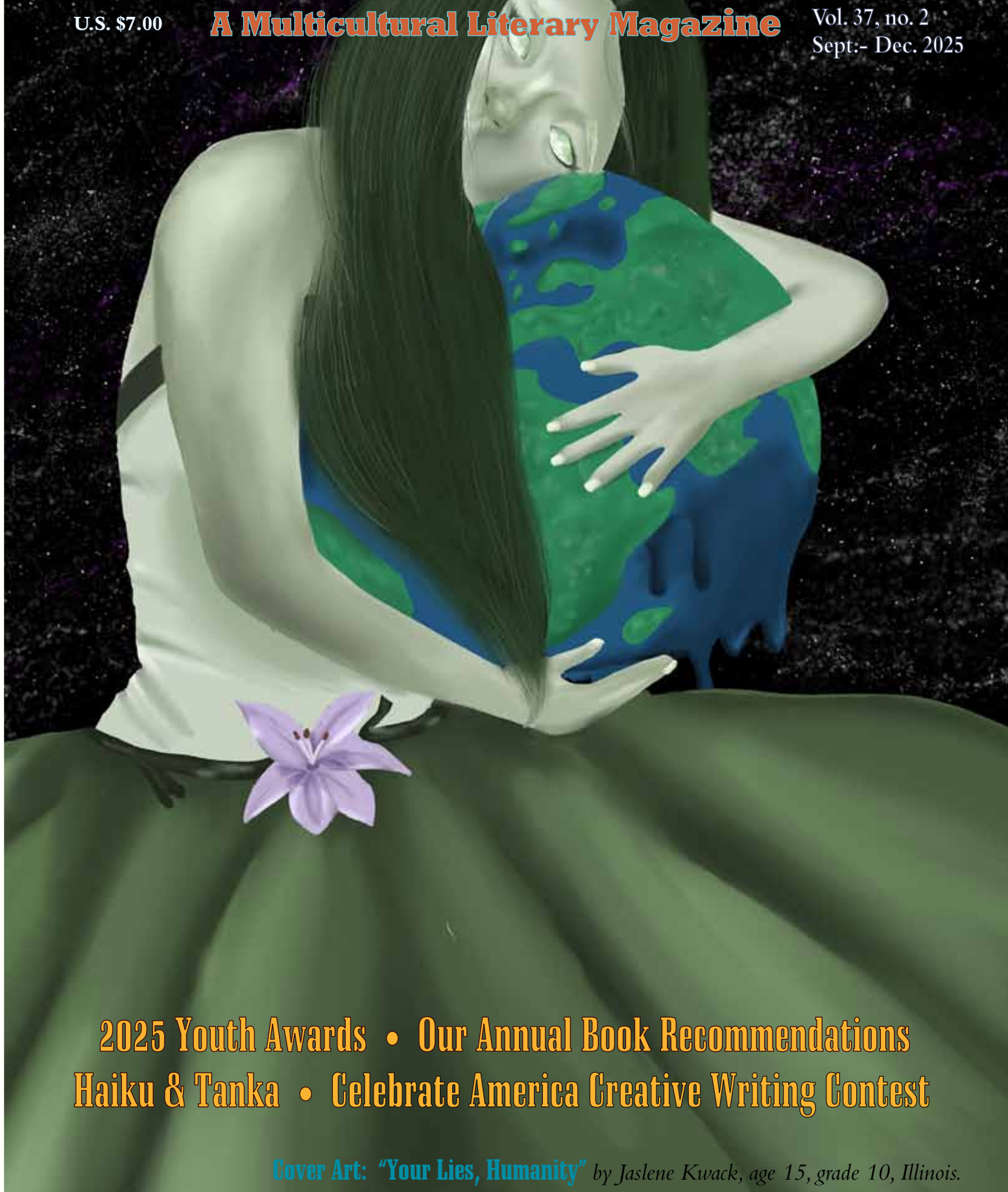


Skipping Stones

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A Multicultural Literary Magazine

Vol. 37, no. 2
Sept.- Dec. 2025



**2025 Youth Awards • Our Annual Book Recommendations
Haiku & Tanka • Celebrate America Creative Writing Contest**

Cover Art: "Your Lies, Humanity" by Jaslene Kwack, age 15, grade 10, Illinois.

The 2025 Skipping Stones Book Awards



We are pleased to honor the following 25 outstanding books—in three categories: Multicultural, Nature, and Teaching Resources—as our 2025 Award Winners. These picture books, chapter books, novels and nonfiction works promote an understanding of cultures, cultivate cooperation, and/or encourage a deeper awareness of nature, ecology, and diversity. They foster respect for multiple viewpoints and closer relationships within human societies. The honored titles offer various perspectives, help us understand our diverse cultures and their histories, and how we overcome challenging situations. Hearty congratulations to the creators of these timely books!

See the reviews on [our website](#) in the *Book Awards* section under the *Contests/Awards* menu.



Multicultural and International Books

Mnoomin maan'gowing/The Gift of Mnoomin by Brittany Luby; illustr. Joshua Mangeshig Pawis-Steckley; trans. Mary Ann Corbiere. *Groundwood Books*. Ages 3-6.

Momma's Going to March by Jennifer Maruno; illustr. Vivian Rosas. *Groundwood Books*. Ages 3-6.

Baking Up Love by Alan Page and Kamie Page; art by David Geister. *Page Education Foundation*. Ages 5-9.

The Home We Make by Maham Khwaja; illustr. Daby Zainab Faidhi. *Lee and Low Books*. Ages 5-10.

Miryam's Dance by Kerry Olitzky and Rachel Stock Spilker; illustr. John Baptist Tumuhaise. *Apples & Honey Press*. Ages 5-8.

Hokusai's Daughter: A Young Artist in Old Japan, by Sunny Seki. *Tuttle Publishing*. Ages 5-14.

Oh No! Chinese School! A bilingual Chinese/English picture book, by Crystal Murakami; illustr. Jon Kenzo Okeya. www.eastwestdiscovery.com. Ages 6-9.

Salma Joins the Team by Danny Ramadan; art by Anna Bron. *Annick Press*. Ages 6-9.

The Go-Between by Jennifer Maruno. *Red Deer Press*. Ages 8-12.

The Christmas Menorahs: How a Town Fought Hate, by Janice Cohn; illustr. Bill Farnsworth. *Le Chambon Press*. Ages 7 and up.

Mercedes Sosa: Voice of the People by Aixa Pérez-Prado. (*A Spanish edition is also available*). *Children's Book Press/Lee & Low Books*. Ages 7-10.

Grandma, Don't Forget How Much I Love You by Linda A. Gerdner and Jacqueline A. Witter; illustr. Amy Bunnell Jones. *Pizzicato Press*. Ages 7-10.

A Tree of My Own by Nui Wilson; illustr. Kayor, et. al. *Qilin Press*. Ages 7-12.

Finding Melody Sullivan, a novel by Alice Rothchild. *Cune Press*. Ages 16 to adult.

Nature and Ecology Books

Loop de Loop: Circular Solutions for a Waste-Free World, by Andrea Curtis; illustr. Roozeboos. *Groundwood Books*. Ages 4-8.

Gifts from the Garbage Truck: A True Story about the Things We (Don't) Throw Away, by Andrew Larsen; illustr. Oriol Vidal. *Sourcebooks Kids*. Ages 4-8.

A Sky That Sings by Anita Sanchez & George Steele; illustr. Emily Mendoza. *Lee and Low Books*. Ages 5-10.

At Home with the Prairie Dog: The Story of a Keystone Species, by Dorothy Hinshaw Patent; photos: William Muñoz. *Web of Life Children's Books*. Ages 5-9.

Hawk Mother Returns: A Story of Interspecies Adoption, by Kara Hagedorn and Marlo Garnsworthy. *Web of Life Children's Books*. Ages 5-9.

Tizzy and Me: Fifteen Ways to Love a Mink, by N.M.L. Hazard; illustr. Alice Priestley. *Red Deer Press*. Ages 7-9.

The Girl Who Cried for the Earth: A Story of Hope, Healing & Possibilities, by Bodhi Simpson. *2nd Tier Publishing*. Ages 11 and up.

Keystone Species: Meet the Animals Key to Ecosystem Health and Biodiversity, by Laura Perdew; illustr. Micah Rauch. *Nomad Press*. Ages 9-13.

Zoe and the Seed Garden by Lorna McMaster; illustrated by the author. *Heartfelt Seed Stories*. Grades 3-8.

Teaching & Parenting Resources:

Teaching Palestine: Lessons, Stories, Voices. Editors: Bill Bigelow, Jesse Hagopian, Suzanna Kassouf, Adam Sanchez, and Samia Shoman. *Rethinking Schools*. Middle and high school grades.

Transgender Justice in Schools. Eds. Linda Christensen & Ty Marshall. *Rethinking Schools*.

Read book reviews on www.SkippingStones.org. See **Annual Book Awards** under **Contests/Awards** menu.

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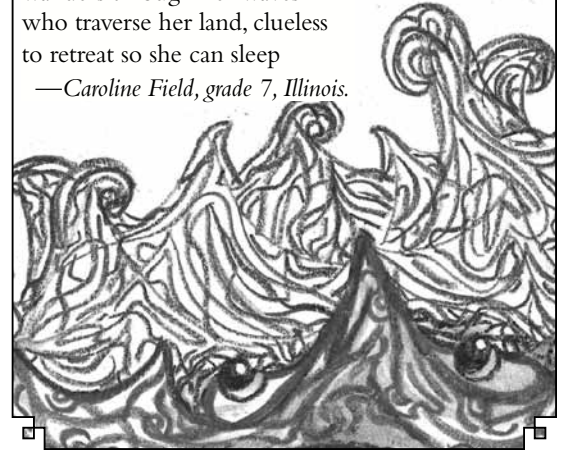
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Ocean Awakened

ocean shields her shores
from us the traitors-whose trash
wanders through her waves
who traverse her land, clueless
to retreat so she can sleep

—Caroline Field, grade 7, Illinois.



In the spirit of ecological sensitivity, we choose to print with soy ink on recycled and recyclable paper with a 30% post-consumer recycled content.



About *Skipping Stones*:

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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Winner of three National Association for Multicultural Education Awards, as well as EdPress Association of America, Writer Magazine, NewsStand Resources, Eugene Ed. Assn., and Parent's Choice Awards.



A Note from the Editor

Welcome to the 2025 Awards Issue! Please enjoy the many thoughtful entries being published in these pages. We also invite you to read our *free* online content that we continue to add regularly to the website. —*Editors.*

Your Lies, Humanity

look at what you've done
ghostly white tears have carved
canyons in my face
do you see it now?
or does all that smoke
smother the view
you forgot me, didn't you
you burned me, drowned me, choked me
when I am gone who will
remember you
when I am dead who will even know
you were once here

—*Jaslene Kivack, age 15, grade 10, Illinois. "I drew the Earth as a woman holding the world (see front cover). As the planet melts because of humans, all she can do is look at the viewers, eyes saying, 'I warned you.'"*

Summer's Haze

The winds of July come in,
As the clouds part to reveal the glorious sun,
The vast skies grin,
Yet the wandering of my mind has begun:

I feel lost in a summer's haze,
Chained down and unable to fly,
I am lost in the endless maze,
As my wasted life appears in my eye,
My soul starts rambling in disdain,
My heart calls out in pain,
My world is set ablaze,
My thoughts are in a daze

My memories fade,
And thoughts of the future cascade,
What have I done and where will I go,
Every day I move to and fro,
But what do I approach,
And what I stand for,
I do not know.

—*Shrey Shah, grade 9, North Carolina.*

Celebrate America 2025 Creative Writing Contest

We are pleased to present the national winners of the American Immigration Council's Creative Writing Contest for fifth graders. **Skipping Stones** is one of the cosponsors of this annual contest. Please visit: www.celebrateamericawritingcontest.org for details.



First Place Winner: America Poem

The city sleeps, but I am wide awake, thoughts bursting through my head.

Stories swirl, whirl, twirl,

Because my mother just kissed me goodnight,

And when I look up at her face in awe

I realize that everyone has a story.

You may not be able to tell by their language or by the way they present themselves,

That. Everyone. Has. A. Story.

One may be similar to my mother's story,

A Vietnamese refugee who escaped Vietnam with only

Her family recipes,

And her immediate family of 5.

You can't tell by my mom's scars or her faint smile,

That her father fought in the war,

Or that her mother one day kissed her goodnight,

Only to spend the next day in a hospital room with cancer.

You. Can't. Tell.

As I reflect on all of this,

I can almost smell the faint Chanel Number 5 perfume

Lingering around the room.

I smell the perfume my mother wears everyday

As her mother did.

I smell my grandmother

and see a faint image of the stories my mom always told me about her

They start to appear in my head.

I think about my grandmother's quick escape from Vietnam

Fleeing in the middle of the night

Grabbing her bottle of Chanel number 5

The bottle that ông ngoại (my grandfather) had given her when he was training as a pilot in the America.

Perhaps that small Chanel bottle was a symbol of hope,

That one day, her life would be normal

She wouldn't have to run away from bombs, she would attend parties.

You. Can't. Tell.

As my eyes get heavy and my eyelashes land softly,

I think of a compelling question,

A phrase my humanities teacher taught me.

A wonder.

"What happened after they got to America?"

That was a question that I have repeatedly asked my mom.

Every time getting a new answer.

Some of these answers are how they settled down in Louisiana in a small town.

2026 Creative Writing Contest

The American Immigration Lawyers Association holds this annual contest to challenge fifth graders across the country to reflect on and write about one of two themes: "**Why I Am Glad America Is a Nation of Immigrants**" or "**What Does it Mean to be a Welcoming Nation?**" You can read the previous years' winning entries on *Skipping Stones*' website under the **Contests/Awards** subsection.

For more details about the contest, please visit: www.celebrateamericawritingcontest.org



Being the only Vietnamese family,
Their neighbors would throw glass into the garden,
Just so they couldn't step on it without bleeding.
You. Can't. Tell.
Thankfully, my grandmother had a superpower.
Bringing. People. Together.
She did this by working at a grocery store and getting ingredients
To make her family spring rolls and give them to her neighbors
With her famous motto, "Roll Forward, Always Forward."
And POOF the neighbors gave her family peace.
And she inspired.
She did this by becoming one of the first Vietnamese American
teachers in Louisiana,
A mentor, and a second mother to her students.
She connected people over the years,
And at her funeral, over 3,000 people came.
If my grandmother, along with millions of other immigrants,
Had never come to America,
Then who would share
Their recipes?
Their stories?
Their hope?
My grandmother has passed down all this to her family,
Like yours,
Which is continuing to grow.
Kind of like America, growing every day with new faces and stories.
If we allow it.

—Luu Ly Shulman (*see photo on p. 6*), grade 5, age 11, New York.

***Second Place:* Flavors and Rhythms**

Every Friday night, as I step out of the dance studio it is my time to choose where my family goes for dinner. I look all around trying to make a choice, which is never easy. Will it be the Argentine Market? The French *Boulangerie*? The new Brazilian Steakhouse? The small sushi counter? The Lebanese restaurant that reminds me of my grandma's home cooking? The Vietnamese *Pho* place, with its scrumptious smell? The Mexican *Taqueria*? The Jewish deli or the Peruvian *Ceviche*? As you can see this small shopping center in South Miami is a representation of my country. A country that is made so special and unique, thanks to all the distinct cultures brought by immigration.

You see, I am a foodie ballerina. Not only do I love to eat, I also love to dance, and ballet is my life! Because of immigra-

Flavors & Rhythms... continued

tion I am able to explore many styles and rhythms from all over the world. All of my ballet teachers have emigrated from Cuba, Poland, and Russia to the United States of America. They are the reason I am both a dancer and the person I am today. I am responsible, disciplined, and I set very high expectations for myself, so I can be the best I can be in all my crafts. They are also the reason why my dancing style is unique. I get to blend Cuban and Vaganova, with the American *Balenchine*. I dance a Polish Polka or an Italian Tarantella. When I'm not dancing ballet, I get to dance Latin Ballroom, hip-hop, Flamenco and jazz, each with its unique cultural tones.

My family is also a representation of this mix of flavors and rhythms. My *abuela*, with her Lebanese roots, will choose *Kibbeh* and *Tabbouleh* and loves Flamenco music that reminds her of her times living in Spain. My mom, raised in Colombia, will go for an *arepa* while listening to Shakira, and my dad, who is American with English and German roots, will go for a more simple, medium rare fillet. If it wouldn't have been for immigration, my family would not be the mix of flavors and rhythms that it is today. I would have not ever been born.

America is a nation of immigrants that have brought everything I love to my home, from flavors, to rhythms, to cultures, and ideas. This fusion has made me who I am today. It has inspired my creativity and imagination and given me different points of views. As I continue to leave my dance studio every Friday night, after dancing to the different rhythms, I will get to choose from the many unique flavors I can eat for dinner with my family.

By Alana Atkinson, grade 5, Florida.

Third Place Winner: Why I Am Glad America Is a Nation of Immigrants

Maman (*mother*) and I were living in Khuzestan, with no idea that America was a nation of immigrants. A hardworking, innovative, nation.

“Hila!” She called. “They’re coming.”

That day, Iraq bombed the most sacred parts of Iran, including Khuzestan. We had to leave Iran. My father had left years before, and we were leaving now.

Goodbye. I thought. I was on a crowded ship, watching as Iran’s shores slowly got smaller, until they melted into the horizon. I imagined my brother Ali on the battlefield, fighting for Iran. But now, I was going to California.

Maman pulled me into an embrace, making me remember she was there, and whispered the words she always repeated. “Your name is Hila. Hila means “hope” and we will always have hope.”

I was afraid of America, but when we arrived, a green statue of a lady greeted us. What I will always remember is the torch she held, for it reminded me of hope, never lost.

When we arrived in San Diego, California, I was scared. I hadn’t seen Baba (*father*) in years. But when we pulled up at his house, I smiled. When I spotted a bigger tree, I felt like a tsunami of hope had just hit me. It was a pomegranate tree, with bright red fruits dangling from its branches. Pomegranates were a symbol of Iran. I gathered my bravery and stepped towards the door. I knocked, and it opened so quickly, I didn’t even think. I just jumped into Baba’s arms. Grinning widely, I looked up at my father. Deep, black eyes gazed at me. “I missed you,” he whispered.

The next morning, I decided to do some exploring. Sitting in a beach chair on the front lawn of the house next to ours, there was a girl about my age dressed in a bathing suit. She wore heart shaped sunglasses, and she was reading a thick book. Sitting on a tray next to her was a glass of pink lemonade. I decided to walk over. When she saw me, she waved and smiled, and I waved back.

“Hi!” she exclaimed. “Aren’t you the girl from Iran?”

I nodded. “Yeah, I came yesterday.”

She smiled. “I’m Sarah!” Sarah patted the grass beside her. We talked a while about my journey, and how Iran was bombed. How San Diego was always somewhat warm, and how Sarah’s older brother was

SO annoying. Then, she did something I didn’t think she would do. Sarah threw her arms around me, and exclaimed, “I am so glad immigrants come here, Hila. You make America great!”

Those are the same words she says to me now, as we receive the news that the war is over. I cry with joy when I see her smiling and hugging me tight. I am an immigrant from Iran, but I am American, and I am what makes America great. Maman pulls me into a warm embrace and whispers, “Your name is Hila. Hila means hope, and we have never given up hope.”

—Sarina Razaghi, grade 5, California.

2025 Haiku & Tanka Exhibit

1. Enlightenment

Knowledge is free, but
Only comes to the willing,
To those who learn from
The ground that teaches patience
And the wind that shares freedom.

2. The Forest’s Loss

The mourning pine sings,
Sings tunes allusive to death.
The solemn willow weeps
For herb’s leaves and for vine’s blooms.
For all things that have been lost.

3. Come. See. Hear the sound!

The rivers speak of your life.
The forests whisper for you.

—Kai Bansal, age 13, grade 8, New York.

— Postcards —
handwritten postcards
curling cursive and smudged ink
barely legible
static memories
protected by plastic sheets
signed, Silly Grandpa

—Addy Steel, grade 8, Illinois.

Dancing Lights
Aurora in green
Shimmering tower of light
Peeks over mountains
Nightlight for the trees
In a rocky paradise
Shamrock colored lights

—Maddie Johnson, grade 6, Illinois.

The 2025 Asian Celebration Haiku and Tanka Exhibit

1. Red

the color of a screaming sunset
of closed doors and endings
the pain of a pulsing heart

2. Imagination

Stories are taking
Other people's words
And making them yours.

—Both by Stuti Jain, age 14, Wisconsin.

1. The sun dips below
An ocean of cold ripples
Onto the next world.

2. Star-speckled dark skies.
Midnight light, warm, velvet night:
Lovely-bright tonight.

—Hanyl Kantner, age 11, gr. 6, Washington.

Warm sand, crashing waves
Ocean breeze brushes my cheek
Peace spreads through my heart
—Xin-Yang Saoirse Chen, age 9, Calif.

The empty swing sways
It creaks of childhood butterflies
Echoes of summer
—Katelyn Kim, grade 9, California.

A newborn soul's search
For the great unknown
In a tiny turtle's crawl
—Yechan (Chloe) Lee, gr. 11, So. Korea.

1. Wilted flowers, glum
reminders of those who pass.
It is now my time.

2. Life and death, rebirth
A cosmic knot, never ends
Welcome back, old friend.
—Both by Clover Harness, gr. 8, Missouri.

sky-bound siblings
sun and moon escaping
longing paints the dawn
—Phoebe Lee, grade 11, California.

Daylight Savings Time
Snowmen melting to their death
Springtime can be cruel.
—Adison Chow, grade 8, Massachusetts.

*We thank all the teachers for encouraging
their students to send us tons of entries!*

Poison Oak

Itchy and scratchy
Five leaves of color, all over Oregon
Horrible plant that makes rash
Hate it, feel it, horrible.
—Thomas Christian, grade 5, Oregon.

Spring

As the gentle breeze
Blows upon, the flowers bloom
Under leaves insects
Roam, petals fall, sunlight shines
Upon us all, Spring has come.
—Matilda Bell, grade 5, Oregon.

Butterfly

A butterfly flies
With a breeze falling behind
In the morning Sun.
—Juliet Fike, grade 5, Oregon.

Life, pollen, beauty,
Earth, green, majestic, poison
Everywhere beneath
—Mylie Corwin, grade 5, Oregon.

Once the rain is gone
the smell of Pines reaches me
as sweet as icecream
—Niha Newhart, grade 5, Oregon.

Cherry blossoms fall
All day and night but they don't
Make a single sound.
—Carsyn Kneale, grade 5, Oregon.

Messi is the goat
Sitting on the grass outside
He is super cool!
—Matthew Anderson, grade 5, Oregon.

River flows all day,
Fish are rushing down the stream.
River never stops.
—Zander Le, grade 5, Oregon.

A towering tree
High above the heads of deer
Who graze silently.
—Siddhant Jain, grade 5, Oregon.

Tornadoes

Cold, warm wind make them
devastating and sudden
Still somehow pretty.
—Oliver Martinez, grade 6, California.

Cherry Blossom

Moonlight gently glows
Sakura shines like stardust
Night dreams in petals.
—Grejanne Jalon, grade 6, California.

Go Beyond

The sun is a star
Pluto is not a planet
The moon is so far.
—Jonathan Baquero, gr. 6, California.

Watching the Stars

In the airplane seat
Watching the stars follow me home
Saying goodnight to them.
—Noe Ramirez, grade 6, California.

United Kingdom's Beauty

Beautiful green hills
Breathtaking modern cities
Regal, quaint, elegant
—Mohamad Momen, gr. 6, California.

Oceans form these tears
As waves of yesterday pass
Home remains elsewhere
—Regina Chae, grade 8, California.

A juniper tree
Climbing up the peaceful sky
Like vines on a wall.
—Fay Xie, grade 7, California.

1. Pictures in the night sky
Sparks of imagination
These are constellations
2. Sprawling lush landscapes
Clovers, Hawthorns, and grasses
Ireland's green magic
3. A pitch black night sky
Livened by a thousand lamps
Diwali brilliance
—Mini Murthy, grade 4, Michigan.

The 2025 Asian Celebration Haiku and Tanka Exhibit, *continued*

Haiku & Tanka by Olivia

Sun warming the Earth
The letter written by Spring
A fluttering skirt

Blue flower whispers,
Like a dream in morning mist,
Floating in the wind.

Lotus floats on still,
A pink bloom softly unfolds,
Mirrored in the pond,
Like dawn's glow on glassy waves,
A quiet peace fills the air.

Flowers fill the air,
Gentle winds brush through the grass,
New life everywhere.

Petals gently fall
beneath the soft blooming shape
a breeze passes by
whispers go through the pink snow
peace is sweet flower fragrance

—Olivia Hsu, age 12, Taipei, Taiwan.
She adds: "I tried to express an idea or image that stayed in my mind. Sometimes, even a small feeling or moment can become something worth writing about. I hope my writing can make people pause and feel something, even if just for a moment."

1. In the evening breeze
My field of sunflowers nods
To such a shy sun.

2. In darkness I wish
For a flashlight to turn on—
Fireflies oblige.

3. Magnolia lets
Her petals fall to the ground—
Silent tears of spring.

4. The cozy fire
Only feels warmest once snow
Starts falling outside.

—Madeline Male, grade 10, Kansas.
Sunflowers photo by Madeline Male.

1. Deep night sky, so far,
so close. Almost like you could
brush a winking star.

2. **Song of Spring**
Melodic grass field,
small studs of flowers along
the ground. Song of spring.
—Leela Fleck, age 12, New York.

The park is awesome
Picnics in the park are great
I love the nature
—Ethan Boles, age 8, New York.

He is the special
Guest of nature with plants for
Limbs and squirrel feet
—Roo Lehman, age 7, New York.

Ocean

Beautiful coral
Octopi and big blue whales
The fish are royal
Big waves are great for sails
The ocean deserves its tales
—Scarlett Claus, grade 6, New York.

1. sun sets a blood red
quickly encompassed
by gloaming; twilight
2. reflections of light
painted on the glimmering
rippling blue sea

3. a singular small
but luminous, astral star
amid desolation

—Kelly Han, grade 8, California.



1. Pink, soft, and so light
Flowers dancing in the breeze
It's raining petals.

2. Shining stars on black.
The best planet is this one
Our world—planet Earth.

3. There's a seed under
grass, greener than emeralds.
Deep, deep down, it cracks.
—Naomi Katz-Moss, 10, gr. 4, New York.

1. The forest floor mixed with
Yellows, greens, and browns—nature
Being indecisive

2. I bask in the sun
My hair dances in the wind
Fresh green grass below
For a second, I forgot
I wasn't the only one
—Rebecca Liu, grade 7, New York.

A glimmer of hope
A robin trying to hide
Discreet and low
—Xiwen Zhang, grade 7, New York.

Children run around—
Wind blows into their faces
Moms chasing behind
—Emily Feng, grade 7, New York.

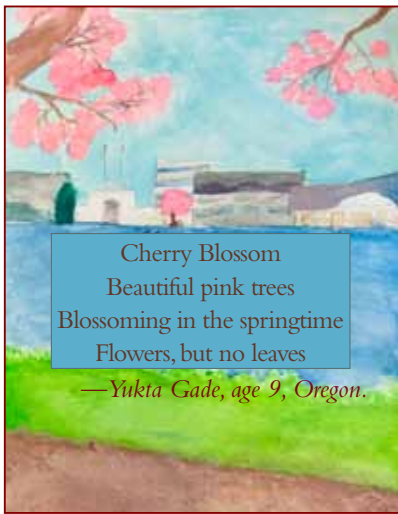
Chatter and chatter
Kids running over the ground
Wood chips flying up
—Jayden Leung, grade 9, New York.

1. Winter doesn't really leave
It makes way for spring, who waits
Winter kept snow behind
Snow blankets spring's new children
Keeping those buds warm and safe

2. Humans destroy life
Selfishly for our own gain
We destroy species
Acting like they're beneath us
Can we live in harmony?

—Charlene Ho, grade 7, New York.

2025 Asian Celebration Haiku & Tanka Art



Cherry Blossom
Beautiful pink trees
Blossoming in the springtime
Flowers, but no leaves

—Yukta Gade, age 9, Oregon.

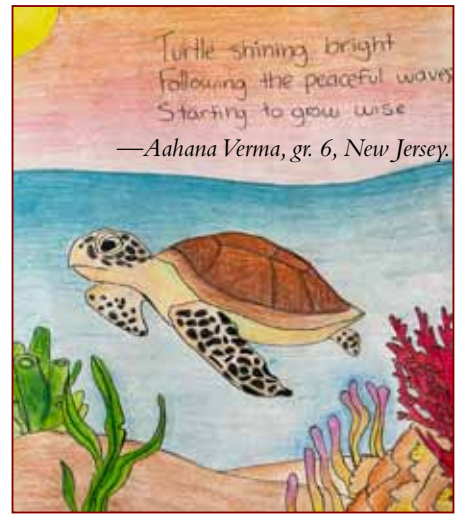


Amazing Artists

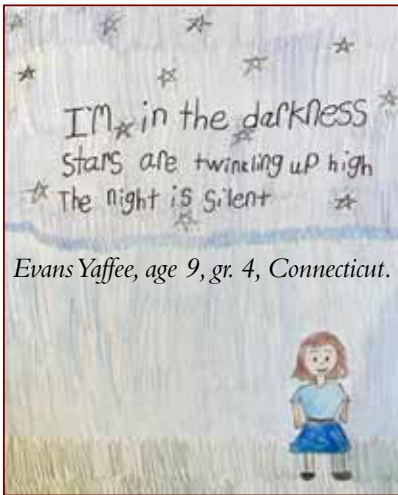
Splattered, colorful,
Red, pink, yellow, purple, blue.
Smells like moms perfume.
Scattered delight everywhere
Like paint on a green canvas.

Allison Suero

Allison Suero, gr. 5, Rhode Island.



Turtle shining bright
Following the peaceful waves
Starting to grow wise
—Aahana Verma, gr. 6, New Jersey.



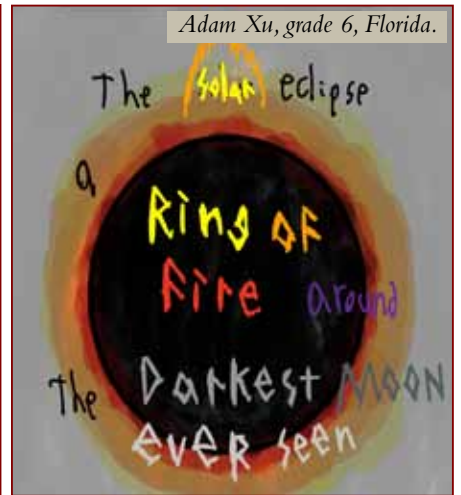
I'm in the darkness
Stars are twinkling up high
The night is silent

Evans Yaffee, age 9, gr. 4, Connecticut.



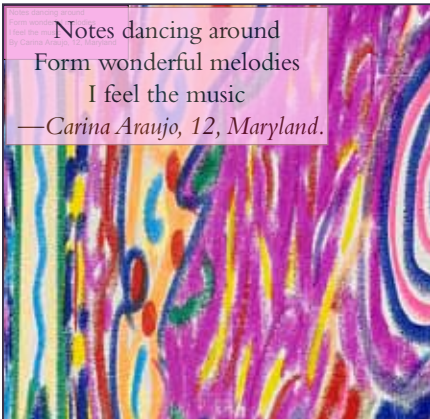
A mysterious world
Black canvas with specks of lights
Peace embraces me

—Carina Araujo, 12, Maryland.



Adam Xu, grade 6, Florida.

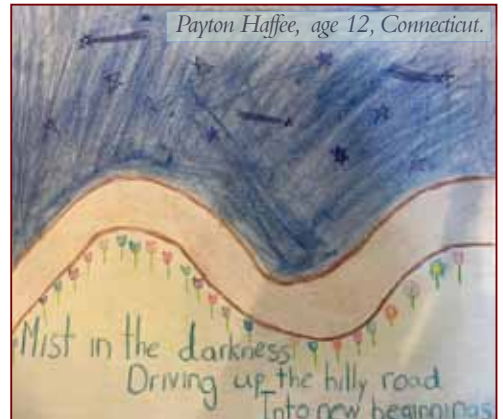
The solar eclipse
a
Ring of
Fire around
The Darkest Moon
ever seen



Notes dancing around
Form wonderful melodies
I feel the music
—Carina Araujo, 12, Maryland.



Blooming scents the air
inhale, a summertime dream
Petals open worlds.
—Morong Liu, 17, P. R. China.



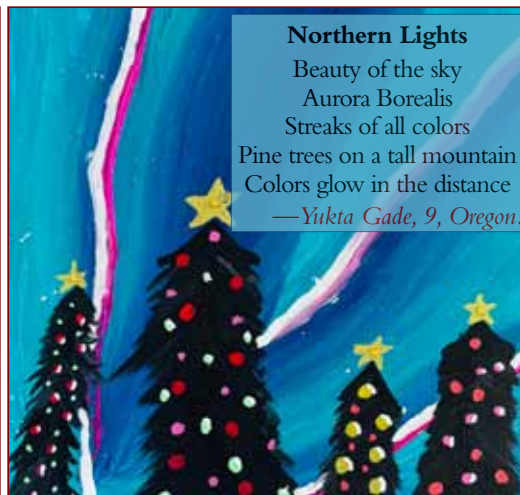
Payton Haffee, age 12, Connecticut.

Mist in the darkness
Driving up the hilly road
Into new beginnings



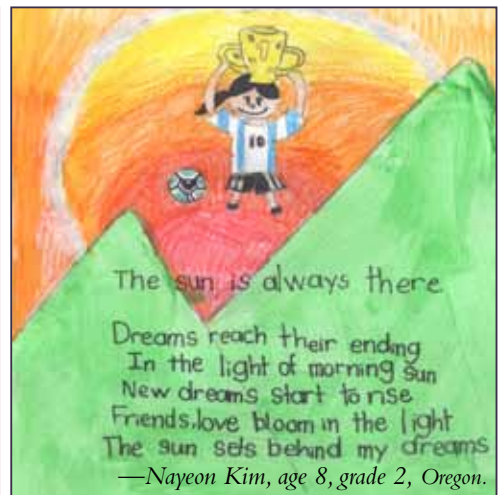
Bailey Huggins,
Age 17, Florida.

We are connected,
All together by one branch,
Standing by one God.



Northern Lights

Beauty of the sky
Aurora Borealis
Streaks of all colors
Pine trees on a tall mountain
Colors glow in the distance
—Yukta Gade, 9, Oregon.



The sun is always there
Dreams reach their ending
In the light of morning sun
New dreams start to rise
Friends love bloom in the light
The sun sets behind my dreams
—Nayeon Kim, age 8, grade 2, Oregon.

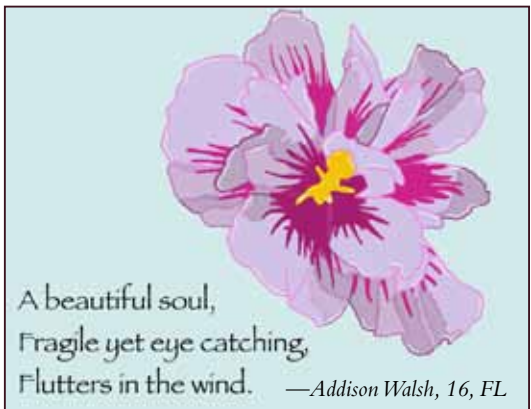
Standing tall and strong
I am rooted to the ground
Each part meaningful
Leaves hold memories and joy
Of now, then, and the future.
—Charlotte Brunner, grade 6, Illinois.

1. Time is delicate
Water slipping from fingers
Drop by drop falling
2. Glitter in the sky
illuminating dark night
Explosion of joy

—Isabella Tòma, grade 8, Illinois.

The good sauce and cheese
With very tasty dough, handmade
Topped with hot mushrooms
—Noah Pak, grade 5, Illinois.

Japanese maple
leaves red as drawn blood droplets
daggers cutting through
—Sebastian Huerta, age 13, grade 7, Oregon.



Eyes orbs of onyx.
Mottled brown and stormy grey
Plush feathers gleaming.
—Olive Jovanoski, Year 4, NSW, Australia.

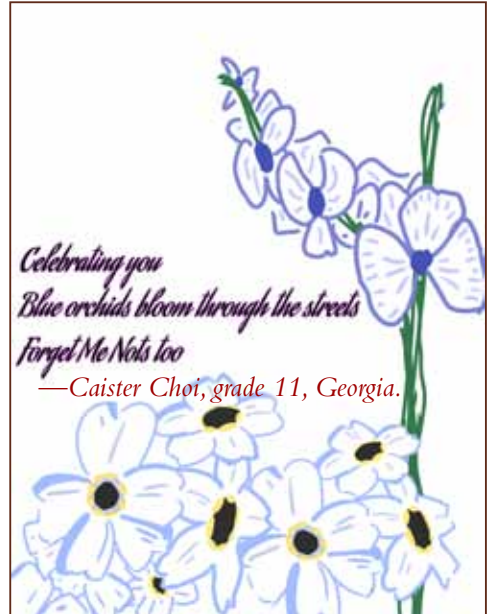


The mind is wild
Beyond my comprehension
Just my useless mind.
—David Garza, gr.5, Rhode Island.

1. A newborn soul's search
For the great unknown
In a tiny turtle's crawl
 2. With each twig and straw
A sturdy fortress rises
Cocooned in tree's embrace
- Yechan (Chloe) Lee, gr. 11, S. Korea.

The Big Storm

Boom of a deep drum
Rain sprinkles over the trees
The sky grows brighter
—Cairo Gundy, grade 5, Rhode Island.



1. find me a flower
sunk in the trench of outcasts
unyielding promise
 2. follow the people
who will guide your lonely path
until you are whole
 3. surrendering to
love as the world becomes more
light with every breath
 4. just as the bully
always finds someone to hate
i love freshly too
- Damian Karnis, gr. 12, Slovakia.

From Students in NSW, Australia

The weeping willow,
With wreathing strong branches but
Insecure and shy...

—Xanthe Gilchrist, Year 4.

Waterfall so calm.
There must be one in heaven.
Cold and relaxing.

—Erika Rakus, Year 3.

A purple gum tree
Glittering eucalyptus
Lines of morning dew.

—Jessica Kopp, Year 4.

1. On the swings alone
A drop lands on my warm cheek
Not sure if it's rain
2. Mist curls through branches
A deer limps across the trail
Scar across its flank
I touch the bark beside me
And wonder what still hurts more.
—Abdulrazak Godwin Omeiza,
grade 11, Oyo State, Nigeria.

Fall

The wind is hopeless
Crying as it blows by trees
Leaves drop like bodies
The trees shake weakly, waiting
For spring seems decades away
—Tianxin (Mira) Liu, gr. 9, California.

At a lifeless pond
Raindrops—carriers of life
Fall from the bright clouds
—Carter Lim Yi-Khai, grade 4, Oregon.

these fleeting moments
like petals in the spring wind
drift then disappear.
held by bonds of memory,
let go as time fades away
—Kimberly Hu, grade 7, Oregon.

On a winter night
Through the frigid wind and ice
Past the snowy hills
Stands a young, snow-covered tree
Bowing its head to the world.
—Katelyn Filary, grade 5, Oregon.

North Shore Country D. S., Illinois

bundled up
first snowflake
falls
—Kit, grade 3.

morning sun
a bird's wing catches
the sunlight
—Cole, grade 3.

last day of school
only one more step
to the park
—Emily P., grade 3.

winter sun
watching the
ice rink melt
—Grant, grade 3.

apple pie
the stockings
are full
—Ishaan, grade 3.

cold day
snow falls
on the treehouse
—Mila, grade 3.

storm rolling in
the last level
of a video game
—Xander, grade 3.

stars looking at the galaxy
—Allison, grade 3.

*Note: This last one is a single-line haiku
called a monoku. It can be read in differ-
ent ways by pausing in different spots.*

1. Poems live always,
Strings of heart-torn words, waiting,
Waiting, soon re-read.
 2. Grass in concrete cracks
I aspire to be like grass
Fierce, surviving, bright
—Nova Macknik-Conde, age 13, gr. 8, NY.
- Golden Sun dips low
Whispers of wind kiss the trees
Night wraps all in peace.
—Jayden B. Victor, grade 5, Rhode Island.

Reminiscent

Quiet peace is here.
In Grandmother's warm embrace,
we talk, cry, and laugh.
—Alina Jiang, age 17, Virginia.

1. Lush, crimson roses
A sweet floral fragrance
Unravelling peace
2. A place still unknown
As fog descends deep below
Crystal blue water
Tall wooden bridges beckon
A hidden story unfolds
—Isabella Hao, age 11, gr. 6, Virginia.

Lightning strikes the ground
As a lion would strike prey
Sudden and deadlly.
—Adam Xu, grade 6, Florida.

Heaps of flowers bloom,
Identical from afar,
but up close, unique.
—Emma Serra, age 15, gr. 10, Florida.

Bark as tough as nails,
yet when you look within,
a sweet and warm sap.
—Cate Russell, age 16, gr. 10, Florida.

The Sun ascends up
Revealing the dark figures
Darkness yields to light.
—Chance Bottenfield, gr. 11, Florida.

Stand tall like a tree
and fight every enemy
by never falling.
—Jillian Fadil, age 16, gr. 11, Florida.

In bloom, colors shine
yet seasons change and light fades
transforming the path.
—Ella Ross, age 16, grade 10, Florida.

Wild wind drives them on—
ghosts of autumn, dead yet free,
seeds of spring they sow.
—Nguyễn Tiến Hưng, 13, Vietnam.

a gnarly tree trunk
sitting sadly by the road
unseen, forgotten
—Katelyn Filary, age 11, Oregon.

2025 Skipping Stones Youth Honor Awards



- ★ ★ Wallace Wu, age 9, New York & Charlotte Kong, grade 3, Jeju, South Korea
- ★ ★ Stephen Chen, age 11, Virginia & Tenzin Palzom, age 11, Illinois
- ★ ★ Sixth Graders of Lawrence M.S., California & Manuga Bandara, age 13, Australia
- ★ ★ Carina Araujo, grade 7, Maryland & Jessie Li, grade 7, B.C., Canada
- ★ ★ Nova Macknik-Conde, age 13, New York & Jevons Ma, age 13, P. R. China
- ★ ★ Hollyn Mei-wen Alpert, 14, California & Jaslene Kwack, age 14, Illinois
- ★ ★ Onew Choi, age 14, South Korea & Aditi Paudel, age 15, Japan
- ★ ★ Madeline Male, age 16, Kansas & Nicole Um, age 16, California
- ★ ★ Jasmine Troutt, age 17, New Jersey & Edward Lee, age 17, New Jersey
- ★ ★ Nature Art Entries by South Korean Students (*See pp. 29-31*)

Hearty Congratulations to all the 2025 Youth Award Winners as well as the students featured in this issue!

What We Can Do to Help Tackle Climate Change

I love art, writing, and our planet. I participate in many art and writing contests, and through my winning designs and artwork, I bring awareness of climate change, and how we can help planet Earth. Over the last three years, I have painted three of my winning designs on storm drains in my city to remind our community that only rain should go down the drain, and that we should not litter. I have volunteered to pick up litter in our beautiful parks. Most importantly, to help reduce greenhouse gases, three of my winning designs were used as bus wraps in Washington, DC. and Maryland for two consecutive years. I have also written a children's book on how to help the environment and have read it in schools to educate children about climate change. Also, every year during Green Week at school, I organize workshops with environmental activities for students to help them understand the importance of protecting our environment and planet.

There are also other ways that we can help. We can lower carbon emissions by using electric cars and taking public transportation. We can pick up trash and recycle paper, plastic, glass, and metal. Also, we can turn off lights to save energy. We can reduce the number of unnecessary things that we buy, or we can reuse old things to create something new. In addition, we can donate to charities, which not only help those in need but also help protect the environment by reducing green house gases due to less manufacturing. Most importantly, we should educate ourselves to spark awareness to help tackle climate change now, for the benefit of future generations.

Our planet needs our help. We caused this damage. Therefore, it is our responsibility to take action now to address climate change and preserve our planet, its beautiful animals, nature, and our lives.

I was inspired to write on environmental issues based on my personal experience. I have been making art and writing since I was 4 years old. During the pandemic, I had more time to pursue my passion and started doing more online art classes through museums of art and participated in art/writing contests. When I won my first contest, I was motivated to continue. Several of the contests were related to the environment, and that has been my focus for most of my art. I use my art and writing to convey important messages. I became interested in arts and writing since it was the only way I communicated for two years. I was afraid of speaking. I never spoke a word for two years at school, but I used my art and writing to convey my feelings and messages. Making art and writing are therapeutic for me. I want viewers or readers of my work to learn something about climate change and take action to help address climate change. Through my research, I have learned that it is the responsibility of each one of us to help address climate change issues.

—Carina Araujo, age 12, grade 7, Maryland. She is a Brazilian-American youth who has won a number of awards. In addition to the haiku below, you can also see Carina's haiku and artwork on pages 11 and 30.

*Smooth flows, wild rapids
A firm grab on the paddle
Life is a river.*

Who Am I?

Am I
An open hand
Welcoming
Any friend
With warmth,
Or a vicious
Red-hot snarl
That snaps and bites?

Human,
Or foreign?
Bright,
With an open mind,
Or dull,
Like an old, dusty stone?

Young,
Like a baby's
First cry
Or ancient,
Like a withered leaf's
Last breath?

These questions
Unlock
The self,
Like a key
Twists and turns
In a rusty lock—
Slumbering and waiting
For centuries,
Already.

What it reveals
Are hidden wonders—
Treasures of sight,
Smell, sound,
Touch, and taste
But also—
Of fear, cold sweat down my back;
Of pain, a presence that overpowers;
Of sacrifice, a choice that divides.

Not always willing to turn.
Stuck.
Shattered.
Demanding effort.
Such is
Me.

*Poems by Wallace Wu,
age 9, New York.*

The Mysteries of Life

We live
Only to die
Like the Mayfly
Whose flame
Is quenched
In the utter
Shortness
Of just a few hours.

Sleep,
Just to wake.
Speak,
An empowering
Deep speech,
Leading to silence.

Life is full...
Of mysteries.

Why do we
Do something
Just to
Undo it—
Always?

Turn on the lights,
To turn them off.
Like an accident
Not meant to happen.

Be gay today,
And shed tears
Tomorrow.

A question
For an answer,
Going eternally.
Will it never end?

Palette of a City

Red is the Sun,
Flaming in the summer sky.
Many relax, and live
In the heat of a star.

But it melts away into the cool
Orange of the sunset,
Which illuminates just
The sharp, angled, deep-set outline
Of a vast community,
Where shadows stretch over benches,
And cars screech to a halt.

Then it gives way to **Blue**—
The color of a silent city,
Where millions upon millions
Of people rest.

And now, the sky blushes **Pink**,
A sign of a city coming to life.

Beneath Borrowed Fire

Haiku Cycle of the Seasons

Spring

Spring breathes into Earth—
Rabbits stir, blossoms whisper,
Life returns in bloom.

Summer

Summer scorches Earth,
Tanning the planet we know
Beneath borrowed fire.

Autumn

Autumn paints the trees—
Vacations fade, leaves tumble,
School bells pierce the air.

Winter

Winter is bitter,
Pure cold cuts through naked skin,
Fire rocks, defiant.

*All poems on this page are by Wallace Wu, age 9, grade 4, New York. He writes:
"Writing poetry helps me express what I observe and wonder about in both the
natural world and the human experience. I enjoy exploring deep questions through
words—how people live, how nature shifts, and how our identities form and change."*

Infinity

Sometimes I want to find a field
Adorned with moonlight flowers,
So I may lay among them
In the starflower night,
When it's bright from miniature suns
That I can almost reach out and grab,
To put in my pocket and carry home
To keep a bit of peace with me
When all I see is war.

I want to lay among the star-shard petals
And pretend it's the sky I rest in,
Imagine that the flowers under me are
The same little lamps as the ones that
Dance in the heavens every night.
I want to feel the universe thrumming
Both inside and out, to see that
Every day stars die, but the sky
Still looks the same.

In the coming of winter, the flowers I lay on will die
But their children will come back next season.
Everything changes, but their essence stays the same.
So although I may die and be reborn
A thousand times,
As long as I do not forget who I am
My soul will never cease to burn so bright,
As bright as the stars in the night sky
And the flora that mirrors them,
A vast expanse of flowers upon flowers
That blur together with the sky and the stars
Until I am no longer bound to life.
—Nova Macknik-Conde, age 13, grade 8, New York.



Danger: Construction Ahead. Photo Nova Macknik-Conde

Hardware

I'm grateful for hardware stores,
And for our house being renovated,
When my dad would go out to buy lightbulbs,
Or mirrors,
Or a bathtub.
I'm thankful that he always said yes
When I asked to come along.
I miss walking around Lowes,
Or Home Depot,
Or whatever store we went to that day,
I miss the weirdly tall ceilings, and the paint-scented air,
and the big gray garages.
I miss making stupid comments,
"The insulation looks like cotton candy!"
And I miss groaning when he retorted,
"I'd tell you a joke about these yardsticks, but it wouldn't
measure up."
I miss the big yellow ladders that rolled,
And looking at the different floor tiles,
And learning why you shouldn't paint all your walls a dark color.
(It makes the room feel smaller.)
I miss blasting Taylor Swift in the car to and from the store,
And my dad singing over it just to annoy me.
I miss going to hardware stores with my dad,
But I'm happy it happened.
And I'm glad that even though we don't go anymore,
We still listen to music in the car,
And watch superhero movies at home,
And make silly jokes,
And play video games just the same.
And even though I know it would be a nightmare,
I almost want to renovate the house again.

—Nova Macknik-Conde, age 13, New York.

young and naive

i have seen stars singing as they sink below the sea
i have glimpsed sincerity hiding under blankets of myths
and legends
i have witnessed scarlet flowers flourishing on blood-soaked
battlefields
i have viewed magic spilling out from between soft lips
and sharp teeth
i have watched the spirit fizz below the skin of dancers
i have observed silver ladybugs carpeting the brittle ice glaciers
i have examined the shards of the sun that ants carry =>

Forsaken

O gods, you hath forsaken your brethren, your kin, your children.
There is a forest, in which grey-white ash falls in a mockery of snow.
The trees are bent and charred.
Their mangled branches reach to the sky, praying for your mercy.
But they pray in vain.
For you will not breathe life back into what once was lush and green.

There is a jungle, rich and lovely with plump petals and sweet fruit,
Your enchantment masquerading as a blessing,
For the flowers are huge and hungry,
And their strangling vines writhe their paths into the minds of travelers.
The flora craves naught but flesh, and you gladly indulge them.
And we mortals do, and shall, suffer in return.

There is an ocean.
A saltwater sea that floods one corner of the surface while ruined castles
of Before stand tall,
Every ripple deepening their cracks.
I wonder, did the people that once lived there beseech you,
As their homes filled with water and washed them away?
Did they raise their eyes and beg for forgiveness, for help, for air
While their spouses and children choked and gurgled?

There are people that reside in the sky, safe and peaceful.
They freely relish the sun and rain and snow.
The priests say you are among them.
That although you have forsaken us,
You are all merciful, and kind, and just.
They lie.
You care not for us, refugees who cannot see the sun,
So I see no trouble in caring not for you.
Old gods, it is time to start anew.
If you shall not slaughter these horrors that plague us,
Then I shall.

—Nova Macknik-Conde, age 13, New York.

=> **young and naive** ...continued

under the lightless earth
i have followed the moonstone fae to the tree from which they march
i have listened to the mourning song that the celestial weeping willow whispers.

so when you call me young and naive,
take note of the honey light in my pupils
and the curl of my tongue when i speak
for truth is rare, and of bright honesty even rarer,
so hear me when i give you reality and i say that
i have seen stars singing as they sink below the sea

—Nova Macknik-Conde, age 13, New York.

Threads of Unity

In every fabric, thread and hue,
Patterns emerge in shades of blue.
Weaving stories of hearts entwined,
A tapestry of souls combined.

Each thread a tale from lands afar,
Together forming life's bright star.
In unity, strength is found,
A common thread that knows no bound.

From diverse fibers, a story grows,
Of shared experiences and hopes.
A quilt of cultures, rich and grand,
Woven together by hand.

In threads of gold and shades of gray,
Our differences find light of day.
Each hue, a bridge across the divide,
An echo of the hearts inside.

Through storms and trials, we shall mend,
This fabric of the world we tend.
For every tear, a stitch of love,
A testament to peace above.

So let us weave with care and grace,
A world where every thread finds its place.
In unity, our spirits soar,
A testament to what we're fighting for.

For in our differences, we see,
The beauty of our shared humanity.
A tapestry that binds us tight,
Threads of hope and love ignite.

—Kasia Badger, written at age 17, Texas.
Kasia has recently published Empathy's Embrace, a collection of about 50 poems. She writes in her book, "In a world increasingly defined by division and distance, there exists a profound need to reconnect with the very essence of what it means to be human." Her poems take us on a journey into the heart of empathy; to see, feel and understand beyond the boundaries of our own experiences. On the Prologue page, she writes, "May these words ignite a spark of compassion within you, encouraging you to reach out, to listen, and to connect."

A Forest, Once

In the quietest summit of a hill, where the sky filtered with green through a thick canopy and mushrooms glowed like lanterns after rain, stood a solitary tree called Olive, enjoying a gentle kiss of the sun. She stood among her family, towering oaks with wisdom in their bark, birches dancing full of giggles with every breeze, and gentle tree leaves that cradled nests like mothers. Dewdrops shone and glittered on a spider's web from the reflection of the sunlight, and the forest hummed with life.

It was a dream from her memory; memory of a warm and safe time. Olive thought it would never end. Back then, she felt happy, she was a part of a big, loving family.

But dreams are like mist, they *always* vanish away when the sun returns.

And so did this one, too!

Olive woke up to the sharp scent of torn soil. The air, that used to be soft and cool, was now heavy and strange. She rolled her eyes and looked right. Her dearest friend, Ash, who had been standing with her for what felt like forever, was chopped down. Olive couldn't think of anything. Inside of her, it felt like her whole trunk had cracked open.

They had come back.

Despair carved itself deep into her rings, Olive cried in agony. Although the echo of pain felt too alive inside her, she could not leave any sound. Everything felt like a nightmare, the kind that clings on to you, the kind you never wake up from, even after opening your eyes.

She longed for the time of what once was: *a forest untouched*. Now roads and buildings had replaced everything, scraping the sky. Where flowers and birds used to dance, machines took over and screamed. Two old witnesses of the fade, now one standing still, with nothing left but sorrow. Now the lanterns have dimmed, darkness took over.

Light rain began falling, a mourning drizzle. It touched the ground where Ash once was, it felt like the sky was grieving with her.

I cannot hide, nor can I fight. Olive thought. *But I can remember. I will keep every memory of Ash and the others.* Carrying the memory, she kept her friends alive within her.

Knowing that her summer will never come home, Olive cried in silence, rooted in the same soil, weathering the years. Although the world had forgotten, Olive remembered.

—Hanbyeol Luna Kim, grade 7, Jeju-do, South Korea.

Charlotte Kong (grade 3, Jeju, South Korea) Shares:

Able to speak both English and Korean, I always seek ways to contribute to my community. Last year, I happened to find out about a U.S. military base in Korea. I wanted to present Korean culture to the U.S. military and their families. To prepare for the event, I gathered my sisters and their friends. For a few weeks, we discussed how we were going to show the families our Korean culture. While discussing, each one of us suggested an idea about cultural activities. My idea was to write their names on name tags in Korean phonetically.

In addition to sharing ideas, we needed to reach out to the military base. We wrote a proposal letter in which we showed what we had prepared. A few days later, we received a reply saying they were very excited about the event. They would readily provide us with a space inside the mall where we could hold the event. Overjoyed, we started making advertisements and rehearsing for the event. I especially enjoyed the roleplay in which our parents pretended to be U.S. soldiers. It was very funny.

When the day came, we took the airplane to go to Seoul from Jeju and rode in two cars to the military base in Pyeongtaek, a rural city about 50 miles south of Seoul. When I first went on base, I felt as if I were in America. As soon as we arrived at the mall, we greeted the staff members and changed into Hanbok, Korean traditional clothes. The staff had everything set up for us. We were to perform right in the center of the mall where we could be very easily seen. I laid out all the color pencils and nametags on the table and I was ready.

"Come and try!" I attracted attention of passers-by inside the mall and beckoned to them. But there were too many for me to handle. Thankfully, some of the employees of the mall greeted visitors and lined them up for me. I was a little nervous at first, and I couldn't explain my part of the event as clearly as I had practiced. Soon, however, I came to feel comfortable and excited. I asked the visitors their names and wrote them phonetically in Korean on name tag stickers. When they looked at their names written in the Korean language, and put the name tags on their shirts, it was very fun and rewarding. People from different backgrounds and cultures enjoyed the same activities, such as writing Korean letters, origami, and K-pop dance, together. I felt the event really added more vibrancy and diversity to our community. Although I was tired after the event, I wanted to be part of cultural activities like this again. —Charlotte Kong.

Reminders of the Rain

3 A.M. My eyes stared at the screen in front of me, the minuscule black print a trail of ants on an aggravatingly bright surface. Textbooks, worksheets, and stray candy wrappers were strewn over my desk, and the air was heavy with a suffocating stillness. My immobilized hands (fingers hovering over the keyboard) and hunched back (protesting any subtle motion) belied my racing thoughts, which quickened with each added worry about a future exam or busy schedule.

It was just another school night, yet I could not compel myself to work. A faint ringing (louder every second) invaded my thoughts, and I gladly closed my eyes at the temporary reprieve.

As the ringing faded and the stifling silence was restored, a **crack** like a bullet hitting a windowpane startled me. It was not long before I heard a smattering of bullets firing down upon glass. My curiosity piqued, I scurried to the window and pulled up the blinds to be greeted by small droplets of water dotting the window.

Inexplicably, my lips curved into a smile. Something in how the delicate raindrops—each a trembling whisper of life—shattered against the glass revitalized me, like a clear film set before my blurry gaze.

I impulsively grabbed an umbrella and a nearby sweater splayed pathetically on the ground. To my slight alarm, I felt a sudden, inexplicable determination to step outside and experience the rain, but the uncertainty vanished the moment I unlocked the front door and inhaled the crisp, earthy air.

In hindsight, I was desperate to reconnect with nature after I had neglected to do so because of overwhelming stress and anxiety. When I reached the driveway, the rain pelted down harder than ever, drumming a grounding rhythm on my umbrella. Standing motionless, I felt tendrils of calm rippling throughout my body, loosening tense knots and extricating any anxious thoughts. Suspended in the moment, I no longer felt detached from the present.

For the first time in months, my mind felt wonder-

fully bare and empty.

Rain illuminated by the streetlight splattered like silvery tears against a nearby tree. It was the only tree on the entire block that had not sprouted flowers, a late bloomer. The other trees—a sea of green—were bespeckled with white.

Gradually, the rain came to a halt. As raindrops dripped from an overhanging pipe that gurgled with the influx of rain, I headed back inside, my hunched back straightened tall.

By morning, the previous night felt like a dream. The damp, dark pavement had fully dried, leaving behind no indication of the rain. Outside, the tree still had not bloomed, its buds unbudging despite the rain's insistent persuasion.

"But that's okay," I thought. Such a simple, fleeting moment wrought so many enduring lessons.

Although stress and responsibilities remained, I was reminded of something I had forgotten: it is important to pause and stay in the moment. When I was caught in a storm of ticking deadlines, blurred hours, and mounting papers, the steadfastness of nature taught me that even in chaos there is clarity.

Most of all, that faded moment taught me that there is no shame in being a late bloomer. As with the stubborn bud, growth does not occur when I expect it to—but that does not make it any less meaningful when it finally does. The quiet, fleeting beauty of the rain was a reminder that clarity and peace do not come all at once. They come in pieces—whispers of calm in the chaos, raindrops on glass.

"My name is Nicole Um, a 16-year-old and a current sophomore who loves to write, bake, bike, swim, volunteer at the animal shelter and spend time with my older sister.

"Reminders of the Rain details my encounter with nature that changed my perspective about my life. It captures a moment during a particularly stressful night when I stepped outside into a sudden rainstorm. This simple act brought me an unexpected sense of peace, clarity, and growth, demonstrating the power and beauty of nature's impact on people."

—Nicole Um, age 16, California.

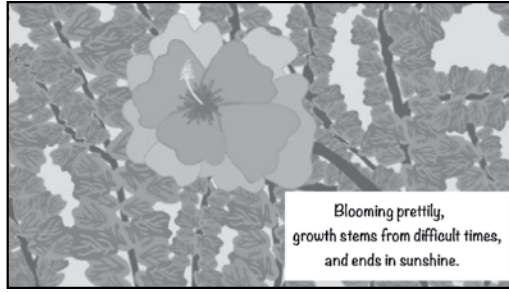
Skipping Stones Stew

Observations on a Walk

I took a walk
through my neighborhood
just like any other walk,
but I noticed so many things.

The plum blossoms in shades of
white and pink were blooming
in the trees along the sidewalk.
The green fields looked so
open and free. The green leaves growing
along with the callery pears. Bees coming
out of their nests and flying in the sky. Birds flying
in circles with their wings spread wide,
drifting with the wind.
I noticed the wind blowing
against my skin, my hair
flying in all directions.
My hands coming out to
run along the dark green thickets.
It was rough and gritty along my skin.
My face cracked open in a smile.
I couldn't help feeling the joy
spreading from my heart
running outwards in my body.
On my walk, it wasn't
just me,
I was one with nature.

—Alina Jiang, age 17, born in P. R. China, lives in Virginia. “On my walk, I passed by a bush that I had never noticed before. It had the most vibrant green leaves, and the color was so beautiful, I couldn't help but stop and take a picture. After I took my picture, I noticed how intricate each of the leaves was and the delicate patterns on each one of them. Later at home, I took some time to research the species of the plant and discovered that the bush was called Viburnum. Facts I learned that were interesting are that some species of Viburnum are used in herbal medicine to treat muscle cramps and menstrual pain, and that Viburnum opulus is a national symbol in Ukraine, symbolizing resilience and the motherland. Through my walk, I not only got to enjoy the wildlife surrounding me but also gained new knowledge and felt connected to Earth.”



Blooming prettily
Growth stems from difficult times
And ends in sunshine.

—Kathryn Thompson, age 16, Florida.

I Won't Give Up

You hope for my demise,
but I refuse to fall.

You push me,
but I refuse to stay down.

You want to see me broken,
but I refuse to give you the satisfaction.

I will get up,
though it may seem bleak.

I will get up,
against the forces pushing against me.

Come at me with all your strength—
I won't relent.

I won't.

—Alina Jiang, age 17, Virginia. “What I like most about writing is that it offers you a space where you can be alone with your thoughts and feelings. It's a creative process that brings a lot of joy to my life. In my writing, I am passionate about uncovering untold stories and experimenting with unique perspectives and narratives.”

When the World Is Quiet

When the world is quiet, I can hear
The birds singing soft songs near.
No honking cars or shouting crowd,
Just the breeze, not too loud.

My heart feels calm, like morning light,
My mind takes off like a kite in flight.

Peace is not just no more war,
It's sharing less and giving more.

It's hugging my mom without a word,
Or planting seeds to feed a bird.
It's helping a friend who scraped his knee,
And letting the last cookie go for free.

When the world is quiet, I truly see
That peace begins inside of me.

—Parth Singla, age 9, Gurgaon (Haryana) India.

The People from Nowhere

I did not know my home.

What is home? Home is the place where you live feeling like you truly belong. Home is the place where you feel appreciated, seen, and heard. Home is the place where you truly feel right. For many, including myself, we have never completely felt the touch of home.

I am the first born daughter of two immigrants. Both having known the feeling of home twice, and then leaving it to find another. I have lived my life in America, without, until recently, knowing my home country. I recognized Illinois as my home, and for years to come, it will be. But I, and my ancestors, will always see Tibet as our home.

My essay speaks of the wistful longing for home, something that feels like it will never come. It mentions the pains of those who have repeatedly left their home, in search of something better, and shines the lights on the conflicts occurring in my home country.

For nine years, I spent my life without ever knowing what Tibet was all about. I lived without knowing my culture, before discovering a piece of myself I hadn't known. My story connects the journey towards finding my culture and recognizing the troubles in Tibet.

My name is Tenzin Palzom, and I have found my home.

In 1959, some 65 years ago, over seven million people became without a country, without a home, or without a family. Approximately 7.7 million people lost something, whether it be large, small, or sentimental. Homes were destroyed, and a war was fought and lost. Heroes were imprisoned, monks were killed, and a country was taken.

Our home is gone. Tibet was once a beautiful, gifted natural resources country. Now, it is forgotten in history. I myself lost my family, after Tibet was taken by China.

Still today, some of us go to school to be told that they are not Tibetan, rather they are Chinese. They are told that they should simply stop trying to be different and should accept their 'true country.' Still today, I tell people that I would rather be from nowhere than surrender. We stand proud for our family members at home who cannot. We stay loyal to our country for those who are forced to change their lives.

We stay Tibetan despite those who change their ethnicities and their heritage to stay alive. It feels through history, times would move in whatever direction it wanted, and if you couldn't keep up, you were left behind.

Every day I think about my family, those fallen, those forgotten. Home has grown to be Illinois, but home will always remain Tibet in my mind. One day, we want to go home to a free country, knowing that we never turned our back on our country. We want to go home one day proud, knowing that our country will never have thought of us as traitors.

So that is why we go to every protest, every language class, every history lesson, and celebrate every holiday. Even with the knowledge that we would most likely never go home, we try. After all, to speak in a place where you are silenced, you must shout.

When I was nine years old, I first went to the Tibetan community center. I couldn't even spell Tibet. It made me angry. It embarrassed me realizing how little I knew of my own home country, so I learned more. I worked harder, and by the following September, I had achieved top marks on my exams. It still didn't feel like enough. I didn't feel like I was really assisting my country. My parents assured me that I was making a difference just by staying loyal, but it didn't matter to me.

On March 10, 2024 (*Tibetan National Uprising Day*), I went to my first protest. It surprised me, to hear of how we did this every year, and I had never known. It was one of the most wonderful experiences I have been through—shouting alongside my friends, seeing people watching us, and for once, noticing.

That is why they ran even when their legs were broken, screamed even when their mouths were covered, and reached for the future even when their arms were cut.

Hope is a funny thing, especially in places of loss.

—Tenzin Palzom, age 11, Illinois.

Tiny little things,
Overridden by our gaze
Needing to be seen.
Magical little places
Tiny spaces past our eyes.
—Natalie Laufenberg, grade 6, Illinois.

A Bridge Between Two Identities

When I put on my *Hanbok*,
a traditional clothing of South Korea,
I feel myself unite.
Two nationalities,
two cultures,
two worlds,
weaving together
to make up who I am.
A swirl of threads, unique,
yet bound together.
The silky touch of the *Hanbok*
carrying my ancestors' history.
Vibrant colors, woven to create
a beautiful work of clothing.
Ornate patterns and designs,
running across the cloth,
telling stories of Korea's past.
Hanbok is more than just a piece of clothing.
It is a bridge between two parts of myself,
yearning to come together.
At times intertwined,
other times independent.
It symbolizes who I am now,
and who I will always be.

—Tae Lee, age 12, gr. 6, New York. "I am a 2nd-generation Korean-American, and I come from the Hansan Lee Clan (한산 이씨 in Korean), a family with a history dating back roughly 1,000 years. Balancing my two cultures has been a significant part of my life and is a major component of my identity."

Breathe In and Smile Out

In the green and silvery balance,
few slip through the grasps of those who wait
Fingers crossed and eyes closed
You can trust the sunlight to catch you
Breathe in and smile out
until you reach the floor
Let the air gently set you,
then open your eyes
Keep breathing in the wind
and smiling out your dreams
because now you are home

—Vivian Steel, age 11, Illinois. "My poem is about a tactic I sometimes use when I need to steady myself. I do this a lot, and for the most part, it works."

Plastic Wrapping

I have dropped
The crinkled pieces
of a KitKat bar's
Plastic wrapping from my hands
sweaty with greed
and which
Are now
probably floating
Inside of me
and you
forgive me
It was small
I didn't think dropping one
would make a Difference
Difference
Difference
Difference
Difference

—Emme Garlinghouse, grade 10,
California.

Earth's Lament

As factories billow smoke in torrid nights,
Pouring molasses on the highways, blights
Fuming, and belching vapor in the air,
A city mired in sluggish despair.
As icebergs sink and oceans creep on high,
As water seeps inland, where the dry lands lie,
As homes once hoisted sink to coastal ground,
Gaia's tears streak her soiled face, decrowned.
As glaciers crumble, scorched taking toll,
As flora wither out of her control,
As acid rains upon a glade once bright,
As hurricanes tear, ravaging all in sight,
As clouds spit up their sulfur, mustard-dyed,
As forests pale in sickness now subside,
As riots break and leaders feebly fall,
We start to see—we somehow caused it all.
As smug consumers burn in self-made greed,
Yet people rise, demanding a new creed,
Tending to their poor Mother and her needs,
And planting seeds for future nobler deeds.

—Stephen Chen, age 11, Virginia.

Haiku Communication

Geographical gaps
were bridged. Technology
was responsible.
The entire world
at our fingertips, yet we
are further apart.
Tales going this way
and that in seconds yet every-
one feels unheard.
A chasm opened,
before us, devoid of any,
human emotion.
Communication
just became harder than it
was before gadgets.
Emojis to mask
emotion, texts that don't
convey the truth.
We long, to reach out
beyond the screen, captivity
and truly connect.
We are trying hard,
to talk to bots, so why
not fellow humans?
—Elaine E. Jinto, age 14, India.

Tteokbokki and Borscht

It didn't start with some grand mission. Just a small question late one night: What can I do, from here, for someone I may never meet?

I watched a documentary about refugee children, kids who had lost their families, their homes, even their languages. The more I watched, the heavier it felt, like their world was pressing quietly against mine. I wanted to do something, to reach across the invisible line between their lives and mine. But most ways to help weren't made for someone like me. They needed you to be an adult, to be there in person, or to speak another language fluently. And I couldn't do any of that.

Then I stumbled upon ENGIN, a program that connects English speakers with Ukrainian students. After training, I was paired with Olena, a teenager living in Ukraine. We scheduled our first call. She would log on early in the morning, and I would join just after midnight. At first, it felt straightforward: she wanted to practice English, and I was there to help.

But very quickly, it became something much deeper.

Some nights, Olena didn't show up. I would sit there, blinking through exhaustion, wondering: Did she not wake up on time? Did the power go out? Is she safe? When she managed to get back in touch, she would apologize softly, explaining there had been more shelling or another blackout. Her voice stayed calm, almost casual. But the reality behind her words was anything but normal.

Still, we kept going.

I am Korean American. I grew up speaking English at school and Korean at home, always switching between languages, between identities. I hadn't thought much of it until Olena. Until I realized how language gave me the power to cross cultures. It could be both a bridge and a home.

When exams piled up or fatigue tempted me to cancel, I reminded myself: she was showing up, even in the middle of a war. I could show up too. And so, two teenagers—divided by oceans, blackouts, and sleepless nights—built something that no border could block.

We practiced vocabulary, laughed over awkward phrasing, and traded stories about favorite foods. She told me about *borscht*; I told her about *tteokbokki*. Some days, the internet cracked and stuttered so badly that we typed back and forth on Google Docs like using

walkie-talkies. Some days, words gave out completely, and we just sat there, two blinking screens and two beating hearts.

At first, I thought I was helping her. But over time, I realized she was teaching me. How to listen even when it's hard, how to be patient with silence, how to keep showing up, quietly and fully. And slowly, I began to understand something more. Diversity isn't just about different languages or flags. It's about what we create in the space between us. It taught me that showing up for someone who's different from you isn't a duty, it's a gift. It means standing at the edge of your own world and saying, There is room here for yours too.

Olena once told me, "When I study, I don't feel fear. It makes me feel like I still have control." That moment opened something in me. What we were building was not just a tutoring session. It was hope. It was peace, not through treaties or speeches, but through quiet, steady effort. Through reading sentences at 3:00 a.m., through smiling when the power flickered back on, through choosing connection over convenience.

A year later, Olena jokes in English. She dreams of becoming a communications director, of telling her story to the world.

But what stays with me isn't just her grammar. It is her spirit. Her unshaken belief in a future still worth reaching for.

Maybe that's what diversity really is. Not just different colors, languages, or customs. But the choice, day after day, to meet across those differences. To listen. To build. To believe that in small, human acts, we begin to stitch the world back together.

I used to think peace had to be loud and visible. Now I know: sometimes, peace is two young people refusing to give up on each other.

Across borders, across blackouts, across long, tired nights, we kept going.

We built a bridge out of words. And we are still crossing it.

—Edward Lee, 17, grade 11, New Jersey. "As a Korean American, I have long walked the border between cultures—language shifts at the table and in school—but it wasn't until I was speaking with Olena, living through the realities of war, weekly, that I really understood the value of the experience."

From Pain to Peace

I am from the depressing, boring, regretful drive to summer school
From saying bye to my dad for probably the last time
I am from swinging alone on the swing set
From swish to swoosh
From knowing only but one person
To not even hanging out with him
I am from seeing my sister and uncle walk up to the short gate
From her being tomato red
From her saying she's sick
From getting in my uncle's jeep
To seeing the big red Emergency sign on the small valley hospital
I'm from waiting for someone to give me information
To getting the news that he had a stroke
To driving as fast as a cheetah to the better hospital almost a hour away
From finally getting there
From staying almost a month with him in a coma
I'm from never getting to see him in the I.C.U.
I'm from getting the news of transferring him to a hospital in San Diego
To staying two years seeing him, telling him stories, missing tons of
school, having to keep my grades up
From city to city we travel
I'm from rarely getting good news
From getting news that our grandma has passed
To attending one of my closest family's funeral
To finding out my mom has a boyfriend
I'm from never hearing a word, never seeing very good
improvements, never seeing any movement from him
From only seeing the casual blink or cough
To seeing the oxygen being pumped straight through his throat
To seeing food being pumped straight to the stomach
I am from transferring him to a hospital in Camarillo
I am from finally hearing the news that he's getting worse
From finally hearing the news that he's gone
I am from seeing the urn that my dad probably loves
From his favorite shade of gray to the silver-grey ring around it.
I am from arriving to the cemetery
I am from the beautiful table with all his medals from the marines
From the flashback of the stories he always told us
To holding back my tears
From letting it all out on my mom's shoulder
To the Marines that honored my dad
To the American flag they gave my mom, then passed to me
I am from keeping it all to myself and telling no one.
I am from knowing he is no longer in pain and now in peace

—Mason Ancheta, grade 6, California.

No Hate, No Harm

Why hate others?
Why show racism?
People are equal
Oh, the criticism.
Whispers from many
Most aren't kind
Just because I'm not the same?
The feeling is unsteady.
Hatred is a strong feeling
Anxiousness is too.
Why make other people feel that?
I don't have a clue.
Everybody is equal.
We may have a different face,
And we may have a different fate
But why hate my race?
Different places
Different countries
Races of all colors
Let's just find peace.

—Grejanne Jalon, grade 6, California.

Why Call Me the Name?

Why call me the name
That cuts like a knife?
I stand in front of a mirror,
Reflecting on my life.
My skin holds a story,
One just like yours,
We share all the struggles,
Behind our closed doors.
In kindness and courage,
Let's bridge this space,
Together we flourish,
In love, we find grace.

Let's end the hate towards black people
Together us brothers and sisters stand strong
Like bark on the tree never letting go.
Why is the world so mean and cold
we always should stand together.

Let our story be told.

Black Lives Matter.

—Bennie Leggett IV, grade 6, California.

The Jungle Is Covered

The jungle is covered
With asphalt.

Someone cleared all the trees,
leaving the scarlet macaw no place to lay eggs.

In the river, fish are swimming
among the trash, plastic, and pesticides
that someone muddled the water with.

The breeze brings intense scents
of smoke and pollution
that someone released into the air.

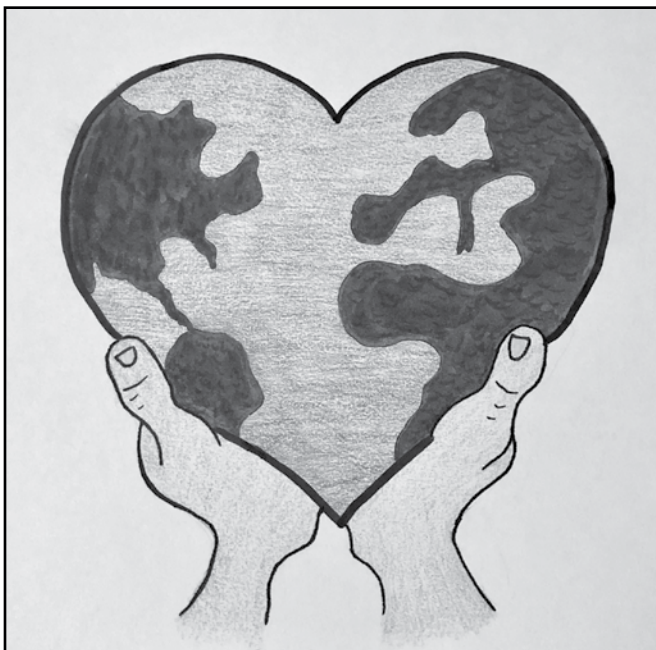
I cover my nose and run inside
but what about the birds and squirrels
who have no such escape route?

Some people try to get away
to the beach, putting on sunglasses
to filter reality.

Someone jumps into the water, instantly enamored
with microplastics—they are sparkly!

They are like a snow globe!
They are a taste of our own poison.

Earth in Our Hands



“My hobbies include writing, reading, art and photography. I gain inspiration for my work through observing the natural world. I appreciate nature, and I feel it’s important to preserve it.”

—Madeline Male, age 16, Kansas.

Just A Fantasy

Your fantasy can be anything you want—
in mine, the world’s problems I’d confront.

Hunger and dirty water would no longer be found;
we’d expand cleanliness, and grow more food to go around.

In this fantasy, poverty wouldn’t be known.

Everyone would feel supported and never alone.

As for poor air quality, climate change, and pollution,
there would’ve long been a practical, working solution.

Each refugee would be able to return to their own door,
after families were torn apart by so much war.

Disease would be contained, cancer would be cured,
and a healthy future for generations would be ensured.

Around the world freedom and equality would prevail;
ideas of liberty would be implemented on a larger scale.

Individually, we’d take charge and be self-assigned
to live our lives with words and actions helpful and kind.

These goals are worthy to strive for,
albeit a lofty ideal.

Should it all stay just a fantasy,
or should we try to make it real?

Preservation

Our days are bustling and full:
School, sports, chores—hardly a lull!

The only peace I managed to find
Was in a forest that helped me quiet my mind.

Under towering trees, hearing branches whisper,
I said, “Thank you, Earth, for turning fall crisper,
Spring milder, summer hotter, and winter into a snowy freeze.”

To give its response, the Earth quiets the breeze:
A chorus of robins, chickadees, and bluebirds
Somehow tells me so much, without any human words.

With its resources, beauty, and just plain fun,

Isn’t it clear Earth is uniquely the one
To give us this life-supporting combination

Of water, warmth, air, and land?

Isn’t it worth taking a stand
To show our planet appreciation,
Through well deserved care... and preservation?

Straddling Two Worlds: Life in Seoul's International School Community

When I tell people I'm from Korea, I often encounter curious questions about my school experience. Their reactions reveal how little many understand about the unique cultural position I occupy.

Attending an English-speaking school in Seoul is indeed like living in two worlds—a reality I navigate daily through language, identity, and community. My experience both supports and complicates this assertion in ways that illuminate the nuanced reality of international education in Korea.

As a Korean citizen with Korean parents, my life diverges significantly from the typical Korean student experience. I attend an American-curriculum international school, worship at an international church, and live in the diverse U. N. Village area where embassies cluster. My social circle and extracurricular activities—from sports to debate—exist primarily within this international community.

This isn't unusual in Seoul. Contrary to some assumptions, international schools serve not just foreigners but also Korean students with dual citizenship, those who've lived abroad, and families like mine who value educational approaches different from Korea's traditional system. Many graduates continue to universities in America, following a path that bridges Korean identity with global opportunity.

International schools do create cultural bubbles—environments where English dominates, Western educational philosophies prevail, and social norms differ from mainstream Korean society. I've felt this separation acutely in everyday encounters: the tension when Korean public school students stare at my English-speaking friend group in elevators; the strange disconnect I feel passing uniformed Korean students in the subway; the distance I experience when news about KSAT (Korea's college entrance exam) seems to describe another world entirely.

Yet these bubbles are permeable. My Korean identity still shapes my daily life—I speak Korean at the dinner table and observe traditional manners with my grandparents. The cultural bubble isn't hermetically sealed but rather constantly negotiated through daily interactions that force me to code-switch between worlds.

Living between cultures has created moments of profound identity confusion. The heaviness I feel when encountering groups of Korean public school students isn't just about language or clothing differences—it's about belonging. Korean schools feel simultaneously familiar and unapproachable, creating an unsettling liminal space where I am neither a full insider nor an outsider.

This cultural duality has become integral to my identity. The frustration of navigating multiple worlds has transformed into a deeper understanding that diversity isn't just an abstract concept but something embodied in individual experience. Being multicultural myself has allowed me to relate to others who straddle different worlds and to recognize that belonging can be complex without being contradictory.

While my international school experience has sometimes created feelings of displacement, it has also granted me a unique perspective. Not being fully immersed in either Korean or international culture has enhanced my empathy—I understand foreigners' experiences while also recognizing the challenges of cultural difference from a Korean perspective.

The "cultural bubble" critique overlooks how these environments can foster a valuable dual consciousness. My experience has taught me that diversity isn't just about different people coexisting, but can exist within individuals themselves. I carry two worlds within me, switching between perspectives and drawing on multiple cultural frameworks to understand complex situations.

Living between worlds hasn't always been easy, but it has expanded my thinking and prepared me for a global future where such cultural fluidity is increasingly valuable. The international school bubble, for all its limitations, has given me the gift of seeing the world through multiple lenses—a perspective I wouldn't trade despite the occasional discomfort of belonging everywhere and nowhere at once.

—Onew Choi, age 14, grade 8, Seoul, South Korea.
"Growing up with my brother and younger sister, I've learned to navigate the cultural boundaries that separate my school life from mainstream Korean society... I hope my reflections help others understand that identity isn't always straightforward and that diversity can exist within individuals themselves, not just between different groups of people."

From the Ocean to the Fresh Water

I am born in a river. I smell its freshness. I hear its roar.

I want to stay. But an instinct tells me to swim. Alongside my salmon brethren, I swim with ease, following the flow of the river as it leads me through various bodies of water, thousands of kilometers of swimming, until I reach the ocean.

I smell salt, indicating that it is a new environment. The next second, I smell a ton of things I don't want to talk about. (*Only much later, I will learn that the ocean is the bathroom of the fishes*). Still, the first body of water I have been through, its scent and other sensory details, lingers in my head.

I must train, but I am not sure why. I see all the other fishes swimming around me, so I follow them.

One day, Bob, my fellow salmon, makes an announcement: *"Alright Salmon Comrades, it is time for you to finally complete your life cycles! To do this, you all must go on a dangerous journey, from the Ocean to the Freshwater. Your journey will begin tomorrow. Are you all ready?"*

"YES!" All the salmon yell. I roll my eyes. *Going to freshwater?* "Nah, I'm not doing that." Everyone turns to me, giving reasons why I should go.

"It'll be fun."

"You can reproduce!"

"You must fulfill your destiny!"

Nothing convinces me. But then, something from my past ignites my memory: the fresh smell of the water where I was born. For some weird reason, I feel an unstoppable urge to swim there right now. No matter how I resist the urge, I know I have to go to the river tomorrow.

The next day, we salmon begin our journey. No one tells us where to go. We have a special ability to use Earth's magnetic poles to guide us back to our birthplace. We swim, day and night, until finally, I sense something different. The water has changed. I could feel the saltiness of the ocean back then, but now, I could sense the water becoming less salty and more familiar.

However, the journey also gets more difficult as I go on. The water is different; it is like the water is pushing me back. Finally, after a long period of time, I

know I am in the rivers for sure. After a while, my back becomes humped. My teeth become sharp. I can smell much more, and what I smell becomes more and more familiar. I hear the voice of the river.

The river says, "Though I rage outwardly, I feel calm. I taste the salmon as I touch the land that encloses me. I pity their struggle, but I do not alter my flow. I feel the prickly rocks and sand. I am the river that pushes the salmon. I am the hardship that they must face in order to reproduce. I am part of their start and part of their end. I have been along for quite a while, and I see this every year. I slowly bob, pushing the fish back bit by bit."

I push through the water; however, it pushes me back. I shoot through the water, but it throws me back. I am tired. I think I am going to die, but I keep swimming. Suddenly, a salmon that was swimming to me is targeted by an eagle. Within seconds, he is devoured by the flying predator. Then, river otters take out almost a twentieth of our comrades. I am devastated by this. I never knew my training would help me in such situations, so I hadn't trained diligently. Now, I knew I had messed up. However, it is too late. Mustering all my strength, I jump over waterfalls, one after another. Despite the pain, I persevere. My fellow salmon and I swim and swim, until we finally stop to rest. Ahead of us is a giant waterfall, and we jump over it, only to find the mouths of bears awaiting us. My friends, Ken and Bob, are immediately devoured.

"No!" I yell, but I must focus on myself, for I also am about to be devoured. Using all my strength and seeing a lot of my comrades being eaten by bears, I flick the bear in the face and soar through the air.

When I land, I see a turtle doing some weird *kung fu* stuff. I fall right on top of him.

"Owww." He speaks. *"Why did you interrupt my Tai-Chi? And you are a salmon! What are you doing not swimming upstream?"*

"Because I hate it! Why do I have to swim UPSTREAM!!!!"

"Upstream is not the problem. It is you that is the problem. You need to see through all the chaos and focus."

"What do you mean! How can I focus when the

From the Ocean to the Fresh Water... *contd.*

stream is pushing me back?"

"You need to change your mindset. Don't focus on complaining about swimming upstream, instead, focus on how to swim upstream."

"I tried! But everyone around me is failing!"

"Balance your emotions!" The turtle then tells me to take ten deep breaths and count to ten. I close my eyes for a few seconds. Miraculously, I feel at peace. I fling myself into the air, back into the river.

There's no escaping it now. My eyes are river, my mouth is river. I have no food. I just swim. Every day is a duel with the river. Sometimes, it bests me, but I still persevere. After three weeks of this, I defeat the river.

As I cushion myself on the river sand and start to help fertilize the next generation, I think about what this upstream journey really meant to me. It was not just a task in life. It helped me grow both physically and spiritually. Although I complained about swimming upstream, I realized that in the end, maybe the river wasn't bad after all; she was, in reality, a life-sustainer!

—Jevons Ma, age 13, Shanghai, People's Republic of China. *"My hobbies are badminton, reading, golf, and violin. When watching YouTube one weekend, I found a video showing salmon struggling desperately to swim upstream. In another documentary, there were bears waiting for the salmon who made it past a bend. It really made me think about nature. I wrote this piece to show how relentless nature is. Even though the protagonist of my story succeeds, not all salmon do. In fact, a large quantity die off. I try raise environmental awareness by showing that animals also have it hard, and I hope that inspires people to have sympathy for these animals and help protect the environment."*

Communication

We don't say what we mean,
Or mean what we say.
And on the device's screen,
A masquerade of texts comes into play.
When we are hidden and unseen
Where emojis mask emotion.
And the truth we can't glean.
There is no real communication.

—Elaine Elizabeth Jinto, age 14, Bengaluru, India.

Hello, Ocean

Good morning, Ocean.

What's it like to be

Scarred with plastics, seen and hidden, burrowing deep
into your broken, peeling skin

Tainted with oil

a thick, muffling layer of tar that chokes the dawn and
obscures the sunlight

Polluted with smoke

the rusty mist fogging the sky and tinging the water

Dotted with withered cigarette butts—the charred edges
scattered everywhere, sinking to the bottom

Does it hurt you?

Good afternoon, Ocean.

What's it like to see

The animals that live with you, the beings you've nurtured
killed and hunted and poached

for strange, unthinkable reasons that you can't possibly
fathom or control

And be able to do nothing but watch helplessly
as blood stains your sun-burnt, wounded surface?

What's it like to have

The vibrant hues and animated soul
slowly drained out of your reefs, once a source of life but
now a place brimming with demise

a cruel disruption to the delicate balance of an ecosystem
you so carefully created

All in broad daylight, only to be ignored?

Good evening, Ocean.

Do you find calm?

How do you find the calm time and time and time again
in the midst of being

torn apart in millions of directions all at once

Through each harsh, moon-lit night of suffering

Do you find solace in something?

Do you even try to fight back?

Do you conjure raging storms to punish us for what
we've done to you?

Do you cry yourself to sleep when you realize that you're
dying slowly and the creatures that live within you are
dying faster than you could ever imagine?

Goodbye, Ocean.

Will I see you tomorrow?

—Hollyn Mei-wen Alpert, age 14, grade 8, California.

YHA Entries by Artistic South Korean Students *(Also see p. 31)*



“Making a Change with Smaller Steps”

—Ahyeon Kim, age 16, gr. 10, from S. Korea, Massachusetts.



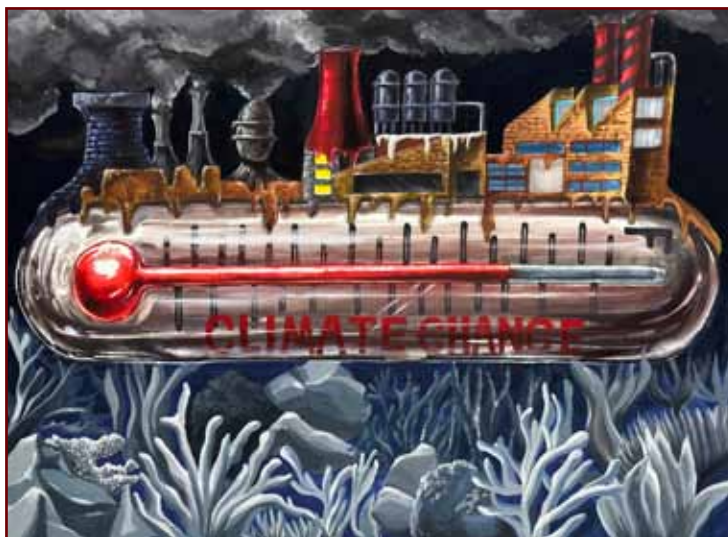
“All Together”

—Juyoung Liam Kim, age 14, grade 8, South Korea.



“Untitled”

—Kate Park, age 15, grade 10, Seoul, South Korea.



Climate Change Artwork

—Yoojung (Jennie) Park, grade 10, Seoul, South Korea.

A Few More Art Entries



Art by Sophie Yoon, age 14, grade 8, South Korea.



Self Identity by Chloe Park, grade 10, Jeju, South Korea.



Human Rights by Carina Araujo, age 12, grade 7, Maryland.



—Benjamin Kurack, age 13, Illinois



"A Boardgame" by Jason Kang, age 16, gr. 10, Seoul, South Korea.



"Honey Bees" by Andrew Yoolhyun Shim, gr. 11, N. Carolina.

Artists' Statements (for Art on pp. 29–30)

Making a Change with Smaller Steps (page 29)

If animals didn't have consciousness, would we be more indifferent to them and their plight? Does that explain why people are so apathetic when it comes to environmental issues? Because there aren't any forms or figures to empathize with? Plagued with these questions, I pondered what a personified environment would see, looking down upon the current destruction of the ozone layer, the threat posed to Earth's ecosystems, and the further threat to the great order of the universe. My artwork depicts how, in a world often disrupted by conflict and discourse, the beauty of nature stands in resilience. Atop the iceberg, a polar bear stands strong, even in the harshest conditions. Amid chaos, the harmony and tranquility of nature serve as a reminder of the enduring strength of humanity. Through this piece, I aim to evoke a sense of peace and empowerment.

—Ahyeon Kim, age 16, gr. 10, from S. Korea, Massachusetts.

Climate Change Artwork (p. 29): Growing up in Canada, I was surrounded by endless forests and pristine lakes. However, upon returning to my home country of Korea, I noticed a stark contrast: crowded cities and declining air and water quality. This exposure to two different environments ignited a passion in me for environmental protection and a commitment to combat climate change. To pursue this goal, I am actively involved in an aquatic environment club, where we work to raise awareness about the importance of protecting our ecosystems.

My artwork reflects both my personal journey and my hope for change. The factories and smoke rising above the thermometer symbolize the human actions heating our planet, while the dying coral reefs below illustrate nature's silent suffering. By drawing on my experiences in Canada and Korea, I hope to emphasize that even small individual actions, when paired with community initiatives, can drive significant change, despite the severity and scale of climate change.

—Yoojung (Jennie) Park, grade 10, Seoul, South Korea.

Sophie Yoon's art (page 30) explores the complex interplay between human desire, consumption, environmental destruction and climate change. Through a pure and fairy-tale-like lens, her work invites us to reflect on the fragile beauty of the natural world, the accelerating effects of climate change, and the urgent need for more sustainable and compassionate ways of living.

—Sophie Yoon, age 14, grade 8, South Korea

All Together (page 29)

My name is Juyoung Liam Kim, an 8th grader, who sees art as a way to speak for the Environment. I believe that the Earth is not only where we live—it's what we have to protect as a family. I've always felt deeply connected with nature, and see damage in all the world has led me to believe that even small voices can change the situation. I am deeply committed to addressing climate change and promote sustainability because I understand that our future depends on what we do today. Through my art, I try to express the suffering that our planet is going through, and hope that we still have the strength and time to heal. I hope to continue to create, learn and inspire others to take care of a little more every day.

—Juyoung Liam Kim, age 14, grade 8, South Korea.

A Boardgame (p. 30)

My artwork features a board game similar to Monopoly, in which diverse cultures, specifically in architecture and geography, are depicted. I have had the opportunity to visit many places over the years: China, Japan, Vietnam, Australia, and more. I think, perhaps, the most distinct part about each nation is how they want to represent themselves in architecture. Egypt boasts its massive stone pyramids, France wants to immerse itself with the great iron Eiffel Tower, and the US continues its representation of freedom with the Statue of Liberty. I wanted to show how diverse our world is, not only through people, but also how we represent ourselves and our nations.

—Jason Kang, age 16, grade 10, Seoul, South Korea.

"Untitled" (page 29)

I am a sophomore in the United States. I have always been fascinated by the ocean since I was a child. I developed a keen interest in synthetic biology since middle school and it led me to research on how it can help save our ocean through formation of affordable synthetic biodegradable plastics. Plastic pollution is a major global issue. It is said to cover 40% of the ocean surface. Plastics don't biodegrade but breakdown into microplastics which persist in our environmental system for centuries. Through the artwork, I wanted to raise awareness of our current situation.

—Kate Park, age 15, grade 10, Seoul, South Korea.

Note: For **Human Rights**, see p. 14. For **Honey**, see p. 37. For **Global Goal#2**, see p. 36.

My Father's Deadline *by Jasmine Troutt, age 17, New Jersey.*

My father is a writer. Ever since I can remember, I've always seen him hunched over a desk, typing like the deadline was mere inches away—lurking behind the door of his mind, reminding him he doesn't have forever.

"Daddy!" I would say, jumping on his lap as a little girl, when he was still strong enough to support my weight.

"Yes, baby?" he would mumble, eyes never leaving the page. The soft light on his desk deepened the crease in his forehead, his jaw clenching and unclenching like a nervous tick as he got lost in thought. His graying beard scratched the top of my head.

"What are you writing?" I would ask, curious. He would pause and tell me all about it while I wrapped my arms around his neck and rested against his chest—lulled to sleep by the sound of his baritone voice and the click of the keys.

He had the power to stop the deadline. He was his own boss. But he never would.

Was it a sign of how hard he worked? Or, was he running from something—scared that if he stopped, he'd be trapped by it?

I remember the first time I was put in front of a blank page.

"Record your ideas on my phone," he said once. He pulled out his iPhone 5 and opened the *Voice Memos* app. "That way, if you forget, your voice from today is a reminder for tomorrow."

I wrote and wrote and wrote, run-on sentences used as roads to build the cities of stories in my mind.

The missing punctuation and misspelled words were a testament to my six-year-old vocabulary stretching to capacity.

I wanted to be just like my father.

I was so excited to show him. I knew he'd be proud of me.

"Again," he said, highlighting the whole page and deleting it with a single click.

That was all it took for my story to crash and burn. The world and characters I created—gone.

Vanished. Erased forever. Like they were never there to begin with.

As the years went on, his deadline grew closer. His moods shifted with each passing day. It became scary to show him my work. I feared the discipline. The lecture about why it wasn't good enough.

The click of the *delete* button grew louder with every failed story I presented to him.

So did the look of irritability on his face. Until I stopped. I

stopped writing with my father.

What was the point?

It was embarrassing—watching the flash of disappointment while he read my work. His mask slipping. His emotions, written all over his face.

I was no prodigy. And he made sure I knew it.

This was my father's idea of bonding. But what he didn't know was that he was crushing his eight-year-old daughter's ambition. Suddenly, the man I looked up to was the antagonist in my stories—deleting every world I built in my mind until there was nothing left but a blank page.

His deadline scared him.

The older I got, the harsher the critiques became.

Until it was clear it had nothing to do with my writing. Maybe it was never about me at all. Maybe I'm just a reflection—a reflection of how quickly time was passing. Of how close his end was getting. Of the story he was still racing to finish, before the door finally closed.

"Dad?" I crept into his office.

The once-soft glow of the computer now sharpened the deep creases in his forehead, lines carved by years of getting lost in thought.

The light accentuated the hollowness of his cheeks. The deadline was near. He was becoming frail. Feeble.

The once-boisterous man, able to command a room with a single throat-clear, now winced when he walked.

Silenced by his deadline.

"What?" he asked, his eyes never leaving the screen, fingers flying across the keyboard—black letters piercing the page, growing by the second.

"I thought maybe you could read this short story I wrote," I said, holding out the paper I had printed earlier at school.

There was no *delete* button. This was my story—and he wasn't going to erase it, just because he was scared of his approaching deadline.

He slowly closed the laptop and turned toward me. His eyes held something I hadn't seen in years: hope.

Warmth flooded my chest. I was transported back to the night I got my first prompt from him. That same soft look in his eyes, a beacon of love I'd watched dim with every story I tried to show him.

Each one *deleted*. Each one leaving a new crease in his brow. But today, he looked different.

(Continued in the boxed inset on the next page.) =>

Across the Ocean

The scent of cardamom and cinnamon lingered in the air as I sat in my grandmother's kitchen, watching her roll the dough for our traditional coconut *rotis*. She hummed an old lullaby—a tune woven into my childhood—and for a moment, I could forget that everything was about to change.

Our bags were packed. My parents had spent many months preparing for the move, filling out forms, making calls, and selling old, but useful pieces of our life that once felt permanent. I understood, but the understanding didn't soften the ache of leaving behind my home, my language, my everything.

At the airport, the air was thick with goodbyes and tears. My grandmother hugged me tightly, whispering, *"No matter where you go, your roots will keep you steady."* I held on to her words, not realising yet how much I would need them in the future.

The plane hummed loudly beneath us, slicing through the night. As we soared across the ocean, I stared out of the small window, watching the tiny specks of light fade into the distance, wondering if I had just become untethered from the only life I had ever known.

Australia was unfamiliar. The sun burned sharper, the streets stretched wider, and the air carried a unique crispness I didn't recognise. I missed the comforting chaos of Sri Lanka—coconut trees swaying in the humid breeze of the beach, the echoes of market vendors selling their local produce and the warmth of home-cooked meals that tasted like tradition.

Our new home felt sterile compared to what we

=> I could tell he'd accepted it: the deadline was coming. And there was nothing he could do about it. I handed him the story and sat in my old spot—the ottoman across from his office chair. I sat cross legged, watching his face as he read it.

That day, something changed. He didn't look exasperated. He didn't flinch at my run-on sentences or lack of punctuation. His eyes widened at the climax. He laughed at the right moments.

And when he finished the last sentence, he smiled. He looked at me, tears brimming in his eyes.

He was proud of me. Not that I needed him to be. I was already proud of myself.

But still...it was nice to see it. —Jasmine Troutt, 17, N.J.

had left behind. The walls were unmarked, the floors polished, and outside, the neighbourhood was quiet in a way that unsettled me. There were no dogs barking at night, no distant chatter floating in through the windows. Everything felt quiet, still and lonely.

School was daunting. My accent made me hesitate, and every lunch break felt like a test of belonging with my classmates. The teachers spoke quickly, their words rolling into each other in a way that made comprehension feel just out of reach. Students whispered when I walked past, their curious glances tinged with uncertainty.

I clung to the familiar. My mother's cooking became my anchor, filling our home with scents that reminded me of Sri Lanka, wrapping me in the comfort of the past. But outside, I was expected to adapt. I struggled to pronounce certain words the way Australians did, stumbled over many phrases that felt foreign on my tongue. The first time someone laughed at the way I said "tomato," heat rose in my cheeks, my voice shrinking into embarrassed silence.

Then, slowly, the unfamiliar softened. A classmate shared her Vegemite toast, laughing as I winced at the bitterness. Another taught me footy, showing me how to kick with precision. Little by little, I stitched myself into this new world, weaving together the pieces of my old life and my new one.

There were moments of frustration, of longing for the ease of the life I had known before. But there were also moments of discovery—of learning that kindness transcends through language, that belonging is not about forgetting where you come from but embracing where you are now.

Years passed, and I no longer felt like an outsider. I learned to love the scent of eucalyptus after a storm, the rhythm of waves against the Sydney shore. Yet, when I closed my eyes, I still heard my grandmother's sweet lullaby, and still tasted the warmth of traditional Sri Lankan food such as our delicious coconut *rotis*.

Sri Lanka would always be home. But Australia had become home, too.

I had not forgotten. I had simply grown.

—Manuga Bandara, age 13, Australia. *"I'm a migrant from Sri Lanka. My writing explores the emotional journey of migration. I believe this writing goes to the heart of multiculturalism."*

Nepal's Democracy: Where Every Vote Counts... If You Can Find It

Welcome to Nepal, where democracy is pretty much akin to that steaming bowl of *Dal Bhat**—everybody gets it, but only the well-connected get that dollop of *ghee*.** The political landscape in this country is a colorful tapestry of corruption, confusion, and our beloved leaders who make sure the term “public service” remains strictly theoretical.

First off, let's talk about our illustrious political parties. We have a tradition here: any time a party loses an election (or wins, or just has lunch) it divides into two. It is like cell division, but without that scientific purpose. One minute you are voting for a unified party; the next, you wonder if that splinter group that formed in the middle of the night is on the ballot. Who knew politics could be this spontaneous?

But don't you worry—no matter how many parties sprout up, they share the same core values: personal gain, backdoor deals, and an occasional promise for the public. Politicians are committed enough to democracy that they have ensured it always remains in a state of work in progress, which is mostly due to their constant “forgetting” to progress.

Well, the election is the big event of Nepal. It's like a cricket match, but without knowing the rules, with players frequently changing teams in between the game, and an umpire mysteriously absent. But hey, as long as the free T-shirt and some festive banners with your candidate's face plastered come along, who cares about a little thing like accountability?

Now, time for our leaders—the stars of this chaotic show. They are like that one uncle who keeps promising to buy you ice cream but never seems to have any cash when the time comes to pay up. Yeah, they have got a million grand ideas—but unfortunately most of them are to do with lining their own pockets. And then they get caught red-handed? It's always a “misunderstanding,” or the fault of the media, which has nothing better to do than to expose some of their “harmless” little bribes.

Our democracy is founded on openness—or at least it would be if anybody could get through the tiers

of bureaucracy, hidden agendas, and stacks of mysteriously unaccounted-for cash. So, there are elections; then there are results and jubilation, and so on—and finally, the real democracy begins: the one of deal-making in the backrooms, decisions postponed *ad infinitum*, and people told to “be patient” as their leaders work tirelessly to... do whatever it is they do.

And then, there is this promise of development. Every election cycle, we are promised that this is the one where things will finally turn around for Nepal. The roads will be built, the schools improved, and the electricity as reliable as the sunrise. Yet, here we are still, dodging potholes that could swallow a motorcycle and wondering when—exactly—that development train is going to arrive. Spoiler: it's running on Nepali time, so don't hold your breath.

Yet what are we to do? We get to be part of this great experiment in democracy whereby our voices are being heard way out there—in a really, really small way—possibly drowning out the sound of another political scandal. After all, what is more democratic than choosing between the lesser of several evils, each with their own creative interpretation of the word “service”?

Long live Nepal's democracy, where politicians are never in short supply, promises never age, and people—well, people, remain hopeful that maybe, just maybe, the next election will be different. And if not, at least the T-shirts are free.

—Aditi Paudel, age 15, grade 10, Japan. She adds, “This is a satirical look at Nepal's political landscape, blending humor with critique to point out some of the challenges of democracy, accountability, and development. It reflects both frustration and hope, catching the resilience of the Nepali people. This piece revolves around social justice, and youth activism.

“Politics inspires me as a reflection of human ambition and resilience. Writing helps me make sense of the world, express my thoughts, and connect with others. I'm thrilled to submit to Skipping Stones Magazine, a platform that celebrates diverse voices and empowers young writers like me.”

*Dal Bhat: Rice and lentil soup;

**ghee: Clarified butter.

A Song of Two Worlds

Amidst the Sakura bloom, I walk alone,
Carrying a fleeting beauty that they'd never known.
Eyes are lingering, oh not in wonder but in fact in doubt,
As if I were a canvas differently painted inside and out.

The crowded train hums a tune in monotone gray,
Yet the space around me seems to only drift further away
I see invisible walls built through staring and silence,
Only a quiet reminder of unspoken defiance.

Lunchtime, and the well-known chime,
Chattered symphonies all around,
Cold at my table, scattering voices that sound.
Words whispered, laughter and wit, a dark silhouette amongst them all lit.

Pairs of shoes placed, every stride a code,
In patterns deciphered but none bestowed,
The rhythm doesn't feel exactly familiar; the dance isn't mine,
Anyway, I do the routine and feign myself to be fine.

Within that mirror, I see a face no one claims as their own,
Beauty forged on summits that I have always known,
Skin kissed with sunlight, eye pupils that carry deep tales,
A beauty so proud within one, yet it just pales.

So, in this silent land, I shut my eyes a while,
Picturing the peaks where my heart can beguile.
The flags fluttering through the Himalayan serenity
The only call that can bring my heart tranquility.

Their short seasons shift hastily, but I carry my own,
Remembrance of the monsoon rains, the fields I've known.
And though I stride under these cherry trees,
It is the rhododendrons I ache for across the mountain seas.

So let the train ride on, let their whispers arise,
I can meet them with strength and unwavering eyes.
A quest of colors, of memories untold,
A story of fire in a world so cold.

—Aditi Paudel, age 15, high school sophomore, Japan. She says: "As a Nepali teenager living in Japan, I write from my experiences: cultural identities, isolation, and the right to belong. I want my poetry to allow others, mostly teenagers like myself to feel understood and seen.

"Writing is not just a personal outlet, but a bridge connecting emotions, stories, and people. I want to encourage others to own their voices, express their emotions without boundaries, and understand that alienation is part of the human experience. I hope to contribute to my community by creating a culture of self-expression and empathy and letting young writers know their words matter. I hope my poem resonates with readers and stimulates some meaningful conversations."

Lost Treasures

Listen.
Hear the reeds sing farewell to the
setting sun.
Look.
See the shadows envelope the world
in a dreamy stillness
Feel.
Feel the river pull at your feet.
Reaching for you.
Long ago.
A roar unknown to the wild pierces
the air. Beasts of twisted steel line up
at the forest's edge. An army ready for
battle, but naught a wall nor guard
stands to defend the woods from the
metal abominations outside.
Listen.
Hear the tree's cries of agony as one
by one they are torn from the ground.
Look.
See cold steel infect the earth, turning
it to naught but a pale reflection of
the beasts that created it.
Feel.
Feel the empty void where a sense of
wonder would sit in your heart.
Now gone.

—Sivan Wizansky, grade 6, Oregon.

"I love the way the wind moves
through the trees, The drip, drip, drip of
raindrops falling from the still wet ever-
greens after a storm, the sweet melody of
birds chirping in the treetops. It was during
hard times that I would run away to the
backyard woods. The trees never cared that
I couldn't focus or that my grades were hor-
rible. I would just sit outside with the sun
on my face, and the wind in my hair and
feel like it was all going to be okay.

"The poem was inspired by my love
of nature and my fear of losing it to the cli-
mate crisis. It depicts peaceful forests being
torn apart by "metal monsters," and I hope
you truly enjoy it."

Cultural Collage

More than You Can Have

Tama! Tell me a tale! I ask
Yes dear, I will do so. She replies.

Long ago, in India
A man told me a tale,
A long tale of evil and bravery
That I won't bore you with.
But the moral was imprinted in my mind
Ravana wanted more than he could have,
Never repeat that mistake, child.
Never want more than you can have.

That wasn't a tale Tama,
But I still liked it very much.
I said.

—Milan Banerjee, age 11, Massachusetts. He will be in sixth grade this fall. He writes, “I am part Indian (why would I call my grandmother Tama if I wasn't?) but I do not speak Bengali (except from the few words my dad teaches me from time to time). I travel to India a lot, and like many of the stories—the Ramayana and Sitayana, for example. I like to write, read and compose music.

“In the story of Ravana and Rama, Ravana became so powerful that he entirely stopped being human, and he had to be killed by Rama. This poem feels like a good way to commemorate Tama after her passing away, a few months ago...Tama was a person full of stories (from stories of my father or uncle in their youth to ‘back in my day’ stories) and a wonderful grandmother with a liking for sudoku.”

UN Sustainable Development Goal 2: No Hunger

The 17 global goals are a set of proclamations by the United Nations, consisting of 193 countries. They are meant to be a call to action for people all over the world to aid those in need and improve the topics as listed in the goals, such as no poverty as the first one, or clean water and sanitation being the topic for the sixth. The image (see p. 30) shows a great effort to save the people suffering from hunger. People in different countries and continents can be seen to have malnourished physiques and expressions to signify the enormity of hunger. In the center, there is a small sphere which represents the whole. Yellow arrows represented the transfer of donations of food products from continents such as Europe and S. America to the less prosperous areas of the globe, circled in a large red circle. —Benjamin Kwack, age 13, Illinois.

Saturday

Saturday morning
pots clatter, food sizzles, microwave beeps
the leaky faucet and the raindrops join in the song
the flowers and the trees dance along
mother scrambles to finish preparing food
for the new week
the smell of fried fish, and roasted meat
seep through the barrier created by my wooden doors
intoxicating me
yearning for more
Yoruba gospel music resounding on the radio
the pelting raindrops its biggest foe
each lyric more meaningful than the last
praising God with the language of our past
quarter and eighth notes amassed
strokes of the igbale broom assimilate to
the rhythm of the music
coupled with footsteps
the strokes get louder
with the fragrance of hot pepper powder
the wind howling, warning me to get up
The mouthwatering aroma builds up
the wooden doors creak open
agreeing with my claim
betraying me
my Saturday had to begin.

—Grace Akindayo, age 16, New York. She writes: “I love to write poetry because I believe that it's is the best way for me to express myself and my experiences. This poem is about my Saturday mornings in our Nigerian household. Saturday is usually the day when my mother cooks all the food for the following week... It's a day to prepare for the new week and for the Sabbath. It's a chance to cleanse the impurities of the old week in order to properly welcome the purity of the new one to come.

“Although we live in the U.S., my mother and other relatives still strive to incorporate Nigerian culture into my life. Despite not living in Nigeria (and unfortunately I have not been able to visit Nigeria), I still feel connected to my culture and values. Despite not knowing my native language, Yoruba, fluently, I still manage to feel connected to it especially through music. Ever since I was little I would sing Yoruba gospel songs fluently. I'd like to say that singing was my first language, because I've been singing Yoruba songs for as long as I can remember. I hope to one day visit Nigeria. Until then I will continue to educate myself about my culture and continue to be proud of where I come from.”

Just Black Enough

"Just Black enough,"
They say, like it's a compliment.
Like being "Black" has a singular definition.
Like I belong now,
In this bubble they've created
Because I'm not too much.
Not too loud.
Not too dark.
Not too threatening.
But enough.
Enough for their entertainment.
Enough to prove they're not racist
Because they have a "black friend."

I become their sun—
They orbit me when it suits them.
Let me shine at parties,
Pull me into photos,
Ask me to say the funny slang
They ridicule others for.

But when the sun sets,
When the conversation gets deeper
They turn to the moon.
Pale.
Familiar.
Quieter.
They forget I burn

They love the way I look.
Lightskin, light eyes, freckles dusting
my cheeks.
I'm black enough to make them feel cultured
But white enough to still be the standard.

They don't see me.
They see possibilities.
The best of both worlds,
A body that checks every box—
Something to admire,
But never understand

High yellow.
Redbone.
Mulatto.
Light bright.
Exotic.

Names I've been branded with—
Like warnings, like labels on a shelf.
Their way of placing me

Where I never asked to be.
Trying to simplify something
That was never complicated to me.

I am not in-between.
I am not confused.
I am not a mix of halves—
I am whole.
And that should be enough.

I am not a puzzle,
Meant to be solved
Or made to fit your idea of "blackness."

I am not your function,
Not your evidence,
Not your orbit.

I don't shine for you.
I am the sun,
Even when you turn away.

—Jasmine Troutt, age 17, New Jersey. "... reflects different parts of my identity and experiences, especially as a young Black woman navigating the intersections of culture, safety, and self-expression. Writing has been one of the most meaningful ways I process the world around me and connect to the women in my family who came before me." Also see her fiction work, **My Father's Deadline**, on p. 32.

Two Haiku

1. Peace

After the harsh
winter, small flower peeks out.
A peace offering.

2. Wishes

Dandelions blown away, with
wishes dancing in the
wind, hope grows elsewhere.

—Elaine Elizabeth Jinto, age 14,
grade 9, Bengaluru, India.

Honey Bees (see artwork on p. 30, lower left)

The 100% pure honey we enjoy in a single jar is the result of the hard work of countless bees. They diligently collect nectar and pollen from flowers to create this natural product. However, due to environmental pollution and changes in ecosystems, the survival of bees is under threat, making it increasingly challenging to produce honey in the future. I work with insects as the main subject of my practice. Insects are vital beings in nature. Though they may appear small and insignificant, they play crucial roles in ecosystems—pollinating plants, decomposing organic matter, and serving as a key link in the food chain. Without insects, the natural cycle cannot function properly. It is this reality that drew my attention to insects, and why I chose to make them the central theme of my work.

—Andrew Yoohyun Shim, grade 11, North Carolina.

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Diversity Shapes the World

People from all over work together to create a better home for everyone. However, this would never work out without accepting diversity.

What is diversity? The dictionary says it implies “including people from a range of different social and ethnic backgrounds.” Respecting one another could also resemble diversity.

As an immigrant, in my perspective, diversity means accepting other people’s life background but it’s also understanding my own culture and beliefs, and using this to help others. For instance, my family, for generations and generations, has come from South Korea.

I was also born in Korea, and moving to America presented hardships. When I came here, I experienced bullying and teasing due to the language I speak and my accent. Having moved here in hopes of a better life, the guilt of leaving my family had refused to let go for the first few years.

Now, as a student in middle school, I know that there are people around the globe who have encountered the same hardships as me, and that there are people seeking help. I finally realized that giving a hand and accepting people from around the globe not only shows how I care but also shows the world needs acceptance to thrive. For a better society, we need to understand and at least try to live in each other’s shoes. Thus, another meaning of diversity to me, is helping people through harsh times—no matter who they are.

To truly comprehend the meaning of diversity, we do need to figure out the ways diversity shapes the world. The world right now—as many of you might have realized already—does not accept differences in people as much as they think they do. So many religions, such as Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, etc, promote loving everyone no matter who they are. Evidently, this means loving everyone will change the world for better. For example, when I didn’t know English and was new at school, it felt as though nobody understood me, as if I was alone in a world! Nevertheless, there were people, I realized, as time passed, who profoundly wanted to help, who wanted me to feel included. With diversity—meaning to accept and help everyone—harmony will spark out between different people who believe in different things.

Art by Jessie Li, age 13, Canada

I’d love to share a bit about my artistic journey and the ideas behind my pieces (*see pp. 39-40*).

Art has been my greatest passion for as long as I can remember. From my first solo exhibition at age 6 to seeing my drawing on the street banners throughout Richmond, the city where I’m living in, I’ve always sought ways to grow as a creator. I work across different mediums—painting, sketching, and digital art—constantly challenging myself to refine my craft.

My artistic inspiration comes primarily from nature. My city, Richmond, is home to the stunning **Steveston Fisherman’s Wharf**, a place of winding rivers, lively recreation, and deep Indigenous heritage. Many of my pieces, from the weathered fisherman statues to the quiet boats along the shore, were born from long walks through Steveston with my friend Autumn and her dog, Arlo.

The **Terra Nova Slide** painting captures my childhood favorite playground, while **Eyes on Tradition and Innovation** reflects my growing understanding of Indigenous culture, shaped by classroom discussions and countless hours in the library.

Thank you for taking the time to review my work. I’d be thrilled to contribute my artistic perspective to ***Skipping Stones*** and its readers.

—Jessie Li, age 13, grade 7, British Columbia, Canada.

Diversity Shapes the World... *continued*

Diversity can mean different things to different people. However, basically it means to include everyone, help one another, and to realize the benefits it will bring to the development of our world. With it, many dreams—even world peace and no war—can become so much more possible, so much more a reality. If we just accept and love each other, then the world will change. And you can see the difference with your very own eyes.

—Junhee Yu, Age 11, grade 6, California. “In my free time, I enjoy reading, playing the violin, or listening to music.”

We invite you to visit www.SkippingStones.org as often as you can. All the digital content on our website is absolutely free for your reading pleasure. We’re publishing new content often!



Hidden Treasures has ecological & cultural aspects; it's about conservation.

Terra Nova Slide • Lady by the River • Fisher Statue. Paintings (Column 1) depicting scenes from Richmond, B.C. are by Jessie Li, age 13, grade 7, British Columbia, Canada.



Three Moments speaks about identity in relation to my matriarchal line—my grandmother, my mother, and myself.

Col. 2 Artwork by Hollyn Mei-wen Alpert, age 14, grade 8, California. Also see Hollyn's poem: Hello, Ocean on p. 28.



Evermore. It's about Racing Against Time to Restore Nature.

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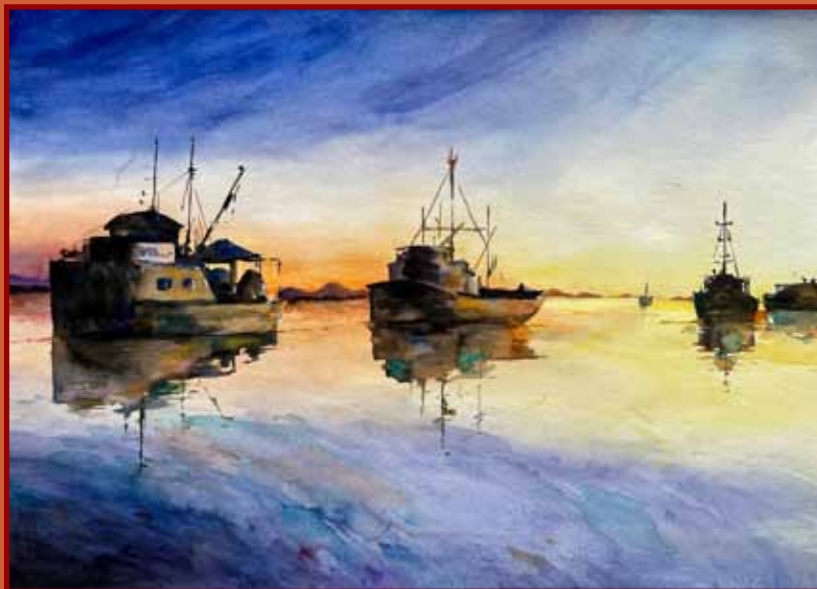
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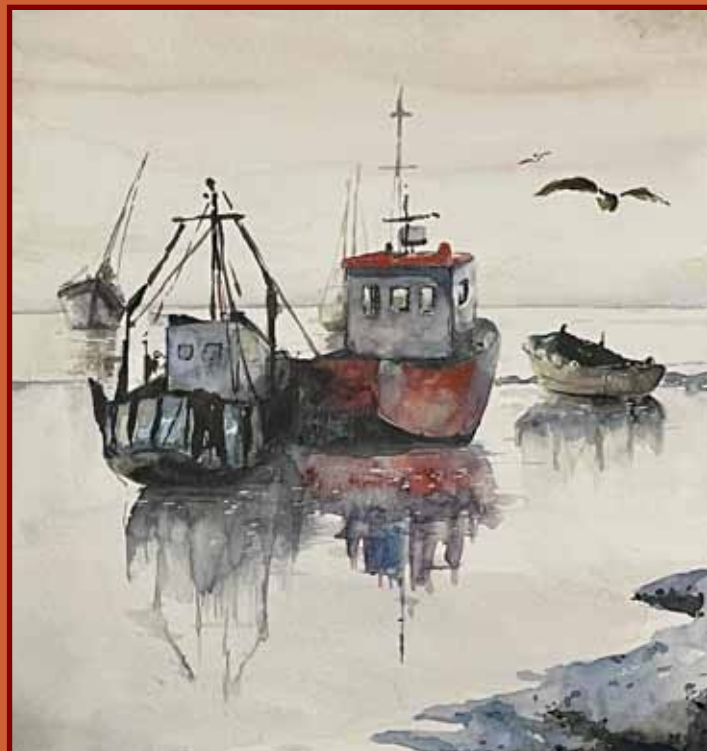
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Art by Jessie Li, age 13, grade 7, British Columbia, Canada. *Please also see pp. 38-39.*



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