

Issue 27



Contrast

Editor Note By Molly Hill

Issue 27

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Editor's Note:

Dear Readers and Writers,

As we watch (and enjoy reading) the many literary magazines that proliferate the internet we want to say thank you — to those who stop by our site to read the latest issue, and to our many (!) contributors who keep our submission queue at flood stage. We know you have a lot of choices for reading and we DO appreciate all of you.

We're also aware that this is back to school, return to the office, things-might-be-back-to-normal time of the year again. Exciting for sure, but nerve wracking if you aren't especially feeling like your shiniest, have it all together self. Our Fall issue is showing up just in time, to calm you down or rile you up, depending on which selections you are reading.

We'd also like to leave you with a little Maggie Smith. Her book *Keep Moving*, has a permanent spot on the editor desk, and well,— there's this:

*Accept that you are
A work in progress,
both a revision and
a draft: you are
better and more
complete than
earlier versions of
yourself, but you
also have work*

*to do. Be open
to change. Allow
yourself to be
revised.*

Keep moving

—Maggie Smith

Feeling more like a rough draft than a polished manuscript??
Same.

Enjoy the issue!

Molly Hill
Editor

Poetry

us without formaldehyde By Neva Ensminger-Holland

there isn't a version of this I can see ending
happy even in my head we are doomed
to spend forever in that storage closet yes

we are in love but eventually the taste
of your strawberry lip gloss goes rancid
in my mouth and the zipper on my dress

rusts shut and no matter how much we try
to convince each other that our love transcends
hunger we starve to death all the same no

one notices we're gone for months years even
but when they do they find what's left
of my biology notebook seeped with just enough

acetic acid to make my marginal drawings
of us at an altar unrecognizable to even your mother
the morgue buries us in the same unmarked

grave our bodies lay rotting unadorned
unremembered beneath the soccer field
in death I rest in secret but you rest easy

knowing that the evidence of our transgressions
will decay until there is nothing
left for the anthropologists to find

Neva Ensminger-Holland (they/she) is a recent graduate of Interlochen Arts Academy, and is an incoming freshman at the University of Saint Andrews in Scotland. They are a YoungArts award winner, and an American Voices nominee in the Scholastic Art and Writing Competition. Their work is published or forthcoming in the Interlochen Review, One Art, The Albion Review, and the YoungArts anthology. In their free time, they enjoy wearing ripped tights in the winter, watching Gilmore Girls with their roommate, and hot-gluing the straps back on their platform Mary-Janes.

gross pink skirt: By Halie Leland

There's a gross pink skirt in my closet.
Last worn in August,
it swings on a plastic hanger,

dangles all pale and pretty above my favorite trousers—
the wildly androgynous ones.

There's a gross pink skirt in my closet
that left red marks on my stomach,
bunched my skin, and suffocated my kidneys.
Pale blue and yellow roses scatter the fabric
that reminds me I'm an object.

There's a gross pink skirt in my closet.
A byproduct of the male gaze,
much like me,
it sways back and forth and tickles my forehead
as I reach for anything that will scream she-they-and-gay.

There's a gross pink skirt in my closet
It serves as an artifact from the times
I didn't know how to dress.
It brings back all those days I forced myself to be femme,
suck in and smile,
cross my legs and sit straight.

There's a gross pink skirt in my closet
that I don't wear anymore
but can't seem to get rid of.
Part of me knows boys would like that skirt on me.
Part of me is still convinced I need their approval.

Halianna Leland is a junior at the Albuquerque Academy in New Mexico. They foster a passion for writing both creatively and journalistically. A young queer woman, writer, and black belt in karate, Halie believes in telling raw stories in beautiful ways. Their work has been published locally in Other Voices Literary Magazine, The Advocate News Site, and received recognition in the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards.

Tinfoil Boats By Marlo Cowan

hey so
so today i saw someone thought it was you
could've sworn it was you they had the same jacket i guess
but how are you? no actually let's scratch that
because i don't really want to know how you are because
talking is weird now.
(can we acknowledge that?
can we rip the band-aid off
or is this wound not ready to rot in the sun?)
yeah talking is weird now but being without you is weirder.
i don't want to know you now but
i wanted to know you then, or
i wanted you to know me, or
i want you to want to know me now
(something like that)
and at night i pull up your contact
i keep typing "hey do you still like me?" and then not hitting send.
i've been thinking about elementary school like how
we're kinda like the tinfoil boats we would make
adding dimes till it sinks
or when you catch the teacher crying and
realize she's human but you kinda wish she wasn't
so i don't know where i was going with this but i think

i think there's still some part of you that still gets what i mean.

you know i used to daydream about you,

like imagining us in every movie i watched,

i'd be chasing after your train, you'd be watching me

out the window, or like you'd come back home

after years away and i'd be waiting for you,

and we'd be perfect,

and we'd be perfect,

but that would never happen anyway.

because there's no one to write our story except us.

anyway what i am trying to say is

i know time is unstoppable, like

it lives in our walls, like

it's the blindfold and the pin and the donkey,

it recedes like a tsunami and then

swings for the sucker punch,

i know we are dragged out to sea

but i think there's still time, grab my arm,

we can go back to ourselves, we can

go back to the way things used to be.

if our past selves still live within us

(like tree rings or like nesting dolls)

let's bring them out

let's let them talk.

Marlo Cowan is a young writer from the West Coast. They have a passion for linguistics and baked goods and are proud to identify as nonbinary. They were a commended poet in

cardiovascular By Dia Bhojwani

My knife slid
like a silver
fish through
cardiac tissue

veins for
green pond scum
arteries still
pulsing, screaming
raw against their
mortality

i cut your heart,
my heart, into
slices as thin
as deli meat

slid it between
sheaves of
buttered bread

and washed it
down with
masala chai

possession is love,
my love, and
love is God

so perhaps
God is the scarlet
at my mouth's
corner

perhaps God
is bread
and jam

Dia Bhojwani is a seventeen-year-old writer, editor, and activist from Mumbai, India. They've received awards from the Seamus Heaney Center, Lune Spark, and Wingword, and most recently, were the recipient of the 2021 Claudia Ann Seaman Prize for fiction. They've been published in a range of literary magazines and periodicals, including Polyphony Lit, Parallax, The Hearth, and The Punch Magazine. Their first book, the *Pandemic Diaries*, was published in January 2021. They enjoy Richard Siken, Hawaiian pizza and stand-up comedy.

Living sometimes, is skydiving between God &
home. Screw my frosty breath. I was born in the language

of summer. Brick after block mason-ed in winter's
semantics. Leaf-green okra whitening in the refrigerator.

I do not know what it means to watch a bird
freeze to its demise in the snow. But I can imagine.

We learnt the same way how light is faster
than sound. Books before bullets. Black bird's path bright

-ened by lightning. Before her blinding. Before thunder
set dudu feathers & bones on golden-yellow

fire scattered over grey clouds. Audience, like in this poem,
no violence is intended. If one or two hundred

million casualties result from a trial at illumination,
we sure could write that off. There's only one

Yoruba word for fire & light—iná. In the GOT series,
The Mad King's last words were: *burn them*

all; burn them all. LOL. The story goes that on the colonizers'
arrival, my foremother & forefather stretched out

black arms to receive light, & were greeted
by bullets. Forgive light. Blame language.

Muiz Opeyemi Ajayi (Frontier XVIII) studies Law at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. He's an editor at The Nigeria Review, featuring/forthcoming on Poetry Wales, Nigerian News Direct, 20.35 Africa, San Pedro River Review, Trampset & elsewhere. He's a 2021 ARTmosterrific Writer-in-Residence, PROFWIC Poetry Prize & BKPW Poetry Contest second runner-up.

How I Spent My Sunday Morning By Shaan Udani

Muggy subway steps
Reach ground level.
Babies on the loose.

Sun gleaming, beaming heat.
Anxiously stretching
Locked hamstrings, flexed calves.
Click, fanny packs strapped.

3-2-1 horn blares!
Human yarn weaving my path
Cautiously. Carefully careening.
Where is the water station?

Mile 4. Lethal cramp,
Gut knotted. Concrete quick sand.
Toes grieving, fingers numb to despair
Rounding mile 5.

9 mile split crossed.
Lemon-lime gatorade splashes

Torrid tongue, saliva shortage.

Knees near collapse.

Feet meet 10 mile finish line.

Sweat sizzles side burns,

Banana tastes of victory.

Medal dangles from my neck.

Shaan Udani is sixteen years old; he lives in Morris Plains, NJ. He is a rising junior at Seton Hall Preparatory School in West Orange, NJ. Shaan plays the Indian drums, otherwise known as the Tabla. He also enjoys playing sports and spending time outside taking pictures of whatever he can find. Shaan likes to write nonfiction and experiment with poetry. The poem “How I Spent My Sunday Morning” is a personal account of running the Philadelphia Broad Street Run with his family.

this is the autumn By Allison Xu

this is the autumn I learned to tie my hair
into a twisted bun with a brass hairpin
I learned to accept the drizzling rain that
slipped under my skin and combed through my blood.

this is the autumn I learned to let words
linger on my tongue and taste their flavor.
I folded my stories into paper cranes
and sealed my poems in a mason jar.

this is the autumn I dipped my sorrow in lemon tea
and watched it swirl and curl into bitterness.

I took off the pearls of laughter
and put on a gold chain of silence.

this is the autumn I became a different me

Allison Xu is a teen writer from Rockville, Maryland. Her work has been published in Unbroken, The Daphne Review, Germ Magazine, Secret Attic, Spillwords, Bourgeon Magazine, The Weight Journal, and others.

Adult-ing By Kyle Gerstel

So much lurks beyond an innocent smile,

To hold back the truth, the hostile:

“Hey!”

“How are you?”

“Excellent.”

“Really? Me Too!”

“We need to get together again.”

“I totally agree.”

“Gotta go, but nice talking to you!”

“Same— byeeeeeee!”

As we separate, Mom mumbles, “Ugh, I can’t stand her.”

Is it just she who completely lacks candor

Or are all adults fluent in passive aggressive slander?

If so, adult-ing seems childish from a child bystander.

Kyle Gerstel is a writer, theatre director, and student from Seattle. He constantly ponders if he is actually just living in The Truman Show, and the person filming his life made that movie to show what an idiot he is that even after seeing a movie about what is happening to him, he still believes his environment is real.

Rugby By Sarah Madeline

I'm sorry I looked at you,
And that you caught me.
Sorry if I'm already
Destroying the little we have.
But changing isn't bad, we do it
Everyday before practice.
Your friends scare me, and you do
In a better way.
This fear is toothsome,
Can I have seconds?
Sure, I can keep a secret.
But shame tastes like mud,
Like turf after a tackle, and
I want you to hold whatever parts
Of me you want. I can love you
Any way you'll let me.
I can stomp on this thing
Before it grows.

Sarah Madeline is a young French Oregonian who enjoys pink flowers, reading by the pool, and cookie dough ice cream.

Cosmic By Annika Gangopadhyay

Pretend for a moment that you are on the sun. Pretend
for a moment that gravity is a pulse. Pretend that
it squeezes you, (look at your lover's eye, morphing)

Pretend that you yearn for flatness, for compression beyond closure.

Pretend time is an orbit around your finger around your eye
like a sunspot is an afterthought—let it collapse on you,
let it scorch & evaporate.

Pretend you can feel the synapse underneath your lover's eye
pulsing across your eye:

now look at the moon looking at you lapsing into fission—

pretend this is sound & sing for love &

maybe the photons will sing you to dust,

arms stretched out, feet

half molten, lungs punctured into corneas &

eyes detonated,

Pretend the embers hold you & your bones

(not to scorch, but to hold) &

this gravity is peace.

Annika Gangopadhyay is a student and aspiring writer from California. She enjoys morning walks, music, and vintage postcards.

Dreamscape By Sabrina Guo

Father
hammers the fence,
rust peeling off
thin as sandpaper.

Mother sharpens
all the pencils, my cat
licking each tip.

I awaken, still swollen
from the dream.

I skip to Julie Crimlia's house
with a cooler of pork feet.

I enter
for a glass of sake,
rice remnants
stuck between my teeth.

Julie takes
a fallen eyelash
from my freckles.
It nests in her palm.

I close my eyes, I wish
to have a family, blow.

Sabrina is from New York and is the youngest global winner of the 2021 Poems to Solve the Climate Crisis Challenge. She spoke out against climate injustice and performed her poetry in the 2021 UN Climate Change Conference (COP26). She received the Civic Expression Award and nine national medals from the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards. She is a commended winner of the Foyle Young Poets of the Year Award, first place winner of the Barbara Mandigo Kelly Peace Poetry Award, recipient of the Poetry Society of Virginia's Jenkins Prize, and a nominee for the 2021 Pushcart Prize in Poetry. She is recognized by the Adroit Prizes in Poetry and the Bennington College Young Writers Awards. Her work has been published in the *Best Teen Writing*, *Raleigh Review*, *West Trestle Review*, *Counterclock*, *Blue Marble Review*, among others. Her debut poetry chapbook *Catalogue of Ripening* is published by *Stone Soup Magazine*.

The Return By Kyra Horton

coming home felt like a warm hug after the universe had been so cold to me.
so turbulent.
transitional times eating my ass alive.
home scooping me up before i can self-destruct.
a sigh of relief the only thing i can muster.
never been good at staying one place for long.
yet never been good at saying goodbye.
existing in limbo with the world at my feet.
learning to create a place inside myself that i can reside on the lonelier days.
learning to create my own comfort.
reminding myself how to breathe on the days my mind moves so fast i forget to.
giving thanks for the love.
thank you for the hate too.
understanding it all works together to create the person i'm becoming.
bear with me... as i get to know her.

Kyra Horton is a twenty-year old creator. Whether expressing herself through writing, performing, or painting, she strives to turn pain into beauty. Her identity as a young Black woman from Chicago shapes her work. She grew up being inspired by activism and solidarity in her community and the arts. Kyra is fearless in the avenues she seeks in order to create the emotions painted in her heart. The world is Kyra's canvas, as well as her muse. Her primary medium of creativity is spoken word poetry. Kyra has performed at over 50 different events since beginning her poetry career 5 years ago. Kyra published her first poetry book called Cries of a Butterfly, wrote and produced her album of poetry called The Silencer, released an EP of poetry called Tears Of Gold, and published poetry for the Gate Newspaper and the nonprofit organization Sixty Inches From Center. She has led writing workshops as well as participated in journalism cohorts to cultivate her skills.

Apology to A By Jessica Daniel

Lost you to bad luck, poor planning, and a
deficit of courage. How could we have known
that the virus would unfurl poisonous petals

and smother us all. I started choking on
cherry syrup. I dined alone each night.
All of my dreams ended in -itis, and I wished

I could remember your hands, smudged with
graphite. Crimson thread sewn into your
thumbs. Instead I could only remember memories.

Is it really an excuse if it happened to everyone.
I just didn't remember the oath. Fools and
liars, all coughing into our fists. I wish you

had texted. Can we still grow green. It was
easier to abandon hope. Now, unearthed,
awakening, I've started writing down

what-ifs. Started believing half-truths. Felt some
sense of grief for my withered, unwatered
garden. I am still a liar. I wish I texted back.

Jessica Daniel is an Indian-American teenager with a passion for writing and tea.

That Tree Looks Nothing Like You By Carlotta Reichmann

That inky tree
against the palest darkest blue
looks nothing like you

except it does
branch out and over
like a harrowing truth

and that cluster of leaves
is a little like the curl
on your forehead
and this branch
starfishes its fingers
just like the way you dance.

But the trunk, stock-still,
is nothing like your hips –
it doesn't sway or worry.

I didn't try to think of you
tonight, the sky a cinema.
But now I have, I'll never know
if it's a choice or neural grooves.

Either way, I think I like you better than the tree.

Carlotta Riechmann, 21, recently completed her degree in French and English Literature at the University of Edinburgh. Her work has been published in The Broad. She writes poetry and short stories.

Fiction

I Haven't Changed By Tara Prakash

Yesterday, our English teacher told us that phrases are incomplete sentences and independent clauses are complete, standalone sentences. She gave us an example that day, scrawled it on the board, the chalk raking against the surface in a way that shaved through me and made my insides coil.

I've changed.

She wrote this on the board, these two words, and told us to identify whether this was a phrase or an independent clause. I shot up my hand. *Phrase*, I called out.

She smiles tightly through white teeth arranged so perfectly I wonder if she got dental surgery. I wonder how expensive that was. I wonder why she's teaching at this school if she

has enough money for dental surgery. If I had as much money as she did, I'd already be on a bus out of here.

No, you're wrong, she says and her sharp voice yanks me back to the chipped walls, the crowded desks, the stench of sweat and mint gum stuck in the air. *It's an independent clause*. The class snickers and I want to glare at them, but instead I sink deep in my seat, the soft fabric of my jeans sliding down the metal chair until my torso is slumped under the desk and only my chin rests on the cold plastic table. *Sit up*, she says. I don't. I slump further down, until I'm basically lying down on my chair. It's an uncomfortable position, and the hard, icy metal of the seat rods press into my shoulder blades but I don't sit up.

The teacher looks at me for a moment, and then turns away. I'm not surprised. Everyone gives up on me at some point.

I look back to the board. The words are still there, unforgiving in their careless scribble. I've changed. It seems like there should be more. *I've changed* isn't enough. It's never enough. There has to be more.

I think back to the evening before, when I walked into the jewelry store and slipped an emerald necklace into my hoodie pocket. The teenage cashier, lost in her phone, didn't notice a thing. When I went back outside to the chilling winter air, I fingered the sharp facets of the emerald. I wanted to yank it out of my pocket and drop it in the sewage drain. I looked at the silver chain in my hand, the evening sun twisting it into a kaleidoscope of color. It felt like a gun.

Even more than the necklace, my thoughts scared me. If I didn't watch out for myself, who would?

I've changed. I have changed. Or maybe I'm changing. I didn't drop the necklace into the drain. But I thought about it. I almost let go. And next time, maybe I will.

I've changed' should be a phrase. It's incomplete.

Tara Prakash is a sophomore at Sidwell Friends School in Washington, DC. Her work has been recognized by the Daphne Review, the New York Times, Bow Seat's Ocean Awareness Contest, and other literary journals and magazines. She has won a national gold medal along with 5 Gold Keys, 7 Silver Keys, and 5 Honorable Mentions in the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards. She received an honorable mention for a poem in the Gabriela Minstral Poetry Contest and was a panelist in Writopia's Essay Conference. Along with flash fiction, she also enjoys writing creative non-fiction essays and poetry.

The Timekeeper By Lynne Inouye

In between swaths of clouds, where space meets sky and Earth fades from view, a clock lays—ticking.

Its gears stretch for miles in a sea of gleaming bolts, and rust flakes underfoot. There is the groan of metal in the air—the gasping breath of ancient machinery. It is a familiar tune to the Timekeeper. He shuffles across moving cogs with light, practiced feet.

As he walks, a distant shape emerges from the cloud cover. The second hand—lurching closer, pausing, struggling on again. The hour is just past eight, the minute stretching off to six; his shift is close to being over, the Timekeeper notes. Thank God. At times, he crouches near interlocking gears or examines the great width of a clock hand, but there is not much to be done at this hour. And he is only one person, barely a speck of dust against this grand design.

The second hand drags on, nearly upon him, and he ducks to avoid its path. Balanced on a spinning gear, the Timekeeper is mindless of the dizzying drop the emptiness that reaches

to envelope him. Time feels almost slower than before. The whine of metal vibrates something deep in his chest as he watches the start-stop-start of the clock, and with a scowl, he rubs at his knees.

Blasted thing. Piteously groaning, the noise of the clock is practically too much to bear. The second hand staggers back and forth like some massive, injured thing, and the Timekeeper blinks, shifting closer.

He does not stand—it is a few feet from him now. But the clock itself seems to fight it, gears pushing and pulling, with rust like fallen blood. He squints. The Timekeeper has worked his job for forty years, but never has he seen something quite like this. Broken cogs, yes—oiling and soothing little aches and pains, but this—

The second stretches. His knees ache from crouching. And with a striking sigh, the churn of time stops dead.

The Timekeeper stares. Cloud is thick in front of him, but the sight, the silence, speaks true. The clock has stopped. The gear he's on is motionless while the world holds its breath, and a hum builds. The smell of iron builds with it—it is raining, crying, red as it turns 8:32.

The clock shudders, and then the second hand resumes its path. Only—

It is traveling backward, now.

The Timekeeper rubs his eyes, bewildered. His tools are small at his side, his hands calloused, but not skilled. This is above his pay grade. And *he* is not affected, so he only turns away as the world reverts—as the cries start from below.

Lynne Inouye, 17, is a queer fiction writer with an interest in all things unnatural or otherworldly. She runs her school newspaper and enjoys acting, spending time with her cat, and using far too much imagery.

Don't Trust Just Anyone By Joel Ramirez-Zelaya

It was a beautiful-sunny day at school in the year 2012 in the downtown area of Los Angeles.

My elementary school, "Union Avenue Elementary School," was a somewhat big red-blue colored building. Everyday, the school filled up with about 2000 students. I was only nine years old in the third grade. I have always enjoyed school and was always recognized with many awards by my teachers. I've always attended my elementary school with my best mind to learn more. The best part was the vendors that sold tamales and pupusas to hungry students in the morning before attending class.

My dad picked up my brother and me from school, and drove us to the tamale vendor. I picked a green-salsa tamale, while my brother picked a red-salsa tamale. I ate my tamale and got dropped off in front of the play area where students would enter and go to their assigned classroom lines to wait for their teacher. I went to my line and waited for my teacher, Mr. Carlos. He led us to the second floor to our classroom, where my classmates and I hung our bags to the backpack-hanger closet and went to our assigned desks. I unpacked my pencil bag and journal.

Mr. Carlos, was starting a lecture on our writing prompt from a book we were reading a week before. Then students in their hyper-activeness started to converse and began to get noisy. Mr. Carlos got up from his teacher's chair to quiet down the classroom.

During all the commotion, my classmate, who I hardly knew, out of nowhere raised her hand at me and told me, "Poke me here in this spot of my hand with your pencil."

I didn't respond. I looked at her and pointed my pencil towards where she told me. I didn't know if what I was doing was right or wrong. My classmate screamed out in pain like if a knife had stabbed her.

Mr. Carlos directs his tone to my classmate and in shock remarked, "What happened. The pencil lead went through your skin."

My classmate then points her finger at me in agony, "It was him Mr. Carlos. He poked me with his pencil."

My heart accelerated. My thoughts went everywhere. I have never gotten in trouble. I thought to myself in desperation, *what would happen if my parents found out? What would Mr. Carlos think of me? Would he think of me as a bad kid instead of a good one?* Ever since I was little, I have gained a reputation with my parents and teachers as being a very well-behaved student. Getting in trouble was a new experience for me.

Mr. Carlos looked at me in a very disappointing and furious way, "I never thought you would do something like this. Go right now to the principal's office."

I felt a hot sensation going through my whole body. All the way from my feet to my head. I was filled with shame. I felt unstoppable tears coming out of my eyes as I walked past the classroom to the hallway towards the stairs. I walked down the stairs to the principal's office. I didn't know where the principal's office was, so I just entered the main office of the school. I told the first adult I saw that I got in trouble. I told her everything I did.

"I don't know why I poked her. I'm truly sorry. I would never do something like it again," I cried to the office lady.

"Okay. I'll walk you to the assistant principal," she replied, looking at me in a very sensible way.

She walked me to the assistant principal's office. I remember the office lady telling the assistant principal that I was truly sorry for what I did. She also said that I openly admitted what I did wrong. The assistant principal looked at me and asked me why I poked my classmate.

I was quiet for a moment looking down at my hands but then replied, "I don't know why I did it."

The assistant principal didn't ask me many questions. She just sat me down at a table with three other kids who had also gotten in trouble. I sat there for hours. I looked at the other kids who sat around the table I was at and remarked to myself in my thoughts saying, *I shouldn't be here. I'm not like all these kids who have done worse things than me.* In all those hours before lunch time, I reflected on what I had done. I realized how ignorant and foolish I was to just listen to the evil instructions of my classmate. I was allowed to go to lunch and afterwards to class. I didn't get a call home from my parents, which was a huge relief and a surprise for me.

From that day forward I realized the importance of the idea of "thinking before you act." I made sure what I did wasn't going to gain me any regret and consequences which I had to deal with if I were to act upon them. I made sure to not listen to any instructions related to bad behavior from classmates.

Finally, I learned to never have communication with my classmate that fooled me into shame.

Joel Ramirez-Zelaya is a student that attends POLAHS in the harbor-beach town of San Pedro, in the state of California. He loves writing about music, about animals, and science-

fiction. He's very motivated to go to a four-year university and study for a pre-med major, to go on to study medicine. His dream career is to become an orthopedic surgeon.

Evaporated Mothers By Dante Antonio

Everyone has a mother somewhere—it seems a safe enough assertion. But there is no mother at dinner with us. And one is left to wonder: What about the mothers of Meetinghouse? What about the evaporated mothers, the disintegrated mothers? What about the cremated mothers, spread and fractured throughout the ocean, through the sea? (*The Sea, the Sea.*)

I remember very little of my mother. It seems a false comfort to imagine her Somewhere. And like my children, she has never been a guest at my table.

I will admit I do not know what suffering my mother endured. Or where she is hidden so well that I'll never know the place I cannot find her. But there is one picture that belonged to my father. And since he died it's belonged to me.

In the frame: an empty vase on a simple rectangular table—We appear to be in the kitchen—a window behind the table; Dusk—I've imagined the vase's color to be blue—a woman sitting at the table's edge, staring at the vase, her hands blurred; and nothing else on the table.

The last time I looked at that photo it fell apart in my hands, and I spent many hours that day trying to put my mother back together, before I realized too many pieces had already blown out the window, off to sea. (*The Sea, the Sea.*)

Dante Antonio (@dante_s_antonio) is a musician, writer, and actor based in Brooklyn, NY. He writes plays and poetry, fiction and non, and is spending quite a bit of time these days researching for a novel. He's also exploring the worlds of microtonal and electronic music (setting some of Eliot's poetry). You can find his literary work in Sheila-Na-Gig Online, Blue Marble Review, and New Note Poetry.

Dream Sequence Seashore By Satori McCormick

We are postcard people: the sun shines like a celestial diamond, so bright the exposure bleaches the entire image. One day we will send this postcard to Mom's ex-husband who she still is friends with, miraculously.

I dig my body into the sand pretending I'm a crab. It's a warm blanket over me. It's golden and smells like triumph. I asked my mom, "Mom let's go to the beach and hide like hermit crabs," a couple hours ago in her office. She skimmed her fingers through the top of her hair. She sighed. "I have to finish writing this paper," she said and got up to close the door on me. She reappeared in different rooms, pacing, her hands entwined behind her back and her head down. Soft shuffle of her socks on the hardwood, and then the jingle of keys. "Let's go to the beach," she announced. Triumph.

I splash into the water. Then I circle back and reach for her. She's frowning at me like she doesn't trust me, her pale white legs propped up and she's leaning on them, the towel underneath her baby blue. I touch her and her skin is rough, grainy. I try to grab her arm and it crumbles into sand.

My mother slumps into a pile of sand on the towel. So does everyone else on the shore, and the salty breeze shifts them away, recycled into natural things once more.

"Don't swim into the deep water or the sharks will get you," she had said in the beginning when I pulled off my shirt so I was only wearing my trunks. My hair is the same color as the sand. Bleached blonde. Maybe I am just a sandcastle again. Maybe I was imagining us ever really being there in the flesh. We are creatures of the earth. We fall back into it when we get too far from it.

One night my mom had a date. She dressed all in white like she was getting married. Lacy white dress with long sleeves and a skirt that cut just above her knees. She looked unrecognizable. "Make up," she explained when I pointed to her face. The babysitter told me the story of the nativity scene; it was around Christmastime. I listened and looked at her picture books. The angels were dressed like my mother. They fly down from heaven. Many times in our life together Mom tried to leave. She started the car and left me in the house at midnight only to come back hours later with apology ice cream and a Nirvana record. Other times she announced she was going on a long solo trip out East somewhere. She made plans, calculated hotel costs, and traced routes through major highways until these scraps of paper were left unfinished in a drawer. She once told me my dad was an angel. We listened to Nirvana in the living room, silently, heads bent, as if we were praying. At my mom's wedding she was literally dressed like a bride, and by then I knew much more about angels. They always wanted to fly up to the heavens and you had to either watch them go or you could tie them down like balloons. When my mom was saying her vows I wondered what would happen if you grabbed on an angel while it was flying back up. Earth would pull you down, I decided. Earth always pulls you away from the angels. That's what gravity is.

Later I learned my mom was a professor of theology. At first I heard "sea-ology." I simply thought she studied the sea. Saltwater realms.

She told me about salt pillars while driving to the school. When Lot's wife looked back, my mom explained, she was turned to salt and you can see her in the Dead Sea. I got chills thinking about that saline graveyard. The hot white shoreline, the water evaporated into dry air above.

When I woke up from my nap on the beach Mom was nowhere in sight. Her towel and things were gone, there were hundreds of footprints in the sand. I waited. I found peace. After this meditation she was back, and she held out her hand with an unreadable face and I took it and I didn't even wonder where she'd been. We drove home. We got Wendy's on the way and I was allowed a medium vanilla cone.

She published her research paper in that same month and several journals rejected it. Years later I read it. It was about the maternal roles in the Bible, heavily centered on Lot's wife. She made a rather striking metaphor about the mother being trapped, solidified in salt, caught making her escape. Wearing a crystal wedding gown.

Satori McCormick (she/her) is a seventeen- year-old high school senior from Denver, Colorado. Her work has been previously recognized by the Adroit Prizes, *805 Lit + Art*, *The Center for Fiction*, and more. She was born in Minneapolis and is a tribal member of Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians.

Homesick By Allison Titus

The gas pumped through the hose in a smooth rhythm. I closed my eyes and waited for the soft *click*. In the front seat the last of the Chex Mix had fallen and settled in the stitching of the rough fabric. I brushed it away before continuing my drive.

Five hours to go. Dad offered to drive with me and fly home after move in, but I didn't want the tearful goodbye in front of strangers I needed to befriend. I promised myself a new start; a new, independent start.

The highway was a wasteland of billboards and truck stops. My audio jack stopped working a few months ago, so I was stuck listening to whatever played on the radio as I passed through each state. I liked moving through places and hearing the static over the music pick up and fade away.

The sky darkened ahead, signaling rain. I rolled down my window and placed my forearm against the cool metal of the door. The air was thick and wet, electrified by the coming storm.

Dad and I used to stand by the screen door when it rained and count how many lightning strikes we could spot. He usually bested me, and I would whine about how he was taller and older, and it was unfair. When the thunder would pound so hard the doorframe shook, Mom would yell at us to close the door. She didn't like how stray rain drops would splatter through the screen and dampen the new hardwood floor. Dad would laugh and say *alright kiddo, let's listen to your mother*. Behind the closed door I would still stand and watch the water beat against the glass.

The rain was coming down in sheets now, and I could hardly see past my windshield. The lights of the truck in front of me blurred into fuzzy red bulbs. My grip on the steering wheel tightened as I eased my foot off the gas pedal. Traffic was moving slowly and my heart rate was picking up, so I decided to turn off at the nearest rest stop. I found shelter at a Wendy's inhabited with other refugees of the storm. The smell of fry oil mixed with the metallic scent of the rain.

Dad and I used to go to places like this after my soccer games. In early September, when the summer heat was still waning, he would let me get ice cream with my hamburger. It would drip onto my grass-stained knees, and Dad would laugh at my mess.

After a few minutes the rain let up to a quiet drip. I ventured back to my car and was off once again. When I crossed the border of Massachusetts a wave of anxiety rushed over me. In my head I rehearsed the greeting to my roommate which I had perfected the night before with Dad. He was nervous for me, but thought it a bit silly to practice saying hello.

Ten minutes away from school I pulled off of the highway again and parked outside of a Starbucks. My hands shook against the steering wheel. I reached for my phone in the cupholder and pulled up Dad's contact. I hesitated to press call, and I couldn't figure out why. Why I had done this alone, why I thought I didn't need him anymore. I watched all the movies and saw the protagonists go off on their big adventures, leaving their overbearing families behind. I wanted to be on my own like them. But why did it already feel so lonely?

I pressed call and held the phone to my ear. Two rings later he picked up.

“Hey, kiddo? You at school?” His voice was loud and cheerful. Picturing him on the other side of the phone made me smile, and my stomach ached a little less.

Allison Titus is a recent graduate of Boston College. She writes as much as she can in her free time and loves sharing her work with the people around her.

My Brother By Ahan Basu

It was the void that filled me up; I had never felt so brimming before. Badly perspiring with my watery palms constantly rubbing against each other, my hands felt warm to me; cheeks were so for a long time now. My half – snapped armchair has been gazing mockingly at me for hours now, the clattering ceiling fan annoying me enough with its dreadful melody. I had none to be with now, except for the pervasive loneliness dominating me. I have lost him; people say “forever” but I don’t believe them.

The thunderous roars outside reminded me to cook dinner. The aroma of the wetted earth rouses me to the core. I was content with him, and therefore he left me.

– skepticism is worse when you’re alone. And I was then. Broken dreams in the countryside lay buried in thousand splashes of rain. The dead of the night shows me that I have nothing to put in the boiling water. Another night like this.

Love is what a dove finds while sailing over the shallow turquoise and I with my brother. “BROTHER”...a nice name for a man! Twenty – seven autumns have I seen pass by and in each I have strolled the pathway from our house leading to the “Precious Circus”. The ~~twenty – eighth~~ one was not that good for me – we went for a stroll through the grassy----

lane which veered onto a pebbled pathway, adjoining a fast, icy rill. We stopped there. The last stop ever. I have never been able to bear hunger and the stream seemed so too, that day; hungry.

He had syncope since childhood. I was aware, or maybe wasn't, I don't remember. It was rather normal when he suddenly dropped down. But it wasn't when I tried calling him several times, giving rather heavy nudges, but to no avail. He wouldn't respond. The last I saw of him was at the edge of the pathway overlooking the stream. My hands were shaking.

The splashing sound confirmed it. What else could have I done? I couldn't tolerate hunger, remember? The flutter was furious that day. I couldn't say the last goodbye.

But people say I never had a brother. Just a broken family. Maybe they didn't know I had lost one. How foolish of them! I can see him from my kitchen window even now, standing and smiling at me, while the water in my saucepan dries away.

An undergraduate with a Political Science major, Ahan is a passionate observer of regional, international and national politics. He holds a keen interest of perceiving societies from different beholder's views, and loves listening to people debate on almost anything.

Road Trip By Bonny Bruzos

I sat in the passenger's seat tapping on the arm rest and humming along to the radio. There was a cloud of Southern strings and country lyrics insulating my thoughts in beer or fishing or whatever else it was that those country-pop stars liked to sing about. In the back seat there were two dry-cleaned black dresses draped over clothes hangers perched on a grab handle. They reminded me of shadows under big, meaty pork legs hanging on hooks at the butcher shop. I tried not to look back at that ominous silhouette of black satin and tulle.---

Resting my head on the window instead, I gazed at the passing green blurbs of trees beside the highway, as my sister and I headed towards our aunt's funeral.

I had seen my aunt in pictures, smiling from a lawn chair next to my mom on the patio, or holding me as a baby. She had moved to North Carolina when I was little, and I never went to visit. My mom went to visit every few years or so, and always returned very quickly. I was never the kind to pry about that sort of thing, especially not at such a young age, but I had always eavesdropped on stories about the terrible fights between the two, and heard my other family members make slight, passive-aggressive comments towards my mother about her sister. At least now my mom wouldn't have to deal with her sister anymore, I remember thinking to myself.

"Are you excited?"

I asked my sister this halfway through her rolling her window down. A lick of wind flicked the bangs off her forehead and sent them dancing into the air, so that I could see the way her eyebrows slightly furrowed as she thought about my question.

"Why would you ask me that?"

There were a few seconds of silence, wedged neatly between the humming of the engine and the uneasy air between us.

"I thought it was funny."

The truth was, I did find it funny, but that wasn't really why I had asked. I asked because I was excited. I understood a funeral was a somber affair, but it was my first time going to one and morbid curiosity could not hold back those guilty feelings of excitement. I had never seen the cold, still face of a person in a casket.

I turned up the radio a bit hoping to dissolve some of the tension, and we spent the rest of the car ride in our own thoughts. My sister wasn't mad at me, I knew that. Hopefully my aunt wouldn't have been mad at me either, hopefully she had a decent sense of humor, but I wouldn't know.

My sister and I got off at a truck stop to use the bathroom and get snacks from the vending machines. I didn't realize that I was zoning out while I peed, so the flush the toilet made when I got up sounded particularly loud and consuming, and it startled me. I got Doritos from a vending machine when I went out and waited for my sister.

Licking the salty seasoning off a chip, I let it sit on my tongue as it melted and bit into my taste buds. I savored that taste, letting it sit hot on my tongue and throat before it disintegrated, the way flesh disintegrates into dirt, or the way pixels disintegrate into the yellowing borders of a 6×4 photograph. Looking up into a clear, bright sky, I had a personal moment of drama while I thought about those Dorito chips and the way they melted so fast on my tongue and slid down my throat, one after the other. I thought about that, and life in general, at least as far as I could comprehend it at that time. What I didn't understand about life I understood about the loss of life, how quickly a final breath can dissolve into the atmosphere and how Aunt Ruby can become the *departed* Aunt Ruby. I threw away the empty bag of chips and got back into the car with my sister when she came out of the bathroom.

As night started setting in, I continued tapping the arm rest and humming along to green blurbs of trees outside my window and the air rushing around the car, the final rays of sunlight glinting off the silver hood. Soon the crickets would come out and the lights in houses would pluck off one by one, my eyelids following suit. It was a great harmony between everything around me, overlapping, uneven movements and sounds weaving together. Like the land was a giant lung, like the Earth breathing in and out in synchronicity with my chest as it has fallen, and as it continues to rise, for now. In that moment, now was all I needed.

Bonny has been creatively writing since as long as she can remember. She is currently a seventeen-year-old senior in high school and hopes to pursue a career in novel writing in the future.

Nonfiction

The Botanists By Sidney Muntean

My flower obsession began in elementary school. It went like this: one day I was mindlessly plucking Chrysanthemums in the park across from my school. It was late—almost an hour after class had ended—and I knew my mother would be rushing from work to pick me up. I had always felt guilty for causing her stress, so I told her that school ended at 3 pm, not at 2 pm. Usually, a swarm of daycare kids was released at 3 pm, so I knew their presence would be enough to convince my mom that I was telling the truth. But that day, the swarm did not come, the stragglers had all gone, and it was just me and another girl waiting. Elizabeth and I went to the same school, but we weren't in the same class. And in elementary school, children who weren't in the same class were enemies.

Despite this, Elizabeth picked a Chrysanthemum and held it up to me—a peace offering. We began our alliance like that, all quiet and inconsequential, and grew to find a sense of camaraderie in the silence. The day we met, we made a Chrysanthemum bouquet, placed it on a worm's grave (from when one of her friends squashed it on a rainy day, she told me), and grieved for a life taken too soon.

At school, we never acknowledged each other. It was that type of alliance that required distance to work. After school, we began our experiments. We spliced Chrysanthemums open and rifled through their insides with mechanical pencils. We crushed petals and took them home for further inspection. We read books about their uses and came to the park bubbling with information. We Googled different types of flowers, chanting the names of

our favorites (hers was hibiscus, and I boasted that I had a hibiscus plant in my very own backyard). We kept them in our backpacks at all times, handy for quick-time medicinal purposes or impromptu rituals.

Nevertheless, the efflorescence of our new bond came quickly to an end. My mother had learned that I had been obscuring the time school ended and turned her world upside down to pick me up on time. Elizabeth stopped staying late too, leaving with her group of friends immediately after school. And just like that, we became strangers.

A few weeks later, it was Elizabeth's birthday. After school, she and her friends were going out to celebrate, and, much to my chagrin, they happened to gather next to my mother's car. I slid in the front seat as quickly as I could and feigned an intense conversation with my mom.

The next few moments I remember in pieces. I remember hearing a loud boom. I remember watching Elizabeth's friends run off, claspng their phones to their ears. I remember Elizabeth's expression frozen in a scream.

And my mother was oblivious to it all. She continued chatting giddily, pulling out of the parking lot and into the road. I, shocked, asked her if she had heard the gunshot. She gave me a funny look. *That wasn't a gunshot, that was a firework or a car backfiring. Someone was just trying to prank those kids: people do that all the time.* A familiar gray car sped in front of us and I felt something in my chest flare up. I stared at the license plate and cursed myself for not having a photographic memory. I repeated the combination out loud like a prayer. Crushed between my fingers was a flower I had discreetly picked from the school garden.

When we reached the first stoplight, we counted how many police cars were headed toward the school. *Two. Three. Four.* My mother looked at me, nodded, and made a U-turn.

I never told any of my friends that I was the one who gave the police the license plate number. In the months to come, my mother would spin her retelling of events at social

gatherings like a party trick. But to me, it felt like something that should be unspoken. I would later learn that it was Elizabeth's mother who died and Elizabeth's father who had done the deed. It didn't make sense to me. I wanted to find some sort of explanation, merely because, at that point in my life, I thought there was an answer to everything.

In the days that followed, I felt misplaced. We had school-wide assemblies. A state therapist was brought in. The whole school billowed with sorrow. I hated every second of it. There seemed to be an unspoken contest to see who could have the most convincing meltdown and led to my complete withdrawal from my peers. I felt like an imposter because I too felt confused and frustrated over what had happened to Elizabeth, but I wasn't sure if this was even my grief to share.

My mother stopped picking me up from the park. Instead, I waited in front of the school along with the majority of the students. I watched as parents got out of their cars and wrapped their arms around their children. I don't know if it was something in the tightness in their embrace or the tenderness of their voice, but I felt the tragedy ripple from person to person. The librarian hung her head as she checked out books. The teachers canceled our tests. The janitor forgot to water the school garden, leaving all the flowers to wilt one by one. What I had initially thought to be forced sympathy turned out to be shared misery. Devastation is a strange thing; it reaches the farthest crevices, stirs up traumas long passed, and leaves scars on even a stranger. That's when I realized that the most beautiful thing about humanity is its capacity for empathy—how it is our instinct to try and replicate emotions to understand those around us. To deny our solitude.

As the end of the school year approached, my hibiscus plant finally flowered. I snapped off a flower and went to school. As I passed by the park, I was surprised to find a memorial in the parking spot where I had last seen Elizabeth. It was adorned with handwritten notes and flowers—the store bought kind. I placed my hibiscus on the memorial before hurrying back to class. I later heard that Elizabeth did see the memorial, right before she disappeared with her siblings, whisked away to a new home far from their past.

I would not show any interest in flowers for several years. I appreciated them from a distance but never dared to touch one. After enough time had passed for the shooting to become a stale memory, a new friend would reintroduce me to my flower obsession. She taught me that if I placed them in a book, they would dry up and maintain their initial form instead of crumbling away. I chose to press flowers in my dictionary and grew consumed with the idea that something living can be immortalized.

I wonder if people are like that too—if they really just wilt and die and fade away or if it's possible to sweep them up in your arms and press them in like a heavy book. Or maybe that's what memories are: moments tucked in the pages of our minds, forever in full bloom, forever preserved.

Sidney Muntean is a first-year student studying Economics at UCLA. Her work appears in *Rising Phoenix Press*, *Backslash Lit*, and *Adonis Designs Press*, among others.

Ode to Bella Vista By Gibson Graham

The bright creature travels through the blades of grass. I can see its rays taking each patch of dirt into their care. Slowly, I come so that they shine within two inches of my face, and I'm forced to close my eyes. On this sunny day, I will be leaving my home of Bella Vista, the city whose name means Beautiful View. Thankfully, it will only be for a short while, and I'm already accustomed to this coming and going. Each week I am forced into the journey away—well, forced may not be the best word. I chose to pursue endeavors out of state, creating the need for me to leave every so often. I chose to do this, yet every time it feels against my will.

Propping my pillow against the headrest of my seat, I enter the car and prepare for the long travels ahead. As my mom and I drive out of Bella Vista, I try to do schoolwork, but I can't—

help getting distracted by the tall trees that trace the city's sky. In each season, these trees present a new landscape for me to be impressed by. With summer, there is a wide variety of greens that transition to oranges, reds, and yellows in the fall. Once all of their leaves have gone, it is a sure sign of winter. On this day, a few small leaves can be spotted budding amongst the limbs, indicating spring. When I peer at the ground, I can see flowers and wild plants growing, their presence creating an image that is easy on the eyes. These views come in only the first few minutes of our drive, with more bright lawns and large forests accompanying us until we reach a sign marking the start of Bella Vista. At this, I usher a sigh, but I realize that now I will be able to focus without the constant bombardment of nature calling my attention.

Once we arrive at our small apartment in Edmond, OK, I put my bags down. By this point, I've finished my workload for the day and am ready to relax. Seeing that there is little to do in a small space away from home, I turn on our TV and sit placidly for a few hours. Although my goal is relaxation, I can't help but feel empty. At moments, I look out the window at the side of our building. It is almost a reflection of Bella Vista, only smaller, with its woodland creatures and few visible plants. It is a mockery of sorts to my home, but it still causes me some joy to be reminded of the place I love. Whenever I try to remember the moments I spent in our apartment at Edmond, I come up blank. Almost a placeholder for true memories, the dimly lit, four-room space only brings out the differences between home and away, the thinly veiled line between comfort and listlessness.

Three days go by in this way, until finally, the trip home begins. Most of the roads we take are long, tedious, and bland. Only the vivid sunset painting the sky in the first hour of our drive provides any sense of wonder while in Oklahoma. I become anxious, my legs sore and my heart aching to be free from the car's tight space. After a while, it begins to feel like this will be my life for eternity. I start to believe that I will never get out of the vehicle's harsh grip, never make it back home. But just as this dread begins to cover me, I see it.

The bright creature engulfs the surrounding area with light and fills the wavering souls of travelers with happiness. Its angled rays burst forward and highlight a sign that marks the

end to our time away from Bella Vista. Although darkness surrounds us, the familiar shadows of ancient trees demand our attention in the sky. Moonlight provides sparkle to the already fruitful bounty of plants issuing from the earth along the road. Full of chaos and life, these integral parts of nature provide the tranquility I need to calm and prepare for rest. Finally, I see the familiar image of my house, and when I continue to the arms of my welcoming bed, I am able to fall asleep in the security that the beautiful view of Bella Vista promises to be there when I awaken.

Gibson Graham is a junior at Bentonville High School in northwest Arkansas. Writing, soccer, and traveling are some of her favorite pastimes. This is only her second publication, and she is very grateful to be featured in the Blue Marble Review!

Global Warming's Gilded Age By Ashwin Telang

You've likely heard the gist of climate change's menace. You almost certainly are disturbed. If I were you, I might've even swiped away, under the impression that this is another climate horror story. So politicians, you're my main target. Unless, of course, the rest of you are courageous enough to digest a mouthful of the future and spread my message.

Thankfully, we aren't in the inescapable stage of such "horror."^[2] Think of climate change like cancer: it becomes untreatable after a particular stage. We are currently in stage three — on the brink of inevitable disaster. Unlike cancer, however, we diagnosed climate change a much earlier century ago. And yet, we knowingly let it plague our green globe.

During my US History class, I couldn't help but think about this issue. Each day we are taught to draw parallels and continuities throughout history. After all, the ultimate goal is for history to inform our modern decisions. So I thought of two very different eras: the gilded age and its succeeding progressive era.

The gilded age was marked by political inaction, lacking legislation and measures against excessive corporate power. The government was riddled with corruption, lobbying, and greedy interest. Criticism predictably followed. Henry Adams' Democracy denounced the government's lack of involvement and inefficiency.^[3] Worse, this passive government has gone *down in history* as an abomination.

Unfortunately, we may be in *global warming's gilded age*. Today's conservative politicians refuse to help our climate. Their corruption, fueled by lobbying and refusal to rescue a dying climate, could not be more similar to gilded age politics. In 2009, congress dismally failed efforts to reduce emissions.^[4] In 2015, Trump withdrew from the Paris Accords, an essential token of global cooperation.^[5] And the prospects of the sweeping climate reform in Biden's Build Back Better Act being passed look bleak.^[6] This is looking more and more like the 19th century Congress which *couldn't get anything done*.

Conservatives aren't only at fault — liberals lack the tenacity that climate change begs for. Democrat, Joe Manchin, has consistently weakened the Build Back Better Act provisions, taking the place of his conservative counterparts.^[7] Meanwhile, other Democrats have misconstrued The Green New Deal, allowing critics to characterize it as a "socialist" agenda that eliminates America's adored beef.^[8] But broadly, state climate plans have been squeezed by moderation.

Politicians, you have a choice: act *now* or be remembered as those who passively killed the country. Later will be too late.

No, the "preserving economy" justification will later be laughable when there is barely an economy. Climate change requires trade-offs for the sake of the long-run. Already, wildfires cost North America \$415 billion.^[9] The future holds temperature extremes that could cost \$160 billion in lost wages. Over 7,000 companies could be suffocated by the climate's consequences.^[10] The alternative is subsidizing renewable energy, which itself will prevent such economic damage and generate over \$2 trillion in business projects.^[11]

Like I said before, an optimistic, green future would remind me of the progressive era. This juncture, praised by historians and politicians alike, fixed a failing society. Tools included reform, regulation, and repair. Progressivism set the stage for the new deal, the economic plan to revive the strangled economy, championed by FDR. Such unprecedented legislation gave FDR and his congress a legendary status. Legislators dream of achieving such a reputation. Some believe it's impossible, but it's not.

The comprehensive Green New Deal could gradually halt the pace of warming. From carbon taxes to grants to energy equality, it will transition our country to be a climate leader.^[12] Like the New Deal, its green counterpart would be the first of its kind and a clear-cut opportunity for lawmakers.

Republicans, if not for saving our planet, honor history and cement your legacies by affirming the Green New Deal. After all, corrupt lobbying money can never buy an eternal legacy.

Solving this crisis should be a no-brainer. We only have three to five years until the window to save humanity shuts. The most proactive model is Denmark, where legislation deployed green technologies and invested in its green workers. It is expected to have zero carbon emissions by 2050.^[13] Denmark's politicians are high-fiving each other knowing that they've secured a heroic legacy. They will be the saviors that lifted their country out of the warming crisis.

Every era in American history has a name: the gilded age, reconstruction era, and turbulent sixties. Perhaps the next few years will be known as the climate era. One where law-makers either take initiative or lay afloat while watching the meltdown unfold. This era, though, will be one unlike any other. It defines implications for massive populations, reaching centuries later. Congress's decisions now could directly impact people two hundred years into the future.

If you made it to this end, you're a real trooper. Global warming is difficult to think about, nonetheless, read about. But to politicians: you took an oath to address every difficult problem — don't break it. The reason to cool an overheating world should be self-evident and moral. Many of you clearly don't understand this. So instead, you must understand that you will go down in history books, cited as the cause of catastrophe. That is, of course, assuming that there are any people left to read them.

Ashwin Telang is a junior in West Windsor-Plainsboro High School South, and writing intern for the Borgen Project. He is passionate about politics, and hopes to spread change across different communities.

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Art

Amaya By Jennifer Chiung



Amaya

Jennifer Chiung is an emerging artist from New York. She enjoys tackling novel concepts and social issues through her digital work. Her work has been recognized by the Alliance for Young Artists & Writers.

In Another Life By Asha Gudipaty

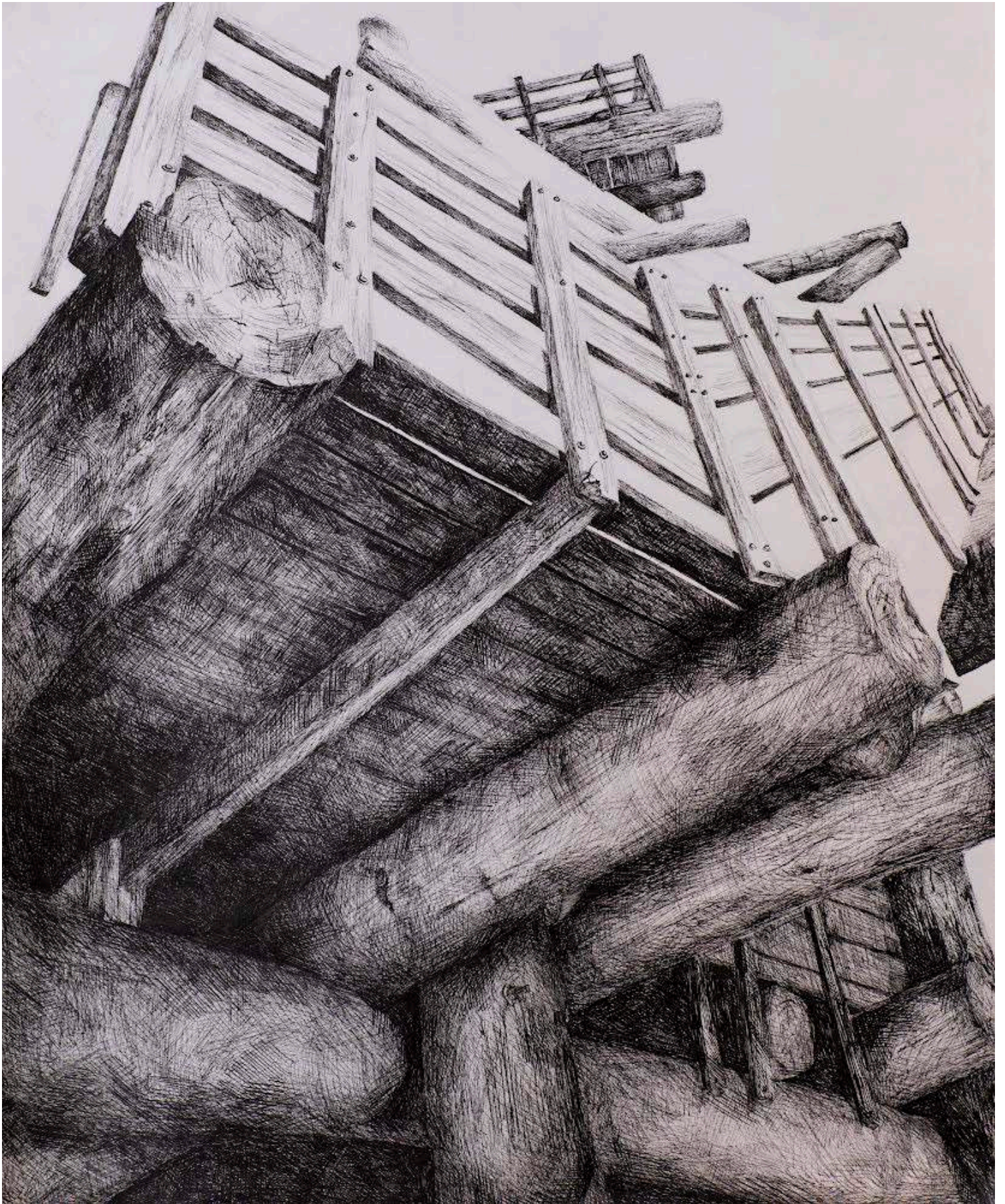


In Another Life

"In Another Life" was inspired by a heartbreaking video I watched about children in poverty desiring an education. I wanted to capture that feeling by portraying a young girl, looking at a reflection, but also a gateway into what her life could be like. I drew the girl on the right in pencil to depict the black and white reality of poverty and how little options are available. On the other hand, the color pencil in the mirror reflects the possibilities of education, as shown through a school girl in a classroom. Unfortunately, these possibilities are not the reality for the girl on the right, and education is inaccessible to her.

Asha is a senior at The Hockaday School, and an artist in all ways possible. She is inclined to experiment creatively with many art styles and writing styles. From acrylic, to free verse, to song lyrics, Asha finds inspiration from the aspects of her surroundings that connect with her the most, objects, emotions, and experiences. She has published work in her school's journal.

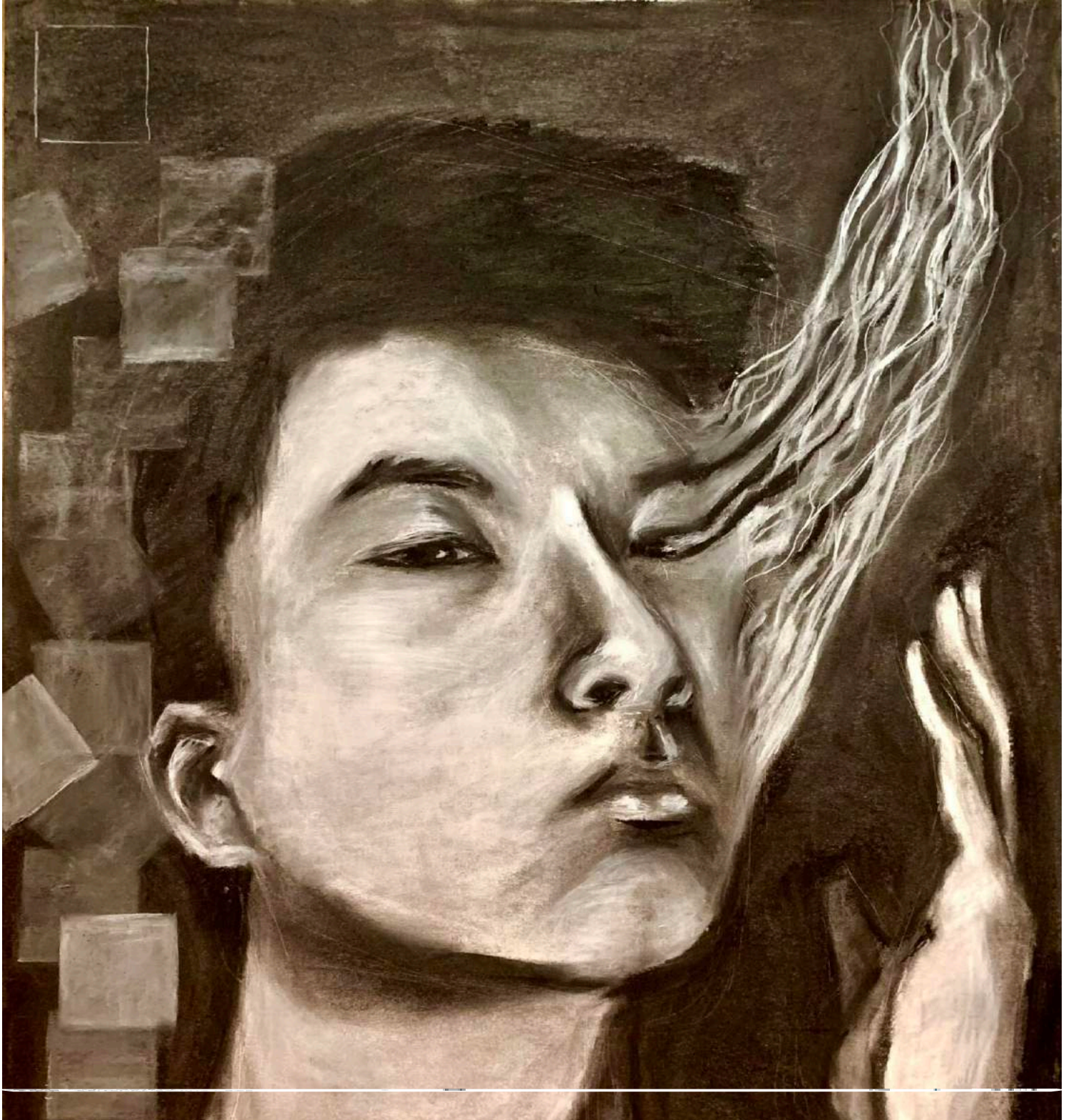
Under the Bridge By Elizabeth Lei

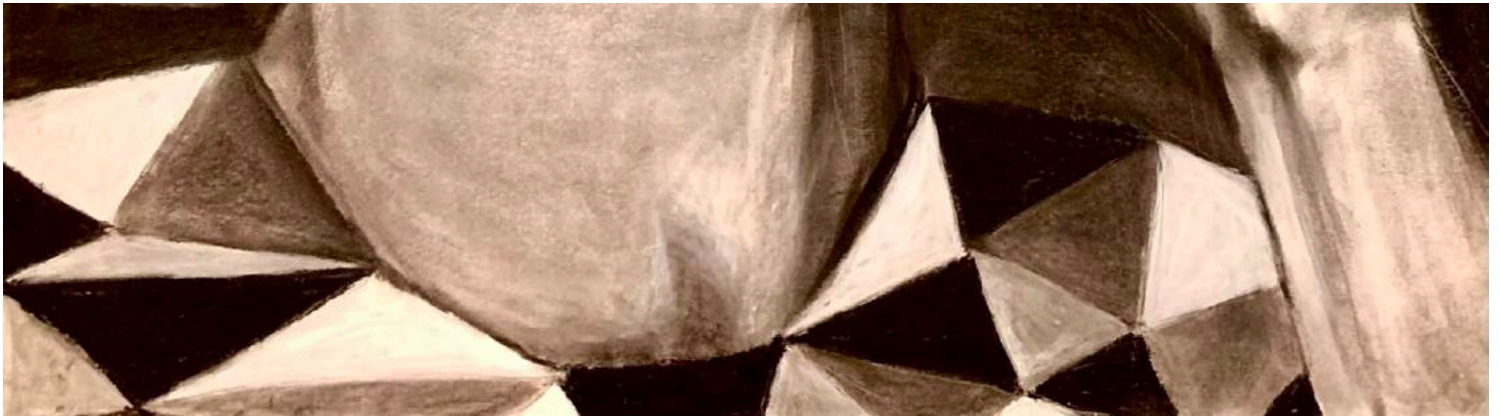


Under the Bridge

Elizabeth is a high schooler based in Texas. In her free time, she enjoys reading fantasy novels and baking banana bread.

Tangible By Ian Chow





Tangible

Tangible has two definitions as an adjective: (1) perceptible by touch and (2) clear and definite; real. The former definition is expressed through the various textures of the piece that can almost be touched, and the latter definition is seen in the clear and definite geometric shapes. There are also some ironic aspects of the drawing which contradict these definitions. The hand, while showing an obvious effect on the “veins” extending from the face, does not actually come in contact with it, and the squares seem to be fading away, thus contradicting their clear and definite quality. This drawing explores the relation between concrete and abstract realities and their effects on individual identities.

Ian Chow is a rising junior from Pierrepont School in Westport, Connecticut. His favorite media include charcoal, pastel, oil paint, and pencil, and he often features themes of contradiction and Asian-American identity in his works.

Bone Crush By Brinda Srinivasan





Bone Crush

Brinda Srinivasan is a rising high school senior in San Diego, who has a passion for painting still life.

Contrast By Brinda Srinivasan

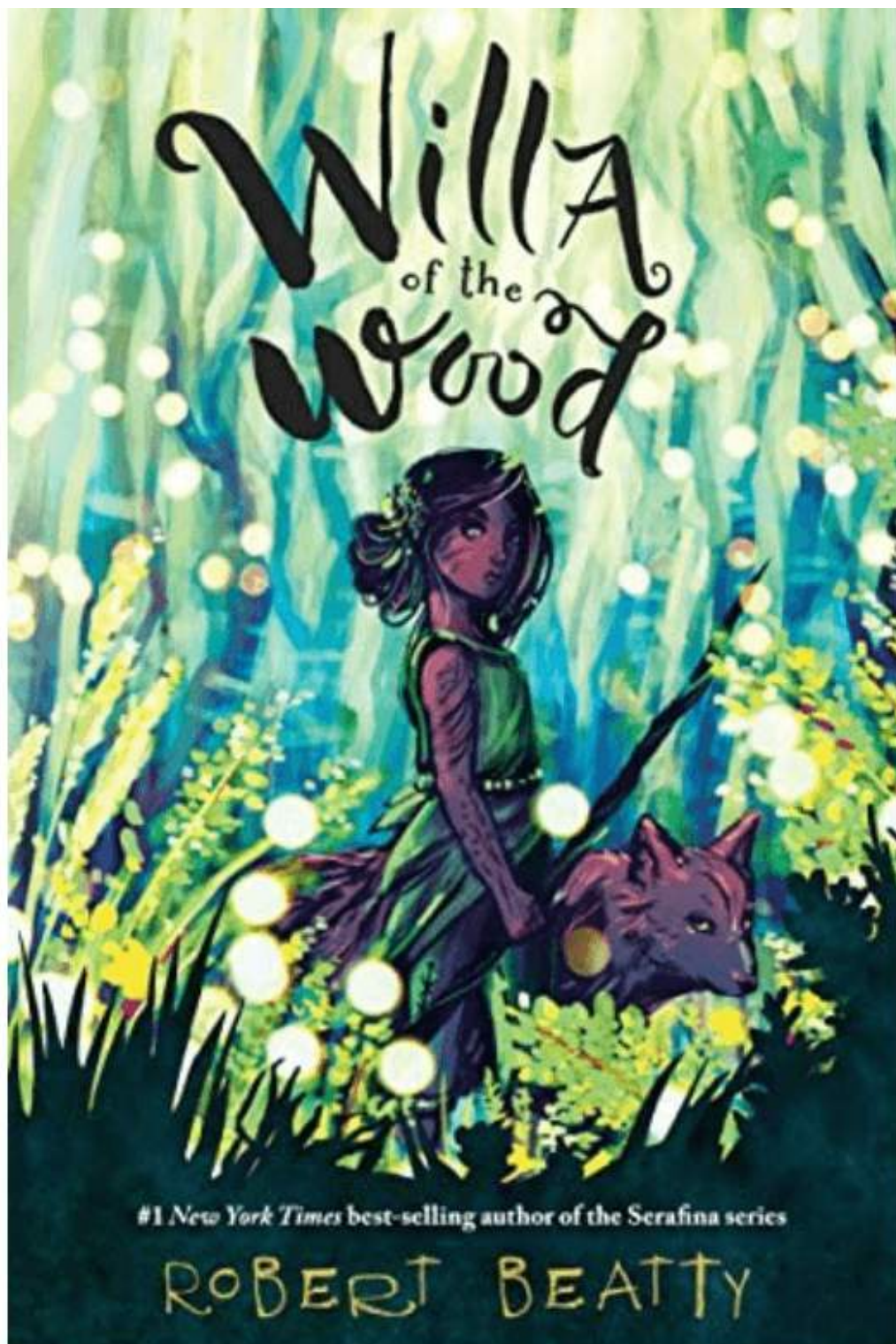


Contrast

Brinda Srinivasan is a rising high school senior in San Diego, and has a passion for still life and watercolor.

Book Review

Willa of the Wood By Julia McCarthy



Robert Beatty fans will not be disappointed in his new novel *Willa of the Wood*. He sticks to his themes about the importance of having family and friends as he writes about Willa, who has neither.

Willa finds herself alone with a clan that doesn't care about her and humans who try to kill her, but just when she feels the most alone, the forest helps Willa, and she ponders one---

kindness that contradicts everything she's learned. All the events steadily build to the climax where choices are harder than ever, and Willa has to decide if she should do what's right even if it will hurt her in the process.

Beatty's writing is rich with sensory details about the Great Smoky Mountains, Willa's home, with its gigantic mountains, flowing rivers, still lakes, and lush forests. Beatty also compares nature to people and man-made tools, like when he writes that people are alike to wolves because they both hunt and kill what they need to survive. Willa also idolized the wolves because of the way they work together. She longs to be part of their pack and hunt alongside the wolves.

There are many secondary characters who shape Willa's life. Willa learned the most from her grandmother who taught her the old ways of their people and how to use her powers in good ways. The leader of Willa's clan, the padaran, taught Willa a lot, too. Most of his teachings were wrong, but they influenced Willa's decisions since she trusts him.

The plausible dialogue between Willa and those characters shows Willa's age and curiosity as she asks many questions and wonders about her place in the world around her.

Beatty writes about so many themes as Willa wanders the woods, but the most important one is about having a family and friends to guide you and support your decisions. Each time reading *Willa of the Wood* reveals more of Beatty's themes.

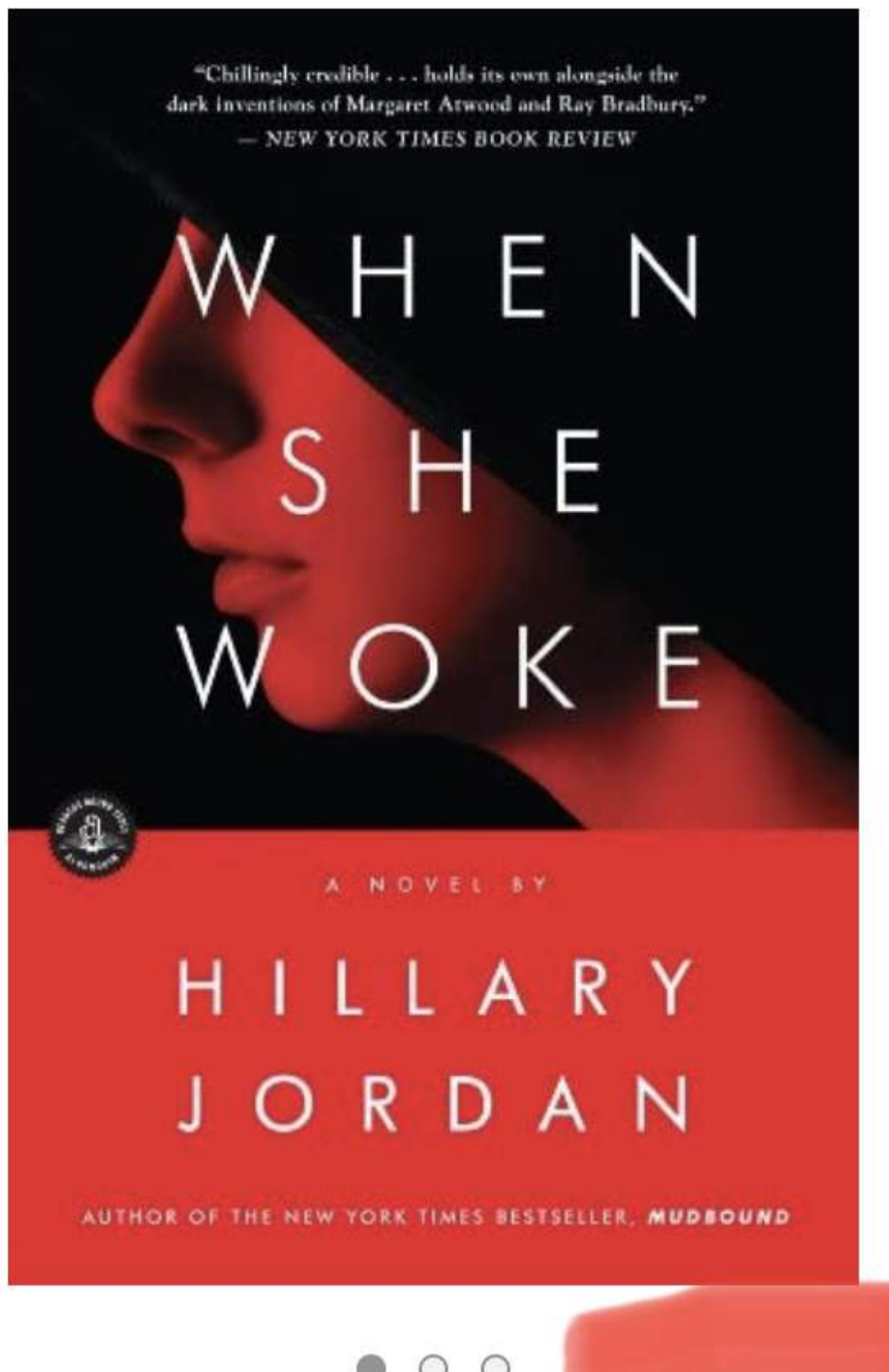
Beatty's usual magic is included which means *Willa of the Wood* is a fantasy book. Much like the Serafina series Beatty wrote, myths become reality, and Willa has some magic of her own.

The beautiful scenery mixed with brilliant themes make this novel one of the best. Lovers of the Serafina series will appreciate and enjoy *Willa of the Wood* because of the main characters' many similarities, like their love of nature and forests and their longing for adventure. Serafina even makes an appearance in the novel, so if you like Serafina or if you

want to disappear into a twelve-year-old girl's mind with the beautiful scenery of the Great Smoky Mountains, then read *Willa of the Wood*.

Julia is a high school student in Missouri, — and wrote this book review while in Mrs. Meusch's English class at St. Patrick School. She enjoys reading fiction and writing about the nature in her backyard.

Colors of Crime By Maria Polizzi



Imagine this, crime is not punished by prison, but by changing the color of the prisoner's skin, and public shame. This is what Hannah faces in *When She Woke* by Hillary Jordan.

Hannah had been changed to the worst color imaginable. A color representing murder. She is red.

Hannah finds herself in a difficult situation in *When She Woke*. Love has driven her to change the course of her life. Maybe forever. Worst of all, she is caught. Now she has to live her life as a red.

Hillary Jordan tackles themes of love, loss, and the weight of your choices in *When She Woke* by using colors to represent crime and discrimination. Some of the best things about this novel are its sensory details, such as describing what skin changing feels like. It is paced very fast, and the characters all go through changes in the book as they face different problems.

The genre of this book is science fiction and is set in a futuristic United States. Hannah is from a small town in Texas, a very Christian community.

Readers will be taken on a journey of self discovery with Hannah as she grows and matures. This is a story that any teen will enjoy, If you wants a story that creeps you out, and makes you think, pick up *When She Woke* at the nearest library.

Maria Polizzi is a high school student, and this is her third publication. She found she enjoyed writing two years ago, and it is something she plans to continue doing as she moves forward in her education.

Rash By Michael McLaughlin



Rash

You all have read some amazing books but, I bet you haven't read the book *Rash* by Pete Hautman. It's an outstanding book. This book has a New York Times Notable Book of the Year Award. It has some great details and that is why I love this book. It's also quite fast paced, and it's a great book for kids older than nine years old.

This book starts off with the main character, Bo Marsten talking to his grandfather about track and field, and how the USSA (United Safer States of America), is because students have to wear padding and helmets for track, as the USSA is making everything safe.

Hautman's, *Rash* is about how to control your anger. It's about self identity— finding how you really are.

Bo Marstens' family is really crazy because in this year, 2074 almost everything is illegal and the Marsten family has some serious anger issues. Bo's dad and brother are both in jail for ten years and are picking shrimp shells as their punishment.

There were many major characters in *Rash*, including Bo, like Rhino, Bork, and Hammer. The antagonist, the character that provides a contrast to the major character, is Karlohs. Anything he did annoyed Bo a lot.

Bo's character developed as time passed, and I liked the message and that we shouldn't have to get angry all the time. So the next time you're in your local library or the one closest one to you check out *Rash* by Pete Hautman. You'll be glad you did.

Michael McLaughlin is fourteen years old and going into eighth grade at St. Patrick's School in Rolla Missouri. His favorite genre of food is seafood. He loves to watch or play baseball, and since he's from Missouri his favorite team is the STL Cardinals. In Michael's words; *"A cool thing about me is that I'm actually adopted, and I've been adopted for about eight years now, and it gave me the chance to be writing this auto-biography and I'm so grateful for what this family has done for me."*

The Hunger Games By Michael McLaughlin



THE HUNGER GAMES

SUZANNE COLLINS

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Imagine your sister is chosen for a death match. You save her by making yourself a volunteer for her. This is *Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins. The story is about a sixteen-

year-old girl named Katniss Everdeen who saves her sister. She steps up for her as a tribute and will fight for her, even though she knows it's tough.

The themes of this story are friendship, family, freedom versus enslavement, and materialism. Friendship and familial bonds are figured as a form of resistance, and Katniss' friendships with Gale, Peeta, Cinna, Haymitch, and Rue help her survive the Hunger Games, even though she is going to miss every single one of them when she's fighting and starving to death.

Although Collins has a lot of characters in the book, the changes throughout the book are different between characters. Katniss is a lot tougher and is a lot more brave, Peeta is also stronger and braver but he also gains trust in people, and Gale is scared and he just wants Katniss to live,— but he's brave trusting she won't die.

Some themes in the book are never giving up on family and friends— even if you just want to die because you're in so much pain. Keep on living and try as hard as you can to succeed and see them after all is done, and hug every single one of them, and when you do you're so happy

Hunger Games does have a sequel as well; the other books are *Catching Fire* which is the second book, and *Mocking Jay* is the third. The fourth that's an add-on and is a prequel to the others is *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*.

I loved this book and the idea that we should never give up on family and our friends. So the next time you're in your local library or the one closest one to you, pick up *Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins.

Michael McLaughlin is fourteen years old and going into eighth grade at St. Patrick's School in Rolla Missouri. His favorite genre of food is seafood. He loves to watch or play baseball,

and since he's from Missouri his favorite team is the STL Cardinals. In Michael's words; "A cool thing about me is that I'm actually adopted, and I've been adopted for about eight years now and it gave me the chance to be writing this auto-biography and I'm so grateful for what this family has done for me."

Jane Austen's "Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary" Gets Her Own Voice—And Romance By Carol

Xu

Pride and Prejudice is the epitome of the enemies-to-lovers trope wrapped in a slow-burn romance, beloved by readers for centuries. In fact, even Jane Austen herself described the novel as "my own darling child." It's easy to swoon over the fierce chemistry between the two main leads, but Austen's novel is chock-full of other protagonist-worthy characters who barely make a dent in the original story.

Take Mary Bennet, for instance. Plain, awkward, and decidedly not rich, with four stunning beauties as sisters and a nagging marriage-obsessed mother, poor Mary seemed to always conveniently blend into the background of any conversation, with that being her sole object in any social outing. In fact, in the original novel she's only given seven spoken lines in total!

But the self-professed "dull and unremarkable" Mary is to be struck by Cupid's arrow in Nancy Lawrence's *Mary and the Captain*, a feel-good satisfactory novel brimming with unlikely romance, unexpected redemption, and, of course, unfavorable first impressions.

It's two weeks until Christmas and Mary Bennet is desperate for some peace and quiet—far away from her contriving, gossipy mother who, regrettably, had not been relieved of her fixation to see all her daughters wedded. A nice family reunion at Netherfield with Jane and Bingley seems just the ticket, but Bingley's cunning sister Caroline throws a wrench into Mary's plans. Caroline's brother Robert is smitten with her dear friend Helena Paget (a

beauty and lady and heiress, oh my!), and what better way to bring the two together than have them settled in Netherfield for Christmas under her watchful eye?

Captain Robert Bingley comes to Netherfield intent on courting and wooing the lovely Helena, but nothing is to go as planned. There's an old adage among the enlightened that warns against rooming with one's best friend for fear of revealing a whole new and potentially unfavorable side of them, and that applies too to staying with the subject of one's infatuation in close quarters, as Robert finds out soon enough.

As Miss Paget's true and decidedly less attractive personality masks her outward beauty, Robert becomes more intrigued by shy, awkward Mary Bennet. His evolving perception of Mary mirrors that of the reader, as Lawrence's firm steering of events and the plot allows the reader to gradually gain a much more favorable impression of Mary than Austen's meager rendering in the original. Though romance is indeed a significant and appealing motif of Lawrence's composition, Mary's personal character development is the true melody that sings out, as always intended.

Mary Bennet had always been more of a self-effacing introvert: "She had never mastered the art of carrying off such social niceties. She would stutter and stumble, or—even worse—sit in strangled silence, unable to conjure up a viable thought to add to a conversation." And when presented beside her sisters—elegant Jane, witty Elizabeth, enthusiastic Kitty, and lively Lydia—compounded by "being the only plain one in the family," it's easy to see why Mary doesn't offer many agreeable first impressions.

In the original novel, Mary unknowingly embarrasses her family with a poor pianoforte performance at a ball, and demonstrates an inability to read-the-room with her solemn words of "comfort" for Elizabeth regarding her sister Lydia's elopement: "Unhappy as the event must be for Lydia, we may draw from it this useful lesson..."

Interestingly, Austen attributes these moments of social slip-ups to Mary's "pedantic air and conceited manner," strikingly similar to Elizabeth originally chalking Darcy's actions to

his pride. But while Darcy's pride and other failings were eventually forgiven,

with Austen awarding him a happy ending, Mary seemed to be condemned to a loveless life for posterity as "the only daughter who remained at home."

In today's literary world, however, the very components of Mary's situation that undermined her in Austen's novel—minor character, misunderstood, hazy resolution—gives her the greatest potential to be her own heroine. Nowadays, introverts like Mary are met with more compassion and curiosity than scorn and rebuffs, elevating them from mere character foils to proper protagonists.

Her awkwardness, which, in *Pride and Prejudice*, had been a subject of subtle mockery, becomes a means of relatability with the reader. Sure, she does bust out a pedantic line or two from the admittedly mundane *Sermons for Young Ladies, Volume One* when feeling particularly desperate, but her efforts and attempts to be more socially aware gives her an unwaveringly sincere voice that is not at all conceited and instead endears her shy, bookish nature to the reader.

Mary may be a clumsy conversationalist perturbed by strangers and prone to stowing away in the library to avoid them, but she proves she's more than willing to leap out of her comfort zone when help is needed. And all the reading she's done has made her an intelligent young woman, whose wits and excellent memory quickly become of great value further into the story. As for Mary's connection to her piano, Lawrence provides the instrument with stronger symbolic value, turning it into a cathartic outlet for when things go wrong.

As much as Mary's journey to find her own voice was engrossing, Lawrence may have bitten off more than she could chew by wedging in a secondary redemption arc for Caroline Bingley, the master manipulator herself. Though Caroline certainly had the potential to become an absorbing heroine, Lawrence resorts to the now popular "Disney villain" treatment of a tragic backstory that attempts to make up for all the character's past

offenses. Caroline's blossoming romance with a kind vicar is also peppered sporadically throughout the story and is admittedly sweet, but its overall ambiguity and vague resolution makes it fall flat satisfaction-wise.

Nonetheless, fans of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* will no doubt find Lawrence's infatuated lovers just as compelling as Elizabeth and Darcy, who unfortunately don't make a direct appearance in the novel but play an important role nevertheless. However, while Elizabeth and Darcy's clear chemistry despite, or rather, because of, their contrasting personalities designated them as one of literature's most popular "ships," Mary and Robert's romance is absorbing not because they seemed destined to be together, but because they appeared not.

Their love flickers with the raw, tender passion of patience and trust, burning slowly and steadily to a satisfying ending where our "Mary, Mary, quite contrary" will finally, *finally*, get the man she deserves.

Hetian (Carol) Xu is a rising senior at Amador Valley High School in California. She serves as the editor-in-chief of the award winning school newspaper, *Amador Valley Today*, and has been recognized by the Scholastic Writing Competition and Goi Peace Foundation for her writing. In her spare time, she enjoys snacking on brownies, watching Korean dramas, and lounging around with a splendid book.

Meaning & Mortality: A Review of When Breath Becomes Air By Abigail Blessing

It is a strange experience to pick up a book imbued with death. On lifting *When Breath Becomes Air* from the library shelf and reading the summary, I sensed a subtle shift in the air — or perhaps within me. I stood beneath the artificial lights, surrounded by the sounds and movements of life, grasping death in my fingers.

Unsettled but deeply intrigued, I leafed through the memoir, feeling the fragments of shattered dreams, relationships, and life permeate the pages. I paused as my eyes fell across a poem, *Caelica* 83 by Baron Brooke Fulke Greville, inscribed in the opening pages:

You that seek what life is in death,

Now find it air that once was breath.

New names unknown, old names gone:

Till time end bodies, but souls none.

Reader! then make time, will you be,

But steps to your eternity.

The lines beckoned to me like a sliver of light beneath a closed door. Breathless, I turned the knob, descending into the depths of meaning and mortality. Fear, sorrow, joy, confusion, peace enveloped me in waves. Can the presence of death cause such a contrast of emotions? It can, it seems. Dr. Paul Kalanithi's life, the epitome of juxtaposition, pulled me from the heights of occupational utopia to the depths of mortal uncertainty. Yet, his words dispelled the silence of death, filling it with moving anecdotes from his personal and medical experience.

When I picked up this book, I expected a compelling but technical lecture on dying from a clinical viewpoint. But what I found transcended this presumption. I found compassion where I thought only mechanism occurred. I found hope where I thought only shadows reigned. I found a soul struggling to make sense of life's meaning in the face of death. And is not that the story of humanity?

When Breath Becomes Air opens a window into the life of Dr. Paul Kalanithi. The son of first-generation immigrants, Kalanithi grew up in Kingman, Arizona. From an early age, his life was cluttered with nature, literature, and a burning ache for knowledge. Kalanithi's mother, dissatisfied with the curriculum at his public high school, helped ameliorate the syllabus, a factor that aided in Kalanithi's Stanford acceptance letter. After earning a B.A. and M.A. in English literature and a B.A. in human biology from Stanford, Kalanithi received an MPhil in History and Philosophy of Science from Cambridge University. At this time, Kalanithi realized that he desired "direct experience"; "it was only in practicing medicine," he writes, "that I could pursue a serious biological philosophy." By pursuing a path in medicine, Kalanithi hoped to answer "the question of what makes human life meaningful, even in the face of death and decay."

After attending Yale School of Medicine, Kalanithi entered a residency program at Stanford. During his internship, he encountered suffering and death — things he had only read *about* in books — first-hand. In his observations, Kalanithi guides readers through the waiting rooms and the sterilized offices, unveiling scenes of profound loss and quiet hope. Through these raw accounts, Kalanithi sets the stage for his own tragedy. He prepares readers in part one of the memoir for his wrestle with death in part two. When the results arrive, a glaring image of stage IV lung cancer, Kalanithi *is* under death's shadow, grappling with his mortality through the words he weaves.

What struck me most about Kalanithi's writing is the degree of empathy with which he conveys not only his anguish, but that of his patients. In one poignant scene, Kalanithi describes relating the option of brain surgery to a terrified patient. He acknowledges that he could have listed to her "all the risks and possible complications... [documented] her refusal in the chart," and departed. However, in line with the resolve he made to treat his "paperwork as patients, and not vice versa," Kalanithi gathers her and her family together, and they discuss the options. In doing this, Kalanithi writes that he "had met her in a space where she was a person, instead of a problem to be solved."

Conversely, while in the trenches of death, he cautions readers of the “inurement” and objectivity that can arise through this persistent confrontation. Kalanithi entered the field with noble intentions, yet, he admits, he felt at one point that he was “on the way to becoming Tolstoy’s stereotype of a doctor... focused on the rote treatment of disease — and utterly missing the larger human significance.” In the end, technical excellence is not enough. Mechanical words and statistics cannot balm the wound of fearful uncertainty; true healing lies in the relationship between doctor and patient. “Before operating on a patient’s brain, I must first understand his mind,” Kalanithi explains. By separating the physical from the mental, the tangible from the intangible, Kalanithi can recognize the patient not as an object, but as a soul, a being in possession of an “identity,” “values,” and knowledge of “what makes his life worth living, and what devastation makes it reasonable to let that life end.” At heart, technical excellence without relationality is like a stained glass window without light. In a society that too often reduces human beings to numbers — the effect of a worldwide prosopagnosia — Kalanithi urges readers to view humanity as a group of *individual* beings, not a mere collection of data.

Once Kalanithi was diagnosed with cancer, his perspective on death changed. Kalanithi writes:

I began to realize that coming in such close contact with my own mortality had changed both nothing and everything. Before my cancer was diagnosed, I knew that someday I would die, but I didn’t know when. After the diagnosis, I knew that someday I would die, but I didn’t know when. But now I knew it acutely.

Previously, as a doctor, Kalanithi saw death as the force he grappled with to attain several more grains of time. In relation to himself, like many human beings, he viewed death as inevitable but not imminent. Death’s shadow was omnipresent, but it was forgotten amidst achievement, distraction, and the sense of immortality that accompanies the two. But now, as a patient encountering the fatal presence in his own body, he felt it. He tasted it. At the pinnacle of his career, Kalanithi was greeted with his finitude.

And his response?

Finding meaning in the life that remained. To acknowledge one's mortality is to acknowledge time's transience. In the face of these two giants, Kalanithi searches for what is significant and what makes his life meaningful. This search results in two significant decisions: the decision to have a child and the decision to write this book.

Kalanithi explains, "If human relationality formed the bedrock of meaning, it seemed to us [he and his wife] that rearing children added another dimension to that meaning." At heart, this line confirms one of the memoir's underlying messages: life's meaning is rooted in relationality. Kalanithi found value in his relationships with his patients, his family, his friends, the world, and God.

When Breath Becomes Air is both practical and deeply personal. It reads as both a guide to living well and a love letter to Kalanithi's daughter. Death is integral to the memoir, laced between the lines and stamped in the cover Kalanithi never held. Like his life, the book was half-finished; his wife and a team of editors worked to publish it posthumously in 2016. Even so, the memoir radiates with life — as Kalanithi quotes Samuel Beckett, "birth astride of a grave." In Kalanithi's poignant reflections and in the promise of his child's life, death and life compose the pages of the memoir.

When Breath Becomes Air offers readers a new perspective on mortality, an echo of *memento mori*, and reveals, through Kalanithi's life experience, how to live and find meaning when breath is still breath.

Although of American descent, Abigail Blessing was born in Pakistan and has lived nearly all fifteen years of her life in Malaysia. From an early age, she has been intrigued by the dark and the deep dimensions of life, prompting her to take an interest in topics of art, death, isolation, and morality. When Abigail is not penning stories or essays, she takes

pleasure in reading classic literature, wading through nature, playing the violin, and blogging at abigailblessing.com.

Drums, Girls, and Dangerous Pie By Julissa Mendoza Robles

Drums, Girls + Dangerous Pie by Jordan Sonnenblick centers around Steven, an eighth-grade drummer, whose younger brother has cancer. Inspired by a past student of his, Sonnenblick set out to write a cancer story that would accurately portray the lives of families with family members who have cancer, particularly the relationship between siblings in that situation. After reading the book, I would say he was successful in writing a story about cancer that not only let me glimpse into the lives these families may have, but also made me laugh despite the heavy subject matter, and further developed my knowledge on the importance of mental health.

Throughout the story, readers can see how Steven deals with middle school, drumming, mental health, and his brother's cancer treatment, as well as how the people around him help him. The aspect of Steven I loved the most was his humor. He was very sarcastic and the majority of the humor of the book came from his light sarcasm. Despite the tough situation, he was able to bring some light to it for his family, especially for Jeffrey, who definitely needed something to laugh about as he was only five years old. Steven even used his sarcastic humor around his friends before he told them about his family's new situation.

Besides Steven's humor, I loved seeing his journey with mental health. While at first he kept his feelings about his brother's cancer diagnosis bottled up, it was nice to see him eventually trust people with his feelings about the difficulties of being a sibling of a cancer patient. I personally felt that it was very realistic for Sonnenblick to not have Steven trust people right away, since I can also be reluctant to tell people when I'm having a hard time. I liked that everyone was willing to support Steven once they realized he was struggling.

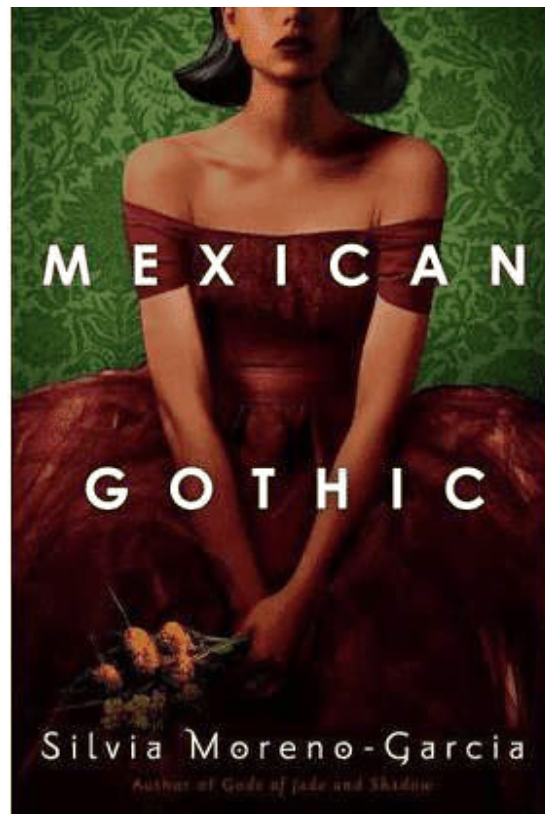
His relationship with the school counselor was one of my favorites to see develop. At first he was hesitant to tell the counselor anything, but he soon trusted the counselor with anything that was troubling him. With that gain of trust he was able to receive the help he needed. His counselor definitely gave Steven wonderful advice on how to cope with a difficult situation that anyone could use. My favorite advice that his counselor gave him was that while he can't control everything, such as the fact that his brother has cancer, he should focus on what he can control. That piece of advice definitely helped Steven stress out less about what he couldn't control and I feel that anyone could benefit from focusing on what they can control, to stress out less.

Of course, the main relationship that the story focused on was that of Steven and Jeffrey. While they did have an eight-year age difference (something that bothered Steven in the beginning of the story), they still managed to have a strong, loving relationship. When people were being sad or concerned around Jeffrey, Steven would make sure to keep Jeffrey's spirits up so other people's negative energy wouldn't bring the five-year-old down. Not only that but Steven made sure Jeffrey didn't feel like an outcast because of his condition. The work Steven put into making sure Jeffrey was happy and could have a happy childhood was admirable.

Overall, I would recommend this book to anyone who wants to read a story with a heavy subject matter that isn't as sad as other options. People will definitely learn something about the obstacles that families have, and how they persevere when a relative has cancer—while also having some good laughs.

Julissa is a student at Eleanor Roosevelt High School.

Mexican Gothic By S.G. Smith



Mexican Gothic

“You must come for me, Noemí. You must save me.”

Silvia Moreno-Garcia’s bestselling novel “Mexican Gothic” begins with Noemí Taboada receiving a frantic letter from her newlywed cousin Catalina, begging for Noemí to save her from an unknown horror. Noemí heads to High Place, a dark and eerie Gothic mansion in the Mexican countryside. Little does she know what she is about to uncover.

Noemí takes the stage as an unexpected heroine. She plays a noncommittal debutant who switches her college major almost as frequently as she drops suitors. Her chic gowns and glossy lipstick appear more fit for a life of glamorous parties than a seemingly haunted mansion. But it is clear from the start of the novel that Noemí is also an intelligent, nosey woman, talented in unearthing secrets. She will do anything to protect her cousin.

She finds High Place filled with mysteries and horrors, such as the elderly patriarch who ogles her and the old cemetery in the backyard. The hostess keeps an ever-watchful eye on

her, and Catalina's husband exudes a foreboding presence. Haunting portraits decorate the walls, mold grows in corners and servants maintain a sinisterly poised composition.

In a harkening back to Shirley Jackson's classic *Haunting of Hill House*, the house itself seems to have its own persona. It invades Noemí's dreams with visions of gore and violence, and it seems to observe her every move.

The descriptions of the house as a stately Victorian manner play on Catalina's love for romance novels such as *Jane Eyre* and *Pride and Prejudice*. Catalina has found her brooding Mr. Darcy and his Gothic mansion, but can she and Noemí survive the horrors it contains?

While the family members keep Catalina under strict surveillance, Noemí's only friend is the youngest son in the family. He appears to want to assist Noemí in recovering her cousin, but he struggles to discern where his true loyalties lie.

Many mysteries lay buried in High Place. The family's colossal fortune was built upon the backs of miners, none of whom survived; madness and violence mar the family's history; and no one has ever escaped the house alive.

As Noemí tries to draw out the secrets of High Place, she finds herself slowly being held captive by its daunting power. She is both haunted by and drawn to the cryptic house.

With *Mexican Gothic*, Moreno-Garcia attacks the period romance genre and flips it on its head. The book's feminist use of a heroine in a Victorian mansion is a dark parallel to the Elizabethan romances in which a wealthy estate-owning man saves the female protagonist.

In *Mexican Gothic*, Moreno-Garcia writes a breath-taking thriller that can be read in a single session. She builds a mystery that the reader uncovers along with Noemí, but upon looking back, the reader can see that the explanations make perfect sense. The ending is shockingly delicious to fans of the genre and will dwell with readers for days afterwards.

S.G. Smith is an undergraduate student studying English with a concentration in Creative Writing at The Ohio State University. Her work has been published in The Journal and Flash Fiction Magazine, and she is the second place recipient of the university's Jacobson Short Story Award.

The World of —Throne of Glass— By Cecilia Yang

Fantasy. An entirely different, impossible world. Fantasy authors create these worlds for us, the readers, to explore. The number of people who read paper books dwindles each year, yet the writers do not stop. Sarah J. Maas is one such author who paints a picture of another realm that ignites the imagination of her readers. Her best-selling novels, including the popular series *Throne of Glass*, are devoured by many young adult book readers.

The protagonist, initially named Celaena, is introduced merely as an infamous assassin. However, throughout the stories she evolves into something more, someone who can change the fate of her world. I followed her journey and growth through these books, as if I also lived and breathed in Celaena's world due to the vivid imagery and breathtaking descriptions. Celaena's world instantaneously came to life in front of me, a fantastical world full of assassins and magic. Celaena's dangerous yet exhilarating life and the intrigue of the courts and palaces plunged me into this world, and it was almost as if I was a part of it.

In her book, Maas breathes life into her characters—a snarky witch, a stoic warrior, a stunning shifter. These rich characters are so well developed that despite not being real, they steal the tears and break the hearts of unguarded readers such as myself. For instance, I was devastated by the fate of a few of my favorite characters, twelve brave, fierce witches who sacrificed themselves to protect their leader.

Celaena herself, of course, is fascinating. Imagine a slim girl with untamed blonde hair and glinting turquoise eyes. She holds a carefree attitude to the world, her every word laced

with sarcasm and spite. However, she is powerful, and even though she has been held prisoner and tortured, she persists, never giving up. When she rises to power later in the story, she becomes even less selfish, willing to lay her life down for her friends.

Yet despite the many tragedies that occur, the series is not without its lighthearted moments. Celaena is a rulebreaker, and when discovered, entertaining scenes are bound to ensue. A particular favorite of mine in the first book is where it was the morning of a holiday, Yulemas. To her assigned servant's surprise and consternation, our dear protagonist was already up at seven, snacking on chocolate and candy. I find that unfortunately relatable.

Once I picked up *Throne of Glass*, I could not put it down until I was done reading. Celaena's world is iconic, filled with intriguing characters. If you have an interest in fantasy and a fondness for a riveting world and are looking for your next read, this is the series for you.

Cecilia Yang is a high school freshman from the Harker School in San Jose, California. She passes the time with her nose buried in a book. While she has been writing in nearly all the genres, fantasy is fondly her favorite. When she is not reading or writing, she can be found drawing or dancing to the city's sounds. Her story, entitled "Memories Bottled Up," has appeared in the Flare Journal.

Brave New World By Tara Awate

A dystopia wherein all the citizens are forever happy and content, —can it even be called a dystopia? This is the theme that Huxley plays with throughout the novel *Brave New World*. Unlike other totalitarian novels, here, stability is achieved by deluding the citizens from reality and drugging them into happiness. Promiscuity is the norm, families no longer exist,

and children are reared in large factories where they are conditioned by birth to love their drudgery and hate nature and books.

All citizens are satisfied, thanks to *Soma*— a hallucinatory euphoria inducing drug available on demand. It is only Bernard Marx, (a brilliantly done anti-hero) who feels ill at ease. And it is through this dissatisfaction that the plot is kickstarted. He has to struggle to not give in to this morally corrupt world and be true to himself.

Huxley paints a vivid portrait of his world, describing it with harrowing detail. It doesn't sound so bad, when the government's agenda is only to keep the people happy and be mindless consumers, does it? It is only as Huxley walks us through what the people lose and are ignorant of, in order to attain that everlasting state of bliss, when we marvel at the sheer brilliance of the premise.

Far away in America the old way of life continues of which John (the main character) is a part. John, coming from very unique circumstances, is very derisive of the civilized life. He is often extreme in his actions and character, very much in stark contrast to the world, to the point of being unreasonable.

While reading this book, I came face to face with life's greatest questions of which Huxley does an impeccable job of answering. As I read, my carapace of long held beliefs and accepted norms and values was slowly ripped away in short painful successions. By making bold statements about how a life should be lived (through each character's point of view) Huxley mercilessly uproots the dormant thoughts of existentialism, musings on the meaning of suffering, traces of nihilism and the subsequent allure of hedonism that reeked in the attic of the mind and brings them to limelight.

Through the fleshed-out characters, all these ideologies struggle against each other and within me,— each character representing a different school of thought.

Though it seems blatant what Huxley himself stands for, he nevertheless presents meritorious arguments both for and against his 'brave new world' solely through his characters. At one point, it had me considering whether I would want to inhabit this world instead of immediately dismissing it as vile.

The society is not a blatant dystopia which is what makes it so compelling and haunts you days after reading it. There are no uprisings, no unrest, all people are happy.

The book had me hooked for the themes it explored more so than the story itself. But there is still enough suspense and conflict to keep you going.

Tara is a senior in high school residing in India. Her favorite form in writing is fiction but she's currently exploring creative nonfiction and hopes to dive into poetry sometime in the future as well.

Review: One Hundred Years of Solitude By Christine Baek

Gabriel García Márquez's *Cien Años de Soledad*, or *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, reads more like a history than a novel. Chronicling seven generations of the Buendía family, the narrative acts as a wandering guide, often retracing its steps to breathe new life into past memories before moving forward. This writing style could almost be mistaken as discursive if not for the vibrant cast of characters— explorers, scientists, soldiers, artists— whose variegated trials and errors, loves and losses distract us from the rapid shifts through time, and revitalize the glories and pains of humanity.

In the very first chapter, we are carried from the present as Colonel Aureliano Buendía faces the firing squad, to the past where the colonel and his father José Arcadio first touch ice, and then even further back to the founding of Macondo, the Colombian village-home of the Buendías. These bursts of "time-travel" permeate nearly every page and can be as confusing as the repetitious Buendía family names: two Amarantas, four José Arcadios, and

over twenty Aurelianos. But the mind-bending effects of these elements are purposeful, forwarding the themes of cyclical fate and the inseparability of past, present, and future. Whether by divine will or by virtue of human nature, each and every generation of the Buendías suffers from Solitude. Family members bearing the same name even share identical causes, which can take the forms of spurned love, violent death, or decrepitude. And with this infallible condition of Solitude comes slow decay, as the once invincible Buendía family descends into ignominy, unable to break free from the inheritance and conditionings of its predecessors.

While *One Hundred Years of Solitude* can be read solely as a compelling family drama, Márquez's 448-page book serves as a political commentary on the Latin American elite and the cycles of violence and instability plaguing the continent. Intertwining with the Buendía narrative are military campaigns, political executions, and short-lived dictatorships. In doing so, Márquez retells his own experience as a Colombian living in the crossfire of the banana republics. His unflinching narrative of destruction and decay, therefore, is less of a pessimistic criticism and more of a solemn reflection on humankind. The paradise of Macondo, removed from society and technology, cannot last, Márquez seems to say, because human nature and history deem it so.

And yet *One Hundred Years of Solitude* reads as uplifting, celebrating the brevity of joy and peace in the midst of war and turmoil. This strange and seemingly irreconcilable dichotomy only cements the nuance of Márquez's voice and of his belief in our capacity for redemption. As he states in his Nobel Prize Lecture, an echo of the story's ending:

"It is not yet too late to engage in the creation of the opposite utopia. A new and sweeping utopia of life, where no one will be able to decide for others how they die, where love will prove true and happiness be possible, and where the races condemned to one hundred years of solitude will have, at last and forever, a second opportunity on earth."

A high school student from the Atlanta suburbs, Christine Baek enjoys writing for The Muse and reading up on history, philosophy, and paleontology.

Grotesque- The Naked Picture of Feminism By Phuong Mai Nguyen

Grotesque, a crime novel written by Japanese author Natsuo Kirino, uncovers the diary behind the death of a prepossessing prostitute, Yuriko. The novel begins with the autobiography of Yuriko's sister, whose name is deliberately kept anonymous throughout the entire story. Her narrative gradually reveals the apathetic relationship between the sisters, as she admits: "(...) I also do not care about finding out the truth about her death." Her hostility towards Yuriko stems from her inferiority complex about appearance when constantly being compared with her gorgeous sister during childhood.

Since her birth, Yuriko has appeared as God's own creation, standing out among any crowd that has the privilege of surrounding her. Yet, that idiosyncratic beauty embraces an unusually distorted soul. Unlike any unconfident Disney princess, Yuriko is fully aware of her superior appearance. Precocious realization of her gifted advantage – beauty – has fashioned a child with the capability to arouse the "Lolita" blind lust in men. Yuriko's "career" of riding the flagpole initiated when she was only 12 years old, at her complete will and satisfaction. As the story progresses, Yuriko is murdered after appeasing the sexual appetite flowing in her veins. Coincidentally, the man who killed her is also charged with the death of Kazue Sato – an ambitious classmate of both Yuriko sisters at Q. gifted high school. Now Yuriko is dead, her sister becomes the legal guardian for her son. The novel ends with Yuriko's sister, a 40-year-old virgin, standing under a street lamp at midnight, craving for "the clutch from a man" for the first time in her life.

Behind the tragic fate of female characters and memorable description of humans' salacious desire, Natsuo Kirino delivers an in-depth message on modern feminist

movement.

The protagonists in *Grotesque* can somehow be seen to represent typical feminist ideals: Yuriko embodies the rise of third-wave feminism, advocating for women's utmost liberty to pursue their beliefs, even if their values contradict past movements by objectifying women as men's possession. On the other hand, Yuriko's sister is a second-wave feminist who strongly believes in the significance of women's independent status, which leads to her opposing stance against prostitution. She even goes so far as to refuse any intimacy at the position "beneath" men. Although their mutual high school friend, Kazue, does not directly express her personal viewpoints, the character is built around the ideal model of modern feminists: ambitious, well-educated, and hard-working.

Despite their differences, the main characters suffer almost similar endings: they are forced to submit to male dominance in various forms.

Yuriko takes advantage of her mesmerizing charm to seduce men for materialistic purpose, but when old age arrives and her beauty is fading, she becomes nothing more than a depreciated goods.

Kazue leads a double life. Her white-collar job and social status establishes her as a role model for modern women, but her true-self only comes out when Kazue wears a nubile skirts and stands in a wintry street at night. She views satisfying men's sexual desire as a means to assert her femininity and attractiveness based on social standards. Even her brilliant academic achievements cannot dispel the inferior perception of self-worth, which has penetrated in her mind since high school. From Kazue's eyes, the value of a woman is determined by her appeal to men. As a matter of fact, excellent student awards can never attract as many boys as a two-second wink from Yuriko.

Yuriko's older sister, who spend her entire life living under her sister's shadow, tries to conceal her insecurities by separating herself from men (or even the whole world) and labelling that lifestyle as rational. She looks at life through the most negative lens, she only

sees the ugly parts in humans. She avoids nearly every social interaction, not even bothers to tell her name and vice versa, no one recalls her name. But in the front of her unimaginably beautiful nephew, she is willing to work as a prostitute – a job she used to detest – in order to “save money for the future.” After struggling to establish the independent role of women, the anonymous lady gives up her belief, ironically because of a young man, and allows the objectification of women to continue.

The endings of three characters partially depict the dark side of feminist movement, which can hardly be acknowledged in today’s media. The submission of female characters to invisible suppressors implicitly confirms the immaturity and lack of cooperation among feminist movements. Three women suffer under the same regime but instead of uniting for a common cause, they choose to let personal enmity and jealousy prevail. Why does pop culture associate genuinely intimate comradeship with “brotherhood” but fake smiles and back stabs with “sisterhood”? Can frail internal structures, and isolated branches divided by ideology gather enough power to change social prejudices?

Behind the exploration of dark aspects within women, *Grotesque* left us pondering over the misogyny that takes a deep root, even in modern society...

Phuong Mai Nguyen is a student, movie critic, cartoon artist and part-time drummer from Hanoi, Vietnam

Anne of Green Gables By Tara Awate

Anne of Green Gables is a classic written and set in the early 1900’s. Although it’s a children’s classic, anyone of any age can enjoy it. It’s set in the idyllic and rural Prince Edward Island of Canada.

It’s about an orphan girl named Anne who comes to live with foster parents in the town of Avonlea. The story is about her adventures in this town. It is heartwarming to see how ---

Anne, who has never had a place to call home, charms the hearts of many and becomes a dynamic resident of this town that is adorned by nature. The book is simply full of breathtakingly beautiful nature descriptions. Anne is a unique character whose fiery temper, and wild imagination get her into all sorts of scrapes all the time. Her love and appreciation of all things beautiful is really endearing. Her vigour and enthusiasm give you a fresh and renewed sense of life. By appreciating all the little joys that life has to offer, she makes you fall in love with being alive all over again. She rekindles your childish curiosity about everything, from attending concerts to performing in concerts, baking a cake, meeting new friends, and chasing your dreams.

But this book is not at all about a person who is always happy and cheerful. That would be preachy. Anne is a flawed and imperfect human being you can't help but sympathise with and relate to. Being very sensitive and high-strung, she has a strong emotional reaction to everything that life throws at her. The author manages to capture these instances and emotions with verisimilitude. Anne's wild imagination gets her into many difficult situations, which is very interesting to read about.

Given that the book is set in the early 1900's, Anne is very ambitious for a girl of that time when girls were only expected to be good housewives. It is a book worth reading and rereading many times.

Tara Awate loves to read and listen to classical music. She loves nature and is an environmentalist at heart. In her spare time, she works on her speculative fiction novel while balancing school and homework.

As Brave as You By Elena (of Elena Reads)

In *As Brave As You*, brothers Genie and Ernie don't expect to have such an exciting summer after their parents tell them they'll be spending it in the South with grandparents they barely know. But even though there are stricter rules and no Wi-Fi, this vacation is probably the best one of their lives.

This award-winning book is about family, love, and courage. It's also about accepting differences and adapting to change.

Genie and Ernie have to experience farm life when they pick peas to sell at a market instead of just buying them at the store. But not only do they experience southern life, they make friends and survive the trip with some surprises along the way.

When I was reading the book, I felt like I was in Virginia with the characters. For example, when Ernie's teeth got knocked out, I could imagine the teeth floating in the jar of milk and him groaning on the couch.

The author conveyed many feelings in the story, like sadness and excitement. There were times when I felt like yelling at the book, or times when I wanted to jump for joy. Also, I really loved the character of Genie. He loves asking questions, like me.

Genie loves questions. In fact, he has hundreds of them in his notebook. So, when he realizes his Grandpop is blind, and learns more about his grandfather's past, Genie finds an unexpected connection. They have fun together, eating entire apples (including the core!!) and sneaking outside in the dark. But after Grandpop confesses his deepest secrets, he thinks of some questions not even Google can answer, like why his dad won't speak to Grandpop, and why Grandpop carries a gun in his pocket. Genie digs deeper to find the answer to these questions, but more importantly, finds the true meaning of bravery.

Genie sees Grandpop do everyday things with confidence even though he is blind. Genie also thinks Ernie is brave because he's older and is the first one to do things.

I would recommend *As Brave As You* to readers ages 10 and up. Some readers may not like that it's slow moving, but I liked it because it had very good messages and a lot of interesting and funny passages. This book has some concepts that younger kids may not understand, like death and self-defense. It's also good for book clubs!

I like author Jason Reynolds' other books too. Here's my review of *Patina*, another awesome story he wrote.

As Brave as You was really great! I rate it four out of four roses!

Elena is a middle school student who reviews diverse children's books on her blog, Elena Reads. She would like to be an author one day. She usually has her nose in a book, but she has many other interests. She runs cross country, is currently rehearsing for her role as Peter Pan in the upcoming school musical, and plays piano and violin.

Middlesex in Review By Anonymous

The book had been sitting on my mother's bookshelf for as long as I can remember. When I was very young, I recall sliding it from its position and staring at its title with the kind of sly fascination that only "grown-up" words can elicit. *Middlesex*.

I was probably fourteen the first time my mother suggested I read it, noting, "It might be a little inappropriate for you," but "the writing is amazing." At the time, even my growing adolescent preoccupation with things inappropriate could not overcome my desire to ignore my mother, which in my early teens was in full swing. Also, my mother had mentioned the term "hermaphrodite" in relation to the story, and because I had no education on the subject, the word made me vaguely uncomfortable. So the book remained on the shelf, gathering dust.

In sophomore year, I was often too distracted to read because I was spending more and more time in doctors' offices. At age sixteen, I had not yet menstruated; after several months of prodding, x-rays and beeping MRI machines I was diagnosed with MRKH, a rare condition where a girl's reproductive system does not develop in utero. I would not be able to engage in intercourse without extensive physical therapy, and I would never give birth to a baby.

My reading habits fell by the wayside. Keeping up with mandatory work was difficult enough. For several months, I could barely stand to go to school. Although it wasn't logical, I found myself uncomfortable around people who were "normal", and I couldn't seem to talk myself out of it. I wouldn't call it jealousy; I'd never particularly wanted to give birth to my own children and after the initial shock, I realized that this was not as upsetting to me as it might have been to many others. However, I was scared of judgment. I had lost the genetic lottery, and with it my sense of belonging.

It was nearly a year after my diagnosis that I gave in to my mother's suggestions, which had dialed up a notch in the past months for obvious reasons. I finally slid *Middlesex* from the bookshelf with the intention to read it.

Middlesex won a Pulitzer Prize, so I was prepared for a good read, something with sparkling writing and a well-developed plot. I was not prepared for this book to hit me as hard as it did. The story follows the life of Cal (formerly Calliope) a Greek-American male-identifying intersex man (intersex is defined as any deviation from standard genitalia). Cal is assumed female at birth, but starts developing as a boy at puberty. The account of his life is astonishingly detailed, stretching from his grandparents' courtship to his own adult relationships. Even if I had no personal draw to the story, I would have thought the plot compelling. But because I am also intersex I found this book moving, relatable and somehow healing.

I had read one book that revolved around MRKH prior to this; I ordered it off Amazon in the hope of finding an anecdote that would make me feel less alone in my experience. The

book was written by someone who did not have MRKH, and it completely missed the mark. Besides being riddled with typos, it was painfully clear that the author was merely using the condition to drive the plot. The character with MRKH had no depth beyond her inability to have children. I came away from the book feeling a little less than human, validated in my fear that people would be unable to see me as anything more than my condition.

Middlesex was the polar opposite of this book. Although my condition is quite different from that of the protagonist, we had many similarities and I could see myself in his actions and internal processes. One thing that resonated with me was when the character discussed his shame regarding his condition, something I immediately recognized in myself. The book reads “My shame. I don’t condone it”, and this simple phrase captured something I’ve been struggling with for the last year. In Cal’s case, he is embarrassed by his atypical genitalia in his dating life. I frequently feel this same shame about my biological uniqueness. I do not want to be ashamed. Intellectually, I know that there is no reason I should be ashamed. But some days, the voice in the back of my head whispers that my inability to reach the milestones that women in our society are expected to reach makes me less worthy than the rest.

Middlesex is written by a non-intersex man who clearly engaged in a huge amount of research to write something that rings so true. The book has been praised by many in the intersex community for being accurate both scientifically and emotionally. Some scenes were so specific that they could have been taken right out of my head. In the sequence of Calliope’s birth, the author describes how the doctor was distracted before he could thoroughly inspect the baby’s genitals. This is something I have often wondered about in my own situation. What could have been so interesting in that room that the doctor overlooked my physical difference? Another thing I have wondered about is what exact genes caused my condition, which strands of DNA did not mutate quite far enough, and what caused this anomaly.

This topic is dealt with extensively in *Middlesex*, going back several generations, and as the book is told from an intersex perspective, the curiosity and the depth of the delving into family history feels legitimate, something I could imagine myself doing in the future. The passage I found most poignant described Calliope, fourteen years old, noticing that every one of her classmates had gotten their period except her. Since sixth grade, when I was first asked by a classmate if I had a spare tampon, I have had the nagging worry that something was might not be quite right, but I attributed it to being a “late bloomer”. This subconscious reassurance and denial of the thought that something might be wrong was powerfully depicted in *Middlesex*.

But to me, the most important thing about the book was that it wasn't only about being intersex. It was about love and family and children and sex and all these things that I had started to think were out of my reach. It was about a character who had every normal human experience without being what most people would call normal. It was about a person's life, a person who happened to be intersex, but a person no less valid or worthy than anyone else.

I am a logical person, and question things like fate or higher powers. For most of my life, I have preferred to take the evolutionary perspective. Naturally, this did not serve me well in dealing with my diagnosis. In fact, the purely evolutionary perspective told me something along the lines of “There's no real, biological reason for your existence.” This unfortunate conclusion is something I've been attempting to shake off for over a year. *Middlesex* brought me a long way towards transforming my viewpoint. I took a long look at my own life, as a good book will make you do. And I noticed how healthy my friendships are, how delighted my art makes me, how my boyfriend is happy dating me without any sort of “in spite of.”

Middlesex made me realize that I would still be able to have just about all the experiences I have been looking forward to my whole life. In fact, it made me realize that I am already having them. When you learn something about yourself that changes your expectations of the future, it's hard to live in the present. But this book took a little bit of the weight off. It

gave me back a little bit of confidence in my future. Even more, it made me feel less alone in my present. That's the highest praise I can give any book. I think it's for the best that I didn't read this story when I was fourteen. It wouldn't have meant nearly as much to me. But ultimately, I've never been more glad I listened to my mother.

Anonymous is an American high school student.

The False Prince By Hossein Libre

Jennifer A Nielsen's *The False Prince* is a stunning fantasy novel. Neilsen uses good sensory description to set the scene for Sage's life and also has strong verbs that will keep your senses awake; such as *Mott was tall, dark skinned, and nearly bald. What little hair he did have was black and shaved to the scalp.* Also this book has lots of twists and turns. Neilsen keeps the readers at the edge of their seats and wondering what will happen in the upcoming pages. As the lies unfold, the truth is revealed and the truth may very well prove more dangerous than all the lies combined.

The False Prince is the first book in the Ascendance trilogy. The Ascendance trilogy includes *The False Prince*, *The Runaway King*, and *The Shadow Throne*. *The False Prince* is a finalist for the E.B. White Read Aloud Award and has also spent several weeks on the NYT Bestseller List ranging in position from #4 to #14.

One of the memorable things about this book was its plot. In a faraway land, a civil war is brewing. To unify his kingdom's divided people, a nobleman named Conner devises a cunning plan to place an imposter of the kingdom's lost-long son on the throne. Four orphans are forced to compete for the crown, including a clever boy named Sage. Sage knows Conner's motives are questionable, yet his life balances on a sword's point: he must be chosen to play the role of the prince or he will be killed.

This is a story about standing up for what you believe in. Sage had to stand up a lot. He was forced to treat a servant meanly, but he treated her with kindness. The second theme is standing up for your rights. When everyone told him to go one direction, Sage went his own way, and he usually made the right decision.

The main character is Sage, a young boy from the kingdom, Carthya. His friends/enemies are Mott, Conner, Roden, Tobias, and Imogen. Some of them crafted him into the person he was by hurting him or by loving him.

Neilsen's strong visuals help readers see the orphanage, the palace, and the castle. Neilsen will fill reader's heads with questions that will keep them turning the page. Some of the questions the readers might be asking are: Who will become king? Will Sage survive Conner's tests? Will the kingdom unite under one rule?

Neilsen's fantasy novel *The False Prince* is definitely worth reader's time and money and is a 10/10. *The False Prince* is perfect for anyone who loves lots of twists and turns. If you want a story that you can't put down and that will keep you at the edge of your seat, pick up a copy of Jennifer A. Nielsen's *The False Prince*.

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Author: Jennifer A Nielsen

Genera: Fantasy

Hossein Libre was born in Tehran, Iran but currently lives in the United States in the college town of Rolla, MO. He speaks Persian and English. His dream is to become a soccer player and play for Manchester United FC. He remarkably loves reading and writing, and his favorite books include *The Ascendance Trilogy* by Jennifer A. Nielsen, *The Percy Jackson* series by Rick Riordan, *The Summoner* series by Taran Matharu, and *Timeline* by Michael Crichton.

Flowers for Algernon By Oscar Wolfe

Recently in school, we had the opportunity to read the classic novel, *Flowers for Algernon*, by Daniel Keyes. Obviously, I chose to read it. When I started it, I realized immediately that it was something special. It follows the story of Charlie Gordon, a thirty-two year old man with the mental age of a child, living in New York in the 1960's. When he is chosen for an experiment that would triple his intelligence, his life turns upside down. The story is told in the form of progress reports that Charlie wrote throughout the experiment to show his progress. As Charlie's intelligence changes, so does the writing style. It is written a little bit like this at least in the beginning.

In case you're wondering who the heck Algernon is, he is the lab mouse that was used to test the experiment before Charlie. The success of the experiment on Algernon is the reason the scientists were confident enough to try it on a human subject. But when Algernon's mental state starts to deteriorate, well, no spoilers.

This book is so well written that it truly seems like a current news article. But, in case there is any confusion, it is not a current news article; it's fifty-three-year-old fictional story. However, this is not to say that it is an easy read. It is an extremely complex book that takes time and effort to get through, especially about 75% of the way through. That's when there's a bit of a boring part (but it gets good again so don't give up on it). But, if you don't want to read the whole novel, I have good news for you. There's a short story version. Of course, the short story doesn't have nearly the detail that the novel does.

Overall though, *Flowers for Algernon* is one of the best, most thought provoking books that I've read in a long time. It put me into the mindset of multiple people all in one. I was able to see how the same situation could be perceived dramatically differently by someone mentally impaired, or a genius. It ultimately looks at how society reacts to different people, and how those people react to society. I would suggest it for anyone probably in high school or maybe middle school. The reason I wouldn't suggest it for anyone younger is that there is quite a bit talk of sex but mainly I don't think a young kid would have the patience to make it through. But enough of me, go read it!

Oscar Wolfe is the founder and lead writer of That is Great!, a blog about great stuff—from science and politics to entertainment—aimed at kids and teens. Oscar has interviewed many celebrities, politicians and business leaders including Sen. Al Franken, Henry Winkler, Billy Crystal, Laura Marano, Lizzy Greene, Kyle Rudolph and Evander Holyfield. He has written for *Mpls.St.Paul Magazine*, appeared on the American Public Media podcast Smash Boom Best, and been featured on Kare11 News. His award-winning short story, *No Paine, No Gain*, was published in the 2015-2016 selected works from COMPAS. Oscar, 14, is an eighth grader at Hopkins North Junior High where he is a member of the student council and participates in cross-country, wrestling, and track as well as band. He has appeared in numerous plays at school, the Sabes JCC and Stages Theatre Company.
