

The Writers' Slate, published by The Writing Conference, Inc., features some of the 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 editor of **The Writers' Slate** invites original, creative and expository writing by students in kindergarten through 12th grade. The editor also invites submissions of book reviews of children's or young adult literature, written by students. Educators are also encouraged to submit article ideas for consideration.

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

Send submissions to: Shelly McNerney
Editor
The Writers' Slate
7619 Hemlock St.
Overland Park, KS 66204

OR submit electronically: shellymcnerney@writingconference.com

Submissions **should clearly indicate the writer's name, school, grade, school and home addresses, and the teacher's name.** Due to the number of submissions and mailing costs involved, the editor will only respond to a student author's submission if a self-addressed stamped envelope is included. Submissions will not be returned.

The editor reserves the right to edit manuscripts for clarity, style, and according to space limitations. Submissions selected for publication may also appear briefly on the journal's web page.

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Shelly McNerney
Editor

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My friend's name is Klose. I met my friend when I was a baby. My friend is a dog. I picked my dog as a friend because when my mom put me down on the floor, he would always come and lay down next to me, like I was his baby. He would always lick me on my face.

I will always have my dog Klose as a friend. But, the years passed and now my dog is 11 and is getting really old. Soon he will die and I will really miss him, because he is my only friend in the whole world.

When my dog dies, I will go to where he used to sleep and I will cry a little. When I sleep I will think that he will be sleeping right next to me. I will always have him in my heart. Wherever I am he will be too!

Tara Englehardt
2nd Grade
Deer Park, New York

BOLD AND BLACK

BOLD AND BLACK THE OWL I SEE, BOLD AND BLACK THE OWL SHOULD BE. I SAW HIM ONCE AND I COULD NOT IGNORE THIS BEAUTIFUL SIGHT THAT I HAVE ADORED. BOLD AND BLACK THE OWL SHOULD BE FLEW INTO THE DEEP DARK SEA. DOWN IT GOES WITH ALL ITS MIGHT. DOWN IT GOES SLOWLY COMING BACK UP ALL RIGHT. IT FLEW ONTO THE HOUSE WITH ALL ITS MIGHT SLOWLY IT SWOOPED DOWN BOLD AND BRIGHT.

Lea Porcelli
Age 9
Secaucus, New Jersey

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7619 Hemlock St.
Overland Park, KS 66204

Hope

As my vision blurs

And the dirt stained floor is wet

That unmistakable image once again stains my mind

I hope that what I'm encountering

Is simply a dream

But the realness of the circumstance is too great

My hope begins to fade

And I feel the joy leave my soul

Andrew Piekalkiewicz II
6th Grade
Lawrence, Kansas

Unknown

Thinking to yourself,
 Staring at a wall,
 A wall with names.
Then you see your name
 Did you die in battle?
But you're standing right here.
 Staring at your name
 How can this be?
You look at your hands,
 Then your body.
You see nothing,
 "What's wrong with me"
 You think but you tried to talk
 Nothing came out of your mouth
Then the horrible truth
 Washes over you
 Like the waves
 Covering the sand
You see a dark hallway
 With a bright light
 At the end

THE END

Danielle Stringer
6th Grade
Lawrence, Kansas

The Monster

"Good night." says my dad. "Good night." says my mom.
I'm so scared, but they act so calm.
For I know that under my bed,
Is a monster that wants to be fed.
There comes its arm, from under the bed,
"It's time," I thought, "for my last words to be said."
There comes its leg, all slimy and green,
Why does it have to be evil and mean?
There comes its head, as round as a ball,
I can hear a frightening, meowing call.
Now I know, there's more monsters to come,
I realize that now, it's time to run.
I jump out of bed and turn on the light,
I prepare myself for a horrendous fright.
I look on the ground and what do I see?
An ugly, worn-out pair of green jeans,
A ball of slime that I had made,
And on the floor, a sweater was laid,
An enormous green bouncy ball,
But I still didn't know what made that call.
I decided to peek under the bed.
I found that my monster was my restless cat Fred.

Lynn Daboul
11 years old
Toledo, Ohio

The Truth About Dreams

Dreams are personal.
They come from deep inside.
It's your secret hope
No matter how
Embarrassing
Different
Unique
Or untrue they are.
It's you.
It's not what you say.
Not what you lie about
To try to be cool.
It's what you think in reality.
Dreams are the you
You might be wishing you weren't.
Look to your dreams
To find yourself.
You can make up who you want to be
But not who you truly are.
Dreams tell the truth.

Jocelyn Caster
6th grade
Pacific Palisades, California

The ups and downs of sisterhood

My sister
My role model
My everything
When my sister was little
All she cared about was me
Now she's not
She's 17
All she cares about is
School
Grades
Her boyfriend
Her friends
And cheerleading
That's great for her
Not for me
I'm still here
I still exist
It's like she doesn't even know me
She yells and ignores me
That's about all the acquaintance we get anymore
What can I say?
She's a teenager 17
And going off to college
I'm 11 and going off to junior high
Sometimes I just feel like giving up
Letting the volcano explode inside me
I never will though
I never can
We're family I love her
No matter what she does
I will always love her
For whom she is
And what she will become
We are sisters
We share the same blood
We have the same parents
We even share the same prospective of life
We may have different personalities
But we're sisters
Sisters till the end of time
She is my role model
And my friend
And that's for eternity

Saying Goodbye

"Can you send Miss Loney down here for a minute?" the loud intercom seemed to shout. I immediately froze in my seat. I knew what this was about. I got up and walked down the hallway. Everything was in a blur for some reason, and I didn't know why. It's like I didn't want what was going to happen, to really happen. My feet were suddenly heavy. Bit by bit I walked down the halls until I finally reached the office where I saw my Mom. My heart stopped and my feet seemed glued to the floor.

"He's outside," she said. Even though I was in a school building, which usually had some loud commotion going on, the only thing I could seem to hear was the sound of my own heart beating. At last I got enough courage to move. We made our way out of the heavy faded red school doors. "Just walk," I thought, "don't think about it."

I couldn't help myself. My mind flashed back to twelve hours ago just before we reached my mom's car. My dog, Beau, laid there outstretched on the tan carpet. His typical hair of black had turned gray in what had seemed like a blink of an eye. His chest was skin and bones, heaving bigger every breath. This was very odd to me; I was so used to an overweight dog, not a skinny one. I was hoping the next breath would be a normal one, that everything would be okay. But as much as I desired the thought, nothing worked. Beau sneezed blood clots onto the burgundy towel my Mom had recently brought in. "Make it stop!" I wanted to cry. I would've done anything for him to be okay. But I was silent.

Beau wouldn't stand, move, nothing at all. His physical life had shut down all of a sudden. In a way, he knew he was going to die, he was a smart dog and all, but he held onto life. I felt he was holding onto life for us, for everyone who loved him. I held a wet rag up to his mouth. Earlier he would lick it dry, just like any other dog. Now he lay there, motionless. As much as we wanted to help, we couldn't do anything. There was nothing I, nothing we

could do, except give him the love that he always has and will deserve until he was gone. We figured that his liver was failing. It was over.

I had to get out of the memory; I had to get back to reality before it was too late. Before he was gone. As much as I didn't want to face the fact that Beau was dieing, I had to. I shook my head and went back.

"Say goodbye" my Mom said, as though she was gritting her teeth. She was trying to hold back the tears. But she couldn't. Her eyes spilled with drops of sadness. She opened the trunk to her white SLJV. The seats were folded back and there he laid; so alone, so still. I climbed in and hugged Beau. I hugged as soft I could, knowing that if I hugged him too tight, he could be gone for good. The tears scorched my eyes and fell softly on his chest. I looked at his eyes. He wasn't crying. Like I had discovered before, he knew he was going to die; but he wasn't afraid. He just looked at me. The eyes I had always loved had lost their spark. The little person that he was, was fading away.

"I love you Beau," I sobbed. "Don't forget me in heaven." I felt as though I could lay there, hugging him forever. He didn't have to go, all of us knew that. Even though we wanted him to stay, we had to let him go. So, I let go. I climbed out as my mom reached to close the door. I didn't want to move. The happy part of spirit had vanished. I felt so empty, so single-handed. It seemed like I had been standing there forever. The whole event had made me grow older. Not physically, but spiritually. Physically this day was the same. Physically, the sky, the sun, the wind, I was the same. But spiritually, it wasn't. He was gone. Forever.

Beau was put to sleep that afternoon. I wasn't shocked that we put him out of his suffering, but I was surprised he had gotten sick and died so fast. I knew he was going to die someday. He was eight years old and all. But when the day came, it came when I was least expecting it.

Every now and then I think about him. I imagine about what my life would be like if he was still here. I think about he would interact with my new dog, Duke. I even consider about how he is doing, if he's enjoying heaven. If he's jumping around and playing fetch like he always wanted to, but never could because his weak legs got in the way. I think about if he misses me. But I know one thing for sure, I miss him. I wish he was still here. But I know he's in a better place now. Yes he was just my dog. But to me, he wasn't only that. He was, and will always be my best friend.

Adelle Loney
6th Grade
Lawrence, Kansas

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If I Had To...

If I had to classify him as a baseball bat,
He'd most certainly be a 30 inch, 24 ounce aluminum bat.
Long enough to reach into the spots you need to reach the most,
Light enough to swing with quickly.
He'd be the one who I'd use to crank home-runs with,
The one to bail me out with the bases loaded and 2 outs.
But then again,
That bat gets old and goes out of style.
I get stronger,
But he doesn't get heavier and longer.
But he'll still be in the box 30 years later,
Along with the mitt, the cap, the trophy, and the team picture.

Brett Porterfield
9th Grade
Denver, Colorado

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Time Will Tell

wintery serenity greets
us as we step into the crisp
dazzling sigh of snow to
meditate on the beauty and wild.

fresh lushness greets
us as we bounce into the jade-scented wind
to spring and play
on the newly freed verdancy.

the splash of a jeans-azure lake greets
us as we break the tension and
mellow out with fine friendship and unlimited time
in the sultry sun.

burnt ocher bags greet
us as we whiz past the
falling leaves, pumpkin pies and turkey dinners
of the invigorating days of turning weather.

the colors whirl and melt
in my mind they become
the vast expanse of the gray fog
of time.

Madeleine Kane
8th Grade
Littleton, Colorado

Ode to Books

O, books, Fantastical books
You have no boundaries
Nothing to rope you in
Free like an eagle
In flight.

You are enticing, alluring
Unpredictable
From page turning
Thrillers,
To heart-wrenching
Romances.

Suddenly I'm flying on
The wings of your words
Away from reality
Into the world of fantasy
Wearing ball gowns,
Meeting princes,
Fighting dragons.

You twist and flow as a river
Rushing me down your path
Now I have no boundaries
In your mystical paragraphs
And plots,
I am whoever I want to be.

Erin Fisher
9th Grade
Denver, Colorado

Black Cat

In the early morning fog, a young girl sat at the end of the pier leading out from the coast of a small island, where a fishing village sat. She gazed out into the fog, hoping for the return of her father's boat. Instead, her gaze found a small dark shape, which soon revealed itself as a weather-beaten lifeboat with a single occupant. She stared. The middle-aged man in the lifeboat had obviously been in a wreck, and his chest was caked with dried blood. He looked dead, but as the boat drifted closer, the girl saw he was still breathing. She pulled the boat closer to the pier and tied it off. Then she ran to get the others.

The villagers brought the strange man ashore. As they carefully set him down, they heard him mumble: "All gone, just me, just me." He kept mumbling as the healer of the village knelt at his side to inspect his wounds.

"Where did you say you found him, Emily?" the healer asked, addressing the young girl.

"His boat just floated in," she replied, shrugging.

"Well, in any case, we need to put him inside," The healer proclaimed, standing up. "Take him to my house, so I can dress those wounds."

The strange man was in the healer's care for several days, in which time the men who had been fishing, including Emily's father, returned with their catch. They all wanted to see the man, but Margaret, the healer, would not allow it. "He needs rest." She said sternly. "And you pestering him won't help." So they relented, and the man soon recovered enough to appear before the village council.

Gingerly, as not to reopen his wounds, he walked over to an empty chair and sat down. "I must thank you for your kindness and hospitality," He said shyly. "You really have been very generous."

The council head smiled. "Think nothing of it." he replied. "What's ours is yours."

"We just wanted to ask you a few questions." Another council member interrupted, "Do you have a name that you could give us?"

"People call me Black Cat." The man replied. That raised a few eyebrows, but nobody commented.

"And how did you come to be on this shore?" the council member questioned. "My ship was wrecked on the reefs," Black Cat said sadly. "It was foggy and we didn't see the danger until it was too late."

"What was the name of the ship on which you were traveling?" The council member asked Black cat.

"The Port an Prince." He said, starting to sound downright miserable. "That's all we needed to know." The council member said to him, seeing his distress. "It's obvious you need to rest."

A week after the meeting, the fish disappeared. The fishermen found nothing in their nets, no matter how long they stayed out, and no crops would grow in the hard, sandy ground. The people were in despair. There was next to nothing to eat,

and they were forced to dig for roots. Even the birds suddenly abandoned the area, along with any other game. Many thought this was a bad omen, and some even considered leaving the village. There seemed no plausible explanation for the disappearance of all their food sources. Then their council hall burned to the ground. This had people muttering and worrying. Nothing like this had ever happened in the history of the village. Many people left and those who stayed grew suspicious. The strange man who had come to them under even stranger circumstances was sought out by the council once again. They accused him of being a Jonah from the sea, a bad luck charm. Why else would he be called Black Cat? Many thought he should be sent back in his boat. Some even thought he should be killed. But none of them had the chance to do anything to him. Because then, something terrible happened.

A ship's longboat nosed ashore near the fishing village. As men got out and started to explore the landscape, they came upon the wreckage of what once might have been a group of houses. Trapped under a charred and blackened beam was a middle-aged man, dried blood caked on his chest. As they approached him, they heard him mutter "Everyone gone, just me, just me."

Aaron M. Schaefer
12 years old
Helena, Montana

Eurotrash

(The Summer I was thirteen)

The pungent European air entered our lungs as we walked through the gate

Filled with cigarette smoke and cheap cologne

The young blondes, brunettes and red-heads

With moles the size of pennies

Wearing tights and skirts the color of fairy tales

The boys in pants as tight as plastic wrap

When a boy looked our way, the make-up would melt off our faces

At night, someone moves our glance upward

The city lights look as if the stars themselves are having a party

We enter a club

A blur of bare backed women

And hair dyed men race in front of us

The morning comes

We watch a blend of cityscape

And country side flash before our eyelids made of iron

The pale brick and clay walls

Populated by a dreary fog of faces

The luscious green forests topped with a clear blue ocean of air

Are just strong holds for secret fairy emporiums and dwarf villages

(Inspired by Geraldine Connolly)

Beth Daviess
9th Grade
Golden, Colorado

Turquoise

The wave crashing in, hungry, foaming at the mouth.
A penny sized pendant

Bold
Vibrant

Never failing to catch one's eye
Makes a statement and
Looks good against mellow chocolate brown.

Calming

The sky just above the mountains on a clear day,
The almost nonexistent ribbon of color below green
And above blue in a wide, arching rainbow.
Tears
Of happiness trickling down a lover's cheeks
Forming an Acapulco pool in her cupped hands.

Beautiful

Eyes with just enough green and blue to make the

Perfect

Color combination and
Cause you to pour all your secrets into those

Tranquil

Seas of understanding
And the wave, satisfied, full, rolls back to the vast, salty ocean.

Katie Ozawa
9th Grade
Highlands Ranch, Colorado

"My stomach felt like it was going to fall out my butt." Those words from my favorite movie, Mean Girls, kept repeating themselves in my head, making me feel as if I was listening to a broken record. My mother and I were riding a cable car to Gimmelwald, a little-known town in Switzerland. Despite my mother's warnings of "Don't look down," I peeked out the window. The green, perfectly mowed grass of the ground was millions of feet below us, and only a thin cord suspended the cable car! I felt so sick, it seemed like I had just stuffed 15 brownies down my throat. The clamor of the car didn't improve my mood. It was as noisy as a mall on the busiest day of Christmas sales!

"Are you OK, honey?" asked my mom, looking at me with concern.

"Mm-hmm," I mumbled. I'm the worst liar to ever set foot on this planet, I thought to myself.

Finally, the torturous ride ended, and I couldn't conceal the relieved smile that spread across my face as I shakily exited the cable car.

Gimmelwald is nestled in the stunning Swiss Alps. The cool, crisp air felt refreshing on my skin. All around me, I saw towering mountains piercing into the sky. They were so tall, they made me feel like an ant standing next to Shaquille O'Neal. However, the most unbelievable feature of those mountains was that they were covered in snow, even though it was late in August. I wonder what they look like in winter, I thought.

"Wow," my mom gasped, in awe of our surroundings.

Casually strolling through Gimmelwald, we fell more and more in love with its silent yet charming atmosphere. After we passed a tiny cabin, we spotted a bench that faced a few especially impressive mountains and sat down.

As I gazed at those colossal mountains, my mind slowed down from its usual sprint. I realized how nice it felt to have a mind that wasn't clogged with thoughts and worries. All of a sudden, I recognized how unnecessary all those worries were. It didn't matter how pretty or popular I was! A wave of self-confidence swept over me, and I felt like I was soaring above the world. My eyes lit up so brightly, you would have thought someone had planted 10,000 light bulbs in my head.

"All right, I guess we should leave now if we want to catch the next cable car," Mom said regretfully. She heaved a relaxed sign.

"OK," I replied. "You know, right now I don't want to leave, but I don't think I'd like living in Gimmelwald. I mean there would be only three ways I could spend my time: going to school, doing chores, and hiking!" I added thoughtfully.

"I know! It's a great place to visit, but living here would be VERY boring," agreed Mom.

Now, as I sit here reminiscing about that amazing day, I know that Gimmelwald worked its magic on me. I left that town knowing how to put my worries into perspective and feeling great about myself. I may not live there, or desire to live there, but I will treasure that moment on the bench forever. Now, whenever I feel sad or stressed, in my imagination I fly back up that cable car to Gimmelwald, and my mood lightens like the sun rising into the sky early on a summer morning.

Lindsay Dale
7th Grade
Rancho Santa Fe, California

The Terracotta Soldiers

Thousands of people,
one nation.
Six years of hard work,
created thousands of clay formations.
One belief,
one goal,
for the terracotta warriors
to guard their king's tomb.

In the tomb,
they solemnly
stood, kneeled, or sat,
silently,
for hundreds of years,
until...
Suddenly,
BOOM!
CRACK!
The start of an attack!
Men's voices, and the sound of metal against dried clay,
echoing
in the air for
thousands of years,
still today.
Made as soldiers,
they forever stand.
Weapons stolen,
they fight, evermore.
Beheaded,
with arms and legs missing,
they always guard.
Loyal to their emperor,
they eternally live.

Alan Shi
6th Grade
Lawrence, Kansas

Song of Myself

I

I am of present and origin, of the life as much as the family.
Forgetting of others, ever wanting of others.
Content as well as dissatisfied, an outcast as well as a member.
Complete with love that is bursting and complete with love that is discouraging.
A child, with a desire for unity.
A young adult, with understanding of separation.
A person, with wants for it all.
At home in the shadows of my memory longing to be in the company of the images.
At home in the silence of a room, enjoying my independence.
A dreamer, realist, optimist, pessimist, and most of all a thinker.

II

Begins slowly,
Begins freely,
Begins easily.
Enters into fun,
Enters into excitement,
Enters into reality.
Proceeds as a complicating choice,
Proceeds as a distressing decision,
Proceeds as a toiling thought.
Continues to propose arguments and heated discussions,
Continues to challenge the comfort level I have accomplished.
Dangles in front of me taunting my every notion,
Dangles in front of me mysteriously as I ponder my future.
What do I do when faced with a decision that determines my remaining years?
What can I say when I am asked to decide my future?
I am faced with a wonderful opportunity full of possibilities, achievement, success, and happiness.
It is time I burrow beneath the surface, much farther than ever before to find the direction to which God is leading me.

III

I swing with a dream; a passion embedded in my soul.
Enveloping my life, it is my waking desire.
Do I dare to dream too far, and hope for it to become a reality?
In nervous anticipation, the cords in my stomach entwine and become rigid.
Anxiously, my heart pulses with every lift of my hand.
A prayer is sent out for the final release with feet firmly landing on the ground.
Waiting in apprehension for my results, I breathe heavily sighs of relief and fatigue.
A victory will be my only joy.
If it be a defeat I will fall -
Then step back up to fly in the air once again.

IV

I never thought the day would come when you would float away.
I longed to watch the sunrise, but never see it sway.
As time approached I realized the geese must fly today.
Flowers lose their petals when cold winds nip their stalk.
I lost you when this ugly thing never gave up.
I'll never forget the day when the leaves shriveled and ground dried.
Never a waking morning when I don't question my loss.
Why could you not stay longer?
Just like birds must learn to fly and ducklings learn to waddle,
I too must learn to stand without you as a crutch.
It was a lesson harshly taught, but now I see the plan.
To heal your suffering and give way to my growth.
Although the sun cannot stay up when night appears,
The moon pops out as an encouraging light.

Amanda Funk
12th Grade
St. Clintonville, Wisconsin

Remembering You

You are the salt on the margarita glass,
The hero in the comic book,
You are the mascot in the game,
You are the leather football flying through the air,
To score the winning touchdown,

And the shovel in the sandbox,

However, you are not the bead on the necklace,
The wooden horse in the playroom,
Or the white rose in a bouquet of red,
You are definitely not the seed that plants the tree,

There is just no way you are the seed that plants the tree,

You could be the marshmallows in the hot cocoa,
When it is raining you are the umbrella, a good book,
Or the diploma of a college graduate,
But you are definitely not the bubbles in the bath,

If you would have any interest,
I am the ripple in the pond,
The minute hand of the clock,
I am the run-down jukebox at the garage sale,
The honey in the hive,
The berry picked by the ferocious bear,
And the smell of barbeque in the summer's breeze,
But don't worry; I am not the salt on the margarita glass,
Or the hero in the comic book,

You are still the salt on the margarita glass,
The hero in the comic book,
You will always be the mascot in the game,
And somehow you are the leather football flying through the air,
To score the winning touchdown.

Hannah Scott
9th Grade
Denver, Colorado

THE HAIR CLIP

A consistent friend always by your side
Holding every one of its friends
Of beautiful blonde hair together
Keeping them all out of trouble.
The blonde locks and the clip
Like two peas in a pod
Always changing in personality and mood
By its shape and color
To agree with its long lost relatives,
The clothes.
From summer pinks and yellows
To winter reds and greens.
No matter what the occasion
The clip is up for anything.

Isabel Gary
9th Grade
Denver, Colorado

Ode to Water: Life's Liquid

O glorious water,
Your sweet tune sings
Harmoniously in my mouth.

You and the sun battle
In an endless clash between opposites,
You provide shelter from the blistering
Heat with your divine aspects,
Your sprinklers, pools, ice,
Water-parks,
And snow cones.

You and cold meet up
In an icy team
To create a frosty mixture,
Presenting yourselves as
Glistening ice, fluffy snow,
And shimmering icicles.
Stillness and you
Band together to
Spread calm ideology
Throughout the land,
Showing your true nature
As fog
And lazy drifting clouds
That block out the searing sun.
We worship you
O water,
We search for your fountains
To bring us eternal youth,
We bring you up from the blackest depths,
Harvest you from the salty seas,
Bottle you from bubbling springs.
Your greatest qualities show through
In your most wonderful inventions,
Juicy watermelon takes your name,
Gentle showers provide life and solace
For flowers and trees.

You are a thing of many moods,
Wonderfully versatile,
Constantly changing,
Swirling,
In a infinite dance of
Liquid,
You can be calm and relaxed
In glassy ponds,
Excited and energized
In whistling steam,
Or powerful
In stormy violence.

Without you I would not be,
Your fruits of creation,
Give me life.

Hayden Stone
9th Grade
Evergreen, Colorado

The Mighty Le Sueur

"Hey, dad, can I take the canoe?" I yelled down the stairs.

"Yeah, but be careful," my father returned. "You know how fast the rivers are moving."

"Yes, I know. I went just the other day," I wailed back.

I walked outside and sat on my deck, relaxing as I waited for my friends to show up. Soon enough, Matt and Jake flew into my driveway, pumped for our first time canoeing this year.

We hurried out to the back of my yard where the seventeen foot, sheet aluminum canoe lay. Matt grabbed the life vests, paddles, and ropes. Jake and I carried the canoe to my truck and tossed it in the bed.

Then we tied the canoe down to the back of my truck, realizing the time was nearing seven o'clock. "We need to hurry if we want to be loading up by dark!" I belted.

The three of us piled into my truck and cruised down Highway 66 into the falling sun. Dust billowed out from under my truck, as we thundered down an old gravel road, off from 66. We skidded to a stop and parked at a turn-around, near the river's edge. Dust from the gravel we had disturbed loomed over the Le Sueur River and dissipated into the surrounding tree line. We hopped out, untied the canoe, and dragged it to the water's edge. Jake and I ran up to my truck with cell phones and any other items we wanted to keep dry, even though we planned on staying dry.

I unlocked the door, as my phone rang. I picked up to hear my father's voice on the other end of the line.

"Drew, you haven't left yet?" he asked sounding concerned.

"Ah, no, we just put the canoe into the water," I replied.

"It's going to be dark soon, so you guys better come back," he explained.

"Don't worry, we will be back soon," I reassured.

"Okay, but I think you're crazy, considering the Le Sueur is full of rocks," my father answered.

Yeah. Okay. I thought as I climbed aboard the canoe. I sat in the back steering, Matt was in the middle, and Jake jumped in the front.

"Jake, are you sure you can do this?" I asked with a wavering voice. I was unsure of his abilities because I hadn't canoed with him before.

"Yeah, no problem. I've been canoeing a lot lately," Jake returned.

Okay, now I feel better, I thought to myself.

"Ready?" I hollered.

My paddle sunk deep into the soft muddy bank, when I pushed off. The canoe glided gently away from the river's shore into the swift current. We careened down the river with speed and agility, dodging rocks, and fallen trees.

Grins appeared on our faces as we called out, "Rock on the left and tree on the right!" Then came our first surprise. Whack! A rock thudded against the bottom of the canoe, directly beneath me.

"Put on your life vests," I shouted out over the roaring river. I could feel the hair rise on the back of my neck and my heart started beating faster. The whole mood of our journey began to change.

We rounded three more sharp turns, trees, rocks, and vegetation, all a blur as we screamed down the river.

Then my attention diverted to a massive gray structure directly in the middle of the river; it towered about four feet out of the water. The river's current smashed into it, spitting water out either side in a foamy froth.

"Uh, guys, left... or right...?" I questioned with a shaky voice.

"Right!" yelled Jake.

"No, left!" Matt and I yelled at the same time.

"We can easily clear that hanging tree following the current along," I exclaimed. "To the right we would have to fight the current while dodging all those rocks!"

I dragged my paddle on the left side of the canoe, trying desperately to point the bow of the canoe to the left of the rock. Jake, still set on going to the right, frantically paddled to the right. We turned sideways in the river and headed directly at the rock. Now my heart was racing. I leaned out and positioned my paddle to try to push off from the rock. This maneuver failed. I leaned away from the rock and positioned my body for impact. Matt jumped off the canoe and onto the rock, tipping the canoe into the current. Wham! I could hear metal grinding against rock as I was thrown into the air. Splash... I hit the water and was pulled about fifteen feet downstream from the rock. I swam hastily upstream, expelling every last ounce of my energy. After what seemed like an eternity, I finally sprawled onto the rock where Matt and Jake stood.

There we sat soaking wet and cold on the rock we tried so hard to avoid. My heart thumped hard deep inside me, and my torso heaved with every deep breath I inhaled, as if I had just run a marathon. My mind ran in circles, jolted by the shocking event I had just unwillingly experienced.

I stared ...my eyes transfixed on the trapped canoe. I realized how lucky I was to escape the canoe. I remember the deep, hollow thudding as the canoe bounced against the rock. Then the river's current doubled the canoe backwards around the rock, forming perfectly to the massive boulder's contour with ease, like a piece of tin foil being pressed around a bowl.

A distinct, fishy smell lingered throughout the air. Water droplets splattered on our skin, from the spray of the current slamming into the rock. We felt helpless.

"Now what?" Jake questioned.

"Well, considering the canoe is bowed around a rock with the current pinning it down, canoeing out of here is out of the question," I answered, laughing hopelessly.

Matt belted out, "It's going to be pitch dark in at least a half an hour, so we better decide quickly what to do."

We sat in utter silence and thought for a while.

I couldn't help but laugh as I imagined a family sitting down to watch television and seeing three idiots, sitting on a rock in the middle of a river, with their canoe crumpled in front of them. I envisioned the rescue helicopter hovering above our heads, with spotlights beaming down on us. Then, a rescue worker strapped into a harness being lowered from the helicopter to save us. My face reddened as I imagined such an event. After considering many options, we decided that jumping off the right side of the rock and swimming to shore was pretty much our best bet. We all agreed to this, considering we had no cell phone, and we didn't want to be caught on Rescue 911.

After being pulled about forty feet downstream and fighting the undertow, we finally crawled onto the shore. This is where the grueling part of our journey began. We began thrashing our way up through the valley, fighting off dense vegetation. Matt, Jake and I, completely exhausted, trudged along about two miles, waist high in nettles and thorn bushes. We came across a house with a light on, where I called my father.

"Dad- we had a little accident with the canoe. Could you come pick us up?" I asked sheepishly.

My dad was silent for a moment. Then he answered, "Yeah, I guess I could."

About fifteen minutes later my dad showed up.

On our way home, I told our story. I tried to leave out some of our moments of stupidity, but at the end my father still managed a laugh. Then came the all-to-familiar line he recited every time he proved me wrong.

"I told you so," he stated with a confident look on his face.

After all was said and done I learned: it is usually wise to listen to someone who is more experienced and, if your canoe is pinned against a rock in the middle of a river, plan on spending a lot more time getting it back out than you did putting it in.

Andrew Goedtel

12th Grade

Mankato, Minnesota

Kristi Woods smeared on a fifth coat of lip gloss, trying to ignore her friends' incessant gossiping. She examined herself in the girls' bathroom mirror and ran her fingers through her light brown hair. It was long and straight and streaked with natural blonde highlights. She had gorgeous hair, yet she wasn't satisfied with it. 'Maybe I should go completely blonde,' she thought. 'After all, all of my friends have blonde hair, and it looks really good on them.'

"Kristi!" cried Kristi's best friend, Carrie Martin, interrupting Kristi's latest wave of insecurity.

Kristi groaned inwardly. In truth, she didn't like Carrie. She was the most avid gossip in the school, and she was a total snob. If you couldn't give her a leg up on the social ladder, you weren't worth her time. 'But I can't do any better,' Kristi reminded herself. 'I mean, she is one of the most popular girls at Lakeviell High.' On that note, she turned to Carrie, flashed her a friendly smile, and chirped, "Yeah?"

"Have you met that new kid, Ted Humphrey?"

"No, I don't think so. Why, is he cute?" Kristi asked, speaking in the superficial valley-girl voice she had grown accustomed to.

"Oh my god, NO!" shrieked Carrie. Allison Schneider and Jenna Vinson, the other girls in the bathroom with them, laughed derisively. "He's really weird, too. Like, he loves Harry Potter and hates team sports."

As her friends continued listing all the "weird" things about Ted, Kristi cast a gloomy glance back at the mirror. She wished she could just tell them to shut up and stop talking about people behind their backs, but she knew that if she wanted to stay on the A-list, that wasn't an option. Both her mother and her grandmother had been glamorous, popular girls who were the captains of their cheerleading squads. Kristi was carrying on the family tradition, and she didn't want to be the one to end it.

"We're going to the mall. You're coming, right?" invited Carrie, taking a brief break from her gossiping regimen.

Kristi turned to face Carrie so that her enormous, Hershey-bar-brown eyes stared straight into Carrie's tiny, ocean-blue ones. "I feel really, really sick. I think I better just go home," Kristi lied.

Carrie shrugged, masking her excitement about finally, if temporarily, getting to be the queen bee in their group of friends. "Whatever."

"Feel better, Kristi!" Allison and Jenna gushed in unison. "Thanks guys," Kristi replied, grinning weakly at them. She felt bad about lying to her friends, but she didn't regret it. She had gone to the mall with them after school or cheerleading practice every day for the last three weeks, and she really needed a break from their shallow behavior.

Ten minutes later, Kristi strode out of Lakeview High- alone. As she headed for Central Park, her favorite place in the whole world, she could feel a genuine smile spreading across her face. Kristi loved everything about Central Park. She loved the huge rocks, she loved the thick-trunked, leafy trees that exuded warmth and friendliness, but most of all she loved how it was an escape from everything. Everyone in Central Park seemed calm and self-confident, exactly how she wanted to be.

As she was thinking peaceful thoughts, a boy caught her eye. At first glance, Kristi knew this was no ordinary boy. He wasn't playing football or romping around with his friends. On the contrary, he was just sitting on a bench, reading a book while his scruffy blond hair fell into his eyes. Every once in a while, he would look up from his book and gaze at his surroundings with a content look on his face that shouted, "I love my life!"

Kristi walked over to the bench where he was sitting and dropped down next to him. "Hi!"

The boy looked up from his book, smiled and said, "Hey."

Kristi did a brief inspection of the book he was reading. 'Harry Potter,' she noticed. 'I thought I was the only 15-year-old in New York City who liked those!' Encouraged, she asked, "What's your name?"

"Ted Humphrey," he answered. "Yours?"

"Kristi Woods." Ted Humphrey... it was an adorable name, but it sounded suspiciously familiar. "Do you go to Lakeview?"

"Yep, I just transferred there. Today was my first day. You go there, right?"

"Yeah." 'Oh no,' thought Kristi. 'Ted's that weird kid Carrie was telling me about! But he seems super-sweet. He's not exactly ugly, either.' She decided to ignore what her friends had said about Ted, at least for the time being. It wasn't like anyone was going to see them talking. "Hey, is that Harry Potter?" she asked, pointing towards his book. "Oh yeah, I love that series. I've read the books about ten times each," confirmed Ted, blushing.

"Really? Me too!"

They must have sat there for hours, talking freely and getting to know each other. Kristi was pleasantly surprised at how well they got along, and it was really refreshing to hang out with someone who wasn't afraid to be himself.

Eventually, Kristi glanced down at her watch. "Shoot! It's 6:30. Mom and Dad always freak out if I'm late for dinner, so I better head home. See you later!" She began walking out of the park.

"Wait!" Ted called after her.

Kristi stopped walking and turned to face him.

"Want to go to the movies this Saturday?"

"I'd love to!" Kristi squealed. She floated back to her family's apartment as if it was the first time she'd ever been asked on a date.

It wasn't until she was lying in her bed that the old, popularity-starved Kristi returned. All at once, she was hit with a tsunami of worries. 'What will happen if one of my friends finds out? Would she make my life totally miserable or just get everyone to shun me? Would I be kicked off the cheerleading squad? No, I'm the captain; they couldn't kick me off for dating someone unpopular. Nevertheless, they could still make me a total outcast!' The concerns raged on for a while and then finally subsided, and Kristi fell asleep.

The rest of the week moved as slowly as a snail traveling from California to Maine. It wasn't just because Kristi was so excited for her date with Ted. She had started paying more attention to her friends' words and actions, and was beginning to feel truly miserable when she spent time with them. 'Why do they have to treat the unpopular kids like dirt?' she wondered.

"So Danielle, why exactly are you ALWAYS wearing Gap? Is it because you're a freak and you actually like it, or is it just because your family can't afford to buy you anything better?" Carrie snarled at Danielle Brownwoods, a D-lister on the social scale. Kristi and Carrie had run into Danielle on their way to English, and Carrie embraced the chance to taunt her.

Kristi stared at the floor while two voices in her head went to war with each other.

'Help her!' commanded one voice.

'It's not your fault she's a geek!' roared the other.

stare.

But Danielle's response made Kristi's conflicting voices drop their weapons and

"I like the Gap," she retorted, glaring straight into Carrie's cold eyes. "And by the way, never ask anyone about their family's money. It's really rude. I would have expected more of you, Carrie." And with that, she spun around on the heels of her Keds and strode away.

Carrie gaped after her for a few seconds, and then quickly regained her composure. "Who does she think she is? All I did was ask a question!" she huffed, flipping her hair over her shoulders. She stormed off to English, completely forgetting about Kristi.

"Wow," murmured Kristi, whose mind couldn't register what had just happened. She had never seen anyone stand up to Carrie before.

day!

After that incident, the day seemed to slip away. The next day was Saturday- date

Kristi strolled to the movie theater and saw Ted standing in front of the ticket booth, waiting for her. All of a sudden, she felt slightly self-conscious. "Hey," she greeted him shyly.

"Hi." He smiled at her, and she could feel her shyness melting away. "OK, I know you'll probably think I'm crazy, but the movie doesn't actually start until 2:00. I just told you to meet me at 1:00 because, well, I was thinking we could walk around the city and talk until the movie started?" he posed it as a question, obviously embarrassed.

"I'd love to!" exclaimed Kristi. She and Ted began strolling around. She loved how she was with him, bold and genuine and happy-go-lucky. They could talk about anything and everything, and before she knew it she had asked him a question she had never asked anyone before.

"Ted, do you ever worry about what other people think of you?"

"Yeah," he admitted. "I know it seems kind of strange for a guy to think about it, but I do. It hurts that some people just judge me based on stuff I like or don't like. But it doesn't hurt enough for me to change who I am. If they don't like me, that's their loss," he finished.

Kristi was in awe of the honesty and wisdom of Ted's answer. "You're really, really cool," she said lamely, too dumbfounded to think of a better way to describe Ted.

Ted chuckled. "Kristi Woods, I'm in like with you!"

Kristi giggled. Ted took a few steps toward her and she did the same. He slung his arm around her and kissed her. It was the best moment of her life, until-

"Kristi!" came a horrified voice. Kristi quickly pulled away from Ted to see Carrie leering at them. "What the heck are you doing?"

Kristi panicked. 'Oh no, now my social life is totally ruined!' In a desperate attempt to save her reputation, she slapped Ted in the face. "Don't ever do that to me again, you loser! Let's get out of here, Carrie!" She grabbed Carrie's arm and started running.

"B-but..." sputtered Ted. Unfortunately, by then Kristi was too far away to hear.

"What was that about?" panted an out-of-breath Carrie as they finally came to a halt after sprinting ten blocks.

"I have no clue! I was wandering around, and all of a sudden that Ted guy came up to me and started talking. So I figured I'd try to be nice to him, and then he kissed me! It was really gross." Kristi cringed inwardly at her lie.

"I knew there was something weird about that kid." Carrie shook her head. "I'm going to Barneys. Come with me. I'll bet you anything spending some money will make you feel better."

"No thanks. I have to go home and wash my mouth out. See you later." Kristi hailed a cab. As soon as she was out of Carrie's sight, tears spilled out of her eyes. 'What's wrong with me? I just screwed up the best relationship I've ever had.'

The second Kristi got back to her apartment, she ran into her room and dove into bed. She didn't emerge from that room for the rest of the weekend.

On Monday morning, however, she dragged herself out of bed and trudged to school. She didn't bother straightening her hair or putting makeup on. Her lapse in selfcare didn't go unnoticed.

"What's been going on with you?" Carrie sneered as she joined Kristi at the cheerleaders' lunch table. "You look like a homeless person! No, worse- you look like Danielle Brownwoods!"

"Can I see your milk for one second, please?" Kristi requested politely.

"Um... sure."

Kristi grabbed the milk and poured the entire carton into Carrie's blonde hair. The cafeteria fell silent. A fight between the popular girls was simply unheard of. Kristi ignored the stares and stormed out of the cafeteria.

"Kristi! Wait!"

Kristi wheeled around, ready to tell the follower to go jump in a lake. When she saw who it was, though, her mood brightened considerably.

"Hi, Danielle. What's up?"

"What you did back there was amazing, and Carrie really deserved it. Everyone knows it; they're all laughing their heads off at her. Anyway, I've been wanting to do something like that for years, but I never managed to muster up the courage," gushed Danielle.

"Are you kidding? You're the bravest person I know! It was really fantastic how you stood up to Carrie about the whole Gap thing. I love Gap, by the way. It's got some really cute stuff."

Danielle giggled. "Friends?"

"Friends!" Kristi gave her a hug.

Just then, Ted Humphrey stepped into the hall. Danielle slipped back into the cafeteria, leaving Ted and Kristi standing in the hall. The glare Ted was giving Kristi made her want to cry.

"Hey," Kristi said uneasily. Ted didn't reply. Then it all came flooding out of her mouth. "Look, I'm so sorry I called you a loser. If either of us is a loser, it's me. Before I met you, I let other people control what I said and did. You made me realize how important it is to be yourself. You're the most amazing person I've ever met, and I totally screwed things up.

"Honestly, I don't want you to take me back. I don't deserve to be your girlfriend." Kristi stopped to catch her breath, slightly tired from her deep, lengthy speech.

Ted's glare melted into a grin. "I didn't do anything, Kristi. I didn't tell you to drench Carrie's head in milk. When we first met, I thought I knew who you were- Kristi Woods, gorgeous, popular head cheerleader. But you're so much more than that. You're smart, funny, and really gutsy." Ted paused as he blushed adorably. "Let's be friends. See where that goes."

Lindsay Dale

7th Grade

Rancho Santa Fe, California

Pages

She tells me stories from when she was young
Of broken lovers halfway through the race,
Of feeble trysts and dreams of martyrdom-
Her ink and strokes invade the empty space.
Behind small nightmares guised by levity,
Under lavish whispers, breaths, and sighs
Hidden “once-upons” sing brevity
A dark-haired boy (distance faded) lies.
And now the words she bleeds are all I know
She’s growing out and up towards lists and forms
Whereas I lay in regression below
The shrink’s deep scrawling notes- they are my norms.
Though her love breathes anonymity,
I need her so much more than she needs me.

Lauren YoungSmith
9th Grade
Littleton, Colorado

The Heartland Award!!

Purpose:

The Heartland Award, created and directed by The Writing Conference, Inc., was established in 1996 to encourage the participation of young adults in the reading of young adult literature, to encourage the teaching of this literature in middle and secondary schools as supplemental and in-class reading, and to aid in the goal that all young adults become life-long readers.

First Round Selection:

Each spring the editor of the Writing Conference, Inc., Newsletter will issue a call for nominations from those receiving the newsletter for outstanding young adult books to be considered for the Heartland Award. Those nominated books must be currently in print and have been published in the 5 years preceding the award year. Those nominations should be sent on or before May 1 to:

The Heartland Award, The Writing Conference, Inc.

PO Box 664,

Ottawa, Kansas, 66067-0664

or

e-mailed to John H. Bushman jbushman@writingconference.com.

During the period from June 1 to September 1, the Heartland Award Committee (made up of 20 enthusiasts of young adult literature who regularly attend the spring Conference on Writing and Literature) will read the nominated books.

Second Round Selection:

In September, the Committee will meet to discuss the books and to arrive at the list of 10 young adult works that will be considered for the Award.

Third Round (Final) Selection:

The list of 10 finalists will be sent to participants of Writing Conference activities and other interested people. During the period from September to April 15, students in schools will read at least three of these books and will vote on their choice for this award. After voting, the tallies are sent to the Writing Conference, Inc., office.

Eligibility for Nominations:

Nominations may be made by any young adult literature enthusiast. These people will receive the Call for Nominations in the Newsletter. In addition, those nominating must work in some way with young adults (grades 6-12) or in the teaching of young adult literature.

[Nomination Form](#)

Eligibility for Voting:

Students who vote must be in grades 6-12 and have read at least three (3) of the books on the list.

Students may vote only once.

[Ballet for Voting](#)

Eligibility of Books:

Books to be nominated must be considered "young adult," i.e., they are written for the adolescent eleven years old and older. Basically, these books will have conflicts that are often consistent with the young adult's experience, themes that are of interest to young people, protagonists and most characters who are young adults, and language that parallels the language of young people. Nominators should not confuse popular fiction that young adults may read nor should they consider children's books. Nominated books may also be works of nonfiction or collections of poetry or short stories.

Announcement of the Winner:

Upon receipt of the tallies in April, the winning book will be selected. The title of the winning book will be announced on this website and in various publications. Every effort will be made to have the author of the winning book as one of the participants at the Literature Festival held in October of that year.

The Committee wishes to note that not all books are appropriate for all grade levels. Discretionary steps should be taken by the teacher, librarian and student. We encourage strongly that teachers and librarians read the books prior to promoting them to their students.

The 10 Finalists for 2004

The Sledding Hill by Chris Crutcher

Comfort by Carolee Dean

Inventing Elliot by Graham Gardner

Looking for Alaska by John Green

Hear the Wind Blow by Mary Downing Hahn

Girl, 15, Charming But Insane by Sue Limb

Devil on My Heels by Joyce McDonald

Jude by Kate Morgenroth

Bound by Donna Jo Napoli

My Sister's Keeper by Jodi Picoult

Heartland Posters and Bookmarks are available in limited quantity. To request some, email jbushman@writingconference.com

Students who vote must be in grades 6-12. They must have read at least three (3) of the books on the list. Students may vote only once. Students may vote by online ballot, <http://www.writingconference.com/ballot.htm>. Or, teachers or librarians may mail ballots to:

The Writing Conference, Inc.

P.O. Box 664

Ottawa, KS 66067-0664

For information about each of the 10 finalists go to:

<http://teachers.olathe.k12.ks.us/~snightingale/heartland.html>