

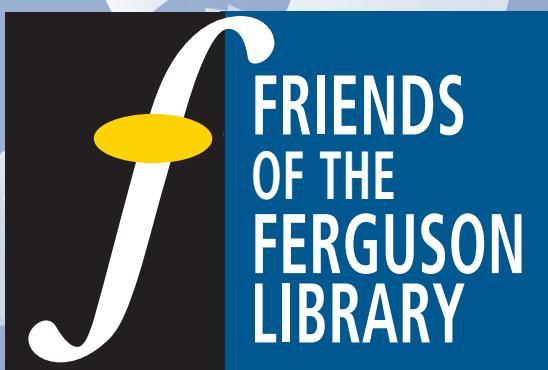
# 36

YEARS OF GREAT WRITING

36TH ANNUAL

# STAMFORD LITERARY COMPETITION

S P O N S O R E D B Y



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### LITERARY COMPETITION JUDGES

Grade 7 – 8 Fiction	Joyce Chavkin	Grade 7 – 8 Fiction	Joyce Chavkin
Grade 7 – 8 Nonfiction	Susan Nabel	Grade 7 – 8 Nonfiction	Susan Nabel
Grade 7 – 8 Poetry	Eileen Swerdlick	Grade 7 – 8 Poetry	Eileen Swerdlick
Grade 9 – 10 Fiction	David Cohen	Grade 9 – 10 Fiction	David Cohen
Grade 9 – 10 Nonfiction	Steven Frederick	Grade 9 – 10 Nonfiction	Steven Frederick
Grade 9 – 10 Poetry	Ann Sexton	Grade 9 – 10 Poetry	Ann Sexton
Grade 11 – 12 Fiction	David Cohen	Grade 11 – 12 Fiction	David Cohen
Grade 11 – 12 Nonfiction	Steven Frederick	Grade 11 – 12 Nonfiction	Steven Frederick
Grade 11 – 12 Poetry	Ann Sexton	Grade 11 – 12 Poetry	Ann Sexton

36th ANNUAL  
STAMFORD LITERARY COMPETITION WINNERS  
  
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Grade Three

Fiction

1st prize	Reethi Thota	Two Together	The Catholic Academy
2nd prize	Caleb Moreen	A Trace of Space	BCHA of CT
3rd prize	Valerie Lenhart	The Mystery Unicorn	The Catholic Academy
Honorable Mention	Gianna Zezima	The Young Cheetah	Stillmeadow Elementary

Nonfiction

1st prize	Ishika Kundu	Indian Summer	Hart Magnet School
2nd prize	Hansika Jannu	Deep Waters	Hart Magnet School
3rd prize	Arthur Perlaky	My Hero: Tom Brady	Stillmeadow Elementary

Poetry

1st prize	Sophie Brand	Books	BCHA of CT
2nd prize	Yael Rosenfeld	Sunset	BCHA of CT
3rd prize	Eva Bomash	Apple Tree	BCHA of CT
Honorable Mention	Ezra Goldstein	Baseball Bat	BCHA of CT

Grade Four

Fiction

1st prize	Melyssa Dorlean-Moise	Christmas of My Dreams	The Catholic Academy
2nd prize	Rudrh Nair	A Voyage to the Red Planet	Northeast Elementary
3rd prize	Molly Steinberg	Perfectly Imperfect	Stillmeadow Elementary
Honorable Mention	Emma Agostino	The Most Terrifying Ride Ever	Davenport Ridge

Nonfiction

1st prize	Victoria Leng	My First Trip	King School
2nd prize	Avigayil Chavkin	Fun Time Baking	BCHA od CT
3rd prize	Savera Nair	My Life in COVID-19	Westover Magnet

Poetry

1st prize	Maggie Mosenkis	Sunset	BCHA of CT
2nd prize	Victoria Angel	Fall	BCHA of CT
3rd prize	Daniella Raich	Flying	BCHA of CT
Honorable Mention	Nishka Yadav	A True Friend	K.T. Murphy

### Grade Five

#### Fiction

1st prize	Sawyer Mills	The Not-So Amazing Summer of Camron Lace	Davenport Ridge
2nd prize	Olivia Manewal	A Test of Three Bells	Davenport Ridge
3rd prize	Dean Eustache	Sixth Grade Blues	Davenport Ridge
Honorable Mention	Nadav Neumeier	Icy Days	BCHA of CT

#### Nonfiction

1st prize	Aliseé Rossetti	The Story of My Birth	Davenport Ridge
2nd prize	Charlie Askew	Recover and Renew	Davenport Ridge
3rd prize	Brooke Healy	It is Better to Give Than Receive	Davenport Ridge
Honorable Mention	Katelyn Franzetti	My Vacation to Camelback Resort	Davenport Ridge

#### Poetry

1st prize	Kristina Sarak	Life, Not a Time to Waste	Davenport Ridge
2nd prize	Maryam Rohawala	You Are Beautiful	Stamford Charter School of Excellence
3rd prize	Ben Daniel	In Honor of Our Veterans	BCHA of CT
Honorable Mention	Mickey Lewiton	Believes Together	BCHA of CT

### MIDDLE SCHOOL

### Grade Six

#### Fiction

1st prize	Sylvie Rosenberg	Race Against Time	BCHA of CT
2nd prize	Camila Pajares	The Plane	King School
3rd prize	Kira Doft	The End of the Street	BCHA of CT

#### Nonfiction

1st prize	Elliot Nerenberg	Books Have Changed Me	BCHA of CT
2nd prize	Sadie M. Parker	Whispering My Love	BCHA of CT

#### Poetry

1st prize	Alicia Leng	Water Around the World: A Two-Voice Poem	King School
2nd prize	Ishanvi Jaiswal	COVID-19	Turn of River
3rd prize	Mia Broder	Autumn is a Dancer	BCHA of CT

### Grades Seven – Eight

#### Fiction

1st prize	Nabeeha Nafey	Somewhere in Between	Turn of River
2nd prize	Jenna Antoine	Eyes Beyond Ellis Island	Catholic Academy
3rd prize	Tamara Hill	Alloria	Turn of River
Honorable Mention	Ella Pearle	Baited by Love	Cloonan Middle

#### Nonfiction

1st prize	Alanna Harper	The Canyon Between Us	Scofield Magnet
2nd prize	Mey Silvey	Why I am a Feminist	Dolan Middle School

#### Poetry

1st prize	Namratha Prasanth Kamath	Books: Friends Forever	Turn of River
2nd prize	Rachel Kelly	Beach Day	Scofield Magnet
3rd prize	Neel Banerjee	Beyond Viruses	Scofield Magnet

## HIGH SCHOOL

### Grades Nine – Ten

#### Fiction

1st prize	Deep Banerjee	Pursuing My Dreams	Stamford High School
2nd prize	Roshan Agannathan	I am a Human	AITE

#### Nonfiction

1st prize	Nora Amsellem	The Timeless Lesson of Aesop's Fable	AITE
2nd prize	Taylor Newman	The Amazing Life of Marie Curie	Stamford High School
3rd prize	Keira Lubliner	I am From Persistence	Stamford High School

#### Poetry

1st prize	Sarah Barry	There Will Always Be Light	AITE
2nd prize	Ella Leferman	Where's the Hope	AITE
3rd prize	Nathan Balayev	You Are...	AITE
Honorable Mention	Deep Banerjee	Opulence	Stamford High School

## Grades Eleven – Twelve

### Fiction

1st prize	Gerson Mendez	The Detective's Burden	Stamford High School
2nd prize	Alec Frohn	The Euphoria of Love	AITE
3rd prize	Chloe Leferman	Out and Away	AITE
Nonfiction			
1st prize	Andrew Hicks	Queer and Different: Analyzing the First Gay Anthem	Westhill High School
2nd prize	Zara Williamson	“Butta” or “Butter”: speaking in Two Lives	Westhill High School
3rd prize	Wendy Lichtenberg	Robotics and Culture in the Art Room	The Harvey School
Honorable Mention	Waldino Joseph	Bottled Up Dreams	Stamford High School

### Poetry

1st prize	Zara Williamson	To Find the God in Me	Westhill High School
2nd prize	Wendy Lichtenberg	Neon Yellow	The Harvey School
3rd prize	Olivia Ellington	Father	Stamford High School
Honorable Mention	Madeline Shapiro	The Light of my Life	Stamford High School

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Robin Denninger	Martha Mavridis	Anne Stone
Michelle DeRubeis	Laura Miller	Dana Stradinger
Alyssa Domini	Patrice Moore	Katie Welsh
Edward Donnelly	Melissa A. Moulketis	Debra Wilson
Priscilla Fields	Annoinette Muoio	Steven Wolff
Robert Fox	Karen Parker	

# GRADE 3 FICTION

## Two Together By Reethi Thota

### FIRST PRIZE

Jessica Bell ran down the runway, did an amazing handstand, bounced off the springboard, landed on the vault and did a cartwheel landing on the mat. It was the first annual gymnastics meet for the Tigers. The judges held up her score. A 9.7! Her team rushed over and hoisted her onto their shoulders. Sarah handed her the trophy and then the team paraded into the locker room. Everybody started chattering excitedly about the meet. Jessica's best friend Natasha plopped down next to her and said, "Good job!" "Thanks!" replied Jessica or "Jess" for short.

Then Coach Winston walked into the room. Everybody stopped talking and turned to face Coach. "Great job everyone!" she said. "Keep that up and we will win the championships! Now that our first meet is done, let's choose our captain."

After all the votes were counted, she said, "It looks like we have a tie between Natasha and Jessica."

Then she invited Jessica up for a small speech. Everybody had confused looks on their faces. "Thank you to all of you who choose me..." she began. "But...I can't be the captain this year. Because I'm...moving."

Everyone gasped. Jessica saw Natasha put her hands over her mouth. A girl named Lily asked, "Where's your new home?"

"It's in Miami, Florida," Jessica replied. She didn't want to leave her hometown in Tennessee, but she knew that life would be better in Florida. Lily's sister Katie asked when she was moving. "Wednesday" she said.

Jessica glanced at Natasha, took a deep breath and said, "So I would like my friend, Natasha, to be the captain in my place."

Two days later, Jessica flopped onto her bed in her new room. She really couldn't be that depressed, but she was. Instead of mourning, she turned on her favorite Ava Max playlist and started styling her room to make it just the way her old room in Tennessee looked.

The next day her mom dropped Jessica off at her new school. Jessica managed to get through the day without thinking about Tennessee. After she packed her backpack, after her last class, she walked down to the west wing and headed to the Dolphins' gym. The dolphin was her new school's mascot. As she entered, she looked around in awe at the gym. It was much bigger than the gym at her old school. This gym had a vault, a trampoline, a floor for routines, beams, bars, and even a separate warm up area. About a dozen girls were warming up. The coach introduced Jessica to the rest of the girls. Then they got started.

After class when her mom picked her up and asked how the team was, Jessica said that they were great, but the truth was that she was ready to quit gymnastics...forever.

That weekend, the Bell family had planned to go to the local aquarium. When they got their tickets and went inside Jessica's mom asked, "Which animal do you kids want to see first?" Jessica shrugged, even though when they went to aquariums in Tennessee, she always wanted to see the dolphins.

Her little sister Emily said, "Dolphins!"

When they got to the dolphin tank, Jessica looked at the dolphin. A sign by the tank said that the dolphin's name was Shadow. Jessica put her hand to the tank. Shadow stared at her for a second. Then the gorgeous female dolphin pressed her flipper to the glass touching the two hands. Jessica's mouth broke into a big smile. She had just made her first new friend!

At the next practice for the Dolphins, when the other girls on the team called her over, she didn't hesitate to go and have fun with her new friends.

Every time her family went to the aquarium, Jessica always went to the dolphin tank and sat there alone taking detailed notes about Shadow and the other dolphins. Eventually she signed up as a volunteer for the dolphins and spent hours teaching Shadow tricks. Whenever she looked at Shadow, she thought of them –Two Together.

## GRADE 3 FICTION

### A Trace of Space

#### By Caleb Moreen

#### SECOND PRIZE

One day, on a sunny morning in 2003, at 43 Albert Street, Renny Harding's alarm clock went off unexpectedly, for the millionth time. Renny jumped and then turned it off. Renny Harding was just an average fifth grader like all of his friends, but there was something special about him. He had a very intense interest in Area 51, the highly restricted area in Nevada where people believe there are aliens. None of his friends, except his very best friend, Bryce McCormack, had a serious interest in Area 51. Renny got dressed, went downstairs, ate breakfast and got ready for school.

Five blocks down, Bryce declared that he was having a crummy day. He awakened up to find his dog slobbering in his face. He had been so surprised that he fell out of bed and hit the floor with a loud THUD! Later his brother joked that; "He had gotten out of his bed on the wrong side." He had put on his least favorite shirt by mistake and then had spilled orange juice on himself. Bryce was also unique and liked Area 51. He read many books a day about it.

At school, Renny and Bryce met up in the halfway before the bell rang to talk to each other before classes started. When the bell rang, they waved at each other and then went to their separate classrooms. About halfway through the day, an announcement came through the intercom. "Renny Harding and Bryce McCormack, please report to the principal's office."

Everybody looked at Renny; he looked just as confused as Bryce did when he heard the command from the other classroom.

"Did you do anything?" asked Renny, as he and Bryce headed to the principal's office.

"No, I don't think so," said Bryce, who hung his head.

"Please sit down," said the principal when they got there.

"I heard you boys are interested in Area 51," said the principal.

"Yes Miss." said Renny and Bryce in unison.

They were looking quite skeptical, with raised eyebrows and cocked heads.

"There was a robbery of three very valuable gems yesterday and because you two know so much about the area, you may go if you want to investigate."

Both Renny and Bryce were so excited and felt like they were going to burst with excitement! They both heard themselves say, "Yes!" and before they knew it they were on a bus heading to Area 51. When they got there, a security guard met them at the entrance.

"Come inside and see what we found near the gems," said the security guard.

When he saw the clues, Renny didn't know if he was hallucinating or not. There were blobs of green on the display, little parts of mechanisms that were definitely not from Earth and a bunch of awestruck security guards standing around the display.

"No!" said Renny. "There's no such thing!"

"Ummm... I think that's a yes, bro," said Bryce.

"Officer! We need to go into outer space like... NOW!" shouted Renny.

"Why would I let you two go into space?"

"It's the only way to get the gems back!" said Bryce.

"Well, if you put it that way, then it is off to launch!" said the security guard.

Renny and Bryce were at the launch area, in gear and in their shuttle in two shakes of a lamb's tail.

"Well, I guess this is it - gems or bust, fame or poverty, return or no retu-"

"Cut it out!" shouted Renny, who had gotten bored of Bryce's pep talks.

"We're about to go!" said Bryce, getting worked up. No sooner than Bryce said that, the countdown started.

"10...9...8...7...6...5...4...3...2...1... Blastoff!"

Bryce and Renny's shuttle zoomed towards space. They were soon past Mercury, Venus and Earth. Renny and Bryce were having a good time until suddenly, everything went wrong and an alert came up on the dashboard!

"I'll go see what it is," said Renny and he got up and went over.

"So what's wrong?" asked Bryce.

"Umm... well, uhh...we might be out of gas." said Renny.

"WHAT!!!" cried Bryce, who had run over.

"Get ready to crash land on Mars!" yelled Renny.

"Ok. Brace yourself!"

There was a big BOOM and heat seared their faces.

Moments later Bryce's head popped up from the wreckage.

"Renny! RENNY!" shouted Bryce.

Renny's head popped up and he said, "I'm here, but where are we?"

Bryce replied, "I don't know, but on the bright side, there are the gems!"

Renny turned around.

"Wow! This is too easy." said Bryce.

Both Renny and Bryce walked forward.

"Hey!" said a voice behind them.

They turned around and were suddenly face to face with an alien!

Neither Renny nor Bryce could believe their eyes. They took a step back.

The alien spoke. "According to my calculations you are harmless earthlings. You are just in time to see us unleash our secret weapon."

"What secret weapon?" asked Renny.

"Stand aside." said the alien, who then walked right past the boys. It picked up the gems and carried them over to what looked like a giant ray gun. The alien put the gems in it, then stood back. Suddenly lots more aliens appeared.

"We are the Glorbs from planet Mars," said the alien. "And you are just in time to see us zap the universe with our Good-o-Tron."

"What?" cried Bryce, but it was too late.

The alien zapped everything in sight, including Earth. It then started dancing around.

"Why'd you do that? You probably just caused something terrible to happen!" said Bryce.

"Huh? Who said anything about terrible? You must have misunderstood. We just spread eternal joy to everyone in the galaxy!" said the alien.

"You mean... That's great!" said Bryce. "But how are we going to get back to Earth?"

"We had that all planned out when we saw you coming in for a crash. We knew you would need a way home, so we prepared another one for you. Oh, and here are the gems. We only needed them for the Good-O-Tron. You can have them back now."

In a couple of minutes Renny and Bryce were blasting off with the gems in their hands. When they

got pack to Earth, they felt happier than ever; probably from the effect of the Good-o-Tron. They were congratulated profusely, got lots of prizes and were famous for the rest of their lives.

## GRADE 3 FICTION

### The Mystery Unicorn

By Valerie Lenhart

#### THIRD PRIZE

Once upon a time, there was a girl named Feona. She was in her driveway playing basketball with her dad. All of a sudden, she saw something go whoosh! She followed it.

It was going too fast for Feona to catch to it. Suddenly, they came to a dead end. When Feona saw what it was, she was amazed! IT WAS A UNICORN!!!! Feona was thrilled with this wonderful sight. She always wanted to see a unicorn her whole life. She tried her best to stay calm. She walked one space at a time. The unicorn loved Feona and Feona loved the unicorn back. Feona's dad was coming. As that was happening, the unicorn hid behind a tree.

"Time to go inside," her dad said.

"Okay," said Feona. While Feona and her dad were walking inside, the unicorn secretly walked behind them.

When she and her dad were inside, Feona went to her bedroom and flopped on her bed. "I can't believe that I saw a unicorn out there, I'm tired out!" Then that's when she saw the unicorn staring straight at her.

"How did you get here?" said Feona to the unicorn. Feona heard footsteps coming up the stairs. "Someone's coming, Ummmmm.....hide in the closet," said Feona to the unicorn.

But it was too late, her mom saw the unicorn. Feona waited for her mom to say something like "Get that ugly thing out of here!" Or "Why do you have that thing in my house, get it out NOW!" But she didn't, she said the complete opposite—"Awwwwwwwwwwwww, it's so cute! I have to tell your father!"

Then her mom went running down the stairs to tell Dad. She thought about something terrible. 'Telling Dad. If I thought Mom would try to make me let the unicorn go but she didn't then, maybe Dad might.'

She came downstairs to see Mom and Dad arguing.

"PLEASE!" said Feona.

"Fine, fine." said Dad miserably, "but make sure it stays upstairs and out of my way."

"YAY!" Feona and her mom said together. But then, when Feona looked back at the unicorn, it was G-O-N-E, GONE!

Feona raced to the phone so she could call her friend Peach. "Hello," said Feona as Peach picked up the phone, "It's me, Feona."

"Hi!" said Peach, "How are you doing today?"

"Not too good. My new pet unicorn ran away. Can you help me?"

Peach cut her off and said, "Your pet unicorn went missing. Let's go find it. I'll go to your house and then we can go look for her! Byeeeeeeeeee see you soon." Then Peach hung up and started to head to Feona's house.

Ding Dong! The doorbell rang. "I'll get it," said Feona, running down the stairs knowing that it was Peach.

Without wasting any time, Peach quickly said to Feona, "Come on, let's go."

Then off they went into the woods. As they were walking, they saw the unicorn's footprints. "Look! Footprints!" said Peach.

"Let's follow them!" said Feona. As they were following the footprints, they suddenly stopped at a bush.

"Should we look in it?" asked Peach.

"I think so," said Feona. They looked under the bush, and THEY SAW THE UNICORN!!!!" Why did you run away?" Feona asked the unicorn.

"I thought you didn't like me," said the unicorn.

"That was just my dad," said Feona, "But he said I could keep you just as long as you stay out of his way, do you think you can do it?"

"Okay, I'll try," said the unicorn.

"WAIT! How is she talking?" said Peach.

"Oh yeah, how is she talking?" said Feona.

"I don't know, I just know how," said the unicorn.

"Well, let's all go home now." said Peach.

"Okay," said Feona.

"Well, I can't believe that you have a unicorn," said Peach.

"Well, I can't believe that we found the unicorn after it ran away, but we found it together, working as a team," said Feona. 'But I still haven't named the unicorn yet. Do you want to come over to help me think of a name?'"

"Okay." replied Peach.

Right when they got to Feona's house, they ran upstairs to Feona's bedroom, with the unicorn beside them. "I was thinking we could write names down on a piece of paper, and then see which one we like best from our list," said Peach.

"That's a great idea!" said Feona.

"Yeah!" said the unicorn.

"You can help us think of names too," said Peach to the unicorn.

"Okay," the unicorn replied. Here is the list they came up with:

Uni

Rainbow

Marshmallow

Sweet Tarts

"Only four names!" cried Peach.

"Well let's go on, and choose the best one," said Feona. "Lets see which one the unicorn likes best," said Peach. "Which one do you like best?" Peach asked the unicorn.

"Let's see..." said the unicorn. "SWEET TARTS!!!!!!!!!!!"

"Sweet Tarts it is," said Feona.

Feona woke up; it was just a dream. Feona checked if the coast was clear and thank goodness there was no unicorn. Feona looked in her closet to see what to wear and to see if there was a unicorn hiding in there. She had told the unicorn to hide in the closet so her mom wouldn't find the unicorn.

Then, all of a sudden, right when Feona opened the closet, a unicorn jumped out of the closet and onto Feona!!! "HIIIIIIIIIIII!!!!!!" said the unicorn as it jumped out.

## GRADE 3 FICTION

### The Young Cheetah By Gianna Zezima

#### HONORABLE MENTION

Long, long ago in Kenya Africa, comes this tale of a cheetah kingdom and a young cheetah named Zippy. There were lots and lots of children in the kingdom and they were all kind and respectful except for Zippy. He was boastful and full of himself. You see Zippy was the fastest cheetah around and he knew it.

Our story begins with Zippy and his siblings playing in the field together. Zippy had three siblings. Zippy walked up to his sisters Zoey and Zena and his brother Zack. He said “I challenge you to a race. They accepted even though they knew he would win, and as expected, he did win. However, Zippy was not a good sport. After every race he won, he teased, “Nana-a-boo boo I’m faster than you-you”. This would cause his siblings to become extremely sad, especially Zoey who was the youngest. She would run away crying. Zena would race after her so she didn’t get lost. Zack the oldest sibling stepped up to Zippy and said “You know, Zippy, you don’t have to have such bad sportsmanship! You could be nicer, we are your siblings!” Zippy replied “or you could get faster.” Then Zippy said “Nana-a-boo boo I’m faster than you-you”. He turned around and ran away. Zack sat there with tears in his eyes.

The next day the king announced “There will be a new cheetah family moving in at any time today, so if you spot them give them a warm welcome.” Zippy thought to himself, “The big race is tomorrow, that’s a bonus, a newsperson to brag to when I win.”

Zippy and his siblings went to the field and practiced. The new kid saw them and came over. She said “Hi, I’m Ada. Can I play with you?” “Sure.” said Zena. Zoey shouted “Yay” Zippy said, “We are not playing, we’re preparing.” Zena said “Sorry about him, he can be a bit over competitive.”

The following morning, Zippy got out of bed and made room for another trophy on his shelf because he knew he would win. Before he knew it, the cheetah kingdom championship race was about to begin. The king shouted, “On your mark, get set, go”. They were all off to a great start. Zippy was in the lead saying to the cub behind him “Nana-a-boo boo I’m faster than you-you”. The little cub started to cry and lost confidence and he finished in last place. Next, Zoey caught up to him and again Zippy said “Nana-a-boo boo I’m faster than you-you”. She started to cry too.

Then finally Ada caught up. Zippy did say “Nana-a-boo boo I’m faster than you” but she ignored him. They were neck and neck and all of a sudden, Ada swept past Zippy and crossed the finish line. The crowd went wild. “I declare Ada as the winner of the cheetah kingdom champion race,” said the king. Everyone cheered for Ada they shouted “Ada! Ada! Ada!” Zippy finally realized what he’d been doing. Zippy walked over to Ada and congratulated her for winning the race. He walked up to his siblings and said “I’m sorry.” He started being nice to everyone whether they were fast or not. Zippy had so much fun playing with everyone since he was no longer worried about bragging. So remember that you should always treat others, the way that you would like to be treated!

## GRADE 3 NONFICTION

### Indian Summer

By Ishika Kundu

#### FIRST PRIZE

After each busy school year, I always look forward to summer vacation. Some of my friends go camping, while others go swimming but I go to my grandparent's house in India every year. Last year due to Coronavirus, I was unable to travel to India, which kept me thinking about how I spent my summertime in the last couple of years. Let me share my experience with you today.

"I'm so excited to go to Tham and Dadumoni's house," I told my sister, Shreya, on the first day of the summer holidays. "Me too," she answered as we headed to the John F. Kennedy airport. As the flight took off, we felt tired and took a nap. My mom woke me up when the food was served. It was my favorite dish, Chicken nuggets. "Yummy!" I said. We got two cups of juice. After almost twenty-seven hours, we arrived at Kolkata airport where our grandparents were waiting for us. When they saw us, their faces filled with joy. It has been a long time since we had last seen them.

The weather in India was very different from that in the US. It was hot, but I was enjoying every bit of my time there. "It's very hot outside, but it's beautiful too!" I told my grandpa. By the time we arrived at our house, it was lunchtime. After eating lunch, we all enjoyed the cool breeze on the balcony. We felt tired after the long journey and took a nap. After we woke up, I saw a house full of relatives waiting for us. They brought gifts to welcome us. We felt delighted and started jumping up and down with joy.

The next day my sister and I raced outside to see our beautiful garden in the morning. There were flowers like daisies, tulips and roses. I always enjoyed looking at them while smelling their soothing fragrance. "Let's go and get some flowers," my sister said. "No, don't hurt the plants, they have a life too!" I answered. Sometimes in the evening, I rode my bike with my sister.

A few days after our arrival, monsoon started in India. Everywhere it was green. One day in the afternoon, it was raining heavily. My mom came to our room and said, "Let's feel the rain outside." "Yay!" my sister and I yelled together. We got drenched head to toe. Dancing in the rain was something new and I never experienced it before in Stamford.

The days passed by quickly. Sometimes I played Ludo and Carrom with my grandparents and cousins. My grandparents told us different types of stories- from fairy tales to horror stories. I also helped them by locking all the doors of the house before going to sleep at night; filling empty water bottles; wiping the clogged water in the bathroom and many more chores.

After a few weeks, it was my birthday. All our relatives came to our place. We celebrated my birthday at a restaurant. We had a family gathering after dinner. Everyone participated in some way or fashion by singing, dancing or reciting. It was the most memorable event of the trip; I still remember and cherish those moments.

A few days later, we went to Santinetan with our cousins by train. It is a small town built by the world-famous Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore to bring harmony in nature among all the students. The neighborhood was unique because the color of the soil was red. On the way the train had windows with no sealed glasses. I saw everything clearly and felt the cool breeze.

I didn't even notice how fast two months passed. Finally, it was time for us to return to Stamford. I felt sad. But I also felt very excited to go to the next grade and meet my new friends. Since every good thing has to end in order to welcome the next event, we said "Bye-bye" to our grandparents with teary eyes. We looked forward to going to India next summer and so did our grandparents.

Last year because of coronavirus, I was unable to go to India. I hope things get back to normal and I am able to go to India again this summer. Just keeping my fingers crossed and hoping.

## GRADE 3 NONFICTION

### Deep Waters By Hansika Jannu

#### SECOND PRIZE

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to be in deep waters in a pool? Well, I've been there. Before I traveled to America, I lived in India. I was five years old and getting ready for my swim classes. My swimming class was near my house. Once I arrived I took a shower, put on my swimwear and goggles. I ran into my friend Charan and we talked about some things. I thought it is so hot...good thing we are near pools.

First, I wondered what we were doing. My coach explained we were swimming in the deep waters. I gazed at the pool while I waited for my turn. Soon after, it was my turn and my heart raced. I said to myself, "Let's dive in." SPLASH ! While I was in the water, I felt like a fish as I swam gracefully. I couldn't believe it. I almost touched the pool floor. But the best thing was, if I couldn't keep my balance and started to drown, the coach would get me back on the floor. Surprisingly, I kept my balance by myself! I swam to the other side and got out of the pool. Coach said with pride, "Nice swimming. Keep it up!" as he patted me on the back. I was so proud of myself finally! I jumped up and down. I felt so happy I smiled the whole way home.

At my first attempt, I was so afraid I shook. But after one week of training, I overcame my fear of deep water. I hope I will have that experience again because it was enjoyable. Although I need more practice at the basic level, I want to train for the other levels too. I wanted to continue going to swimming classes last year, but because of COVID, I didn't have the chance. Hopefully, this summer things will be different and I can go back to swimming classes.

## GRADE 3 POETRY

### Books By Sophie Brand

#### FIRST PRIZE

It looks like a magical thing  
That you flip open  
With marvelous pages  
That tell a stupendous story  
In a world far beyond the Milky Way  
With majestic creatures  
And exotic beaches  
My fingers touch the corner of the pages  
And then turn them  
Until there's no more left to turn

## GRADE 3 POETRY

### Sunset

By Yael Rosenfeld

#### SECOND PRIZE

Filled with magical colors  
A color changing spectacle  
Black sun  
Fresh ocean air  
Squawking seagulls on the horizon  
Waves crashing against my toes  
I sit down  
I look up  
What a beautiful and majestic sight  
I could look at this for ages  
The beauty of the sunset  
Oh no!  
Lightning strolling in  
Boats coming back to shore  
Fun is over  
Pack up your bags  
The day has come to an end  
Yay!  
Again tomorrow

## GRADE 3 POETRY

### Apple Tree

By Eva Bomash

#### THIRD PRIZE

Red, green, yellow,  
sweet, hard, juicy.  
Apples come in different colors  
sizes, tastes and textures.

On a chilly November day  
I walk to a local farm,  
but apple trees stand empty,  
bare, and leafless,  
staring helplessly at me.  
I sigh:  
there are no more apples.

# GRADE 4 FICTION

## Christmas of my Dreams

### By Melyssa Dorlean-Moise

#### FIRST PRIZE

Hi, my name is Amiya Tunity. I just celebrated my 10th birthday last week on December 9, 2010. I live with my mom, my dad, my 16 year-old sister, Sage, and my dog who is a white golden retriever named Snowflake. I live at 50 Pinewood Oak Street, Springfield, Vermont 05156. My two best friends (Astrid Preston and Jemma Beckett) live a few houses away from me. Astrid has a younger brother named Paxton, who is six years old. Our parents have told us that they have a surprise for us and I can't wait to see what it is! A few days ago, they gave us a clue saying, "Think of the heat during the winter season." I wonder what that could mean. I guess we'll have to wait and see!

I woke up to the blaring sound of my buzzing alarm at 7:30 AM. I truly have to turn off that alarm later. After all, it is Christmas break! I got out of bed and decided that since it was the first day of vacation, I would eat breakfast in my pajamas. I tiptoed downstairs trying not to wake up my sister who was still sleeping heavily. My mom was downstairs making snowflake shaped pancakes and my dog was sitting next to the stove drooling. Once I got downstairs, I exclaimed, "Yes! Snowflake pancakes," and the real Snowflake looked up at me expectantly. "Sorry, not you girl," I told her. I went to sit at the table, finished all of my pancakes, and soon after, my sister came along. "Sage, I got extra syrup for you!" my mom had called. I giggled a bit since I knew that it was the only thing that could fully wake her up. I told everyone that I was going upstairs to take a shower remembering what my parents had said the day before and that today was the day that they would reveal the big surprise! The clue that our parents had given us was basically impossible to figure out. I finished my shower and put on a fuzzy rainbow sweater with my leggings and striped leg warmers. I rushed downstairs and saw that my dad was going to work for the last time in two weeks due to the holidays. I asked my mom if I could go to Astrid's and Jemma's houses to gather them up for the surprise. She said yes and so I went to the closet, put on my warm water jacket and winter boots and ran out the door.

The snow was six inches high and I trudged along the path all the way to Astrid's house since she's the nearest one to me. Once I got to her house and rang the doorbell, Mrs. Preston came to the door and when she saw me she said, "Oh Amiya, Astrid has been asking for you all day." I greeted her back and she told me that Astrid was in her room. Mrs. Preston let me take off my boots and put them on the mat. Mr. Preston was near the coat rack and offered to take my coat. I said thank you and went upstairs to Astrid's room. She was at her desk making the engine for another robot that she was going to put in her collection. Over her desk was a strip of paper that said Question of the Week. Under the piece of paper was a big sticky note that said, What could the big surprise be?

"Hey," I said, "I'm so excited for the big surprise later"

"I know right!" she exclaimed.

I told her that we should probably go get Jessica, since all of our parents were going to tell us the surprise all together, and my dad was almost home from work. She agreed and texted her mom that she was going to Jemma's with me. Her mom texted back: "Okay, but take Paxton with you." As we were walking down the path, we stopped every now and then to have a mini snowball fight. We made it to Jemma's house and when we rang the doorbell; she was the one who answered.

"Hey you guys!" said Jemma. We told her about my dad coming home soon and that we should get going. She asked her mom if she could come with us and Mrs. Beckett said yes because the surprise would be held at my house.

“You know what?” Mrs. Beckett said, “I’ll tag along with you since my husband is already at your house.” Once we all got to my house, all of our parents were there and this was the moment we were all waiting for: The surprise. Our parents gathered us on the couch and we were all whispering with excitement, even Paxton was whispering to Astrid about how excited he was.

“So,” my dad said, “you’ve all been very patient and mature...”

“Come on, get to the point already, my mom broke in. “They’ve been waiting an eternity and the last thing they want to hear is a whole speech.”

We all laughed a little and my dad said, “Fineeee. So, ‘drumroll please’ We are going to the Bahamas for Christmas!”

“No way!” I yelled, Thank you so much.”

Soon everyone was hugging his or her parents and then we all said at the same time, “When are we leaving?” All of our parents looked at each other and Mr. and Mrs. Beckett said, “First thing tomorrow at 4:30 AM sharp!”

After a bunch more of hooting, hollering, and hugging, we all managed to calm down and take a breath. Then, we all had to go our separate ways and start packing. It was getting late after all and we had to get packing if we were leaving this early tomorrow. I really can’t wait!

The next morning, my mom woke me up at 3:00 AM. She exclaimed, “Wake up honey, we have to get ready.”

“Five more minutes,” I groaned back.

My mom said no as she pulled me out of bed and dragged me to the bathroom. I finally opened my eyes all the way and saw the time.

“3:15!” I exclaimed.

“I told you so,” my mom said sarcastically and jokingly while she was taking out her rollers.

“Okay, fine you did,” I admitted.

I went into the bathroom and took a shower as fast as I could. I looked at the time again when we were all done with everything.

“3:44, not too bad,” I said.

Then, suddenly I thought of the clue our parents had given us and now it made much more sense.

My mom called Mrs. Preston and asked, “Are you guys ready?”

“We sure are!” answered Mrs. Preston. “And I already called the Becketts and they are ready too.”

“Great!” My mom exclaimed, “We’ll see you all at the airport.”

After an hour and a half of driving, we finally made it to the airport; we waited for our number to be called, passed all of the security checks, and got onto the plane.

“We’re going to the Bahamas!” Jemma called out, “it’s so exciting!”

“I know” I replied.

“Ladies and gentlemen, please put on your seatbelts, we are about to depart,” the pilot said in a muffled voice.

“Woohoo!” I whisper-shouted to not disturb everyone.

“Good night!” Jemma said, “I’m going to have to sleep through this one.”

“Same,” Astrid said almost right after.

“Me three!” I agreed. I knew that the flight would go by in a second if I managed to fall asleep and I couldn’t wait to get there!

“We made it to the Bahamas!” My mom had announced. We all got off of the plane and got out of the airport.

“You guys,” Mr. Preston had started, “Since it’s still pretty early... we’re going to the beach!”

“Yay!” we all shouted in glee.

This was going to be the best vacation ever. At the beach we played volleyball, ping pong, soccer, made sand castles, and went swimming. We hopped back in the car at sunset; once we got back to our resort

named Silverstone, we ordered pizza, watched a movie, and then went to bed as I thought about the awesome day I just had along with the amazing weeks I have ahead of me. My eyes slowly closed as the lights were turned off and I fell asleep.

I woke up to the blaring sound of my buzzing alarm at 7:30 AM. I realized that I was in my room and not the resort. My friends were not beside me and I still smelled the amazing smell of my mom's snow-flake pancakes. I realized that everything I thought I had experienced was a dream...or was It?

## GRADE 4 FICTION

### A Voyage to the Red Planet

By Rudrh Nair

SECOND PRIZE

When I was a young boy, I used to look up In the night sky and wonder what the rest of the universe looked like, what it is like to be out there in outer space. I studied a lot of books, but I thought there is still a lot that we don't know. I decided that when I grew up, I would become an astronaut to see and research the planets and the cosmic objects for myself.

With that goal in my mind, I studied really hard during my school and college days and when it was time, I applied to be an astronaut. The space research organization liked my knowledge and interest and recruited me. I soon became part of a research team that looked at exploring other planets. Luckily for me, the organization decided to launch a project to land humans on Mars to increase our knowledge of the planet. I was selected as the captain for the mission. This was the first Mars mission ever Involving human travel. My happiness knew no bounds and I was proud to be part of a mission that was going to make history.

As part of the procedures, I was sent to the avionics department where the spaceship was being readied. The head scientist, James, welcomed me and gave me a tour of the ship. The space ship was equipped with seats for four astronauts; mine was the one with the steering wheel of course. Each astronaut was also provided with a space suit. When I got inside the cockpit, I saw all the controls, and asked what each of them did and noted them down, many of them in my memory. When the scientist was done explaining all the controls, we went to the bathroom. It was designed such that when someone flushed, the things that they, umm, ejected, would be thrown out into outer space.

When I was done touring the ship. I went to the zero gravity simulator for training and practice. It was basically a room filled with water, and inside we all wore space suits to feel what zero gravity exactly felt like. It needed some skills and a lot of practice to navigate through the zero gravity situations.

After a few weeks of practice sessions, I asked the mission planner for details of the mission. He told me that I will be leaving next week and I am supposed to go to Mars, collect a few specimens, get back to Earth, and study the specimens with my crew and other scientists. I was then introduced to my crew. George was the co-pilot, so he would be sitting next to me, helping with the controls. John was the scientist in our group who will safely secure the specimens and study them until we reached home after which we all will be studying them in detail. Kate was the engineer, whose job is to fix the ship up if anything goes wrong. I am glad to have such a great team traveling with me. When we were all familiar with each other, we went to bed.

One week later, the day arrived when we were going to make history – the launch day. We were all strapped into our seats, and I was just waiting for the signal to take off. The countdown started, ten, nine,

eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one, lift off! I ignited the ship's engine, and before we knew, we were flying up at the speed of sound! We couldn't move for the first few seconds, but as soon as we passed by the Earth's atmosphere, we were able to. I pointed the nose of the ship towards Mars and put it on auto-pilot, and then unstrapped the seat belts. It felt really awesome! We were all tumbling around, racing each other to the bathroom, because we each had to go. George spotted a fast-approaching asteroid! I swam through as fast as I could in the zero gravity towards the cockpit and turned the ship just in time away from a disastrous collision. Phew! That was a close one. I hope that the rest of the travel will not have such surprises.

I set the boosters at full thrust, and reached Mars' atmosphere. Now that we were so close to the planet, I decided to land. When the ship landed, we decided to call it a day and went to sleep. The next day, we checked the oxygen level, put on our space suits, and went outside into the Martian land. I stepped outside first. In that moment I made history, as famous as Neil Armstrong when he landed on the Moon! When everyone was out, we set up all of our equipment as he practiced back on Earth. The first thing we did was to find a specimen: a few pieces of rock we could experiment with that can help with understanding the mysteries of the solar system. We also took some to see if there was any evidence of life, microscopic or otherwise. We also decided to do some Mars tourism, just so we could know what secrets it might be hiding. We had brought a camera with us, so we could also take pictures. The next thing we did was to check on the Mars Rover, which is almost a Martian by now, and made sure that there weren't any problems with it for many more years. We then went checking to see if there was any water on the planet. Earthlings always had the suspicion that Mars was once like Earth and so must have been a planet that could have supported life. We didn't see any, but there's a 0.00001 per cent chance that there might be because we studied only half of the planet.

We traveled on the Martian land using a car that was built to operate through the conditions of Mars. All was going well until the car broke down. We radioed the space center on Earth and told them the situation. Meanwhile, Kate was already taking a look to fix the car. When it didn't work, we tried walking back to the ship, but we soon got tired. We didn't have any food or water, and we were still about ten miles away from the ship! That's when George had a brilliant idea. He said that we could take the car apart, reassemble it, and build another version! We all liked the idea and agreed, and piece-by-piece we took the car apart. Then, George told us that we should assemble the metal in the form of a pod, and assemble the other parts such that they would fit inside the pod, except for the thrusters. The thrusters had to be sticking out. We also needed to install a door, which we did by leaving one side of a piece of metal loose. When we were done, the end outcome looked awesome. We all got inside, closed the door and out the thrusters on maximum boost. We were all really tired by the time we reached the ship, so we all got inside, and fell asleep. The next morning, we said goodbye to Mars (and any living Martian that we haven't seen yet) and took off from Mars' atmosphere towards our home, the Blue Planet. We curved through space in the direction of Earth. When we were about to reach Earth's atmosphere, we got into the landing pods which had parachutes attached to them. When it was time to land, we released the pods from the ship and as it fell to the ground, the parachutes opened up. We had arranged to land in the ocean, which is much safer than landing on hard land. A ship arranged by our space organization was waiting for us and we were picked up and headed to our final destination.

We were given a warm welcome and all newspapers had news about our achievement. On reaching the labs, we studied our specimens under the microscope for detailed information. John found some signs of liquid in the samples. On closer inspection, we also spotted some signs of bacteria and other micro-organisms as well. In other words, our belief that Mars was once like Earth is – TRUE. We told our boss our findings and he was really happy. He praised us for our efforts and raised our weekly salary by one hundred thousand dollars and we each were given a trophy for doing what no one else had ever done before.

Our voyage from the Blue Planet to the Red Planet was adventurous and gave us very good scientific knowledge that was not known before.

Mission accomplished.

## GRADE 4 FICTION

### Perfectly Imperfect By Molly Steinberg

#### THIRD PRIZE

I had been in Washington for a year since the move. I was doing fine at my new school and was doing great on my gymnastics team. My sisters were teasing me as usual, and I was making sure my room was nice and tidy... like REALLY tidy. Did I mention I'm a bit of a perfectionist? I wear the same type of outfit every day and I love my label maker. My parents love how I'm always tidy but my sisters think it's so weird. They say things like; "Sierra, you're always so perfect, be messy sometimes, it's fun!" and "Sierra, your room is too tidy, this can't be good for you".

I never thought being a perfectionist was such a bad thing until last Tuesday. I had studied really hard for a test Monday night, but when I got a C minus the next day, I was shocked. I went home and cried until dinner. All my friends were thinking I was crazy.

On Wednesday there was a new girl in my class. Her name was Jessica Bell and she had just transferred schools. She had wavy black hair and very pale skin. I went over to talk to her. She seemed quiet, but I wanted to make an impression.

I said "Hey, do you want to come over to my house after school?"

She said, "Yes!" and we came home and went straight to my room. She said that my room looked really nice, then she asked "Why so neat?"

I replied. "Jessica, I'm a bit of a perfectionist."

Then she said, "You know, being perfect isn't everything."

"Perfect isn't everything..." It was in my head all night.

Months passed by and Jessica soon told me that her dad had found a new job in Wisconsin and they were moving away. I was pretty upset to hear this, since she and I had become very close.

Two weeks later she was gone. I missed her a lot. The weekend after her move, I put a pen on my desk and I was going to put it in my pen box, but then I thought, "Perfect isn't everything" and I left it on my desk. Slowly I started to realize that being perfect is NOT everything. A C minus was better than an F, and a book left on my bed was okay. I was perfectly imperfect, and that was okay with me.

## GRADE 4 NONFICTION

### My First Trip By Victoria Leng

#### FIRST PRIZE

Knowing that I was going miss school was shocking, but knowing that I'd be missing it on a trip to Singapore made me too speechless to even FEEL shock! For my birthday on February 16th, we were taking off-just my little sister Emilia and I. At that time, I was turning six and Emilia wasn't four years old yet. It was just so cool to be going out of the continent that I felt goose bumps, already excited to go. The word 'airsick' never came to mind!

We were more enthusiastic about actually being there than waking up at 4.00 AM to go to the airport. But since it was going to also be my first ever airplane ride, it was still nerve wracking. Just not AS nerve wracking as the Singapore landscape probably looked and felt to be there, with the mind-blowing idea of the chilling pool water in a tropical paradise! We'd stop by some places, due to how far it was, but I'd rather be that way than go for HOURS AND HOURS straight! Well, I still had to go to sleep and go through the tough waking up part.

I felt my blankets fly off of me, but I still did not fully awaken. At last, though, I needed to get up! Singapore time! I wasn't even completely up when I brushed my teeth, but it was worth it to be half asleep.

My dad passed me some clothes to wear to the airport and on the flights, since it's probably quite cold, which I quickly put on. No hesitation, because you never doubt the amount of fun you will have on your first vacation! Emilia woke up, minutes after, going through the same routine. She was jumpy too. Who isn't jumpy before going to Singapore? Just gazing at my elder sisters Sophia and Alicia's pictures there at ONE WATERPARK made me think. 'Dad, we have to go there.'

Alicia and Sophia were sleeping, but they didn't even notice when we were off!

It took about an hour, I'd say, to get to the airport. After checking in with our passports, we went to visit areas in the airport such as the lounge and shops.

After a while – REALLY A WHILE – we were called and headed to the gates to board the plane. As we found our row, I looked at our economy seat. Still very nice, though it was not the richest and finest section in the airplane. Could be better – so we weren't in the comfiest chairs. Big deal, as long as I get to go to S-I-N-G-A-P-O-R-E! I started getting the chilling goose bumps once again. We were on a plane! It was moving! It was moving! I was stunned as my seatbelt was buckled. My first ever plane ride! The thought of being on ANY plane took my mind away from 'but this,' 'but that.' I could scarcely breathe! I started to watch a movie on my TV. Small TVs, I noted. But seriously! At least I can watch something.

I played games, and watched movies, and did everything there was to do, including eating breakfast, snacks, lunch, and more snacks, but still there was no sign we were at our stop. I sighed. Going to Singapore was tough! We wouldn't even be in Singapore yet at the coming stop! THIS WAS TAKING FOREVER. This stress was making me tired, so I decided to take a calming nap. When I woke up, we were LITERALLY at our stop. No mistake. Well, I just had to play one more game.

We landed in the airport at our stop, and the first thing was to get off the airplane. Next, go to the lounge. I wasn't sure where I was, Japan or something, but I didn't mind nor care either. Repeat the routine - PLANE AGAIN? I barely even got a rest! Whatever.

We went and boarded the plane once more. I repeated the same plane cycle again, and AFTER AGES AND YEARS AND DECADES AND CENTURIES, we were stopped at Singapore! Wow, wow, wow, wow. Grandma and Grandpa, with their cameras in hand, were there to greet us.

When we arrived at their apartment, we were too excited to sleep. There was so much to see that a week was not nearly enough to see everything! Before I knew it, it was my birthday! I got birthday presents also known as my forever souvenirs from my very first trip to Singapore.

In the next few days, I also visited River Safari, Singapore Zoo, Night Safari, Jurong Bird Park and so much more! (Plus restaurants; I need to eat to have energy so I can take in all of the goodness of this trip).

One of my favorites was Jurong Bird Park's parakeet feeding center. We got the bird food, which was a small plastic container filled with honey water and some other nutrients, then headed deeper into the canopy where we saw parakeets of all different colors and patterns. They were all so beautiful that they took my breath away, though they also made a lot of noise! The feeding trail was made of bridges in the middle of the air that you could walk on to feed the birds that were flying on your side. When they noticed the food, they'd climb on to your hand, their little claws so delicate, then devour the food until there was none left. Sometimes they wanted the food so much and were so eager that they tried to take the container away from your hand. At one point, a bird climbed into Emilia's hair and didn't want to fly away! It gripped on tight, not even letting go of her hair. That was the first time I got to see a bird close up! I swore I'd come back to

Jurong Bird Park's parakeet feeding center every time I visit Singapore, which I did later on.

Another event at Jurong Bird Park that I loved was a bird show, with a very smart talking parrot. One of the staff members asked him. "What is your name?" and that little bird said, "A-migo! A-migo!" Then they asked him to count to ten and he did it in both Chinese and English! He also sang three songs in three different languages – a "Welcome Guest" song in Chinese, "Rasasaya" in Indonesian, and "Happy Birthday" in English! Many regular humans can't sing in so many languages, yet imagine a parrot singing songs in different languages! I never expected a parrot to be so clever.

Time flew and a week had already gone by I didn't want to go back home, but we had to for school. Which is what I did. I went home, and Alicia and Sophia and my mother were all there to see us again. I was so happy, but sad, too, to leave Singapore behind. I guess I'll go again next time! (And I have)!

## GRADE 4 NONFICTION

### Fun Time Baking

By Avigayil Chavkin

#### SECOND PRIZE

My sister and I love baking, but there is always one problem. We never know what to bake, so we always look up recipes.

One time, we looked up a recipe that was Twix Bars and it looked so good because Twix is my favorite candy.

So, we gathered all of the ingredients. The ingredients were sugar, flour, eggs and baking soda. We put all the ingredients in the bowl. We mixed the batter with a spoon until it became smooth. We put the cookie part in the oven and it took about fifteen minutes to bake. When the Twix bars were ready, I touched the bar and it was hot on my hand. It was not so good because the crust was breaking, apart and it smelled a little bit like Play dough. We put in the rich, sweet chocolate and spread it all around the crust. We then melted the caramel and first we let the chocolate set in the refrigerator. After it set, we spread the yummy, salted, sticky caramel and we let it set in the refrigerator again.

Finally, the best part was tasting it. We tried it and it was not as we expected. It was delicious but it did not taste like Twix Bars. I don't know what it tasted like but I know it did not taste like Twix Bars! I learned from this experience that next time I should double the recipe so it will be thick instead of thin. It was so much fun baking with my sister.

## GRADE 4 NONFICTION

### My Life in COVID-19

By Savera Nair

#### THIRD PRIZE

Hi, I'm writing about my life in COVID lockdown... COVID struck when I was in school, in the month of March. When I came home, my parents told me what had happened. I was just speechless. I had a lot of plans for spring, but COVID crushed it. It was pretty much downhill from there. The world had so many COVID cases, it was so terrifying just to see on the news how many people had got COVID and died. I was not reading the news but I would hear my parents talk about it.

School closed and we had remote learning, that was the hardest part because I lost connection a lot, but thankfully my teacher was really nice. Life in COVID was so dull I could barely see anybody walking on the streets and I could not go outside, or play with anybody. All of a sudden, Epic, a reading app, came to my rescue. I used to spend hours on that app because the library was closed.

After a while, my family started to go for walks in the yard and play really funny games at home. Then came summer. I saw some of my friends but we had to keep our distance and wear a mask. After a while I went to Barnes and Nobles to get some books and then the library opened. It was awesome because I could get to read again, but sadly my birthday was in COVID so I did not get to invite a lot of people.

Summer flew by very quickly, but COVID was still here. My parents choose remote learning again, but this year it was so much better! I had a super cool teacher plus a super funny and cool class!

Then came winter with the COVID vaccine. I was so happy I was jumping off the walls, but other than that it was great! I hope that this year COVID will go away!

## GRADE 4 POETRY

### Sunset

By Maggie Mosenkis

#### FIRST PRIZE

Long walks along the beach,  
Red, blue, yellow and peach,  
Paint bucket pouring all over the sky,  
Hoping that this moment will never die,  
Clouds dancing,  
Colors prancing,  
Black silhouette trees,  
Hearing the faint sound of buzzing bees,  
Gazing upon the fading sun,  
I see the first star!  
The sunset is done.

## GRADE 4 POETRY

### Fall

By Victoria Angel

SECOND PRIZE

Leaves falling to the ground  
Without making any sound  
Trees changing from reds to yellows  
While we're inside eating marshmallows  
Branches sway in the breeze  
No more buzzing of the bees  
Here comes the snow in flecks of white  
It's too late to fly my kite

## GRADE 4 POETRY

### Flying

By Daniella Raich

THIRD PRIZE

You fly  
in the sky  
along with the wind  
fly, fly, fly away  
gliding like a bird up in the sky  
flying around  
you suddenly fall back down, down, down to the ground  
that's the end of flying  
but wait, you buy a balloon  
to go back up again  
but you don't succeed

## GRADE 4 POETRY

### A True Friend

By Nishka Yadav

#### HONORABLE MENTION

When I found you  
I found a friend

When I heard you  
I heard a fine accent

When I smelled you  
I smelled an unforgettable scent

When I touched you  
I touched something smoother than silk

When I found you  
I found a true friend

I found a true friend  
Whose smile was as bright as the sun

I found a true friend  
Whose eyes were as blue as the sea

I found a true friend  
Whose nose could recognize my smell right away

I found a true friend  
Who cared about me

When I found you  
I found a true friend for  
LIFE!

## GRADE 5 FICTION

### The Not-So Amazing Summer of Camron Lace By Sawyer Mills

#### FIRST PRIZE

The clock was ticking. Everything grew quiet. Even the gerbil, Scruffles, was staring at the wall, building suspense from his bulky wire cage. The little chew sticks were torn to shreds from Scruffles' razor-sharp teeth. My head turned, looking close at his small, igloo-like cave, with an almost peeled off price tag of \$2.99. I felt the relaxing breeze blowing on my face, growing weak from the lack of excitement. Beaming sun crashed through the window, making me squint as I stared at the window shade, rocking slightly.

Then, the bell rang. I saw the door fling open, from the lucky kids who sit in the front, and I heard their sneakers squeak down the hallway so quickly, you may think a duck was quacking next to the lockers. I watched as the other kids darted to the door, busting it open. I got up after everyone left, and suspiciously sashayed to the door. I strutted down the empty hallways, through the gymnasium, and out the back door. I sat on a rock that oddly had a stump right next to it that works perfectly for my after-school snack table. I plopped a few strawberries in a plastic bag on the large stump-table. I slowly plucked the leaves off the strawberry and popped it in my mouth. I savored the sweet, tart flavor.

After my snack was finished, I made my way down Westwood Lane. I took a turn at the beautiful trees growing in the yard of an old house by the corner of Carson Avenue. I slipped past the large, bulky, grey home, and trotted down the street. I have always despised going home, because of the chaos. I have always imagined that if I told somebody that, they would think I live with a herd of wild brothers, but no. All I have is one measly younger sister and one absolutely absurd Aunt Veronica.

When you first walk in the door, in a normal home, you would take your shoes off. Well, when I walk into my house, it reminds me of a danger zone. You need to dodge the Legos spread across the floor, and you need to parkour around the endless complaints of the all-dreaded Queen Veronica.

I should probably say that my problem is not what Aunt Veronica looks like on the outside. It's how she is on the inside. Most people who see her walking out of the salon or grocery store, probably think, "Well, you should never judge a book by its cover." but again, no. Aunt Veronica is exactly the same on the outside as she is on the inside.

I burst open the door, ready to become a slave once more, to both the queen, and the little 'princess'. That's what my aunt likes to call her. By the 'princess', I mean my little, spoiled-rotten brat of a sister. She goes by the name of Barbara. I always thought we would be best friends and love each other and all that junk, like in the movies. Guess what? I was SO wrong.

I made my way through the minefield of toys and I entered the final level, the ultimate boss, Aunt Veronica. I slowly sashayed to the stairs, not trying not to make a peep, but then, the worst thing happened. My little sister, Barbara, appeared out of nowhere and hung onto a lock of my hair. I don't have any idea how toddlers can get away with doing stuff like that. Without any warning, the bomb exploded. Barbara began to sob, like she just saw a puppy die in her favorite television show, Paw Patrol. It sounded like a kidnapper came to take her, and they chopped off all her limbs, so she wouldn't get away. Her screeching caused the attraction of the queen, while she was making us dinner. In other words, she was pouring olive oil onto a pan, with great confidence that it would become a gourmet dish. I knew I shouldn't have left "Chopped" on when I went to school. Rookie mistake.

The monster has been awakened. No stopping it now. Aunt Veronica slowly turned and scooted over to me, frying pan in hand, and olive oil dripping all over the floor. It made an odd, dark green puddle, flowing through the disgusting, pale tiles that looked like they had been in a nuclear explosion.

I clenched my eyes until I felt like I was dozing off to sleep, but I knew it wouldn't last for long. My

logic was that if I couldn't see her, she couldn't see me. Let me tell you, I never won a game of hide and seek in my entire life.

Before you could say supercalifragilisticexpialidocious, she started screaming, "CAMRON REBECCA LACE!"

She sternly thrust her finger up the stairs and hollered, "GO TO YOUR ROOM, YOU LITTLE SNOB! DON'T YOU DARE UPSET YOUR SISTER!"

I rushed upstairs, slamming the door to my room. I shoved my hand in my bag, hoping to pull out something entertaining, and just my luck, I whipped out my cell phone. I was typing in my password, and when I got in, I saw a notification saying, "One voicemail." I tapped it, and it started playing. I heard a familiar voice. It sounded sweet and gentle. I couldn't quite put my finger on it though. It only took about thirty seconds to realize who it was. It was my mother!

She said in her sweet, calming voice, "Hey honey. I know it's been a while, but I'm on my way home! It was supposed to be a surprise, but I was bursting to tell you the exciting news. I love you, and I hope your aunt is taking good care of you! Make sure to use the money I sent wisely. Remember, Mommy loves you! Bye!"

Almost a million and a half thoughts plunged through my mind, and here are a few of them. I came to the most urgent thought, and cleared my mind of everything else. Who is taking our money? I am going through the prime suspects, while making a list of them on the back of an unfinished assignment. Then it hit me like a baseball bat to the jaw. Who has been acting odd lately? Who has been buying odd things and food themselves?

Well, the answer to all those questions is one horrible person and her name is Veronica. I don't know if it could be clearer. Well, it could have, but then it would be so obvious that even my MOM, from across the country would have seen it coming.

I made myself a chart. I did a little math, and some basic calculations, and figured out that right about now, Mom would be flying over to Missouri, because it was getting late, and she never would be able to take a flight from Maine to Washington in one day. I figured that by tomorrow afternoon, she would be home. I looked at the word alarm clock on the floor and glanced at it. It was already 10 PM! Without thinking, I just threw myself onto the bed, still in my jeans and Hello Kitty shirt and I fell asleep as quick as a light bulb might go out.

I woke up in my bed, with a serious bed-head, and I glared at the summer vacation sun beaming through the little peephole Aunt Veronica calls a window. I blinked my eyes open, feeling a little off, like there was something I was missing. I realized that my mother was coming home to save me! The day kept going on, and I drowsily flopped around the house, like a slug. I watched cartoons and slouched on the couch. I made my way into the kitchen and I grabbed a cherry Popsicle from the freezer Mom may have left some treats for us, but I am just HOT.

I heard knocking at the door, and an echoing voice of my aunt hollering, "I'M NOT GETTING IT. ANSWER THE DOOR CAMRON, YOU BUM!"

I gasped, and I let those hurtful words from my aunt come through one ear, and out the other. I dashed to the door and before my eyes was the UPS guy.

He said, "Does a Veronica live here? I have a package of jewelry for her."

I dropped my head, and grunted, "No sir, we don't have a Veronica in this household." The UPS guy slouched back into his truck and rode away.

I galloped back into the kitchen, only to hear another knock at the door. I stumbled back to the door, and then I gasped. It was she, my mother. She came home. I burst into tears and launched into my mother's arms. I looked up at her with my wet ole' eyes and she started to pet me on my scalp. I just buried my face in her sweatshirt and grinned.

# GRADE 5 FICTION

## A Test of Three Bells

### By Olivia Manewal

#### SECOND PRIZE

In Italy, there lived a man named Lorenzo. Lorenzo was a greedy man; he did not leave his house much. When he did, he would walk around the streets asking for gold. Everyone knew that that was a pretty big ask, but that did not stop Lorenzo. If you gave him anything less than gold, he would either give it back, or find a way to get rid of it. If anyone offered him a job he would turn it down for two reasons; one, he was too lazy to work, two, he only accepted a payment of gold. Because Lorenzo only accepted gold, he grew poor, very poor. Now, he couldn't afford food, and when it came time to pay his bills, he had no money at all. But still, Lorenzo only accepted gold. Eventually, the villagers got tired of Lorenzo and his greedy and selfish ways. One of the villagers decided to bring this up with the wisest man she knew, Giovanni Regio.

Giovanni was an old man with many experiences and he was great at solving problems. The thing is Giovanni did not live in the village; he lived up in the mountain near it. The villager hiked all the way up the mountain to find Giovanni. When she reached his old cottage, she took a moment to look at Giovanni's magnificent collection of bells. Beautiful bells of all colors. Some were made of silver or gold, and some looked so old, they may be as ancient as Giovanni himself. When the villager knocked on Giovanni's door, it was answered by an old woman in an apron and dirty gardening boots.

"Hello, Miss. I am here to see Giovanni Regio."

At first the old woman looked puzzled.

"Why, Giovanni is asleep, and no one has come to see him in ages." The villager looked very upset.

"Well then, may I talk to you please, just to pass the time?" The old woman nodded and opened the door more so the villager could come inside. The woman pointed to a small table and the two of them sat down.

"Excuse me, but I didn't get your name," the villager said as she slipped into her seat.

"I am Aida, Giovanni's wife and caretaker. You see, Giovanni is very ill and cannot walk and sometimes, he can't speak."

"That is terrible!" the villager replied.

"What is your name?" Aida asked the villager.

"I am Gianna, a gardener and seamstress." Gianna saw an excited look appear on Aida's face.

"You garden?" the old woman asked.

"Why of course!" Gianna said, pointing to her dress which was covered in mud and dirt.

"Come" the woman said, "while we wait for Giovanni, come see my garden."

When the two ladies got outside, Gianna saw the most magnificent thing, a garden full of flowers in every color. Suddenly, Gianna heard a voice coming from the cottage.

"Aida. I'm up." It was Giovanni!

"Giovanni, Giovanni!" Gianna said running back into the house.

"Hello, Miss." Giovanni said, taking a seat on the wooden chair by the window.

"I am here to speak to you about a problem we are having in our village," Gianna said. Giovanni leaned in closer, signaling to Gianna that he was listening. Gianna told him everything. When she was done telling the story, instead of advice on how to deal with Lorenzo, he told her, to bring Lorenzo up here at this time tomorrow for a test. Gianna wasn't sure what he meant but was determined to help Lorenzo.

The next day, Gianna dragged Lorenzo out of bed and up the mountain to see Giovanni. When they got there, Giovanni was standing out on his front porch staring at lazy Lorenzo.

“Lorenzo.” Giovanni said walking down the steps “I have a test for you.”

“Cool,” Lorenzo replied lazily.

“Thank you Gianna, you may go.” Gianna left a smile on her face. Giovanni would surely fix Lorenzo or at least fix his issues.

“So Lorenzo, your friends say that you only accept gold as a payment?”

“That is true.” Lorenzo said proudly.

“Well then I have a test for you. You see, I have hidden three bells on this mountain, one copper, one silver and one...” Giovanni paused fixing Lorenzo with a firm gaze “Gold. You must find the bells; each of them is special and has something inside that may help you. But here’s the catch, find the bells, but only pick up the bell you need. If you take the wrong bell, there will be a consequence.” Lorenzo smiled. “Yes sir.” He knew he would take the gold bell.

“Go!” Giovanni yelled. Lorenzo took off trying to find the bells. He easily found the copper bell behind a bush but paid no attention to it. Then he found the silver bell up in a tree; again he paid no attention and kept running. It took him hours but eventually he found the gold bell. Without a second thought, he ripped the bell from the ground. Water poured out of the hole where the gold bell once lay. Lorenzo looked inside the bell... NOTHING!

Just then Lorenzo was swept away by the water and was drowned. The water rushed down the mountain destroying anything in its path. It took down shops, swept away houses and tore away the town. Gianna was so frightened but she knew she needed to get all of the villagers up the mountain to safety. She gathered everyone up and brought them up the long steep mountain in hopes that they could stay with Giovanni and Aida.

When they asked the elderly couple, they immediately agreed. Gianna asked Giovanni what happened. Giovanni explained.

“Well, you see, I told him to choose the bell he needed. He didn’t need gold, maybe he needed silver or copper but not gold. If he had chosen the copper bell, he would have found money, not too much but just enough to pay his bills and to buy food. If he had chosen the silver bell, he would have found seeds, seeds to plant all sorts of plants and he could have sold them at the market for money.” Gianna nodded understanding what had happened. They rebuilt that town and gave it a new name. The water never disappeared, so their streets were made of water and you needed to ride a boat everywhere. They named this new city Venice, Italy.

Now most parents in Venice, when their kids are being greedy or selfish, they tell them the story of Lorenzo, the man who wanted gold.

## GRADE 5 FICTION

### Sixth Grade Blues

By Dean Eustache

#### THIRD PRIZE

It was a beautiful Sunday morning in September. The sun was beaming through my bedroom window and the birds were chirping from a distance.

“Breakfast is ready!” yelled Alex’s mom from downstairs in the kitchen I could hear her singing and humming to her favorite songs. My mom always loved to sing while she was cooking or cleaning. Who enjoys cleaning that much?

I pulled the blanket over my head because I was not ready to get out of bed so soon. Summer break

was over and I was not happy about it. I heard my brother Devonte run down the stairs. He was always first at the table. My mom said he has a worm because he was always hungry. Devonte was a junior in college and he was very popular. He played basketball and had lots of friends. I wish I was like him, he's so lucky.

"Alex!" Mom called from downstairs, "Come eat your breakfast." I pretended not to hear her and kept my eyes closed like I was still asleep. Ten minutes later, there was a big tug on my blanket and my mom standing over me.

"I know you're not asleep Alex, wash up and come downstairs for breakfast." I groaned and I slowly rolled myself off the bed to brush my teeth and change my clothes. By the time I made it to breakfast, Devonte was already done. No shocker there!

"What's wrong Alex?" asked my mom. I took a deep breath and said, "Nothing was wrong." She said, "So why are you sad? Didn't you enjoy your summer?" I told her again I was fine but I really wasn't.

My mom knows me well so she knew something was bothering me. I asked to be excused but she said, "Not until you eat all of your food. Breakfast is the most important meal of the day."

I slowly ate while my mom started singing again as she washed the dishes.

After breakfast I went up to my room and I buried my head in my pillow. Tomorrow is the first day of sixth grade and I was not happy about it. Middle school, right smack in between elementary school and high school.

I have been dreading this day all summer long. I prayed that it would not come. What's the big deal anyway? Why does it have to be a new school? Why couldn't it just be sixth grade in the same school?

I thought about telling my mom I have a tummy ache in the morning, but I would have to come up with a different excuse the next day. I didn't know how long I could fake being sick. Plus, my mom is pretty smart and she would know I was lying. She has been telling all her friends about how excited she was that I was a big boy now and growing up so fast.

The problem is that I was smaller than most fifth graders and I would definitely be smaller than everyone else in my new school. At least in elementary school I knew almost. No one bothered me and stared at me for being small. I started there in first grade so kids were used to me.

I stayed in bed most of the morning. I thought about how big the kids in middle school would be. Not even just the sixth graders; but the seventh graders and even the eighth graders were going to be giants compared to me. I felt like I wanted to vomit thinking about it. I did not want to get bullied. I heard that some schools have bullies and stuff kids in their lockers.

None of my friends were going to Rippowam and that I would have to go there too. She did not care. She said my district was at another school. I don't think she understood how I felt and how important it was for me to go to Rippowam. Why can't I go where I wanted to go? If we all go to the same school now, then what changed with the district? It just did not seem fair at all. My mom does not understand. Parents just don't understand.

I tried to talk to Devonte about how I was feeling, but he was always busy on the phone with his girlfriend or playing with his friends on his new PS5 game.

My mom called me down for lunch. I tried talking to her again and she just smiled and told me it was going to be ok and kissed me on my forehead. She said that if anyone tried to bully her baby she would come up to my school and take care of it. Oh, great, my mom coming to my school to defend me is exactly what I do not need. Plus my brother always says snitches get stitches, so I am not snitching on anyone.

I spent the rest of the day in my room; I skipped dinner. I was so nervous about tomorrow. I could not even sleep. I kept getting nightmares of kids laughing at me or stuffing my head in the toilet. Every time I fell asleep, I woke up. The time was moving fast and in a few short hours my worst day ever will begin.

My alarm went off and I wished I was dreaming. My mom opened the door and said, "Wake up Honey". I did not understand her excitement for my bad day. I took a shower and I got dressed and ate breakfast. My mom drove me to school since it was my first time but she said that starting next week, I would have to take the school bus. She was going back to work then. My mom always takes the first week

of the new school year off from work to make sure I am ok.

I got out of the car when we got to school and I felt like everything was moving in slow motion. Middle school was bigger than elementary school. There were a lot of kids looking for their classes and their lockers. I felt like a midget walking with giants. I finally found my class and the teacher who was standing next to the board said, "Come on in." with a big smile on her face. The seats in the back were taken so I had to sit in the front. I hate sitting in the front of the class.

The bell rang and the teacher told us a little about herself. She was a Giants and Lakers fan just like me. Then she went about the room and we all had to say a little about ourselves. My hands were cold because I was so nervous because everyone was staring at me when I talked.

Lunchtime came around and the lunchroom was packed and loud. I found an empty table by myself but a few minutes later I heard someone call my name from across the room. He invited me over to eat with them. I was really surprised. The table was full and they made room for me. Everyone was eating and laughing and happy to be in sixth grade. There were even some kids from seventh grade at our table but no one was mean to each other or cared that I was smaller than them. I was really surprised and so relieved.

After lunch I had music class and my music teacher said that he was a friend of Mr. Darling from Davenport Ridge and he was excited to hear me play the trumpet. Mr. Darling was my music teacher and he was an amazing teacher. He taught me to play the trumpet and it is my favorite instrument.

After I played the notes for my new music teacher, the whole class started cheering and patting me on my shoulder. My teacher said he was signing me up for the band and I would be the lead on the trumpet.

The rest of the week everyone in school was so friendly and talked to me. The older kids helped me find my classes and gave me a pound when they walked in the halls. No one was bullying me or even cared about my size. I made so many new friends and I had really cool teachers who did not get annoyed at me when I needed extra help.

Middle school is awesome. I was scared and nervous for nothing. I now wake up every day excited to go and I am not sad anymore. I just had to give it a chance.

My mom always says that there are still good people in this world and I think that most of them are at my new school.

## GRADE 5 FICTION

### Icy Days By Nadav Neumeier

#### HONORABLE MENTION

It was a freezing winter afternoon, when the young boy decided to go outside. He had seen the blizzard whip up only moments ago, but already wanted to play in the cold fallen clouds as they danced to the ground. He was speechless looking at the graceful, icy powder. He dashed to the closet where his snow gear was stored. He struggled to clumsily put on his gear, one piece at a time.

The young boy played around in the freshly fallen snowflakes making fresh snow angels on the ground. He played with his sister creating snowmen that towered over them like giants. They brought carrots, a scarf, and some coal and made their sculpture beautiful. They started to construct a masterpiece. One by one the blocks began sliding together to create a giant igloo. He decorated the igloo with mini-snowmen and carved snow angels into the walls. The boy's father told him to gather sticks for the family fire while he chopped wood. So the young boy ran and gathered the best sticks while listening to the sound of his father's

ax against the wood. Even though it was loud, it seemed to have a soothing effect like a heartbeat or drums: CHOP CHOP... CHOP CHOP...CHOP CHOP.

The time flew by and soon it was a pitch-black sky. He wanted to stay out forever but he grew tired, cold, thirsty and wet. His father started the fire, feeding the flame with all of the sticks he had worked so hard to collect. He watched the fire rising and falling faster than the blink of an eye. The fire crackled in the fireplace in a mesmerizing pattern: flashing...crackling...exploding. His father brought him hot cocoa filled to the brim with marshmallows like soft pillows for the cocoa. He almost cried with delight when he tasted the marshmallows so perfectly soft like biting into a cloud. The hot cocoa was the best he ever had. It was a pure mix of not too sweet, not too bland, and not too bitter.

The boy sipped his hot cocoa by the fire gazing into the blaring flames. He began to feel sleepy as every thing looked hazy. The fire crackled from log to log so fast that he could barely see it. Then everything started to slow down until his eyes grew heavy. He slumped to the floor fast asleep dreaming about the next icy day.

## GRADE 5 NONFICTION

### The Story of My Birth

By Aliseé Rossetti

#### FIRST PRIZE

The story of my birth started when my mom told my dad she was pregnant. It was a warm spring day in May 2009 in Segusono, Italy.

In the first place, my mom and dad met very late in life and had not planned on having a baby. My dad was shocked and excited at the same time. He had mixed emotions, because he didn't expect to be a father at the age of sixty-seven.

Equally important, at that time, my mom's dad, my grandpa, was dying of cancer. My mom was very sad and so the news of her pregnancy made her very happy. It was bittersweet for her. One day, when my mom's dad was about to die at the hospital in France, she felt a terrible pain in her stomach. So they rushed her to the emergency room. At the hospital, after running tests, the doctors not only told my mom that her baby was fine, they told her she was having twins! My mom was so delighted. My dad was even more scared at that point, but he said, "At least the twins will always have each other."

By the same token, the news of my mom's pregnancy thrilled all my family. My mom went for her monthly check ups. She had to get her blood taken, and do monthly ultrasounds. the doctors told my mom when she went for her 4th month checkup that she was having two girls. My mom and dad named one girl Melodie and the other girl Aliseé. I always used to kick my mom in her belly, I was the feisty one. But Melodie never kicked her. Melodie was the calm one. On my mom's 5th check up, the doctors said Melodie was sick. That was why Melodie never kicked her because she was weak. The news was very sad because maybe Melodie would not make it.

To say nothing of, my parents were devastated. They could not believe this was happening to them. It was like a bad dream. My parents went to the best specialist in Milano. The doctors said if Melodie was going to make it, she would have to have so many heart surgeries from the moment she was born, and even with that, they said it would only be palliative, meaning she would not survive in the long run. The specialists told them that Melodie would not make it past the age of two. I believe that Melodie gave up everything she had and gave the little strength that was in her to me. I think she realized she was meant to be with my grandpa and therefore she gave up her life so that I could live. Consequently, I had to be born early because

it was not safe for me to stay in my mom's stomach. It was extremely dangerous for me and for my mom. When the doctors were taking my mom to the operating room, one of them told her "If your baby is born alive, she would not be able to talk, walk, and she will be mentally challenged." The doctors told my dad that they were no longer concerned about saving me, the baby, but they were concerned about saving his wife, my mom. She was at risk.

In the light of these difficulties, I was born at 12:03 am on October 1, 2009, intend of January 22, 2010. I was born extremely premature. I weighed only 11 ounces when I was born. Can you imagine that? A normal baby would have weighed six pounds. Although being a twin means you are smaller than a normal baby, being 11 ounces is unheard of. Most babies at that weight will not make it. I was the size of my dad's hands. My skin was so clear one could see all my veins. My head was the size of a mandarin. My hands were the size of my mom's thumbnail. My feet were the size of half of my mom's thumb. I was incredibly small!

Not to mention, when the doctor saw the desperation on my dad's face, how wrecked he looked, he took me out of the incubator and let my dad hold me for a few minutes before putting me back. I was hooked up to so many tubes through my nose mouth, and bellybutton. I had so many IV's hooked up to my veins One tube was to give me caffeine to give me energy to fight and survive, the other tube was to give me food, one tube was for medicine, and I had a tube going down my nose to my lungs giving me oxygen so I could breathe. All the times that I needed a blood transfusion, and I needed many of them, the doctors had 10 hooks up the IV for the transfusion to a vein in my head since all the other ones were already taken.

Furthermore, my mom got an apartment next to the hospital in Padova, where I was born, so she could visit me every day. She was the first visitor at the hospital and the last one to leave. I had to fight hard every day to survive. My poor dad would take the train in every Thursday night to be with my mom and visit me and he would leave every Monday to go back to work. Those were tough times for my dad. They used to always go to St. Anthony's Church which is a famous church in Padova to light up candies for me and pray for me to make it. St. Anthony Is the patron saint of miracles; I believe he helped me through the tough time.

Be that as it may, during my battle at the neonatal ward, many times I went into apnea, meaning I had stopped breathing. The monitors that were hooked up to me would flat line and beep and I would turn purple. The doctors would rush in there, tell my mom to get out and they would pump me on my chest to make me breathe again. It was very scary for my mom. Because of the oxygen that was needed for me to breath and survive, it caused my retinas to come off and that meant I might have gone blind. This is what happened to the famous singer Stevie Wonder. He wasn't as lucky as I was because the doctors were able to do surgery on my eyes before it was too late and they saved my eyesight. This happened right before Christmas. For this reason, the doctors let my mom and dad visit me on Christmas eve and New Year's Eve, even though no one was allowed in the neonatal ward passed visiting hours. The doctors were so nice, caring, and generous. My parents were so happy to see me every day One day, my mom asked the Chief of Staff of my ward "when can I stop worrying about Aliseé?" to which she responded "as long as your baby is here in the hospital, that means you cannot be 100% sure she is okay, she is still in danger of not making it, of else she would have been already out of the hospital."

Finally, on January 2, 2010, after being in the hospital for over four months, the doctors let my parents take me home. Although I only weighed less than three pounds, I had made it! My mom was worried and hesitant about taking me home, because in the hospital I was hooked up to monitors, and tubes to help me breathe. I had over seven specialist doctors checking on me every single day and was cared for by thirty-four nurses. She was scared that she wouldn't be able to take care of me on her own. My mom had mixed emotions. My dad was relieved to finally have me home. In all, my parents were excited to take me home and leave the hospital once and for all.

All things considered; I proved the doctor wrong. Not only can I walk, I am extremely athletic. I play golf, tennis, paddle, and waterski. I am a pretty smart little girl. I do well in school, I speak two

languages fluently and understand another two pretty well. Most importantly I am strong I never gave up and I will never give up. It was brutal for me, but I did it. I will never give up on myself even when times are hard, f live my life as a normal girl, always dying lo make my sister Melodie proud of me and of all the things I am able to do and shots not. My parents call me their miracle baby, and I believe that I am a miracle.

## GRADE 5 NONFICTION

### Recover and Renew

By Charlie Askew

#### SECOND PRIZE

Finally! The new soccer season has just started! It is my first game back from a very badly broken foot. My team and I are ready to win this game and come out on top for the season. For our first game we are up against A.C. Connecticut and we have our game faces on.

One night, late in May, I was getting ready to go to bed. My room felt hot, so I jumped up on the heavy wooden cover that goes over the old steam radiator to try to open my window. I squatted down on the cover to push because the window felt stuck. Unexpectedly, I felt the cover start to slip out from under my feet. I tried to grab on to my bedpost but it was too late, I had already hit the ground and the heavy cover landed on my foot. For a few seconds after it fell, I didn't feel any pain. Then the agony set in. I heard my parents rushing up the stairs. Eventually, they arrived at my room and pulled off my sock. My dad knew it was broken after a couple of seconds of seeing my swollen foot. My parents debated taking me to the hospital, but they didn't because they were nervous about Coronavirus. For the whole night I lay my bed, awake with pain throbbing throughout my foot.

The new morning we went to the orthopedist for the doctor to examine my foot. He took a couple of x-rays and confirmed what we had already suspected. My foot was broken, three metatarsals to be exact. The doctor ended up putting a splint on my foot that day. But a week later the doctor strongly recommended that I have surgery to put in two pins to align my big toe bones. I was devastated because I knew that would mean a longer recovery and no summer soccer. I went through the whole summer with a big cast on my lower leg. Also, if I wanted to swim I would need to wear a big rubber cast cover and hop around on one foot.

After a long summer trapped in a cast and only walking with crutches, I was finally able to get back to playing soccer. Saturday, September 12th was my first game back from my foot injury. My dad woke me up at 5:30 AM to start getting ready. I ate a quick breakfast; I brushed my hair, put on my jersey, shorts, shin guards, socks and cleats. Once my friend got dropped off at my house, we were ready to get on the road for the hour and ten-minute drive to New Milford, CT. Upon arrival; I saw my opponents and felt a shiver down my spine. Oh, and did I mention that there was a heavy layer of dew on everything? My friend and I walked up to the field joining some of my other teammates. We dropped our bags on the wet ground and got out the soccer balls and started warming up. Everybody arrived and the game started.

We were dominating the game, but we never scored. My coach took me out often because of my foot. I was basically wobbling when I ran. Halftime hit and the score was 0-0. I looked around at my teammates and saw that they were all nervous, and thinking about what the next thirty minutes of the game would hold. Eventually the whistle blew for the next half. It was about the same as the first half, however, we had more shots on goal. But then, what felt like the golden opportunity arrived! The other team committed a handball in the penalty box. Everybody thought, "This is the time, the time we score." Sofia took

the penalty. She was eyeing the ball and the goal. “Tweet!” The whistle blew. She shot the ball with all her might. But it was too hard. The ball just flew over the goal; we were all so shocked. We thought she had it. Still, we held our heads up high and fought for the rest of the game. The whistle blew for the last time. The game was over, 0-0 tie. We drove home and thought about the game. My friend and I were freezing, so we took off our soaking wet socks and shin guards, I completely forgot about the one stitch that the doctor never took out. My foot was soft from my wet sock so I just closed my eyes and pulled it out. It wasn’t all that bad. We got home and continued with the day.

The rest of the season was excellent. We won every game, however some of them were very close. At the same time, A.C Connecticut won all of their games too. That meant we were battling hard for first place. Over the course of the season, my foot got better every game. And I started to take every free kick and corner and scored several goals.

As the season wound down, one big game remained. Not only was it a rematch against A.C., our biggest competitor, it is our last game of the fall season, and for first place. I arrived extra early to get ready and warm up. Once everybody was there, we had the pre game meeting with our coach and then the game started. This was the game everybody was both dreading and excited for. “Tweet,” they took the first pass, I took a big gulp and began to run with the team.

The first half was nerve racking, we had so many more chances than they. But their goalie was great, and every time she got possession she would punt the ball and we would have to sprint back so that they wouldn’t score. The first minutes of the game ended scoreless. No one had any idea what was going to happen. My coach gave a pep talk and gave us our positions for the rest of the game. We ran out to our positions. I was biting my nails. I was afraid about what would happen. We needed to fight hard if we wanted to win.

The second half continued like the first until they got a cheap goal. Our goalie tried to kick the ball hard down the field but she stubbed it and it went right to the other team. They scored. Now we were down 1-0. My coach moved me up to striker to try to even up the score. We had a breakaway, this was the time, I was running up the field with my other teammate who had the ball. She passed to me and I shot it, but the defender on the other team tried to kick the ball at the same time. My ankle went back. I dropped to the ground and then stabbing pain kicked in. Everyone stopped and took a knee. Tears came down my face. My coach ran out to get me. This was horrible. There were only about five minutes left in the game. I had to get taken out. My heart felt like it was going to burst out of my chest. I sat down and drank some water. We needed to score. The other team had the ball, however, we stole it back. Sally, our best striker, got the ball and booted it very hard. I closed my eyes, and when I opened them back up, the ball hit the back of the net. “Yes!” The score was all tied up. It felt so good. I begged my coach to go back in but he would not let me. There was only one minute left. We got possession of the ball and then “Tweet, tweet, tweet! ” and that was the end of the game.

Even though we didn’t win, it still felt like a victory. From the start of the season, I could barely run. At the end, I was sprinting around scoring goals and it felt so good. We did tie for first place in the game and for the league, but I’m ready to get them next year.

# GRADE 5 NONFICTION

## It is Better to Give Than Receive

### By Brooke Healy

#### THIRD PRIZE

This past March, my grandma passed away from cancer. I knew I had to do something big to honor her. She used to volunteer her time at many local charitable organizations. One that I remember was a Stamford homeless shelter on Thanksgiving every year. Even though she isn't alive, she has inspired me to give back to my community too. I started thinking of what I could do.

This past November, while I was home, according to my hybrid schedule, I got a text from my mom. She sent me a recipe for a DIY hand scrub. My mom and I love to do craft projects together. I was excited to make this. That night, as I was sitting on my bed thinking of what I could do to help people in need, nothing came to me at first. However, the following day, I was thinking about what it would be like to not get presents on Christmas. Then I knew what I was going to do. So I went on my iPad to the app, Procreate, and started making an ad. It turned out amazing!

After my ad was created, I went to present it to my mom. She absolutely loved the idea of making different hand scrubs to send to our friends and family. My mom even posted it on her Facebook page. Over the Thanksgiving break, I got to work! I decided that each scrub would cost \$8. I ended up raising \$750 in just one night. That accounted for about 94 scrubs! I stayed up until 11:00 PM, the first night, just putting all the orders into my spreadsheet. That night when I went to bed, I felt so good about myself. My mom was the biggest help I could ever ask for. I would have never been able to pull this off so quickly without her help.

For the next week, my mom was there everyday after school, helping me get this done. I was working hard to get all the orders done, while going to school in person and online every other day. Everyday there were at least five more orders. I had my entire family, including my brother, to thank for helping me get these orders completed. My brother would tell me the names and orders and I would write them on the bags. After I sealed the bags and packaged them all, they were ready for delivery.

The process was very quick. We ended up raising about \$1200 and by the beginning of December, we were ready to shop for toys. I remember that my mom woke up at 5:30 AM to get some scrub delivered to some final purchasers and then she picked me up and we delivered more. When we got home, my dad and brother were ready to go shopping. We took my mom's and my dad's car I rode in my mom's Jeep and my brother was in my dad's car. We went to a toy truck and bought a couple of toys there. Then we went to Kohls and got some more toys. After, we saw the store Five Below and we were like, "No not today!"

My mom said, "Let's go check it out!" So we went to Five Below and ended up getting two carts full of toys. It was amazing. Then we went to TJ Maxx and Walmart and got more toys. Both cars were filled with toys and we were done!

The following Monday, we went to a church in downtown Stamford. The people at Toys for Tots were there and thought I was a company trying to drop off toys, but they quickly realized I was not. We dropped off the toys and I met the organizer. We took pictures and I got a pin, an ornament, a keychain and a wallet. They were all so appreciative that we were donating so much!

After that weekend, I was home doing distance learning and was in a LIVE meeting with my fifth-grade teacher, learning a new math skill. All I remember was my mom walking in to tell me that Toys for Tots wanted me to come back and be interviewed by News 12! I was so happy and shocked at the same time! Because I was online at the time with my teacher and my class at home and in school, my teacher asked me why I looked so happy when my mom came into the room. She said, "Brooke...why are you laughing? Was it something I said?" I told her that I was happy because my mom told me that I was getting interviewed by News 12! My teacher was so excited for me! I ended up leaving the call and going to get

ready for my unexpected interview

When we got to the interview, I was so nervous. All of a sudden, a camera guy came in with his camera. He asked me some questions and, at this time, my mom was crying when she was about to go on camera. We went on camera and my nerves subsided and I think it went well.

News 12 informed us that it would be aired that same day at 5 PM. We don't have News 12 so we went to our close friend's house to watch it. Of course, we took a video of the TV while it aired. I definitely looked nervous, but I think my grandma was with me and made it so much easier and everyone said I didn't look as nervous as I thought I was. Grandma was there!

At school the next day, I found out that my teacher emailed the News 12 video to the principal and all of the teachers and even put it on our Google Classroom. It was unexpected and everyone was congratulating me. It was so fun and we watched the interview with the whole class. It was the best. That night, I never slept better.

## GRADE 5 NONFICTION

### My Vacation to Camelback Resort

By Katelyn Franzetti

#### HONORABLE MENTION

The drive up to Camelback Resort in Tannersville, PA with my mom, dad and sister was a long ride! It took about two hours to get from Connecticut to Pennsylvania. There wasn't that much to do in the car, so I played on my iPad most of the time. But it was all worth it because Camelback Resort is one of my favorite places to go on vacation.

When we pulled into the parking lot, I got excited. The inside of the hotel is supposed to be themed like an expedition to ancient Egypt. When you first walk in, there's a beautiful fireplace with a loft above it. The loft has two spiral staircases leading up to it. It has tons of books as decoration. Even though the loft is off-limits, probably because it can't hold much weight, it's still very cool. To the left is the gigantic window where you can see the indoor waterpark. Since it was winter when we went, that was the waterpark we went to later on. There were also a ropes course and an escape room. To the right were the check-in, buffet, cafe and gift shop. Upstairs were the hotel rooms. Downstairs were the arcades, pottery place, snow tubing and skiing reservations and the entrance to the indoor waterpark.

Once we got checked in, my family and I finally got into the elevators, which were in front of the cafe. When we got onto our floor, walked down the hallway and went to look for our room. We stayed in room 418 on the 4th floor. When you first walk into the room, you'll see the bathroom to the right, and a closet to the left. If you walk straight and to the left, you'll see a vanity with a mirror and a sink. If you walk straight and look to the right, you'll see a room with two sets of bunk beds in it! Then if you walk past that, you'll see the living room, sliding door that led to the balcony and the master bed. My dad, my sister and I slept in the bunk beds, while my mom got to sleep in the master bed. The living room had two couches and an armchair, as well as a TV. The balcony looked over the skiing mountains. Early in the morning, you could see them making fresh snow for the skiers. The bunk beds were very comfortable. My sister and dad got the bottom bunks.

The indoor waterpark called Aquatopia was so much fun! My favorite things are the hot tub and the wave pool. The hot tub has a hole in the wall that you can swim through, to get to the hot spring outside! I thought it was a little odd being warm and cold at the same time. The wave pool is really fun. I love jumping over the waves! I also like to swim through the waves. The water slides are amazing as well. You need a

tube for all of the slides. There's one slide called Venus Slider Trap. It starts as a regular slide. Then it brings you out to a really big mouth and your tube goes up and down the sides of it. There are also two slides that go straight down. You stand inside of the see-through tube and when the lifeguard pushes the button, the floor beneath you falls and you go shooting through the tube! I didn't want to go on it because the thought of the lifeguard pushing the button at any random time made me nervous. The Aquatopia waterpark is the best waterpark I've ever been to.

There are so many places to eat at Camelback. One of my favorites is the buffet called Hemispheres. It serves breakfast, lunch and dinner. They also have all different types of desserts that they serve all day long. Some of them include ice cream, cookies, brownies, cupcakes, cakes and more! Trail's End is an awesome restaurant because it's right at the bottom of the ski mountain, so you can watch all of the skiers skiing down the mountain while you eat. They have ribs, burgers, chicken tenders, nachos and more! The restaurants at Camelback have such delicious food.

At Camelback, there's so much to entertain yourself with. For starters, there's the arcade. It has so many games you can play. They have great prizes you can win with your tickets. There's also an escape room. My dad and I tried it. You had to find all the different figures and put them together to open the door. The ropes course is pretty cool too. There are five stories you can do. First, you had to get hooked up. That was one of the activities I did, so I had to get hooked up. There are bridges and planks with other things too, like pieces of wood that spin around, and wobbly nets you climb across. I think the rock walls are my favorite things to do at Camelback. It's always a challenge to be able to get to the top and press the buzzer. There's a red one where you need to put your hands and feet in the circles in the wall. I always make it to the top of that one. There's also a yellow one where you can climb on the rocks sticking out. There's also a really fun laser tag arena. My dad and I played it and we had so much fun. There are so many fun things to do at Camelback.

The best part of our vacation to Camelback was skiing. I went skiing with my dad. The bus goes from the lodge to the part of the property where you get the skis. I didn't know how to ski yet, so I had to take lessons. Luckily, the hotel offered skiing lessons for the guests staying at the hotel. But before I could head toward my lesson, I needed skis. It took a long time to get the right size. The worker told us the skiing lesson didn't require poles. But, we did need helmets, or as my dad likes to call them, brain buckets. After we got our skis and helmets, we walked over to the building where the lessons were being held. Then I got nervous because I was afraid I was going to embarrass myself in front of all the kids who were also taking lessons. I reminded myself that all of the kids that were there didn't know how to ski either. Plus, I probably wasn't going to see any of them again, so who cares? When we got outside to the bunny hill, the instructors taught us how to go faster, slow down, and how to stop. I was starting to get the hang of it. It was when we got to the practice course, that's when everything went wrong. I started strong and got about halfway, but I didn't see the bright orange large plastic fence and skied right into it! The instructors helped me get up, and my face turned red from embarrassment. When my dad came to pick me up after the lesson ended, he asked me if I wanted to go on the real mountain, and right away I said no and I told him exactly what happened at practice. I also told him, since I wasn't really good at skiing, I didn't want to risk getting hurt. He started laughing at me and I got upset because I didn't think it was very funny. The experience was fun, but crashing into a bright orange large plastic fence that's meant for you to see was not.

Camelback also has snow tubing! My dad and I went on the afternoon of the second day. I had so much fun. The only hard part was grabbing your tube and pulling it from the bottom of the hill, all the way to the moving ramp that brings you back up to the top of the hill. The easiest part is going down the hill, since it doesn't require any effort. That was the first time I've ever been snow tubing, so I was nervous at first, but after I sped down the snow-covered hill, I felt much better. After a while, I got bored so we went back to our hotel room.

A few days later we started packing our bags. I was very sad that we had to leave, but all vacations are meant to end. We got in the elevator and went to the check-in/out so that they could disable the bracelets

that they gave us so we could open our door. We headed out the door and headed towards our car. As we packed our suitcases into the car, I thought about all the fun we had at the waterpark, escape room, arcade, and my epic skiing fail. They were all such great memories. I can't wait to go to Camelback again.

## GRADE 5 POETRY

### Life, Not a Time to Waste By Kristina Sarak

#### FIRST PRIZE

Life isn't a time to waste on nothing  
It takes you on adventures  
Filling your mind with either happiness or sadness  
Making the best moments the brightest  
And making the saddest moments the lowest  
We all have our happiness  
And we all have our sadness  
Life is a time to be grateful  
But it could also be a time when you feel like it's over  
And after a couple of minutes  
You feel loved and untroubled  
As if you are resetting every little sorrowful moment  
They are leaving your head  
Like a gust of wind that swept through your mind  
Leaving just a tiny crumb  
That you will soon forget  
And every day the gust of wind will come back  
Sending a piece of a rainbow  
And when the rainbow is finished  
You break down and reset again  
Starting a whole new rainbow

## GRADE 5 POETRY

You Are Beautiful  
By Maryam Rohawala

SECOND PRIZE

You're beautiful the way you are,  
You don't need make-up  
to look like a star!

Don't put on flashy glasses,  
Or wear fake lashes.  
Don't dye your hair,  
Since when it wears out...  
You'll look like a nightmare!  
You don't need eye shadow,  
To make people go, 'WHOA!'

Because

All you need,  
Is your good deed,  
And to help those in need.  
Be caring, respectful and kind.  
Leaving all bad habits behind.  
If you do, you'll shine,  
And be gloriously divine!

For you are beautiful,  
Truly Beautiful.

## GRADE 5 POETRY

In Honor of Our Veterans  
By Ben Daniel

THIRD PRIZE

You are a soldier  
A brave fighter  
I am a kid,  
A kind writer

You are a bald eagle  
Soaring in the sky,  
I am a writer  
My words flying high

You are a hero  
Noble and strong,  
I am a boy  
Writing a song

You are a veteran  
Battling in wars  
I have only words  
But this poem is yours.

## GRADE 5 POETRY

### Believes Together

A poem inspired by *The Hill We Climb* by Amanda Gorman  
By Mickey Lewiton

#### HONORABLE MENTION

We are a country that

Worked together

One that helped each other.

One that dreamed together

Emerged with beautiful

Flowers as they bloom.

As we free It.

We hoped.

We tried.

To have a

Free country.

But to build this

Country we must have

P E A C E .

## GRADE 6 FICTION

### Race Against Time By Sylvie Rosenberg

#### FIRST PRIZE

"Go now!" the head of ski patrol exclaimed. The bomb suddenly exploded sending snow everywhere. Even though it was expected, this caught many people by surprise. Snow poured rapidly down the left side of the mountain as skiers glided gracefully down the right side without giving the disruption so much as a second glance. The Aspen Ski Patrol was testing a closed off area for avalanches, so that none would occur unexpectedly. Audrey and Will were among the many who had moved on since the fright. It was the perfect skiing weather so Audrey, Will and Harper, three high school students, had decided to go to Aspen Ski Mountain to cure their boredom during winter break. Audrey and Will were far from the mountain base but were making an effort to get there quickly to heat up. The air had chilled plenty in the last few days and today seemed to be the peak of it. As the two whooshed down the mountain at record speed, something dawned on Will. They had just made it to the base before Will asked Audrey, "Have you seen Harper? She's not with us." Audrey's face grew from relief to concern.

"I haven't. I assumed she was ahead of us. I'll call her to make sure she knows where we are." The phone rang for a good thirty seconds but went to voicemail. This was unusual for Harper, and Audrey knew it. Harper was the type of person to answer on the first ring, so this was concerning for the two friends. Will tried to reach her as well, but he didn't manage to. The sky had started to get dark and heavy clouds appeared taking over the clear, blue sky.

That's when they heard an announcement over the speaker. "The mountain will be closing in twenty minutes due to weather concerns. Please begin to gather your belongings and make your way to the mountain exit. Thank you and sorry for the inconvenience." This got everyone's attention, so people started scrambling to get their belongings and head to their cars. Audrey and Will started to do the same before they realized they still hadn't found Harper.

"Excuse me, have you seen a girl around the age of sixteen? She is around 5'5" and has long blonde hair," Audrey asked a ski patrol worker who was busy gathering all of the medical sleds and equipment.

"I haven't but the mountain won't be completely closed down until 2:00. If you have to, you can stay until then to look for her but after that it will be tough. The weather forecast is calling for severe weather conditions," the worker replied.

Audrey thanked the worker and promised they wouldn't take very long. Will and Audrey headed to the lift and asked for a ride up. The lift operator was skeptical at first but after hearing about the teenagers' day, he let them for one time only. The ride up felt like hours of discomfort. The crisp, chilly air began to blow stronger in Will and Audrey's faces, and the chair was creaking and swinging wildly to the point where they felt the need to grab onto the sides of the chair for their lives. As soon as the lodge at the mountaintop came into sight, the teens instantly let their guard down. Unfortunately, before they reached the top, the lift stopped just a couple feet from the summit, leaving them dangling one hundred feet from the ground.

"Excuse me! Can you please let us get to the summit?" Audrey frantically, asked, hoping for a response from the lift operator. There was no answer. This time Will asked, and again, there was no answer. The two tried many more times but still got no acknowledgement.

"I can try to look through the window to see if anyone is still in the booth," Will suggested after Audrey began to give up hope. Will shuffled to the left causing the chair to balance unevenly.

After only five short seconds of searching, Will finally exclaimed, "I see someone!" The two friends instantly cheered up, but that was before they realized yet another problem. The operator was wearing head-

phones and listening to music so loud that Audrey and Will could hear it from their chair.

"What should we do? How can we get his attention when he can't hear us?" asked Audrey.

"Maybe we can wave our arms and hopefully he will see us moving," Will suggested. That was exactly what they did for two minutes until they grasped a visualization of how stupid they must look.

"This isn't working. Let's wait until he leaves. Maybe then we can get his attention," Will offered. They decided to stick with that plan, but they might have decided on it too soon. The clouds started rumbling and both Audrey's and Will's hands started to freeze just as hail started to crash down hard over them.

Thankfully, the hail was pounding on the roof of the summit's hut just as hard as it was falling on Audrey's and Will's heads. The lift operator came rushing out at the exact moment the two friends screamed for help. The operator turned around so fast that he almost fell over into the snow.

"What are you guys doing up there? Guests were supposed to leave forty minutes ago?" the operator questioned.

"Please help us! Our friend was missing, so we asked if we could stay for a bit longer to look for her. And now, we're stuck on the lift!" exclaimed Audrey.

Luckily, the lift operator got them to the summit, and Will and Audrey rushed to the ski patrol headquarters at the mountaintop.

"Excuse me, you didn't happen to see a teenage girl with blonde hair anywhere around the mountain, did you? She was wearing a black jacket and had a light purple helmet on," Will asked the ski patrol worker.

I checked the entire mountain this afternoon, and I haven't seen anyone that fits your description. There was a warning that a female was near the avalanche testing sight around the time it fired. We got news that it was a false lead around a half hour ago though. We better start looking before the weather gets even worse." the worker instructed with a fearful glance.

"Harper! Harper! Can you hear us?" the whole search team, including Audrey and Will, shouted.

Everything was a blur now. The beeps of the heat and metal detectors rang out through the whole mountain. Search dogs were wildly sniffing and digging in piles and more piles of snow. People, as well, were on their knees digging through snow in order to find a girl who was running out of time. Finally, running out of hope, a loud, rapid, beeping sound was heard.

"Over here! Everyone come here and help me dig!" said a ski patrol worker who was already at work trying to unbury a shape in the snow.

"I think it's her!" he continued to say. As Will rushed over to help dig, he caught a glimpse of light purple. He realized what this meant. They had found Harper. Now it was only a matter of time before their time to save her was up. The search dogs ran through the snow to where all the commotion was occurring. Everyone was now excavating and fighting against time. Celebration was already taking place, but maybe not in time. Lighting struck the darkening sky as a frightful scream sounded with the bolt.

Sleds were being rushed to the site of the mishap and almost as fast as the lighting, Harper's body was laying on the sled being sped to safety. The sled was followed down the mountain by Will, Audrey, and all of ski patrol. Finally, safely in the warmth of the Aspen Ski Resort Medical Building, Harper was being taken care of and recovering from hypothermia, frostbite and a concussion. The day's events weren't forgotten, ever, but they were kept in a calm mind. Harper was safe, and that was all that mattered at the moment. Audrey and Will must've been thinking the same thing as they both outstretched their arms towards one another for a hug. The day ended with a warm moment between friends, who had just planned to go skiing for the day, but got so much more than just that.

# GRADE 6 FICTION

## The Plane By Camila Pajares

### SECOND PRIZE

I shuffled through the single file line between the seats, not sure if I should be breathing through my nose or my mouth since the guy in front of me smelled like rotten milk. I finally reached my seat and practically lunged at it. My mom slithered her way to her seat going between me and the seat in front of me. I waited until everybody had passed to get up and stuff my suitcase in the bins. I sat back down and buckled my seatbelt. In about 15 minutes the plane took off, and soon after the flight attendants went around distributing snacks to everybody. I chose some peanuts and a coffee. I got tired quickly and fell asleep.

I awoke to soft shudders of the plane shaking. I stretched and wiped my eyes trying to get rid of my blurry vision. I leaned over my mom, craning my neck trying to get a look at what was going on outside. Unexpected lightning startled me.

“Oh. That’s what was causing the shakes,” I thought, calming my rising nerves. I closed my eyes trying to go back to my silent, peaceful world of being asleep. I tried covering my ears, but I just couldn’t nap. The unusual rattle of the shaking plane just didn’t allow it. After I made the decision to read my book, I noticed my mom was awake. Another harsh jolt made me drop the book. As I was bent down to pick up my book, yet another intense jerk made me shoot up and straighten my back. I gripped the sidebars of my aisle seat.

“You’re being foolish. Just calm down,” I told myself. These rattles just escalated.

Not long after, the plane began shaking violently. Different noises were flooding my head: a child screaming, the flight attendants reassuring everyone that it was all alright, and going over safety protocols. I tried blocking these out by closing my eyes. I took several deep breaths trying to calm myself. Another harsh jolt made me snap my eyes open only to see luggage falling from the overhead bins while passengers tried to dodge them. The strong jerks made my head loll around hitting the back of my seat. These continued with no sign of stopping. Lightning outside illuminated the airplane as the lights flickered on and off. One of the attendants announced to put our life vests on. Her voice was shaky and did not sound sure. I looked at my mom frantically, my eyes as open as they could be.

She just told me the same thing the flight attendants said, “Put the vest on.” My hands fumbled under my chair as I panicked trying to get my vest out. It felt like every second other people were strapping on their vests, and I was yanking at mine. With one last tug, I got it out.

As I looked up, I realized that everybody had their arms wrapped around their knees, with their head resting on top. I was confused, but the sudden thrust of the plane convinced me to do the same thing. I was reminded of a time that I was watching a movie with my cousin about a plane crash. This position was the one they did preparing for an emergency landing. In an instant I connected all the dots. Why would we have to be in a position to brace for impact if everything was alright? Why would we need to tuck our heads in our knees and put on our life vests, unless this plane was going down? It was going down with nothing but only blue water in sight. It was going to go down in the Indian Ocean with us, all 37 of us.

My fears were confirmed as the plane made a powerful connection to the surface of the ocean. It felt like time stopped. When time sped up, I was back in reality. Pain shot through my body starting at my toes and ending on the tip of my hairs. Water started to fill my shoes. The flight attendants rushed everybody onto the inflatable slides. I struggled to walk through the water trying to get to the exit. I slid down the slide and the cold water hit me like a bus. I got goose bumps all on my body. I imagined that the water would be warm since it was summer.

I lifted myself onto one of the safety rafts. I tried stretching out my sweatshirt in a way that it could cover me as much as it could. Nobody knew what was going to happen. All we could do was hope that we

would get through the night. I guess I had fallen asleep because I woke with the bright sun burning my face. I tried repositioning myself in the tight crowded space with other strangers. My mom sat next to me looking out at sea. I looked in the direction that she was staring at. I saw a small shape on the horizon. It came closer, and I made out the shape of a ship. As I gaped at it, I turned around and realized more people were awake, exchanging looks of disbelief.

The ship stopped close enough to us, and pulled each of us up. We were able to sit down, and they gave us water and towels. I was mostly dry because of the sun. I closed my eyes, enjoying the feeling of being safe and not on a rubber raft.

When I opened my eyes, I was in my bed sweating like crazy. I looked around and pinched myself multiple times. It was a dream. I then got enraged wondering what possessed me to make me have that nightmare. I drank some water and just sat in my bed thinking about what I just dreamed. And there I stayed for the night.

## GRADE 6 FICTION

### The End of the Street

By Kira Doft

THIRD PRIZE

A strange woman walked across the hall in Caesar Manor. That had to be wrong. Nobody had lived in that house for at least a decade. The dark, creaky house with rotting wood sat at the end of the street. That's all it ever did. No one ever went inside or even paid attention to it. John had gotten a couple of calls about the house, but he had always assumed it was fake or a prank of some sort, especially since it was always the same girl who called. The house at the end of the street was just there, and everyone in the neighborhood just ignored it. The way it sat was almost like it was looking over you. The walls were covered in ivy and the windows were cracked. John questioned why no one even bothered to move in or even renovate it. A house like that could sell for a high price if it had the right look. But he was a detective after all, the best detective in America. Everything he thought he knew about this house was wrong, and now he was more invested in this mystery than ever. There was a woman living here, a woman in old tattered clothes, and nobody cared enough to notice.

The house at the end of the street used to belong to Edward Caesar. Decades ago, he lived a very successful life as a businessman, but then he died a mysterious death.

"Now's as good a time as ever to investigate," John reassured himself as he stepped towards the front door. He struggled to turn the rusty doorknob. The inside of the house was surprisingly tidy. From the looks of it, nothing had been touched for decades. Who was that woman? What was she doing in the house? How did she enter the house if nothing had been touched? There were so many unanswered questions. John could tell this would be a tough case.

As John stepped inside the house, the first thing he noticed was that it was unusually cold. That was especially peculiar considering it was the middle of summer. There was no sign that anyone had stepped inside this house for years. The door shut behind him. He turned around to open it, but it was locked. Now there was nowhere to go except forward. He looked towards the creaky stairs, not even sure if they were stable and carefully stepped up. Although this house was very beautiful on the outside, the interior design was very strange. Once John got to the top of the stairs, there were three doorways right next to each other. He quickly examined the doors and chose the one on the right. Once he stepped through, the doorway disappeared just as it had downstairs.

It was a hallway with one door at the end and one window in the middle. This was the same hallway

in which he had seen the women walking. He could have sworn she had taken a turn right here, but there was no way. Nothing was making sense. He kept walking. The hallway didn't seem to end. He was stuck. How could the world's best detective be stuck? How could someone who has solved unsolvable cases be stuck? How could he be stuck in an old house which not one person even cared about? There was a candlestick on the wall. This wasn't there before. It had to be some type of secret passageway.

John pulled the candlestick, hoping this would lead him out of the house. It led to a dark stairway. He slowly stepped down. He was back in the room he started in. At least it was identical to the room he had started in, but there was a plain mirror instead of a door. This was his chance. If this really was the first room, he could escape by just breaking the mirror. It was now or never for him. He punched the mirror, and glass shards went flying everywhere, missing his arms by less than an inch. Everything went dark. He could see the spirits that had been walking through the house. He could see his own body walking out of the house even though he was still inside. John M Bloom was no more. There was no more 'greatest detective in the world.' Once you stepped inside Caesar Manor, you would do anything to get out. Even if that meant taking over a body that's not yours. That's exactly what Edward L. Caesar did.

## GRADE 6 NONFICTION

### Books Have Changed Me

By Elliot Nerenberg

FIRST PRIZE

January 11, 2021

Dear Mr. Brandon Sanderson,

Since life started, most humans have been burdened with the weight of stress and anxiety. Each person has his or her own severity, and personally, I think that mine is on the more extreme part of the scale. Or, at least it was at one point in time. Your books have helped me change the way that I think for the better. They have helped me find who I am and brought me joy when I needed it most. Each one of your books, *The Reckoners* to *Mistborn*, and everything in between, had specific details that spoke to me. These books shaped my life and taught me how to properly live in a constantly changing and growing society. They taught me that in order for someone to lead a relatively acceptable life, one must adapt to the challenges that they face.

In *Mistborn*, the last book of yours I read, Vin struggles with finding how she fits in with her group. This made me wonder about what my purpose in life might possibly be. This brought me some concern because I wasn't sure what it was. I thought about how my life has gone so far and what brought me happiness without sacrificing the happiness of others. I ended up deciding that my purpose in life was to make other people's lives better. I felt slightly disturbed, and it brought me some anxiety after that because I thought that would mean I was only on Earth to make others feel good. After some more thinking and more reading, I realized that we are here on Earth for reasons we will never know, and those reasons are plentiful.

As I read *Mistborn*, I kept getting the same feeling as I did when my panic attacks ended. It felt like I had found the rational part of my brain. The book made me feel as if my brain was accepting my fears. I'm not sure why this was, but I think that I have an idea. It might be because someone else in the book was also fighting herself. In the second *Mistborn* book, Vin gets controlled by Ruin and she makes her fight herself

and her loved ones. She realizes this and accepts that she was at his mercy. She had to act carefully and keep things to herself. This is similar to what I did, but I learned that I have to talk about my problems to fix them. Vin thinks that she has to be alone, but realizes that in order to win the war against Ruin, they need to come together. I think that your books need to be more widely known, as they would teach others, just as they have taught me.

Sincerely,  
Student of the Sixth Grade

## GRADE 6 NONFICTION

### Whispering my Love By Sadie M. Palker

SECOND PRIZE

Have you ever felt your heart being wrenched right out of your chest? With tears streaming down your face until you can't cry any longer? That's how I felt the day my cat, Maxi, left my life. That afternoon, I was sitting restlessly at home, nervous and anxious for what was going to come. I bounced on my toes and tried to keep my dog happy and prevent him from barking his ear-splitting yip. I paced back and forth and didn't stop worrying. Then, finally, after what seemed like an eternity, I looked out the window and saw my parents' car. I began to cry as my parents walked up the stairs without my cat. Even though my mom's sunglasses were over her eyes, I could still see her puffy face and tear-streaked cheeks. My dad's eyes were bloodshot, and he looked weary. They didn't even need to say a single word. I just knew.

We pulled into the parking lot of the veterinarian's office. This was not my first pet to put down; a few years before, we had put my other cat, Vinny, to sleep. The vet, sad-eyed, brought the trembling, fragile cat to our car and left us to sob our good-byes. My brother fed Maxi catnip; he licked it off our hands silently telling us that he would miss us too. I stroked his soft, black fur and cried into it; I kissed his velvety, wet, pink nose and whispered my love. My dad read a prayer for Maxi, and I tried to, but the sorrow overwhelmed me. We all stroked him and whispered our love; we blessed him and told funny stories about his wonderful life. Finally, the vet came. It was time for him to go.

At home, after loads of tears and happy stories, I retired to my room. The vet had given us a vial of his fur; now, I clutched the vial close to my chest. Carefully, I pulled the covers back and thought about Maxi's favorite spot on my bed. I sat down at the foot of my bed and curled up. I let myself sob and sob and think about how every day he used to rest there. I thought about how during online learning, Maxi would sleep on my lap. I thought about how he would curl up next to me and sleep with me for part of the night. I thought about how he and my dog, Ori, would steal each other's food. I thought about the morning Maxi was staring at me to wake me up. I tried to laugh at the memory, how I had felt his eyes watching me. I remember being so tired but waking up to feed him anyway. I remember how he would comfort me whenever I was sad. I remember coming home from vacation and crying when I saw him because I had missed him so much. I remember the soft, wet feel of his whiskers and nose rubbing against me. Now, in remembrance of my wonderful cat Maxi, I read the rainbow bridge poem every day and miss him terribly.

## GRADE 6 POETRY

### Water Around the World: A Two-Voice Poem By Alicia Leng

FIRST PRIZE

#### Voice # 1 Girl In Flint, Michigan

I head home from school,  
Thirsty  
Tired  
Aching  
I reach for the tap  
But the water that flows out  
Is  
Dirty  
Brown  
Thick  
All I want is a glass of

#### Voice # 2 Girl in Africa

**Cool, clean water**

Is what I need  
And never get,  
I walk four hours  
A day  
To get water that is  
Contaminated  
Polluted  
Why do people pollute  
When they know it is not right?  
Thirst claws at my throat  
I feel faint and

#### Dazed

I walk into the kitchen.  
I hear my mom on the phone,  
Saying,  
“I cannot pay the water bills  
For water that is not clean.”  
When she hangs up the phone, she looks  
Infuriated  
I watch as she takes  
The last bit of money  
Out of her purse.  
I run to the faucet,  
Turn it on,

Hope that the water is  
Cool and  
Clean.  
But it's the same result from  
when I got back from

### School

Is where I should be right  
now.  
I should have been  
Learning.  
A four-hour walk back is  
A total  
Of  
Eight  
Hours.  
I wonder how people don't  
like school,  
But that is where I would like  
to be

### Right now

I sit on the couch  
Disturbed.  
7 years  
Ago,  
Before water stopped working,  
It was  
Delightful.  
Now I cannot  
Even eat  
Cooked food.  
When there is  
No  
Cool  
Water  
To wash my face,  
I feel

### Hot

As it is,  
I keep on  
Walking  
Back home.  
The trees

Provide shade,  
But I am still burning.  
Summer  
Is the worst season.  
Eight hours and more  
In the  
Sun  
Is not how  
I would like to  
Spend my day.  
Why do people  
Pollute their own water?  
The Earths' purest substance  
Is starting to be less and less  
Consumable  
Why can't people take it  
Into

### **Consideration**

Is what people  
Need  
When it comes to

**Water**  
– Is  
**Important**  
**On**  
**Earth**

## **GRADE 6 POETRY**

### **COVID – 19 Heroes**

**By Ishanvi Jaiswal**

### **SECOND PRIZE**

Police, firefighters, delivery guys,  
I think everyone should be recognized.  
While we are inside, safe and sound,  
These heroes are outside, standing their ground.

Let's not forgot the doctors, scientists, and bankers,  
Whom we depend on like our anchors.  
Because of them, we will continue to strive,  
Towards a better future, in which we can still thrive.

I think these individuals are very brave.  
I cannot even count how many people they have saved!  
They have helped so many people survive,  
Thanks to them, most of us are well and alive.

All these heroes are at our beck and call,  
Always ready to respond to us all.  
We need to recognize and praise their hard work today,  
For coming to our aid every single day.

Soon, these COVID-19 cases will be reduced to zero.  
All thanks to each and every COVID-19 hero.  
So let's take a moment to be thankful for them,  
As they help this pandemic come to an end.

## GRADE 6 POETRY

### Autumn is a Dancer By Mia Broder

#### THIRD PRIZE

Autumn is a Dancer  
Leaping into the fresh cool air  
Swaying with the winds from side to side  
Like a bird soaring without a care

Twirling leaves fall off the bare trees  
Dancing winds in the air  
Gliding through the light breeze  
Brushing her styled hair

Stretching legs like rows of apple trees  
Awaiting to be picked  
The audience begs her to continue please  
How the dance ends no one can predict  
Timing steps as each leaf falls  
Like a conductor in a show  
Turning colors the audience calls

# GRADE 7 – 8 FICTION

## Somewhere in Between

### By Nabeeha Nafey

#### FIRST PRIZE

Thirteen-year-old Ginger looked blankly at the ornate, antique grandfather clock in her family room going to and fro monotonously. Her surroundings were rather peaceful, conflicting with her inner unrest. Ginger Elspeth Ross was the third born of her parents, Stephanie and Carl. She had an older brother and sister, both in their finishing years of high school. She loved them, and they loved her... But it was complicated. They didn't care much about including her in their activities. She longed to be a part of what seemed like a "secret club." For example, once they were talking about a concert that both of them had attended. Ginger wanted to go, but her mother had said no.

"Ginger, Lukas and Maddison can look after themselves. You, on the other hand, are not old enough yet. We never know what could happen in an arena with mobs of crazy fans. Don't rush your youth."

Upset as she was, she accepted because she didn't have a choice. This wasn't something new for her. Whether it was about some big event at school or a funny online video they would discuss, she felt left out. It was as if they were a team that was too exclusive for her to be a part of. She would try to wedge herself into their conversations, but directly or indirectly they dismissed her. On the other hand, she had a five-year-old brother, Noah. There was a big age gap between them, making it hard for Ginger to get along with him. Noah was, after all, a bit... troublesome!

She snapped back into reality as she looked for her phone, not finding it anywhere until she heard all her siblings snickering behind her. Ginger turned and found them looking through her Instagram, making fun of her posts.

"Hey! Give it back!" she yelled, running toward them. Lukas snorted and tossed the phone to Maddie. She caught it then tossed it to Noah.

"Noah, run!" Maddie laughingly exclaimed. Noah chortled like a madman, catching the phone and attempting to run away. Ginger was seething, but then seized her chance to get the phone back. She hurtled over the couch to block Noah, but she accidentally unleashed her aggression by tackling him and pinning him on the ground. Just then, the door opened and her parents stood, shocked, catching Ginger red handed.

"Um-this isn't what it looks like...!"

Her brother wailed melodramatically, "Mommy! Ginger attacked me! She would have killed me if you hadn't arrived in time!"

Ginger's parents exchanged vexed looks, before her mother ordered angrily, "Ginger Elspeth Ross, go to your room." "B-but..." stammered Ginger.

"Now!" commanded her mother. Ginger looked through tears of embarrassment at her parents' disappointed expressions and her siblings' mocking smirks and stomped off.

Later that night, she sat at the top of her stairs, listening to her parents' hushed whispers.

"Carl, what are we supposed to do with Ginger? This is getting out of hand. Everyday there's more aggression and meltdowns. Where are we going to go from here?"

Ginger stayed still, listening.

Her father said, "Noah is too young to be reasoned with. It doesn't help that her older siblings tease her, but Ginger should know better."

After hearing what her father had to say, she felt angry.

"Noah gets the advantage of being younger and Lukas and Maddie get away with their tricks because they're older."

She thought. "What about me? I'm stuck in the middle! They think I'm hopeless."

Her family would conveniently treat her like a baby when she wanted authority, and would expect responsibility when she wanted them to cut her some slack. She trudged back to her room, not bothering to listen anymore.

"You know, it just breaks my heart to see her in so much turmoil! I think she feels lost as she is steering her way from being a young kid to an older one," sighed Ginger's mother. "Steph, don't worry." Carl said reassuringly, "She's an adolescent going through a major transition. It's a part of her journey to face confusion. But I'm positive she'll bloom through these stages beautifully. How about we sign her up for that library opportunity that you spotted the other day? That will boost her confidence and empower her to be more independent. I think she could use some time for herself. I can understand her position, being continuously sidelined by her siblings," suggested her father.

The next morning, Ginger woke up, lacking motivation because of last night's events. Reluctantly, she walked down to the kitchen table and looked up through the mass of her unruly hair. She saw her sister at the other end, looking nice and neat, as always. Ginger felt even more agitated, because she looked the opposite. Noah was busy playing as if he had forgotten what happened the previous night.

Her mother greeted Ginger and said, "So, your father and I were talking last night and decided to sign you up for a library volunteer program. It starts tomorrow." Ginger wasn't surprised, as her mother was always telling her to do things without her own consent. She sighed wryly.

The next day, Ginger remembered that she would be starting her volunteer work.

"Maddie and Lukas actually have a choice about what they do, and Noah always cries his way into getting anything he wants. I'm the only one who has to be rational!" she grumbled. Little did she know that her mother had overheard her as she was passing by. Her mother's heart sank, feeling rather helpless. They drove to the library in silence.

As Ginger was about to close the door, her mother grabbed her hand.

"Ginger, you may not like what we chose for you to do. But the choices we make have immense value for you. You don't realize it yet, but this opportunity will help you find yourself."

Ginger looked at her mother earnestly and nodded, squeezed her hand and walked inside. She was filled in on her assignments, which would involve shelving books and some other slightly "mundane" secretarial tasks! Ginger's smile began to falter as she wondered how this was supposed to benefit her...

Ginger mostly kept quiet during work. She had surprisingly started to enjoy the peace and freedom that she was acquiring. She loved the responsibility, especially when a younger child asked her if she could help her find a book. Finally, she felt like she had a little authority, something she had always longed for. When her mother came to pick her up, Ginger was beaming, which her mom noted.

"How did it go, sweetie?"

Ginger animatedly filled her mother in with the details. "Mom, thank you. I can see why you signed me up. Parents definitely know their children's nature best."

The next few weeks flew by. With Ginger volunteering at the library regularly, there was an immediate change in her attitude. Finally, she had other things to focus on besides feeling constantly annoyed with her family. One day, Ginger was at the library. She didn't have anything in particular to do, so she wandered around, moving between aisles. She looked at some books, her hands running past every title. Suddenly, a book set atop a display case caught her eye. The title read, *Uplifting Quotes*. She picked it up and skimmed through it.

One quote in particular caught her eye. It said, "I have learned silence from the talkative, tolerance from the intolerant, and kindness from the unkind;" Ginger let out a soft gasp, moved by the words. She understood that there would always be instances in which people may be unkind or intolerant. What mattered was how one chooses to respond. Her mind drifted off to the countless times she had struggled with keeping her cool when her siblings annoyed her.

Since she started volunteering, things had improved for her. This didn't go unnoticed by her family,

and gradually, they also realized and apologized for their share of unreasonable behavior. Her parents exchanged a proud glance when one evening, Maddie and Lukas wrapped Ginger in a hug, acknowledging each other's points of view. Noah jumped in as well, giving Ginger a slobbery kiss. She grinned at the memory.

Ginger looked back at the book and saw another quote that seemed even more relevant to her ongoing journey. "Maturity is not measured by age. It is an attitude built by experience."

Ginger decided to stop trying to light speed her evolution. She recognized that you can't get where you're going without being where you've been. And after all, she had her whole life to grow! All the experiences, good or bad, collectively make one who they are. She felt her inner turbulence subside. In that moment, Ginger realized she was right where she was supposed to be: somewhere in between.

## GRADE 7 – 8 FICTION

### Eyes Beyond Ellis Island

By Jenna Antione

#### SECOND PRIZE

I always wondered what Thomas Jefferson really meant when he said, "The price of freedom is eternal vigilance." I wondered if freedom is something to work hard for or if it just could never be earned. When looking back, I always remember how my grandmother told me stories, which her mother told her. These stories were about how Haiti finally got its freedom and independence, after many hard years of fighting and using many other tactics to get rid of the French. I was always delighted in the fact that both men and women stood firm and worked hard for what they believed.

My name is Roseline Etienne. I am twenty-four years old and was born in Haiti. I have decided to go to America for a better life. My plan is to arrive at Ellis Island, since it is known as an open door to America for immigrants. For years, it has been the "gateway" to the United States for countless immigrants and for countless opportunities. If I am lucky enough to make it to America, I will immediately search for and secure employment. With my earnings I will provide for my family in Haiti. I am thankful that my uncle's friend, Joseph, is willing to let me live with him when I get to America. His sponsorship gets me a step closer to freedom and greater opportunities. At the same time, I know this journey may be very difficult, but I am willing to take the risk. As the days before my departure passed quicker than I imagined, I practiced my English and visited my family members maybe for the last time.

Finally, the day arrived for me to leave Haiti. When I laid eyes on the ship, "Gabriel," it was huge and looked well made. I felt happy and excited. Yet, deep down I was scared. Would I be treated differently in America because of my skin color and gender? I had never ever left Haiti before and I was alone, so this was the emotion I felt. As I boarded the steerage of the boat, I quickly realized that the number of passengers was tremendous. It was annoyingly crowded and noisy. I paused, jolted back to a disturbing time in my past history. I saw frightened slaves like animals stuffed into the bottom of a dreary boat on a hopeless journey. Then I slowly drifted back to reality.

While on board I spoke with many different people. Most explained why they had always wanted to come to America. Many of them were cases just like mine. We believed America would provide better opportunities for a better life for ourselves and our families. For example, I met a girl named Stéphine who was going to America to find a good job so she could take care of her siblings. Both of her parents had recently died in Haiti. For my journey, I decided not to pack a lot of personal belongings. I thought too many things would remind me of home and make me homesick. I even questioned, "Will I ever return home to Haiti?"

On the ship I had a lot of time to think. Gradually, I became aware that I was taking responsibility for my family, just as my mother and grandmother had done in the past. The main difference was that I was lucky enough to have a better chance to help out financially. I knew the US had the potential for limitless opportunities, which they never even, dreamed about. From time to time, I felt guilty about leaving my family behind in Haiti. But I knew this was the way for all of us to have a better life and someday we would see it occur. As time passed many passengers became seasick. Also, many displayed symptoms of other illnesses such as trachoma, tuberculosis, and favus. I was fortunate that I didn't become ill. During this time, I continued developing my English-speaking skills. Sometimes I had negative thoughts about what might happen once I arrived. But I was confident that God was with me until the end and He wouldn't let anything happen to me.

A few weeks later, I suddenly was awakened by loud clapping and cheering from the deck. I raced up to the deck as fast as I could go to see what was going on. My head was dizzy and spinning as if I was in an endless dream. We were finally arriving. A gigantic green statue stood bright and beautiful before me. It was the Statue of Liberty standing there to welcome us to America with her great glorious torch. While I was looking at it, I knew that I was close to my arrival. Her light was my light. I believed the statue's torch was my light of possibilities.

A short time later, I hurriedly gathered all my belongings disembarking from the boat that I had spent a month on. We were all rushed into Ellis Island along with other passengers who were also disembarking from other ships. The tremendous crowd startled me. I have never seen so many people together at once. While going up the stairs to the main building of Ellis Island, I saw many people running and pushing each other in order to be screened. I felt like I had been accepted through the gates of Heaven. Tears of joy rolled down my face.

Next there was waiting and waiting and more waiting. I used this time to pray that everything was going to be all right not only for me but for everyone who had made the journey also. Finally, it was my turn to be 'Processed.' I went through a series of stations until I reached the medical exam. The exam was embarrassing to me due to the lack of privacy. I felt every eye was on me. Though I was uncomfortable, I remained calm.

Next to me I recognized a man from the boat named Jean. The doctor put a huge X mark on him and shook his head saying, "Might qualify for quarantine." I realized it meant something was wrong. Just like that, Jean turned and looked at me saying "Tanpri ede m s è m mwèn pa ka tounen." He was asking me to help him as if I was able to. Tears started running down my cheeks because I felt that he might be sent back and I couldn't do anything to help. I thought it was like you finally made it to Heaven and then suddenly a demon decides to drag you down to Hell with him.

After the medical exam, I had to go through many more stations until I ended up right back in the Great Hall. There was more waiting and more lines. Once I finally got to the front of the line, a man with a long beard then asked me another series of questions. Thankfully, I answered everything correctly and was released.

I quickly went to buy my ticket. As I was purchasing my ticket to Connecticut, I wondered what would have happened if I never took this risk. Departing Ellis Island, I began to cry tears of joy. It was at this moment that I realized the new life I had in front of me. The opportunities I had for myself and that others before me could not even dream of. I realized this was the first step in my journey to freedom, opportunities, and to citizenship. I will always work hard so that future generations will not dream about freedom, but it will be real to them.

## GRADE 7 – 8 FICTION

### Alloria By Tamara Hill

#### THIRD PRIZE

It was unusually hard for me to open my eyes at that moment. It felt as if I had marbles on my eyelids. With a struggle, I eventually got them open, and I was perplexed as to what I had just laid my eyes on. There was a path, going on for miles, made of limestone, with bushes and daisies surrounding it. I got up off the ground, dusted off my jeans, and started walking along the path. The grass growing tall beside me was greener than emeralds. Although I did not know where I was going, I felt a deep sense of calm running through me every step I took. After what seemed like hours, I finally reached something at the end of the path. It was a small cottage with stone exterior walls covered with vines, a mud brick roof and chimney, and small, detailed wooden windows and doors. I walked up the old stone stairs and knocked on the door. No one responded. Assuming no one was home, I wriggled the wooden doorknob. The door was unlocked. I pushed it open, and the interior looked as old as the outside; dusty, old wooden floorboards creaked underneath me if I took the wrong step.

“Hello, Hiraeth,” uttered a short, old lady with glasses much too big for her eyes. How did she know my name? It is certainly uncommon. Hiraeth means homesickness for a home you cannot go back to, or a home that never was. My mother named me this because she always thought of the most peculiar alternate worlds. They were always like a Utopia, and they were always in her mind. When I was younger, my mother used to tell me about these worlds, in detail. Her favorite was called Alloria. Nothing ever went wrong there, and people were always peaceful and care free. Alloria is where she escaped to, to clear her mind when she was worried, sad, or angry. Despite this, I still had to answer this lady.

“Hello,” I muttered. “Where am I?”

“Oh, you’ll figure that out on your own soon enough,” the old woman said with a smile. “In the meantime, come for tea.” She led me into the kitchen and sat me down at a small wooden stool.

“Is this Heaven?” I asked.

The woman put down her teacup, looked me straight in the eyes, and told me, “I can assure you, Hiraeth, you are not dead.” If I wasn’t dead, then this had to be a place on Earth. Although, something about this place seemed awfully familiar, the aesthetics of it. Judging by the confused look on my face, the woman offered me a tour of the whole area. We walked outside and around the back of the tiny cottage. A pond full of lilies and the clearest water I have ever seen glistened as the woman continued to walk farther back into a forest.

“I never asked you what your name was, Ma’am.”

“Call me Audora,” she said from afar. I caught up with her, and I caught a glimpse of something on her wrist. It was a watch with a little angel on it. This angel seemed curiously familiar, yet I just couldn’t put my finger on it. We were now out of the forest, and we were in a village. It was very much like the cottage I had first arrived in. There were the same stone, vine-covered buildings that were shops and services. They filled up the sides of walkways. There were villagers filling up the vast region, all of them wearing simple dresses and pants. We walked into one of the shops, and it was filled with books. I explored this place, and I saw one really bright and shiny book. I pulled it this out and it was titled, *All About Alloria*. Alloria? The place in my mother’s head? This couldn’t be real. I sprinted out of the store, and suddenly everything about the place had changed. All the villagers were now wearing very fancy dresses and suits. They all had very brightly colored hair and skin, and they all either had wings, horns, or extra eyes and arms. Audora had turned into a young lady with a third eye and a pair of wings. She was wearing a big, white dress. She had kept her white hair, but now it was in a fancy bun. It was like I was dreaming, and I woke up to something fascinating.

“What happened? How am I in Alloria?” I asked her.

“Well, Alloria is your mother’s world, and all of us have changed to our true form.”

I was so confused. Audora didn’t give a very clear answer. If I was in Alloria, in my mother’s head, then my mother had to be here too. And what is a true form? “So that means my mother is here too, right? I can just find her and we can go back to the real world?”

“Your mother is in the real world. But why would you ever want to go back?” Audora said. “Alloria is the best place you could possibly be! Your mother wouldn’t mind anyway. After all, she’s the one who created this world. Come on, there is much more to see!” She took my hand and started to fly. For some reason, I wasn’t even scared. I wasn’t even worried. I could see almost all of Alloria, and it was so beautiful. I realized that there were many characteristics of it that I should have noticed before. Daisies, my mother’s favorite flower, were everywhere. The angel, my mother had the same angel in the form of a locket she had always kept on her nightstand. She said it was good luck. I was now wondering why I would ever want to go back to the real world. Alloria was amazing. The people were lovely, and I could stay in the cottage with Audora. It could be my new life.

But then everything suddenly came back to me. I remembered. One morning, my mother was very sad. I heard her crying subtly, and I went to comfort her. I had put my hand on her shoulder, and all of a sudden, boom! I was in Alloria without my mother. I came to the conclusion that my mother must be in a trance at our house. I was in my mother’s head. It all became clear now. I had traveled into my mother’s head by myself.

As thoughts raced through my head, Audora and I landed right in front of the cottage again. Now I was getting a little irritated. “I can’t stay here, Audora. I really need to get back to my mother. She’s my best friend.”

“Don’t worry. Your mother is absolutely fine with you here. She created this world. She would want you to see it and stay here!” Audora said, with her usual smile that I could now see was fake. She wanted me to stay here, trapped.

“No! You have to take me home! I can’t take it anymore! Please!” I screamed.

“Hiraeth, you are really better off here! Now come inside, we should have some tea again. It’s time.”

“No! Leave me alone!” I cried out. I started running, running for miles and miles through the forest again and out to the end of the village. A fence wrapped around the region. I followed it. Halfway around, I realized it was a circle, enclosing Alloria. I could barely see beyond the fence. I reached my finger out to the other side of the fence. It burned so badly. Luckily, my finger was ok, nothing too severe. There was no use. I sat down on the limestone ground, crying to myself. I saw Audora walking up to me. She held out her hand to me, trying to change my mind one more time.

“Nothing will ever go wrong in Alloria. You can stay here for eternity.”

“Please, no! The only person I need is my mother,” I said, now bawling. I was shaking and I just wanted to go home, where I belonged. Something touched my back, and I started to rise up. I had wings, attached to my back. I kept rising, hundreds of feet above until I could fly over the fence. I yelled down to Audora, “I’m sorry, I have to go back.” She had a look on her face that was sort of sad. I flew over the fence and traveled for miles, until I recognized something. It was my house. I landed down onto the doorstep. I ran inside, into my mother’s office, where she was, in a chair with her eyes closed. I shook her, trying to wake her up.

“Mom! Wake up! It’s me! Hiraeth! You have to wake up!” Her eyes jolted open.

“Hiraeth! It’s ok, I was just dreaming.”

I smiled to myself and we walked into the living room to read a book

## GRADE 7 – 8 NONFICTION

### The Canyon Between Us By Alanna Harper

#### FIRST PRIZE

The Grand Canyon is 95,040 feet wide and 5,280 feet deep. Sometimes it can feel like we, people of different races, religions, genders, sexualities and political views are standing 95,040 feet apart with a 5,280 foot drop between us. Our differences divide us. Our divisions define us. They dig a canyon too deep to cross through. And it's nearly impossible to see the view from the other side. But it doesn't have to be like that.

We can build a bridge across our "Grand Canyon." We must build that bridge. For a world or a country cannot hope to function when a grand canyon divides it and stands in the way. We must build a bridge because we cannot hope to face the problems of the world alone. And we must build it from both sides. It can be a small bridge at first. Small, and weak, made of rope and wood. Then we will strengthen it. We will make it strong and large, so people can look to the horizon and see not the canyon dividing us, but the bridge connecting us. And then, standing together on our bridge, we will be ready to take on the world, together.

In my social studies class, we discuss politics related to current events. A girl in my class has very different political views from me. We often debate in class. However, we always listen to each other. Even though our opinions differ, we always respect each other's opinions. Likewise, in an out-of-school program, some students were discussing politics. Two boys ended up debating an issue. While their opinions were different from each other, their respect for each other was the same. In our government for example in the presidential debates, we have watched as political figures disrespected each other because of their differing opinions. However, when I was in class debating with that girl, I may have disagreed with her, but I learned a lot about her views and was able to better understand her opinions and the opinions of others who agreed with her.

Being different than someone doesn't make you bad. We need to stop associating words describing people different from us with negativity. Disagreeing is all right. Looking or being different from someone is all right. And we must respect each other despite our differences and disagreements. If we can do that, and put our differences aside long enough to work together, we can build that bridge to unite the world. So, let's hurry up and get started because we have a lot of ground to cover. About 95,040 feet.

## GRADE 7 – 8 NONFICTION

### Why I am a Feminist By Mey Silvey

#### SECOND PRIZE

When children are young, we are taught war as well as being treated differently than others is nonexistent or should be nonexistent. However, as you grow older there is much more to experience. When I was six and seven years old, I continuously used stereotypical terms including "tom-boy" and "girly." They

were words which my dearest companions used. There could not have been anything peculiar about the terms; they were consistently used as a normal thing. There is a memory which is engraved into my mind from when I was eight years of age. My friend and I were standing in front of my bedroom window watching cars go by. Then we began to sort ourselves into gender-roles without the merest realization. "You're definitely a tom-boy," she told me. My exact response was "I think so too... You are a tom-boy too ." People remember things which eventually serve of great value to them. Here is why I now know I amable to recall that memory

I noticed sufficient gender gaps when I was nine or ten, primarily during December. It was two days after Christmas. I got to spend some lime with my cousins, they're three brothers. We would spend this time eating and playing video games, sometimes running around outside in the chilly winter breeze. I still remember my nose feeling like an icicle. At this specific time, we were downstairs playing some nonsensical game together on the TV. When one of the boys became hungry, he poked on his little brother to make him a sandwich But he had done it in a way I had never witnessed. His voice projected. "You're the closest to looking like a woman... Go make me a sandwich." I vaguely remember his little brother hitting him. Numerous amounts of questions flooded my mind. What did that mean? and Why did he think that? were the most popular among all else. All I was able to do was tell him his words were not funny, then question why his little brother was outrageously upset at being called a woman. I was too young to understand why woman were now being devalued, but I also had never thought of a woman being treated differently from a man. It sounded surreal and impossible, especially since my mom worked in data and analytics; she ran the house, everyone bowed down to her. Therefore, I had had no statistics or examples other than my own to understand something was off. After that day, I began studying, it was no coincidence that I had remembered the day from when I was eight. Those degrading words and phrases were shouting to be noticed; my cousin's implicitly biased sentence connected the dots.

Now we come nearer to the present. Why should it be that of thirteen year old, a girl is able to feel the worry of becoming a housewife? Life may not go on as it did in the 1800s, though many aspects from a woman's life from the 19th century continue to exist, it is eye-catching when you notice your mother doing more work than your father. Though my father may do work, it is traditional. For instance, a majority of the time, my mother will be cooking and my father will be woodworking. Whenever I make an attempt to have a glance into my future,unfortunately I think about the tiniest things. I have had a dream to become a congresswoman for years now, not to mention a senator, then perhaps President if I am optimistic enough. However, then I think about my children. I believe most people have a desire to adopt or birth their own child, but who will take care of mine if I shall never be home? Of course, my husband could: though there is a doubt in my stomach that he would not do as much as I'd like him to. Every day presents greater challenges of having a glimpse into my future. At a younger age, it is much more uncomplicated, you see it, you do it. At a younger age you do not know the substantial amount of information you know at thirteen. Why should being female pose a burden? Half of the pages in my journals speak of these issues – no, this is not an overreaction. Everyday, I knock on wood for my future in an attempt to rescue it because many days it feels severed. The most infuriating of all situations is when people make an effort to explain why we live in a "post-feminist era". We cannot live in a post-feminist era if 2021 marks the date of our first female vice-president. We cannot live in a post-feminist era if substantial gender roles continue to exist. We cannot live in a post-feminist era if women's health care products posses a price. We cannot live in a post-feminist era if 42 percent of women are discriminated against and underpaid. No one should be able to feel incompetent due to his or her gender. Certainly no female should need to feel her future will persist with more challenges than that of a man's.

Months later, on September 18, 2020, I walked out of swim practice to learn Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg moved on; passed away. That evening was exceptionally the most grueling night of my few years alive. Not once had I thought her death was possible. I wasn't ready; no one was. Without Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, women could not have abortions and could even get fired for being pregnant, When I have

boys tell me they are anti-women's choice or pro-life, I fear for myself. What if, now, the law was overturned and I could not have power over my own body; females would turn into another thing men would be able to manipulate and control. I cannot understand why abortion becomes "murderous" if it is to save a fetus from living an unbearable life. If that fetus were to develop a disease which would prevent it from fully living, if the mother cannot take care of the baby, if the mother will die. If the mother got raped, abortion is necessary. Imagine a child carrying a baby: her future is gone. No child can care or give birth to a child; they cannot even live on their own yet. Whenever I try to put myself in a woman's position, one whom is being denied access to abortion, I am overcome with fear. That is nine months of an unwanted pregnancy which you know you cannot have for a very clear reason. Why does the government care tremendously about a fetus when they could care less about it once it is born? Abortion is a hard decision to make. It is not simple; it is heart-wrenching. When a man can consistently give birth, he can decide on whether abortion is right or wrong.

To conclude, through my few years of living, there have been countless amounts of lessons I've learned. Though I may not have learned many lessons in the moment they occurred, those moments were important enough for me to remember. The memory I am able to recall from when I was eight there had always been something wrong with words such as "tom-boy" and "girlish." Only, I was too young to understand why. However, I now understand that these terms are used to differentiate being female to being male. There had always been a feminist inside of me; it just took years to unlock the door. While I know there are many years ahead of me, I hope I will be able to hold onto more memories because these memories paint a picture for my future.

## GRADE 7 – 8 POETRY

### Books: Friends Forever

By Namratha Prasanth Kamath

#### FIRST PRIZE

Whenever I'm lonely or feeling down,  
Whenever my face is wearing a frown,  
I can count on my books to make me smile,

And then I feel better, after a while.

When I'm happy or in a good mood,  
I pick up a big novel, and then I'm glued.

Even while I'm at home or on the go,  
Do I ever stop reading? Never, no!

The words on the pages start mixing and stirring,  
Minutes become hours, and time starts blurring.  
Slowly, I am a wizard and I fight an evil sorcerer,  
I win and I rejoice; I am a conqueror!

After, I live on the vast London countryside,  
The wind whistles and thunders, as my pony and I ride.

Then, I follow a rabbit down a small rabbit hole,

Wait, am I shrinking? I'm not in control!

Afterwards, I'm a spy working for the CIA,  
Whew, I saved the world, just another day!

Later at the farm, I tell stories to the spiders and pigs,  
It's so quiet, I can't even hear a snapping twig.  
But, I remember who I am and snap back to reality,  
I'm just a normal girl, and I'm taken out of my fantasy.  
How I wish I could live in my stories?  
To live among my dreams and majestic glories?  
Stories of those who have fought for basic human rights,  
And of those who started low, then went on to great heights.  
Those who fought against racism, and against discrimination,  
Those who believe everyone should get an education.  
Those whose stories sadden yet enlighten me,  
As they overcome their problems, and teach thee.  
The tales have made me into who I am today,  
Shaped me and molded me like a piece of wet clay.  
They've given me insight into other views and opinions,  
I won't live just one life, I will live millions.  
My books are my inspiration, my teachers and friends,  
Their lessons stay with me even after the story ends.

## GRADE 7 – 8 POETRY

### Beach Day By Rachel Kelly

SECOND PRIZE

Sand between my toes  
Sun in my eyes  
Sunscreen on my nose  
Seagulls in the skies  
Kids in the waves  
Shovels in the sand  
Wet, happy days  
In this marvelous land  
Person laying down  
Drink in a bottle  
Sandcastles, golden brown  
Boats going full throttle  
Ice cream on my shirt  
Hat over my face  
My burns start to hurt  
But I feel quite in place  
Salt in the breeze  
Laughter in the air  
Lifeguards on jet skis  
Showing off their hair

Seashells on the ground  
Seaweed in the water  
Family all around  
Mom, dad, son, daughter  
Surfers in the foam  
Boogie boards in the spray  
Little children roam  
What a lovely day  
At the Jersey shore  
There is a loss of speech  
Life is better than before  
Right here on the beach

## GRADE 7 – 8 POETRY

### Beyond Viruses By Neel Banerjee

#### THIRD PRIZE

Every year thousands pass.  
Disease being the Number One reason.  
Summer to Winter to Spring to Autumn  
They haunt, no matter the season.

Known as Coronary Artery Disease  
It is caused by plaques.  
A person will die every 36 seconds  
If exercise lacks.

Moving on to Leukemia  
Caused by imprudent White Blood Cells,  
In which kids are mainly attacked  
Knocking on 56,840 people's bells.

With a number of 36,560 deaths in 2018  
Seat belts were the main aspect,  
Quality of roads being another factor  
Don't drink because of its effect.

Mucus in the bronchial tubes  
It was due to smoking,  
Occurring in the Respiratory system  
Scientists were done with the joking.

Stroke being a fairly common one  
Shattering countless lives of people,  
Each time the blood supply is reduced  
Doctors are nothing but people.

Unfortunately tarnishing people's memories  
There is no cure to be found.  
Also known as Senile Dementia  
With three million cases around.

We are here at Diabetes  
Accompanied by two fatal types,  
Combining AIDS and Breast Cancer  
Surprisingly doesn't equalize.  
Influenza being another problem  
Spreading from person to person,  
With 38 million people sick in 2019  
2020 continued to worsen.

Depressed people of 10 to 34 years,  
A mental bank  
Leaving a handful of families in tears.

But there is still hope  
Our technology is advancing,  
Many diseases are being cured.  
And we should continue enhancing it.

## GRADE 9 – 10 FICTION

### Pursuing My Dream

#### By Deep Banerjee

#### FIRST PRIZE

I was failing all my classes. Every single one of them. I was living by myself in a lousy, shabby apartment in a lousy, shabby building. Community college was all my father could afford, and I was wasting the education he worked hard to provide me. And still, I didn't work hard to do better in school. I didn't work hard to make a little money for myself. I spent hours upon hours sitting in a chair, staring at a screen, and playing video games. I had one dream, and one dream only, and that was to go pro in gaming and streaming.

My parents were refugees, extracted from war in the Middle East. My father was a janitor, my mother a maid. They left home early, came home late.

Due to our financial situation, I was brought up never to be materialistic. My peers at school, however, did not think the same. I was made fun of for wearing the same old jeans every day, the extremely creased Reebok sneakers I had for so many years. Because of this automatic judgment from them, I never

bonded with many people at school; and because it was my parents' fault. I never bonded with them either. I grew up extremely independent.

When I was in eighth grade, my father saved enough to buy me my first gaming console. He walked to my room, holding a wrapped box, which I had never been given before. My eyes lit up as I tore the wrapping apart, to see the big green X on a black box.

I was instantly addicted. I found people to talk to online, people I could share my stories with, people who did not judge me based on my race or my clothes. I found people I could laugh with.

Throughout my high school years, I never had a plan for what I would do, where I would go, and how I'd make something of myself. I just continuously played, somehow passed my classes and graduated, and then kept playing. I centered my life around video games and my dreams around them too.

Then I went to college. I spent the extra money my father gave me to buy a basic computer instead of textbooks. I spent my entire day streaming myself playing Fortnite, an emerging video game with a lot of potential. Streams with terrible quality, my bad PC and Wi-Fi were getting in the way. Streams I spent alone, with only five followers and averaging not a single viewer per stream. I was getting better at the game, but the game was getting me nowhere.

Soon enough, my father was getting sick of it. He screamed at me, angry about how I was wasting my time, wasting his hard-earned money, wasting my life.

"What are you doing?" he always asked, and I never had a straight answer. I just stayed quiet and sometimes hung up. It was not long until he stopped calling; he stopped sending money. I was on my own.

I sold my phone, some of my furniture, and almost every one of my possessions. I did not sell my keyboard, my mouse, my desk, my monitor and my computer. I had come so far, devoted so much time to my dream; there was no going back.

I did not improve my grades. I did not get a job. I just kept playing and playing and playing. I started playing less for fun and more to get better. I devoted all my time to the game. When my Wi-Fi or my computer messed me up. I took a deep breath and started playing again. I started sleeping for three hours a day at most. I was determined.

That weekend, a Fortnite tournament was announced, a tournament with a fifty thousand dollar prize pool. I got extremely excited, until I saw that the tournament was being hosted in LA, a couple of thousand miles from my apartment in Chicago. I checked plane ticket prices, and then I checked my wallet. I had nowhere near enough money to buy a ticket. There was only one way.

I loaded up my PC, got online, and contacted someone for a wager for twenty bucks, all I could afford. If I won the wager, my opponent would pay me twenty dollars, and I could afford bus fare home to my father. If I lost, then I was out of spare money, and I would have no choice but to sell my computer. It was an extreme risk, a risk I had to take.

The wager we agreed upon was a first to seven win by two on Fortnite. My opponent won the first three rounds, leaving me extremely nervous. I won the fourth round and the fifth. The score was 3–2, him. He then proceeded to win the next three rounds. My heart sank, but I kept fighting. I played my heart out, beating my opponent in the next five rounds continuously. I had won the wager.

With forty dollars in my hand, and my heart beating harder than an entire percussion band, I ran over to the bus station, quickly bought a ticket, and stepped onto a bus to home, to my father.

A couple of hours later, I arrived at the door I once entered daily. I knocked on it, and when it opened. I looked my father face to face.

"I need 300 dollars," I begged. "300 dollars. If I cannot make anything out of this money, I promise you, I will sell all my gadgets, find a job, focus on school and quit gaming. Just give me one chance, please."

He looked at me. I stared back. We stood like that for a while. Then he walked back into the house, leaving the door open, and a minute later he handed me three-hundred-dollar bills. He turned back and shut the door.

This was my chance. I ran back to the bus station, caught a bus back home, packed clothes into my bag, and, with most of the remaining money, bought a one-way ticket to LA. If I didn't earn money there, I was stuck there.

My flight arrived at Los Angeles at one o'clock at night. I did not have money for a hotel, so I walked out of the terminal and found a park nearby, where I slept on a bench. Skipping breakfast the next morning, I caught a taxi to the venue. It was quite a tennis stadium where the qualifiers were being held. After paying the twenty-dollar entry fee, I was officially out of money.

The initial qualifiers were fairly easy, for the tournament was open to anyone and not all the players were great. The finals, however, were extremely tough. I was playing with other pros and streamers who had made thousands off the game. I trusted myself though; I trusted my skill and I played with a passion and determination, for my dreams relied on it.

The first game, I placed eightieth. Extremely upset with myself, I punched my desk. But there were still three games left; I still could make money. The second game I placed tenth, which was decent. The third, fifteenth. That meant I officially could not win the tournament, but there were still prizes for making the podium. I had to do better in the final game.

In the early game, I eliminated three players, setting me up for success. Then, I got quite lucky when I was able to make it out of a fight, barely alive. Picking up two more eliminations on the way. There were only five gamers standing. Three of them started fighting, and I hit an amazing shot, eliminating one of the other players. There were two left, one opponent and me. He hit me for a lot of damage, and despite my best efforts, I died. I was upset with myself but also extremely excited. I had placed.

I felt the best I ever had. I couldn't stop imagining what I could do with the five grand. Immediately after the tournament, I bought a ticket back to Chicago, got on the plane a couple of hours later and headed back to my apartment for the night, a night with little sleep.

The next morning, I took a bus home. I rang the bell. My father opened the door and I looked at him. He looked at me, and then I handed him three hundred-dollar bills. He took them quickly, smiled and shut the door.

Because of my top three placement, I had gained a ton of exposure. My streams, which had spent hours and hours with zero viewers, now rose to seventy. I was able to buy myself a new PC, a new monitor and an upgraded Wi-Fi. I began generating thousands a month and supporting myself.

My father started calling me again, and every time he asked, "What are you doing?" I answered, "Pursuing my dreams."

## GRADE 9 – 10 FICTION

### I am a Human By Roshan Jagannathan

#### SECOND PRIZE

The rain splattered onto the concrete road similar to the sounds of a dark melody. I walk under the oak trees to protect myself from the hard rain and to smell the aroma of the dreadful earth. I am a poor child who begs for the leaves of the trees to not become distracted by the wind, so it can keep me dry from the rain. I do not own a jacket but own a stained t-shirt. As I walk towards the factory for labor, I question if it is my fate to be born in such conditions. I reluctantly started to reflect on my life: I am a young boy who is originally from Antigua and my country's culture was colonized and corrupted by the English. My parents and I are immigrants who sought the United States for a better future. The United States is supposedly the

land which “promises” to protect the rights of immigrants. But as I came near the factory, I started to reflect even more on my challenges. Without any warning, the rain poured harder through the small holes between the leaves of the trees which I was walking under. Slowly, my shirt became soaked. I looked down at my fingers and noticed the abnormal but the usual rough texture. I examined my fingers which were marked with injuries. I recognized that each one of them has a significant story to tell. As the rain poured harder, it seemed as if the creases on my hands were disappearing slowly. At that moment, I suddenly envisioned myself standing in the thousands of factories that poor children are forced to work in. The faces of the children are similar to those of farm animals. Their faces are smeared with mud and scars. The bones on their bodies emphasized their starvation. Some children did not have limbs but still dared to work in such conditions to solely benefit their family. Suddenly, the water that soaked my white shirt turned into a dark red color. Into realization, it is blood. I stood in confusion as I was hit with flashbacks of my past. Although the image seemed to be blurred, I saw my father and mother sacrifice their lives for me. I saw the death of my parents but in reality, I wasn’t there. Both my parents worked at a coal mine where they met their fate of a cave engulfing them. Then, the image changed. I saw my past self who was told that my parents were killed by rocks. There weren’t any tears on my dark cheek. Why would a child cry to reality? I knew misfortune was a part of immigrants like me. It is the dark fate of immigrants. At these moments, I learned that life is about letting go and no one can understand this better than my parents who left everyone without saying goodbye. Suddenly back to reality, I saw my shirt once again. It was still soaked with blood. When I see my past, I question peace, existence and God. I question if humans can experience such sorrow and pain. But of course, it is inevitable for immigrants to experience torture and pain. Slowly, the farm animals started to surround me. Their faces did not show any expressions. As I crumbled onto the ground like a seed, I was not afraid. I was finally happy. I was happy that the torture would end. Maybe I’ll become sane when I reach death. I was suddenly hit by a shine glazing on my eyes when death is imminent. The rain that splattered onto the concrete sharply came to an end. I knew that I could not bribe the door on my way to the sky. But I couldn’t care less. I felt wings finally grow on my skinny back, and I elevated towards the sky. As I flew upwards, I looked around and saw the farm animals morph into angels. They were souls that were never granted joy but were looking for a golden sky at the end of a storm. When I reached the clouds, I took a final glimpse below me. I finally understood that life was meant only for the fittest. Although I may be an immigrant, I am also a human.

## GRADE 9 – 10 NONFICTION

### The Timeless Lessons of Aesop’s Fables

By Nora Amsellem

#### FIRST PRIZE

People nowadays are often unaware of the complex history and meaning behind the simple tales they are told as children, such as the many stories from Aesop’s Fables. Aesop’s Fables can seem quite simple; they use animals to symbolize human actions and the stories are straightforward. However, they share extremely important morals that apply to so many life situations, no matter the time period. The fables are believed to have originated in Ancient Greece by a Greek slave named Aesop. As a slave, Aesop lived a difficult life and was forced to gain independence by using his intelligence and wit. From the hardships he faced, Aesop was inspired to teach moral lessons to society, thus leading to the creation of Aesop’s Fables. Originally, the fables spread orally and appealed to all age groups. Around the 15th century and beginning of the Renaissance was when many of the fables were officially documented and translated.

During the Renaissance, they were demonstrated through the arts, such as literature and music. Now, the fables mainly appeal to children as they are in the form of cartoons and picture books. Additionally, it is likely that each fable has been significantly altered since its creation by Aesop. In fact, Aesop may not be the true author of each fable; some stories may have developed later on. Even so, the lessons conveyed have remained the same throughout history. Through the use of animal symbolism, Aesop demonstrated many of the countless human flaws, from which he taught moral lessons that have stood the test of time.

Perhaps the most well-known of all of Aesop's fables is "The Boy Who Cried Wolf." Its long-lasting popularity is a result of the important moral it shares. The story describes a young shepherd boy who works a tedious job. He finds himself longing for something interesting to happen, which leads him to repeatedly trick the villagers that a wolf was attacking him and his sheep. When the villagers discover the false alarm, they are outraged. When a wolf truly comes, they do not rush to the boy's aid; they do not believe him. The takeaway of this fable is that lying wrecks one's credibility. In other words, trust must be earned. This moral proves the importance of honesty, a lesson that applies to life no matter the time period. As a result, the moral of the story has changed very little over time. For example, one of the original translations from Greek to Latin of the fable was written by Hieronymus Osius in 1574, titled "The Lying Boy." According to him, the moral of the story is "dicant quae quoque vera" in Latin, which translates literally to "to make them say the truth." Similarly, several hundreds of years later in 1894, an author of English folklore known as Joseph Jacobs titled his adaptation of the story "The Shepherd's Boy." According to Jacobs, the moral of the story is "A liar will not be believed, even when he speaks the truth." Additionally, the moral is still referenced in modern society. For example, a common figure of speech in English is "to cry wolf". This refers to someone who is constantly lying and therefore making it difficult for others to determine if and when they are being truthful. Furthermore, modern usage of this fable is often shown through books, movies, and shows. Often times, these adaptations include minor changes in detail from the original version in order to conform with modern ideals. For instance, during the High Middle Ages and Renaissance, the fable ended with the wolf murdering the boy. In the modern world, however, it is not encouraged that children be exposed to violence. Even so, the same moral has remained true throughout history. Overall, "The Boy Who Cried Wolf" demonstrates the human tendency to lie, a characteristic that has existed for centuries, from which it proves the importance of honesty.

Another one of Aesop's Fables, often called "The Lion and the Mouse," gives a timeless moral that can be interpreted in various ways. In the tale, a mouse disrupts a lion's sleep by crawling across his nose. The lion wakes up and nearly kills the mouse, but reprieves after hearing the mouse beg for mercy. Later, the lion is captured by hunters. The mouse returns and gnaws at the rope until the lion is set free. The moral is that despite our differences, it is always important to lend a helping hand. Additionally, the fable demonstrates that people depend on each other, no matter size or status. Although the lesson has remained the same throughout history, emphasis has been placed on various themes. Many interpretations of this fable emphasize the importance of working through our differences in order to achieve a common goal. The animals first discriminate against each other, but later realize the benefits of working together. Other interpretations focus on the theme that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend". The lion and the mouse do not like each other, but they have a common enemy: the hunters. As a result, they come to each other's aid. Apart from this, some authors brought in a unique-perspective on this fable, one of which is Robert Henryson. He was a 15th century Scottish poet who translated many of Aesop's Fables in a series known as *Morall Fabillis*, where he included aversion of "The Lion and the Mouse." He focused on themes of justice and law, which many historians believe was inspired by the reign of James III, a king well known for not handling justice in a fair manner. Henryson expanded on ideas relating to fairness and justice to prove that human actions are not always ethical, which contributes to an unjust society. For example, he stated that since the mouse caused no harm to the lion, the lion could not justifiably kill the mouse, even with the various interpretations of this fable, the underlying idea has remained the same throughout history, proving "its moral is timeless. Overall, "The Lion and the Mouse" demonstrates how humans are often quick to judge which prompts poor decision

making, from which it teaches to look beyond the surface.

Lastly, “The Tortoise and the Hare” is another inspirational tale of Aesop’s Fables. It’s long-lasting moral is often associated with competitive sports and games. The story describes a tortoise and a hare who challenge each other to a foot race. Judging from their natural abilities, the hare would surely win. However, the hare is so overconfident in his abilities that he takes a nap during the race. Meanwhile, the tortoise persists onward and wins the race. Despite that the tortoise was inferior, he won because the hare was overly self-assured. This fable reveals that one should not take too much pride in his or her abilities. Otherwise, this often leads to becoming certain of victory, or even claiming it, before actually winning. As a result one becomes lazy which leads to losing instead. The fable also shows the importance of perseverance. By simply giving up, there is not even a chance of accomplishing anything. In 1692, Sir Roger L’Estrange shared a similar moral in his version of “The Tortoise and the Hare.” “There’s no thought of ever coming to the end of our journey in time, if we sleep by the way.” In other words, when pride gets in the way of persistence, success is not attained. All modern references to the fable revolve around this same moral. For example, the German board game created in 1974 called “Hare and Tortoise” incorporates the moral into game play. Similar to the fable, the objective is to cross the finish line. However, players must advance by spending carrots. If one gets too ambitious or overconfident, they may easily lose the game. In addition to board games, sports players are often compared using this fable. Even if one player appears stronger, this does not indicate they will win. Oftentimes, their stronger appearance will lead them to not put forth much effort. This would allow the tortoise, considered the underdog, to win if they persevere. These examples, yet again, show how the morals of Aesop’s Fables are timeless. Overall, “The Tortoise and the Hare” demonstrates the human weakness of overconfidence, and shows the importance of persistence and perseverance.

Aesop’s Fables are an effective way to demonstrate the many human flaws and teach moral lessons; they have been constantly used throughout history despite their relatively unknown origin. The fables have allowed humans to self-reflect and reason, something other animals cannot do despite their use in the fables. The complex meaning and different interpretations of each fable have historically helped people understand and gain new perspectives on life, furthermore, the fables’ various uses throughout history allowed them to spread and gain popularity. These fables are clearly influential; they have been continuously kept alive for centuries. No matter the time period, humans can always draw an important lesson from Aesop’s Fables. With such significance, it is clear why they have remained.

## GRADE 9 – 10 NONFICTION

### The Amazing Life of Marie Curie

By Taylor Newan

#### SECOND PRIZE

Marie Curie was a Polish chemist, born on November 7, 1867 in Warsaw, Poland. Her family grew up under the strict Tsarist rule, as he was trying to eliminate all Polish culture. Curie also lived through World War I, and even assisted on the front lines. She died on July 4, 1934 of the rare condition, aplastic anemia, which is linked to exposure of radioactive materials such as radium and polonium, the same ones Curie discovered and studied.

Curie and her husband, Pierre Curie, had two daughters, Irene Joliot-Curie, and Eve Curie. Curie’s education was interesting to say the least. After she graduated high school, she hoped to go to college to further her education. The problem was, it was illegal for women to get a higher education, and no college would accept her. She eventually enrolled at Flying University, a Polish college that accepted women. However, the college had to constantly change locations so that the authorities wouldn’t find them.

During her lifetime, she contributed many discoveries to the world of science. Curie discovered the elements radium and polonium, and also performed experiments on radioactivity. She wrote her thesis on the radiation that was discovered in uranium. She found that “an ore containing uranium was far more radioactive than could be explained by its uranium content.” This led her and her husband, Pierre Curie, to further research this bizarre phenomenon. They discovered an element that was 400 times more radioactive than uranium. When it was added to the periodic table in 1898, it was named ‘polonium’ after Curie’s birth country. Poland. After this, Curie proceeded to discover another radioactivity element, radium. Curie won the Nobel Prize twice for her discoveries. She was not only the first woman to win the prize, but the first person to win the prize twice. In addition, Curie is the only person to win the Nobel Prize in two different scientific fields.

While Curie is most notably known for her contributions to the scientific world, many may not know that to prove that they had discovered new elements. Curie and her husband needed a workplace bigger than their labs. They transformed an old shed into a workplace, which offered them more space for them to perform their experiments. The shed looked like a “joke,” as the glass roof was not waterproof, and the walls were drafty. It is hard to believe that this is where radium was discovered, and yet it just goes to show that one doesn’t need an expensive office or suite to do amazing work.

Curie was also a WWI hero. During the war, new medical equipment, such as X-ray machines, was hard to supply to the front lines. Curie made mobile radiography units by “revamping” cars. She then collected a group of women, including her own seventeen-year-old daughter, to operate these machines. These machines became known as ‘Petites Curies,’ which translates to ‘Little Curies.’ She was motivated to produce these machines because she knew that if a soldier’s injuries were detected earlier on, they could be operated on faster, and the outcome would be better.

Nobel Prize winning also ran in Curie’s family, as herself, her husband and even her daughter, Irene, won the prize. They all won for their discoveries and contributions to both physics and chemistry. Curie’s son-in-law, Henry Labouisse, who married her younger daughter, Eve, also accepted the prize.

Overall, Marie Curie lived a full life, leaving behind a legacy sure to last for years to come. She contributed two elements to the periodic table, and set records for Nobel Prize winning. Her family assisted her in her discoveries, and she proved that women could face any challenge a man could, including assisting on the front lines of World War I. Curie will definitely be remembered for her discoveries, and her findings will help continue scientific research on radioactivity long after her death.

## GRADE 9 – 10 NONFICTION

### I Am From Persistence

By Keira Lubliner

#### THIRD PRIZE

It’s true what they say, you should always live in the moment. I learned this lesson the hard way, when the annual Stamford Thanksgiving Parade was canceled due to the pandemic. Looking back, I wish I had appreciated the previous year’s parade more. It was cold and raining, and made for unpleasant dancing conditions. However, this year I’d rather dance in the freezing rain than not be dancing at all. I miss the thrill of hearing the crowd cheer, of finally making it to the end of our long route and getting to perform our routine in its entirety. When I was 13 years old and dancing in the parade, I realized the lengths I go to for things I love.

I remember how exhausted I was, waking up at 8:30 that weekend. The parade doesn’t even start until 12, why do I need to be there so early? I threw on the costume, a sweat suit consisting of black and an incredibly ugly mustard yellow. The pants read LPAC down the side, representing our studio name. I

watched the rain beat against the windows as we drove down, wondering why on earth the parade wasn't canceled. Along the way were different groups; all dressed the same, all huddling together. We continued to drive until we saw the vibrant yellow and black against the cool gray sky. After listening to my mom's long speech about keeping my gloves on and asking about 30 times if I needed more layers. I finally got out of the car and joined my group.

I hurried over to the car that essentially served as our home base. They would follow us along our route and hold everything we needed. I was handed a beanie with our studio name on it. I quickly slid it on, praying it would somehow make me forget about the raw air surrounding me. Then, I was handed a transparent poncho to put on. I looked ridiculous. I found my friends in a huddle and joined them. We lingered in the same area for what felt like forever, not having much to do. The roads were so slippery that our teachers didn't want us to practice! Everyone was joining together in-group hugs to try to warm each other up, however no one accomplished much. The chilled weather swallowed us whole, and we had no escape. Regret showed upon everyone's face, we all wished we'd have stayed home. Suddenly, a surge of energy ran through the clumps of people. The quiet murmuring turned to yelling as a sea of kids ran over to the car. "What's going on?" my friend asked. We headed over to the car and pushed our way through to the trunk. A woman with an overwhelmed look on her face held a carton of hot chocolate from Dunkin' Donuts. She was rapidly pouring it into small cups; the demand was high from us freezing kids. There was also a box of hand warmers being fought over. The scene was crazy! Finally I was handed a cup of my own. The taste was nothing special, but it kept me warm. I sipped it slowly, savoring every last drop of warmth. After an hour of shivering under the trees, the parade finally started moving.

Oddly enough, everyone seemed excited to get moving. The streets were scarce with spectators, however the few that were there were very encouraging. We danced along happily, our loud hip-hop music taking over the streets. Every few blocks we'd stop and put our ponchos in the car, then do a section of our dance. People would cheer from windows of buildings as we danced. Occasionally, there would be a lull in the parade and we'd be at a standstill, in which everyone would put their ponchos back on. Despite our constant movement, we still felt cold, however that wasn't on anyone's mind. We were all having a great time despite the absence of feeling in our toes. We persisted along for around an hour and a half before we made it to the end where we did our full routine. It was an amazing feeling going from the narrow streets to the huge open square in front of the government building. We spread out all over the vast cement and took our starting positions. As soon as the music started, we knew the wet freezing weather was worth it. Despite some people slipping, and some of us limiting our energy to prevent falling, the dance was amazing. We went out with a bang and the crowd roared for us. All of the hours of rehearsal we put in paid off. We didn't let the weather ruin what we had worked for, for so long. I am from Locust Performing Arts Center and I am from persistence.

One year later, I am so glad I got to perform that day. The weather may have been, awful, but performing in the cold is better than sitting at home doing nothing. This day taught me that I will go through a lot for what I love. I could've given up and stayed home, but that wouldn't have made me happy or made me a better dancer. My love for dance rose above all of the challenges that day presented me with, and it will continue to rise throughout the challenges this pandemic presents me with.

GRADE 9 – 10 POETRY  
There Will Always Be Light  
By Sarah Barry

FIRST PRIZE

Sometimes we wonder,  
If I had done that one thing differently,  
Or if that one thing hadn't happened to me,  
Would I be where I am now?

The shadows of the past haunt us as we question: how did I end up here?  
We ask, why?  
Reaching for the answer: why do certain things happen to us?

For me, it's wondering,  
Why did I get sick?  
What happened last year, those many months ago, to bring me to this point?

Everyday I am fighting the unknown enemy; some days I lose every battle.  
Others... I win.  
My body is fighting me, attacking itself, every day is a raging war within me.

Mysterious autoimmune and neurological rebellion, seizing control of my body.  
Ripping away my ability to be who I once was.  
The cure seemingly out of reach, but hope is not.

No war can conquer the flame within us,  
No matter how dark things get, there will always be light,  
What pain has taught me, is that the only definite cure is love.

And I don't mean the superficial love we see commercialized in the world today,  
But rather, love and nurturing for others we see struggling.  
As well as those we don't see.

Taking time to care for ourselves,  
But climbing out of ourselves too,  
Because each life finds its meaning in the way it touches other lives.

The key to escaping our own torment,  
Is to reach out a hand to those drowning in theirs:  
For it'll come back in ways least expected.

We all only have a limited time on this earth,  
One shot to do all we can to make it worth it.  
With each new battle I see that clearer and clearer.

Reflections of the past,  
Who I once was,  
Dance like a taunting dream forever out of reach.

But rather than wallow in fear and self pity,  
We must find every chance.  
To make every moment count.

Enjoy those rare successes.  
Those few quick moments when you can dance without crumbling to the ground,  
Or when you can get up in the morning and simply walk.

Because even in the darkest of hours,  
There will always be light.

## GRADE 9 – 10 POETRY

### Where's the Hope By Ella Leferman

#### SECOND PRIZE

There's so much bad in the world,  
Nowadays.  
Good people make bad mistakes,  
And each new piece of information just  
Brings you down.  
It almost seems like there's nothing left.  
Even hope seems to be gone,  
Sometimes.

Hope is tricky;  
It evades,  
It distracts,  
It shows up at the worst moment to lift you up,  
And it escapes when you need it most.

People will tell you not to lose hope,  
Only it can be hard to feel like it was ever there at all.

But:  
Even if life feels hopeless,  
Hope is never completely gone.  
It exists inside everyone,  
Whether we realize it or not.

Hope is a form of magic—  
The magic of belief.

Never lose hope if you can help it—  
And if you can't.  
Know that there's always a friend  
Who will give you some of theirs  
In a heartbeat.

GRADE 9 – 10 POETRY  
You Are...  
By Nathan Balayev

THIRD PRIZE

You are my life.  
You are a friend, you are family.  
You are so beautiful I would burn my soul on fire for millennia to come just for you.  
You are encouraging.  
You are inspiring.  
You are my dream.  
You are my hero.  
You are the heart of heaven and beyond.  
You are my life.  
You are God's greatest creation.  
You are the reason that I'm living.  
You are my protector.  
You are a healer.  
You are as bright as billions of stars fused together, oh my god you are too much.  
You are my teacher, my mentor.  
You are the ocean, calm and beautiful, courageous and endless.  
You are the best, the smartest, don't let anyone tell you otherwise.  
You are my boss.  
You are my life.  
You are the strongest, both mentally and physically,  
You are two halves of a whole peach.  
You are the one who gives a nice breeze.  
You are the one to be aggressive sometimes.  
You are divine.  
You are essential.  
You are different.  
You are eccentric.  
You are creative.  
You are a unique snowflake.

You are my life.  
You are clean.  
You are optimistic.  
You are a cocoon wailing to show the world your beauty inside.  
You are impactful.  
You are influential.  
You are the only one in this world that's keeping me going.  
You are the life force, the key to my survival. You are crucial.  
You are the one that I should be thankful for;  
No no, everyone should be thankful for  
You are my life.  
You are the future, worth more than the universe.  
You are loved by all around you.  
You give everyone smiles, you are the one who never lets anyone down  
You are the one who has it all.  
You are the one who knows what it means to live.  
And you know what, let me tell you something:  
You are the only one who understands one thing,  
and one thing only, you... are never alone.  
You are my life!

## GRADE 9 – 10 POETRY

### Opulence By Deep Banerjee

#### HONORABLE MENTION

Springy or soft  
Gray or white  
Many cannot imagine  
Laying without it at night.

Hanging from strings  
Flickering; red, yellow, green  
Our roads would be havoc  
In the absence of this machine.

In a world of mass data farming  
A simple lock lies  
Maximum privacy it  
Rarely denies.

Circular metal rods  
That we bury in the ground  
Without them, nothing would come up to quench our thirst.  
Nothing would send our waste down.

Woke with drowsy  
No problem with a sip,  
Caffeine allowing people to function  
With every drip.

Tick...tock...tick..tock  
Sound two hands  
Schedules, meetings, jobs  
Even lives built on its stands.

Slippery and smooth  
Solid bars or liquid gels  
An item relied on  
To reduce human smells  
Rectangular prisms  
Made of clay  
Thousands upon thousands  
Construct the places where we stay.

Black, brown, and yellow  
With pink on the end  
For those with thoughts  
It can be a best friend.

Now we see people  
Spending full days on their mattresses, asleep  
On their phones at the light  
Even when the car behind them beeps.

We see people  
Messing with passwords and pins  
Complaining about ugly pipes  
Throwing tons of half-full coffee cups into full trash bins.

We see people  
Purchasing diamond Rolex clocks to display  
Applying 10 times of soap per bath  
Baths taken 3 times a day.

People  
Cut down thousands of trees  
To build massive mansions  
And pencils they throw around and out with ease.

And people forget about  
Those that sleep on dirt,  
Those that, in order to get somewhere  
Have to trek miles of desert.

Those that have no space,  
Those without sanitation,  
Those working hours and hours  
Brains losing track of time with concentration.

Those who cannot stay clean  
Those without somewhere to call home  
Those who want to speak up, but never have the means.

So we should be grateful for the traffic light down the street  
And the bricks that lie on our walls  
For the things we may not notice  
May mean so much to others, no matter how small.

## GRADE 11 – 12 FICTION

### The Detective's Burden By Gerson Mendez

#### FIRST PRIZE

“All I want is to catch every bad guy and punish anyone who breaks the law.” That’s what I’ve told myself for a majority of my life. That’s the idea that I was raised around, and that’s the idea that keeps me going every day. As much as those words hold true, every day at the station is another one spent with my eye on the clock. Waiting patiently. Staring at those digital numbers on the bottom of the computer I SHOULD be doing paperwork on. Think this: here I was, this young naive kid, dreaming of becoming a cop and fighting all the bad guys like they show on those late night cable shows. And flash-forward to now: a borderline senile detective, wasting away in the same office. Day after day. Waiting. Typing. And for what? As much as I want to say that I can’t wait to finally retire. I can. I can wait because I don’t want to miss those few times I am called on a scene. Take my partner Mia Bridges, for example. Years of extensive training and constant effort to become the best detective she can be, working hard her entire life as a female cop, against all odds, only to be sitting at her desk all day just like me. Then you have Gary Schneider. This big, lazy dude does nothing but brag about his medal given to him by the mayor. He’s barely put any effort in his career, yet because he happened to catch a prolific criminal on his coffee break; he’s now a decorated officer who gets all the praise. We’ve always hated each other. We were in the same training class years back, and even though I was clearly smarter than him. He always performed better because of his better physique. “Hard work pays off” is the saying right? What a load of bullshit. It is pretty entertaining the few times they speak to each other though.

“Lots of plans for this weekend huh Mia?” asks Gary, sarcastically.

“No Gary, no plans at all actually because, you know, some people ACTUALLY have work to do. SOME people don’t have time to sit around at a bar all night watching some stupid game that had no significance whatsoever,” replied Mia.

“Right. So anyways for lunch today I—”

At that point he just ignores what she says and continues being a nuisance. I usually just sit back and listen, minding my own business. A lot of times I don’t even listen to what they’re saying. Sometimes I’ll just look at a picture of my wife, my daughter, and I all-together in front of our Christmas tree.

It breaks me.

How different life would be. How different I would feel and act. But what could I have done differently? It was my fault. But was it really? I couldn't have known. Or could I? I should have known.

This is what my mind drifts off to during the day, constantly thinking about how much I miss them, how much I wish they were still here, how much life they had ahead of them. I keep telling myself to get over it but I just can't. How can you just "get over" the death of the only two people that mattered in your life? It's like a clinical infection inside of you. You can't fight it off; you're just kind of forced to accept it. You don't know what pain is until you've lost someone dear to you first-hand, not to mention two of them.

"Hey—" It was Mia, conveniently interrupting my thoughts as always. "-You alright? Come on we got a new lead." as she beckoned me to follow her outside.

That's right... I thought...we were supposed to be working on a new case. There were multiple reports of dead bodies dumped around town, all seemed to be killed in the same way. This time one was found by a highway and we traced the location of the suspect's vehicle from a security camera's footage.

So off we went in her car, in silence, as usual. We don't normally speak too much if it's not regarding the case. That's just how it's always been. Not that I really mind. But I also wouldn't mind if we got to know each other more.

"Listen" she broke the silence, "I know you've been going through a lot recently."

"I'm fine Mia."

"I know, I know. I just can't help but notice when you stare off into nothing at the precinct sometimes." There's her observation skills for you. "Just please know that I'm here if you ever need someone to talk to. I'll always be here."

I didn't answer. Silence again.

We stopped next to a forest off the side of a highway.

"This is where the car was last seen," she said as we moved further into the woods.

It was kind of eerie. It was a cloudy day, lots of fog around too. And here we were trodding across all these branches and leaves for a lead that might not even pay off. I started thinking of my wife again. I couldn't stop myself She loved hiking. She would've loved exploring this forest with me. I could almost see her right there in front of me, walking forward without a care in the world, with the prettiest smile on Earth. God I missed that smile. I walked forward and tried reaching out to her, when I heard a branch snap behind me. I pulled out my pistol and turned, but I was too slow.

There he was. The suspect we were looking for. His face was covered by a mask. Gun in one hand. Mia's throat in the other.

"Drop the weapon, put your hands up and get on the floor." I said, a little shakily.

"You're not really in the position to give directions right now are you Aaron?" he said with confidence.

"How do you know my name?" Now I was scared.

He took off his mask, and there he was. Gary Schneider.

"Surprised?" he said with joy in his eyes.

"Gary? Why? I don't get it. How could – Why would you do this?" My mind was racing. How did this slip by us? How could we let him get away with this without any suspicion?

"I bet you're kicking yourself right now aren't you," he said snarkily. "Don't blame yourself too much Bud, we both know – you do that enough as is. Now let me explain this grand situation I've been put in. Here I am holding you and your little big-mouth partner at gunpoint. How funny is that? All those years of you two messing with me, I'm sure you never thought little old Gary could ever do something like this huh? Well here I am, and what a jackpot I got I must say."

I didn't know what to say. I didn't know what to do. I was going to lose my life here. I was going to let another person in my life die again. How could this happen? What do I do? I still had my gun pointed at him. I could take the shot any second, but I could also hit Mia in the process. What the hell do I do?

"Are you going to let her die?" a familiar voice spoke. "What will you do with yourself if you let this happen?" And there they were. My wife and daughter, standing right next to me. They were staring at me

waiting for me to make the right decision.

“You have to save her,” they said in unison.

“Please Dad!”

“Please Aaron.”

But the risk was too high. I couldn’t see well. What if the wind messed up my aim? What if I missed completely? Both Mia’s and my own life were at stake here. I can’t lose someone again. I can’t. I can’t live knowing I let another person die because of me. I couldn’t let us both die here. I couldn’t let her die. So I took a deep breath.

And fired.

## GRADE 11 – 12 FICTION

### The Euphoria of Love

By Alec Frohn

#### SECOND PRIZE

It's Utopia. For the past century, life has been perfect. Thanks to breakthroughs in technology, there are infinite resources. War has ended. Starvation has ended. Parties have been unified. People live as long as they want in perfect health. There are no problems, as there is no reason for a problem to occur. Everyone lives in his or her own personal paradise. Because of the sciences that be, one can create his or her own ideal life. With the invention of the matter creator, known to the world as Jupiter, anyone can organize and create anything ever thought of, whether it be something that exists in place or in mind. One is only limited by their imagination.

Just like everyone else, Leander loves his life and personal paradise. In his paradise, there's a pristine beach, with the barrenness of the sand and the ferocity of the ocean joining together in perfect harmony. Fifty meters away from the meeting point, a palace, with the beauty of both Roman architecture and Christian cathedrals being combined to create what Leander sees as the perfect home. Off in the far distance, another island in the sky, another personal paradise for someone else, so far away that it might as well not exist. Leander never needs, but when he wants something, he has the mind and the skill to create it. However, despite the love for his life, he does not love. Despite being in paradise, he has no life to love, no life to love with.

Back in the era of need, humans tended to be social creatures. They needed to feed off one another because they needed each other for survival. But now there is no need. When one wants, one goes to their Jupiter to quench their thirst for more. All one needs to do is picture perfection for Jupiter to configure a layout. From there, one only needs to select the matter for each part. If one has a gifted mind like Leander, anything is possible.

Leander knew this, and he knew his predicament. For the first time in his life, he had a want that couldn't be immediately fulfilled. As time went on the want became more prevalent in his mind, so important to him that it became a need of sorts. In a needless world, Leander needed love.

So Leander tried to construct love himself. He used his Jupiter to create a library with every book he could possibly want. After days and weeks of studying the human body, Leander was prepared. Using his anatomy books as reference, Leander created his perfect man. Everything about his perfect man on the inside was made based on the strict requirements of the human body, but the outside was manipulated to Leander's will. He had created a man without flaws.

When the man emerged into existence, Leander considered giving him a name, but ultimately

decided against it. There was no need nor want for one, so no name was proposed. He was quite simply known as the man, for he was the living embodiment of a perfect one.

The two lived together for months, and Leander enjoyed the companionship. He never knew how to talk to others, as he had been alone for all his life, but he was learning. Leander loved to learn and loved learning with the man, but he didn't love him. He loved the fact that he could create companionship, yet he didn't love his companion. The man was great, but at the end of the day, he was only a shell of a human. His only interest was Leander; his personality was only liking Leander. There was no uniqueness in him, nothing inside to love.

The man lacked a voice of his own. Everything he ever did was predetermined due to the way he was constructed. Leander was left with a predicament: how can one program unique thoughts into one's mind if one has not thought of them yet? It wasn't possible, and no matter how hard Leander tried, he was unable to make a life that acted on its own. He tried to play God, but he failed.

He failed because love cannot be fabricated, as love is a natural intangible. It's something one feels but is unable to describe. It's a feeling the people of the past felt and felt they understood, but an enigma to fully comprehend. Questions swirled around in the head of Leander, as he was desperately trying to solve this puzzle, but what he knew deep down inside left him broken. Real love cannot be forced.

Leander was devastated, but he knew this to be true. Despite being with someone, he was more alone than he had ever felt before, as he had lost hope. His quest for love had left him devastated. He had gained a new feeling, hope, losing it bit by bit with each passing day. He knew there was something out there, but he didn't know how to get it. Rejection stings deeper for the spoiled, and Leander just had his first taste of it.

He looked off into the distance, more dejected than ever. After a few minutes of attempting to understand his new emotions, something caught his attention. Off in the far distance, was the other island. Someone else must be there. The only problem was getting there.

Once again, he went to his library. He scoured his collection, finding books about aviation. This was his path to the other island; this was his ticket to companionship. He studied and studied, and then, when he was ready, consulted his Jupiter. Using his imagination and intelligence, he created a starship, white and blue, with seating for two. Leander was off, hoping that he would find the love he so desperately needed.

As he approached the neighboring island, he saw things that he had never seen before. First and foremost, the island was much bigger than his, stretching a few miles in diameter. Additionally, there were multiple buildings, tall and rectangular, with tinted glass windows covering most of their exteriors. On top of the tallest building, a Jupiter Machine was buzzing with life. Finally, there were multiple people on the island. All of them seemed to be working together, collaborating to achieve a common goal.

Leander landed his ship on the edge of the island. He was met by another human. They greeted each other and did all of the other formalities one does, and the human offered to give a tour of the island. Leander agreed, and they walked to the island's heart. On the way, things began to grow strange. Leander could've sworn he saw the same person at least a dozen times. Also, for an island full of people, it was strangely quiet. The only noticeable noise was the humming of the Jupiter, busy at work. Leander was focusing on that noise, or he was at least until he heard a scream.

He asked the other human what that was, but there was no reply. Something was off. It had to be. He turned to follow the scream when the human wasn't looking and began to run. He stayed hidden from everyone else, eventually finding the source. Inside of an underdeveloped building, a man was suspended, with both arms and legs chained. He approached the man saying that he was a friend. "How did this happen?" he asked, wondering why one would suffer in paradise. The chained one replied, "I tried to love."

That's when Leander realized the humans around him weren't humans. Only the chained one was real. The creations had grown tired. The Jupiter had grown tired, and now, with man's selfishness and lust, it had an outlet for revenge. Just then, five humans, all identical and emotionless appeared. The chained one looked up, mustered up his remaining strength, and spoke: "Run."

The creations' eyes instantly turned blood red. In the sky above, the Jupiter stopped humming, suddenly glowing red and shining a light of the same color in Leander's direction. He was a marked man. He turned to run, but the "humans" were closing in. There was an opening though an alleyway, dark and narrow, but a possibility. Leander had no choice but to hope this led to his ship.

He sprinted through the alley for minutes, his adrenaline pumping. He grew tired quickly, but a light at the end of the alley gave him hope, and hope kept him going. He reached the end, luckily being where he landed, but his ship was destroyed. It would not have mattered anyway. His failed lover had probably transformed his island by now, just like the creations here did. No matter which island he chose to stay at, he would be hopeless. He approached the edge of the island. A swarm of hundreds of artificial humans began to surround him. Leander took a deep breath, and then fell backward, hoping that there would be something in his seemingly endless fall to save him.

## GRADE 11 – 12 FICTION

### Out and Away

By Chloe Leferman

#### THIRD PRIZE

When the waves came, they hit my poor town worse than anyone could have guessed. I don't understand why, but when the first storm ended, all that was left was the old, dusty library sitting in the middle of town. All of the other buildings were horribly destroyed, wrecked, completely obliterated. It was almost as if the waves had a mind of their own, smashing and attacking the buildings, weaving and shifting around the library, leaving nothing but it in its wake.

My town was a small one, beautifully built hundreds of years ago, and not changed much since. The library was the center of town and a gathering place for all who lived there, the only place left standing after the waves. Its pristine walls, glittering bricks from the waters of the waves, standing and encompassing the incredible amount of information within.

I was a young girl when I went to the library for the first time, starry-eyed and not exactly the brightest. I loved looking into those ageless pages and reading all sorts of stories. Exemplary fiction that took me out of the mundanities and dullness of the world around me and into the incredible worlds that were within the pages. Non-fiction books were better teachers than the ones in my school, making me smarter with every page I turned. I loved losing myself in the walls of the library, seeing the old world from inside the confines of the walls.

Now, because of the waves, I fought to enter within the walls of my childhood to take refuge from the disaster happening around me. When I exited my home, or what was left of it, I remembered the games I used to play as a child, trying to "survive" my siblings messing with me and teaching me about the dangers of the world through survival games. Our town was cut off from the world, and the people within were quite different, constantly training for any disaster that might come to them. My siblings were no different but I only wanted to learn and not fight. I didn't care for violence; I believed in intelligent survival. When the waves hit, I was the only one protected inside our home, the rest of the town was outside for our monthly town-training day. I was happy to get away with being inside, avoiding the violence, and even more glad after that I was alive to see another day when the waves hit.

I swam against more waves, trying to make my way to the library, and I remembered another thing I loved to do as a kid, which was to swim in the ocean that surrounded the other half of the town. I would jump in head first, and swim all throughout the sea, watching fish, and other sea creatures, spying as they lived their aquatic lives. I wished that I could be as free as them, and now I had the chance. I braced myself

and made it to the library, surfacing and sprinting full speed into the grand oak doors of the library.

Once I walked within the dimly lit walls of the old library, I remembered the times I spent running throughout the bookshelves, looking for that one book that I could never find, but loved with all my heart. I cherished those times, and I treasured sharing timeless stories with my friends and my family. But I am afraid that I will never share them again. As I walk through the bookshelves, the walls start to crumble. I leap to find cover, but fail, and as the walls deteriorate, I remember my final memory, the final thought I will ever have. I remember the times I spent building forts to read in, while my siblings played as knights and royals. Oh how I missed them, and soon, I am to join them. As I wash away drowning, the life seeping out of me, I cry, knowing that I will soon be with them.

## GRADE 11 – 12 NONFICTION

### Queer and Different: Analyzing the First Gay Anthem By Andrew Hicks

#### FIRST PRIZE

Music and song are some of the most elemental forms of communication and entertainment known to man, and, as such, have been the vehicle of extraordinary expression. One of the most common tropes in music, romance can often become trite. However, when certain romances have been abhorred or forbidden by society, romantic songs have given way to songs of protest. Gay anthems are just that. Challenging the status quo, gay anthems have been songs that express pro-LGBTQ+ themes, and have thus become akin to rally cries for various subsets of the community. First released in the Weimar Republic of Germany in 1920, with music by Mischa Spoliansky and lyrics by Kurt Schwabach, “Das Lila Lied,” or “The Lavender Song” in English, is often cited as the first gay anthem. The Weimar Republic was established in 1918 after the end of World War I and collapsed in 1933, when Adolf Hitler was appointed as chancellor of the state. During this admittedly brief period, gay, lesbian and bisexual people experienced a relatively improved quality of life and acceptance in society, which, coupled with the cabaret movement, led to the inclusion of non-heterosexual and non-cisgendered themes in popular culture in the 1920s and early 1930s. Throughout “Das Lila Lied,” Schwabach employs religious allusions, rhetorical questions and connotative diction in order to craft his argument for LGBTQ+ pride and empower this disenfranchised community.

A relatively short song, “Das Lila Lied” discusses the societal disdain towards queer people and the many reasons to embrace one’s true identity in spite of societal views. The song is composed of two verses, each followed by a chorus, with each verse generally focusing on the treatment of queer people while the chorus essentially advocates for people to disregard all the negatives mentioned in the verses and just live their fullest lives.

Religious allusion is perhaps the most blatant of the rhetorical devices used by Schwabach to advance his rally cry for the LGBTQ+ community. Seemingly forever in conflict with non-heterosexuality, religion and more specifically monotheism, has historically been a potent tool against the progression of queer rights, given how sacred texts often condemn homosexuality. In the very first lines of the song, this clash is referenced in the question. “What makes them think they have the right / To say what God considers vice?” In alluding to this concept of the supposed “vice” of homosexuality, the song actually works to dismantle the religious justification for homophobia, seeing as the phrase “to say what God considers” implies that the words have not actually come from any god or creator, and therefore have no more authority than the words of any mere human. Similarly, Schwabach writes of how “(they) keep us out of Paradise” which alludes to this same struggle while also introducing the concept of Heaven. A blissful afterlife is most likely appealing to anyone who believes in the like. Considering the way in which Schwabach says that such

“paradise” is being withheld from queer people on the grounds of their sexuality, and coupled with the previous allusion, the song’s message becomes very clear that there is no divine mandate that bars queer individuals from the idea of Heaven, only regular people who create this barrier to spiritual acceptance. In referencing this obstacle and showing that it can be overcome by mere mortals. Schwabach’s allusion would thus arouse queer communities to fight for equal acceptance in the realm of religion and spirituality. Taking the concept of Heaven and Hell to the extreme, the chorus suggests that embracing oneself in the present is worth all risks when it states. “If (being queer) means hell, well hell we’ll take the chance”. Traditionally, eternal condemnation has been the most grave punishment with which anyone could be threatened. In this usage, however, the gravity of the concept of a soul’s never ending torment appears to be entirely lost, especially considering the two ways the word hell is used in the line - first, as the antonym of Heaven: second, as a colloquial phrase to express a lack of care. By linguistically nullifying what is generally considered the greatest punishment or threat against queer people. Schwabach is able to advocate for the unapologetic expression of one’s fullest self.

Alongside the dismantling of traditional arguments against homosexuality, Schwabach implements rhetorical questions in order to shift the narrative into the hands of the queer community and provide a sense of empowerment. The two rhetorical questions that begin the first verse, mentioned above in the context of religious allusion, serve not only to dissect religious views on queerness, but also to make the listener consider societal views come to be. With the repeated sentence starters in lines 1 and 3, “What makes them think they have the right?” Schwabach poses the question as to where these queer phobic views originate from. Of course, the answer to these rhetorical questions is religious texts, namely the Bible. However, by posing such seemingly obvious questions, the listener is forced to realize that there really is nothing concrete that gives heterosexual society any right to discriminate. In exposing this simple truth through the listener’s own realizations, the listener is empowered to take control of their own narrative with respect to the expression of their sexuality.

Though not tied to religion, the second verse further escalates the use of rhetorical questions to advocate for pride in oneself:

You act from fear, why should that be?  
What is it that you’re frightened of?  
The way that we dress? The way that we meet?  
The fact that you cannot destroy our love?

The message of these consecutive rhetorical questions is so clear that Schwabach need not explicitly state it, but the answer is a resounding yes. The way that queer people have met up with one another and dressed have long been targets of discrimination, yet, in using rhetorical questions to reference these, such “queer” behaviors can become a source of pride, because generally people are only afraid of things that have power. Without the use of the interrogative mood, the listener would not have had the opportunity to contemplate his or her own strength throughout the song, and thus would not have come to the empowering realization that Schwabach intended.

Much subtler than any other rhetorical device seen in the lyrics to “Das Lila Lied” connotative diction works to achieve Schwabach’s goal of empowering the LGBTQ+ community without being too overt for the general public. A prime example of such careful connotation can be seen in how the first verse ends with the phrase “love with pride”. Although in a strictly denotative sense pride only refers to satisfaction with one’s accomplishments, in the context of love, pride is often used to refer to pro-LGBTQ+ self-love. Similarly, the chorus features two other words with connotations of queer identity. In its first line, the chorus reads, “We’re not afraid to be queer and different,” and, although queer may be simply defined as different or peculiar, this word is also a quasi-reclaimed slur for anyone who is either non-cisgendered or non-heterosexual. Later in the chorus, Schwabach also writes, “They’re all so straight, uptight, upright and rigid”. The use of the word straight creates a sort of double entendre, because it denotatively reads as another qualifier to describe the uncomfortable stiff nature of mainstream society, but straight also refers to heterosexuality.

The significance of connotative diction in “Das Lila Lied” lies not in its contribution to the meaning of the song, *per se*, but in the security with which it provides its queer listeners. Were Schwabach to have explicitly referenced homosexuality or gender-nonconformity, the song would never have been released, especially not in the 1920s. In disguising the gay agenda with discreet connotative diction, no meaning is lost, but, more importantly; the song has the ability to pass without heavy public scrutiny. This ensured that the song reached a much larger audience and, subsequently, empowered more LGBTQ+ people as was Schwabach’s purpose.

Gay anthems have existed - or perhaps more accurately, - have been documented for exactly a century now, and in that time, have pushed for great social change through music. Kurt Schwabach’s cabaret hit song, “Das Lila Lied” evinces the highly effective way in which well-crafted lyrics with a myriad of rhetorical instruments, both obvious and subtle, can promote the empowerment of a marginalized community. Although the song was first released in 1920 and the cabaret golden age of the Weimar Republic lasted little more than a decade, this very first gay anthem paved the way for dozens of others over the last one hundred years, and continues to serve as a testament to the critical role music plays in queer liberation, and the more general liberation of all marginalized peoples. From “The Lavender Song” and its impact, one can be certain that in the next one hundred years, social progress will continue, all to the tune of our voices now.

## GRADE 11 – 12 NONFICTION

### “Butta” or “Butter.” Speaking in Two Lives

By Zara Williamson

#### SECOND PRIZE

At the bright-eyed age of seventeen - the year of prom queens and driver’s licenses – I have grown to love my rather colorful identity. I think I am of two seeds - one layered in sand and the other in silt, both of which are growing tall as palm trees and great oaks. My mother was born in Jamaica and raised in Trinidad and Tobago, and only moved here to attend law school in the United States. A lover of her country and a “Trini” at heart, she and my grandmother made sure I was always in touch with the Caribbean side of me. Trinidad is not necessarily the most well-known spot on the map - neither a New York nor a Bahamas - but I have always been proud of what it represents to me: family, love, and a unique culture and people. Within this diverse culture is the uniquely Trini language, a combination of flavorful syllables and sweet diction.

While Trinidadians speak English, their English is much different than that of the United States. Instead, it is painted with diverse accents and unique phrases - bright, colorful strokes that make the sky just the right shade of blue. From a young age, this Trini language began decorating my life with “badges” of phrases and accents that I consider to be a large part of who I am. My grandmother and I always tease each other about our respective accents; the way she says “butta” instead of “butter;” the way I say “ad vr TA1Z muhnt,” and not “uhd-VUH tuh smulmt” (advertisement). My grandmother’s accent is the product of Trinidad’s history as a British colony, as well as its rainbow of people and citizens. I savor my many trips to Trinidad - rushed airport visits with three bags in each hand - in which I am welcomed by the sound of urban and rural accents alike: a chorus of distinctly Trinidadian voices. Trinidadian singers have accents as thick as “butta,” with voices soft as silk. My friends sometimes have trouble understanding my grandmother, but I have grown used to her accent and fast talking. I believe there is a unique rhythm to all words, and I like to say I am well versed in this drum. And so, it is this way of speaking that reminds me that Trinidad is so far and so beautifully different from my own home – where our inflections are fewer and our voices, quieter. And somehow, I cherish each rhythm, each colorful word – where Connecticut is “green” and “blue,” and

where Trinidad is “red” and “yellow” – with each fold of my mouth.

Beyond the Trinidadian accent, Trinis have an abundance of unique phrases and words. I recall many nights in Trinidad when my grandmother took me down the busy streets, laughing about people “liming,” in the buzzing city. Here, “to lime,” would translate to “to party” or “to hang out,” but somehow it is not the same. I believe “liming” is more a lifestyle than a phrase. Trinidad is full of such vibrant people – joyous citizens who light up the streets each night. To “lime,” is to let go: to enjoy all parts of life and to not take everything so seriously. Similarly, I can smile fondly at memories of light banter at Christmas dinner, my cousin (who is somehow that much taller now), yelling, “Look nuh!” (“Pay attention!”) at my brother; my aunt snickering about “bacchanal” (drama); my grandma teasing my sister, lightly accusing her of “macoing” (being nosy). Trinidadian language is special in the way that it highlights its people. Words like “maco” or “bacchanal” represent the light-hearted nature of Trinis - their tendency to tease or make light fun. Thus, language represents not only the way in which we speak, but the people who are speaking. My grandma always talks about how Trinidad is not the place for the faint-hearted - people have the tendency to say just about anything there. And yet, it is all in good fun, like their words have a special warmth that is carried in the air. In this life – where there are less palm trees and more oaks - I find myself using Trinidadian phrases, laughing when my friends ask me what it means to be a “chupidee (silly).” I think the beautiful thing about language is that it can change wherever you go. In Trinidad, I use Caribbean slang by the beach; in Connecticut my mouth is home to African American Vernacular English and the “Connecticut accent.” In Trinidad it is “butta” and at home it is “butter.” And somehow, these are both me. And I think that is beautiful.

## GRADE 11 – 12 NONFICTION

### Robotics and Culture in the Art Room

By Wendy Lichtenberg

#### THIRD PRIZE

We think we know what Art is, but our choices often do not stand the test of time. In the 1860s, Impressionism was not considered Art. At that time, Art was realistic and depicted mythology, nobles, and religious figures. Whereas, Impressionism captured everyday scenes in a less realistic way, it was seen as lowbrow and unfinished. However, today Impressionism is in every museum across the country, and no one bats an eye. While it is interesting to consider the merits of Impressionism as an Art form, it is even more interesting to ask what its dismissal told us about the culture. One may conclude that the society did not value products aimed at average people.

By analyzing what we consider Art or not Art, we reveal societal beliefs. In the eighties, Hip-hop was seen as just aggressive noise. Many critics did not see the genre as Art or Music. Maybe, this tells us something about the culture and undervaluing contributions from black artists.

With all this in mind, I want to talk about why Robotics is an Art, and, therefore, why schools should offer full Art credit for this subject. I love Art and Robotics. And, to me it seems so clear that these two disciplines are cut from the same cloth. It is hard to fathom that people view them as opposites.

To convince you that Robotics is an Art. I cannot just give you a definition of Art and then jam Robotics into it, because you may have a different definition than I. Instead, I want to talk about what skills Art requires and why those skills are the same ones required by Robotics. That way, we can focus on the creative act and avoid getting stuck on the amorphous definition of Art. Schools offer Art because the prac-

tice helps students express their creativity in a tangible way. One of the core skills that Art involves is the ability to use creative ideas to understand the world in a new way.

Both disciplines are about creative problem solving through original design. By creating Art, you are bolstering your problem solving in Robotics and vice-versa. We often think of Renaissance artists like Leonardo Da Vinci as having incredible abilities in both engineering and the Arts. But, in reality, their talents come from the same creative ability. It is not two different subjects where they simultaneously have extraordinary skills. They are two sides of the same artistic coin. The only way to be successful in either discipline is to manifest something that did not exist before.

Some people argue that Robotics cannot be an Art because Robotics fulfills a purpose and is not solely an aesthetic. Yet, all Art already fills some purpose. For example, assignments in Stagecraft like creating a mask achieve the goal of making someone appear different. As every mask is unique, every Robotics design reflects different artistic choices. Students flex their creative muscles in both projects. Acting is a more abstract example where the purpose is to convey an emotion like sadness or fear to an audience. The nuances in every performance allow for creativity. All Art really does have a functional purpose. It is a disservice to assume that Art must only be aesthetic.

So, why is something that so clearly resembles an Art not viewed as an art? It is because we have two core assumptions in mind. The first is that Robotics as well as Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (known as STEM) are considered masculine and logical, while Art is thought of as feminine and spiritual. The second assumption is that emotion and logic cannot go hand in hand - in order to have one - you must exile the other. These assumptions feed into each other. As a culture, we tie emotional awareness to both femininity and Art. Therefore, we connect femininity to Art. We do the inverse with masculinity and STEM. Some see Art as this feminine burst of emotion with no pre-planning or logic and STEM as logical masculine tasks with no creativity involved. These thoughts are ingrained. Most people do not even stop to consider that Robotics can be an Art.

We are putting our disciplines into gendered boxes that fall into just one category and never both. We are disincentivizing whole groups of people going into fields. We subconsciously discourage feminine women from going into STEM and masculine men from pursuing arts.

The tendency to separate Robotics and Art in schools subtly endorses these boxes. This decision is not necessarily active, but results from following society's default. For women, this assumption is that anything logical and analytical is masculine, which, as we all know, is outdated and unfair. Similarly, strict gender boxes also hurt men. The rigid assumption here is that anything associated with masculinity cannot be creative. And, we devalue and constrain Art when we do not view Robotics as an Art. We only make this distinction because we perceive the subject as masculine.

Just as we now look at the critics of Impressionism and Hip-hop as off base, the current narrow view of Robotics will soon seem outdated. Robotics and Art use the same world skills, and the reasons for not classifying Robotics as an Art rest on distinctions that do not exist. I encourage every one to not follow the default caused by strict gender roles and to consider Robotics as the full Art that it is.

## GRADE 11 – 12 NONFICTION

### Bottled Up Dreams By Waldino Joseph

#### HONORABLE MENTION

Have you ever sat down and thought about how one piece of paper can change a person's life? I have realized that money creates and destroys. A dollar sign can build up a child's legacy or leave them drowned in debt and sadness watching their dreams crumble. Money impacts everyone's lives differently. Through

the last few years, money has seemed to leave a stain on my whole family's lives.

Ever since my mom lost her job as a hotel maid in 2014, we have failed to maintain a stable income. The stifling pile of bills created a heavy weight on my stepdad's shoulders, pushing him down as he fought to keep things stable. We were all scrambling, our heads overheating as we tried to think of ways to find money. Out of the blue my mother brought up collecting bottles. I looked at her like she was crazy, but I already knew there was no way of stopping her once her mind was made up. That was when our expedition started. My mom would not leave the house without stuffing her pockets with trash bags. At the time I hated walking with her. A huge sense of sheer embarrassment would overcome me as my mom stopped to pick up a can. I would drown myself into my hoodie, hiding my face in the safety of its darkness. I bolted. I walked faster and faster, just to create distance from her. I refused to pick up any bottles and cans. It took time for me to figure out how useless I was being by doing nothing.

I had not truly realized our predicament until I had to bear the responsibility of filling out the family's paperwork. With my sister gone, all of it fell on my fifteen year old shoulders. Seeing the numbers in front of me opened my eyes. Filling out the renewal forms for Housing and Food Stamps worried me the most. Questions swirled around my brain. "Would I be homeless if it was not for Section 8 paying most of our rent? Where would we go? Do we lose everything if I make a mistake?" I wanted to do more. I started to help my mom return bottles. The weight of empty plastic bottles surprised me. Holding enormous bags, one in each hand, for thirty minutes, walking about a mile made my shoulders ache and my biceps cry for rest. But I still could not stop, just because I did not want to be seen. The fear of embarrassment drove me to hasten my strides. We carried bottles back and forth about three times a month for a whole year.

The relief I felt when I was finally old enough to start working was one of the most exhilarating feelings ever. The search for a paying job began. I filled out what felt like a million applications. I was in shock when I got a call for an interview. Next thing I knew I had a job. I was FINALLY helping! Night after night I worked as many hours as I could. The amount of sleep I got shrank every day. It became harder to stick with my schoolwork. There were days I had to stay up until three in the morning just to finish an assignment. I overslept often and walked into class late due to my tired, slowed pace. The laborious journey to attain financial stability is my ultimate goal. I stay steadfast, committed to doing this for myself and for my family.

## GRADE 11 – 12 POETRY

### To Find the God in Me

By Zara Williamson

FIRST PRIZE

I wear this body like my Sunday morning Church dress  
Like this mahogany skin does not sit right on my bones  
This hair — tight coils that dance along my scalp — fits like a bright pink bonnet  
Too tight and too much  
But Momma says I'm pretty  
My reflection looks a lot like stained glass these days  
My face a puzzle of pieces that barely resembles a familiar picture  
But Momma says she sees God in me  
I suppose these hands are like my Church gloves

Palms white and soft as silk  
These are prayer hands, you see  
I talk to the sky sometimes  
I imagine She listens with her ears open as my heart  
Loud as my voice ringing in the Church bathroom  
Asking what I will be  
But Momma says God hears me  
So I earthquake the Church floorboards into pixie dust  
Momma, God and I dance on top of clouds and my Church dress fits just right  
I peer into the stained glass windows  
And my reflection looks like someone I know

## GRADE 11 – 12 POETRY

### Neon Yellow By Wendy Lichtenberg

SECOND PRIZE

When we talk, I think of us in February  
consumed in fabric,  
quivering,  
with our fingers in our own armpits  
in Williamsburg, Brooklyn,  
where we looked at the skyline,  
wondering what ad the people in their tiny apartments  
are still doing with their lights on  
like a backlit checkerboard stretched into the night.

There is a woman  
looking at her reflection in the mirror.  
You tell me she sees statuesque bismuth, which is so weird.  
cause I thought she saw dissolved clay.

I swear there is a monster in one  
turning the pages of a book  
He has decomposing teeth for eyes, and no mouth,  
and you tell me you see nothing  
but an empty room.

I paused

“Do you like it here?”  
“I don’t know any more”

When I remember you,  
I think of us arguing.  
Two matadors without a bull,  
I say it's progression, and you say it's regression  
I say it's a gray area,  
and you say you don't care if it's neon yellow.  
You are the only person I know  
who moves through the world on wings of butter and gold while still managing to wear a paper crown.

## GRADE 11 – 12 POETRY

### Father

By Olivia Ellington

#### THIRD PRIZE

I wait patiently as the encapsulating darkness surrounds me, it consumes me  
A faint whisper of breath is left, disrupted by a whisper.  
Whispers of doors being flung open, the beating of footsteps on the stairs  
Stagnant, frozen, speechless.  
Stuck in the dark, without any objection I accept my fate.  
His jagged breaths tell me my lime is almost up  
There are tears I don't remember forming,  
A quivering lip becomes a silent plea for peace.  
A plea is all that I have, I fear I am no longer human,  
He says that I am not, what other choice do I have.  
At a glance he forces me into that darkness, drowning me.  
The plate I hate more than anything yei, he forces me Viwft.  
My thoughts are racing, doing laps around the enclosing darkness“  
I thought he was supposed to love me? Why doesn't he act like it?”  
Then I snap back and feel it all over again.  
Flung back into reality I am once again forced.  
Forced to be back, forced to live, to breathe.  
I'm tired of this endless cycle, all I have left is pain.  
I am pain  
Now all I can do is wait patiently  
as the encapsulating darkness surrounds me  
It eats me up.

## GRADE 11 – 12 POETRY

### The Light of My Life By Madeline Shapiro

#### HONORABLE MENTION

In one second,  
I fly through the solitary black void of infinite endings  
And crash into a minuscule floating rock,  
A rock of deep blue encased in a murky layer of white.

In one second,  
I slow down upon entering the filmy outer atmosphere,  
And against my will,  
I am clumsily scattered in countless directions,  
Smoothing out over the bumps and bruises of the world,  
I descend onto an unfamiliar yet comfortingly vast surface.

In one second,  
I plunge into the chilling depths of the underwater world  
And remain glistening on the ocean's cascading crust.  
I shove my way through every window  
And manifest myself into elongated squares  
Of pure glowing, warm-to-the-touch light.

At once,  
I see every inch of bed head and every overexcited puppy,  
I see a snowstorm and a thunderstorm and an expanse of endless blue sky,  
A devastating car crash and desert roads that never seem to end,  
Corn fields being plowed and skyscrapers standing still,  
Volcanoes brewing and bumblebees buzzing.  
I see it all at once.  
And then I see nothing at all.

In one second,  
I am gone  
Like the wax that continues to drip down the side of a candle  
Once the flame has been indefinitely extinguished.  
Like how the brightness of ethereal stained glass  
Eventually fades and wanes after the sun disappears below the horizon.  
I've seen it all.  
And I don't wish that I had had more time.  
In one second, I am happy  
Because I know you'll remember me  
In good light.