



OUR OWN PRESSIONS

POETRY
DRAWING
PHOTOGRAPHY
SHORT
STORY

TEEN

Writing & Art Contest

2022 Winners

Congratulations

In 2022, more than 890 talented teen artists, photographers, poets and prose writers participated in the 26th annual Our Own Expressions Teen Writing & Art Contest. These students demonstrated truly impressive artistic vision, technical understanding and passion in the work they submitted.

All entries were subject to a double-blind judging process. First, volunteer Pierce County Library System staff judges reviewed anonymized entries. The finalists of this initial round then moved on to a second round of professional judging.

In 2022, there were four professional judges. Artist Nikki McClure and photographer Faith Matthews selected the drawing and photography winners based on composition, artistic skills, creativity and effective use of media. Author Kendare Blake and Tacoma Poet Laureate Lydia K. Valentine selected the poetry and short story winners, evaluating originality, style and general presentation.

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

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

Join us in congratulating this year's winners, and recognizing and celebrating 26 years of creative teen talent, voice and vision!

2022

Winners

POETRY
DRAWING
PHOTOGRAPHY
SHORT
STORY



OUR OWN
EXPRESSIONS

Poetry Winners

Grades 7 & 8

1st comfort food

Emma Sevilla

Other

2nd Lighter

Lin Best

Pioneer Middle School

3rd Mask

Willow Moon

Curtis Junior High School

Grades 9 & 10

1st Vita Nova

Audrey Douglass

Covenant High School

2nd Reflection Unto Her

Kathryn Harry

Gig Harbor High School

3rd Fill a Need

Joel McMillan

Covenant High School

Grades 11 & 12

1st The Swan Song of the Lady of Shalott

Tyson Cornwell

Eatonville High School

2nd The Stationwagon

Rylie Wood

Covenant High School

3rd Our Fault

Isaac Hacker

Franklin Pierce High School

Drawing Winners

Grades 7 & 8

1st Blue Jay

Leslie Wallace

Kalles Junior High School

2nd Hummingbird

Cadence Reed

Pioneer Middle School

3rd the plant

Billy Atkins

Glacier Middle School

Grades 9 & 10

1st Earned wisdom

Julia Clarke

Gig Harbor High School

2nd Spirit Guide

Samantha Diaz

Home School

3rd Westport South Jetty

Charlotte Southworth

Stadium High School

Grades 11 & 12

1st Before It's Me

Abi Losh

Henderson Bay High School

2nd Sea Nocturne

Evelyn Bang

Bonney Lake High School

3rd Metamorphosis of Vitality

Caitlynn Wohlford

Bonney Lake High School

Photography Winners

Grades 7 & 8

1st Love Under the Sun

Sophia Olsen

Goodman Middle School

2nd Vibrant Hues

Ava Garcia

Pioneer Middle School

3rd The Turtle

Ethan Barnes

Goodman Middle School

Grades 9 & 10

1st Luminescence

Grace Harbottle

Steilacoom High School

2nd the bright side

William Aldridge

Steilacoom High School

3rd Mountain Lake

William Abarr

Graham-Kapowsin High School

Grades 11 & 12

1st The Wild Past

Tyson Cornwell

Eatonville High School

2nd Everything is Fine

Abigail Matelski

Steilacoom High School

3rd Solitude

Rhemmy Chen

Steilacoom High School

Short Story Winners

Grades 7 & 8

1st The Creator

Mia Colombo

Goodman Middle School

2nd The Spider

Willow Moon

Curtis Junior High School

3rd The Golden Needle

Greta Brown

Other

Grades 9 & 10

1st 보고 싶습니다 (I Miss You Dearly)

Grace Elliott

Graham-Kapowsin High School

2nd Don't Lose Your Voice.

Lily Carpenter

Spanaway Lake High School

3rd I Am Stella

Denrie Gray

Graham-Kapowsin High School

Grades 11 & 12

1st Foursquare

Savannah Mitchell

Bellarmine Preparatory

2nd Witch Picnic

Skylar Viene

Spanaway Lake High School

3rd Dumpling

Hannah Scott

Covenant High School

Table of Contents

Poetry

Grades 7 & 8

1st	comfort food.....	2
2nd	Lighter	3
3rd	Mask.....	4

Grades 9 & 10

1st	Vita Nova.....	6
2nd	Reflection Unto Her	7
3rd	Fill a Need	8

Grades 11 & 12

1st	The Swan Song of the Lady of Shalott.....	10
2nd	The Stationwagon.....	11
3rd	Our Fault	12

Drawing

Grades 7 & 8

1st	Blue Jay	14
2nd	Hummingbird.....	15
3rd	the plant.....	16

Grades 9 & 10

1st	Earned wisdom.....	18
2nd	Spirit Guide.....	19
3rd	Westport South Jetty	20

Grades 11 & 12

1st	Before It's Me.....	22
2nd	Sea Nocturne	23
3rd	Metamorphosis of Vitality.....	24

Table of Contents

Photography

Grades 7 & 8

1st	Love Under the Sun	26
2nd	Vibrant Hues	27
3rd	The Turtle	28

Grades 9 & 10

1st	Luminescence.....	30
2nd	the bright side.....	31
3rd	Mountain Lake.....	32

Grades 11 & 12

1st	The Wild Past	34
2nd	Everything is Fine.....	35
3rd	Solitude	36

Short Story

Grades 7 & 8

1st	The Creator.....	38
2nd	The Spider	42
3rd	The Golden Needle.....	45

Grades 9 & 10

1st	보고 싶습니다 (I Miss You Dearly).....	50
2nd	Don't Lose Your Voice.	53
3rd	I Am Stella	57

Grades 11 & 12

1st	Foursquare.....	60
2nd	Witch Picnic.....	64
3rd	Dumpling	68

Poetry

Grades 7 & 8

POETRY
DRAWING
PHOTOGRAPHY
SHORT
STORY



OUR OWN
PROFESSIONS

comfort food

by Emma Sevilla

First Place

I mash my teeth together and pull them apart again
My own spit mixing with my meal
I force myself to swallow it all
Even though I want to throw it all up
Then lay on the bathroom floor

"How does it taste?"

I stare at you with an anguished look
And try to disguise it as a look of thought
Contemplation

Like I didn't make up my mind the second I heard you say "comfort food"
How does it taste?
Melancholy

Like the static of a forgotten technology, a VCR or a past life
Like a rusting rivet that helped hold my favorite playground
growing up together
Like the focus of trying to remember a nearly gone memory of fishing
with my family
Like a blackening mirror of princesses and unicorns growing
discolored with age
Like the damp of the wood in my childhood treehouse rotting
Like the various browns in a photo of my 6th birthday growing sepia

And like the salt in my tears
When I realize that it's all leaving me

Lighter

by Lin Best

Second Place

My body is so heavy, it keeps my feet dragging against the ground,
kicking up pebbles and dirt, making the walkway clear.
It pushes me to where I need to go with no thought of how painful it is.
It bends me backwards until my spine is stuck and all I can do is lie crumpled
on the floor.

Maybe if my body were lighter, I could fly up.
I'd walk amongst the stars and wish on every dandelion.
I'd say hello to all the people passing by me, cherish every sunrise
like they were new beginnings.

I would find my way to new places as if I were following old trails,
ones that were drawn by prancing deer and tired kits,
memories of rabbit paws and soles of bare feet imprinted forever into the soil.
My eyes would memorize the views: rivers washing the banks where they lay,
the sun kissing the mountains good morning and goodnight as it rises and falls,
rain falling like bullets on the cold sea's surface.

I'd admire all the living others did, living I hadn't done myself.
Watch as those I saw hugged like a hug could fix it all,
spoke about meaningless things that meant everything just by them saying it.
They love and lose and cry and doubt, only to move on soon after.

If I could bear the weight of myself, crushing down on my shoulders,
like Atlas holding up the sky, maybe I'd be one of the people I observed,
knowing death comes, but living fully just the same.

Today I'll lay in my bed with my bent spine, conjuring a dream
where my body is light.

Mask

by Willow Moon

Third Place

She didn't know how to feel
Was this a fantasy or was it real
She brushed away her tear
Which in turn, led to more fear

What if people saw her cry?
Would anyone care if they saw her die?
She forced a smile on her face
She would continue to run the endless race

But soon that fake smile disappeared
She became scared to be seen as weird
And so she started to wear a mask
But no one noticed and no one would ever ask

She thought she was happy now
But she was lying so she made a vow
Never to let anyone know what was behind that smile
She would just throw more pain on her pile

She wore the mask for years on end
She tried to tell her friends but couldn't bring herself to hit send
And so one night she was gone
Now there was only a shell of a woman who always had a mask on

Poetry

Grades 9 & 10

POETRY
DRAWING
PHOTOGRAPHY
SHORT
STORY



OUR OWN
PROFESSIONS

Vita Nova

by Audrey Douglass

First Place

No one is left to tell the tale of fire;
The world I knew is a funeral pyre.
Ringing in silence I hear a soft choir
That haunts the world with its cries.

Never before has the Earth ever seen
Its once-green ground covered in such a sheen:
The only trace of the place it had been
Then its color slowly dies.

But wait, over there! Just look at the ground!
The sudden brightness of a newborn sprout!
Somewhere, faintly, I can hear a small sound,
A rustle of leaves nearby.

Maybe there's colors, some green and some blue?
There are stems and petals and branches too.
From all of this I can hope it is true—
Some of this world still survives.

Reflection Unto Her

by Kathryn Harry

Second Place

A mirror cannot show you any more than what you face;
the entropy behind the mask where there still lies a mess
You may stain a reflection, but it will not be erased

Atop a dark oak table can be seen a fractured vase
whose heart has long been spilt over the counter's sharpened edge
But mirrors cannot show you any more than what you face

Where innocence once bloomed lie drooping petals in its place
One thousand withered soldiers in a game of painted chess;
though the reflection may be stained it will not be erased

A veil grasps at the mirror's sides, tightening its white lace
but still reality bleeds through her long embroidered dress-
A mirror who can't show you any more than what you face

She seems to drown in her nice gown, falling to wilted fate
yet through her final cries, you hear her wearily confess,
"You may stain a reflection but it cannot be erased."

Her silver blood is spilled across the marbled floor with grace
Her fragments mimic spider webs, still striving to impress
for a mirror cannot show you any more than what you face;
you may stain a reflection, but it will not be erased.

Fill a Need

by Joel McMillan

Third Place

Water and sugar will not mix
Without someone to mix them
Broken cars will not be fixed
Without someone to fix them

Little children will not learn
Without someone to teach them
Their love of knowledge will not burn
Without someone to reach them

Poetry will not be read
Without someone to make it
No good news will be spread
With no one to break it

In short if you want something
And that “something” is a need
Don't be a chef who cooks nothing
When he has mouths to feed

Poetry

Grades 11 & 12

POETRY
DRAWING
PHOTOGRAPHY
SHORT
STORY



OUR OWN
PROFESSIONS

The Swan Song of the Lady of Shalott

by Tyson Cornwell

First Place

Long have I looked upon life
Yet never lived.
No one came for the girl in the tower.
Life never looked back.
So as the last candles blow out
I'll let go of the world.
Yet
I still carry it's image, woven in my hands.
Wishes have a tendency to turn to regrets.
We all have things to carry with us
As we at last travel the dark waters beyond.
No longer will I look upon life.
May it
For once
Look upon me.

May it hear me
As I sing.

The Stationwagon

by Rylie Wood

Second Place

Jack's love was like the sea
Violent, changing, treacherous;
Gloria's love was like a glacier
Constant, looming, but eroding;
Betty's love was like a mirage
Tempting, beautiful, false;
Ezra's love was like rain
A cleansing downpour, never wanted but always needed;
Lucy's love was like a flash flood
Strong, overwhelming, and then gone;
Yet they all returned, flowing into one stream
And recycling into the life that made them and they made better;
All dripping back together into the coffee pot
At their favorite cafe that they had just left;
All flowing back together into the river that gave their town its name;
All condensing back together into the dewdrops
On the mossy stone in the middle of the road;
All falling from the sky together into
The faces of the onlookers in ambulances;
All coming together to fill the lungs of each as Jack's station wagon
sank into the river.

Our Fault

by Isaac Hacker

Third Place

We burned the pyre.

Found the kindling, built the fire,
Found the fuel, and stripped it bare,

Burned it till the smoke rose higher.

We blamed the others.

Spent our time, pointing fingers
at the backs of those who backs were bare to winter.

While we remained warm.

We can do anything.

Build machines that we abuse,
To build a rocket we can use to fly away, escape the Earth
we left behind to burn.

We will live forever.

Etched in mountains that aren't ours,
And in the rubble near the stars,
We cannot die regardless of our willingness to try.

I guess that's all that we can do,
Fight ourselves and others too.
Until the end when all that's left,
Are ashes made from our own sins.

Drawing

Grades 7 & 8

POETRY
DRAWING
PHOTOGRAPHY
SHORT
STORY



OUR OWN
PREFESSIONS

Blue Jay

by Leslie Wallace

First Place



Hummingbird

by Cadence Reed

Second Place



the plant

by Billy Atkins

Third Place



Drawing

Grades 9 & 10

POETRY
DRAWING
PHOTOGRAPHY
SHORT
STORY

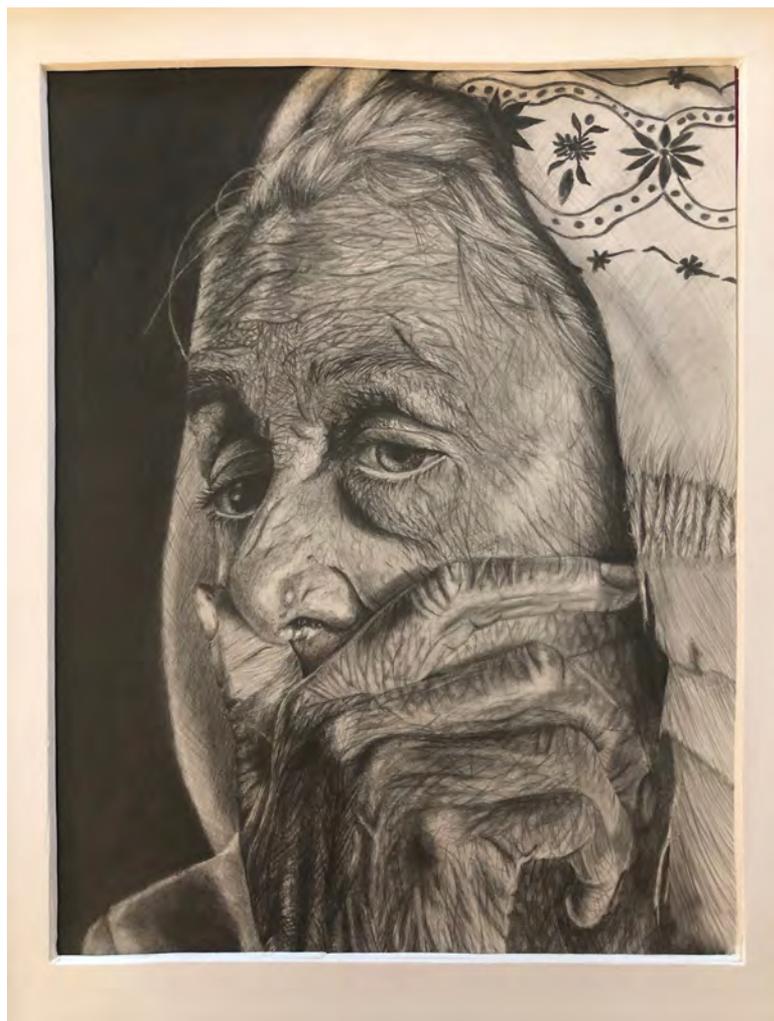


OUR OWN
PROFESSIONS

Earned wisdom

by Julia Clarke

First Place



Spirit Guide

by Samantha Diaz

Second Place



Westport South Jetty

by Charlotte Southworth

Third Place



Drawing

Grades 11 & 12

POETRY
DRAWING
PHOTOGRAPHY
SHORT
STORY



OUR OWN
PROFESSIONS

Before It's Me

by Abi Losh

First Place



Sea Nocturne

by Evelyn Bang

Second Place



Metamorphosis of Vitality

by Caitlynn Wohlford

Third Place



Photography

Grades 7 & 8

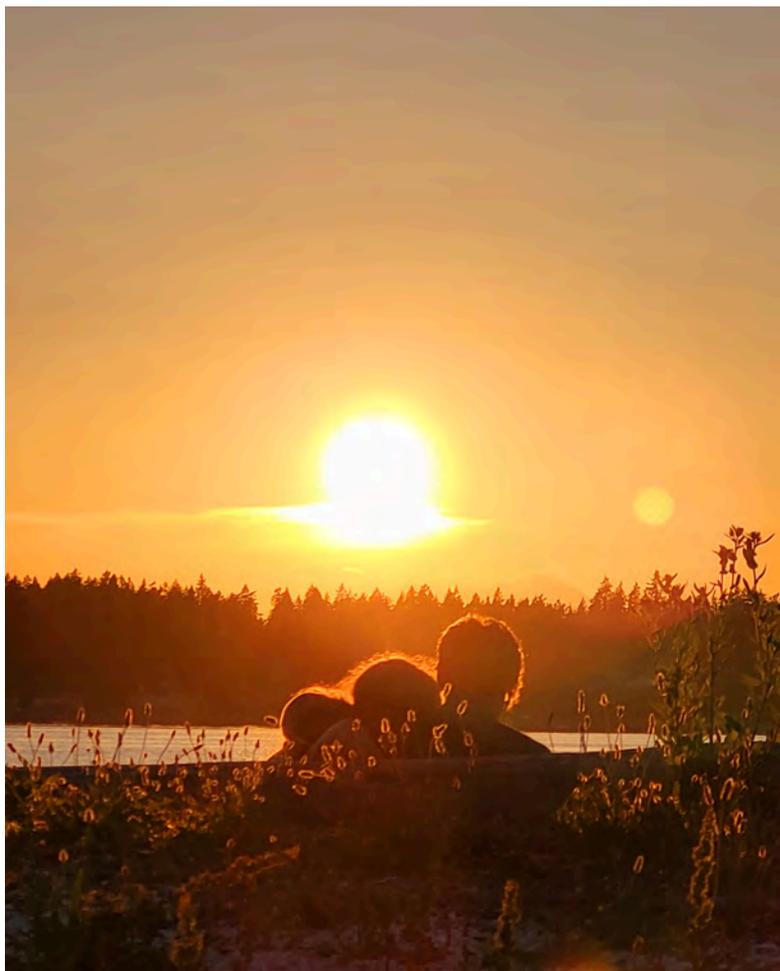
POETRY
DRAWING
PHOTOGRAPHY
SHORT
STORY

**OUR OWN
PREFESSIONS**

Love Under the Sun

by Sophia Olsen

First Place



Vibrant Hues

by Ava Garcia

Second Place



The Turtle

by Ethan Barnes

Third Place



Photography

Grades 9 & 10

POETRY
DRAWING
PHOTOGRAPHY
SHORT
STORY



**OUR OWN
PROFESSIONS**

Luminescence

by Grace Harbottle

First Place



the bright side

by William Aldridge

Second Place



Mountain Lake

by William Abar

Third Place



Photography

Grades 11 & 12

POETRY
DRAWING
PHOTOGRAPHY
SHORT
STORY



**OUR OWN
PROFESSIONS**

The Wild Past

by Tyson Cornwell

First Place



Everything is Fine

by Abigail Matelski

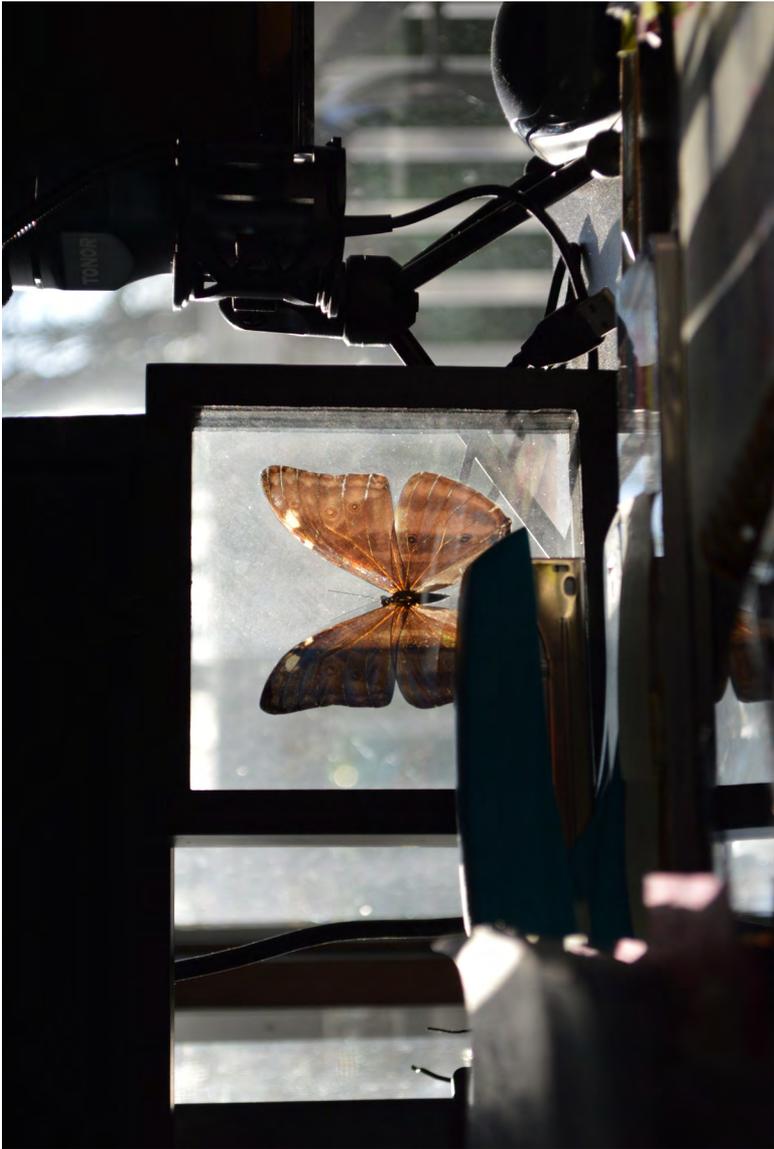
Second Place



Solitude

by Rhemmy Chen

Third Place



Short Story

Grades 7 & 8

POETRY
DRAWING
PHOTOGRAPHY
SHORT
STORY



OUR OWN
PREFERENCES

The Creator

by Mia Colombo

First Place

Before flora and fauna blanketed Kalvera's islands, before the islands had even dared to challenge the Morgun Sea, before there was anything, there was a tree. Her name was Laekma.

The tree stood proudly above the waters, her tall trunk reaching far above the surface. Her juniper leaves shone in the sunlight, a green blemish on the monotonous cerulean sea. She was the only thing besides the ocean, and the Cosmos seemed opposed to her very existence. Obsessed with perfection, the Cosmos had created the world with the image of a flawless liquid sphere. Miles of ocean stretched on in exactly the pattern the Cosmos had intended, until you reached the tree. From the beginning of time, she had stood there, her roots planted firmly in the planet's core. Each day for eons the forces of the Cosmos conspired to find new and imaginative ways to torture her, and find them they did. Through every trial and every torment, however, she did not once waver.

Laekma did not waver as the waves crashed against her surface. She neither faltered when bolts of lightning struck the sea, nor when wind and rain churned the waters into an obsidian void that boiled like a witch's brew and threatened to uproot her and send her hurtling into oblivion. When the sky turned its lightning on her, a few leaves crumbled to ash and fell into the dreaded waters, but nothing else.

The Cosmos was stumped.

For once, Kalvera was at peace. The Morgun Sea was still and silent. Laekma's branches swayed lightly in the breeze. The sun shone gently in the breeze. All was well.

And then the stars began to fall.

It seemed as if the sky was collapsing. Meteors streaked through

the sky until it was more brown than blue. Tidal waves rose from points of impact, sweeping across the sea in droves. Fire caught from seemingly nowhere, great infernos rising from the tides and devouring the air. Laekma stood in the center of it all, straining to hold herself upright in the wind. From her lofty height, she could see the world burn, and knew it was all because of her. In all her lifetime, she had never seen such horror, and at once, she knew what she must do.

She let go.

In an instant, she was swept into the air. The wind and rain beat at her furiously, and for the first time, she let them win. Flames devoured her as she fell into the ocean, singeing her bark and burning her leaves to ash. Her trunk splintered in the heat, long cracks splitting her into dozens of pieces. Still, the Cosmos refused to relent, burning her to ash and sweeping her away, spreading her remains until it was satisfied that all evidence of their greatest mistake was eradicated. Only then did the waters still, the sky clearing as the flames exhausted their seemingly limitless energy. Once again, there was peace on Kalvera.

The world maintained its contentment for a few moments, and this time it almost seemed as if the peace might last. The Cosmos had achieved its perfection; Kalvera was at rest. The ocean sparkled in the sunlight, gentle waves the picture of tranquility. Beneath the surface, however, something was stirring, and had been since the moment Laekma fell.

Over her life, Laekma had collected many words. Few existed outside her, and they were mostly mundane. Simple nouns and a few sparse adjectives, describing sea and sky and not much else. She had quickly grown bored, and began creating her own. In her mind, she wove rich worlds where creatures walked on islands and built houses and carved rocks and brought more to the Cosmos than water and lightning and pain. She made words for things she saw, but her favorites were for the things she couldn't. The ideas that couldn't be seen, that were only felt. Love, bravery, family, home.

Hope was perhaps her favorite.

As the stars fell, she found new words, ones she would have preferred never to exist. Misery, agony, hopelessness, all were created

in the space of a few moments. The greatest horrors of the world all sprung from one incomprehensible instance of excruciating torment. Even as she was taken and ripped apart, as the very matter of her existence was decimated, she continued to create. Her final word was unique to her language. Helnama, a mother's sacrifice.

All of her creations were ingrained deep within her, in the very atoms of her being. Each mote of ash contained its own story. One told of a sandy beach and round, smooth shells. Another spoke of lakes, chartreuse birds swooping down to poke at crabs in the muddy shallows. They lay dormant, waiting for the day when their ideas could play out in the real world. That day came quickly in the moments after her death, in quite the spectacular fashion.

Suddenly, islands broke through the water's tranquil surface. Dozens of them dotted the water, growing larger by the second. The landscapes evolved, some rising higher and higher until they sported jagged mountain peaks. Others grew thick forests or fields of flowers, while some stayed bare and sandy. Before the Cosmos could even comprehend what was happening, the world shifted again, unique landscapes coming alive with sound as animals sprang into existence. Birds soared above treetops, snakes sunned on rocky beaches, bugs buzzed and skittered across dirt. The Cosmos could only watch, stunned, as whole new species came into being in a matter of minutes. Wherever ash had settled, life began. Every story Laekma had dreamed, every word she had thought into existence, each found their place on an island.

For centuries the Cosmos tried to wipe Kalvera out, and found that it couldn't. No matter how hard it tried, the little planet could not be touched. Thrown stars missed, storms dissipated, tsunamis shrunk into the ocean before hitting the shore. Little things could still hit, minor storms and earthquakes, even volcanic eruptions, but those were few and far between. Kalvera spun on, relatively unharmed.

The Cosmos glared helplessly, unable to do anything but watch as Kalvera defied its expected perfection. It watched as creatures learned to walk and talk and think. It watched as they named the things around them, pulled to certain words like moths to a flame, blissfully unaware

of why. Unaware of what had come before them, of what had given those names the first time. It watched as these creatures made new things, and new words in turn.

Domela for the small, sturdy houses built by the people of the forested island of Yaori. Quola for the floral tea brewed by the inhabitants of Kashana. Lumevra for the festival held every year on Gunlu, when lit candles filled every spare space. All these words, and more, were created to describe every wondrous thing the Cosmos had tried so hard to prevent. And one more.

Laekma.

Creator:

The Spider

by Willow Moon

Second Place

In a small field of nettles, near the woods, a spider quietly waited. He had often used his beautiful woven web to catch food but now he was hoping to catch something different. He watched with his heart pounding and anxiety making him tremble as a sweet looking bumblebee didn't look carefully enough and flew into his web. Her eyes were wide with fear as she struggled to break free of the silk. He crawled towards her silently but with a shy smile.

"If you're going to kill me, just make it a quick death spider." She buzzed with fear. The spider opened his jaws and the bumblebee braced for the world to go dark. But instead, the spider cut the silk entangling her, letting her fly free.

"I don't want to hurt you. I was wondering if you would be my friend." The spider smiled up at her shyly. He was an elderly spider and he knew he was destined to die soon. He was scared about dying. Scared about dying alone with no one who liked him at his side. But instead of finding a friend, the bumblebee's fear quickly turned to anger.

"Are you kidding me? Why would I ever be friends with a blood sucking *monster* like you? YOU JUST KIDNAPPED ME IN YOUR WEB!" She yelled. Then, with a sharp buzz, she flew away into the forest. The spider felt like someone had turned him into glass and shattered him with a hammer. He stared at his beautiful web no longer with pride but with absolute shame. The bumblebee was right. He was nothing but a blood sucking monster. Extending his leg, he began to cut down the web. It took many hours and with every fallen string, the spider's sorrow grew. When it was all said and done, the spider climbed up a nettle and watched the breeze carry the little strands of silk away. Watching the wispy lines twist and turn and fly away made his eyes fill with tears. On his way down the nettle, a sparrow suddenly swooped over him knocking him off the leaves with such force the nettle didn't have the chance to sting him.

He hit the ground hard. The sparrow flew away seemingly having forgotten about him. Was that all he was? An unloved monster that would be forgotten by the world? An insignificant being whose only purpose was to live, eat, and die? A friendless arachnid that had no hope, had never had hope, and would most likely never feel it. With all this grief piling up, the spider suddenly wailed and collapsed in sorrow. He started crying. He cried because he was going to die. He cried because no one loved him. He cried because there was so much beauty in the world that he would never see. He cried because he was alone. Alone with nothing. Alone with no one. Alone. Forgotten. A monster. He cried all throughout the rest of the day and well into the night. His eyes were so clouded with grief and sorrow he didn't even notice that a small sprout had grown beside him. As he continued to cry his soul out, the sprout grew into a small plant.

The plant had long beautiful leaves. A strong and sturdy stem with the slightest fuzz that looked as silky as webbing. It also had soft, golden petals. It was a flower. A small dandelion had grown. Suddenly sensing he was not alone, the spider looked up and saw the flower. It was swaying ever so gently in the summer breeze. The light of the half moon made it seem to glow. The spider stood up very slowly unsure about this new visitor. One of the leaves gently brushed him. He closed his eyes expecting a sharp sting but instead was greeted by a soft leaf stroking him as if the flower was saying *everything is going to be ok. I'm here for you*. The spider smiled.

"Hello there," he whispered to the flower, "Will you be my friend?" He looked at the petals with an almost pleading look. The flower dipped in the wind in almost a nodding fashion as if it understood the spider. His heart swelled with newfound joy. He wrapped his two front legs around the stem in an embrace. He thought to himself as he enjoyed the company of his one and only friend. He thought about all the smallest beauties of the field. He was touched that the flower had sensed his grief and grew to hold him close and comfort him. Maybe, he thought, even a monster like me can be happy. He thought about the bumblebee. Was he really a monster? He hadn't meant to scare her and he certainly didn't enjoy that he had to kill to survive. It was just his lot in life.

Tired from crying, and comforted by his new friend, the spider curled up at the base of the stem under the petals and fell asleep. He didn't dream that night. But he was happy and cozy that night and as the moon reached its peak in the sky, he died quietly. Sensing the spider was no longer with it, the flower, being a *true* friend, cried for him. Small flecks of golden pollen fell to the grassy floor. It would always miss it's friend as their time together had been a brief hour but it was still enough for them to have grown close.

The bumblebee had gone to her hive and spread the rumor of a vicious spider that nearly ate her and that died later that night alone, unhappy, and cold. But the flower knew better. It protected the spider's body with it's leaves and petals from any wandering robin, blue jay, or sparrow. And when the flower died a year later, the seeds it had spread grew among the nettles. You see, the bumblebee got it wrong. The spider was a gentle creature who did not die alone but with a friend beside him. He had not died unhappy but quietly with hope and joy filling his heart. And he did not die cold but surrounded by the warmth of the flower. The dandelions spread year after year and the spider was soon forgotten. But, if you listen closely to the newest generation in the nettle field, you might still hear the beautiful story of a spider. A spider who lived, loved, lost and dared to be more than nature intended.

So listen close dear reader. From grief we can find hope in the most unlikely places. Whether it be a seed that grew to comfort us, or someone who sat down and did not try to force us to be happy and change us, but someone who will love you for who you are.

Special thanks to my friends Zazzy and Dras. Thank you for being my flower in my hardest moment.

The Golden Needle

by Greta Brown

Third Place

It was known all throughout the Kingdom of Trapunta that Borovnica Lepotica was the best seamstress for hundreds of miles since Starejsi had passed away. That had been in the second age, though, too long ago for anyone to remember. Any needle she held became like a pen in the hand of a great writer, and she was able to create beautiful things with seeming ease.

Nobody was surprised, then, when she moved to the Province of Callor, a short walk away from the royal palace. She couldn't stand how busy it was, but she wanted a secure income more than she wanted peace, so she stayed.

When her last needle finally broke, she sighed, put down the dress she was working on, and went out the door, grabbing her bag. It took some time to find anywhere to shop, but finally, she found a run-down little store. The bell on the door tinkled as she walked in cautiously. Within the shop, she was met with haphazardly organized shelves of all shapes and sizes. She stepped around the overflowing bookshelves, looking for the needles. After a bit of searching, she came upon what seemed to be a drawerfull.

Though she was enticed by all the needles, her eye was caught by a glittering golden needle at the bottom of the drawer. There was no price marked, and the gold coloring did not seem promising. Despite this, she took it to the counter where an elderly woman was sitting, deeply engrossed in her colorful crochet project.

"Excuse me?" asked Borovnica quietly. The woman looked up, smiling, "Hello! What are you buying today, darling?"

"This needle," she placed the needle on the counter. "How much?"
"450 penger."

"That seems like too little!"

"Not at all, dear," said the woman kindly, "your crest says that you are a seamstress, and you must make a living somehow."

“Thank you!” said Borovnica with a grin. She gripped the tiny needle between her fingers and waved the woman goodbye as she left. The moment she got home, she threaded the golden needle and picked up work again.

For only 450 penger, it was a great needle. It caught the fabric smoothly, gliding through the thick wool easily. Borovnica liked it so much that she worked late into the night, purely to enjoy the needle. Working at this pace, the dress was soon done. When the customer came to pick it up, she was delighted with Borovnica’s work.

“Thank you Nica! It is beautiful! Callor has brought out the best in you!”

“Of course! I hope it keeps you warm all winter.”

“You are too kind, Nica. I will try it on and come straight back!”

Borovnica smiled widely as Laguna left. Five minutes later, Laguna came back. Much to Borovnica’s surprise, she was frowning.

“What’s wrong, Laguna?”

“Only everything,” replied Laguna dejectedly

“But you were smiling so brightly a minute ago, what happened?”

“I can’t explain it so leave off.” and Laguna stormed out, leaving Borovnica confused. She decided to start on her next project to calm down.

She laid the pattern pieces down on some red linen, trying to relax as she cut them out. Once it came time for sewing, Borovnica was mostly calm, and she forgot about the event for the time being. The way the needle made it so easy to sew brought her peace, and she focused solely on her project for the next week or so.

When the second customer came in to collect her dress, Borovnica began to remember what had happened with Laguna, but she knew that it couldn’t be any fault of her own, and tried to forget about it.

“Here’s your dress!” Borovnica handed over the garment.

“It’s lovely, thank you.” replied Ausaz, taking Borovnica’s work,

“5,000 penger does not seem like enough.”

“Glad you like it”

“Thank you. I’ll see you around town, yes?”

“Of course! Enjoy your dress.”

Borovnica took a deep breath, glad that there was no strangeness this time. She contently made dinner and went straight to bed. A couple

days later, she spotted Ausaz in the street, wearing the red dress. “Ausaz! Good to see you!” Borovnica waved enthusiastically at her friend, pushing her way through the busy streets, “How is the dress working out for you?” Ausaz eyed Borovnica suspiciously and kept walking. “What’s the matter?” called Borovnica, trotting quickly, trying to keep up with Ausaz

“What are you doing?!”

“What’s going on?” said Borovnica worriedly.

“Don’t hurt me! Leave me alone!” and Ausaz sped up at such a pace that Borovnica couldn’t keep up. Borovnica stopped to catch her breath, confused and hurt. She went back home slowly and began working on her newest project.

Word had spread of her skills, and the queen herself had requested a dress to wear at a speech. The fabric was a dark blue silk with silvery embroidered stars. The golden needle seemed smoother than usual, and the gown was done in two weeks, which was not much considering Borovnica’s tiny stitching.

On the day of the speech, Borovnica woke early to take the dress to the queen. Her highness smiled beamingly, and gushed over the quality of the gown. Borovnica stayed over for the next few hours to make small alterations until the dress fit the queen perfectly. Borovnica looked on from the sidelines as the queen stepped out onto the stage, and grinned as the queen began to speak.

“People of Trapunta!” There was a pause and the audience stood still. “Go home! You are better citizens when you are working. I do not feel like talking anyway.” and the queen whirled around and went back inside the palace. There was a great clamor outside and Borovnica felt very worried. This was the third time such a thing had happened. She helped the queen to undress, and another sudden change came over her highness.

“Oh Nica, I do not know what came over me. I should’ve spoken. I had an entire speech written out! Perhaps my shoes were too tight.”

“I’m very sorry, your highness. I hope your next speech goes better.”

Though Borovnica wore a smile, she felt a sneaking suspicion that it was not the queen’s shoes that had caused the problem. In need of advice, she went to the temple where the oracle sat. She said a quick prayer, and knelt before the oracle.

“Oh Jakintsu, inspired by the gods, please tell me, are my dresses changing the personalities of those who wear them?” After waiting a couple seconds, Jakintsu spoke softly but firmly.

“Golden.” At first Borovnica was confused, but then she realized: the golden needle! She thanked the oracle profusely and rushed back home. Freeing the thread from the offending needle, she clutched it in her fingers and walked the two miles to the goldsmith.

At her request, with some other gold, the needle was melted into a figurine of a rabbit. When it came out of the casting mold, it sat there, and then came alive, hopping around the room. For the rest of her life, Borovnica kept the gold rabbit in her sewing room to keep her company.

Short Story

Grades 9 & 10

POETRY
DRAWING
PHOTOGRAPHY
SHORT
STORY



OUR OWN
PROFESSIONS

보고 싶습니다 (I Miss You Dearly)

by Grace Elliott

First Place

The callouses on her wrinkled hands tell stories of the lives she'd lived.

The one on her right thumb was from working in kitchens when the skin was still smooth. The center of her hand turned to leather years ago, and her fingertips are made of thick skin, perpetually memorizing what her mind couldn't keep— or perhaps, what it didn't want to. She is a woman who shifts between two lives in order not to forget what was important. There was one she lived, before she exchanged a country for another, a dream for a dream— though that life lacked her son. There is one after, with him in it, and he is like a candle illuminating a dark room— but that life had sickness. Sometimes though, these lives mix, and they form two silhouettes— both sacrificing themselves for the other.

Seong Ha-Neul was raised on a Busan farm, born in 1953. Her childhood was poverty, work, dirt, and silence. She had been the last of a line of girls, sisters she'd loved so dearly. This is the first life she led, but the memories of this one have grown scarcer as time goes without her. She supposes that the second began when she was 22 years old, when she left her home for America. She came then with her husband.. He had been an American soldier, with family in the United States and shining eyes as gray as the sea between her home and his. When her father had first seen those eyes, it was as if he'd finally been proud of his daughter. She thought she could see on his face every dream he wanted to give to her, but it was only momentary. Though he had never cried, she thought then that maybe she saw tears gathering in his eyes— but if they had, it was nothing compared to her silent weeping that had filled the home when she was told of the marriage. The smoke of her sadness curled to the ceilings and polluted the air— a smoke nobody else could see. But she'd gotten on a plane

anyway (because the money that bought the ticket was hard to come by), and the suitcase she held wasn't made to carry a grief that large.

The first night had been the hardest. She couldn't get in bed with her husband.

Couldn't. Wouldn't. When she'd emptied her belongings from her single suitcase, she'd found her heart resting among the clothes. She'd pulled off her skin, blood pulsing out of her in rhythm, wet and hot as tears, thick. Ha-Neul had laid on the floor all that night, in a puddle wet and fluid. There was nothing she'd ever known that could ache like that yet—and leave her without a body. Maybe her sadness was too great, a tsunami her flesh couldn't contain, and so she emptied, liquid smooth on the carpet. All night, her heart beat beside her, and maybe it was a cry for the sisters she could no longer touch, for the family who gave her away with hope. A part of her had disappeared then, and she knew it was packed into the dirt outside her father's house. When that night had come to a close, the sun rose to paint the small, cold apartment as Ha-Neul watched. She got up and stepped back into her skin. She pulled open her chest and fixed her heart. It never happened to her again.

The summer when she'd been 27, Ha-Neul found herself pregnant. Still, she'd been working tirelessly, burning her hands on plates, washing dishes in a sweltering kitchen. Her feet had hurt more as they'd begun to swell, but nothing was like the exhaustion. She had been powerless to it. There was only one thing that kept her working, that didn't allow her to collapse in that year. She knew then that she would never forgive herself if her child lived to have to make sacrifices for others, or if he suffered like she had. He wouldn't have to work tirelessly, live paycheck to paycheck, wouldn't worry about the food he couldn't afford or the illnesses too expensive to have.

When her son was born, he came on a night that was unusually warm for spring, after 14 hours in the large, quiet, sterile building. He fit into her arms perfectly then, with her nose and the same bow of lip that she had. He was Daniel, her small son, for the biblical prophet. Ha-Neul hadn't been incredibly familiar with the bible at the time, but names here didn't carry the importance nor the weight they had in

Korea. She'd swept her fingers across his forehead, traced the slope of his forehead to his tiny nose, and she'd wondered then if he would ever grow to know the country in his blood like she did.

Daniel had been a boy of dreams. As children often don't, he never grasped the fine line between his life and the other lives of the children in his grade, though he was teased. The things his mother had done that differed from others, he never noticed, at least not then. Her coupons, her sewing machine (and the scraps of cloth his clothes had been stitched from), the trips to Salvation Army, the way she picked him up from school smelling like dish soap and exhaustion. The way the other kids mocked her for it. He was a boy of dreams and music, imaginative, creative, and quiet. When Ha-Neul gave her son a violin to play (rented, battered, expensive as it had been) he never put it down. In those years, Ha-Neul watched as her son spun gold from the air with his hands. He was made of talent, intelligence, and dreams— but the years in between these ones and the next are blurry to her. She doesn't remember when he got so tall.

A blip in time— She cannot remember what happened here. Medication sometimes has the suffocating side effect of stealing your life away from you, and all you have left of it. No— she has it, she can still recall. She remembers hurt, pain— Uterine cancer— and she remembers packaged boxes. She remembers doctors offices, her son crying, her crying into her hands in the dark of a room. The boxes, which were meant for college, for Daniel's future, ripped from his hands because there was no other money for treatment. She remembers his resentment, and her understanding. But her love for her son, the unbearable love she holds for him, is what stays with her.

There is a quiet room the hospital gives you when they send you to die. Her son sits beside her, his hand over her small calloused one. She wants to push it away, but it envelopes her. She's unfinished with him, she hasn't told him how sorry she is. But time does not stop turning for anyone. Her son is a candle in a dark room— he's warm, and his hand is on hers— and a silhouette disappears.

Don't Lose Your Voice.

by Lily Carpenter

Second Place

Nova had always been curious as to why people went mute. As a kid, he was infected with the idea that being mute was the result of some unknown disease — as if people’s voice boxes were subject to the sudden and devastating possibility of just shriveling up. The idea had burrowed into his head like a thorny weed, slinking its roots into the narrow crevasses of his mind. Then, one day during third grade recess, a girl his age came up to him. She had a little pen and notepad. She had scrawled on it in big, messy letters, “Can I be your friend?” He was about to respond when his mind came to the realization that she couldn’t speak — and, of course, his conclusion told him that she would pass on some “mute disease” to him. His eyes had widened, and his heart had begun pounding. At that moment, Nova had feared so much for his voice, that he had yelled at her, “No! I don’t wanna lose my voice!” He ran, hearing her sniffles grow faint as he dashed to the other side of the playground.

He never saw that little girl again.

Now, Nova just felt bad for that girl. It wasn’t until the end of elementary school that he learned that there wasn’t any “mute disease.” Similar to the image his brain had conjured up as a child, the thought had soon shriveled up and withered away, unable to replant itself within his mind. Even then, there was a lingering fear that remained ever since — the fear of losing his voice. It had stuck around, as he now had a bustling career in a small, yet enthusiastic singing group. They would often perform for small audiences and schools.

Even now, these reminders of reality only provided small comfort to the nightmare Nova was stuck in. His mind ran wild as he desperately scrambled to get away from a rushing wave of thoughts.

It looked like words, tumbling over each other as they tried to swallow him whole. They grew closer and closer, laughing with a menacing tone as he tried to outrun them. He heard whispers; each word repeated what it read. He heard them growing closer as he ran straight toward a wall, the wave almost looming over him. He needed to get away, he—

Nova jolted awake in a split second, his head still swimming with the fear of drowning in those words. That's strange, he doesn't usually get nightmares like that. He decided to shrug it off as minor stage fright and tried to close his eyes again, focusing on slowing his breath and letting his muscles relax. He was trying to think of something positive for the moment, then remembering what he thought of earlier today; childhood memories. As their bus drove through the state of Oregon, he had felt nostalgic looking at the scenery going by; small towns, dense forest and occasional fields. Every now and then it would rain, just a sprinkle, then it would go right back to being sunny again. Sometimes you could spot a rainbow. It was rather nice, and reminded him of his home as a kid.

Currently, Nova envisioned himself walking through a forest path, one he frequented as a kid. He knew where every berry bush was, every bump in the path to avoid. Every fallen log to hop over, or small game trail to investigate. He envisioned himself as a little kid again, running along that worn path with a red plastic wind wheel in his hand. He had the biggest typical little kid grin on his face, anticipating the fresh berries on the next wild raspberry bush he would run into. His smile faded when he found that the berries were gone. Looking over to the other side, he still saw no berries. Assuming that he just stopped too early along the path, he ran along with his arms spread out like an airplane.

Nova watched the bushes passing by as he went along the trail. None of them had berries, when they usually would. Perhaps the berries just didn't grow this year. Well, he could hope for some next time. He ran along the path once more. This path was frequented within the small town, mostly by tourists, so it was fairly worn down. It ran along a dense forest next to the town. He would play on it often, enjoying

the wilderness. Though, it was beginning to seem much longer than he remembered. He slowed, growing tired.

Then, Nova heard an odd noise. It almost sounded like paper ripping, then crumbling.

Curious, he traveled towards it. It grew louder as he approached, then stopped. "Hello?" He called out, his throat feeling dry. He turned the corner around a thick section of brush, seeing a little blonde girl in a blue dress. She was sitting on a mossy log, facing away, surrounded by small balls of crumpled paper on the ground. He called out again, puzzled. "Hello? Are you alright?" His throat felt even dryer, his voice beginning to get raspy. He should've brought a water bottle with him. "I'm Nova. Do you wanna play with my wind wheel? It goes fast when you blow on it," He demonstrated by blowing on it to make it turn, though his new friend wasn't looking. Sticking the handle into a pocket in his overalls, he grew closer and picked up a crumpled piece of paper.

Written in big, childish letters, the paper read "Can I be your friend?"

He grew puzzled. He dropped that one and grabbed the next, unfurling it. It was the same message, but in slightly different handwriting. As he went from one to the next, he noticed that it started looking similar to his handwriting. He cautiously walked around the log to see the girl's face, immediately reeling back when his eyes landed on her throat. There was a large hole in her flesh, appearing to be rotting away. He could've sworn he saw strings of flesh within, dried and shriveled. It took effort to not throw up. The edges of the large hole were black with rot, with small, faded streaks of dried blood that ran down her neck, having soaked into the blue and white dress she wore.

The girl looked up at him, staring with wide eyes. She opened her mouth, taking a moment to form words.

She closed her mouth, then opened it again, matching Nova's gaze. "Why won't you be my friend?"

That was Nova's voice.

He tried to scream, but nothing came out. A feeling of dread washed over him as he jolted awake once more, trying to make any sound. He was terrified, he couldn't speak. He sat up, coughing into his elbow. When he pulled his face away, his arm was splattered with blood. He desperately tried to make sound, trying to believe that he still had his voice, that she couldn't have taken it.

Nova looked towards the hallway. There was the little girl in the blue dress, barely around the corner. She spoke, the sound beginning to shift to fit her likeness.

"Thank you, new friend."

I Am Stella

by Denrie Gray

Third Place

I open my eyes and a piercing light overtakes everything, blinding my first taste of sight. I feel warmth on my scalp and heat seeping into the roots of my hair, but my skin is like ice and rock. I am alive.

As I come to exist, I know who I am. I am Stella. I am a mother, a royal and a goddess, and my children are waiting for me, below the clouds, under the sky.

My eyes adjust, and I see. Flurries of mauve and indigo, forming a soft bed of clouds. A vast sky; streaks of passionate oranges and reds over cold gray. Two imposing shadows stretching from my sides.

A pair of hands weigh on my shoulders and I remember a memory I never earned. My creation, my goddesses manipulating and melding air and clouds to craft my body, and using their tears and soul to craft my heart. I am Stella, and I know the women standing on the sky beside me.

There is the quiet one with a sharp face and gloomy eyes. Luna, her beauty in her enchanting symmetry and demanding grace, and the regal way she carries herself.

There is the smiling one with fire in her soul and tears settling under her rigid jaw. Sola, her beauty in her radiant smile and fierce presence, and in her powerful athletic build.

Each woman tightens their grip on my shoulders. They stand still on the clouds, looking down on me, and something inside me stirs. First, it manifests as a little spark in my soul, a phenomenon I couldn't possibly describe. Then a fire grows and burns and whistles within my chest. My eyes start pouring out tears as I wheeze, laugh, and sob at nothing in particular. Something strange, bright, joyful, devastating, and new courses through my veins, and I feel closer to every mortal

beneath me. A question lingers in my throat before escaping with a heavy breath, "What is this?"

As the words came out, I knew. I feel that I am sinking in the clouds, I feel that I am shining with the stars, I feel I am Stella. My name is Stella and now, I can feel.

With my vision and my feelings and every power I was born with, I rise to my feet. "My subjects," I call out, "my children, what do you need?" I close my eyes.

Limbs to move, voices to be heard. I hear them. *Bigger, stronger bodies, to command around and to live in.* I look back to Luna and Sola. They give me nods and smiles.

I scoop up the most beautiful clouds I see, cradling them and gently swiping at the fluffy white to shape them. I keep the forms close to my heart as I sculpt them to have my bones. I create their muscle and fat to be special, all different but the same. Some of my children will stand tall and lean, others short and plump. I give each vessel my love and my time, and hope that as I send them down to the untethered souls of my subjects, that they all love my work as much as I do.

I watch with careful eyes as each body comes to life and discovers every sense that I did. Warmth, ice, sight, love. And I hope they discover a connection to me: Stella, their mother, their queen, their goddess.

I notice Sola and Luna looking down at me, Sola showing her shining teeth in a bright grin and Luna with something subtly sweet in her usually distant expression. "How strong you are," Sola beams as she leans down and pats my shoulder, my whole body rattling from her mighty touch.

"And how powerful," Luna purrs, running a kind hand through the waves of my hair.

Pride bursts within me, and I grab and hold the women close to me. They know who I am, I know who I am, and someday my children will, too.

I am Stella.

Short Story

Grades 11 & 12

POETRY
DRAWING
PHOTOGRAPHY
SHORT
STORY



OUR OWN
PROFESSIONS

Foursquare

by Savannah Mitchell

First Place

I always think that if I sit quietly enough against the back fence, my grey winter jacket will blend in with the dreary November sky, and Flannery O’Leary won’t see me. I’m always wrong; she always does.

She runs over with a smile, a Trix yogurt she smuggled from the cafeteria grasped in her right hand. She waves at me with her other hand, but like always, I never wave back. I just watch as she plops down next to me with an energetic thump.

“Hey kiddo!” she exclaims, her face filling with a gap-toothed smile. She always calls me kiddo, even though she’s only two weeks older than me. “How’s it going?”

I’m fine. I hope it doesn’t rain.

“I think I’m doing pretty good today. I got a perfect score on my spelling test, which means I get to pick out a new game at the store.” She peels the lid off of her yogurt. “And it’s so pretty out. I bet it’ll be sunny soon.”

I look up at the sky. The clouds are denser than they were before.

Pulling a spoon from her pocket, she begins to eat, not seeming to mind when a few drops of purple yogurt land on her shirt. Looking at her, I wonder how she isn’t cold. It’s obvious that she dresses herself; I don’t know anyone our age whose parents would want them wearing a sparkly red t-shirt and a pleated skirt when it’s almost winter. But Flannery doesn’t seem to mind the cold, just like Theo Collins, who wears neon yellow gym shorts year-round.

“Are you gonna see the new Harry Potter?” she asks, slightly muffled by a mouthful of yogurt.

No. It’s too loud at the movie theater.

“I’m not. I hate going to the movies, and Harry Potter kinda stinks. I read this other book that’s way better. They should make a movie for that.”

Flannery starts describing the plot of the book, getting up at one point to throw her empty container away. She doesn’t stop talking as she walks away. I watch her flounce over to the trash can, her sometimes-brown-sometimes-blond hair bouncing as she walks. She waves at the people playing foursquare as she comes back to the fence, but I’m too far away to hear what they say in response.

“...So Marcia makes them all go down the garbage chute, even the boy from outside, and they just get covered in trash! It’s so gross, but it was actually really smart. Marcia’s, like, a genius, and she’s really pretty, too. That’s why she’s my favorite.”

I’ve missed too much of Flannery’s summary to understand what she’s talking about, but I keep listening anyway. I like the way her voice sounds, bright and happy.

“Then they all have to leave so that the Hunter won’t find them. The boy doesn’t want to go because he thinks Marcia’s evil, but he doesn’t say anything. He never talks, kinda like you.”

She keeps going, but as I listen, I watch the game of foursquare over on the blacktop. Theo is easy to see in his yellow shorts, but to me, the other three people could be anyone. They all have the same hair and the same faces, and wear similar sweaters under their coats.

I watch Theo serve the ball to the square diagonal from him. The thump of red rubber hitting asphalt becomes rhythmic as the ball is passed from one identical kid to another, over and over. Every so often, someone is forced out of their square and replaced by someone else. I don’t understand the game, but I watch as the rounds repeat, over and over. Thump. Thump. Thump.

“So Aunt Zelda has everyone come to the duck pond, even Marcia, and it shows them that the boy’s real name is-”

The red rubber ball flies out of someone’s hands and hurdles towards Flannery and me. I duck with a yelp, and the ball hits the fence

just above my left shoulder.

“Are you okay?” Flannery asks, picking up the ball.

I think so.

“Can you give that back?” one of the foursquare players yells.

“You can come get it,” Flannery shouts in response, hugging the ball to her chest.

After a bit of arguing, the group sends Theo across the field, and Flannery and I watch as he trudges towards us.

“Can I have it now?” he asks, out of breath. Flannery stands and hands it to him.

“Here you go,” she says, “you should be more careful with that. You almost hit somebody.”

“Who? One of you re**rds?” Theo doesn’t know what the word means, he’s only heard others say it, but it’s still full of hate. It still makes Flannery look like she might cry. She knows what it means, just like I do.

“Go away.” Flannery does everything she can to keep her voice from shaking. Theo scoffs, but leaves. Flannery watches him go, then sits down again.

“I’m sorry,” she says, her voice catching in her throat, “are you okay?”

I’m fine. This happens all the time. What he said, not the ball thing. I don’t normally have balls launched at my head. Are you okay? Please don’t cry, Flannery. He didn’t mean you. There’s nothing wrong with you.

I expect her to go back to the way she was before, chattering away about her book, or one of the millions of other things she fills our time together with. Nothing ever seems to hurt Flannery, things normally just bounce right off of her. But this time, she’s silent. She just sits, looking out across the playground. The game of foursquare has resumed exactly as it was before, the ball flying from one set of hands to another. Thump. Thump. Thump. Nearby, a set of girls play

double-dutch, the jump ropes in their hands hitting the ground in even intervals. People laugh and scream as they rush down the slides and swing on the swings and chase each other across the open field. It would be a cacophony from up close, but from far away, the sounds blend together into a sort of melody. It almost feels like Flannery notices it too. We sit, and we listen, and we find comfort in the silence.

The spell is broken by the harsh ringing of the bell. I habitually cover my ears, and Flannery habitually covers hers. She stands, and reaches out a hand to help me up.

“It’s kind of nice being quiet,” she says, “does the world always look like that to you.”

Yeah.

“No wonder you never say anything. I wish I could do that.” She smiles, but her eyes are still sad. “See you tomorrow, kiddo.”

With a wave, she starts running across the field; her usual energy seems to have returned. I watch her make her way to her classmates, who are lining up to go back inside. I begin walking towards my own line, but with my grey winter jacket against the dreary November sky, none of my classmates seem to notice that I’m there. That’s okay, Flannery knows I’m here.

Witch Picnic

by Skylar Viene

Second Place

The kitchen fills with wild scents of the feast-to-come--sizzling pans of succulent meats; rolls and sourdoughs baking; dashes of exotic spices from faraway places: All bathe the room in a tantalizing haze. Sitting in its very center boils a giant cauldron-- hanging above an open fire, churning with a yellow-brown muck of herbs, yak milk, and sugar. Only a precious few additions remain until the secret ingredient: children.

As if they've heard me thinking, one pops their little blonde head around the corner and says, "Miss, we need to get home now! It's almost dinner time. Our parents will worry if we don't leave soon."

"Oh, I forgot to tell you! Silly me," I say, shaking my head, "Dearest, I informed your parents you'd be eating here. I thought it would be a lovely treat for you and your brothers for being so... sweet. But, if you really want to eat cabbage for dinner, I'll go get the mule read--"

"NO! I mean... no thank you, Miss. If it's still alright, I'd like to eat here. What are we having for dinner?"

"It's a surprise! I'll call you when it's ready, okay?"

"Okay!"

And with that, the little boy scampered off to play with his siblings in the other room.

Ah, children, so innocent, so trusting, so naive... It's what makes them taste so good. It's just shameful that so few witches know how to prepare them properly anymore. Everyone thinks it's the tender young meat, but what you really get from cooking children is their soul and spirit. It's very time-consuming and difficult to get these out intact. But it is so worth the effort. A child's soul truly is a one-of-a-kind delicacy.

I turn back to my cauldron and throw a few more ingredients in, mutter a quick, detailed spell over the top, and wait for it to take hold. Yellow becomes molten gold, then liquid silver before finally fading to iridescent black. I dip my spoon, and the taste is perfect. As always.

“Children! Dinner’s ready! One at a time please. My kitchen’s small and gets crowded easily.”

There’s a ruckus in the main room before the youngest scampers in, nearly tripping on his untied laces, then stops beside me. He looks around curiously. Expectantly. Deliciously.

“Here,” I say, handing him a bowl, “Fill it up from that big pot while I get you a plate full of rolls.”

I wait as he hurries over to the cauldron. He’s far too short to reach over the top and too excited to ask for help. It’ll only be seconds before he . . . sploosh, falls in, I think gleefully.

“Oh goodness!” I cry. “Help! Someone help me, please! Your brother’s fallen in!”

The eldest child comes running. I point towards the bubbling cauldron, and he plunges his arms in, desperate to find his younger brother. Almost immediately, he pulls them out with an agonizing scream. Everything beneath his elbows is gone, taken, devoured, and mixed into my delicious brew. He stumbles and falls to the ground, staring at his nonexistent hands in horror. I grab his shirt and drag him back towards the cauldron. He struggles, but without hands, it’s in vain. With a great grunt, I heave him in. He’s quite heavy for an eleven-year-old. But it’s no matter, he still ends up in the pot.

I grab my spoon and prepare to add the final ingredient when I hear a floorboard creak behind me. Slowly, I turn to see the middle child, the one I’d forgotten about, trying to edge his way towards the front door, face full of undiluted fear.

“H-h-how could you! You said . . . you said you were gonna make us dinner!”

“And I told you no lie, child. I *did* make you dinner! Now come along; it’ll be much easier for everyone if you just come into the kitchen.”

“No! I’ll never go with you! Let me go, let me out!” He runs to the door and pulls with everything in his little body. But it doesn’t budge, and he turns around just in time to see a gleeful, wicked witch looming over him. He barely has enough time to scream before he’s unceremoniously dumped into the pot.

* ~ ~ * ~ ~ * ~ ~ *

Hours later, after the moon has risen in the sky and the woods look dark and haunting, I’m finally ready to leave. Everything I need is packed into the delicate picnic baskets beside the door. With a wave of my hand, the baskets lift off the ground and dance out the house. I quickly grab my cloak and follow behind them.

I go a ways before stopping at the edge of a grassy river bank. Dark thick trees tower above me, and an owl coos from one of the branches.

“You can come out now; I know you’re all there! You aren’t sneaky at all! You really should work on that.”

There’s a beat of silence before five figures emerge from the shadows, all of them covered by thick, black cloaks. One by one, they shed these to reveal themselves as gorgeous women in spectacular dresses. And then I’m surrounded by them, hugged and fussed over and teased. Finally, my coven is back together.

“Oh, it’s been so long, hasn’t it lovelies?” Cecilia hisses, her auburn curls bobbing and sapphire eyes glowing. “Those damn hunters always ruin everything!”

“They do, don’t they?” Evelyn replies, her voice innocent yet sickly sweet. “I was so heartbroken when we had to keep pushing it back. I know it was for safety’s sake, but it’s been, what, 70 years now? I can only spend so much time seducing men and cursing beautiful women!”

Her twin adds in a much deeper voice, “Indeed, I can only rein in my sister for so long before she inevitably causes a catastrophe.”

“Oh, Vicky, you’re just being dramatic!”

“I’m really not, Evelyn. Don’t you remember . . .” Someone’s stomach loudly growls, interrupting Victoria.

“Alright, alright,” I say, “I know we’re all excited, but I think it

would be best to continue this while we eat. I am ravenous!”

Everyone steps back while I set up the feast. First, I unfold a large, ornate rug, draping it over the plush grass. Then come the porcelain plates and shining silverware. Then the food, the tender braised lamb and hollow-thorn soup. The delicate jewelfish noodles drenched in weeping willow sauce. Mountains of honey rolls and star-peach pies. And finally, my legendary screaming delight, placed in the very center of it all.

I take a moment to admire my work before turning. “Well ladies,” I announce, a wicked giggle of anticipation upon my lips, “I think it’s time we feast!”

Dumpling

by Hannah Scott

Third Place

His soft and solemn presence quieted the room. Wise gray eyes scanned the faces staring back at him and he ran a hand over thin white hair, preparing to address them. With light yet deliberate steps, John approached the podium, running his hand on the assistive bar. When he reached his target, he turned to the people, forming a thin smile and filling his eyes with what he hoped was a confident gaze.

The heads before him nodded in agreement with John's soft-spoken words as he accepted defeat, then hands applauded as he left the stage. John sat down in the chair next to his wife. Tamisra's thin nose was pointed straight ahead, her eyes boring a hole into the seat in the next row. In an attempt to hold it, John reached towards her hand but she snatched it away quickly. Her husband sighed and turned his attention to the new speaker, the newly elected mayor of their small town.

Combined with wise leadership decisions, his jovial laugh and bright cheeks, which endeared him to everyone he met, had led to a landslide victory in the election. Although this success had caused John some embarrassment, no one had been more bitterly disappointed than his wife. During the election, she proved herself to be his greatest supporter: going house to house to spread his name, developing his "brand," as she called it, even spending hours of her day ironing and tailoring his suit coats. Since these efforts had produced no results, but instead a disappointing defeat, Tamisra blamed John for the loss. More than once, John had caught a murmur of wishes for his ambition and curses on his being a "lazy pushover."

A silent ride home was followed by a slam of the bedroom door. As was his solitary routine, John went around to the back of the house to check on his chickens while he processed the past day. John knew

that Tamsira had poured time and energy into his campaign, and so he understood her frustration, but he couldn't help feeling hurt. He too had given much to the election process. They were trying to get *him* elected after all. Suddenly, something on the ground halted his train of thought. It was small, with closed eyes. Many eggs had recently hatched in his chicken coop but those chicks had already grown to be much bigger than the one he saw now. John gently scooped up the pitiful animal and stared at it.

He decided that he couldn't let it be trampled by its healthier siblings or starve to death here on the ground, so he slipped it into his jacket pocket and turned to the house. Inside, he placed the chicken onto the table to examine it. After a moment, the eyes opened to a weak slit. John's heart was wrenched.

"What is that?"

John jumped and spun around, shielding the chicken from his wife.

"Nothing."

"Don't try to lie to me," scoffed Tamsira as she walked around to see what John was hiding behind his back.

She looked at the chicken, at her husband, then sighed.

"Why is there a chicken on my dining room table?"

John confessed abashedly, "Well... I found it outside and I thought I could, I don't know..."

"Nurse it back to health? Give me a break," laughed Tamsira. "You can barely keep the other chickens alive, let alone bring one back from near death."

John turned back to the animal, nodding. She wasn't wrong. He spent nearly all of his time caring for his chickens when he wasn't at work and yet, much to his dismay, many hadn't lasted long.

"You should keep it."

Startled, John jerked his head back to his wife.

"What?"

"You should nurse it back to full health," Tamsira's eyes glittered

wickedly. “Name it Dumpling. Then we’ll have a nice meal for Thanksgiving.”

Contrary to Tamisra’s judgment, John’s care revitalized the chick. Dumpling was growing larger each day, his feathers becoming more full and his eyes brighter. John mirrored the change in the chicken. He now took Dumpling on his routine walk around the house, admiring the garden and picking him up when the neighborhood cat got too close. John found himself laughing, something he hadn’t done in a long time.

Tamisra scoffed when she saw the bond John had with the chicken. It rested contently on his shoulder and sometimes snuggled into the crook of his elbow. Checking up on Dumpling became routine and almost a respite for John. Through the past months, the couple’s relationship had continued to be tense, and the addition of John’s attention to Dumpling didn’t help Tamisra’s nastiness. She had begun to look at the chicken with more murderous than mocking eyes.

One bitter morning, John left the house, shivering as he pulled on his coat. He was reluctant to leave Dumpling alone with his wife today as she had seemed even more vicious than usual.

Never had a day gone by so slowly for John. The clock’s tick was infuriatingly slow and before lunch even came, he was overwhelmed with impatience. When he had to calm his leg from nervous bouncing, he started laughing at himself and the ridiculous situation. Then he remembered the friend that the chicken had become during a moment of loneliness and the change that was brought about in him. He stopped laughing.

John rushed home that afternoon. His blood pumped frantically inside him as he pictured Tamisra with a knife, an evil smile on her face, and poor Dumpling staring up at her. The car screeched up the driveway and John flew inside. There she was: his wife with hands in Dumpling’s cage. John reached for them and began to call out in horror, but he was silenced when she turned to face him. There was a soft and still look on her face that was foreign to John.

In her arms rested Dumpling, his eyes closed, breathing peacefully. Tamisra glanced up at John and smiled at him and a breath of relief left John.

“I was just looking at him and I don’t know what came over me but I picked him up,” said Tamsira softly. Then she chuckled, “I guess I can see why you like him so much.”

John approached them and put his arm around his wife. She didn’t move away. The couple looked down at the chicken with the eyes of young parents, their hearts softened towards each other.

Our Own Expressions Teen Writing & Art Contest

**Fostering literary expression
and creativity in youth**

Generously sponsored by



piercecountylibrary.org • 253-548-3300