

The Writers' Slate is published by The Writing Conference, Inc., and features some of our nation's top quality writing by students, kindergarten through 12th grade. The national journal is published three times a year, including one issue filled with award-winning prose and poetry. The publication is available online.

The editor invites original, creative, and expository writing by students in kindergarten through 12th grade. Book reviews of children's or young adult literature written by students are also welcome. Educators are also encouraged to submit article ideas for feature article consideration.

The deadline for the spring issue is December 15. The deadline for the fall issue is June 15.

Please submit all entries electronically to Robyn Seglem, Spring 2012 editor:
robynandjuston@yahoo.com

Submissions should clearly state:

- Writer's name
- Grade level
- School's name
- City and State
- Contact information (email address and phone number)

Due to the number of submissions, the editor will typically respond only to submissions that have been accepted for publication. Submissions will not be returned. The editor reserves the right to edit manuscripts for clarity, style, and according to space limitations.

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John H. Bushman
Director, The Writing Conference, Inc.

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Editorial Letter 4

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October 2011

Praise & Thank you from the Editor of this issue:

This fall edition of *The Writers' Slate* celebrates the storytellers and bards for their mostly imaginative, sometimes mournful, often reflective literary pieces. The selected writings speak to one another in an organic, stream-of-consciousness sort of way, resembling pockets of conversations overheard by an interloper, moving among neo-literati at an outside gathering.

So, readers as you peruse this issue and listen to the talk, I hope you find these authors' works as interesting and enlightening, as honest and insightful, as thought-provoking and promising as I did.

There were many "bests of the bunch" submissions, and I wish we could've published them all. Since that could not be, I want to encourage those writers whose work was not selected to keep writing and keep submitting because *your* imaginings, contemplations, and perspectives are just as worthy as those in print. And, thank you all for thinking of *The Writers' Slate* as a place to showcase your writing.

Lastly, much of the work in this issue is written by middle school and high school students, and it is appreciated. However, *we* would also like to hear from the elementary bards and storytellers out there. Those voices are not as loud in this issue, and we miss not hearing them:

Please write!

Enjoy this issue,
Sheryl Scales, Fall 2011 Editor

Falling into Earth

- Ethan Levin, 7th Grade
Maitland Middle School
Maitland, FL

Part I: A New Mission

Dallas took his last breath of fresh air and put on his helmet. It was as hot as an oven in his space suit. In about 30 seconds he was sodden with sweat; nevertheless, Dallas and Cam took a spirited step into the elevator.

"Say your goodbyes to the ground," said Dallas. "You won't be seeing it for a while." Dallas caught a sullen look in Cam's eyes; something was plaguing her.

"Something has been seriously scraping at my instincts." Dallas looked bewildered.

"Like what?" Dallas goaded. Silence. The drone of the elevator scaling up the ship was the only thing disrupting the awkward silence between the two astronauts.

"I don't know," said Cam, eradicating the silence. "I'm just getting some foretaste of a bad thing, like a preview of a movie." The elevator was almost at the top of the ship, and Cam stared out the transparent window. They were at the top finally, and the elevator doors opened.

"Bzzzzzt." The interstellar mission was to repair the broken lunar module on one of Jupiter's moons - as simple as breathing. It would be a breeze. The two astronauts stepped onto their modest shuttle, which was in the middle of nowhere.

"All systems are go!" said Cam. Unresponsive, Dallas just stared into the bright blue sky.

Although it would be a piece of cake, Cam hesitated to start the space ship. She didn't feel right about the mission.

"Hey," Dallas said calmly. "Don't worry about it! It'll be fine."

Despite her instincts, Cam started the space ship and blasted into space. Blasted into danger's way.

After jostling through the atmosphere, Dallas could think clearly and was back on track. They were now passing the moon. "Alright. Prepare for hyperjump!" Dallas started pulling the lever and listening to the ultra-powerful engine get ready for light speed. But Commander Jenkins showed up on the monitor in the middle of his controls. Dallas and Cam snapped to attention and saluted.

"At ease, astronauts."

"What's the problem, sir?" asked Dallas.

"Well, it seems our satellite has picked up a giant meteorite, on a trajectory for Earth."

Cam's face turned chalk pale.

"How much longer until impact?"

"About 27 hours. You better get some rest, because when you wake up, you're gonna stop this thing."

"WHAT?" Dallas yelled. "With all due respect, Sir, how are we possibly going to stop a giant meteorite?"

"That is for you to find out, Mister Graham."

"But what about Cam? She's got a family at home."

All the more reason to make it home. I'm done here. You have exactly 26 hours 47 minutes. Good luck, astronauts." The monitor turned black, leaving Dallas Graham and Cam Donston praying for their deaths to be quick and painless.

Cam stared blankly into space. Literally.

"I was right," Cam said, with no emotion. It was like she was in a trance. "I knew there was something wrong, but I went anyway. And now we're going to die here in the middle of this void of space."

"But we'll die with pride, honor, and patriotism towards our country. Now let's go to bed and wake up early, so we can plan how we're going to stop this big rock!" So Cam mindlessly slumped into bed and lay there, silently crying and saying good-bye to everyone she loved.

Part II: Falling into Earth

"Wake up, Cam. Wake up." Dallas stood over Cam and gently shook her awake.

"How much time left?" Dallas looked at the time on the monitor.

"3 hours and 54 minutes," said Dallas.

"We better get started," Cam said somberly.

"No need, Cam. I got no sleep last night. Spent the whole time devising a plan. I know how we're going to stop this thing." Cam looked at the bags under Dallas's eyes and the completely slumped way he held his shoulders.

"That's great!" said Cam. "We'd better start preparing!"

The plan was simple. The ship had mining lasers on it in case the two needed to cut through rock. They would fly close to the meteorite, try cutting it in to the smallest pieces possible, lessening its impact and turning it in to space dust. They contemplated that cutting it into fractions, so small, the impact would be no more destructive than dropping a bowling ball from a building. People on the ground will be fine as long as they go to underground shelters.

"30 minutes left. We should be seeing it in about three ... two ... one!" Sure enough, they could see the meteorite, coming in way faster than expected. "Uh-oh. Start mining lasers now!"

"Zzzzzzz!" the lasers heated up. Cam grabbed the controls and put the ship in reverse.

"We're not fast enough!"

"Then we'll just have to let the meteorite hit." Dallas looked at Cam. She was silently crying.

"Okay." Dallas grabbed the controls and veered right. But it wasn't enough.

The meteorite smashed into the ship's engine, creating a terrible screech and ripping metal. The ship was totally exposed to the void of space. The shockwave threw Cam and Dallas against the side of the ship, badly knocking Cam's head inside her space suit. Cam watched the meteorite hurtling towards Earth and saw the impact as her vision darkened, and she lost consciousness. The meteorite's impact meant the end of Earth. Everything went black. Both Cam and Dallas unconscious, falling into Earth.

Final Part: Alone

"Cam ... Cam ... Cam! Wake up!" Cam Donston slowly let the light flood into her eyes. Dust blurred her vision, but when she wiped her eyes, she saw Dallas Graham, standing over her, looking casual as ever. "Geez, you took quite a nap there, Cam!"

Cam was confused. Was she dead? Did she somehow make it? Or, was it all a dream, from beginning to end? *No*, she thought. *It doesn't matter. I'm moving, breathing, and somehow on a destroyed world.* Then Cam remembered seeing the meteorite hit.

Turning 360° degrees, she looked around the desolated planet. Just blackish-gray sand. She then realized she somehow made it, and the dust that fell in her eyes was actually ash. So Dallas and she were alone, on the planet Earth, or whatever the ball of ash was. She would have to get used to it.

Epilogue

In the year 2520, Cam and Dallas were long dead. But they had children together. And those children had children, and from the year that Earth was destroyed, in 2082, a little less than 400 years later, there were about 2 million people back on Earth. It's not 6 billion, but it's a start! Cam and Dallas were remembered like Adam and Eve, the first people on planet Imagine, the name of the ship that help the two most famous people on Earth. Cam and Dallas would live in the people of Imagine forever.

Life is a Climb

Kaiyi Hall, 9th Grade
Tabb High School
Yorktown, VA

Life is a steep, rugged mountain climb,
Starting out at the bottom of nothing,
Working its way up, slowly, steadily,
Each step taken seems to drain energy,
As if you were climbing the corporate ladder.
Encountering narrow path and raging streams,
An occasional glance towards the summit keeps the goal in mind,
Enjoy each passing moment because there's no turning back,
Once you reach the peak, stand back to take a good look,
Breathe, let it out, the view from above was worth the climb.

Alive

Ashley Moore, 11th grade
Croatan High School
Newport, NC

What is it to be alive?

Is it loving?

Is it caring?

Is it being there?

Is it friendship?

Is it family?

Is it sharing?

Is it breathing?

Is it hope?

Is it passion?

Is it thinking?

Is it praying?

Is it laughing?

Is it crying?

Is it pain?

Is it fury?

Is it wanting?

Is it cherishing?

Is it feeling?

Is it playing?

Is it working?

Is it needing?

Is it wanting?

Is it tasting?

Is it hearing?

Is it smelling?

Is it seeing?

Is it touching?

It is being.

Being all these things and more.

Being alive is being here and not taking any moment for granted.

Tomorrow

Lucy Zhou, 10th grade
Livingston High School
Livingston, NJ

She often sat at her window watching

The sun set slowly, watching the days fading

Into one swift stroke that gusted past her,

Too fleeting to be considered.

And she would close her eyes,

Eternity flashing beneath them, like a recurring

Dream-turned-nightmare in an endless loop, elusive

And melancholy, the song of the siren calling her.

But the window was always screened shut, and the

Slightest touch nestled with thorns. She feared the

Abyss of what came after, when quiet villages rumbled

With snores, the light of the moon giving way to dawn.

She feared fear itself as it stared her down, its eyes

resembling

Her own. So she spends her days wishing-watching, dazed,

Her escape from limbo always postponed.

The Lonesome Teen

Codi McIntire, 11th grade
Standley Lake High School
Westminister, CO

What exactly is loneliness? Loneliness is a feeling of emptiness, a feeling of pain, a feeling of being unwanted and unloved. Loneliness is a common feeling experienced by not only adults but teenagers as well. There are different forms of loneliness as well as crucial elements in which it can occur.

From my experience, high school is one of the first places where teens are old enough to know and feel loneliness. Several teenagers strive for acceptance from their peers, and try as much as possible to not feel left out. If they feel they are out of place, they will either change into the person they feel they "need" to be, or give up and isolate themselves entirely. Eventually, their feeling of isolation leads to loneliness.

Teenagers have also been known to isolate each other. For example, they can criticize and knock a peer down for what that person wears, their personality, or who a peer hangs out with. Again, these types of actions will lead that person to feel lonely and unwanted.

Loneliness is a serious feeling that should not be taken lightly. If someone is feeling down for a long period of time, the possibility of suicide and other harmful events may arise.

Whenever I've felt lonely, I wanted to run away and never look back. The feeling is dreadful, and it's as if no one cares about you.

Some teenagers experience loneliness simply because they are alone. It may be their family or other issues going on in their personal life that has caused this to be the case. There's a big difference between feeling lonely and actually being alone. When teens give off that lonesome vibe and always seem down, they will more often than not be ignored by others, left out, neglected, and unnoticed. Outgoing and fun teens want to associate with other outgoing and fun teens. I know from firsthand experience how hard it is to want to hang out with someone who is always down, inactive, and depressed.

Occasionally, it's the type of environment a teen grows up in that is at the root of their loneliness, and other times it's simply their actions. For example, not being talkative enough, bashful or reserved are all ways in which it makes it harder for them to meet and/or approach people. Additionally, teens that do not engage themselves in any activities or clubs can feel left out. Engaging in activities and joining clubs are good ways to meet new people and share a commonality.

When it comes down to it, no one wants to be or feel lonely. It's a sad and depressing feeling no one should have to go through, especially teenagers. They already have a lot of

stress: keeping up with grades, sports, and still learning the ropes of life. If someone you know is feeling unwanted and isolated, the best thing you can do is to comfort them and let them know you care. If it's someone you don't know, invite them into your circle of friends and accept them for who they are because you never know what their situation or life struggles may be.

SILENCE

Briana Smith, 11th grade
Croatan High School
Newport, NC

As my fears and past come rushing toward me,
I begin to scream and no one hears anything but

SILENCE...

Filled with hopes, dreams and desires,
The silent room tells me to go ahead, it's alright

If I believe in the dark.

But I know that as soon as I close my eyes,

The silence will take my dreams and breath

But it will also bring my fears and I will remember the

SILENCE...

I remember those times when nothing was silent,

Everyone was fighting.

Silence is what I dread and fear,

Silence cannot be forgiven and cannot be overcome because it is

SILENCE...

Fabrications of the Mind

Nathan Wood, 10th grade
The Potter's School
Marlborough, CT

How can truth in ones' mind

End up so carelessly intertwined;

Bound with falsehoods created to save

Ourselves each time we misbehave?

We must ask ourselves our reason;

To what purpose do we commit this treason?

Nightmares

Shania Cook, some grade
Some school somewhere
Planet Earth

There is a nightmare

A very scary nightmare

i had this nightmare

This nightmare is about zombies

These zombies want me

They aren't like other zombies

These zombies don't want to chase you around

They want you to come to them

Grounded

Margaret Shavlik, 10th grade
West High School
Madison, WI

When I was young, I could touch the sky.

Or that's what I imagine anyway - looking back. I used to be able to do anything, and I took it for granted, every minute of it.

It's hard to keep track of the days that I've been in room 34L.

I'm starting to forget what things look like: colors, shapes, faces. I don't remember what things taste like, or what food feels like in my mouth. I've forgotten textures, and even how to chew. My teeth are gone; I haven't needed them since I've been fixed to the IV.

There's not much to do, besides thinking or remembering.

Sometimes I don't like the memories I have. One can't leave my mind. When it comes, the crash re-plays in slow motion. I see the truck, the road, and the can of beer. I see Mom.

I like it when they turn on the radio or TV, and I get to listen.

It's weird - I don't know how to take the news. So much is happening every day. There are earthquakes and tsunamis, and then I'm pretty sure there's a war, but it's hardly mentioned. I used to imagine that our enemies were bad and awful. I imagined them with gross hair and cold hearts. I thought that they must be horrible for us to have been sending over so many soldiers,

and to have been fighting them so long. But now, I don't really know. I don't fully understand war. I always talked about it, but never really grasped it. It's a grown-up notion, I think.

Am I a "grown-up" now? I think, I would look like one at least. I'm bigger than I was before, but not quite as big as an adult should be. I don't have much muscle, but my limbs are longer and my torso is a different shape now. I wonder what I look like.

I know what I feel like---sore, guilty, frustrated.

I listen to all sorts of stations, each person that comes in changes it to a different one - to their favorite. One station tells me that the war is bad, another that it is good. One tells me that the President is a moron, and another that he is a hero.

There have been a few different Presidents since I've been in here, five actually. I don't know which I like best. I don't know if I like any.

I hear my door open and a shuffle of feet. A gentle voice speaks: it's Rachel, my sister.

I wish I could open my eyes.

Something jumps onto my stomach, startling me, but I can't react. My nose starts to itch but I can't scratch it.

Agony.

A soft rumbling sound echoes through my chest from where the cat has moved. His slight feet shift around, kneading my thinly-clothed skin. The little beast begins to rub my cheek, the tickling sensation warming my whole face.

What a hello.

Cats.

Everyone assumes they're so clever. It's true, but I still think that dogs are the smarter of the two. I like thinking back to my bloodhound Piper, she was such a good dog. That droopy-eyed creature was the sweetest. So loyal and comforting, and always patient when us kids would pull on those floppy ears of hers, or dress her up. If I were to make a list of things from home that I miss, Piper would be at the top of it.

Rachel begins to speak to me, telling me about her day, about Ryan, her husband. I've never got to truly meet Ryan. Rachel has brought him in, but I've never seen his face. I've never talked to him, never gotten to approve him for my baby sister.

I missed their wedding.

She tells me about Ryan's big promotion. "They say that he's one of the most promising employees. I tell ya, it's all that..."

I'm not listening to what she's telling me, but instead I focus on the sound of her voice. I like to imagine her face reacting to what she's saying, what she must look like. I can't quite remember is the thing. I've had to invent.

I'm surprised that Rachel hasn't given up on me yet. She and Kiki, the cat, come almost every day. More came at first, but over time the numbers have started to falter. Dad hasn't visited yet. I don't blame him. I know it's my fault, what happened.

As she talks about Ryan, I think back to all of my girlfriends. I wonder if I would have gotten married. I can't imagine myself

as any of the grown men that come to mind. I hope I never turn out like Mr. Porter, our neighbor. Or Uncle Steve, he was always so smelly. I wouldn't mind turning out like Dad. I guess he was my role model, but if you had told me that before, I wouldn't have believed you.

I wonder how he's doing.

Rachel tries to keep off the topic of our parents. She slipped a few times though, especially around the time of the wedding.

I've been working on inventing things, with all this time on my hands. I've invented some pretty cool things if I do say so myself. A seal for your Coke so it doesn't go flat, a CD player that uploads albums straight onto your iPod (why hasn't this been invented yet, I mean seriously?), a tape recorder for your dreams.

I wish I could invent a way out. This life that I'm living is artificial. I can't interact with others, I can't taste, touch, see. I want to be able to feel again.

Something Rachel says brings me back.

"Dad wants to pull the plug, Jacob..." she begins to choke up; her voice is all crackly in her throat.

What does that even mean? I don't understand how this is such an ordeal, he can pull any plugs he wants, he's a fully grown man.

"I've tried to convince him not to, but he's just so..."

And then it hits me: *That* plug.

Dusk

Caitlin Rubin, 9th grade
Friends Academy
Locust Valley, NY

As dying wind takes final breath,
And flowers close their lovely heads,
As rays of light accept their death,
And expire in pools of crimson red.

As lively bird sings final call,
And beasts of day concede to sleep,
As steady trees rise straight and tall,
And nature's babes sound final peeps.

As verdure's color grows weak and wan,
And creature's calls are lost to dark,
As wheat inspects its golden tan,
And poplars don new coats of bark.

As widows throw out final strands,
To catch the far-off day's first dew,
As critters hush their noisy band,
And dolphins mute their loudmouth crew.

As sun ducks down its weary skull,
And lays its soul right there to doze.

As sharpened breeze begins to dull,
And moon into the sky done rose.

As predators come out to play,
And nocturnals compete as well,
And start their game 'pon death of day,
Awake their soul where instincts dwell.

As hunters spark this deadly fire,
That's flames lick pain once they've begun,
As thirst for blood grows truly dire,
I watch and see, dusk bars no one.

Altering Everything

Rachel Savage, 9th grade
Crossroads Middle School
Los Angeles, CA

My knees tingled as my flowered skirt swished against them and my ponytail brushed my neck ever so slightly with each step I took in my new sandals. My eyelashes were curled sky high and I had the slightest amount of lip gloss coating my lips, not too shiny to make them look like plastic but more shiny than normal. All the pretentious girls wear lip gloss like that and everyone knows it looks trashy. People thinking I'm trashy was the last thing I needed right then.

It finally felt right. My outsides matched my insides. I'd finally learned to accept myself for who I am, and it felt great. I was as unstoppable as the wind and impenetrable like a rock. Bringing me down from my high horse was a feat only Hercules would be able to accomplish as a 13th labor. My mental thinking made my stride longer, and I fully allowed my hips to shake and my shoulders to shimmy. The sound of my footsteps changed as I stepped from concrete onto linoleum, and I heard the murmur of gossip from the middle school kids buzzing like a hornet's nest. Then the murmurs stopped as quickly as if the nest had been swatted down by a kid with a big stick. I didn't stop walking. I knew they were looking at me either with hatred, disgust, or wonder. All their narrowed eyes were fixed on me as

they saw me walking through the hallways to my locker all the way at the end. The boys with their mismatching shirts and shorts and the girls in their tights and blouses were frozen in tense positions when I walked by. I was not deterred, and I continued past their gazes and silence to my locker.

I was barely past Room 14 when I tripped and fell, sprawled on the floor. Time slowed before I reached the cold floor. I thought about what they were going to do to me and what they were going to say. "I knew this was going to happen," I thought. "What else would I expect? Someone like me doesn't exactly walk into every public school in New Jersey."

My head crashed into the linoleum with a revolting thud and my knees burned from the graze. My confidence was shattered. My skirt lifted up from the fall, and I struggled to pull it back down in front of the group of boys who stood in front of me: Gregg Harckle, James Vast and Diz LeMagne. Gregg was a small boy with a flame of red hair standing straight up and light, nervous brown eyes set in the center of a face that reminded me of a puppet. James was handsome. He was so very handsome with chocolate brown hair playing around light blue eyes. His teeth were brilliant white and his forearms and calves were tan and muscular. He's one of those people who you say have "good bone structure" and mean it. Diz was big. Really big. He stood over

six feet, and it made you dizzy to look up at him for long, which is where he got his nickname. He was dark-skinned with short black hair and green eyes wide-open and scared. Diz was really just a big teddy bear when you got to know him. His appearance was daunting at first though.

"Hey Marshall," said James, casually but still constrained. I didn't look at him or respond. I gathered my things as quickly as I could to stand up to leave until James swiped his arms through my books. He sent them crashing to the floor a little farther away, beyond his crew where I couldn't get to them. I couldn't get to them without going through Diz, that is. I felt the eyes of everyone in the hallway locked on our tango.

"I said, *hey*," growled James. His light eyes turned menacing as quickly as a light switch.

"What do you want?" I responded trying to be just as threatening but without success. James smiled darkly and moved closer to me.

"I heard about the change. I don't see much difference; you still look like the big idiot you used to be and always will be. You just put some lipstick and a skirt on. I must say, Marshall, the dress really isn't working for you. I can still see your fat legs poking out. You would think someone who wanted to be a girl

would try harder to look like one," he said slowly giving me a once over. "Yeah...you could use some work."

"I don't need your approval." James swiftly moved up to my face as graceful as a tiger and just as forboding. I tried to step back but encountered Diz then was caught between the violent eyes of James Vast and the brick-body of Diz LeMagne. James was rigid and muttered underneath his breath.

"You don't. But you *will* need protection if I see you looking like some ugly chick by tomorrow." James stepped back just as Mr. Chang leaned through the doorway of the office. Mr. Chang was a beefy Asian man with salt and pepper hair and huge glasses who worked in the front office.

"What's going on out here?" Mr. Chang asked suspiciously. Suddenly, all the frozen kids melted and hurried to their classes. James swiveled on his heels to face Mr. Chang and smiled warmly, the smile he gave when he wanted to charm someone into believing him, the smile I knew too well. His voice was as smooth as butter, with an innocent inflection.

"Nothing, Mr. Chang. Gregg and I were just about to pick up Marshall's books after he tripped. Diz helped him get up. That's all." James smiled again and raised his eyebrows with that I'm-as-perfect-as-an-angel look. Mr. Chang returned the smile and

nodded before stepping back into the office. Almost instantly James' smile faded, and he turned back into the bully he was.

"Watch it Marshall. Watch where you put those little painted toes of yours." James said. We locked eyes for a long time before he kicked my books away. I saw something else in his eyes then. It was neither the intimidating look, nor the innocent look, nor the cool look. He was hurt. His eyes were so emotional, they gave everything away. His blue eyes were displaying signs of damage. Before I could read anymore, he swung his arm around the shoulders of a girl with brown hair that cascaded to her mid back. It was curled to perfection and hung around a body clad in a loose red knit sweater that went just below the buttocks. Gray leggings led into tall, black suede boots. Seraphina Rosen peeked back at me over the shoulder of James. Her eyes looked sympathetic but scared too. I know she wanted to help me and that she felt sorry, but there was no way she could help without angering her boyfriend.

I watched all four of them stroll down the hallway, Diz and Gregg lagged after Seraphina and James. I looked after James with sadness. His departure spoke to me in ways that I would never be able to be put into words. Finality, anger, destruction. I wasn't mad at him. I wasn't mad at him for tripping me or bullying me like that. He felt betrayed. All the

happy times from the past were swept away, and a new, bad relationship was established between James and me. I knew my switch hurt him after all we had been through together. It's hard to see someone you told all your secrets to, played with, and even slept in the same room with turn into someone else. Some days after school James and I discussed all the girls at Jameson Junior High, which ones he liked, like Seraphina, and ones that he didn't. He mostly talked about their personality instead of their looks, and if he did mention what they looked like, he always described girls as beautiful, never hot. That's what I always liked about him. On these days, we would eat Oreos and play video games. I never lost to him at video games, and he always got the girl. That's how it was between me and James, which I was okay with. I knew he was remembering these times right now, hoping that it would go back to "normal." I forgave James. After all, his best guy friend was a girl.

I'm different than everyone else. I know that. It took a lot of courage to change from who I was to who I am. But, they are scared of me; they don't know what to say or do. My being unlike other kids alarms them. I knew from the beginning it wasn't going to be easy, and after this experience with James Vast, I knew I wasn't going to be safe either.

My Light and Darkness

Adam Grafton, 12th grade
Croatan High School
Stella, NC

My two halves, my light half and my dark half, hammer away in a never ending struggle. The darkness in me is prone to violence, but fails to defeat my light, who is an eyewitness to the malevolent, dark destruction. The light is grateful, and not a troublemaker, like my darkness. The motto of good and evil is that everyman must choose. So, if I must choose, which card shall I play? The marigold colored light? Or the darkness in search of destruction?

I am naive, happy, and ignorant.

You cannot tell me to calm down so easily.

I am a child at heart.

I know I can be obnoxious, but I try not to be so annoying.

So few people truly hate me... I think.

I have always told myself to always look on the bright side of life.

I may be cast in my sister's shadow, but she doesn't hold a candle to my insanity!

I refuse to accept any denial of ignorance is bliss; nobody can tell me otherwise, except for...

I am brother to Sorrow and Grief.

I am all means of trepidation, scorn and depression.

I am forever cruel, cynical and hateful.

I will not hold back the truth.

I am not hidden in his shadow; I break his facade time and time
again.

When I am alive, I will keep to myself.

If you try to pester me, be warned, I will not be nice.

Yes, I feel incredible pain, but I relinquish it onto others
with my heart of wrath.

I am the demon Dread!

After a Rainstorm

Christina Baek, 7th grade
Altadena Middle School
Phoenix, AZ

Swirling mist envelops me,
 around my ankles,
 around my arms,
its bony fingers enwrapping me.

It conceals me from reality,
 drowning the colors,
drowning the sound of plip plop,
 completely blinding me.

I swim through the thickness desperately,
 looking up,
 looking down,
but eerie shadows are all I can see.

Fog feathers up the whole city,
 blurring out details,
 blurring my mind,
after a rainstorm of intensity.

State of Mind

Andie Capace, 9th grade
Stone Bridge High School
Ashburn, VA

Sweet smell of autumn with a touch of lingering summer winds

I lay in the weeds as the sun warms me and the cool air
surrounds me

Creating a peaceful state of mind

I close my eyes

Wondering why the sky is blue and why the grass is green

No one knows the answers to these questions exactly

They give a definition but no explanation

That's the way things are in the modern world of today

You ask and wonder and wait

For something better to come along

But the same old same just keeps showing up

With no explanation at all

Like the way things are and how they have to be

They're a labyrinth, a riddle, a mystery

But we live on in hopes to find an answer

Wandering through life without a clue

You may be smart, but without a clue

Why the roses are red, and the violets are blue

And why the clouds in the sky are white

And the sun shimmers a yellowish-gold color

Is it possible for one person to know?
Know the explanations and know the answers
Questions wander through the minds of beings
The kinds of questions no one knows another can attain
You may think a person is dull, doubtful, and demure
But do the questions that float through your mind
Also graze through theirs?

You ponder about your thoughts
About today, about tomorrow, about the future
Ever so changing and evolving
Always moving never seizing
Do your passions or curiosities ever stop transforming?

It's like walking a tightrope with nothing to stop you from
crashing into the ground
Your balance begins to quiver and shake
Descending downward, falling into a pit of emptiness
Longing to hit solid ground
Waiting for the butterflies to fly out of your stomach
You fall and fall and fall until they start to shrivel in the
depths of your descent
No more butterflies, no more fears
You have overcome all that you have encountered
The mountains collapse and the oceans drain out.

Valleys dilapidate and the corners of the earth start to crumble

There's nothing left but you

Alone you lie on this vacant lot

Waiting and hoping for something to come along

And for something or someone to come and save you...

The colors of the crisp winds flow out of proportion

They fold and contort over the endless landscape

Grazing the surface of my forehead

The dawn of the dusk approaches

Sweeping along the bitterness of the earth

The weeds with the flowers sway amongst the chilly air

Each individual hair trailing in the direction of the currents

eager to go on

My skin begins to tingle and the corners of my lips begin to

curl

Wishing I could bottle up this moment

Let it be mine forever

Sweet smell of autumn with a touch of lingering summer winds

I lay in the weeds as the sun warms me and the cool air

surrounds me

Creating a peaceful state of mind

I open my eyes

Tido the Turtle

Lawrence Tuttle, 9th grade
Albion Middle School
Salt Lake City, UT

CHAPTER 1: A TURTLE IS BORN

A long, long time ago, in an ocean far away, a little turtle was born. The turtle's mother had laid the turtle on a beach on the tips of Southern Australia. Of all the 115 other turtle eggs around him, Tido (as he was called) was the first to hatch. He was a hawksbill turtle with green fins, all except one. The color of the odd one was deep blue, so deep that it was almost black. His shell was yellow and brown with a star-shaped pattern. Furthermore, he had a diamond shaped head with a dark circle around it.

Since Tido had no other knowledge of what to do, he waddled straight ahead for the huge, vast ocean that lay in front of him. Although it seemed like an easy trip to the water at the time, the tiny turtle had no idea about what dangers he faced.

The little hatchling made his way across the beach from his nest at a swift pace. As he shuffled along, Tido suddenly heard the loud beating of an enormous creature coming from behind him. He turned around and all he saw was a black and brown blur of feathers flying towards him. Out of desperation, he dove to the right and scooted as fast as he could behind a crevice in a

rock. Narrowly, he escaped without being seen and was able to hide. Tido sat and waited as quietly as he could until the huge bird gave up the search and flew away. But, just as he was about to continue his run to the water, six gigantic legs stepped right in front of him.

Before Tido could react, the individual happily told him there was nothing to be afraid of and then introduced himself as Sandy the crab. He was a jolly creature and, unlike most crabs, he did not eat hatchlings. Sandy also told Tido that he would help him make it safely across the beach. He had spoken with Tido's mother when she had laid her eggs and had promised her he would do all he could to direct as many baby turtles across the beach as possible. Since Tido had been the first to hatch, he was the first to be helped.

Sandy decided that it would be less obvious to predators if he crawled over the top Tido as they both made their way crosswise to the beach. They moved this way for several yards, and it seemed to be working. Once they were about five yards from the shoreline, Sandy told Tido that they would have to split up, and that Tido would have to make the rest of the journey on his own. If Sandy had continued any closer to the water he could have been swept away by the tide, which could have jeopardized his life.

Sandy then gave Tido instructions as to what he should do once he reached the ocean. First, stay near the ground and in the plants in order to find food and to stay hidden from any predators. Then, after about a week of growing and becoming stronger, follow the trail of the Australian smelt, a type of small fish that Tido could eat. The fish would lead him to the Southern tip of Tasmania. This is where his parents and a large population of hawksbill turtles were.

Once Sandy had finished giving him the correct directions, Tido set off on his journey to his parents. He swam straight through the waves that were crashing onto the shore. Tido hugged the ocean floor as long as he could, until he had to surface for air. After taking a huge breath, he swam back to the bottom and searched for food; he was hungry.

CHAPTER 2: SHARK ATTACK

Seconds later, Tido found some plants to eat. There was a huge grass bed at the place that he was, giving him plenty to eat. Also, there was some coral and caves that were close by, providing him with some protection and shelter. Overall, the place that he stayed was quite ideal.

Two days after leaving the beach, he had settled into his new, little home. Tido made many new friends, including a

particular seahorse named Turby. Turby was also very young like Tido but about two or three days older. He was small and black with little yellow spots, and he had four brothers and one sister who all looked just like him.

Turby helped Tido identify some additional plants that he could eat different than those Sandy had already informed him of. He also showed him what Australian smelt looked like so that he wouldn't get lost on his way to his parents. Although finding food was important, the highest priority that Tido would need to learn would be to stay safe from predators. Turby had no way of knowing this at the time, but Tido would need to learn how to be protected from dangers to come.

Tido resided for two weeks at his temporary home when he decided that it was time to set off on his adventure to the southern tip of Tasmania. Just before he was about to leave, Turby had asked his mother and father if it was all right if he go along with Tido. He explained that he was big enough and that it was time for him to set off on his own. His parents agreed, thus giving Tido a companion for his journey.

They began their trip swimming with the Australian smelt. They had plenty to eat, both fish and plants. As they swam along, many creatures around them asked what they were doing and why they were all alone. Tido and Turby didn't want anyone to

know exactly where they were going because they weren't sure about the motives of the questioners. They could be a threat.

After several hours of swimming that day, the two friends came upon a huge, dark cave that was directly in front of them. They had to either go through it or swim above it. The problem with swimming above it was that there were two-foot long piranhas lurking around, searching for little animals to eat. The problem with swimming through the cave was that nobody had ever gone all the way through the cave after going inside. The two buddies decided that they would be eaten alive if they went over the cave, and decided that they would have to take their chances and go straight through the dark, scary cave.

Their plan was to stay really close together in order to prevent from getting separated and lost. They made their way through quite quickly until suddenly, Tido bumped into something slick and huge. He looked up to see if he could tell what it was. All that he saw were billions of razor sharp teeth, glistening in the darkness.

Tido did the smartest thing that he could have done in the situation: nothing. The only movement that he made was motioning to Turby to be as quiet as he could. After several seconds of silence, the shark seemed not to notice what had bumped into him. The shark was about 12 feet long and was resting

soundlessly against the wall of the cave. It was a hammerhead shark with its two eyes closed on either side of his long, narrow head. Turby and Tido then decided to try swimming as quickly and quietly as they could past it and prayed that it would not awaken.

Sadly, after swimming for about 100 yards, Tido and Turby turn around to see the huge shark swimming swiftly towards them. They immediately dove behind a rock wall in order to get out of reach from the hammerhead's enormous jaws. Then, hardly before they could get another breath, the shark heads right back for them. Problematically, Tido and Turby cornered themselves inside the narrow crevice in the wall, disabling any escape route past the shark. The two friends were trapped.

To Be Continued..

Ocean Predators

Karina Donahoe, 9th grade
Tabb High School
Yorktown, VA

The shark stalks by, watching you
Eyeing you, waiting, waiting to
Maybe, just maybe let you touch
Its skin, but perhaps that's too much
It skims by on the ocean floor,
Wondering if you will swoosh through opportunity's door
Your metal tank glistens, inviting even more
Smiling barracudas to come, shivering to your very core
These predators swim around,
You slowly sink down
Carefully turning your head
Move too fast, and you're dead

Ocean Whispers

Venessa Meaney, 12th grade
Croatan High School
Newport, NC

The ocean whispers to the lonely man

On a sacred, silent night.

He closely shadows the voice,

So flowing with boldness and deathly might.

When he swims in her icy liquid blanket

She pulls him down below.

He desperately fights and gasps for air

While her force begins to grow.

Her waves fall up and slowly back down

Over his floating head.

He bobs above the blue liquid

And wishes he were dead.

But the ocean whispers to the frightened man

Do you love me so?

You are vile and powerful, but I think

I love my dear strong foe.

Her icy tongue flowed down his throat
When she gave him a moist kiss.
He choked and gasped again for breath
But this time he got his wish.

For a while he floats above the dark liquid
But then slowly descends down deep
Into the watery abyss of his granter's deathbed
For the dire ocean to keep.

Forever he stays inside her liquid blanket
His soul still lonely as before.
His heart never filled with love
As he lies beneath the ocean floor.

Then the ocean whispers to the lonely man
Do you love me now?
But the man never answered, for he was silenced,
And a tear fell below her brow.

Maya and Her Mother

Paul Ngu, 10th grade
Syosset High School
Syosset, NY

By mid-afternoon, the streets of Lamar Road are bustling with villagers who travelled across the countryside for the town's open-air market. Street carts set up along the sides of the pebble roads entice passing visitors with the smell of grilled kabobs and stuffed eggplant. In the corner of a food stall, a young mother dressed in a yellow blouse kneels to her son, admonishing him for running off in the streets. The young boy squirms upon being examined by his mother for stains on his sleeves. To his right a group of young townsmen unload carts of produce, their work briefly interrupted by a stray dog gnawing quietly on a cart of green mangoes.

Maya slams her foot on the brakes of her bicycle, lingering in the town a little longer to take in the aroma of papayas wafting in the air. Her eyes systematically scan the street vendors for the source of the fruit. The sun's rays gleam over Maya's face, forcing her to retrieve the baseball cap that once belonged to her father. Rummaging through her bag for the cap, she realizes she left her purse at home. It was her mother who suggested she keep her money at home, scraping together their remaining savings for their move to America. Her family was not financially well-off, especially after Jay, her father, was laid

off from his job as a computer technician soon after she was born. Now Jay works at a stable technology firm in Boston, where his company is based and where Maya and her mother would finally join him.

Frustrated that she would have to forgo the boxes of papayas, Maya stomps on the turf before retreating towards her bicycle. While fiddling with the straps of her helmet, she watches a group of young girls kicking a tethered ball on a nearby dirt field. She doesn't know what to expect in America, but she doubts that Boston will be anything like her town. Her neighbors tried to soothe her concerns about America, choosing to mention the opportunities for success there instead of the loss of her friends and culture here. Above all though, they emphasized a united family in America, where they would no longer be separated by the Pacific Ocean from their father. To Maya, that was the most appealing part about immigrating to America. Jay transferred to Boston when she was at a tender age of three, too young to retain any solid memories of him. Years following, Maya's only connection to him was the crinkled bills and coffee stained letters that arrived a week after her birthdays.

The wind begins to pick up in strength and Maya knows her mother will be worrying about her whereabouts. She ties a sloppy ponytail and adjusts her helmet to fit snugly over her head. A

group of sea gulls swarm around her, pecking on the ground for crumbs that fell out from her bag. Maya yells at the birds angrily, waving her hand in disgust before pedaling home.

Her mother told her of the move only a week ago, too short of a time for her to take it all in. That night when Maya had wrapped herself in a thin summer blanket, she could hear from across her room the soft and steady cries that could only come from her mother. It was a private moment for her mother, and Maya never had the courage to ask her about it. Her mother was a fragile woman, preferring to live in poverty with her husband by her side than having Jay relocate to Boston. Yet it was never her choice, and Jay accused her of paving a life of hardships for their family. Now Maya and her mother will travel to America.

The shuttle bus to the airport slowly rolls to the corner of the street, stopping momentarily for Maya and her mother to load their suitcases to the back of the bus. Their tickets are stamped by a young man who sports a pair of tinted glasses and a beige hat that reminds Maya of her own baseball cap. As usual, the seats are already occupied. A young mother sits on one end, gently stroking her baby to sleep with a soft lullaby. Between the mother and the front of the bus are two young men dressed in gray flannel suits, their spoken words foreign to Maya. Turning around to grip the metal handle of the bus, Maya notices that

her mother is composing a letter. Her mother worried that Jay had neglected his native language, taking up English as his means of communication. With the help of a translation dictionary Maya had purchased for her, she carefully transcribed the letters she had written for him to English. Living in Boston would require her to be patient in adapting to the new language. As Maya had already discovered about her though, she was accustomed to waiting.

Their plane arrives at Chicago for a stopover before making its final destination to Boston. Maya cautiously steps off the plane, turning around to make sure her mother is behind her. She takes a firm grip of her mother's hand and proceeds to the nearest set of chairs. Maya recalls on when she was ten years old, she ventured into an open field of daffodils, leaving behind her mother who was selecting vegetables in a nearby market. It seemed like an innocent act, but that evening when her mother found her, lying on the ground with petals decorated on her face, she began to tear up. In a muffled voice that frightened Maya, her mother explained she could not risk being separated from another family member. In what was once unusual to her, Maya understood that since Jay's departure from her life, her mother had grown to be dependent upon her.

Outside the airport there is a downpour of rain, an unusual occurrence on a mid-summer afternoon for Boston. Behind the

revolving doors that open to the streets of Boston is a young man explaining to his group of tourists the attractions of the city. Maya is hesitant to approach the man for directions, but reminded of her mother's request for cough medicine, she interrupts his conversation to ask for the nearest drug store. While she listens to his instructions, her mother rests on a narrow bench near the airport terminal, recovering from the shaky plane landing. Since Jay will expect them to be waiting in the parking lot, her mother hopes he will understand their reason for delay. Stretching her neck towards the glass window pane, Maya's mother sees that Boston is different from what Jay described it to be. There are neither open air-markets for her to purchase anchovies and papayas, nor parks for Maya to ride her bike every morning. Instead there are concrete paved roads dotted with lofty gray buildings. While Maya is away, her coughing erupts again, and she collapses on the bench waiting for Maya's return.

Inside the store there are unusually long lines at the checkout counters, and Maya grows frustrated at the customers in the convenience store. Quietly, she giggles at the attire of the people around her, promising herself never to alter her own style of dress. The woman in front of the line begins to cough, reminding Maya of her mother's condition. Since arriving to Boston, her mother has complained of throbbing pains in her

head, later accompanied by a series of coughs. Although she attributed it to changes in the environment, Maya knew there was more to account for it.

Even though they had all dreamed for this day to come, and Jay had been prepared them, it suddenly seemed to Maya that she and her mother were not yet ready to accept him back into their lives. An unfamiliar country, a foreign language, and the addition of a person, whose relation to her in name only, made Maya apprehensive. It would not be easy accepting part or all of this, and yet, for as long as Maya could remember, starting over was all that she ever knew. She would be patient, like her mother had been for so many years.

On Sitting Above Tomales Bay

Eleana Binder, 9th grade
Berkeley High School
Berkeley, CA

The poplar stretches one green shoot after another,
Always reaching, reaching,
Wishing to grow higher, higher,
Anticipating tomorrow,
The sky's blue dome just beyond its grasp,
Until, one day, it can grow no more.
Has the bent and gnarled trunk forgotten its supple younger
self?

II

The past, a low hurdle leapfrogged over,
Rushing towards the new, the better, the brighter,
Pushing towards the next landmark.
But the future ones have already surpassed its importance.
So that hurtling towards the shrinking finish line,
Gasping, stumbling, falling,
The runner finds no cheering crowd, only
The emptiness of dreams and promises.

III

Oh to live outside of time,
Yet within a moment,
Still and satisfied,
Like the distant, unmoving inlet.

The Simple Things

Sara Gaylon, 11th grade
Mira Loma High School
Carmichael, CA

Looking around there's much to be found

Shiny jewels and coins lurking about

Just waiting to be discovered if you take the right route

They're there in the shadows where they seem to be lost

Forgotten and wasted by times long ago

They were taken for granted and put a stop

Their value was forgotten but now they're needed most

Since society's but a ghost,

Of the values it used to have and treasures it used to hold

So, if you wish to uncover these timely lost jewels

Simply step over all of society's twisted rules

And remember the things that matter the most

Like life and liberty

Rather than money and misery

If you remember these simple things

I think you will have the jewel of kings

The Teacher is Such an Idiot

Hector Figueroa, 6th grade
St. Francis of Rome
Ciscero, IL

The teacher is such an idiot.

He thinks $4+4$ is 8.

The Teacher is such an Idiot

He thinks the plural for sheep is sheep.

The Teacher is such an Idiot

He thinks one of our presidents was named Bush.

The Teacher is such an Idiot

He calls me an Idiot.

The Little Old Man Who Sat in the Lobby

Maya Best, 8th grade
Falk Laboratory School
Pittsburg, PA

A nice little old man sitting on a bench,

In the lobby

His smile as bright as gold

Two green plants sitting on either side of him,

With blue windows reflecting from everywhere

Behind his back I see,

A little piece of candy that he is hiding from me

He reaches out his big hand,

Placing the candy into my little hand

I am happy

My father tells me about Mr. Jimmy,

The little old man who sat in the lobby

He tells me that he has died

And I know he is gone,

He was old

So I think...

Little did I know

Twelve years old now

I remember,

The little old man who sat in the lobby

My father tells me this sad tale,

My mind pictures his words

A stranger offers him a ride,

He says yes with a kind nod,

Not thinking

Inside the car his head is bleeding

A gun,

In the stranger's hand

Thrown onto the railroad tracks,

His body

The little old man who sat in the lobby,

Now on the ground,

With blood on his face

Eyes closed,

With his mouth a straight line,

A flower stem

I hadn't known

No one had told me,

And I tell myself

That I'll never forget,

The little old man who sat in the lobby

My face is down,

With my hands by my side

And I remember Mr. Jimmy

The little old man who sat in the lobby

Sitting Vigil

Dylan Winchester, 11th grade
Sheldon-Williams Collegiate
Regina, Saskatchewan Canada

a cat slinks out
 an open door,
 a secret journey
of friends and shadows

searching for nothing,
 content to wander
in the sunset
 it climbs

up a drainpipe
 up to the sky,
 unseen, unheard
 ever present

dark and watchful
 silent guardian
stars dance and spin,
 sliding across tin shingles

eyes twinkle and flash

code for long time friends,

high up above

the sleepy town

dawn is breaking,

lazy night

floats

down from roof tops

stars dim

reluctant to part,

the cat waves

its tail up at the sky

the moon slowly fades,

the cat pads back

through the open door

waiting for tomorrow

The Dance of the Books

Jack Maldonado, 4th grade
Sparta Alpine School
Sparta, NJ

Books live at my school.

They rest while the children are there.

But when the children leave

They do a break dance.

Their pages flip like lightening.

And the pages fight

To see who is the most popular to read.

Then they rest

They need to flip more pages the next day.

Flip, flip, flip.

The Dance of the Books.

Poetry and Me

Julia M. Allen, 8th grade
Richard T. Stank Middle School
Binghamton, NY

Where is hope? I am trying to see

A valid reason to believe.

I search, waiting to soar

Yet everywhere I search bliss is bottled by a cork.

Hey it is me,

The wishing wonder that watches you sleep.

What have you done? Can't you see

That poetry is an escape from misery?

What? Poetry can't help;

It is more menacing than an economy graph!

Even a warrior will cringe

At the sight of poetries' arrogant laugh.

Haikus are simple;

They are sweet. Most say they are

A delightful eat.

What? Come on and get
Real! Who wishes to sound like
That when one's around?

See, you're catching on!
Words like these are what create a song;
A melody, a verse, and piece of me
Soon enough form a remedy.

Song lyrics? You have got to be kidding me;
Close your eyes and open up your mind!
Poetry may be magical and carefree,
Yet the disgusting feed blocks any shimmering glee.

Have you not realized that without poetry
You would not be speaking to me?
So what are you going to do?
Poetry carries your luminescent destiny.