates deeply with me, granting an inherent sense of calm. I can imagine myself walking down the paved path, allowing my senses to absorb the beauty surrounding me, and the terrible monster inside of me dwindles.

One day, I’d like to visit my happy place. I have yet to find it in the real world, so, in the meantime, I can continue to travel there in my mind, living amongst nature and forgetting the horrors of reality. 🌸

—Keira Kelly, age 17, Missouri. She adds: “My goal... is to become a published author, hopefully one day, of a fiction novel. What I enjoy most about writing is the artistic creativity available in carefully choosing and stringing together words to create a beautiful piece. I’ve adored writing ever since I was little, and I am ecstatic to explore how far I can reach with this passion. I wish to continue Creative Writing programs in college, and depending on my success rate, pursue a career as a full-time author. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to begin my journey.”

Photo: West Boulder River Valley, with Absaroka Mountains in the Background, Montana. Photo by Paul Dix, Oregon.

Spring Leaf

so fragile
lightly fluttering in a gentle breeze
the beauty of green.

in summer: just there; an anemic refrain
day after day
staying the same

in fall: flash; red – orange – yellow!
then gone; crumpled; stepped upon;
barely any are holding on.

in winter: brittle shells
blackened with age
on the branch where they somehow remain.

but spring!
tiny green droplets sprinkling trees
tentatively claiming back the woods.

heat slowly rising – beauty arrives
slowly, but surely; softly, until
the forest is a sea of green.

soft like velvet; smooth yet fuzzy
like the down of a newborn bird

the color – green; a touch of yellow –
bringing alive even the darkest of forests

light streaming down
flowing through the branches
glowing green on the bough.

thousands upon thousands
glorifying the world
with their common grace

savor the beauty
of one spring leaf.

—Sufyana Johnson, age 12, gr. 6, Maryland.

She enjoys reading, writing, skiing, ultimate frisbee, and long nature walks. She is a developing computer scientist and mathematician and loves making the connection between art and technology, a passion that helped her to create www.RamadanRecycling.com, a website to promote environmental awareness during Ramadan and beyond.



“Spring Isn’t Far!”
Daffodils in Garden
Photo: Arun Toké

Skipping Stones Stew

Spring Light

The frost on the grass revealed green blades,
The chilling air slowly warmed,
Later and later the sun fades,
And instead of snow, the rain stormed.

The singing of the birds awakens me each morning,
The scent of flowers accompanies my days,
This blissful relief sneaks without warning,
Yet I shan’t complain as I feel the sun’s rays.

Thriving in the light of her beauty,
The paining cold now gone,
Appreciating mother nature is my duty,
Before the winter’s dawn.

Day after day she blesses my life,
Allowing me to prosper in the spring light.

—Keira Kelly, age 17, Missouri.

The 2024 Youth Honor Awards & The Asian Celebration Haiku & Tanka Contest

We invite your creative writing (essays, letters, poems and stories, etc.) as well as thought-provoking, original art and photo essays. Ten youth winners and select noteworthy entries will be featured in the Awards issue. Share your ideas, experiences, dreams and visions. Prose: 1000 words. Poems: 30 lines. Haiku & Tanka poems are also invited for the Haiku Contest. (Both contests are for ages 7–17). Send by May 5, 2024. Visit our website for details and guidelines!
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editor@SkippingStones.org www.skippingstones.org



Sufyana adds: “I wrote this poem to express my feelings when I saw one of the first leaves of Spring. I thought about the life cycle of leaves and trees throughout the year, and the beautiful light green color of Spring.”

Home

Home

For me, it's a place where, if I go to the street, my ears hear a choir of angels when someone says something as simple as “*kaixo*”, “hello” in my mother tongue. Where at the end of the day I don't have a headache, because I don't have to do double work and translate everything before talking. Where if I say, “*Zelako eguna izan dudan*” someone will come and hug me, because they know what it means.

Home

For me, it's a place that smells like my grandma's “*croketak*,” a smell that comes with the memory of Christmas and an afternoon with my grandmother that ends with the amazing flavor melting in my mouth. Where “*jamoia*” is an everyday snack that comes with a nice conversation with my loved ones before lunch, “*mahaigaina*” my mom would call it.

Home

It's a place where if I feel sad, my grandmother is just a sigh away—not separated by a vast, dark ocean. Where if I have a bad day I can just go downstairs, hug my mom and ask her to make my favorite cookies, “*Cremonaiak*.” Where at lunch time my dad wouldn't shout my name to address me; he would call me “*arraitotxo*a.”

Home

Now, I'm starting to forget my own language because no one knows it here. I haven't eaten “*croketak*” or “*jamoia*” in over a year because it's not the same here. Now I have to be careful what time I call home, because we are separated by an immense ocean and a seven-hour time difference.

I think I know what home is, and it's definitely not what I have now.

—*Iris Esteban Acha, age 16, is an exchange student studying in Wisconsin. Iris adds: “I'm originally from a region of northern Spain, called the Basque Country. We have our own language and culture—very different from the Spanish one. If you ask people here, they will tell you they are from the Basque Country, not Spain. Part of the Basque Country is in France, so I speak Spanish, Basque, French and English.”*

Glossary of the Basque Words Used

Zelako eguna izan dudan: *I had a horrible day*

Croketak: *Traditional Spanish food*

Jamoia: *A traditional snack in Spain (serrano ham)*

Mahagaina: *Time before or after lunch where people usually talk and have snacks*

Cremonaiak: *Traditional Spanish cookies (butter cookies with vanilla cream inside)*

Arraitotxoa: *An affectionate nickname in Basque*

My Home

The ocean is calling me
Hot sand under my feet
Cool salty breeze
Gently slapping my face
Staring out
At the endless
Dark blue ocean
Sun shining brightly
In the cloudless sky
Mother Earth's most
Mystical child
Hearing the most
Unique melody
Out and in,
Out and in
The ocean tides
Waves crashing
Splashing
I feel at home

—*Simar Sodhi, grade 6, New Jersey. She adds: “I have loved writing since I was in first grade, and I have been practicing my skills ever since. Writing poems and fantasy-fiction stories have always been my favorite types of writing.”*

April Road

Petals of cherry blossoms fell
Pink road with sweet scent
Spring has arrived

Turn

Bee sat on flower
Other flowers wonder
When is my turn?

Melting

Ice cream melts
I am melting as well
Summer has arrived

What am I?

Golden leaves and breezy wind
Too cold to wear less
Too hot to wear more
Little less cold
Littles less hot

—*Hyunchae Sung, 17, California.*

Kimchi Cologne

“*Jungmin-ah*...hurry up! You’re going to miss Ms. Sunok fermenting the cabbage!” my grandmother admonishes me.

Snorting, I sloth over to where three generations of women all huddle around Ms. Sunok, whom I call *Halmoni*. In Korea, we call all elderly ladies “grandma” out of respect.

I squeeze my teeny eight-year-old body between a tall and short shoulder, sighing. I would much rather be making a snowman with my friends than this stinky old cabbage dish.

As I watch *Halmoni*’s soft, wrinkly hands meticulously stuffing a kimchi paste of chili, fish sauce, scalions, and salt between each cabbage leaf, I shudder.

Ew. How can Halmoni touch our food with her bare hands?

Grandma beckons me to join my female relatives as it is our job to wash the cabbage.

“Grandma, this is really boring, and the smell is too much for me,” I pout as I dip another cabbage into a bowl of water and sloppily slosh it around.

“What do you mean, Jungmin? To me, the scent of kimchi is more elegant than Chanel No. 5,” my aunt jokes.

“Jungmin, this pickled cabbage has been keeping us from starving in winter for 3,000 years,” Grandma said, her eyes bright. “It’s essential to life.”

“Kimchi even protected us from The Black Plague,” my aunt said. “It’s the probiotics.”

I stared at this humble vegetable, wondering if I was alive because of this thing I found so boring. Maybe it wasn’t boring after all.

My relatives were laughing as they massaged the zesty scarlet paste into each freshly-washed cabbage leaf, then stuffed it into large ceramic pots that we would eventually store in our kimchi cellars to eat for the rest of the year. Remember that trap door in the ground where Dorothy and Toto hide from the cyclone? That’s what a kimchi cellar looks like. Kimchi is so important to us we craft entire cellars for it.

As the women tease each other over who has made

the tastiest chili paste, I remember all the times this humble side dish graced our table, and the generations of women who have used their creativity to create variety from such humble ingredients.

I remember my family piling onto our ripped up beige sofa on Friday nights to eat pork belly kimchi while watching our favorite comedy show, *Gag Concert*.

I remember slurping hot ox bone soup with *kkak-dugi* (cubed radish kimchi) to revive myself after an exam week that felt like I was bungee jumping without a safety strap.

I remember eating fancy *dongchimi* (radish water kimchi soaked in cold water) to celebrate the day Grandfather turned seventy.

I still recall the first time I tried it—I was only two, but my kimchi-obsessed grandma insisted on sneaking me a bite while Mom was not looking. Because of the spicy and weird texture, of course, I cried.

Then, there were all the times Mom made me delicious steaming kimchi soup or cold kimchi noodles for my *dosirak* (school lunchbox) that I would devour during our fifteen minute lunch break. (Yes, Korean lunch breaks are that brief).

Upon reflection, I realized that this once-despised dish was now a beloved part of me, as inseparable as peanut butter and jelly. It tastes like the past, the present, and the future of me.

—Alison Hwang, age 17, Korean-American, California. Alison is fluent in Korean and English,



and is intermediately fluent in Spanish. Ally values being a lighthouse to others and dreams of a world where everyone is happy because they spread kindness. Her epiphany of the beauty in Korean food and culture is what inspired her to write “Kimchi Cologne.”

Meet Youth Artist Austin Liu, grade 11, Vancouver, B.C., Canada

Motivation, Struggle, then Discipline

(Project: Self Improvement)

The essence of self-improvement is a lifelong pursuit, where individuals strive to discover their true selves and purpose in the world. In my artwork, I explore the diverse range of emotions I've experienced during my own journey of becoming the best version of myself.

I've recently been trying out strategies in regard to self-improvement. As a young man trying to figure out the immense complexities of the world, I've just started to realize the essence of pursuit in becoming the best version of myself. In many cases, this has impacted many aspects of my life: physical health, interpersonal relationships, emotional health, and education. It is a step towards maturity. However, despite the benefits, self-improvement is mentally depriving sometimes especially, at the start. Every once in a while, I have this feeling of being unproductive, but generally, I discipline myself to get through the day. These are the day's traits such as fatigue and a form of regret come in. However, knowing the benefits that come from these few days of despair, I force myself to make progress in the stairs of self-improvement.

On a canvas, I hope to compose a painting using drywall mud (the material I used for underlay). I want to really emphasize perspective using the drywall mud. (It would be from an angle above). The mud will be stairs. I will create a feeling of motion on different steps through expressive line work. There will be three figures that will symbolize motivation, mental deprivation, and discipline respectively.

Motion can be signified as progress or process

- The haziness of a replica of a figure
- Animation

Making the stairs very cohesive and the motion of the figures hazy can represent how self-improvement may seem like an easy process or concept but can come with many mental challenges as expressed through the figure. How to make use of the perception, shadow of the staircase.

- Painting... Performance/Installation piece

Please see the 'stairs painting' on the back cover, lower left.

An Unsought Transition *About the Century-Old History of Vancouver, Canada, paint on rock (top pieces, p. 36)*

This artwork illuminates the challenges endured by indigenous communities throughout centuries of colonialism highlighting the loss of identity, land/territory, and cultural heritage. The visual displays a native figure proudly adorned in traditional attire, juxtaposed with the same figure substantially transformed by Western influence on the flip side.

Through my piece, I hope to promote the need for reconciliation among all diminished native cultures worldwide.

Which One? *(back cover, lower right)*

When facing a dilemma, we're on a precipice of choice, contemplating the vast potential of our future. To progress, we must engage in metacognitive decision-making, linking our own past values, preferences, and beliefs to our present conundrum as we steer our future forward. "Which One?" explores the limitless eventualities that arise from each decision: an immediate solution shaped subjectively through a reflection on our past self.

Mr. Wilke *(p. 35, bottom center)*

After studying one of Ireland's foremost figurative painters, Cian McLoughlin, I applied his general artistic process and ideology in my own portrait of my teacher Mr. Wilke.

Mirroring Identities in Conflict *(p. 35, lower left)*

Individuals often clash with themselves in moments of stress. In the depths of their conflicted selves, a chaotic group of emotions coupled with straining identities competing for power inevitably leads to a fracture in one's core. Mirroring Identities in Conflict signifies the tension from inner dissonance culminating in the embodiment of a fragmented identity. *(p. 35, middle rt.)*

Motivation, Struggle & Discipline *(p. 36, lower left)*

The essence of self-improvement is a lifelong pursuit, where individuals strive to discover their true selves and purpose in the world. In my artwork, I explore the diverse range of emotions I've experienced during my own journey.

—Austin Liu, gr. 11, at work *(p. 35, lower right photo).*



Illumination (above); Enlarged view (right)



cūicàn zhī yè

璀璨之夜 illumination

以多彩灯光点缀的壮观夜市

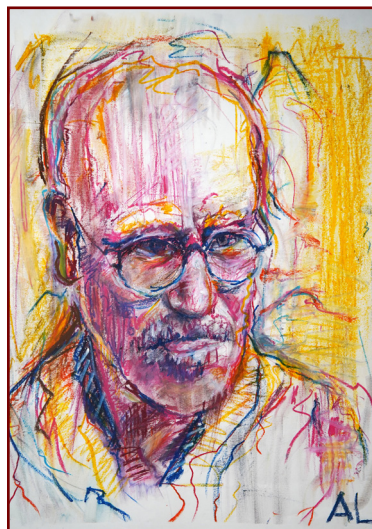
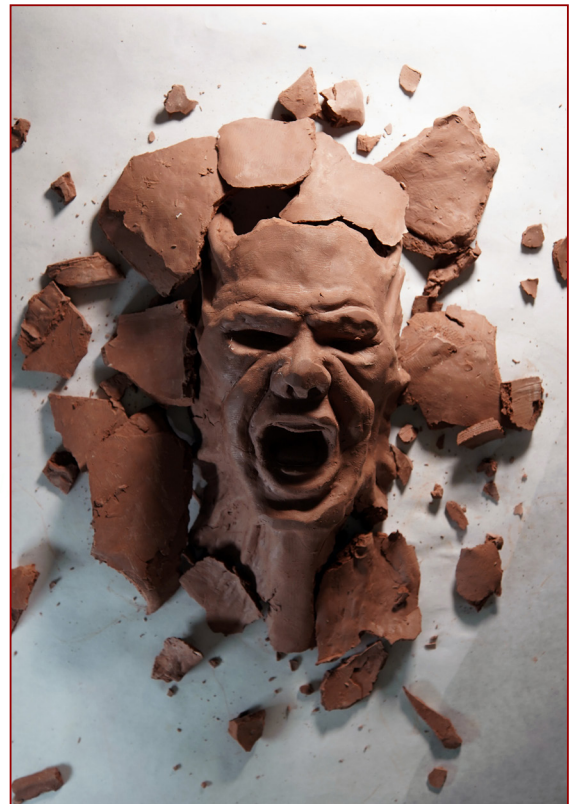
a decoration of lights, usually colored lights

丙烯画

acrylic painting

里士满夜市以其热闹的社交聚会、多元化的美食和引人入胜的娱乐而闻名。这个活动通过体现城市的欢迎和包容精神，聚集了来自各种背景的社区，一同庆祝和分享传统，反映了里士满的多元文化。我为里士满夜市创作的这幅画作，侧重于欢乐的人群，捕捉到了分散的灯光所营造的生动氛围。与强调细节不同，我选择了印象派的方法，因为它更有效地展现了里士满夜市的精髓。

The Richmond Night Market is renowned for its vigorous social gatherings, diverse foods, and engaging entertainment. This event reflects Richmond's multiculturalism by embodying the city's welcoming spirit, gathering communities from various backgrounds to celebrate and share traditions. Referencing the Richmond Night Market, I created a painting focusing on the convivial crowd and the scattered lights that define its animated atmosphere. Rather than stressing on the finer details, I decided to adopt an impressionistic approach as it captures the luminant essence more effectively.



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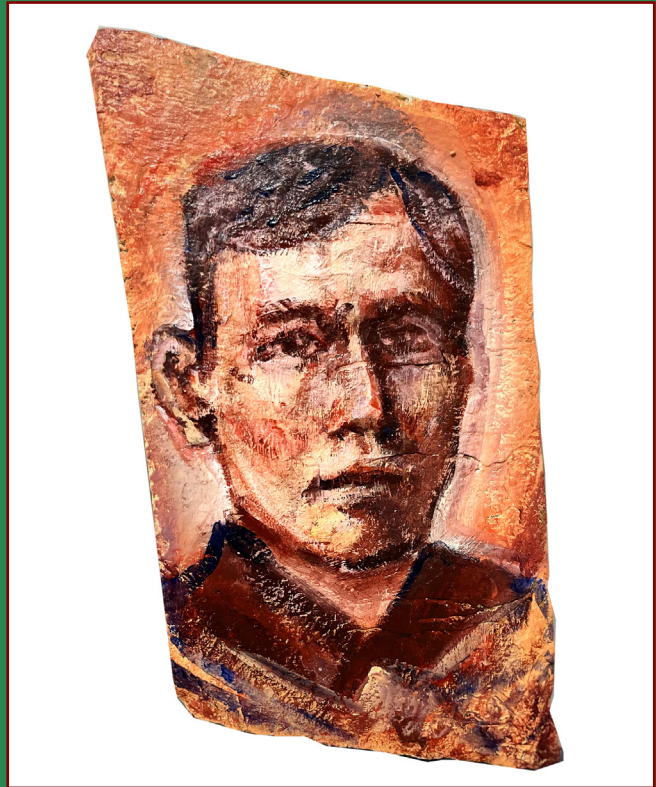
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Art by Austin Liu, grade 11, Vancouver, Canada. Please see p. 34 for captions.