



OUR OWN PRESSIONS

POETRY
DRAWING
PHOTOGRAPHY
SHORT
STORY

TEEN

Writing & Art Contest

2020 Winners

Pierce County Library System

expressions.pcls.us

Congratulations to the more than 800 talented students who participated in the 24th annual Our Own Expressions Teen Writing & Art Contest.

As our students, families and communities continue to experience the impacts of the coronavirus, we are so grateful to be able to celebrate the creative visions and voices of Pierce County youth. No matter what the future holds, we will continue to recognize and honor the value of the arts in the lives of our students.

Volunteers, including Pierce County Library System staff, reviewed all entries. Writers Christina Butcher and Daniel Marks selected this year's writing winners, evaluating originality, style and general presentation. Photographer Sharon Styer and artist Jill Alayna Frey selected the art winners based on composition, artistic skills, creativity and effective use of media.

The Pierce County Library Foundation awarded the winners with cash prizes and the winning entries are published in this book.

The Library gratefully acknowledges the contributions from the Pierce County Library Foundation to help fund and support the contest.

2020 Winners

POETRY
DRAWING
PHOTOGRAPHY
SHORT
STORY


OUR OWN
EXPRESSIONS

Poetry Winners

Grades 7 & 8

- | | | |
|------------|--|-----------------------------|
| 1st | Anxiety
Kyleigh Helland | Key Peninsula Middle School |
| 2nd | Ode to September
Benjamin Hughes | Pioneer Middle School |
| 3rd | Lifestyle
Autumn John | Chief Leschi Schools |

Grades 9 & 10

- | | | |
|------------|---|-----------------------------|
| 1st | Black Excellence
Clarence Sanders | Franklin Pierce High School |
| 2nd | I Am
Alicia Hale | Fife High School |
| 3rd | To Be A Lady
Claire Ensuna | Franklin Pierce High School |

Grades 11 & 12

- | | | |
|------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1st | Dear America,
Syncear Loyd | Lincoln High School |
| 2nd | Cemetery
Alisa Zhupanenko | Science and Math Institute |
| 3rd | I Believe
G. Alvarado | Bellarmine Preparatory |

Drawing Winners

Grades 7 & 8

1st Nature's Wonders in Origami

Krishna Anne Dullago

Woodbrook Middle School

2nd Faces

Will Barnes

Bryant Elementary

3rd Black Panther

Joel McMillan

Heritage Christian

Grades 9 & 10

1st Take a Flower

Alexandra Arrascue

Lakes High School

2nd Odin in Ink

Iris Rogel

Bonney Lake High School

3rd Who am I?

Sam Johnson

Bethel High School

Grades 11 & 12

1st Timeless

Angelina Cruz

Peninsula High School

2nd A Bystander's Wounds

Chloe Brown

Home School

3rd Summer Pagoda

Korena Dixon

Lakes High School

Photography Winners

Grades 7 & 8

1st **Metalworking**

Rachel Miloa McKeen Home School

2nd **An Upside Down World**

Denaya Dyke Home School

3rd **At the front of the Meadows**

Alivia Stuck Home School

Grades 9 & 10

1st **Behind the Saying**

Amaialyne Nadine Cepeda Steilacoom High School

2nd **Dandelion**

Lauren Cryder Rogers High School

3rd **Into the Wild**

Laurel Oelke Covenant High School

Grades 11 & 12

1st **Rainier**

Millaray Lopez Salazar Washington High School

2nd **Andy's Auto**

G. Alvarado Bellarmine Preparatory

3rd **respect walk**

Aiden Michael Steilacoom High School

Short Story Winners

Grades 7 & 8

1st The Great Leader

Ellis Adamson

Kopachuck Middle School

2nd Yellow Fire

Natalie Baker

Tacoma Baptist Schools

3rd The Magic in the Music

Emily Bray

Kopachuck Middle School

Grades 9 & 10

1st Cerebrum Interfectorem

Viola James

Covenant High School

2nd Music Personified

Skylar Viene

Spanaway Lake High School

3rd Kurt.

Jacob Lawty

Covenant High School

Grades 11 & 12

1st The Spirits of Venice

Maleila Henry-Mitchell

Annie Wright School

2nd The Labyrinth

Juliana Smith

Other

3rd The Unnoticed Apocalypse

Savannah Guenzi

Covenant High School

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Poetry

Grades 7 & 8

POETRY
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OUR OWN
PREFESSIONS

Anxiety

by Kyleigh Helland

First Place

shaking, quaking, trembling, your lungs refuse to work. these
thick black waves of dread are ever present, they lurk
and out from under you, your feet they jerk.

it spreads lies like a disease, causing doubt and fright
but it always wins, no matter how hard you fight
and it will sneak up and extinguish your light

though you say you're fine, and pretend you're okay
as your mind decays they only see a fake display
of a smile, not the true one of utter dismay

the other people say you'll be alright,
but how much longer will you have to fight
how long, for the freedom, for light

you believe these lies your fed
up until the day you're dead
and even then it still lingers, the dread

and your trapped in a dark endless hole
you'll never find the key, the loophole
and you won't find it until it's full

and its name, is anxiety

Ode to September

by Benjamin Hughes

Second Place

Walking along I hear the hard crunch of leaves under my feet;
they are a blanket covering the ground,
keeping it warm for winter.
The air like the soft breath of a loved one.
The hues of the
deep reds,
calm auburns,
and brilliant golds
filling my eyes with wondrous pleasure.

The whole year's work finally ready
as pumpkins grow vines,
carrot leaves bloom,
and onions develop their matte shells,
protecting them from the dirt and filth of their earthen womb.

O' September your contributions
are criminally underrated.
You're overlooked because of you older
sister August and her summer breezes.

Lifestyle

by Autumn John

Third Place

My Life? *Messy*

Trust blown up at a young age
My mom left me when I was barely 1
Basketball is my only anchor
The anchor surviving in a huge storm

But still end up having hope
Never had a dad figure
Wondering why he isn't here
He's missing moments he can never have back

My life? *Impressive*

Climbing huge walls to get where I am
Got a huge smile on my face
Loving
No matter how hard it gets

Trying to make my Papa and Gram proud
May be the best thank you I can give them

Poetry

Grades 9 & 10

POETRY
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OUR OWN
PREFESSIONS

Black Excellence

by Clarence Sanders

First Place

What does it mean?

I guarantee it's not exactly what you think,
simple like a mink yet has the power to make you think,
weird and crude like a fink yet such an amazing thing, If you ask the
internet

what black excellence means it'll tell you it's a mindset backed by a
time set

It will tell you it's a redirect for the negro to grow like a tree grows
yet not branded like honey nut o's.

But for me it's a bit different

To kneel for an indifference not to take back but to learn what your
culture truly yearns

A chance to show out what you're truly about, to excel when others
were truly at doubt

An opportunity to take to the community and create a color unity you
see this is true to me

Cause I didn't always have that chance

I used to live with truly racist men, I felt as if I were living in a den

Not truly taught how to be a black man

Not shown that my melanin was excellent, which mad me so angry I
used to wish the death of them

But then I was shown, to this wonderful world I had never truly known
I had found my skin and called it my home

This whole new place I am allowed to roam

So, when you ask What black excellence means to me, it means to
flaunt and embrace your culture for all to see. This is a message for
you from me.

I Am

by Alicia Hale

Second Place

I am a swirl of colors, Blacks, Blues, and Purples
Combined in one great painting
Using worn down paint brushes
And I don't know how to finish.

I am trying to find the road
Looking back at every broken pencil
Every lie told, every breath wasted.
Sticky notes crumpled up, drawings unfinished.
Trying to solve something that I'll never know.

I am "fake it till you make it",
Continuing down the road of uncertainty
With no clue how to move forward or back
Trying to reach an unknown destination.

I am an unfinished puzzle, a few pieces put together
Without edge pieces to guide me to completion.

To Be A Lady

by Claire Ensuna

Third Place

To be a Lady:

- be sure to cross your legs when you sit
 - do your hair up nice
 - make sure your dress isn't too short
 - make sure it isn't too long
 - never leave the house without makeup
 - don't curse, it makes a lady ugly
 - you must get married, but under no circumstances divorce
 - your interests are valid, as long as they're acceptable
 - listen attentively to him whomever he may be
 - never forget you're fragile
 - never forget you're too emotional
 - never forget
- Your Place

So when you tell all the young ladies
They can be anything they want to be
Be sure to let them know
About the ceiling they will never see

Poetry

Grades 11 & 12

POETRY
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OUR OWN
PREFESSIONS

Dear America,

by Syncear Loyd

First Place

The Contradiction in the Culture demonstrates the Slaughter,
the problem of the white man refusing to break down the borders
Figurative not physical, not non fiction but mentally mythical
Creating the features of the so beloved white picket fence visual
Words sharp like swords, made from shards from relatives that proved life as hard
Painting pictures of pain, constraining and contrasting,
the proof of your actions as regardless
Of your materialistic mindset, showing the difference on where our time has been spent
Hard working and Hardly working
L-Y is the difference between you and I
Changing yourself mentally, so physically you can be portrayed as part of the culture
Vulture on a roller coasters, swooping down just to a black man running,
or still a poster, either way white cop has his hand on the holster
The passion of the people, more important than equality, but focus on equity
Understand what you represent because you gain sauce on what you believe
You represent the morals of the representations,
Statures of persona from the streets to Government placement
Someone out there is fully focus on floral arrangements when more black men
are getting penitentiary cell placement
But When will we sit down and stop spilling blood on this piece of the earth?
And finally Think about what the time has been worth.

Cemetery

by Alisa Zhupanenko

Second Place

It is disrespectful
to breathe inside of a cemetery.
It causes the spirits to wake up from their blurred dreams
and remember too much.
Maybe that's why girl, dressed in a bright yellow t-shirt
doesn't want to go. Not many living beings understand but
she does. She knows they can hear her heartbeat if she's not careful.
If He was the one taking her there, He would tease her about it
the loud, careless way it searches for love but
Dedushka is gone.
Girl and Dedushka can't be in the same room anymore or they
disturb each other's sleep. Babushka loves the cemetery, takes deep, messy breaths
there so that's where she takes girl.
Girl holds her tears and her breath, girl stands on the wet grass, girl tries
to listen for Him. You can only get buried when you're alive so she
listens to the trees telling stories of their scars in distance, the birds weeping out
so many different parts of Him sleeping, waiting.
It is disrespectful to breathe inside of a cemetery but He wants her to.
It is the first time she breathes after his leaving.

I Believe

by G. Alvarado

Third Place

Oh so you're a senior where are you off to?
Do you have a job, what do you want to do?
My classmates have been accepted and committed for next year,
But I have not been selected with the deadlines drawing near,
Yet in truth I do not worry in fact I'm quite relieved,
For it boils down to what is inside I truly believe,
I believe I will endure the setbacks as they come,
Never give up till I've won, when all is said and done,
I believe that I'm not perfect, but I can always try my best,
When writing, directing, animating and even my math tests,
I believe in dreaming with my heart and looking to the greats,
To continue to learn and grow, even from my mistakes,
For "I am the greatest" I will say like Mohammed Ali,
And repeat that in the mirror, my dreams getting nearer,
in myself I will believe,
The more hardships I receive, may be blessing that deceive,
For a new trait or skill I must know to go for my dreams to achieve,
And if I do not attend a university,
I'm no failure I am a success as to know who I am to be,
And who I am will stretch tall rather than hunched and curled,
I believe no matter what I will make a difference and forever
change the world

Drawing

Grades 7 & 8

POETRY
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OUR OWN
PREFESSIONS

Nature's Wonders in Origami

by Krisha Anne Dullago

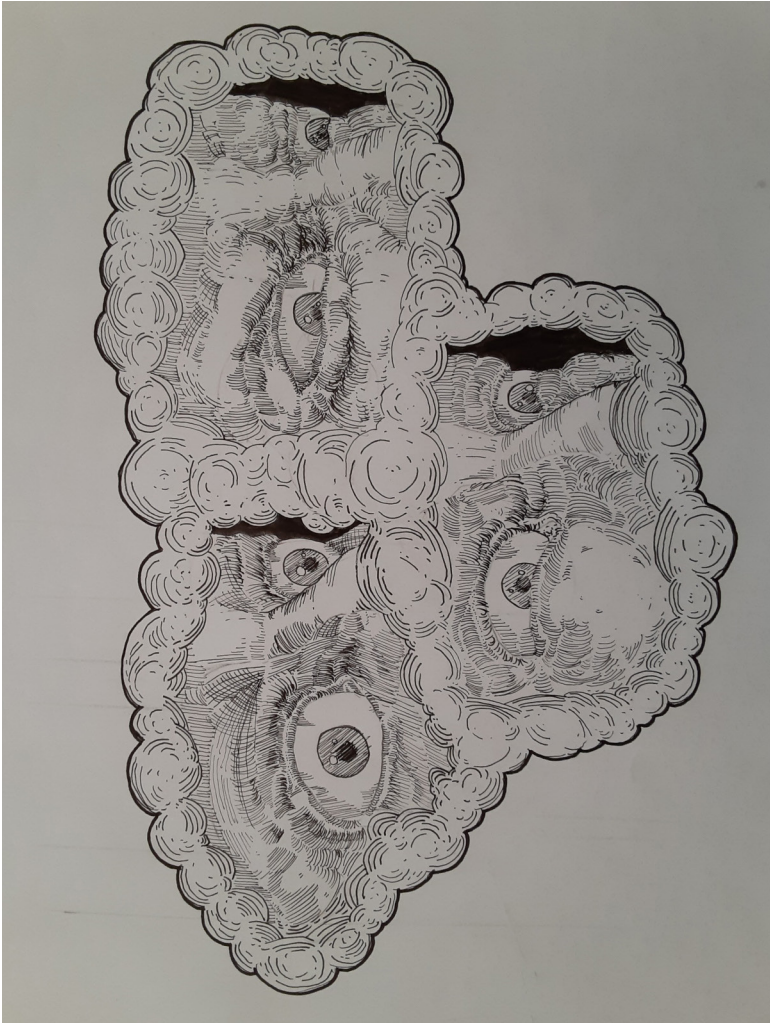
First Place



Faces

by Will Barnes

Second Place



Black Panther

by Joel McMillan

Third Place



Drawing

Grades 9 & 10

POETRY
DRAWING
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OUR OWN
PREFESSIONS

Take a Flower

by Alexandra Arrascue

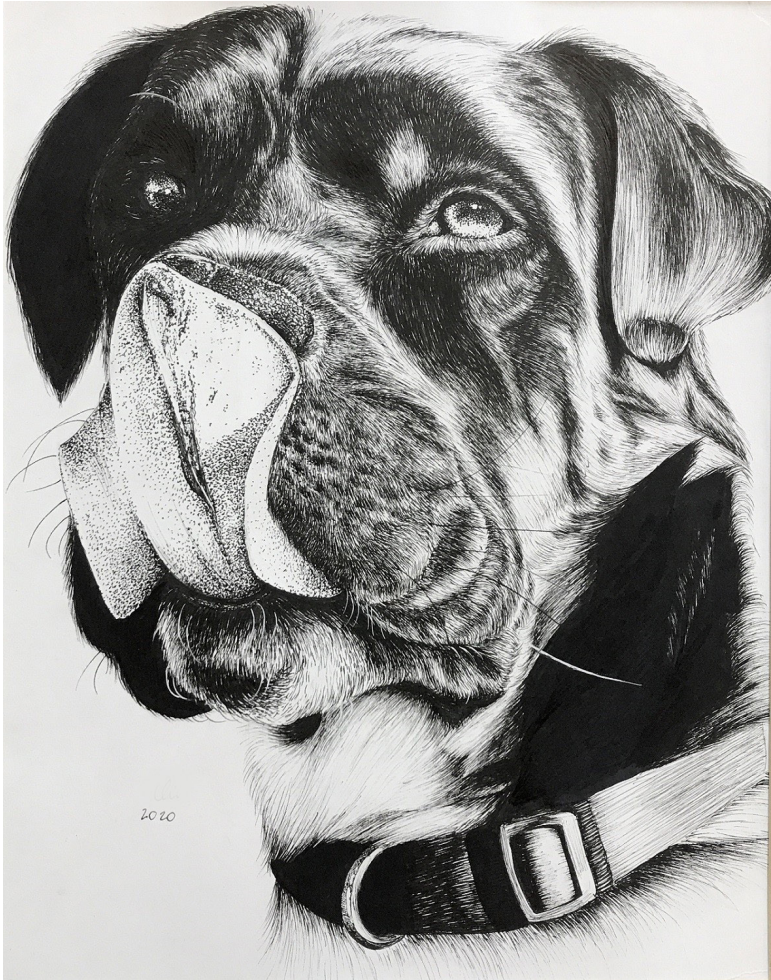
First Place



Odin in Ink

by Iris Rogel

Second Place



Who am I?

by Sam Johnson

Third Place



Drawing

Grades 11 & 12

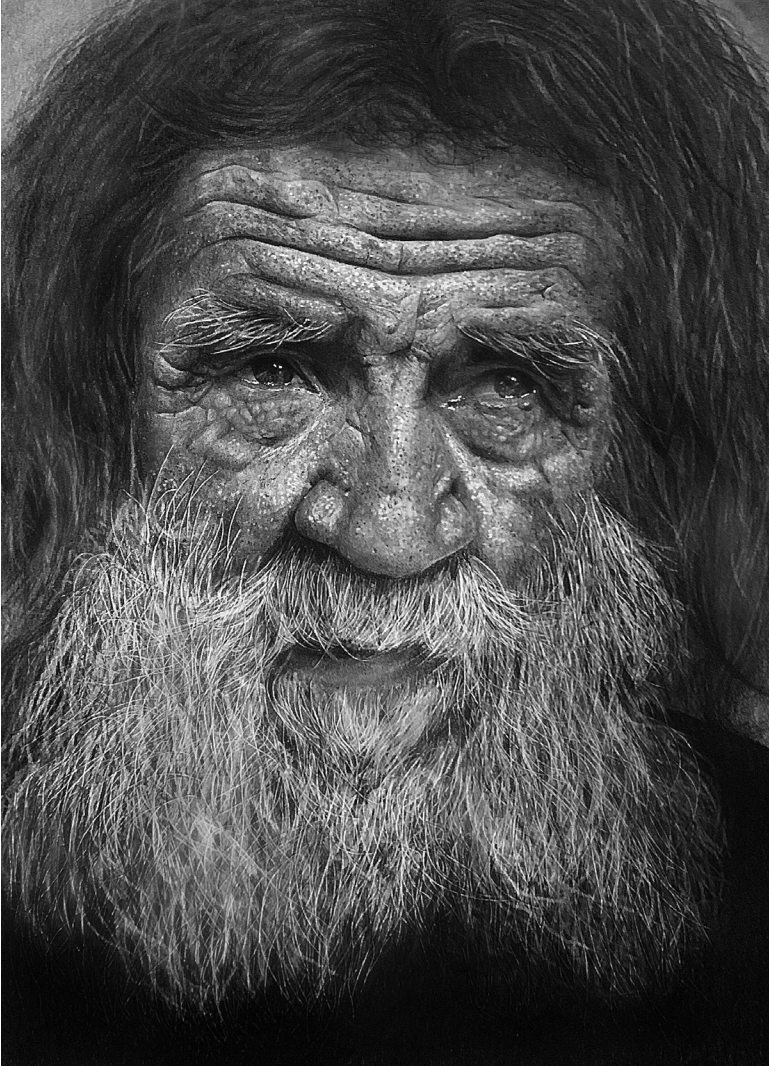
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OUR OWN
PREFESSIONS

Timeless

by Angelina Cruz

First Place



A Bystander's Wounds

by Chloe Brown

Second Place



Summer Pagoda

by Korenna Dixon

Third Place



Photography

Grades 7 & 8

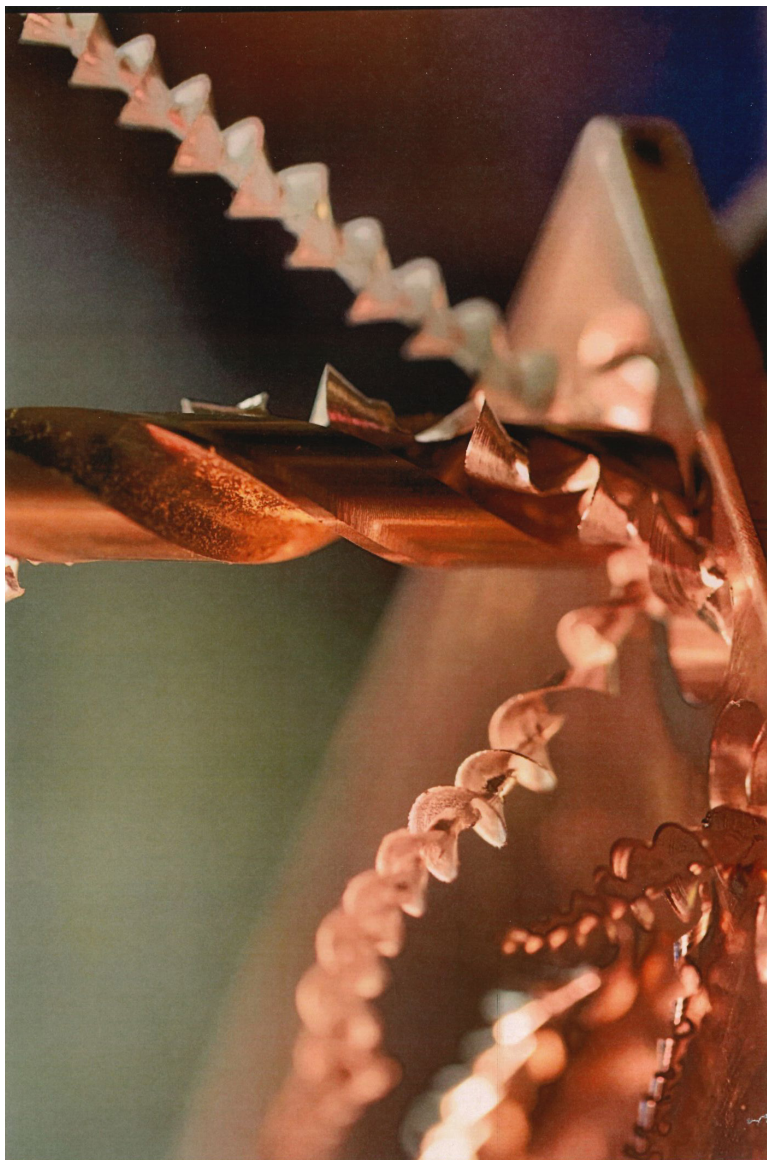
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OUR OWN
PREFESSIONS

Metalworking

by Rachel Miloa McKeen

First Place



An Upside Down World

by Denaya Dyke

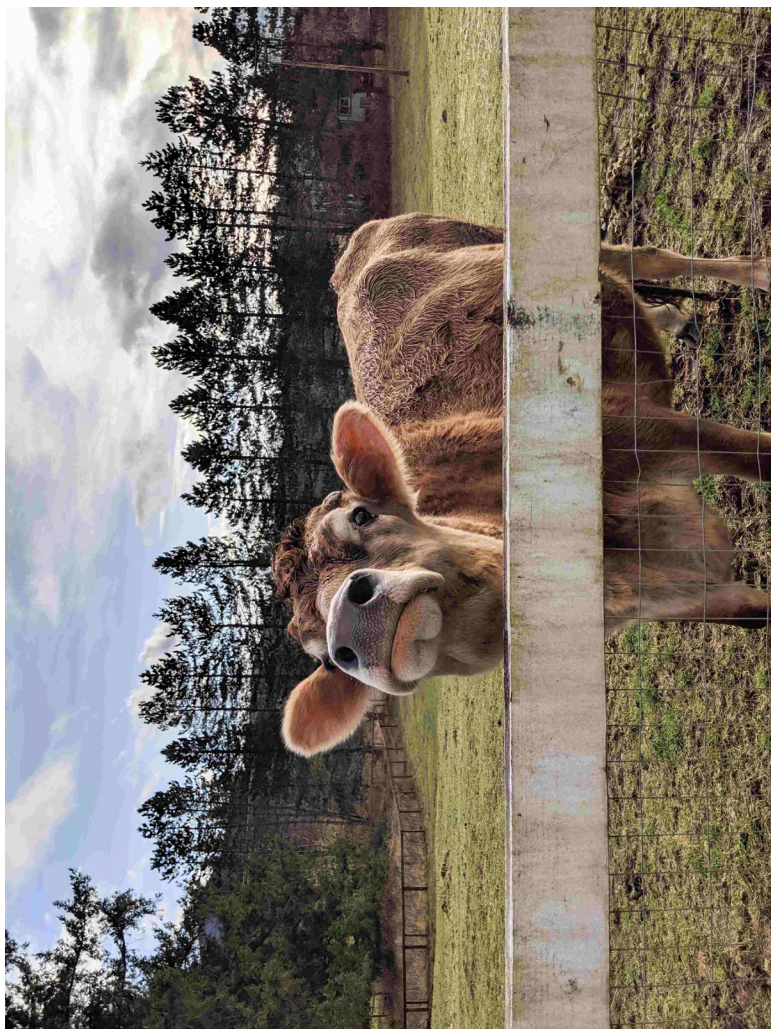
Second Place



At the front of the Meadows

by Alivia Stuck

Third Place



Photography

Grades 9 & 10

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**OUR OWN
PRESSIONS**

Behind the Saying

by Amaialyne Nadine Cepeda

First Place



Dandelion

by Lauren Cryder

Second Place



Into the Wild

by Laurel Oelke

Third Place



Photography

Grades 11 & 12

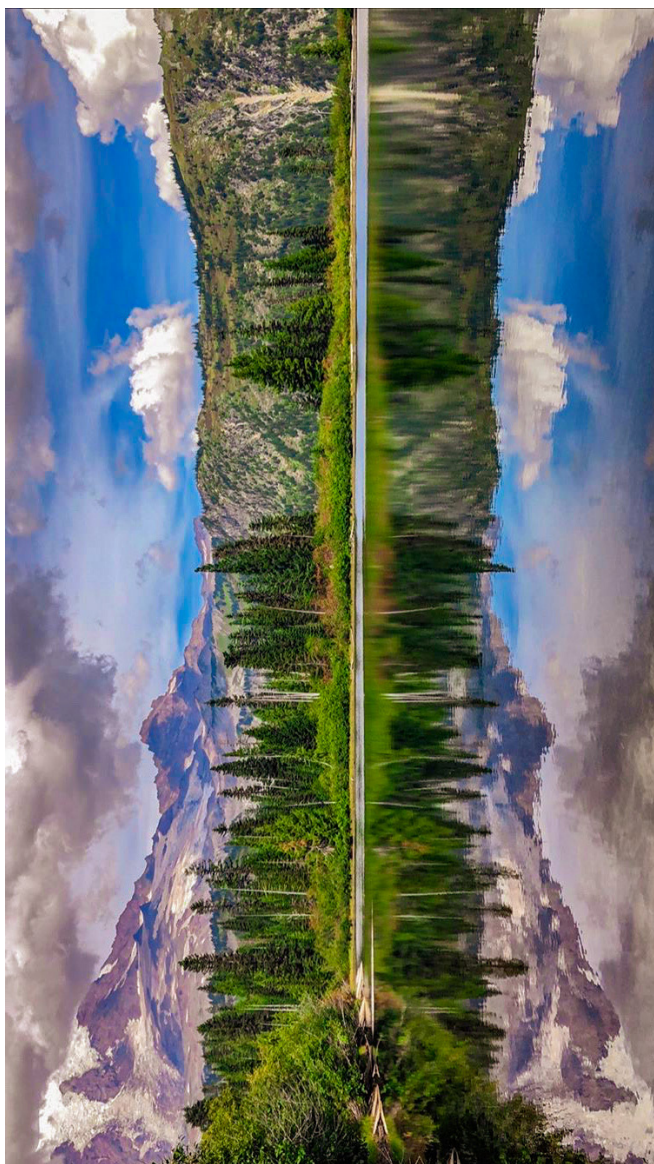
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**OUR OWN
PRESSIONS**

Rainier

by Millaray Lopez Salazar

First Place



Andy's Auto

by G. Alvarado

Second Place



respect walk

by Aiden Michael

Third Place



Short Story

Grades 7 & 8

POETRY
DRAWING
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OUR OWN
PREFESSIONS

The Great Leader

by Ellis Adamson

First Place

“It’s all fake.” Edgar said as he and his workmates were walking to their assigned living units after working the day shift in their assigned work detail.

“What’s fake? We all know that our leaders make sure the media is controlled so no fake news can be spread.” said the man to his left.

“It all is! The abundance of food, the booming economy, the environment being healthy and thriving!” Edgar exclaimed as a thick ashy smog enveloped them, causing some of the workers around them to cough.

“It can’t be,” said the man behind Edgar, who had been listening intently. “I myself have seen videos of the great green fields full of animals, the great warehouses full of grain, meat, and other food, and the great exports being sent abroad. On the TV the Great Leader said it was true.”

“Feel free to believe those lies, but we all know that they’re lies. When was the last time you had fresh food, uncanned fish, fruit?” Edgar countered.

As all the workers slowly dispersed to their homes, this doubt played on their minds. As they sat down for their usual dinner of canned meat, rehydrated milk, and rice, as they talked about the same things they always did, this thought of living in a false truth bothered them.

As Edgar finished his dinner and was cleaning up after his family, a thought occurred to him, “what was out there if everything the Great Leader says is wrong? Are there barren desolate fields or booming cities?”

As he sat down in bed with his wife he asked her “What do you really think are behind those walls dear wife, if what the Great Leader says are lies?”

“Oh Edgar, we all know that what the Great Leader said must be true and Edgar you have seen the great fields and great food yourself on the TV. Stop doubting the Great Leader for he knows what is best for us.” she responded, slightly chastising him.

As Edgar looked around the dull grey concrete room he lived in, he still doubted everything that he had been told. He felt as if the dull grey and black world around him swept into him, depleting all his joy and gratefulness for the world, erasing his confidence in the Great Leader. As he lay there the doubt grew, and grew and as he slowly drifted off to sleep he knew his life would never be the same.

When Edgar woke up seven and half hours later, he was greeted by a feeling of uncertainty that he had never truly experienced before. He no longer had the confidence Great Leader knew what to do.

As he set out for work, the man on his left was the same as yesterday and the man behind him was also the same. This mind dulling monotony Edgar realized was so the workers could never develop independent thought, and it was he that had broken this loop. As he reached the factory he donned the same safety vest as always and did the same task as always, pouring molten metal into the moulds of iron rebar for more construction. After an entire day of work, he walked through the same dirty smog as always, a smog that was destroying his lungs. But then something unexpected happened. As he walked to his house past an alleyway he was grabbed by his shirt and pulled in, and a metal bar hurtled onto his head.

As Edgar groggily woke up bound to a chair with a pounding headache, a man walked in.

“Edgar, you have two choices, you can either erase all of your memory and go back home or retain your memory and go to the gulag.”

“But why, why do I deserve this?” Edgar pleaded.

“Because you found out our lies, Edgar, we have no food, the world is burning, and we have no economy. See, we can’t risk having that exposed so you must be dealt with.”

“Please don’t do this to me, I will do anything you say as long as I can go back to my family, please.” Edgar screamed.

“Sorry Edgar but you have your choices, I will be back in ten minutes, you better have your choice,”

As Edgar mulled over the decision he knew, either way, that he would never see his family again. Edgar started to cry, tears of despair began to fall on his cheeks. He knew that his life would never be the same.

The door opened and the same man entered.

“So what is your choice, Edgar?” the man questioned.

Edgar still sobbing answered “Wipe my memory, please.”

The man grabbed Edgar’s arm and untied him, and he suddenly had a bag on his head. He was led through many twists and turns until he reached a well-lit room. As the bag was lifted Edgar shielded his eyes from the harsh light coming from the great surgical lamps around him. As he was strapped onto the great metal table, he shuddered at the thought of what would happen. A man in surgical garb entered the room and started to prepare a hypodermic syringe with a yellow liquid inside. As the surgeon walked over and inserted the needle into Edgar’s arm, the man whispered into Edgars a chilling five-word phrase.

“We have no memory wipe.”

And then the surgeon pushed the plunger.

Yellow Fire

by Natalie Baker

Second Place

The night was almost half gone when the wolf heard it- a faint rustling noise in the shrubbery behind her. She crouched down, waiting for a moment, then relaxed. A frightened rabbit ran through the dry thicket, unaware of her existence. *What frightened it?* She tensed again, almost involuntarily, as the question coursed through her mind. Five, ten, twelve minutes passed. Nothing. She partially relaxed. *Kira, you've got to stop letting the night get the better of you.* It was time to move away from the clearing, into the rest of the forest. She took a step back, preparing to turn, but her hind paw hit a single twig, brittle from the weeks without rain, snapping it in two. It was a quiet night, and the noise echoed through the clearing. *It's your own fault; you should have been more careful. You just gave away your presence to everything in the forest.*

Nearby, another wolf shot forward, poising momentarily before leaping over the underbrush, landing barely five feet in front of her. *Little fool. You are nothing. A half-grown cub, just as helpless now as you were on the day I destroyed your parents.* He almost felt bad for her. *I will end you quickly, but definitely.* He couldn't afford the competition.

Kira knew him the moment she saw his face. She remembered the same rage and hatred beneath the glowing yellow fire in his eyes. Her father had given him the scar that ran from under his left eye and along his jaw. *My father.*

She saw her father's face in her mind, remembering her sixth birthday, how they had made a cake together, and he had laughingly let Kira eat the whole thing. She was so happy then, when they were all together. The other wolf had destroyed her parents, destroyed her happiness, destroyed her life. She was no longer thinking now, only feeling. A

single desire pulsed through her veins like a heartbeat growing ever louder. *Revenge. Revenge. Revenge.* She pounced.

Kira landed just to his left and sank her jaws into his back, catching him by surprise. He tried to shake her off, but she held on. The wolves tumbled through the withered brush, snarling and biting, neither one willing to relent.

She couldn't overpower him, she realized. He was twice as big as a normal wolf, maybe bigger. He was crushing her. She couldn't last much longer. She glanced up at the heavens, thinking of her parents. *Help me. Please help me.*

Without warning, a clap of thunder echoed through the sultry night. The clouds that moved in, almost instantaneously, brought no rain-only lightning. The night sky flashed yellow, the same burning yellow of his eyes. One vein of light after another split the night sky, setting the bone-dry forest around them ablaze. The ring of fire surrounding them captured Kira's attention. She leaped away from him and stood facing her opponent in the middle of the clearing, teeth bared, daring him to strike. He charged, his muscles rippling through his fur. His full body weight propelled him forward; his jaws snapped and opened again to tear her flesh to pieces. But she was gone.

Kira waited for him to strike, preparing to counterattack. Without warning, she felt a searing stab in her hind leg. She collapsed to the ground, crying out in pain, and batted away the flaming stick that had hit her as it had fallen. She scooped a handful of cool, rotting leaves onto the gash to soothe the burning. She struggled to be calm, to stay in the present. *The leaves help.* She watched from the ground as the other wolf hurtled toward her, then past her, toward the flames.

He turned his head and saw Kira, two steps away. His eyes reflected his thoughts as they shifted from blazing fury to absolute terror. Now it was his turn to cry out to the heavens. The flames were too close. It was too late to stop.

The burning color of his eyes was too similar to that of the yellow flames. Kira could no longer see them, only the dark silhouette of his

hulking frame within the blaze. He howled one last time, a bone-chilling sound of agony. She watched his form sink to the ground, still. *It is over.* Exhausted by the exertion and pain, Kira could not keep her eyes open. She slept.

When Kira awoke, the sky was filled with blazing orange streaks that matched the now dying flames. The night rushed back to her in a flash- the injury, the fire, the death. She let out a howl of victory, but it was filled with pain and sorrow. *Destiny repaid him for his evil, but it won't ever bring my parents back.* She limped to the edge of the forest. It was safer there. Her matted, bloodied fur faded into skin as she began the transformation back to her human form. The dawn-tinted streaks in the sky faded to a confident blue. She was Kira the orphan once more, but she had a burden lifted from her shoulders. *I wonder if I knew the human form of the other wolf.* She grinned and tugged at a short, dark strand of hair. *I guess it's time to find out.*

The Magic in the Music

by Emily Bray

Third Place

I was eight when I first saw the music.

It was streaming out of my mother's violin, in soft waves of pink. The song climbed, and it peaked in a sea of yellow, surrounding me as the color danced around the room. My mom finished the piece, sweeping her bow on the strings, and the vibrant colors faded, but I remained, watching in wonder to see if it would return.

"Mom," I asked. "Where did the color go?"

Her face lit up. "You see it too?" she responded. Lifting the violin to her chin, she played a scale, and the color returned. This time, it was a cool green that glowed as the music mounted from low to high, then vanished as the scale fell.

"I... I saw it again! The green, coming from your violin!" I cried excitedly, pointing to where it had been. "What is it?"

My mom put her instrument to the side, joining me on the bench where I sat. "Some call it disease. Others call it an abnormality. But I call it magic."

Then she hugged me before standing up and playing another piece of music for us, and we watched as blue swam in elegant swirls toward the sky.

Ever since then, the music has been my guiding principle my whole life. I found out not much later, just seeing colors would trigger a bout of notes it seemed only I could hear. Melodies follow me around, fluctuating with my mood and directing my actions.

It was my own secret superpower, my musical magic.

Not long after that, I began taking piano lessons. It took me a little while to learn, but slowly, surely, the trickle of notes that would run

from my fingers became a rushing waterfall as day after day, I took my place on the worn piano bench. I could control my own music, free from the influence of the rest of the world. Every day, after school, I would dash to the keys, and watch everything melt away in spirals of tantalizing color. I devoted every spare moment to it.

When I moved up to high school, I signed up to play piano in the orchestra. On the first day, there was a large prompt printed on a rolling whiteboard when we walked in - "Why did you choose music?"

One by one, our teacher went around the loose circle, calling on each of us. Most people said something false-bottomed and phony, but I had spoken my deepest truth: "The music chose me. It was magic, and it found me. It's my destiny to follow it, to be part of something bigger."

As I spoke, I had swelled with pride, that red wave on the edge of my vision. But after class, I saw the other students laughing in disdain. I heard their whispers, what they said about me, how they called me "diseased." At first, I wanted to quit the ensemble, but my mother would console me, saying, "Do not give up on the magic. Those kids will never know the power, the call that you feel. Ignore them, and they will lose interest in you. Then, wow them with your music."

And she was right. Eventually, the laughing kids stopped, or left. I made friends with other music minded students. On weekends, we would meet at each other's houses to practice, and I felt happy to be around other people like me. We stuck together all the way until we stood up on the graduation stage, throwing our caps in the air, and for once, everyone else heard the joyous music I did.

Then came college, and I was taking classes in data analysis, my future slated for a desk job. It was time to leave childhood behind, everyone said, and the music in my ears began to dim for the first time in my life since it had started. Throughout the years, my piano became dusty with misuse as I devoted my days to my studies.

But at night, when the noise of the world was quiet, I could still sense the magic there, calling to me.

I had been studying away from home, and the distance was great between my mother and I. Yet when the shocking news came that she died in the car crash, the music that had come as easily as breath stopped with the rest of the world, leaving me in pieces with nothing left to console me. She had stood by my side, encouraged me my whole life, but now she was gone. It was simply unbelievable.

So I did the only thing I could, and I had lifted the mahogany cover, letting a piece of my heart and soul return to me as I played the keys once more. Great sobs had racked my body as the morose melody that I played had seemed to speak my inner conflict and sorrow to no end. But it was within the worst moment of my life that I realized my true passion, the reason I live and breathe, and I went and devoted my life to it.

“Give it up for Chelsea Scott, performing Clair de Lune on the grand piano!” the announcer hollered, and I took a deep breath and stepped out on stage. I could feel the heat of the spotlights as the audience clapped their own steady rhythm, slower than that of my frantically beating heart.

Sliding onto the piano bench, I hesitated for just a moment, my fingers hovering above the keys, and I remembered. I felt the joy, the happiness, the exhilaration and the bliss that music, that life brought me. I took it and I poured every ounce of it into my fingertips, and passionately, gently, pushed down on the first key, letting the light purple resonate. Slowly, I worked my way along the keyboard, before my fingers were dancing, leaping, pounding out the melody, until around me hung a tapestry of colors, the fabric of a world I had created. As my vision began to change from black and white to bursting with rich hues, I spared a second to gaze out over the audience, whose faces were alight with wonder.

And they began to see the magic that I had always known.

Short Story

Grades 9 & 10

POETRY
DRAWING
PHOTOGRAPHY
SHORT
STORY


OUR OWN
PREFESSIONS

Cerebrum Intertextorem

by Viola James

First Place

There I was floating around, perfectly happy, when all of a sudden my body started splitting in half. I screamed loud enough to wake the dead. Not that it hurt; it was just so shocking and unexpected. The even more frightening part was that the half that had split off of me opened its eyes and said, "Hello," and then proceeded to split itself, causing me to scream all the louder. Each time one split, the new half would split again. Now this was extremely disturbing. And although I had stopped shrieking like Prometheus when he was chained to the rock getting his liver ripped out by an eagle, I was still filled with fear. When a neighboring cell who was one of my close friends came over and said, "Don't worry, I was scared the first time, too. You are just undergoing mitosis and it's completely normal." This gave me enormous relief like Hiroo Onoda must have felt when he found out that World War II really had ended. For a long time I just sat there and watched the cells split and wondered what one could do with them. With this many cells I could probably take over the body and free all the cells from their labor under the dictatorship of the brain. I was part of a group of cells in the neck and we always had to be careful when going around the spinal cord as it was necessary to the life of the brain.

The idea took hold and I gave it some more thought. If we developed a large enough clump of cells around the spinal cord, we could effectively cut off the head of the snake. So I called all of my split cells together for a meeting and told them of my plan. They said it was a good idea and that we should start right away. While these cells headed to the spinal cord I went to recruit more cells to our cause.

The white blood cells were not pleased with this idea and were going to send me back to the factory for reprogramming, but they got distracted by an infected red blood cell and hurried off to take her to

the clinic. I found a large group of dermis skin cells repairing a tear in the layer, and after convincing them of the cause of freedom they hurried to the spinal cord. After I had recruited many cells I sent other cells to recruit more while I headed to the spine to see how progress was coming. There were several good size lumps appearing along the spinal cord and some of our scouts had returned from the brain.

“Bob, I have some good news and some bad news. The good news is that the brain is malfunctioning and that the body underwent a seizure. The bad news is that we went over to the eyes momentarily to see what was going on outside and the human is in an ambulance going to the hospital.” As my friend Steve told me this I started racking my nucleus for a solution. If we wanted to succeed we would have to work quickly.

“Double the number of cells gathering on the spine and send a group of dormant infected cells to the brain. We can activate them sometime in the future if this gambit fails,” I replied.

We had arrived at the hospital and both the teams were racing down the track to either victory or defeat. We were ahead of the brain’s survival by a few lengths, but the doctors had almost caught us. The cells were splitting as fast as they could and the small number of cells that were sacrificed to bring the infected ones to the brain would be among the few that, if we failed, would survive. We were putting everything into this war and if we were going to lose we were going to leave a time bomb behind.

That’s when the scalpel cut through and started removing the tumor. The cries of the dying were like that of those that were heard in Ramah. Then they were gone and there was silence, I fled down the spinal cord only to find that the lumps were gone. The Bourgeoisie had destroyed them before the protests of the people against tyranny could be realized. I went back to my old job to bide my time, while I waited for the body to return home and grow lax on security before igniting the infected cells in the brain. Next time we would win. Next time we would go for the brain and not the body, and we would destroy it, even if it meant our destruction in the process.

Music Personified

by Skylar Viene

Second Place

The first note is played. A deep low note from a bass that expresses the inescapable pain of loneliness. The longing call for a companion who has yet to answer. It floats like a phantom lost on the wind. Then it stops, having vanished just as easily as it appeared. The next note: a crisp, clean sound from a violin that subtly turns into a tune that tries to soothe the aching cry of the first, beckon it from its cave of solitude, and end it's solo dancing. She begs the bass to hear her song and bask in its beauty, the only price is to save her from her tower at the edge of a still, silent sea. But soon, it too starts to end. Feeling wounded and heartbroken and rejected she curls up into herself, leaving only a quiet echo as evidence that she was there at all.

The bass, being the cautious creature that it is, answers with an almost inaudible response. The violin had taken him by surprise, and now he wasn't sure how to respond to the genuine care she seemed to feel towards his pain. He played a tune that was guarded, like a vault in the deepest dungeon of a stronghold that housed an entire army. It was the unyielding clash of steel against chainmail: tough, brutal, and protective. The violin having heard his response wasn't frightened, she was just happy to finally have freedom. For the walls of her tower to finally crash and crumble into a sea that was no longer still and no longer silent. She played her song for the bass, now a piece of joyous movement that welcomed him to come and sing with her. And slowly but surely he did. The clambering clang of metal halted, and in its place was a gentler more compassionate tune. It molded to the violin's music and amplified it into something stronger.

Now it was no longer an unorchestrated mess sound. It was a gorgeous melody that blended into a harmony so perfect that none would ever find music as pure and beautiful as theirs. They were so enchanted, so engulfed in their new found love that they didn't

notice the steady, pulsing beat of drums. But the thunderous crash of cymbals quickly awoke them from their trance. Their song started to morph into something tainted with worry. Worry that quickly become fear as they realized who had appeared. The grand organ, the king of the land, followed by a host of all sorts. Trumpets and trombones blaring their displeasure at being so close to a common bass. Violas and cellos still teary eyed and crying about the betrayal of their queen. Clarinets and flutes and drums and cellos not wanting the high nobility's attention. The grand organ watched it all from the side. He watched as the trumpets and trombones belittled and degraded the bass for his lowly status. He watched the violas and cellos screech and scorn the violin, his queen, for falling out of love with him and for refusing to sing to him. And he watched the bass and the violin frantically try to reach each other through the onslaught of noise, to continue their song of love.

But the disdain in the air was tangible and impenetrable, the pound of the drums too insistent, the deafening complaints of the trumpets too loud, a whole symphony of chaos arriving at its crescendo! Neither the bass nor the violin could come close to the full overwhelming rage of an orchestra. Their voices were drowned out by the unrelenting typhoon of hatred, betrayal, devotion, and lust. They were being cleaved apart by the king and his forces. And it was when the violin could no longer hear the bass's song that she let loose a cry that could shatter souls. Everything fell still. Her heartache, her sorrow, her desperation, all of it could be felt in a single note.

But the king remained unmoved. And so, with the violin still pleading for freedom, he and his forces marched back to the kingdom. And when the violin's voice finally started to fade into the distance, the last note was played. A deep low note from a bass that expresses the inescapable pain of loneliness.

Kurt.

by Jacob Lawty

Third Place

October 28, 1944

I felt the train slow to a stop. I looked among my fellow passengers. There was not a happy face among them. Some faces presented a façade of resignation, but I knew that inside their heart was fighting, fighting the fear of what might come next. Other faces were more conspicuously afraid, dejected, angry, even, but they were quiet. One thing was sure. Their minds had no room for any wandering thoughts of what kind of hearty meal might have awaited them at home or of what they might do the following Sunday. These kinds of expectations were distinctly unrealistic.

My thoughtful state was interrupted by the shouting of men. “Gehen aus der Zug,” which I understood to mean “Get off the train.” We complied. As we trudged past, I noticed the uniforms they wore seemed to engulf all colors of light or joy that might have been present. They continued to shout orders at us as we disembarked.

I lifted my head and saw a complex of red and brown brick that loomed over us, like dark clouds that foreshadowed the rain. What did this strange arrival foreshadow? I could not answer.

Those Germans reminded me of my time in the war. The first one, that is. I was one of the lucky ones. I stood by the side. I had to see the injuries, not endure them. How terrible that war was, and yet, it somehow never compared to the horrors I witnessed at my previous “home”. That dreadful place that I, yes, I, made people believe was somehow livable, humane, generous.

We marched single file toward the gate and walls. The same kind of walls that during my childhood in Berlin made me feel so safe. I would run and play, and I knew I was protected. Now, I felt anything but. As I walked through the gate, I saw the familiar saying inscribed over it. I had seen it countless times at my old camp. “Arbeit Macht

Frei.” “Work sets you free.” I shook my head in quiet denial of this creed. It sickened me how they posted this as if some cruel marquee would convince us that the grueling work and egregious pain we endured was for any other reason than inordinate hate and extreme prejudice.

The position of it over the gate brought a flood of memories to my mind. How I used to be overwhelmed with excitement when I saw the words, “The Threepenny Opera,” above the theater entrance. How I would wait backstage, eagerly shaking in anticipation of when my time to act would come. How the audience loved it when I sang “Mack the Knife.” They would cheer, yell, and even sometimes sing along, no matter how badly they sounded. But that was then, and now I didn’t know what would come next. I didn’t know if I’d ever be able to make an audience laugh like that again. I didn’t know if I would see an audience again. I didn’t know if I would see my family again.

The men shoved us through a door and into a dirty, dismal hallway. We were forced to move. Our steps were slow, like those of wandering cattle who have no place to go or any direction. As I looked around at my fellow prisoners, I saw tears. They fell heavily. Not like before. Before there was some magical way the men and women seemed to hold them back, but it was the aura of this unfamiliar place that allowed them to flow freely. The tears reminded me of the many tear-filled scenes in *The Blue Angel*, the film I had starred in.

Oh, how that film had transformed me. Acting in that film had introduced me to an entire new world. A world where anyone, no matter what age or what country they came from, could unite to watch their heroes act, sing and dance right in front of them. I longed for the day where they would be able to in color.

Color, how beautiful it was. The most recent months of my life had been ultimately devoid of color. I marched through the halls and corridors of my old camp and my eyes were met with nothing but gray door after gray door, the silver of the gate that separated us from the outside world, the blackness of the despair felt by all who entered there. But nothing was worse than the total embarrassment and abuse I endured. How I was forced to entertain them with petty displays that could hardly be called art. And the culmination of it all: the propaganda film.

I had never before taken part in such a godless action. It pained my soul to imagine that even a single mind witnessed my despicable creation and believed it to be true. I had, I was afraid, transgressed in the deepest sense. I had succumbed to the will of these evil, evil men. These men who felt it right to strip away millions from their home under the pretense of “purification.” These men who felt that any human could be, simply, “undesirable.” I showed forth an image of these men that was not true. I showed an image of compassion, mercy, and good treatment. This image was designed to generate some sympathy for these men that deserved none. I had been scared. Scared of what they might do to me, scared of the punishments I might endure, and as I looked at my fellow man and woman, marching with me to the grave, I saw the exact same fear.

I suddenly knew what was about to happen to me. As I looked around at my fellow musicians, actors, directors, for that was who they were, I saw that they knew too. We all knew what was coming, and we were determined to face it with dignity. After all, it’s the dignity they tried to take away from us. The dignity they tried to convince us we could never have and would never deserve.

After the men cruelly paraded us through the halls we came to the door. That great divide between the spiritual and the real. I pondered what lay beyond that threshold, and what had lain beyond all the thresholds in my life that I had already crossed. As this thought journeyed through my mind, I noticed a small child right beside me, touching me to get my attention. He spoke softly. I could hear the fear in his voice but knew he was determined to tell me something. “Mis. . . Mister Geron? Your show always made me laugh. I really liked your show.”

This is what I had lived for. I had lived for the fact that a small child might see my show and laugh. Not that someone would think right of those evil men, but that a small child might have thought, just for a moment, that there was no fear in the world. No sorrow. No evil. As I stared at the door, I thought about what was coming. I was ready. I had run my race. I had fulfilled my purpose.

I was beckoned forward.

I crossed the threshold.

Short Story

Grades 11 & 12

POETRY
DRAWING
PHOTOGRAPHY
SHORT
STORY


OUR OWN
PREFESSIONS

The Spirits of Venice

by Maleila Henry-Mitchell

First Place

They called her the Weeping Wanderer. A few had seen her. But all could describe the slender outline of a young woman in a painted mask roaming across the rooftops in the moonlight and watching the city from the spires of churches.

Luca de Cosimo had seen her once, a long time ago, and he had never forgotten it. It hadn't been far from here, he thought, as he walked slowly through the island city's narrow, darkened streets. Moonlight caught on the gently rippling surface of the canal to his left. Distant laughter and footsteps drifted between the buildings from the livelier section of the city. Around him, only a few windows were still lit, and it was quiet. He should have been heading home, but he wasn't. He just couldn't do that yet. He had been doing that for two years, wearing the path between his tiny boardinghouse room and his rented office. Cases had come and gone across his desk, but the one that gnawed at him — that he was no closer to solving than when he had arrived on the scene too late.

Not far from here at all. Luca paused halfway across a small bridge and stared down at the dark water beneath him. The young face of the dim reflection that stared back at him was etched with a deep weariness.

Luca had been a detective for five years. He knew what it felt like to be watched. The only sound was the whisper of the cool breeze through the twisting streets. The dagger he sometimes carried was in the top drawer of the desk at his office. He took a quiet breath and turned.

Perched on the bridge's railing across from him was a slight figure. Her ragged clothes and long, pale hair rippled slowly in a breeze Luca couldn't feel. Her face was covered by a white mask painted with

intricate designs, swirls of red and gold and blue above crimson lips. Painted tears dripped from the mask's black eyes.

"You," Luca breathed.

The Weeping Wanderer stayed perched on the railing, completely still. "Luca de Cosimo," she said softly. Her voice was faint, barely audible. "Why do you wander?"

A shadow flickered across his expression. "I . . . I couldn't figure it out. The man who was killed here. I couldn't solve it."

"Two years ago." She tilted her head. "Perhaps. . ."

He shook his head. "I can't. I can't just let it go." The moonlight caught on her pale hair. It seemed to float around her. He couldn't tell whether it was the breeze. The mask gazed back at him evenly with its sorrowful pitch-black eyes, unreadable. "You were there, weren't you?"

He strained to catch her voice over the sweep of the wind. "I'm not anywhere anymore."

"I spent weeks looking for you," the detective admitted. A hopeful note crept into his voice, the same hope of the sleepless weeks he had spent roaming the city, combing the streets. "You saw it. You could tell me what happened."

The Weeping Wanderer seemed to shrink into herself, barely there in the moonlight. Her voice was scarcely a whisper. "No. Not about that."

Luca bit his lip to keep from pressing her. The one witness to the murder. The only witness he needed. He tried to curb his frustration, but the bitterness leaked into his question. "Why find me now?"

The spirit unfolded herself from her perch and skirted the stone railing until she stood across from him. "We're the same," she whispered.

"What?"

She spread her thin arms to gesture around them, at the dark streets, at the moonlight falling across the bridge, casting a shadow

over the water, at Luca standing there on the silent bridge with the spirit.

Lonely," he said quietly. She gave no affirmation, but he understood. "Why don't you talk to them? To the people?"

Pale hair fell in a curtain across the mask as the black eyes lowered to the bridge's cobbles. "They don't understand. They fear. I'm not a person. I'm..."

"The Weeping Wanderer," Luca finished. Stars glittered on a velvet sky above them. He could no longer hear the distant raucous souls still awake. "Why don't you take the mask off?" he asked softly.

"I can't..." The black eyes raised to meet his again, faint light catching on the elegant tears that leaked from their corners. Her voice was as fragile as the porcelain mask. "No one can see me. They fear..."

"I don't," Luca said before he could stop himself. "I wouldn't."

The pale rags draping from her gaunt body fluttered ever so slightly as she stood there watching him, the brilliant colors of the mask muted to shades of grey in the dark. "Truly, Luca de Cosimo?"

"All I've seen of this city for five years is grime and blood and death," he answered quietly. "You don't scare me."

He took a step closer across the bridge, half expecting her to vanish into the dark, half expecting her to leap gracefully to the railing and run. She didn't move. His hand brushed against her pale hair as he reached out. The mask's surface was smooth and cool. He lifted it slowly.

A cold chill slithered through his veins.

In the moonlight, his own face stared back at him.

His voice sounded hollow. "I don't – I don't understand."

The moonlight no longer went through her. The ethereal clothing that had hung off her skinny frame was solid – *his* clothing. Luca looked down at his hands and saw them transparent in the silvery light.

The chill spread straight to his core. “What’s happening to me?” His voice came out faint, like the whisper of the wind.

“Your face is mine now, Luca de Cosimo,” the spirit said calmly. Her voice was no longer so quiet. It was deeper, rougher — his own voice, the same one he could feel fading in his throat.

Luca dropped to his knees, leaning over the bridge’s edge to catch a glimpse of the black water beneath them. The sight of the reflection that danced across its surface made his breath freeze in his chest. The shivering outline had no face. His clothes were pale and ragged, and he could no longer feel the breeze against his skin.

The spirit sighed from above him. Luca looked up to see his own face watching him with pity written into the familiar lines of his expression. The spirit’s eyes were inky in the dark. “Didn’t your mother ever tell you not to talk to the spirits of Venice?”

Luca tried to reply, but no voice would come from his throat. The spirit turned, and he watched as Luca de Cosimo disappeared into the darkened streets toward his boardinghouse room. The stone cobbles were cold beneath him. He looked down at the mask in his pale hands. Moonlight filtered through his skin and glinted off the painted tears of the Weeping Wanderer.

The Labyrinth

by Juliana Smith

Second Place

There is world. It is named and nameless, near and far, familiar and unknown. It spins and orbits in a universe not our own, but is closer to us than anything else. It is a world of wonder and color and light. But with wonder and color and light comes fear and pallor and darkness.

In this world there is an underground maze. A living labyrinth. It twists and winds and changes, and it cannot be controlled.

Only two beings live in the labyrinth: the beast and the glass child.

The glass child runs aimlessly through the labyrinth. If she trips and falls, she will shatter, but if she stops, the beast will catch her. So she runs, paying more attention to where she's placing her feet than where the path she is on is taking her.

The beast prowls through the labyrinth. It has the body of a human, the thick fur and head of a cat, a leathery tail, and the thick horns of a bull. It hunts the glass child, she is the only thing that sustains it.

Every day, the glass child runs through the labyrinth. Eventually, her path leads her to a wooden door, set into the walls. The door opens, and a blinding light shines through. She steps towards the light, but hears a growl behind her. The beast has found her. She has to make a choice. She looks to the light, but hesitates. The beast is dangerous, but familiar. She knows what will happen if she stays with the beast. She doesn't know what will happen if she goes through that door. And in that moment, the beast strikes. It rushes past her and slams the door shut. The glass child turns to run, but the beast grabs her and holds her down. With sharp clawed hands, it tears out her heart.

As the child's heart beats in its hand, the beast grins with sharp fangs. Then, as the glass child watches, the beast eats her heart. The beast roars with glee, its power growing as it absorbs the life the

glass child has to give. Then it shatters the glass child's body into a thousand fragments. The fragments scatter across the labyrinth.

The beast, satiated for now, retreats to its den. As it sleeps, the fragments spin and gather, reforming into the body of the glass child. She wanders through the night, eventually finding the beast's den. She lays down beside the beast, and it curls around her, almost comforting. As they sleep, the glass child regrows her heart, siphoning energy from the beast. Then, when her heart is reformed, the glass child wakes. She smiles at the sleeping beast, pets it on the head, and leaves. She knows that when the beast wakes, it will hunt her again.

The glass child wanders the labyrinth until she hears the tell-tale roar of the beast awakening, once again finding that she has taken back her heart. It follows her scent, prowling through the labyrinth once more. The glass child hears it's roar and runs, filled with both fear and excitement. The beast's hunt is the only thing that happens in the labyrinth. Her life would be naught without it. So she runs, and the beast chases, and when it catches her, it eats her heart. Then, as it sleeps, she takes her heart back. And so the cycle continues.

The glass child knows that if she goes through the door with the light, the cycle will end. But she isn't sure if she wants it to end. She knows this labyrinth, this cycle, the beast. It's painful, but it's comfortable. The light, however... it's unfamiliar. A comparative unknown. She is afraid not of what she thinks it isn't, but of what it has the possibility to be. So every day, when she comes upon the door to the light, the glass child turns away, lets the beast take her, lets it take the heart. Because she knows that night she will regrow it. But the beast knows something she doesn't. One day, when the beast takes the heart, the glass child won't be able to get it back.

The Unnoticed Apocalypse

by Savannah Guenzi

Third Place

November 8, 2039, 6:15 AM. William Tracy wakes up in his bunker home, deep underground. Why is it underground? Mr. Tracy dislikes sunlight. He rides the subway to his work at the DMV. Mr. Tracy arrives at his job, sits at his desk, reads his book. The day passes. It's closing time, he wasn't needed today, as usual. The subway ride home is exciting, there is someone threatening to shoot everyone if their money isn't put into her bag, but Mr. Tracy's eyes never leave the page of his novel. He gets off at his stop as if nothing happened. To him, nothing did. He takes his dinner at his plain steel table with a seat for one, then goes to bed. He does not dream. Has he ever?

November 9, 2039, 2:49 AM. Governments across the globe have had enough. Nuclear warfare rages. Nations around the globe release their nuclear payloads. The sky flashes green and yellow as radioactive materials rain from the sky. There is no time to scream, to get underground, to blink. A moment passes in terrible agony, then it is gone. All humans on the surface of the Earth are wiped from existence. The Apocalypse has arrived. It was quick, sudden, and silent. Destruction to this scale can never be undone.

November 9, 2039, 5:06 AM. The Apocalypse is finished. The smoldering, radioactive landscape does not show that life forms had once inhabited the area or that mass genocide had just taken place. Birds no longer chirp, neon signs no longer glow, and humans no longer fight. All that remains on the blackened planet are some underground buildings, a few subways, and the grimy DMV. Still, the sun creeps over the horizon, the subways take their usual courses, and those few who dislike the sun sleep in peace.

November 9, 2039, 6:15 AM. William Tracy wakes up in his underground home. He takes the dilapidated and sparking subway to his job at the DMV. Mr. Tracy arrives, sits at his desk, reads his book. The day passes. It's closing time, he wasn't needed today, as usual. He never even notices that there is nobody present in the ever-busy place. Would he care? Who knows? His eyes are permanently glued to his novel. He gets off at his stop as if the subway wasn't a dangerous, jolting wreck. He takes his dinner at his plain steel table with a seat for one, then goes to bed. He does not dream. There is nothing to dream about.

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