



Cover Art: Holiday Lights (Red Lantern) by Austin Li

## Issue 9

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### Poetry

**Human Misconceptions** By Alexa Bunn

why is there a stairway to heaven,

and a highway to hell.

my asthma doesn't like stairs that much,

and i can't drive on my own.

is there anywhere for me?

Alexa Bunn is a high school senior in Selkirk, Manitoba, She has had two poems previously published in her high school literary magazine 'Mercy Street'. Alexa identifies with her traditional Ojibway heritage as indigenous in Canada.

### **An Open Thank-You Letter to My Dog** By Claire Ahn

Dear Dog, I suppose I should've said it earlier. There was

No time when I saw myself in you more than the time we

Pulled that sled down a snow-covered peak. Flecks of white

Scattering into my peripheral vision and into your fur; ice

Slicing through the sled and breaking frost underneath our feet.

Dog, I need to ask you something—it's been digging incessantly at

My chest since you left me. Did you love me? Because

I loved you. Wholeheartedly. Like a sunrise kissing the

Edge of an ocean & a waterfall cascading down to the ground.

Dog, that day we slid down the hill, plummeting faster than an

Apple plunges toward the ground. We were so eager, anxious and

Ready to fall down. No, please. I wasn't ready for you to

Tumble down Fate's red string so quick. You did it so effortlessly.

Guess it's too late, Dog. I hope you look down from Heaven

And glance down at our measly human lives. Maybe you will find

Some value, some happiness—maybe a sanctuary—in our lost love affair.

Claire Ahn is a student at Rancho Bernardo High School. Her writing has been recognized by the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards and Writopia Lab's Worldwide Plays Festival. She enjoys reading a variety of books and writing, and she hopes to one day become a published novelist. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in Eunoia Review and \*82 Review, among others.

in the pre-dawn

said birdsong to the night wind,

gather me up in your arms

and carry my colors on your daily sojourn

from the mountains on down to the gullies and fields,

and set me loose in summer grasses.

and the old wind replied,

it would be an honor.

Jenna Kurtzweil is twenty one years old and hails from Palatine, IL. Along with her responsibilities as a student at the University of Illinois, Jenna is always looking for new opportunities to experience life through travel, literature, music, and all forms of storytelling. Jenna has also been published in The Noisy Island, and Forest for the Trees.

**Collision Theory** By Vivian Lu

A body wilts

over time. If aging is a catalyst

and death a point of collision,

we constantly react,

desperately resisting forces of nature.

Our bending limbs must snap someday.

We'll weather

whether we want to or not. (Fade with me,

into uncertainty, into a sunset that never ends.

A room with sharp edges and no windows.)

We can no longer deny age

when our fathers decay to gum, no teeth,

welts on their foreheads

like death's branding label, marking what

is his, what has always

been his. We know collisions

with too little energy

do not create a reaction. Why does

it surprise us now

when our cells produce less

bone marrow, our skin refuses to cling

to our skeletons, like it

once did? Our children will have children

and these human beings

will come into contact with absolute orientation.

Time spills

through the gaps of our fingers, like silica,

harbingers of the end.

And when we reach the point of collision,

all we can do is hope

that the remnants of our reaction

yield something sublime,

something untouchable by time itself.

Vivian Lu is a junior at Cherry Hill High School East and the Editor-in-Chief of Bitter Melon Magazine. Her work appears or is forthcoming in National Poetry Quarterly, deLuge, Eunoia Review, and elsewhere. Her writing has been honored by the National Scholastic Art & Writing Awards, the Live Poets Society of NJ, and the Walt Whitman Birthplace Association. Beyond writing, she is the Founder and Executive Director of The Axon Project, a nonprofit organization that seeks to increase accessibility to neuroscience education for high school students.

**I Keep the Time** By Lauren Nolan

i keep the time

from slipping

by pouring it away.

pouring it into the kitchen sink

where it sluices

between coffee grinds and egg shells

it's all rushing away anyways

i am four five seven eight eleven thirteen sixteen sixteen sixteen

a rush of birthday candles

'what do you want to be', they asked

and i had no answers for them

'an artist?'

i am a child

for whom time is swirling too fast

and my mind is whirring too slow.

so i keep the time from slipping

by pouring it away.

because maybe if i push it away

it'll come back to me

like everything i've never found.

Lauren is a senior at Avon Grove High School. In addition to writing, she enjoys piano, violin, and drawing.

**Friendship** By Bryce Langston

I trusted that the sun  
would rise again  
I trusted it would do so  
but I suppose it grew weary of  
the pressure of my dependency  
and the monotony of its cycle  
for it did not rise today  
as it had for me every day before  
Today.

I trusted that the flowers  
would blossom this spring  
as they had every spring  
but they seemed to go the other way  
to cave inwardly  
and trickle shamefully  
into the ground  
afraid to be exposed  
in sunlight that didn't care to shine.

They trickled further  
all the more calloused  
in their wrong-way-wayward ways

that I had never seen them follow before  
Today.

Bryce Langston is from a small town in central Florida. He writes because he enjoys finding and capturing the symbolism and metaphors in everyday life. Bryce's hobbies include playing guitar, playing tennis, and reading.

**4am, Trailer Park:** By Norah Brady

There's a neon palm tree

standing uphill

from where I emerged,

half-awake,

a moth brushing off a synthetic chrysalis

draped in imaginary green and white.

It's just another fixture,

gaudy and bright in the then-discovered early morning.

The dull red of sunrise

sits atop the mountains,

the kind of color that reminds me of midnight,

of times not meant to be seen—

Geese out on the pond,

afraid of my heart in the dark,

my shoes full of dew.

I don't remember looking up

which is why the stars surprise me, still flickering

in the pale gray sky—

the brightness of a planet,

still and steady

catches the corner of my eye,

like the palm tree, like me,

a satellite masquerading

as a star.

Norah Brady is a fifteen-year-old wanna-be poet, author, and actor. She's most at home anywhere she can write, preferably with two cats and quite a few books. You can find her work in Rookie magazine, Stone Soup, and Write the World's 2017 collection: Young Voices Across the Globe.

**Jewelry** By Tobi-Hope Park

I sit in the prenatal black of

A chaotic new moon,

Waist-deep

In the marsh,

It clings to my legs like

A salmon to its home-stream,

Slip-sliding up

the cliffs and

Crags of my shoulder blades

As they extend cupped hands

As pixie-stars fall ash-like

As fingertips touch green

I feel snakes.

They pulse peristaltic,

Tasting the glow of my palms,

Maws encircling

My fingers like rings,

My wrists,

My shoulders,

I am the feeder and the feed,

Yet I feel no fear as

The new moon wilts

And tumbles into the pit.

Tobi was the youngest speaker for the 2016 TedxValenciaHighSchool. She has been published in Adonis Designs Press, Basil O'Flaherty (2 pieces), and Phosphene Literature Journal, Chautauqua Journal, Panoplyzine, and Rattle. She also won a Silver Key in the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards. Tobi writes for many reasons; one of them is to inspire change. She wants to change the world, and in her opinion, change doesn't have to be big. Maybe she can bring a new perspective to light. Maybe her words can bring joy. To her, any small shift can be change.

**Girl at Rest** By Eleanor Colligan

I crave the blinding white,

The sheer intensity of it;

Burning your corneas,

Creating a

low, moaning hum that passes through your spinal cord

And turning your fingerprints and everything they've ever touched

Caressed or fondled to powdery, meaningless ash.

I relish in the white hot pain.

Or perhaps what I desire most is the murky black

The foggy forgetfulness of it;

Temporarily suspended in time.

Here you don't just float for a moment,

Traipsing in and out of fleeting truth and

Demanding realities.

Where I go

You no longer exist.

Eleanor Colligan is a junior currently living in Chicago, Illinois. She loves to read and write poetry.

### **Lunch at Elementary School** By Albert Zhang

The lunch line, swirling

Full of anxious adolescents

Waiting to feed in a frenzy

Of hotdogs and burgers

Like a rambunctious dragon

Upon discovery of its prey:

A lone rabbit, helpless

Like me, sitting at the end

Of the long, plastic table

My black lunch box on it

Containing *baozi* and noodles

Wearing a red tee from

the Chinese New Year's Festival

Trying to hide from my predators.

Light blue trays,

The surplus of ketchup on their hotdogs and burgers,

Neat hair,

Bright polos

Mark them as a different species.

I try to camouflage myself

Inching closer to the group

Pretending that I belong

In order to avoid detection

But the *baozi* gives me off.

Once I take a bite of it

Its luscious contents and savory flavor

Creamier and less sweet than ketchup

Waft out from the meatball inside

Into the noses of the predators.

All eyes turn to me

Like a tiger stares its prey

Before it pounces

Catching me mid-bite into my second *baozi*.

Suddenly, I'm

All alone, helpless

About to be devoured.

Albert Zhang is Head Editor for The Westminster Schools Bi-Line, the school newspaper. He is also Co-Editor-in-Chief of Evolutions Magazine, Westminster's annual creative writing magazine. Albert attended The Kenyon Review workshop, SCAD as a Silver Scholar, was published in Celebrating Art and exhibited in Atlanta's High Museum, Capitol, and National Fair.

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## Fiction

**Soar** By Simon Matela

The problem with learning to fly is that, on the first few attempts, you actually think you might be able to do it. I was luckier than most on my first try. I only shattered my tibia, a minor price to pay for the sake of progress. The whole ride to the hospital my mom was crying, both for me and the medical bills she would have to cover.

“What were you thinking, jumping out the window like that?” she screamed between the short, choked sobs and occasional honking of our rusted-out ford as we navigated the back roads to the hospital. “Never do that again. Look at me Charlie. Never. Do that. Again.” The thick musk of whiskey hung on her every word.

I spent what seemed like forever in the hospital, trapped in an oppressively white room, surrounded by a small army of nurses that watched over me like my mom used to. Then came the doctors, measuring my reflexes and asking all sorts of questions about my injury and family.

“Have you ever done this before?” / “Tell me if you can feel it when I do this?”

“Can you rotate your ankle for me?” / “How's your relationship with your father?”

For the first few weeks after I was got home there was nearly always someone with an eye on me. Family dinners, a new concept in our house, were suddenly the norm. Most ended with little being said. Dad occasionally skipped them altogether to work in his den, or because he had to work late. It didn't matter to me. Eventually, they would stop watching. Things would go back to normal. I'd learn to fly, whether they wanted me to or not.

That chance came on a wonderfully sunny Sunday afternoon. Mom was sleeping on the couch, beer cans strewn about the floor. Dad had been in his office all day, only coming out to use the bathroom. Every once in awhile I could hear his Keurig splutter out another coffee, the only indication I had that he was still there.

I crept up the steps to the second-floor window, slid the screen out and took a deep breath. The breeze rustled my hair a bit, I could see the trees swaying from side to side in the sunshine. I took a few steps back, got a running start, and propelled myself out the window. For one, beautiful moment, I hung in the air. Then the ground came rushing up to meet me.

Simon Matela is an undergraduate Creative Writing major at Chatham University with a focus (on/in) Fiction. He has been published in *The Minor Bird* and now *The Blue Marble Review*. He lives in Pittsburgh, PA with his cat, Lola.

### **King** By Sofia Scarlet

my muse and your desperation is the introspection I begin after brunch when I find myself in a world of unknown. I've always enjoyed my travels and exploring but the crowded streets of the City and the unattended baby blue limousines have forever surpassed my ability to endure. it is all too much. my soul is perturbed. I do not wish to be here for a day longer but deep down inside I know there is no escape. there are parties to attend and there are shops to raid. there are guests to mingle with and there are swimming pools to disturb. there are colleges to pay off and there are diplomas to frame. there are contracts to sign and there are frauds to commit. there are cocktails to drink and there are husbands to divorce. there are lives to live and there are none for us. we are trapped. I am trapped. the shadow of fortune and reputation lie as heavy as the

crown and I am the heir to the throne, but if I am to take a seat I feel my back would break.

Sofia Scarlat is a fifteen-year-old short story and poetry writer, book author, traveler, movie and Chinese food enthusiast who finds making pancakes therapeutic and feels most at home in NYC. You can find her work in Whiteteethmag, Voices of Youth, The Paragon Journal and arts & culture Romanian magazine.

## **The Goldfish** By Temima Levy

In my memory I'm home and opening the door, speckled brown and white and grey where the paint had peeled. I remember that the doorknob was in the shape of a goblin head. It scared me, with a snouty nose and smirking mouth clenched around the copper hoop. I swung the door open, creaking like a horror movie, but it was really just that mummy hadn't oiled the door, and I walked in.

I don't remember the colour of the walls, or the pictures hanging on them but I know that the floor was cold wood in whorls and ovals that my mummy said was a tree's inside. Strange. For me sound lingers and sight fades, and I can hear the pud pud pud of socks on wood, because mummy was always very strict about the no shoes inside rule, and I remember my voice shouting mummy mummy mummy mummy.

And I remember the silence, but maybe that isn't something you can remember, not something there; it's an absence, a hole in the fabric of noise and life. Worry crept through the rip of silence and into my heart, and its conjoined twin fear, and both lodged deep and permanent claws in my heart. If you can, feel the transition from innocence to terror, like Eden after the fall. Or if you want, if you can, insert another metaphor that rings more true. I was never a good writer, and now my brain is being eaten all up by this tumour, so even less. I revert to my high school clichés and metaphors and similes when I write. But I digress. My purpose is to tell this story.

Far back along the warped trails of remembrance a pink, plump hand turned the knob and went into the kitchen and there was a person on the floor. It was my mummy with her flowy-long red hair which she let me twist and pretend I was a hairdresser, but my lovely happy-face glow-eye mummy was not moving and she was not laughing and the chips for supper were spilled all round her head going soggy and my mummy didn't like soggy chips. I went over and touched her cheek, because she hated people touching her face, but she still didn't wake up and her chest was a crumpled empty shell.

In school we had a teacher who wore glasses that made her eyes look like big bug eyes and she was teaching us about science and how everything was kept alive by a heart which is inside your ribs and which is really for blood and not feeling love like everyone thought. If my mummy was not well maybe she needed a new heart. I didn't want to leave her alone all by herself in the hard kitchen, but I went and got some paper and a crayon from the crayon basket in the playroom. The playroom had plastic chairs striped like a candy cane. It was an orange crayon and I hoped that was all right because I couldn't find the red one (which is proper heart-colour) and I sat and drew a heart. A child's heart, two bumps and two lines, and then I put it on my mummy where I thought her heart was and I gave her a kiss, because that's what princes do to wake up princesses. Her skin was very cold, and her makeup smudged when I kissed her. Then she woke up.

And that was it.

My red mummy with red lips and red hair and red heart and she gave me a kiss, lots and lots of kisses like she always does and she didn't mind that the chips were spilled.

"I must have tripped, and banged my head."

That was what she said. It was probably a heart attack. That was what got her the second time round, years later, when I was too big and grown up and far away to help.

And that was it.

We had goldfish, two, and they were in a big glass square with bits of the price sticker still on it. Sometimes I would watch how the light was reflected through the corners of the aquarium, or stick my hand in and the fish would nibble on my fingers. I was older than before. I could tell the fish was dead when I saw it that morning, but it was so pretty and gold floating above the fronds of weed and I didn't want it dead so I drew it a heart, just a tiny one on the corner of paper I ripped off the shopping list. I pushed the paper underwater and held it against the fish's heart with the tip of my thumb. The fish rolled over and shimmied away and the scrap of paper floated down to the bottom of the pond bleeding ink and now I knew.

It wasn't magic or god, least I don't think so. It just was. That was the last time I used it, but I saw dead bodies many times more. I worked in the maternity ward, and every squalling, flailing life was a miracle, but sometimes the tiny bodies were still and my hand itched for a pen and paper but I did not, because I could not.

And now I'm in a bed where the mattress is hard and thin, everything is sterile and white and I stare down at these little black marks on the paper and I know that when the sight leaves my eyes and my voice leaves this world there will be no one to draw a clumsy heart on a paper and hold it to my silent chest.

Temima enjoys living, doing unexpected things and eating good food. Preferably simultaneously. She also has two cats, or maybe they have her.

**monophobia** By Claire Shang

*monophobia (the irrational fear of being alone)*

she collects words. makes lists and pins them in her apartment. her walls have long forgotten the color of her hair, her caving clavicle, her clattering teeth. they have been blinded by the paper: mostly scraps, forced onto the rough wallpapering. the walls, they resent her for covering their eyes.

(she knows this because they whisper while she's asleep.)

she is always writing. she has pens everywhere. extracting them from behind her bookcases, buried in her sock drawer. you even find one pinned on her wall.

why's that pen up there? you ask.

i was making a list of things that i can always trust, she says nonchalantly.

you don't ask: what about me? don't you trust me?

instead, you clear your throat and survey the wall that is weighted with fluttering papers. it's like the whole wall is about to take flight.

adding quickly she says that: i realized soon after i can't even always trust a pen. the foreverness of their ink, the way it bleeds through the paper desperately, trying to escape... but you know, once you make a list you can't change it.

you didn't know this was a rule. but if she says it's one then it is. she's always been good at these things. she's usually right.

you sit down at the coffee table. its surface is covered with shards of paper laminated over with stained plexiglass. a splatter of dried coffee covers the title of a list with four items: love money happiness fame.

pointing to it, keeping your index finger on the stain so the list won't run away, you ask about the list delicately.

that silly little thing? she cries.

yeah, you shrug, trying to look disinterested. remember what the poster looked like in the counselor's office? disinterested: pupils that slither to the corners of eyes, raised eyebrows, hand on cheek.

it's a list of what people *think* you need in life, but is actually complete bull, she says. i made it a while back.

oh.

and you're back to reading the lists. you finish reading the coffee table's surface, so you move on to the legs. there are four, but the lists are plastered on crookedly, words often left dangling, only to be finished on the next face of the leg.

she turns around, sees you crane-necked, and laughs hoarsely. the pawing of a pen against cheap paper, the sound of her rippling hair, the shreds of lists flapping against each other like a paper ocean. familiar sounds.

she tiptoes to reach the top of the wall. says nothing as she does so. neither do you.

buried deep under the sofa lies another layer of lists. these are personal and you're glad she's busy taping a new fleet of lists onto the ceiling so she can't see you absorbing everything. head half submerged in the dusty darkness, you find *unlucky numbers* (10 –

when the older kids, your role models, taught you about popularity and cafeteria lunch and magazine covers and ribcages, 12 – when you feel grey all over for the first time, 15 – when you're sitting with the grey on your birthday, no one else, just grey. everywhere.)

you army crawl deeper into the murkiness of the under-couch. here you find *dreadful colors* (*stained white* – the color of bathroom tiles and toilet bowls and office walls, *ocean blue* – the color of your eyes trapped into one dimension, *grey* – how loneliness feels, all scratchy and hollow and damp.)

she's done taping the lists up. her pointed feet step down from the ladder and land lightly on the plexiglassed lists on the ground.

where are you? she asks quietly.

you scramble to read more, absorb more, even though you know this is knowing too much of her.

reluctantly you roll out, yelling boo with lackluster energy, coated with dust.

you found my secret spot! she says, flustered.

you push yourself up with your arms and sink into the couch, causing dust to ricochet off the cracked leather.

you notice that in your absence, the whole ceiling has been plastered down with lists. you spot *beautiful words*, *best days of the week* and *most populated countries*. a thicket of paper whispers around you.

you stand up, knees trembling, large eyes, confused eyes. all four walls are lined with lists. the ground is, too. the tables, the bar counter, the fridge. and the ceiling.

you spot one last list resting cockily by the mirror: *worst places to be trapped in*.

the only item is: *your own brain*.

as soon as you look up, the ceiling comes crashing down in a fitful plume of smoke and crackled cement. as you emerge from the rubble with plaster and slips of paper on your arm, you notice that she is gone. and so are the endless lists with their endless words.

so it's just you now. just you.

Claire Shang is a sophomore at Hunter College High School in New York. She runs and drinks tea almost as much as she writes. Claire's works have been recognized on a national level by the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards and she will be published in the forthcoming issue of Moledro Magazine.

### **Daisy Petals** By Caitlin Roberts

My older sister was always a bewildering creature,—at least, to me. I was sure that to my mother and father, she was just Delilah, just like I was just Willow. They never blinked when Delilah waltzed around the house, humming tunes from a time before she was born, or when she buried herself beneath wool blankets, so deep that I was surprised she could breathe. I know that I wouldn't have been able to breathe, but then again, Delilah was a different species.

Delilah was older than me by seven years, which might have been part of the reason that we lived in two different worlds. She didn't attend school like I did, which was fine, but it was just another area where our paths diverged. Most days, I never saw her. When Delilah did surface from her room, she wore her hair braided down her back, and a

yellow sundress, no matter what season it was. I didn't understand how she wasn't cold, but for all I knew, her skin might have been immune to the icy air. From the way everyone treated her, the idea that her skin was made of porcelain, was entirely plausible.

The strangest thing about my sister though, was not her mood swings or the distance she kept from me. It was her favorite activity, which she found time to do, even when she was having one of her "rainy days," as mother liked to call them. Delilah liked to pick the petals off daisies and paste them to her skin.

I'd watch her do it, when I could. Father always kept a bouquet of daisies on the kitchen table, and whenever they'd disappear from their green, glass vase, I'd start searching. When the sun was warm, I'd find her in the garden. If it rained, she would be in the living room. When the wind blew, it was the front porch. It had taken me a while, but I had memorized each of the spots.

She always had a tin, full of some type of paste, and a bristled paintbrush, that she used to smooth the paste over her skin. Sometimes she put the petals on her arms, and often her shins. It was rare, but I once saw her press one of the yellow petals against her cheek.

Delilah would cry while she worked, or if it was a "sunny day," sing one of her songs. Whether there were tears dripping down her cheeks or a grin spread across her face, she was meticulous as she worked. Once she finished, the petals would remain on her skin, until they turned from yellow to brown, and finally crumbled into dust. Then, Delilah would paste more on. I was fascinated by the whole process; I found it beautiful.

So, on an October day, when the sun peeked through the clouds, I pulled the daisies out of their vase, and headed out to the garden. I didn't have Delilah's special tin or the paintbrush that she used. They were both hidden in the most forbidden area of the

house, her bedroom. But I was determined to wear the petals on my skin, so I held a bottle of Elmer's glue in my grubby, little hand, and the daisies in the other.

I knelt on the stone pathway, and began to pluck the petals from their stems. I tore the first few, not realizing how gentle I needed to be. Some of the petals blew away in the wind, and others slipped between cracks in the stone path, but soon I had a small stack, ready to be used. I slathered my arm in glue, and was preparing to lay the first petal down, when I heard a scream.

I looked up and saw Delilah standing close by, her yellow dress billowing in the wind. Her skin looked ghostly against the blue sky, and for a moment, I believed she was a figment of my imagination.

"What are you doing?" Delilah cried, as she ran and knelt next to me. She yanked the daisies out of my hand, and in my surprise, I didn't protest.

My sister never spoke to me, whether she was happy or sad. It was part of what had made her into such a mystical being, and even now that words had spilled from her mouth, the spell was not broken. I felt as if I should run away and hide, rather than remain in the presence of the strange creature that was my sister.

"What are you doing?" Delilah asked again, this time with more force.

"I wanted to put the flowers on," I spoke quietly; refusing to stare into her icy, blue eyes. "Like you do."

"You can't," she insisted. "You can't ever, ever, be like me."

"Why not?"

Instead of responding, Delilah looked to the ground, and began picking up the scattered daisy petals. Her lips were pressed into a thin line, and I knew that I should leave before she began to cry. But at the age of nine, my curiosity was too much for me to walk away without my questions answered. So, if Delilah wouldn't tell me why I couldn't have flower petals, then I wanted to know why she could.

"Why do you always wear the petals?" I asked.

Delilah looked up, seeming almost as surprised as I was, that I had the courage to speak again. I found myself staring at the freckles on her nose, as she turned my question over in her mind, hopefully forming an answer.

"The things I feel sometimes," she said slowly, as if she were tasting each word carefully on her tongue, "I can't ever explain them in words. It's hard for me to remind myself that I ever felt different. That I can feel different again."

I nodded my head, though none of her words made sense. All I knew was that my sister was talking to me. My sister was talking to *me*, and I wasn't going to stop her.

"When I put the petals on my skin," she continued, "they represent happiness, and when they crumble to nothing, they represent sadness. But the thing is, there are always more petals. There is always more happiness, no matter how many times it turns to dust."

She finished collecting the petals, and stood up, walking back towards the path. She didn't say goodbye, or invite me to follow her, but I didn't need her to. On that day, the strangest part of her, the obsession with daisy petals, had made her seem more human.

Caitlin Roberts is a young author, born in California and raised in Alaska. She enjoys all types of writing including fiction, non-fiction, and poetry. Her other activities include dancing, playing piano, and spending time with her wonderful dog, Tess.

## Non-Fiction

**Written in the Stars** By Alizaya Doyle

I am five.

My mom and grandma rush to get me to my first day of preschool. We are about to go out the door when my mom shouts, “Wait! Ali your hair!”

“Do we have to brush it out?” I complain. I hate brushing my hair because I twist it into intricate little knots that are later impossible to brush out. I know that it will hurt.

“Yes,” says my mom, mimicking my whiny tone. “Let’s go.”

“Fine!” I say. We walk to the bathroom, and I hop on the counter. She holds the black handle of the brush and starts to untangle the knots. One by one, she unties each of them ever so carefully, trying to be gentle.

“Ouch!” I yelp.

“Sorry,” mom says unconvincingly. “Beauty is pain, darling, get used to it.” I ponder this statement as she braids my dark brown hair down my back.

“Ready to go?” she asks me.

“Yeah” I say.

I get to school just in time before everyone goes down to the preschool room.

“I love you, sweetheart,” mom says.

“I love you too”, I say back. She stands there staring at me lovingly, but all I say is, “You can go now, you know.”

“Oh, sorry. Ok bye.” she says with a smile. I watch her leave, turning quickly just before her tears spill over her eyes. She waves me goodbye again, blows a kiss and gets in the car with my grandma.

I am six.

I hop in the car with my younger sister and my mom, excited that she is picking us up for once.

“Look what I got!” mom says in a singsong tone.

“What?” I ask.

“A stepping stone we can paint ourselves!” she answers. I stare at the bright yellow and blue box and the picture of the contents. I love to do crafts with my mom. I am so excited to get home and paint.

“Yay!” I say cheerfully.

We pull into the driveway and I jump out of the car. I race my sister to the door, swing it open, and fling my backpack on the couch. We walk to my little bedroom, sit on the bed, and open the box. Inside are the instructions, paint, and a plain white stone begging to have color. The stone has a butterfly, a flower, and a ladybug carved in it.

“Can I paint the ladybug? Please—,” I beg.

“Okay, I’ll paint the butterfly,” my mom says.

“I’ll paint the flower!” my sister says, trying to be part of the project. I paint the ladybug very carefully, making sure I don’t mess up. I decide on a red body with purple spots. My mom’s butterfly looks amazing, as always and, well, I can’t say the same about my sister’s flower. But, it is our creation, and it is perfect to us. When we finish painting, we let it dry, flip it over, and sign our names.

“This looks great girls. Let’s go put it outside” Mom suggests.

“Okay,” my sister and I say together. We walk outside in the dark and place our little creation gently beside the sidewalk in the grass.

“Good job, girls, it’s beautiful,” my mom says.

I am seven.

I walk outside in the damp grass. It is 9:00 A.M., way too early for me. I crawl into the car and buckle up. The leather of the seat is freezing, and I am trying my best not to make

contact with it, which is failing miserably. I finally give up and slump down in my seat.

“I’m cold and tired!” I complain.

“I know. You can go back to sleep when we get back from the store,” mom says.

“Ugh!” I moan. We sit in silence for about five minutes until my mom asks me to put a disc in the slot. I do and it starts to play. She sings along with the words of the music perfectly. I sit there staring at her. I start to hum the tune and then I’m singing with her. When the song ends, we laugh and play the disc again and again until we make it to the store.

I am eight.

My sister, grandma, and I stand in the doorway of the living room waiting for my mom to say goodbye to us before school. She comes in and we hug. “Have a great day girls. I love you two,” she says.

“Love you too,” we say. “Goodbye”

“See you tonight” she says, but we don’t see her that night or ever again. That is our last goodbye. My mother dies that afternoon. She is only twenty-eight years old.

I am thirteen now.

Our perfect little creation lays outside, weathered and in shambles, a mirror of my heart. A few weeks ago, my dad tells me to go clean up the mess in the yard. I walk outside under the night sky, thinking of the words my grandma said to me five years ago, “God wanted another star to be put in the sky to make the night more beautiful. God chose your mom to be that star.” I look up at you, shining brightly and I can only think of three words: I miss you.

Alizaya Doyle is thirteen years old and in 7th grade. She goes to St. Patrick School in Rolla, Mo. She wants to dedicate this memoir to her wonderful teacher who taught her

how to write a great memoir.

**Kissing: A Soundtrack** By Bec Kashuba

### **“Zombie” – The Cranberries**

I’m eleven and dressed in a *Nightmare Before Christmas* costume, and I sit, tugging at my gloves, surrounded by other eleven-year-olds in costumes. I’m not like them. They all laugh and talk and enjoy each other’s company, and I’d rather die than stay here for one more minute, except I don’t get what I want. I’m very much alive and my mom’s not getting me ‘til nine-thirty. It’s seven now and everyone is playing Truth or Dare. I pray nobody calls on me, but God makes sure that one girl named Kassandra does. I pick “dare” so people might think I’m cool. She tells me to kiss one of my best friends, and everybody “ooh’s” until I give him a nervous peck. I’m lying when I say this isn’t my first kiss. He wipes the red lipstick off his mouth and I run to the bathroom to cry because I wasted your first kiss on someone I don’t like, in a desperate effort to impress people I like even less.

### **“Backseat Serenade” – All Time Low**

I’m thirteen and at a concert for a band I used to like. I’ve been abandoned by all of my friends, and I’m hitting it off with a girl I met in line. I’m different from her. She’s tall, has long, pink hair, and is way out of my league. I’m nervous, five-foot-three, and my hands are sweaty. Even though I know little more than her name and her music taste, that’s enough for me. She’s into me, and that’s more than I can say for a lot of people. It feels better than being alone, so I stand on my tiptoes to kiss her. I’m lying when I tell my friends that I’m the type of person to make out with a near stranger at a concert. I lose my best friend Siarra that night because I’m turning into someone I’m not. She’s telling the truth when she says this. I don’t learn my lesson.

## **“Stay” – Rihanna ft. Mikky Ekko**

I’m fifteen and I can’t tell for sure if that’s what’s playing over the chatter of high-school dance attendees swarming around me. I’m with another girl, also tall and out of my league, and my nerves are getting the best of me. She holds my hand and looks at me with sad, helpless eyes, and I look away guiltily, apologizing for ruining the night. She’s lying when she says I’m not ruining anything. I know how much she loves to dance, and I’m stuck here wallowing in self-doubt. She’s quiet for a moment, and then she breaks the silence by asking if she can kiss me. I’m lying when I tell her I’m okay with it, and when I convince myself that the last time I kiss her a year later really will be the last. I know this isn’t going to work.

## **“Just for Now” – Imogen Heap**

I’m sixteen and it’s just after Christmas break. I arrive at school and find her waiting for me, box in hand. She hands it to me and we don’t talk about what’s happening. We both knew this was coming anyway. She apologizes and I reach for the door. I hesitate, turning to look back at her. I’m lying when I tell myself I don’t want to kiss her goodbye. I punish myself for ruining our relationship by not doing it.

## **“Arabella” – Arctic Monkeys**

I’m sixteen and a narcissist. I’m alone in my room, applying makeup even though it’s the middle of the night and I’m not sneaking out to go anywhere. I’m lying to myself by pretending to admire my reflection; instead, I scrutinize every detail of my appearance endlessly. I cry, and the makeup smears. I kiss the mirror and slam my fist into the glass. I’m lying when I say “Pain is beauty” as I pluck the lipstick-coated shards from my hand.

## “Ivy” – Frank Ocean

I’m seventeen and the loneliest I’ve ever been. Siarra isn’t the only one who’s left me; all of my friends tell me that I’ve changed, that I’m not the person they used to know. I sit in a stairwell by myself and scroll mindlessly through the photos on my phone. I come across something a friend sent me a few months back: a photo from Halloween in 2012. I’m dressed in a *Nightmare Before Christmas* costume and surrounded by people who genuinely liked me for me, not just for the person I convinced them I was. I’d never been kissed.

*“It’s quite alright to hate me now,”* Frank Ocean sings.

I’m telling the truth when I say that I hate me now. But it’s quite alright. I finally learn my lesson from all of this. I go home that evening and remove the makeup, the clothes, and the facade I’d put up for years. I delete the phone numbers of those old flames, and I come across Siarra’s number. When I call, she doesn’t pick up. I leave a voicemail, telling her that I’m sorry for everything that happened that night at the concert. I never hear from her again, but I do see her the next day when she comes through the drive-through at work. She knows who I am; I can see our history in her eyes when she looks at me. But she says nothing. She grabs her frappuccino and drives away. Somehow, I am okay with this. I don’t spend my break crying over the fact that I’ve been ignored. I don’t dwell on the years of time spent together, or the way it all fell apart. I hand her her drink and that’s that, and I am okay.

*“We will never be those kids again.”*

Bec Kashuba is a writer and coffee-hating barista from Pittsburgh, PA. Her interests include dogs, calligraphy, and drag. Her least favorite song is “Margaritaville.”

## Thanks for the Mangoes By Sofia Bajwa

Thank you, mangoes: thank you for long summers spent with remnants of yellow stuck like plaster all around my mouth, like rusted ring-lines around a bathtub. Thanks for coating my fingers with the same sweet, sticky chrome tint that I promised my grandmother I would wash straight away, but I never obeyed because the bathroom was oh so far. Thanks for being the first streak of paint on Nani's immaculate, white canvas of a carpet that had been laid down only two months ago. But it's no big deal because they replaced all the carpet floors with wood three years later. Thanks for cooling me down in the sweltering summers when the box fan's breeze was not frigid enough, so my tongue playfully immersed itself in the refreshing wake of your juicy liquid that oozed between my teeth and coated the insides of my throat. At eight year's old, my cousin and I would be content with sitting idly in front of the box fan, transfixed by the monotonous rotation of the blades as we ingested every inch of your surface right down to the peel.

Unscrupulously, we cast the bowls off to the side as we proceeded to amuse ourselves by talking into the fan to make our voices sound all echo-ey. But Nani always selflessly cleaned up our messes for us; well, I guess except for the time I stained the carpet because some messes just can't be undone. Thank you, mangoes, for teaching me alongside Nani that what's on the inside matters more because the first time I ever met you I defiantly shook my head in disgust. To me, you looked like what the awkward result would be if a potato and an apple had a baby. You were a weird shape; you were not quite circular or ovular, and your color was if a second grader hadn't yet finished blending their paint stripes together. Despite my protests, Nani bribed me to try you in exchange for a lollipop, and by the time I had polished you off, I didn't even want that lollipop. Thank you, mangoes, for becoming my comfort food and my go-to midnight snack. I'd choose you over a pizza any day. I love to bask in your sweetness, and I love your psychedelic yellows that hide beneath your obscure, outward appearance. Thank you, mangoes for providing a distraction when my cousins and I had to wait in the hospital lobby on Christmas Eve as Mom and Dad left us. "It'll be fine," they said. That was a lie. Thank you, mangoes for helping me reminisce the good times, the bad times, all

the other times in between. But most of all, thank you, mangoes, for reminding me of her.

Sofia Bajwa is a high school student, and her work has appeared in a small amount of anthologies by students. She is an emerging writer who also claims to be a DIY guru, chocolate enthusiast, and professional Netflix binge watcher!

**Writer** By Max Paik

Often I wish that I could just lie down. But not on my bed. The zebra-striped blanket or the pillowcase that should've been replaced years ago or the mattress that feels only slightly softer than concrete will not satisfy my needs.

Maybe the couch will work, perhaps for just a day, or an evening, or an hour. Maybe just three minutes of my back against the sharpie-stained fabric that's been torn apart by years of curious cats and my pretending to be a Jedi, will fix me up. No. It won't work. It can't. The couch is too cold and I know that dad would never let me have the blanket. You'd think he'd buy another one. I saw them on sale at Ikea the other day.

I think maybe the floor will have to do. The carpet is better than the hard wood. The cat barf doesn't smell too bad, right? Maybe if I turn and lie on my stomach, and shut my eyes and pretend I'm tanning somewhere in Hawaii. Or maybe Fiji. But then it's dark and I'm in a car again and the stars are bright and I'm coming around a turn a bit too fast and two faces are lit up in the darkness, like they're under a spotlight. Because they are, I think. But was it the moonlight or the headlights? The floor won't do.

The grass is nice. But I've tried that one before and as fun as it is to watch the ladybugs dance on my fingertips and feel a breeze rush over me, I know I'm allergic. And I know that hives are no fun. And I know that the grass isn't really where I want to lie.

I want to lie down on the page. I want to fold myself up like origami and tuck myself into the middle of some notebook or maybe a novel and feel how I felt when my mother tucked me in; like there was nothing to be afraid of. And even if there was something to be afraid of it was far away and non-threatening and not a bright red 2013 Ford C-max with the license plate 5HAR619 that was sliding around like I did the first time I went skating.

The page is all too inviting. But I've tried this before; I know its tricks. I know that I'm no more easily digestible when I come in the form of 12 point Times New Roman. I know that the second you try and leave a little bit of you behind, maybe just a small seeping or a little leak or maybe even just a colon or semicolon or some other bit of punctuation that the paper rejects you. Not your writing or your plot development: You. The way that Goodyear tires reject traction when they're spun around too quickly. The way that the night sky rejects screaming by letting it fade into the black between the stars, destined to eternal hiding behind constellations.

But maybe if I just tap the page. Not lie on it. Just tap it. Like a boy seeing if the pool is too cold by lightly dropping his toes into the water. But not even that. I wouldn't even break the surface. Just a tap.

But damn it, I don't want to tap. I want to dive in, headfirst, like an Olympian. Forget not breaking the surface. I want to rip through, like a knife shoved into a balloon. The way being told to get over your fear of darkness,— like every time you shut your eyes you don't see bodies and hydroplaning and screaming and crying and a police officer telling you you're safe and that everything is okay even though the skid marks on the road and the shaking legs and crying faces say otherwise,— cuts through you.

But I know that a page is only as comforting as it is full. I know the pain of staring at blankness. The suffering and torment of knowing that any stories you may have, any poems or metaphors or characters that dance through your mind like ballerinas, will never make it to the page without a few scratches. That whatever ideas may be in your head will be trapped there forever. Like prisoners. Like a son, a mom, and three cousins trapped in a skidding middle class hybrid vehicle on a Monday night the day after Christmas— forever destined to imperfection. Like circles drawn with pencils or pens. Like humans.

Max Paik is a junior at Half Moon Bay High School in California. He enjoys sunsets, avocados, and traveling when he gets the chance. He also enjoys math but he likes to keep that relatively private.

### **What is the Point of Life?** By Lexus Ndiwe

There is always a stage in a human's life where they question their existence. Whether you are at work, school, or however else you may be going about your day, you stop for a moment. You look over what you are doing, or repeat what you said and trail off, or maybe you say nothing at all. And you begin to stare as your mind wonders to that reoccurring question, asked throughout human history: What is the point of life? I mean, what really is the point in all this? You begin with the common solutions. Religion? Evolution? And you ponder on the thought that all this means nothing from a wider perspective. And that your life will have no impact on the universe, and at this point you become ever so quiet. Your head starts to spin, and your heart races slightly. *But I want to make a change in the world, you say. Or, I do not really care, you say. Or, it is all in God's plan, you say.* And you turn your palms up, and examine every dash and curve. With those

same hands you put their backs on your forehead to check for a temperature. And then you place your hands on your chest to check that your heart is still beating.

Your eyes scan the crowd of blank faces, of people you have seen, but will never know. And then you see a familiar face in the crowd, but still it is not someone you know. Just the same person that you pass every day, on your way to and from work, or in your lunch break. They decide to light a quick one a distance from their work building. You are sitting in a nearby café from your own workplace, as you watch them from the window. It is clear that they are having a stressful day. They deeply inhale, and exhale a plume of smoke. You admire their skills, as you have never smoked a day in your life. You know that smoking is not your taste, but something about it in the movies, and in the way this person is standing, makes it look somewhat cool. You check your watch and hurriedly finish the croissant and coffee that you have been enjoying. As you make your way back to your workplace, you pass the person smoking a cigarette. They turn their head to avoid catching your face, and you smile politely as you pass, acknowledging their consideration. You walk a few minutes more until you reach your destination. What you do not know is that the person smoking as you passed, caught the end of your smile, and let their gaze linger upon the back of your head a little more than necessary. You have always been told that you have a great smile, but you have never quite believed it. Once the cigarette has been put out, they quickly brush off any remaining residue, and straighten out their clothes.

A few towns away, a dispute can be heard. One is accusing the other of cheating, while the accused furiously denies such suggestions. Hands flail around. Their rings move in and out of the light, which catch it and flash like a siren. The regret is clear on the face of the accused, and after trying to convince their partner, they sigh and blame it on the bottle. A neighbour smirks after peering through a bedroom window. They begin

adjusting the buttons on their shirt, and fixing their rumpled hair. Their pulse is still racing.

In the world somewhere else, a group of children take the miles-long route to school, travelling through forests in order to learn. Their hands are a little rougher, their hearing a little sharper, and their vision is just a little clearer than their across the sea counterparts. Who knows what is waiting in the forest? Across the river, two people stand at the water's edge, trying to catch some fish. The rumbling of their stomachs is muffled, but the hunger is clear in the longing of their eyes, and the salivating of their mouths. When one starts to become impatient, the other taps their shoulder a few times, and mutters, 'patience'. Their bucket remains empty until the next morning.

Somewhere else people are travelling to other countries. Think of those first time flyers, the honeymooners, the experienced travellers, the escapists, the adventurers, and those people on business trips. Or they are being trafficked by the same people that promised them a job and a new life. This new life, turns into a lie. One that could cost them their life, or limbs. On a ship there is a container full of livers, kidneys, and hearts. For a second you stop and question how they could possibly be human, but before you get any deeper in, your mind changes subjects.

Moving along, someone dines in the finest of eating establishments, where they eat until their heart's content. It has taken them years of saving in order to afford this. Course after course is served in the daintiest of portions, cooked to perfection some might say. Each mouthful leaves them longing for more, and as they ponder on the taste of the previous dish, a new one arrives. When they have finished dessert, their stomach reaches full capacity, and they fall into a kind of food coma ecstasy. Food is what they live for after all.

And as a baby is born, another life leaves this realm, and enters one unknown. And you finally realise that you have been thinking and people watching for far too long. You

continue to go on your way. The answer is still unknown to your question, as you go a few more years before it crosses your mind again.

Lexus Ndiwe is currently a student at university, and when she is not studying or writing in class, writes outside of academia as a sort of therapy. She is fascinated by the sound and influence of words, and uses them as a bridge to try and connect with people.

## Art

**Road Trip to Myself** By Chris Kim



**Road Trip to Myself**

“Who am I?” I ask,

“You are wasting your time trying to answer that.” He sighs.

“Then, who’s inside of me? Somebody is knocking here.” I point at my head.

“...Don’t pay attention to such small potatoes.” Once again, he sighs deeply.

I know there is a hidden figure within me, waiting to unlock its true potential.

That person is not myself, yet it is myself.

That person is a description of myself, yet is a different character.

That person and I are the same, yet we are completely different.

I am intrigued...most intrigued.

I need to know who that person is.

I don’t know who that person is, but I know where it resides.

That person is hiding within my own soul.

So, I guess it’s time to begin on my road trip to find that person...or myself...or both.

I have always been curious about my own self, as to who I am. My character has always seemed to be shrouded behind illusions that I simply need to look past. This was the mindset I placed for myself when I began this project.

I used the “outside” area of the picture (CT Scan Image) and juxtaposed it with “inside” area of the picture to visualize that abstract quest to uncover my identity.

Also, I decided to snip parts of road maps usually found in atlases to depict the various complicated neurons and synapses of my brain, which is often confused. I then applied layers of these paper maps in addition to a blue led light to exemplify depth of my mind.

I had just begun my road trip to find the person I am looking for, but I already know it will be endless task.

Chris Kim, 16, is a junior from Bellevue High School, located in Bellevue, WA. This young aspiring student believes that art is an excellent utility for self-expression as well as communication with his community. He loves experimenting with diverse media to create various forms of visual arts: paintings, mixed media, animations, and political cartoons. When he is not working on his artworks, Chris avidly builds and programs with his robotics team, enthusiastically plays his musical instruments, and practices his Taekwondo lessons. When looking at his recent activities, Chris has excitedly exhibited and sold his artworks at a local art fair as well as earning several art awards from the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards. In addition to his artistic interest, he enjoys playing video games in his spare time while watching political, preferably unbiased, news.

## Water Yourself By Rhea Bhatnagar



My creativity is spontaneous and usually strikes me by a deluge of thoughts resulting from boredom. While creating “Water Yourself,” I sketched my concept out first, noting down every minor detail. This art piece was different for me since I usually work on projects with no clue about what the final piece will look like- it’s like opening a present on the night of Christmas Eve. Over the months, I’ve found that I create best when I merely sit down in the company of nature, listen to indie folk and let my imagination take over me which is exactly what I let happen when creating this art piece.

Rhea Bhatnagar is a high school student studying at Delhi Private School, Sharjah. She is a passionate feminist and animal rights advocate who likes to spend her free time volunteering at local cat shelters.

### **Holiday Lights (Red Lantern)** By Austin Li



**Holiday Lights (Red Lantern)**

My inspiration for this artwork comes from the Chinese city Jiang Nan, a city like Venice where towns are built on top of the water. This painting took place around Chinese New Year, hence the red lantern hanging below the roof. In my art-making process, I

intentionally exaggerated the fading of the background and emphasized the details of the foreground. I chose a cool color scheme to represent the cloudy weather.

Austin Li is a junior at Los Altos High School in California. As an artist, he enjoys using dry medium to express himself. Recently, he co-founded the Multi-Media Housing Club at this school. The club focuses on creating therapeutic art, and crafting and building miniature houses to assemble a miniature city. Two of his favorite artists are Salvador Dali for his wild choice of subject matters, and Claude Monet for his simple brushstrokes. Outside of art, he enjoys reading and weightlifting in his backyard.

This year, the Chinese Lunar New Year is on February 16. This is a special occasion when families get together, eat delicate food, and decorate their houses with Red Lanterns, which are symbols of prosperity and hope for a happy and prosperous year ahead.

Gong Xi Fa Cai (Happy New Year)!

**Perspective** By Chris Kim



Perspective

I found an inspiration from the artist Andy Warhol and his Marilyn Monroe series. I thought it would be interesting to utilize the same idea that Warhol presented but with a different medium, a parody if you will.

While Warhol used silkscreen to produce his artwork, I felt it would be interesting to utilize colored paper instead. In addition, I decided to use thin sheets of foam as spacers between each sheet of paper to add more depth to this parody.

While creating this parody, I also began to form the theme in which I would base this work around: perception and perspectives. This can be seen not only in the difference in the material and depth of the piece but also the angle in which the figure is depicted.

While the original Marilyn Monroe series have a straightforward camera angle, I decided to use a lower camera angle for the piece as well as incorporating some maps rather than solid colors for one of the shots.

Chris Kim, 16, is a junior from Bellevue High School, located in Bellevue, WA. This young aspiring student believes that art is an excellent utility for self-expression as well as communication with his community. He loves experimenting with diverse media to create various forms of visual arts: paintings, mixed media, animations, and political cartoons. When he is not working on his artworks, Chris avidly builds and programs with his robotics team, enthusiastically plays his musical instruments, and practices his Taekwondo lessons. When looking at his recent activities, Chris has excitedly exhibited and sold his artworks at a local art fair as well as earning several art awards from the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards. In addition to his artistic interest, he enjoys playing video games in his spare time while watching political, preferably unbiased, news.

