

PENCIL FOUNDATION

CATERPILLAR STUDENT WRITERS SHOWCASE

2005-2006 WINNING ENTRIES

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CHILDREN'S STORIES

LUCY

There once lived a big, fat cat named Lucy. Lucy lived in an old house in the country with her two owners. She loved her owners very much. Lucy liked to lie around and sleep most of the day. She was very lazy! There was only one thing that Lucy liked to do and that was to eat mice.

One day, after eating her lunch (which was a mouse, of course), Lucy decided to take a nap. So she jumped on her favorite laundry basket and went to sleep. Lucy saw a giant mouse standing in front of a group of smaller mice. Lucy's mouth began to water in her sleep. Then she noticed that the mice had tiny bandanas around their heads. The giant mouse was teaching the other mice karate. The mice were very good at karate, too. They were tired of being eaten by cats and decided to defend themselves. Instead of waiting for the cats to attack them they would attack them first with their karate kicks and punches. The cats would run away hurt and bruised.

Lucy woke up from her nap scared and shaking. It took her a few minutes to realize that she was dreaming. Lucy was starving, but this time she did not want any mice. From that moment on, she decided that she would never eat a mouse again! Lucy also started to run and play more around the house. She did not want to be out of shape in case the "karate mice" ever came to visit her.

*Aaquil Anoor
Crieve Hall Elementary
Third Grade*

WHAT ABOUT ME?

It's Santa's Workshop, with only twelve minutes for the most important night of the year. A small orange tabby kitten padded across floor, glancing at the busy elves whacking away with their hammers. The kitten leaped on a worktable, looking at the elves with big sad eyes. He was promptly set on the floor, and shooed away. The kitten stalked out the door, insulted. He entered the stable and looked around. All of the reindeer were set to go, with the bells set on them. The kitten walked forward, but the famous reindeer stomped a hoof down.

"You are not an elf, nor a reindeer! Go away!" The big red nose shone brightly as the words were shoved upon the kitten.

"But where do I go?" the sad orange tabby thought as he slowly moved away, going out into the biting cold, heading for the kitchen. The smell excited him a little. When he got there, Mrs. Claus lunged at him, exclaiming in her high voice about cat hair on the cookies.

He quickly jumped through a small door leading to the stockroom, to avoid being hit by a saucepan. Hundreds of toys were stacked up against the wooden walls and the shelves. Quite a few of them were on the floor, scattered about. He leaped up onto a small red box. Suddenly, it popped open. The kitten landed amongst the toys on his feet.

"You there!" said the Jack-in-the-box in a silly voice. "Why do you step on my house? You coulda crushed it!"

"I'm so sorry!" the kitten exclaimed.

"You're not a toy," Jack remarked. It held his nose in the air in distaste.

The kitten scooted back as the toy kept raving.

"Why, you have no gadgets or gizmos, no label, or price tag! You are nothing! You hear me? Nothing! I don't even believe that you exist! You are a piece of worthless junk! I bet your mother was just a miniature yo-yo!"

The kitten ran out sniffing, and then spotted the big guy in the red suit getting ready to load up his sleigh. He ran over to him.

"Santa, why am I here?" asked the little kitten. "All the elves have jobs making toys, and the reindeer pull the sleigh. Mrs. Claus is here to bake all the cookies and the toys help delight all the people and children. You place the candy and little things in the stockings. You also deliver all the toys. What am I here for?"

Santa gave no reply, but he winked. He grabbed a red ribbon and tied it carefully around the kitten's neck. The big man took his gloved hands, and set the kitten in a box. He put the lid on, and the kitten began to shake.

"Santa! Santa, come back!" The kitten was pushed forward. When he rose to his feet, he began to cry in his circular prison. He was unwanted, and he did not even know his name. Santa would not even listen to him. He curled up, and fell asleep.

* * *

The kitten woke up when he felt as if he was falling. He curled himself back into a small ball, and shouted "The end!" But he did not die as he expected. In fact, he was set

carefully on the ground. Almost immediately, thundering noises came, and the kitten felt that this was odd. He poked up his head and saw a beautiful Christmas tree, decorated with lights and glass icicles. The piney smell overwhelmed him. The angel at the top winked at him, then looked forward once more. Several gifts were laid out underneath the tree, all tied in fancy ribbons and special wrapping.

“Mommy! Santa brought a kitten!” A red haired girl, still in her pajamas, shouted in a clear tone, picking him up and petting him. “I’ll name you.... Blitz, cause Santa brought you.” Blitz purred, and in his mind, he could hear Santa’s jolly voice saying, *“That is what you are for.”*

*Mackenzie Minnick
John Early Paideia Middle
Sixth Grade*

ILLUMINATION

Once upon a time there lived a king named Neon Light-Bulb. He and his wife, Queen Fluorescent Light-Bulb, ruled peacefully in the country of Illumination. They and their subjects were known as Bulbans. The Bulbans looked just like regular people, except they had bulbs growing out of the tops of their heads, which glowed different colors according to their moods. Because you can read the truthfulness of all Bulban by the color of their light bulbs, King Neon and Queen Fluorescent easily picked out the naughty Bulbans and scolded them. The few mischief-makers never did anything bad after going to see the rulers of the country of Illumination, because they were afraid of them. The King and Queen were both powerful Sorcerers, but they only used their powers for good. So, the Bulbans lived in peace and opulence for many years in their modest country of Illumination, until the cruel rulers of the Isle of Reflections discovered their wonderful land.

The rulers of the Isle of Reflections were King Mir-Ror and Queen Looking-Glass. They ruled over a people known as the Rors. The Rors were tall, beautiful people with eyes like brilliantly colored mirrors. They lived on a large island in the middle of the Mermaid Sea where enchanting mermaids lived in beautiful castles on the ocean floor. The island was called the Isle of Reflections because Queen Looking-Glass was especially beautiful and vain and had giant mirrors placed all over the island by magic so she could give at her gorgeous reflection wherever she went. But Queen Looking-Glass was also very greedy. Long ago, she stole a magic mirror from the good magician, who used to rule the island. The treacherous Queen used the magical mirror to take away his magic powers and turned him into a ring, which she always wore on her index finger, so no one would steal it. The evil Queen was afraid someone would discover what the ring was and turn the ring back into its rightful form.

One day Queen Looking-Glass decided to consult her magical mirror.

“I command you to show me the country nearest to the Isle of Reflections!” commanded the Queen. The magic mirror instantly reflected a picture of the country of Illumination.

Queen Looking-Glass shrieked with delight. “Ha! I will leave at once! I must tell the King Mir-Ror to gather our army so we can capture the country of Illumination and steal all of its riches!” She rushed to King Mir-Ror.

“My Queen, are the people of the country of Illumination happy?” asked King Mir-Ror.

“Yes!” shrieked the horrible Queen.

“Good!” cried the awful King. “I hate happy people! When we conquer the country of Illumination, I will make all of the Bulbans my slaves! Ha Haaaa!”

“Hooray!” shouted Queen Looking-Glass. These were horrible things that the King and Queen said, but they were cruel and wicked people by nature, so I suppose it never occurred to them to be kind.

In three days and three nights, the army of Rors reached the country of Illumination armed with hand mirrors and thousands of mirrors that protected their bodies like armor. The Rors ran very quickly to the palace, and all of the Bulbans fell to the ground clutching

their eyes because the Rors's armor reflected the sun so intensely. (And you could tell they were angry because their light bulbs were all red.)

While Queen Looking-Glass and King Mir-Ror were consulting the magic mirror, one of the Rors was taken hostage. His name was Image, and he had witnessed Queen Looking-Glass transform the good magician into a ring. He was led to the throne room by the palace guards and brought before King Neon Light-Bulb and Queen Fluorescent Light-Bulb.

"Hello Sir Image," said the Queen. "We have brought you here to advise us on how to capture the impish Queen and King of Reflections because we know that they treat the Rors cruelly and you resent them deeply for it. Do you know of any information that might be of use in our conquest of the Rors?"

Image at once realized that these kind rulers could help him overthrow the evil Rulers of Reflections and put the good magician back on the throne of Reflections. So, he told the good King and Queen the story of how the evil King and Queen came to power, and of how the Queen stole the magic mirror and turned the good magician into a ring.

"We must capture the Queen and take away her ring and her mirror!" exclaimed King Neon.

So, they set a trap right inside the palace gates for the Queen, and opened the doors just as she was about to recite a magical cantation that would have crushed the gates to tiny pieces.

As soon as the evil Queen Looking-Glass saw the gates were open, she rushed into the trap. She and her army were caught in the trap, the Queen's mirror and ring were taken, and King Mir-Ror and Queen Looking-Glass's hands were bound.

"Good citizens of the Isle of Reflections," called *King Neon*, "I am sorry you have been forced to live under these town horrible tyrants. Their magic powers have been taken. Do you want your original ruler back, or do you want to Queen Fluorescent and myself to select a new leader?"

"We want the good magician!" all of the Rors roared.

So the two wise monarchs used their magical knowledge to turn the ring back into the good magician. There was a great celebration in the country of Illumination. The Rors and their ruler stayed a feasted and laughed with the Bulbans for many weeks. The good magician took down all of the mirrors. King Mir-Ror and Queen Looking-Glass were locked in dark, mirror less rooms in the palace because they would not behave themselves, even when King Neon Light-Bulb and Queen Fluorescent Light-Bulb scolded them.

"I guess some people just never realize their faults," remarked Queen Fluorescent.

*Eleanor Phillips
West End Middle
Eighth Grade*

IF ONLY

Billy Fredrickson was a regular little boy. He had brown hair, brown eyes, fair skin, and not so sparkling white teeth. To little girls his age, Billy was even considered cute. Billy, however, thought he was just as plain as a white wall. He didn't like the way his brown lackluster hair matted on his forehead, or the way his brown eyes, no matter how much sleep he got, just didn't seem to twinkle. He hated the fact that his fair skin never glowed, and he still had one missing tooth. Billy Fredrickson just found himself boring altogether.

One rainy Monday morning, Billy woke up in a particularly terrible mood. He got dressed, brushed his teeth, and trudged outside to catch bus #14 to school. By the time he had arrived in Mrs. Huckabee's third grade class, Billy was drenched head to toe. School rolled by and Billy found himself unable to concentrate. All he could think about was how he wished he could change his appearance. When the bell rang for lunch, Billy was in such deep thought that he didn't even hear it. Billy's best friend, Thaddeus Diadora, came over to him.

"Hey, Billy, it's lunchtime," Thad said.

"Oh, ok!" replied Billy, snapping out of his thoughts.

"So, what do you have today," asked Thaddeus.

"My favorite, PB&J," Billy replied.

The two boys proceeded to sit down, unwrap their sandwiches, and eat. As they polished off their lunches, Billy noticed how unique Thad's hair was. He had curly golden brown locks that perched atop his head like a bow on a Christmas gift. Billy felt his body pulsate with jealousy.

"Thad, you're so lucky. You have the coolest hair out of all the kids at P.S. 112," said Billy with a hint of jealousy.

"Gee, thanks!" replied Thad, running his fingers through his golden mop.

That night, as Billy lay in his bunk bed, he thought about how lucky Thad was. If only he, too, could have great hair. Billy slowly pulled the covers up to his chin, switched off his favorite red and purple polka-dotted lamp and said out loud: "I wish my hair was as unique as Thad's. I'd be so much happier." Then little Billy Fredrickson turned over and fell asleep.

The next morning Billy woke up, put on his clothes, and began to brush his teeth. When he looked in the mirror he noticed something was different. Instead of his usual floppy brown hair, Billy's hair had gotten so much volume that it resembled his favorite lamp. Billy was ecstatic. He ran through his house screaming, "Look, Mom, my hair is the coolest!"

Then he headed out to catch his bus. When he arrived at P.S. 112, Billy couldn't contain himself. He strutted, he yelled, he laughed, and he preened. Billy knew he looked good, and he wanted everyone else to know it, too.

Of course, Billy was the center of attention in Mrs. Huckabee's third grade class. All of his classmates were astounded by his hair and wanted to touch it. Though Billy was very happy about his new look, he ran into a few problems.

That day during, P.E., Billy's class played his favorite game, dodge ball. Billy usually was the winner, but with his "lamp hair," he got put out every time. Though the defeat bothered Billy, he knew his new hair was worth the sacrifice.

As the bell rang for Mrs. Huckabee's class to return to the buildings, Billy's friend, Alexa Spradkins, came up to him.

"Billy, you have the neatest hair ever," she said.

"Gee, thanks!" exclaimed Billy. Alexa smiled back at him and it was then that Billy noticed how cool Alexa's teeth were. She was the only kid at P.S. 112 to have neon glow-in-the-dark braces and she was proud of it.

"But you have the coolest teeth of any kid at P.S. 112," chimed Billy sadly.

Thanks," replied Alexa, flashing him a blinding neon grin.

That night Billy lay in his bed thinking about his appearance. Though he loved his hair, he couldn't help but think about how uncool his teeth were. As he slowly pulled the covers up to his chin, he said out loud: "I wish my teeth were as cool as Alexa's I'd be so much happier." Then Billy rolled over and went to sleep.

The next morning Billy woke up, got dressed, and began to brush his teeth. When he looked in the mirror, he noticed something different. Instead of his usual dull white he had bright blue teeth that stuck out of his mouth like a beaver's teeth. Billy jumped up and down then hopped through his house screaming, "Look, Mom, I have the coolest hair and teeth."

Then he galloped out to catch bus #14. When he arrived at P.S. 112, Billy beamed with pride. He strutted through the halls with his lamp hair and blue beaver teeth. Once again he was the center of attention in Mrs. Huckabee's third grade class. That day during lunch, Billy pulled out his favorite PB&J. As he went in for a bit, the bread stuck to his teeth and just wouldn't come off. Though Billy tried and tried to eat his sandwich, it wasn't possible. Billy convinced himself he didn't care, but the rumble in his stomach said otherwise. That day on the way home Billy's friend Reeda Whiteout, sat by him.

"Billy, your teeth are so cool," she said with a hint of envy.

"Gee, thanks!" cried Billy but as he spoke the words he noticed how shiny and glowing Reeda's skin was.

"But you have the coolest skin out of any kid at P.S. 112" Billy added, sadly.

That night as Billy fluffed up his pillows and got cozy for bed; he couldn't help but think about how lucky Reeda was. He pulled the covers up to his chin and said out loud: "I wish my skin was as unique as Reeda's I'd be so much happier." Then Billy turned over and fell asleep.

The next morning Billy awoke, got dressed, and brushed his teeth. When he looked in the mirror, he realized something was different. Instead of his dull fair, skin, Billy had navy blue plaid skin. He was so excited that he ran through his house screaming, "Look, Mom, I have the coolest skin, teeth, and hair." The Billy skipped out to catch the bus.

As Billy entered P.S. 112, he was met by a crowd. Everyone wanted to see the lamp-headed, blue-teethed, plaid-skinned boy. Billy loved every minute of it. That day was a special day in Mrs. Huckabee's third grade class. It was game day. Mrs. Huckabee asked questions, and the class answered. If they were correct, they got a trip to the coveted treasure box. Billy was on a roll. He knew all the answers, but when he raised his hand Mrs. Huckabee never noticed him because poor Billy's skin was exactly the same pattern as the wallpaper in his classroom. Billy blended right in. He was the only boy without a nifty prize.

Then lunch rolled around, and Billy couldn't eat once again. P.E. came and Billy was hit in dodge ball every time. Though Billy tried not to be upset, deep down he missed his old self.

On the bus ride home, he sat in his least favorite seat, right behind the driver. One of the new students, Raleigh Ann, sat next to him.

"Hi, Billy!" She exclaimed.

"Hi," mumbled Billy.

"I just wanted to tell you that, though you look great now, you always were the cutest boy at P.S. 112." And with that Raleigh Ann jumped up and ran to the back of the bus.

That night Billy tossed and turned in his bed. He fell into a nervous sleep interrupted by bad dreams. At midnight, Billy awoke from a fitful sleep. He peeled off his covers and said out loud: "I just wish I could go back to the way I was. I'd be so much happier, I think." Then he flipped over and slept the rest of the night.

The next morning Billy woke up feeling very down. He got dressed, brushed his teeth and tentatively looked in the mirror. Billy screamed at the sight. Instead of a lamp for hair, blue beaver teeth, and navy plaid ski, he had brown matted hair, dull white teeth with one missing, and regular fair skin. Billy couldn't be more excited. He inspected himself and realized that his hair was actually quite nice. It stuck to his head like a piece of tape and was perfectly straight. His teeth were abnormally white and they were perfectly shaped and his skin had a healthy tan. It was then that Billy realized he actually looked unique. He looked like a little boy, who was a dodge ball champion, had many friends, loved PB&J, and was very smart. Billy Fredrickson had never been so glad to see himself.

*Sarah Buchanan
MLK Academic Magnet
Tenth Grade*

CRITICAL REVIEW

THE HUNDRED DRESSES

Do you think that you as a reader can relate to a book, which was published many years ago? Could its message still be meaningful to you even though it was set during the 1950's? I say, yes!

The Hundred Dresses, which was written by Eleanor Estes has become one of my favorite books because of the lessons that it teaches. Accepting others even though they are different from you and choosing your words carefully before you say them are the main ideas of the book.

The story is set in a small town in the late fall and early winter, and the main characters include Wanda Petronski, Peggy, and Maddie. Wanda moved to town from Poland, and she and her family are very poor. She wears the same dress to school each day, and the children taunt her. Wanda wants to make friends at her new school, so she tells Peggy and Maddie that she has a hundred dresses "all lined up in my closet." Peggy, who is the most popular girl in school, laughs at Wanda and makes fun of her. Peggy's friend, Maddie, is a nice, caring person, but she goes along with the teasing because she wants Peggy to like her. Secretly, Maddie wishes Peggy would stop saying hurtful things to Wanda. Maddie wants to "stand up" for Wanda, but she is afraid, and she doesn't understand why Wanda keeps saying that she has one hundred dresses.

The school that they attend has an art competition, and the girls must draw dresses using the best design possible. On the day of the competition, all of the drawings have been displayed. The winner is announced: Wanda Petronski! Wanda had turned in many drawings of beautiful dresses. She was a great artist, and what she said was true. She did have a hundred dresses even though they were just drawings. Sadly, Wanda was not at school to receive the prize because the family moved away from the small town because they were treated so badly.

From reading this book, I learned many things. You should always stand up for someone who is being hurt by others. Standing up for what you think is right is important. Maddie wished that she had stood up to Peggy and told her to stop teasing Wanda.

Also, this story teaches you how words can hurt others. When we choose our words we should stop and think before we say them because once a word leaves your mouth, it can never be taken back again. I believe that your mind is like a journal. Whenever you hear something negative, it writes it down so that you can never forget it. That is what happened in this story. Peggy's words were so hurtful to Wanda that she had to move away.

Both children and adults can learn from the book, The Hundred Dresses. It teaches that we should always walk in another person's shoes before we criticize him or her. This is an important lesson for the young and old. The Hundred Dresses is a great book.. Read it, and you will see what I mean!

*Zoe Woodruff
Julia Green Elementary
Third Grade*

WHERE THE RED FERN GROWS

When I read the first sentence of Wilson Rawls' Where the Red Fern Grows I knew it would be a wonderful book. That first sentence, "When I left my office that beautiful spring day, I had no idea what was in store for me," caught my attention and sucked me in like a black hole.

In the beginning of the book Billy, as an adult, is walking home when a gang of dogs of all shapes and sizes come tumbling over each other through the underbrush. All of the dogs are trying to bite one red hound dog. Billy suddenly has a flashback of when he was little, when he had two hounds of his own. After the fight is over Billy takes the still angry red hound home and cleans him up.

When Billy and the dog arrive home, Billy begins to unfold his childhood memories. He remembers his family of three sisters, his mother, and his father. He recalls how hard he worked to get two red coon-hunting hound pups. Their names were Li'l Ann and Ol' Dan.

Billy trained his two pups to coon hunt by dragging a coon skin over branches, rocks, and other numerous obstacles that might have to be overcome during a hunt. After this training Billy decided that Li'l Ann and Ol' Dan were ready to go on a real hunt. He promised them, "All you have to do is tree a coon and I'll do the rest."

My favorite part of the book was when Li'l Ann and Ol' Dan did tree a coon but the coon ran up the biggest tree in the whole forest. The only weapon Billy had to kill the coon was an axe. He could chop down the tree and hit the coon on the head with a large stick. The only problem with this situation was that the tree would take about two weeks to chop down. Billy started right away and kept at it all day without food or water until suppertime. Finally his sister came and brought him dinner in a pail.

Billy refused to leave the tree because of the promise he had made to his dogs. After two days, his grandfather came to the tree and showed Billy how to make a scarecrow to keep the coon in the tree while Billy went to supper. The two dogs wouldn't leave the tree. This proved that Billy and the dogs both had loyalty toward each other.

Billy came back to the tree and started chopping again. After awhile he admitted to his dogs that there was no way he could chop the tree down without killing himself, but his dogs eyes kept him going. He prayed to God that some miracle would occur to help him cut down the tree. A few minutes later a thunderous wind hit the top of the tree Billy was trying to cut down without disturbing the other trees. The wind blew so hard the large tree fell to the ground "with a cyclone roar."

At times in this story I cried, but at other times I laughed. Mr. Rawls was able to express a lot of things through this book. I think that he wanted to say that love and loyalty are magical. He tells of an old Indian folk tale that says if two creatures die at the same spot and their love is everlasting, a red fern, planted by an angel will grow there. Wilson Rawls used wonderful words that made everything so clear it was as if I were inside the book. It is truly one of the most descriptive, heart-warming love stories I have ever read.

*Ann Manning
J.T. Moore Middle
Fifth Grade*

RYAN WHITE

How would you act if you had a fatal disease and knew you would soon die? Ryan White was placed in that situation, but, instead of losing heart, he rose to the challenge and became an inspiration to others with fatal diseases around the world. Ryan White: My Own Story by Ryan White and Ann Marie Cunningham chronicles his life, his fight against AIDS, and ultimately, his death. This touching and engaging autobiography will surely interest and amaze most readers, especially teenagers.

Ryan White: My Own Story is about Ryan White, a hemophiliac who contracted AIDS from a contaminated batch of Factor VIII. Factor VIII is a blood product that helps hemophiliacs' blood clot properly. Because he had AIDS, Ryan was shunned by his hometown of Kokomo, Indiana, and barred from school. He was understandably angry, so he sued the school system and, after many hard-fought court battles, was eventually allowed to go back to school again. Unfortunately, the students at his school discriminated against him to the point that he and his family had to move to another small town in Indiana. The students at his new school in Cicero treated him well, and he got to meet many celebrities and important figures as a result of his fame. Ryan tragically died at the age of eighteen but was able to accomplish the education of America about AIDS.

One of the reasons I think this book will appeal especially to the teenage group is that it relates so much to teenage life. Soon after Ryan was told he had AIDS, his doctor had a long talk with him about avoiding cigarettes, bird droppings, and animals and not swimming in lakes or rivers. However, Ryan had different ideas. He figured that trying cigarettes and having pets were normal parts of a teenager's life. Sometimes when the phone hook-up between Ryan's home and middle school classroom was on but Ryan had free time, he would turn on the television and watch cartoons. Also, Ryan enjoyed filming *The Ryan White Story* as much as any other typical teenager would. In spite of AIDS, Ryan was a typical teen.

Another interesting aspect of this autobiography was its vivid portrayal of discrimination. Not long after people in Kokomo were alerted that Ryan had AIDS, a boy walked up to Ryan's friend Chris Sadler in school and made a nasty comment about Ryan. Ryan's mother's car tires were slashed at work around that time, too. The tradition at Easter Sunday in Ryan's church was to shake hands with your neighbors and wish them "peace." On one particular Easter Sunday, no one was willing to do this with Ryan and his family. On the following Sunday when the Whites were still at church, somebody shot a bullet through their window. Also, cruel rumors about Ryan, like one that claimed he spit on vegetables at the grocery store, circulated. When Ryan won his court victory to go back to school, a kid at his school defaced his locker. Ryan endured much discrimination during his time in Kokomo.

The third and final reason I would recommend this book is because of Ryan's determination to defeat AIDS. For example, Ryan once asked if he was going to die because of AIDS. "We're all going to die," his mother answered. "We just don't know when." Another time when Ryan was still in the hospital, he had a dream that the devil was trying to pull him into hell. However, as Ryan explained, God saved and comforted him. Ryan believes that his attitude could impact his health. As Ryan said, "I figured out that if you believe you're going to get better, you will. If you sit around moping and thinking, I'm not

going to make it, then you won't. So I made up my mind." His determination to stay positive was incredible.

Ryan White: My Own Story is a poignant and inspiring book that is sure to appeal to many age groups, especially youth. Ryan is an inspiration to everyone, not just those with AIDS or other fatal diseases. He might have died horrible at a young age, but he dedicated himself to and succeeded in his lifelong mission: to educate America about AIDS.

*Jacob Schafer
Meigs Middle Magnet
Seventh Grade*

TONY HOAGLAND'S AMERICA

Entering this school year, I had every intention of writing a critical review of the Beatles' *Revolver*. Every year that I have participated in this competition I have chosen to critique a musical piece. Why? I always chose this alternative because it always seems as though those who write reviews about anything besides a literary piece hardly ever win. Call it "rebellious against the system" (yet still submitting myself to it). However, one day in English class, my fellow classmates and I were presented with a poem. Upon the first reading, we were all struck dumb, speechless for several minutes (which was unusual given our typically loquacious manner). The room was filled with a heavy silence loaded with the awakening of latent passion and something uncannily similar to shame. Nobody knew exactly what to say, and when the bell rang, we were still perplexed.

That befuddling poem was Tony Hoagland's "America" from his book *What Narcissism Means to Me* (published in 2003 by Graywolf Press). For those unfamiliar with this verse, the poem in its entirety reads:

*Then one of the students with blue hair and a tongue stud
Says that America is for him a maximum security prison*

*Whose walls are made of Radio Shacks and Burger Kings, and MTV episodes
Where you can't tell the show from the commercials,*

*And as I consider how to express how full of s--- I think he is,
He says that even when he's driving to the mall in his Isuzu*

*Trooper with a gang of his friends, letting rap music pour over them
Like a boiling Jacuzzi full of ballpeen hammers, even then he feels*

*Buried alive, captured and suffocated in the folds
Of the thick satin quilt of America*

*And I wonder if this is a legitimate category of pain,
Or whether he is just spin-doctoring a better grade,*

*And then I remember that when I stabbed my father in the dream last night,
It was not blood but money*

*That gushed out of him, bright green hundred-dollar bills
Spilling from his wounds and—this is the weird part—*

*He gasped, "Thank God—those Ben Franklins were
Clogging up my heart—*

*And so I perish happily,
Freed from that which kept me from my liberty"—*

*Which is when I knew it was a dream, since my dad
Would never speak in rhymed couplets,*

*And I look at the student with his acne and cell phone and phony ghetto clothes
And I think, "I am asleep in America too,*

*And I don't know how to wake myself either"
And I remember what Marx said near the end of his life:*

*"I was listening to the cries of the past,
When I should have been listening to the cries of the future"*

*But how could he have imagined 100 channels of 24-hour cable
Or what kind of nightmare it might be*

*When each day you watch rivers of bright merchandise run past you
And you are floating in your pleasure boat upon this river*

*Even while others are drowning underneath you
And you see their faces twisting in the surface of the waters*

*And yet it seems to be your own hand
Which turns the volume higher?*

Hoagland's language is effortlessly straightforward. There are no words of enigmatically astronomical proportions to baffle the reader. Yet, even with all the simplicity, the words are wielded with such poignant wit that they are rendered heartrendingly eloquent. Its commonplace proper nouns induce in us a shameful familiarity with corporate America. His style is that of a contemporary, common man with a flair for satire and a slight case of attention deficit disorder.

The opening twelve lines suck you into Hoagland's world. The reader witnesses a rebellious student incarcerated in a figurative fortress of corporations. Hoagland begins skeptical with his cynicism of an experienced professor. I myself wasn't sure what to think of this boy. Part of me could relate to him—that same drive to dissent; another side wanted to yell at him, tell him that he's saying things he shouldn't; but then again, there is a smothering quality to America that Hoagland captures perfectly. In America, even with all its luxury and wealth, there's a sort of emptiness that pervades everyday activity and strangles true meaning out of life.

The next five couplets take us away to a dark place within Hoagland's subconscious where money leaks in place of blood from his wounded, dying father. His father welcomes the patricide, exclaiming that the big bucks were keeping him from freedom. In analyzing (and thus essentially butchering) this poem, it seemed as though the message in this passage was as easy as the cliché: "Money can't buy you happiness." However, upon closer examination (and gutting and hiding), a sense of suffocation is again conveyed. The money becomes a restraint, prohibiting freedom of heart, mind, and soul. In the American world, marriage isn't all about love; marriage is, in part, a financial contract. Intelligence is only a means to make money, and a person can only make as much money as he or she is "intelligent." True wisdom means nothing. Money is everything.

Hoagland then transports us back to the student, except this round, the reader experiences more deeply Hoagland's thoughts. He, like the student, is "asleep" in this nation with no means of waking himself. He is trapped in a dream world with no exit. America is an indestructible plastic bubble; it's not real. Those visions of fast food restaurants, plasma screen TVs, and scantily clad teeny boppers are just illusions with which we deceive ourselves of the actual world where people eat nothing (not French fries), endure life in the sweatshops, and watch falling bodies with bleary eyes. Hoagland expresses a thought with a quote from Karl Marx: "I was listening to the cries of the past, when I should have been listening to the cries of the future." It forced me to speculate what will become of the world in the years to come. Oftentimes, people are so preoccupied with the now and themselves that they forget about the generations to come, here and elsewhere. What kind of place will we leave behind for our posterity? A world where all must wear 100-SPF sunscreen because the ozone is gone? A nation riddled with avarice and obesity while other countries are riddled with bullets and starvation or maybe even completely desolate, human life died out altogether?

Even in trying to rebel against the system, we are still submitting ourselves to the trite microcosm of America (or, at least, that is the way I feel) because there is no escaping the groping, gluttonous hands of America. It surrounds us, intoxicates us, hypnotizes us, and brainwashes us. We just continue to dig ourselves deeper and deeper with our "100 hours of 24-hour cable" and "pleasure boats" despite the adverse effects of our greed. Even worse, we block out the screams of those crushed by our sweatshop sneakers, gagged with our free trade tomatoes, run over by our gas guzzling sports utility vehicles, with high tech state of the art American headphones perkily replying "That's just what Americans do!" on repeat. Why do we buy (and promote) clothes manufactured in inhuman conditions? That's just what Americans do! Why do we pay taxes contributing to a war we shouldn't even be in? That's just what Americans do! Why do we drown out the cries of all the suffering in the world and insist on being petty and egocentric? That's just what Americans do! Why do we destroy the world, others, and, even, the most human, real part of ourselves? O America the

Beautiful, the Blissfully Ignorant, the Money-Obsessed, the Selfishly Preoccupied, what have you done?!

No other literary work to my knowledge poses that question with as much audacious profundity and compelling fluency as Tony Hoagland's "America."

*Jessica Ch'ng
MLK Academic Magnet
Tenth Grade*

DISCOVERY OF A SOUND HEART IN THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN

It is often said that people are just a product of society, that they simply reflect the ideas and opinions of their given environment. However, sometimes people do think for themselves, using a sound heart to make choices. In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, author Mark Twain uses Huck's journey down the mighty Mississippi River to illustrate that while the ideals and opinions of society shapes a deformed conscience, a sound heart is more honorable because it transcends all times, people, and societies. Huck begins by only looking to his deformed conscience for advice, slowly discovers his sound heart (with opposition from his deformed conscience) and eventually uses his sound heart to make better decisions.

In the beginning of the novel, Huck uses the influences from his father and other southern ideals in the actions and words that he chooses. This deformed conscience appears in the first few pages of the novel as Miss Watson tries to teach Huck about prayer and heaven.

"She told me...I must help other people, and do everything I could for other people, and look out for them all the time and never think about myself...I couldn't see no advantage about it---except for the other people---so at last I...just let go" (p. 11)

These words strongly mirror Huck's father's way of thinking. His deformed conscience makes him focus on the fact that he does not get anything out of helping others. Huck's deformed conscience also surfaces when he and Jim, a runaway slave, have one of their first conversations. Huck muses, "He said that...whoever saved him would send him back home so as to get at the reward, then Miss Watson would sell him South...he had an uncommon level head for a nigger" (p. 65) Jim surprises Huck by simply understanding what will happen if someone discovers he's a runaway. He sees that Jim can actually think and make sense of situations, abilities that southern society did not credit to blacks. Huck discovers one of his society's stereotypes and sees for himself just how wrong society can be. Huck also shows how he uses his deformed conscience to handle a situation when Jim gets a snake bite because of Huck's practical joke. Huck explains, "Then I slid out quiet and throwed the snakes clear away amongst the bushes; for I warn't going to let Jim find out it was all my fault, not if I could help it" (p. 45). Huck does not admit to being the cause of the bite, because he does not want Jim to get angry or want to make himself seem inferior to a black man, exactly what he would do if he apologized to Jim. Interestingly though, Huck does feel some slight sense of regret, perhaps a foreshadowing of his eventual true friendship with Jim.

As the story continues, Huck slowly begins discovering this other voice telling him what is right from wrong, not just by society's standards. When Huck and Jim think they are almost to Cairo, the point where Jim would be free, Huck gets extremely anxious. He realizes just what he is doing.

"[Jim] was almost free—and who was to blame...? Why, me...conscience up and says, everytime, 'But you knowed he was running for his freedom, and you could a paddled ashore and told somebody'.... I almost wished I was dead." (p.74)

The magnitude of Huck's actions does not hit him until this point. If word of this gets out it won't be "Jim ran away," but instead "*Huck Finn* helped a slave run away." He

knows society will brand him as a traitor and abolitionist. Yet, when he gets the chance to set everything “right”, at least as his deformed conscience’s definition of right, he just cannot. He follows his sound heart, going against everything society says, and helps Jim find the freedom he deserves. Again, later on in the novel, Huck finds himself in conflict over whether he should write a letter telling Miss Watson about Jim. He does write the letter but cannot find it in himself to send it. He narrates, “I got to thinking over our trip...I see Jim before me...we a floating along, talking and singing, and laughing. But somehow I couldn’t seem to strike no places to harden me against him, but only the other kind” (p. 79). The transition to camaraderie between Huck and Jim appears here. Huck’s deformed conscience wants him to send the letter, but he knows deep in his own heart that Jim does not deserve to go back to slavery. Huck almost always has good intentions, whether he uses his deformed conscience or his sound heart. The difference is that in this situation he follows his sound heart, even though he feels society thinks it is wrong.

Beginning in the middle of this river journey, Huck shows signs of his ability to use his sound heart and ignore his deformed conscience. One of these foreshadowing moments comes when Huck decides to tell Mary Jane of the conmen’s plan to rob her of her inheritance. “I felt so ornery and low down and mean, that I says to myself, my mind’s make up; I’ll have that money for them or bust” (p. 147). If Huck had used his deformed conscience he would have stuck with the king and duke conmen, the people that have helped and been with him longer. Instead he helps these practical strangers. He finally reaches the point where he can judge right and wrong for himself, without outside influences. Huck also completely uses his sound heart when he plays a second practical joke on Jim. After a confusing night in the fog, Huck tells Jim that everything had simply been a dream, but Jim knows Huck is lying. “He got up slow, and walked to the wigwam...It made me feels so mean I could almost kissed *his* foot to get him to take it back.” (p. 73) In the snake prank situation Huck did not even think twice about apologizing to Jim. Now he says he would beg for Jim’s forgiveness. Huck does not see Jim as a black man that cannot take a joke, but, instead, as a friend, deeply hurt by a lie.

Huck Finn’s adventure is also a journey of self-discovery. Floating down the Mississippi river, relatively far away from society and past influences, he can hear himself think and see things in a new light. Outside influences no longer affect his ideas, opinion, and reactions. He makes the right choices for himself. Mark Twain specifically put this young man, raised in society with very concrete ideals, on a whirlwind adventure that allows and causes him to discover his own sound heart.

*Amber Christian
Hume-Fogg Academic Magnet
Eleventh Grade*

EXPOSITORY ESSAY

MY WONDERFUL SISTER, MY TEACHER

Even though some people with disabilities may look different, act strange, or even have scary behaviors, they can teach us a lot. For example, my sister has a disability called epilepsy. Epilepsy means she has seizures. Seizures can be scary if you don't know what to do, but my sister has had seizures for as long as I can remember. I know what to do when she has seizures.

One thing people with disabilities can teach us is to ask questions and accept who they are. My sister has epilepsy because she got sick with meningitis when she was nine months old. Meningitis is an infection that affects the brain. My sister is a great person. She is just as fun as all of my friends.

Another thing people with disabilities can teach is that you can have fun with anybody. You just have to think of ways to do that. There are quite a few things I like to do with my sister. First of all, I like dressing her up because she looks so cute! Second of all, I like reading to her because she's a good listener. Next, I like throwing balls with her. I do these things because they are fun. People with disabilities like to do the same things we do. My sister loves water and getting wet. She loves dancing and listening to music. She also loves to be funny. As you see, she is a great and fun sister.

One of the greatest things that she teaches us is to love everybody. The thing I like best about her personality is she gives great hugs and kisses. She likes giving hugs and kisses to everybody that she sees. My sister has a great personality and loves everybody.

As you see, there are a lot of things I like about my sister. Sometimes there are things I do not like. Like, I do not like when we are out in public, and my sister is having a good time and people make faces at her. I know people don't know about her, but they could at least be nice to her and even learn from her. I love my sister, and I could not imagine having any other sibling, because she is so important to me! Actually, even with people not knowing, she is important to everybody, because she can teach them a lot of important things.

*Anais Wolfe-Mazeres
Crieve Hall Elementary
Fourth Grade*

MY MOTHER

The person I admire most is my mother. She has been through a lot. She is a hard working mother with two children she would die for. I admire her so much because every time she goes through something, she dusts herself off and tries again. Most of her friends she cared for have let her down. They were there when everything was perfect, but when she came down, no one was there.

She has been on her own since she was eighteen. When she became pregnant with me, she was still in school. She did not drop-out of school; she continued going and graduated. She strives and works hard for the things she wants. She may have made mistakes in her life, but hasn't everyone?

My mother has had times in her life where she felt like giving up. She told me that she would never give up because of my brother and me. I respect her because some mothers don't care. My mother respects all people. She feels that to get respect you have to give respect. She always told my brother and me to never disrespect our elders. She teaches the right things to do always.

My mother keeps it real. She doesn't sugarcoat anything. She tells us everything about the way the world is. She explains that it can be cruel and we should never fight each other. We should fight for each other. My mother once told me that she teaches us about the world so when she is dead and gone, we can take care of ourselves.

My mother is a good loving mother whom I admire more than anyone.

*Jasmine Crawford
Rose Park Middle Magnet
Sixth Grade*

INEQUALITY REMAINS

“It is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say ‘Wait’.”

--Martin Luther King, Jr.

As everyone knows, from rich millionaires to poor homeless people, from popular athletes to the unpopular “nerds,” the world is divided into classes. Everything in life is, by nature, divided. People like to categorize each other on just a glance or by a few minutes of talk. Hence, in economic, political, and social life, people are segregated. Yes, it is segregation. Though it does not exist in the same way racially as it did in Dr. King’s time, it remains all the same. These discrepancies in “class” are sometimes flagrant, and sometimes subtle, but now, as it probably will be in the future, people are separated based on who they are, their wealth and their way of life.

In economy, we are separated. There is the obvious difference: wealth versus poverty. Some people are rich, but some are impoverished, and an even lower class includes those who are starving, such as in Africa. Yet there is also a difference in the brutal world of business. There are the giant businesses, like Microsoft and Wal-Mart, that are veritable juggernauts, swallowing up the ranks of the struggling small businesses that focus more on just making a profit. Money is definitely one reason that people are discriminated. The rich sometimes have contempt for the poor, and the large companies look down on small business, like a lion looks at a fly. This leads to a caste-like system of economic wealth (or lack thereof).

In politics, especially in democratic nations, many people can come to be quite judgmental. Specific images are formed of different parties. For example, here in America, Republicans are thought by opposition to be rowdy, pro-bi-business, environmentally unfriendly, and supported by uneducated or country people. On the reverse side, Democrats are thought to be old, unpatriotic, and too ready to get angry or debate. These stereotypes have been formed over years of individual men, but this image still transcends to the party as a whole. Also, there are other stereotypes. It is easy to say that these people actually are so, but for those who have never met anyone like this, and for those who have no basis of these assumptions it is really a faulty stereotype generated by individual actions. So in politics, too, humans separate each other.

To a common person, the most noticeable segregation is in social and economic life. In a school, children and teens will often categorize each other as “nerd,” “jock,” “prep,” “dork,” and many other names based on the person’s intelligence, athleticism, and personality. It seems that even in school, children and adolescents have a hard time getting along between their own self-imposed hierarchy of people. Furthermore, one may be familiar with stereotypes of cultures, such as Chinese, Mexican, French et cetera, and religions such as Catholicism, Judaism, Islam, and more. As years pass, these icons and castes have developed, and they are the roots of segregation. In school, people bully each other on account of where they are on the popularity scale. Employers and even voters discriminate against people who fit their mental image of a religion or culture. And for those who discriminate, it is easy to ignore these prejudices and say “Wait,” and to further harm the welfare of their fellow human beings.

These different cases tie in. Time and again, from the smallest matter to huge issues, people have distorted the better judgment that we are born with and follow these stereotypes and cases down a road of segregation and discrimination. For them, it is easy to hold back, to differentiate, to say "Wait." But for those who "...have felt the stinging darts of segregation..." things are different. Granted in some cases an iconoclast has come and destroyed one of these icons, or an idealistic civil rights advocate has reintegrated two segregated groups, but we continue to have these discrepancies. Until humans stop ignoring and begin fixing the glaring and subtle differences and prejudices we have, no matter how common they are, there will always be segregation and there will always be those who say "Wait."

*Ian Boothby
Meigs Middle Magnet
Eighth Grade*

SUCCESS VS PERSONAL FREEDOM: THE ASIAN APPROACH TO ACADEMICS

In modern American society, many Asian students are often stereotyped due to the commonly held belief that they are both intelligent and diligent. In many Asian families, success is more important than individual learning experiences. Because they are immigrants, parents feel insecure due to the cultural and economical differences in America. Therefore, parents put pressure on their children so that they may grow up to be successful. Many Asian students harbor ambivalent feelings towards this harsh style of upbringing. Some children realize the pure intentions of their parents, while other hate the strict control their parents exert.

When the topic of Asian upbringing comes up in conversations, only one word is used to describe Asian families: strict. Many Asian parents have full control over their children's lives without any consideration for their children's needs to develop individual identities in modern society. Asian students are often described to be similar to someone with an avoidant personality disorder. Because many Asian students are very successful academically, their social and athletic abilities are treated with doubt and often become the targets of ridicule by their peers.

In order to shelter their children from the harsher aspects of life, Asian parents begin training their children at a young age in various studies so that they can obtain the optimal economical opportunities when they grow up. But Asian families forget the freedom of recreation that plays an important part in the development of a child's imagination. Therefore, the actions of some Asian students cause others to criticize them as being extremely systematic and pragmatic, without even a hint of creativity. A child's need for creativity is one of the most cherished values in the modern world and defines the very essence of a child's imagination.

Due to their strict upbringing and their pursuit of academic excellence, Asian students are able to achieve top honors in their class. In many Asian countries, such as China and Japan, children are subjected to education in art, music, and academics at a very young age. The crowded population inspires competition in which only the most intelligent and qualified are presented with the best economic opportunities in the future. In China, students are required to learn English along with basic subjects in the first grade. Night schools are very common, and many students who hope to excel study at school until as late as eleven. They then return home and do extra work until twelve. Absurd amounts of work are imposed on the children, delving into advanced topics such as calculus in the ninth grade, without the luxury of graphing calculators or any other high tech devices. Diligence is the only thing that allows students to succeed. Parents talk about the challenging methods of education in their homelands to motivate their children. They often compare the leisure that students here have in their studies as opposed to those students in Asian skills in order to imbue their children with feelings of guilt.

Many families also train their children in very high levels of morality and abstinence. They seek to shelter their children from the dangers of drugs, alcohol, sex, and violence. These factors are characterized as debilitation to the mind. Because Asian parents fear these things too much, they are very hesitant in letting their children interact freely among their

peers. In doing so, they take away their children's freedom and opportunities of learning through adolescent mistakes.

Asian families do not realize the increasingly important ideals of modern individualism and restrain their children from many social activities. Many parents use severe criticism in an attempt to goad their children to do better without realizing that they are tearing apart their children's self-esteem. A constant barrage of verbal abuse can lead to a fear of any kind of criticism. This can cause a child to become even more reclusive and timid when it comes to social situations. The result of this kind of upbringing causes some students to be unable to relate to their peers in many ways. They have never experienced some of the situations their peers have. They can feel isolated or even rejected during social situations due to the fact that they have no experiences of certain issues of common debate among teenagers.

Asian students are often misunderstood in society. They are even laughed at because they feel that studying is a greater priority than having fun. But despite public ridicule, they still persist with their studies. This logic may seem wrong to most teenagers, but, to adults, the notion is a very astute one. By studying diligently now, students can increase their productivity as adults and can be presented with much better financial opportunities. If students work hard now, then they can go to better colleges. The better the college, the better their chances are at being financially successful. In truth, the aspects of recreation and entertainment are not foreign to Asian students. They just choose to make studying a priority because they feel that securing their futures now is important. This type of thinking is fostered at very early age in Asian families. The chief goal among Asian families is usually success.

Despite all the dire consequences, Asian parenting does effectively prepare a child for professional situations. Asian students more readily accept the challenges of more difficult situations. They embrace the thought of learning because they are used to challenges and continuous studying. Because they have been raised to be diligent in their academic pursuits, Asian students can adapt to the difficulty of college work more easily than others.

There is no real way to tell whether social identity or academic excellence will have a better effect on Asian students' futures. Both have their disadvantages and advantages. In a time of changing values, social skills are increasingly important for both personal and occupational purposes. However, that is not to say that academic success isn't important. In fact, as the world's economic situations continue to digress, it is very important to be well qualified in order to obtain the best economical opportunities. People should not readily criticize Asian parents for imposing strict rules and study regulations for their children. Their way of parenting is a result of both cultural and personal reasons. If that is the way parents want to raise their kids, then others should respect their decisions. People should keep in mind that parents are only trying to do what they feel is best for their children. However, the type of treatment a child should get depends on his or her own individual character and motivation. Asian parenting should not be considered cruel, but it is quite damaging towards a child's creativity and takes away qualities that a child can only learn through experience. In the modern world, it is important to remember that a child's sense of individuality and happiness is just as important as his or her academic excellence.

*Tiao Guan
MLK Academic Magnet
Tenth Grade*

AN EXPOSITION AND PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON JAMES JOYCE'S 'THE DEAD'

This James Joyce short story follows the precedent of Hawthorne and O'Connor works by illustrating situations where characters have revelations, epiphanies, or catharses. In "The Dead", Gabriel is the subject of thematic relevance. He appears to be a proper and typical upper-class gentleman of Irish descent. It is later revealed, though, that he feels very much apart from the socialites that surround him at Miss Morkan's annual dance. Themes of isolation were also prevalent in the Hawthorne short stories that I read earlier this year, namely "Young Goodman Brown" and "The Minister's Black Veil".

In addition the "The Dead" sharing the theme of revelations with O'Connor's stories both Joyce and O'Connor implant criticism of self-righteousness into their works. While O'Connor achieves this through humiliation of Hula in "Good Country People" and Mrs. Turpin in the aptly titled "Revelations", Joyce makes this commentary through characterization of Gabriel. It is revealed that he puts himself on a level above his countrymen. One factor in this feeling is his seemingly superior educational background. "He was undecided about the lines from the Robert Browning for he feared they would be above the heads of his hearers," and he follows that patronizing thought with "their grade of culture being differed from his," (2). It is ironic that he elevates himself above the others around him so insistently in the beginning of the story yet ends up recognizing through his realization that his own mortality puts him on the same plane as the rest of humanity. He finds that the defining points of life-passion, love, identity-are fading away, and the separations between people in the world will also dissolve in the "descent of their last end" (35).

The characteristic of Gabriel that I thought most gravely separated him from the others is that he really does not identify with Ireland or Irish culture in general. In fact, he references the importance of old-fashioned Irish hospitality in his bird-carving speech merely to spite Molly Ivory, who criticized him earlier that night for being a "West Briton" and failing to honor his Irish heritage. Gabriel is also portrayed as aloof, and in the story's closing reflection he realizes his lack of emotion toward others, namely his wife, Greta.

A motif I especially enjoyed in this story was the metaphorical usage of "hot" and "cold". For example, cold is associated with sickness and death, or Gabriel's personality, whereas "Irish hospitality" and Greta's presence are connected to warmth. I thought it of note that there are many references to Greta "getting a cold", and Gabriel says of her, "she would walk home in the snow if she were let," (4). I took these to imply something about the relationship (or lack thereof) between Greta and Gabriel. Greta's "cold" could be a symbol of Gabriel's own cold personality having a harsh influence on her. The line about her walking in the snow if let seemed to be metaphorical for Greta's submission to Gabriel or her burden of having to live under the wing of this man.

Music is also recurrently referenced in descriptions of setting and characters. I found that each time Gabriel entered a pensive state or had an important conversation, there was always a waltz tune being played on the piano, and it is the discussion of the traditional song, "The Lass of Aughrim", that precipitates Gabriel's realization. I eventually began to ponder the connection of music to memory. By this I am not merely saying that music evokes memories, as in the case of Greta remembering her love for Michael Furey. Music is

representative of historical Irish culture itself. Mr. Browne, the archetype Irish male figure, reminisces of “the days...when there was something like singing to be heard in Dublin,” (17). In a similar fashion, Aunt Julia’s singing is representative of her past and perhaps the fading of youthfulness. Seeing his aging Aunt sing this song aids in putting Gabriel on the path to his realization by causing him to focus in on the fate of man. In reflection he says, “One by one they were all becoming shades. Better pass boldly into that other world, in the full glory of some passion, than fade and wither dismally with age,” (35) Perhaps this also exposes one of his own flaws-that he lacks such a glorious passion. He admits that he has not loved his wife as well as he could, and he does not have a special pursuit like Mary Jane’s virtuosic playing of the piano. This is a possible explanation for why “Gabriel could not listen while Mary Jane was playing her Academy piece, full of runs and difficult passages,” (8).

A second topic that engaged my interest was the significance of the names in “The Dead”. Gabriel and Michael, two men that have loved Greta, both have angelic names. In a way, this could be another instance of “dead” imagery, if one were to suppose that angels are the ethereal and spiritual manifestation of those who have passed on from this world. The name Michael means, according to the Book of Saints, “who is like God?” It is interesting that in the way the name Michael questions those who try to be like god, the image of Michael Furey strikes the character Gabriel into realizing that he is not greater than his fellow man. Also, the angel Gabriel I associated with the bearing of a message, and perhaps James Joyce wants to emphasize the fact that Gabriel, the character, is the bearer of his own message. Gabriel is supposed to say something important to the reader, to impart some truth to them. He certainly did this to me.

*Thomas Stevens
Hume-Fogg Academic Magnet
Twelfth Grade*

FORMAL ESSAYS

LOCKHEED MARTIN F-22

The British have the Harrier, the Russians have the MIG, and now the Americans have the F-22. The plane is run by sixteen computers to allow the pilot to focus on the mission. It can reach super sonic speeds without even activating its after burners. The F-22 is by far the most deadly aircraft to ever take flight.

The F-22 project was completed in 1990 and has been high priority ever since. The contract for the aircraft was awarded to the Boeing industry team in 1991. Changes to the plane and the contract just added more money to the contract budget. When they were done with the changes, the budget was 11 billion dollars. All together the project cost a whopping 73.5 billion dollars.

The final design for the F-22 was approved in 1995 after passing all of its combat tests, and the pilots that flew them were just as surprised as everyone else. After taxiing back from a test mission, operations officer David Krumm said, "The jet flies wonderfully the plane has tremendous handling capabilities. The way the nose moves is amazing. The Raptors advantages over a F-15 Eagle are remarkable. It flies better than any other plane I've flown or flown against." Lt. Co. Art McGettrick also has a place in his heart for this plane. "I'm impressed by its power. The engines are unbelievably powerful. I am also impressed with its stealth. It's unlike any other fighter," he said.

The F-22's top builders are Lockheed Martin and Boeing. The plane was brought into service in late 2004. The new era of air dominance had begun. The Raptor's weapon load is astounding. It can carry JDAM missiles or six AIM 120c advanced ATA missiles in internal compartments under the wings. It has 1 M61A2 20mm cannon capable of firing 100 rounds per second. The Raptor is 22ft 6in across, and 62ft 1in long, its top speed exceeds Mach 2 which is two times faster than the speed of sound. It even has its own chaff (flare) system.

There is much more classified information about the Raptor that the Air Force keeps secret, but these are the basics. The American bad guy buster is the most deadly in our arsenal. There are not many who would want to go up against America with the F-22 on our side.

*Aidan McSharry
J.T. Moore Middle
Fifth Grade*

THE FIGHT FOR EQUALITY

If “all men are created equal,” as stated in the Declaration of Independence then why don't gay couples have equal rights? Homosexual people across America are vying for their rights. These rights are more or less simple liberties, such as the right to marry, inherit their deceased partner's possessions without paying taxes, and Social Security benefits for not only themselves but also their children. When someone truly loves another, his or her gender or sexuality shouldn't matter. There are several ways that homosexuals are being discriminated against, and there are ways for people to help end it.

One argument often used against homosexual people is that which says someone's sexuality is a choice. It's not. According to “Resource Guide to COMING OUT,” a pamphlet by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation, “Sexuality and gender identity are not choices anymore than being left-handed or having brown eyes or being heterosexual are choices.” The American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its list of mental disorders in 1973. The American Psychological Association followed with a resolution in 1975 stating, “Homosexuality per se implies no impairment in judgment, stability, reliability, or general social and vocational capabilities.” Most any gay person asked whether or not being gay was a choice would respond with “no.” Why would anyone choose the harder road?

Prejudice against homosexuals not only prevents many Americans from receiving the benefits offered by our country, but it also prevents them from giving back to their country by serving in the armed forces. In the military, they have a “Don't Ask, Don't Tell” policy. We don't ask what an applicant's sexual orientation is and he or she doesn't tell. If someone is in a part of the military and they're found to be homosexual, he or she can be discharged, no matter his or her rank or status. That's outright discrimination. It's said that heterosexual soldiers may feel uncomfortable sharing close living quarters or being in a foxhole with a gay person. In Lesbian and Gay Rights, by Mark McCauslin, he talks about Canada and England soon dropping the antigay policy. “These two nations believe banning homosexuals has meant losing the services of some talented and able men and women.” All the country is doing is stopping people who want to help. Since the end of the war in the Persian Gulf in 1992 over 1,000 soldiers were discharged for being gay. This is just one example of how gays have unequal and unfair rights.

Probably the most publicized issue over gay rights is for same-sex marriages to be legal. Conservative *New York Times* columnist David Brooks says, (Nov. 22, 2003,) “We should regard it as scandalous that two people could claim to love each other and not want to sanctify their love with marriage and fidelity.” Little do most people know, but from the gay point of view, the debate over same-sex marriage is more about the legal issues than the religious issues. What gay couples really want are more than 1,100 federal benefits marriage has to offer. If someone in a married couple dies, his or her partner automatically gets the deceased property. This isn't so for gay couples. The surviving gay partner must pay estate taxes on inherited property, even if the couple bought their home together. The Family and Medical Leave Act ensures partners that are married, should one fall ill, the other has legal permission to take a leave from his or her work in order to tend to he or she. Since same-sex couples can't marry, they're forced to make due. Gay couples can be denied the right to live their final years together in the same nursing home. Due to the passing of a wife or husband,

the remaining person in the marriage will receive all of the deceased's Social Security payments, while in the same scenario except with a gay couple, the Social Security will not be available, causing an average income loss, in some cases, of approximately 5,528 dollars. Should someone in a same-sex partnership be hospitalized, the other has no legal rights to make medical decisions or have hospital visitations. Just imagine if someone's partner of thirty years was put into the hospital and he or she couldn't visit him or her. The fact that they love each other doesn't count. Representative John Lewis, a leader in the fight for African-American civil rights, while writing in the *Boston Globe* states, "I've heard the reasons for opposing civil marriages for same-sex couples. Cut through the distractions, and they stink of the same fear, hatred, and intolerance I have known in racism and in bigotry."

The lacks of these benefits are magnified when a gay or lesbian couple has a child. Instead of thinking about marriage only between a man and a woman, think of the children involved. Family health insurance plans provided by one of the gay parent's employers might not be offered to same-sex couples. If it is offered, gay or lesbian couples might have to pay extra taxes compared to those of their heterosexual friends and co-workers. If a child fewer than eighteen years of age loses their mom or dad, they will receive Social Security benefits until they reach the age of eighteen. For same-sex couples with a child, should the non-birth/adoptive parent die, their child will receive no such protection due to the fact that his or her parents could not marry. These families are denied these rights despite the fact that, according to "The Cost of Marriage Inequality to Children and Their Same-Sex Parents" one shocking, little known statistic says, "Same-sex parents, who are denied the right to marry, are on average more than twice as likely to be in long-term relationships as heterosexual parents who choose to remain unmarried." There are ways people can help.

The first step is to have an open mind. Gay people exist and contribute a lot to our society. For example, according to the transcript of the PBS special "Decoding Nazi Secrets" Germany depended on a complex secret version of Morse code to set up surprise attacks against American and British ships in the Atlantic. Breaking the code would be a major component of winning the war and, "If they failed, the Battle of the Atlantic-and the war-could be lost. One mind held the key to breaking the Enigma, and it belonged to Alan Turing." He saw the connection between the letters and combinations the Germans were using and thus, the Allies could know the German's plans. After the war Alan Turing was discovered to be gay and because of this he was considered a security risk and discharged from the military. Sadly, in 1954 he shot himself. Many other homosexuals made an impact such as Alexander the Great, Tennessee Williams, Langston Hughes, and Ellen DeGeneres.

Most of the information about homosexuality is lies and stereotypes that contribute to the prejudice. If people know the stereotypes are not true then maybe they will think differently. "Knowledge shatters stereotypes." As said in a pamphlet by the Human Rights Campaign entitled, "Speak out! Activist Tools for GLBT Equality." Ignorance is bliss, or prejudice in some cases.

Officials need to know that people care. Write them a note or make an appointment to see them. Encourage them to oppose antigay propositions. If there's an antigay talk show, call in. Volunteer or join a local gay-friendly group such as the Human Rights Campaign, Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), or the Gay and Lesbian Task Force. People have more power than they think. A pamphlet called "Speak out! Activist Tools for GLBT [Gays, Lesbians, Bisexuals, Transgender] Equality" by the Human Rights Campaign has ways for anyone to help. "Every time someone comes out of the closet, reports a hate

crime to police, joins a GLBT advocacy group, telephones a member of Congress to ask their support or legislation, or writes a letter to the editor, our community makes progress." IF someone is of the voting age, ensure he or she researches the candidates to find which is more gay-friendly. If the right person is elected into office, it could mean great things to come. Making the right voting decisions could impact everyone, but it starts with an open mind.

We went through a similar scenario with black and interracial marriage. Mark Twain once said, "The past does not repeat itself, but it rhymes." Our generation must do something to make a difference. "We cannot keep turning our backs on gay and lesbian Americans. I have fought too hard and too long against discrimination based on race and color not to stand up against discrimination based on sexual orientation." This is another statement by civil rights advocate John Lewis, for the *Boston Globe*. Until everyone has equal rights, there is work to be done. Not only can a person enrich someone else's life, even thousands of other lives, but perhaps he or she can also learn something about him or herself.

*Avery Parker
Meigs Middle Magnet
Eighth Grade*

THE DIMINISHMENT OF SELF

As management theorist Peter Drucker once said, “The individual is the central, rarest, most precious capital resource of our society.” Tragically, the worth of the individual is easily diminished, which Aldous Huxley points out deftly in his novel Brave New World. The government of the society in Brave New World reduces the value of the self in a number of ways: the discouragement of emotions other than happiness, hypnopaedic teaching, and the mass-production of its citizens, among others. By illustrating how individuality is sacrificed by these practices, Huxley emphasizes a central theme of his novel: in a mechanized, efficient society, the worth of the individual diminishes.

Because the society of Brave New World discourages the formation of emotional attachments, the mere notion of romantic relationships becomes virtually nonexistent. Since everyone is free to have sex with everyone else, each person becomes virtually replaceable. The idea of a “significant other” is laughable—no person is more significant than another. When Lenina is desperately in love with John, Fanny devalues John as an individual who can love and be loved by dismissing him as one of many men that Lenina could be with: “But it’s absurd to let yourself go into a state like this. Simply absurd,” she repeated. “And what about? A man-*one* man...as though there weren’t millions of other men in the world” (187). Rather than acknowledging John’s unique qualities and ability to make Lenina happy, Fanny treats him as a fungible commodity. This attitude is common in Fanny’s society; no individual is more special than another, thus the whole idea of individuality is devalued.

The complete conditioning of thought in the society of Brave New World is another factor in the diminishment of the individual. This is for two reasons, the first being that all people are taught to think the same thing; this lack of independent thought leads to an absence of individuality and no appreciation for it. All in a certain class are conditioned to think that their class is the most superior, and everyone in the society is programmed to think that sex should be had often, that time should be spent in the company of others, and that *soma* is the perfect solution to all problems. Identical thoughts and beliefs leave no room for alternative ways of thinking; therefore, individuality is stifled and those who are different are under appreciated. The morals and beliefs of the whole overwhelm any unique thoughts that might exist; the worth of the individual is diminished because any personal thoughts that one might have will be disregarded and ideas imposed upon the whole society are favored. For example, Bernard Marx is one of the few citizens who thinks for himself; he likes being alone. However, his merit as a distinctive person is lessened when his ideas are scorned: “ ‘It’s horrible, it’s horrible,’ Lenina kept repeating, ‘And how can you talk like that about not wanting to be a part of the social body?’” (91). Because nearly everyone thinks identically, the ability of an individual to develop unique thoughts is under developed and under valued.

The mass-production of people endangers the worth of an individual the most. When no one is unique and when all can be easily replaced by an identical being, the qualities that one possesses have no value. In the society of Brave New World, the quantity of the people produced is more important than the quality. The Director of Hatcheries and Conditioning remarks enthusiastically, “I’m working on a wonderful Delta-Minus ovary at this moment. Only just eighteen months old. Over twelve thousand seven hundred children already, either decanted or in embryo. And still going strong.” (9). Rather than focusing on

nurturing individuals, the DHC prides himself on his ability to produce huge batches of people. If one of those twelve thousand seven hundred children is lost, he is simply replaced by another just like him. Each child is entirely disposable and insignificant. As society becomes more and more efficient, as more and more people are produced per ovary, and as factories can become staffed by a single Bokanovsky group, individual people lose their significance and become just one in a sea of duplicate faces. "Each process," explained the Human Element Manager, "is carried out, so far as possible, by a single Bokanovsky group" (159). Nothing is exclusive to the individual because everyone else can perform the same tasks. Though the society is more efficient individuals become less valuable assets.

Words describing the state of individuals in the Brave New World, such as "replaceable" and "expendable", underscore and underlying theme of Huxley's work: the more efficient and mechanized a society becomes, the less importance its citizens have as individuals. If Peter Drucker's words are true, and the individual is the most precious resource our society has, then by streamlining a society, one deprives it of its most valuable asset. Huxley's not-so-subtle message in this novel is that instead of working towards a mechanically sound future, people should work towards one in which the individual is valued.

*Gillian Brassil
Hume-Fogg Academic Magnet
Tenth Grade*

TEENAGE LIFE

Between the ages of twelve and nineteen is a period in a teenager's life that determines what kind of adult he or she will become. This period of adolescence, also known as the "formative years", is the subject of much study and research to determine why adolescents are vulnerable to the phenomenon called peer pressure. The disturbing number of incidents of teenage drug use, teenage pregnancy and teenage suicide is most assuredly the reason that fuels the need for such research. Perhaps it is because as children they were taught the importance of having and maintaining friends. Or perhaps they don't feel that they can talk to their parents or teachers when problems arise. "or maybe they simply want to rebel against the pressures placed on them as youths. Because adolescents spend their time either at home or in school, it is within these confines that the answers to the answers to adolescents to give in to peer pressure because of an overemphasis on the importance of social adjustment, a lack of interest or communication on the part of the parents and teachers, and the unrealistic expectations that these entities create.

Although the purpose of attending school is to receive an education, it also provides children with a medium through which they can develop relationships with other children that eventually turn into friendships. The ability to form friendships can be traced back to even the pre-school years and its importance henceforth emphasized by eager parents who want their children to fit in at school. Most agree that social interaction is important but sometimes the parents are guilty of over-emphasizing this importance. Let's recall the numerous birthday parties where every child in the neighborhood was invited to come regardless of whether or not they were actual friends. This desire to socialize children also occurs in the classroom at school. Teachers tend to promote social interaction by assigning exercises that require working in pairs or groups. Furthermore, when a teacher spots a child playing alone, they encourage him or her to join the other children while overlooking the possibility that the child might have preferred to be alone. Thus, from an early age, children are taught to value the importance of social interaction and this value stays with them as they move into the adolescent years. The result is that adolescents come to value their friendships deeply and in some cases more so than their relationships with family members. This accounts for the adolescent not being able to refuse their friends for fear of losing the bonds that they have formed and is thus a cause of their greater susceptibility to peer pressure.

A second cause that contributes to the vulnerability of adolescents in the face of peer pressure is the lack of interest or communication on the part of the parents and teachers. If the parents are not around or simply do not show interest in their children's affairs, then it should not be surprising that adolescents will be more influenced by their peers with whom they spend the majority of their time. Since the adolescent also spends a good deal of time at school, it would seem that the teacher would serve as a sort of parent model in the classroom to whom students could come for guidance. However, not so much a lack of interest, but rather a lack of communication exists in this setting as well, due to the ratio of students to teacher in the classroom. This inhibits the possibility of the teacher having a true personal relationship with each student. Of course, this is a situation not easily remedied but nonetheless it is still a factor in an adolescent's tendency to turn to their friends as role models. If there are no adults available to provide negative feedback, then once again it is not surprising that they give in to the pressures placed on them by their peers.

In the home environment, relations between parents and adolescents tend to be strained because each has different goals that come into conflict. Parents expect their children to see things the same way they do, overlooking the fact that they have more experience in life that thus accounts for the difference in perspective. School as an institution is also responsible for placing unrealistic goals upon these adolescents, who are only concerned with immediate gratification. Because they cannot yet visualize the long-term benefits of a good education, their goals conflict with those of educators. These conflicting interests eventually lead adolescents to rebel against these unrealistic expectations and thus give in to peer pressure as a demonstration of their rebellion.

Because it is the parents and teachers that instilled in them the value and meaning of friendships, it should be the parents and teachers who help them to see that friendships have limits. If adolescents realize that social interaction is important but only to a certain point, then they will have the strength to say no to their friends. Likewise, if parents and teachers somehow found a way to better communicate with their children and students respectively, these adolescents would most likely come to share feelings with them and not rely so much on their peers for feedback. And lastly, if parents and teachers became aware of the unrealistic expectations they place on teenagers, the result would be a decrease in conflict as well as a decrease in the number of adolescents who feel the need to rebel through conformity to peer pressure. In other words, examining the ways in which family and school cause adolescents to give in to peer pressure leads to a resolution of the causes. What is the overall result? Adolescents have a healthier sense of the meaning of friendships, they have an alternative other than peers to whom they can turn to and they are freed from unrealistic expectations that they themselves can't understand. But most importantly, they become less susceptible to the traps of peer pressure.

*Son Tran
Glenclyff High
Eleventh Grade*

PERSONAL NARRATIVES

MY FRIEND REESE

My friend is not like the kind of friend people usually have. She has four legs, a tail with a tip that is white, and two floppy ears. She has white paws, but her name is Reese because she is black and brown like a Reese's Peanut Butter Cup. She is the cutest friend I've ever had.

Once we went to the park together, and Reese was running around. Then all of a sudden she did the funniest thing ever. She had climbed up the ladder and slid down the slide so fast that she fell in the dirt and her white paws turned dirty brown.

So then I said, "Oh, Reese. I have got to get you hoe!" So I picked her up and went back home to give her a bath. Once she was clean, she had her cute white paws again. After her bath, she ran down the stairs, grabbed her bed with her teeth, and dragged it over to the fireplace to take a happy little nap. Reese likes to sleep near the heat and in the sun.

Reese is very talented and knows a lot of tricks. My dad trained her to roll over, say please, jump for joy, say her prayers, play dead and freeze. When she does her tricks she gets a treat. She barks loudly when our next-door neighbor's dog is outside. She knows that he is out because she goes to a window, jumps up, and puts her paws on the windowsill to look outside. This is how she tells us that she wants to go outside to play with him. She also barks loudly when my sister and I hold her toys and take a long time to give them to her. That is how we play with her.

There are other things that Reese does that are funny. One thing she does is she chases the white tip of her tail acting like it is a bug. She goes around and around in circles. She also likes to chew her paws. When she is hungry or thirsty and there is nothing in her dog dishes, she sniffs them, and uses her paws to turn them over. Sometimes she pushes them under the kitchen table with her head, nose, and paws.

There are times when Reese is a naughty friend. She jumps up on people and scratches them hard. She also sneaks into the bathroom and takes tissues and trash out of the trash can. There are times when she tries to go into the pantry when she is not supposed to. If I leave my toys or things on the ground she will find them and chew them up.

Even though she is sometimes naughty, she is sweet and obedient, too. She is sweet because she loves to lay her head on my legs when I sit with her. When I lie on the floor she chews her toys on my back. When she is obedient she sits down and waits for us to put food and water in her dishes before she runs to eat. Also, when I eat my dinner with my family, Reese lies down on my bed and waits for me to say the magic word when we're through eating. The magic word is, "O.K." When I say, "O.K." Reese jumps off her bed, sniffs the floor, and eats the crumbs from dinner.

I am glad Reese is my friend and that we can play together. I have had her for one

year and I hope that she is my friend for a long, long time so we can have a lot of memories. She is the best friend I've had in my whole life.

*Elise Tedeschi
Crieve Hall Elementary
Third Grade*

TEARS OF HONOR

It was an ordinary day. Same cold breezy morning. Same old routine. My life is about as ordinary as a dust bunny. But today hope swelled up inside me ready to pop. The reason is that today was the last day to be chosen for honor band. Yes, I'm a band geek. No shame! But as a fifth-grader I knew my chances were slim, but I was still driven to make it and I knew I could.

My day started as my alarm clock buzzed inside my head. My bones shook as I slipped out from under the warm winter blankets into my cool bedroom air. I scanned my closet for the perfect outfit to wear. I clenched my fist as I found out all my good clothes were in the wash. I pulled on an oversized shirt and a pair of torn jeans instead. I munched on my toast as I gathered my binder, ID, and trumpet case. My trumpet was the most beautiful and valuable thing I owned. I had just cleaned the night before so now my reflection danced upon the valves as I stared at it in awe. I opened the door as a crisp but bitter wind slapped my face. I started down the hill to the bus stop and thought of honor band brought chills to my neck. I reached the front door of the school and spotted my two best friends in the whole world. I rushed up to them.

"Hey, what's your hurry?" said Chrissy.

"Huh? Oh, nothin'. I'm just jumpy about the honor band stuff," I said.

"Ah, you know we're going to get the spot!" said Katherine.

"I guess..." I whispered. We walked into the gym and spent the rest of the morning explaining to Chrissy what honor band was. After first period I realized that this excitement wasn't that great on my behalf. Everything my teachers had said went in one ear and out the other. I grew frustrated with my friends, for it was easy for them to push honor band into the back of their minds.

At lunch, I looked at a plate of fruit jell-o, spinach, and a corn dog in disgust.

"You gonna eat that jell-o?" said Katherine with a mouthful of food.

"Eww...You can have it," I said as I pushed it toward her.

"Guess what?" Chrissy said with a bored tone in her voice.

"Huh?" I looked over at Katherine as she gagged on a mouthful of food.

"Katherine!" Chrissy and I said at the same time.

"I'm okay...yeah...Sorry 'bout that." We all let out a sigh and finished eating in silence. After lunch I longed to go to the band room instead of Social Studies. I tried to wait the best I could, but as far as I was concerned this was the most boring class yet. When the bell finally rang it felt like it had been three hours. I walked to the band room by myself and sat down. I had a good feeling inside me.

"Okay everybody! Sit down and be quiet! You don't have to get your instruments out!" the loud voice that had said that was that of my red-faced director, Mr. Waters. I sat in my chair with a perfect posture and a smile that stretched from one ear to the other. "Now," he started, "There are only two spots left. I will give each of you a piece of music and if you are in I will tell you." He picked up a stack of papers and started handing them to the flutes.

He didn't say a word, then he got to the clarinets. Now he was in our row. He gave Katherine and I a piece of music then walked away silently. Tears swelled up in my eyes. My face burned red-hot. I felt an empty feeling rise in my stomach. A hot tear streamed down my face. I looked at Katherine and saw a look of disappointment and shock on Katherine's face.

"It's alright. We'll have to do better next year" she trailed off. I noticed my hands trembling. I wanted to run away into someone's arms and cry.

Then Mr. Waters spoke up "honor band is a privilege that should never be abused, but cherished." He paused to raise suspense "Shelby Rosenberg and Katherine Tudor!" An explosion of happiness erupted inside of me. More tears fell down my face, but these were tears of honor and joy. I wanted to run to the top of the world and back but I've stayed right where I am since. I have pushed myself to do better and better and that's what has kept me ahead of my goals. And then, honor band was the most important thing in my life and it still is now.

*Shelby Rosenberg
Bellevue Middle
Sixth Grade*

SNAKE ATTACK

The body crashed to the dusty classroom floor and the round head looked up at me as it lay in ruins. “Anna! Why did you do that?” my friend and project buddy demanded. “You should be more careful!” I sighed and glued the dismembered game piece we were using as an Inuit chief, and gently placed it back onto our model of an Inuit village. “Our proooo-jeeect is finnnn-isheeed!” Chloe chorused.

“Finally!” exclaimed Maria. “Ummm, now what do we do?”

I picked up a wad of taffy like clay and started to mess around with it. “What could I make?” I mused.

“How about a snake?” Mrs. Allen suggested as she strode into the room. “They are certainly easy to do.”

“Mr. Allen, please come to the office. Mr. Allen, please come to the office immediately,” the loud speaker barked. Our teacher snapped her head up from the papers she was grading. “I just remembered something! Last year, Mr. Allen played a really exceptional trick on me,” Mrs. Allen reminisced. “We should definitely do something to him! Girls, I have an idea!”

Chloe, Maria, and I looked at each other excitedly. We could smell fun in the air. “What? What? What?” Chloe yelped.

Mrs. Allen held a perfectly manicured finger to her lips. “Shhhh now. Okay, first, Mr. Allen has ophidiophobia.” She glanced at our extremely puzzled faces.

“Oh no, I’m so sorry! Is Mr. Allen going to be all right?” one of my friends asked in a rush.

“No Chloe, ophidiophobia just means he is scared of snakes and creepy crawly things!” Mrs. Allen laughed.

Chloe blushed, matching the color of her beet red tee shirt. “I think we should make a snake out of that leftover clay and put it in his car!” We gasped; that seemed like the perfect plan!

“Okay, Anna, you start making the snake,” Mrs. Allen began to bark orders. (She clearly knew I had absolutely **no** artistic talent!) “Maria, could you go ask either Mr. Kassen or Mrs. Schimenti whether they have any colored markers or paint?” Maria nodded her head solemnly. “Great! Chloe, please keep watch for *Mr. Allen*.” She said his name in a whisper. We diligently set about our jobs, honored to be a part of a prank against another teacher.

“Quick! Hide the snake! Mr. Allen’s coming!” Chloe yipped in a high-pitched whisper. “Here Anna, stash it in the refrigerator!” Ignoring my confused stare, she beckoned me with urgency. I did as I was told. “False alarm! He just went into Mr. Parson’s room for something!” Chloe breathed with relief, and we collapsed into our chairs just as the final bell rang.

“Girls, come into my room at lunch tomorrow for the execution of the plan!” our teacher said.

“Mrs. Allen!” we shrieked as we ran into her room the next day. “The snake! Did it freeze? I can’t believe we left it in the fridge all night!” we yelled.

“Calm down! It’s fine just a little cold,” said Mrs. Allen as she handed it to me. It felt like ice. “Here are the car keys,” she handed us a jumble of key chains and keys on a hoop,” and here is a note explaining what you are doing. Good luck!”

To our dismay, it was pouring rain outside. We dashed through the parking lot, approaching the dented red car as instructed. “Quick!” Maria screamed. “I’m soaked!”

After some argument, (“Here, no here!”) Chloe thrust the snake on top of the dashboard where Mr. Allen would surely see it. We ran inside, drenched and giggling like hyperactive puppies, just as lunch was letting out. Mission accomplished!

“Mrs. Allen! There he goes!” Chloe diligently reported as she watched Mr. Allen drive away from the school. “It should be long now.”

An annoying ring tone coming from the depths of our teacher’s purse interrupted her prediction. We watched Mrs. Allen’s face to see if the caller was the subject of our joke. “It’s him!” our ringleader whispered to us.

When Mrs. Allen got off the phone, she turned to look at our gossip-hungry faces. “What did he say?” we squealed.

“He said that you should look out, because he might just play a trick on you!” Mrs. Allen said. We blushed and chuckled furiously. Our nervous titters turned into laughs which turned into outrageous, belly slapping guffaws and wild snorts.

Through the rest of the day, all three of us had giddy smiles on our faces, which we could not explain to anyone. Now we look back on the event fondly, because that was the day we found out teachers aren’t always strict and menacing. They have fun too!

*Anna Fleming
Meigs Middle Magnet
Seventh Grade*

CONVERSION

This year was going to be great. Everything was falling into place-I was starting my ninth and final year at Saint Joseph's, the cheerleading squad was getting even better, my summer reading was done and perfected, and there were two new teachers coming that had no idea how cruel they were supposed to be to the class of 2008. Nothing could possibly go wrong.

That's what I thought *before* I met her.

From the first time I saw her, I knew I wouldn't ever see eye-to-eye with Sister Maria Karol. It was at summer orientation before my eighth grade year when we met. As I entered the cold classroom, the stale smell of old holy water and scented candles filled my lungs. With an ignorant, crooked smile, she looked at me.

"I'm Schister Maria Karol," she said in her thick, Polish accent. "Are you looking forward to your confirmation?" The question seemed to burst out of nothingness, like a really bad football team through a paper banner adorned with poorly painted bulldogs. I was caught completely off guard.

"Uh.... Actually," I stammered, "I'm not..."

"Oh." She stopped smiling. "So you're the non-...?"

"Yeah. That's me."

All warmth vanished from her wire-framed eyes.

The first two weeks of school were every bit as awkward as the day of orientation. I visited Sister's classroom twice a day, and she made it a priority to make my religion and English classes as hard as humanly possible. She always knew when I wasn't paying enough attention to her long and droning lectures about why girls like me were all doomed to go to hell and made sure to point it out to the rest of the class. Sister always found things wrong with all the work I did-whether my handwriting was too small or too big or my writing was too personal or too general or the way I stated things sounded too childish or too mature-my papers were always covered in red ink.

I soon realized that Sister had been sheltered her entire life. As she explained very vividly and with numerous hand gestures on the first day of school, she grew up in Poland, where she attended Catholic college. She then came to the States to join a convent that suited her and wound up in Tennessee. Her clumsy and lisping accent made every class entertaining, and she had no idea the lack of respect she had from the students. She walked as though on wheels, swaying from side to side and staring carelessly into the ceiling. Sister was always preoccupied with her own thoughts and shared them with all of 8B for hours on end, regardless if we were interested or not. Talking was the one thing that she really enjoyed.

After a fascinating explanation as to why nail polish was one of the Seven Deadly Sins, the class started the "Roots of Our Faith" section in our thick purple religion books, and Sister explained a colorful circle chart. In the center of the illustration, there was a tiny red circle that had the word "Catholics" written inside it, with the titles "all other Christians," "Jewish people," "Muslims and all others who believe in God," All who seek

God,” and “People who do not know God but live by their conscience” surrounding the red circle. Sister told the class that this picture showed how Catholics were all closer to God than anyone else and how Heaven belonged to them alone. All around me heads were nodding in agreement.

I'd heard this notion repeatedly since I started kindergarten, but it was then that the idea truly baffled me. She spoke so often about being a “servant of God” and always told how she accepted all people because that's what Jesus did. I had never wanted to hit anyone until that moment, but my gut told me that Sister needed it.

Instead, I raised my hand and asked, “Sister, if God made us *all* in his image and loves us *all* equally, then why does he only let the Catholics into Heaven?”

Heads twisted and twenty-five pairs of unaware and appalled eyes bored into me. Sister looked as though she had just seen Satan himself traipse into her classroom. Then suddenly her eyes softened and she gave me a pitying look.

“Abby...That is a good queschtion. You see, that is the way things have always bee. The Bible says that in order to get into Heaven, you have to follow the commandments and do exactly as he says. And as I'm sure we all know, the only religion that wholly follows God's rules is Catholicism. But it's not too late for all non-Catholics. We-I mean, other Catholics-can reach out to those who need their help and save them from their sins, unless of course, they are not Baptized or schomething like that.” She shoved her round mustached face close to mine. The stench of her breath was not unlike that of cat food. She blinked slowly and asked, “Do you see now, Abby?”

For several long moments, I just sat in my seat and stared at the nun. Then I rose from my seat and said, “Yes, Sister, I really do,” and left the classroom for good.

*Abby Randall
Hume-Fogg Academic Magnet
Tenth Grade*

BEST IF SOLD BY FEBRUARY 17, 2006

In the beginning, I loved you for the dark side of me that you brought out. You made sex, drugs, and alcohol seem like a paradise of unpunished sin. Two years later my endless party fades away because you don't retain the mental awareness that you once showed. Sometimes I hate you. You knew I was a good girl, and that was your incentive. I don't understand why you only want me for corruption; you made me grow up faster than I wanted to.

What happened to rainy nights? Those nights were sacred events. You promised during the showers, there would be no sex, drugs, or alcohol. Those were the few nights we were able to drive into town without the paranoia of inebriation.

Every night we're sitting on your couch, even when it is raining, snorting whatever was the best price rather than the best value. It's all about the quantity now, not quality like it once was. I used to feel appreciated by you because I hadn't done anything. Now, I am just another addiction with no foundation of respect.

In the mornings, I crawl from the guest room of your house and step into a cold shower. I can feel the filth washing out of me from whatever acids I had previously taken, only to be replaced by a sneer of anger from you once you awaken.

I used to sleep in bed with you, but your violent drunkenness has escorted me to the guest room through a series of kicks and punches. I hate for you to see me through your hazy vision, and yet your image of who I am blurred even when you are sober.

If I could be your purification instead of your substance I would feel so exhilarated rather than the current high of convening into a realm of darkness. Loving so indiscriminately has become too much for my run-down body to take. I need to act like the grown up woman that you changed me into and leave your lifestyle to you.

*Paisleigh Kelley
Hillsboro High
Eleventh Grade*

PERSUASIVE ESSAYS

SCHOOL VS. HOMESCHOOLING

Some kids think they would rather be homeschooled than sent to a public school, but I do not. We have this difference in opinion because we think about different things. The other kids think about being in their own home with their own parent. I think of different things.

One reason I do not think I would like to be homeschooled is you would miss out on enrichment activities such as Encore. Enrichment activities are important because if you are ahead they challenge you, but if you are behind they help you keep up. Furthermore, after school enrichment activities are more convenient to go to if you go to public school.

Another reason I do not want to be homeschooled is teachers are trained professionals and my parents are not. Because they are professionals they know tricks and skills to help you learn. These skills can help you get a more complete education, which can lead to a better job.

The next reason I do not want to be homeschooled is I would not meet anybody who was different than I am. For example, I would not meet anyone who was of a different race or religion. I think that would be boring. There are other benefits to attending school with people of different cultures. One example is last year we were studying Asia, and there were kids in our class who were from Asia. They helped us learn about it.

The last reason I do not want to be homeschooled is I would only hear my parent's opinion. If I only heard one opinion I might think that was the only opinion there was. That would mean I would think that I had to choose that opinion, which would take away my right to choose for myself.

There are the reasons I do not want to be homeschooled. Some are social, some are educational, but whichever they are they both mean the same thing. I do not want to be homeschooled.

*Sophia Ellingham
Eakin Elementary
Third Grade*

GET AMERICA OUT

Have you ever had a family member die? If you have, then you know how terrible and soul wrenching it is. Now imagine sending your son across an ocean and for a year not knowing if he is dead or alive. Then one day you find out on the news that he has died. Imagine the pain and anguish of that knowledge. This is one of the many reasons why America must take the troops out of Iraq. Even if you do not have a family member in Iraq, it still affects you in more ways than one. For example, the tax money you are paying, tax money that could be used to help the poor or conserve national parks, is being wasted on this hideous war. Another thing is that is being wasted is the troops. They are risking their lives for something insane and pointless, when they could be helping with an American crisis. And, as I mentioned earlier, families are being torn apart and America is becoming a country of sadness.

The soldiers who are fighting in Iraq could be serving our country in a more profitable way in doing other government activities such as helping Katrina and Rita victims. After the hurricane struck, it took much longer than it should have to aid the victims. This was because America did not have enough militia to support its country's needs. People were stranded on their rooftops for days, wondering whether or not they were ever going to be rescued. If America had attained more soldiers, then there would have been less confusion and chaos. The soldiers are doing nothing in Iraq and are being wasted.

There are enormous amounts of money being sent to Iraq and to the troops. The money that is being sent in is tax money that you are paying. This money should be spent on saner reasons than war like cancer research, which would be helping to save millions of lives instead of destroying millions. If we want to live on a planet that is healthy and beautiful, then the "war money" should be donated to wildlife reserves or national parks. Also, since education is one of the most vital principles in America, and we don't have nearly as much money as we want going towards it, we could be educating the future generation of America instead of supporting this horrendous war. War is a terrible thing it supports. If you help to sustain it, it is no different than supporting death. If we took the soldiers out, we wouldn't be wasting money on such a terrible purpose.

The most crucial and foremost reason for taking the troops out is death. Thousands of young men and women are dying each day away from home and comfort. For each life that is taken, a contributor to the new generation is forsaken. Every time a life is lost the hope for a stronger America grows weaker. If for no other reason, we need to extract the soldiers from Iraq because of the lives that are being taken, and the misery that the war is breeding. By staying in this war, America is ruining its future.

America needs to take its militia out of Iraq. The soldiers have been away from their homes and families for far too long. Our country would be much better off if the soldiers could serve America. In Iraq, the soldiers are participating in something that is inhumane when they could be helping Katrina or Rita victims. There are millions of dollars going to Iraq which could be used on more profitable causes. We could be saving lives or preserving the planet instead of diminishing our country. These are a few of the numerous reasons why we must bring the soldiers back home.

*Alexa Romersa
J.T. Moore Middle
Sixth Grade*

SUCCESS

Success could be disastrous! It could fill your mind with nonsense. You will not have success every time you do something, because success comes with failure.

When you succeed in a way of doing things, you will want to keep doing things that way, to secure your rate of success. But sometimes this habit is not good. For example, when a boy is poor and doesn't like to work, he will try to get things from others for himself, which in another word, is stealing. If he succeeds the first time, he will do it again and again, when he needs it. This method won't work forever; one day he will get caught, and sent to jail. All of this was caused by his success in stealing the first time. He thought that's the way of success without much hard work.

Success could also destroy all your dreams. For example, when I was ten years old, I participated in a ping-pong competition. The reason I entered the competition in the first place was because I was always the champion when playing against my friends and parents. As the number of my successes grew, my confidence grew with it. I became over confident. My success was like a group of trees. As the number of trees grew, they took land; so they started fighting each other for land. My confidence was turned into something that gave me disappointment instead of success. I lost during the ping-pong competition.

Success could be the tiger blocking your gateway to improvement too. A person gets better at doing things by improving. Without improvements, a person will walk in their old footsteps all the time. For example, I surprisingly got in the Mid-State orchestra as first violin. I was very proud and satisfied with myself. I actually thought I was the best, while not knowing that there are many better players than me. I was like a fish that knows only my little tank, while there are many larger bodies of water all over the Earth. Success has given me much satisfaction to make me feel really good about myself. Since I am really satisfied with myself, I won't be thinking about improvements. Without improvements, I will be walking in my own, old footsteps all the time.

Success doesn't always do you well. It creates a large amount of confidence, which will soon turn into disappointments. The only one who can stop this from happening is you! You have to control the confidences, and rearrange them so they won't compete!

*Wei Yao
J. T. Moore Middle
Eighth Grade*

TEEN COMMUNICATION

Since this is the first issue of our newspaper, keep in mind a newspaper is a way of communication. So we decided to do this column on communication with your parents. I know you're probably thinking, "NOT YOU, TOO!"

Just think, everything you go through, you can't face it by yourself. Like when you first learned to tie your shoe. You learned in one of these ways: you watched somebody older, you practiced over and over again, or you had the help of your parents. Now I know talking to your parents might not be the coolest thing to do. Believe me, I'm a primary source. But you would be surprised how they could help, because they have been your age before.

I'm not saying that parents know everything and anything. There might be days where they can't help you in your situation. Sometimes you know what you have to do, but you don't want to face it in the right way. Sometimes your spiritual leaders, parents, teachers, or guidance counselors can't help you. As a teen you are entitled to a voice, an opinion, and you have a right to express yourselves in any shape, form, or fashion, which has a lot to do with freedom. The meaning of freedom is the quality or state of being free.

No matter how hard you try to deny it, we're not able to face everything on our own. Sometimes you may have felt that you're Ms. or Mr. Know-it-all. As teens we only know what we have been introduced to or what we have witnessed. Over the years you have learned about loss of loved ones, socializing with others, and self-control. There are many other things we have learned and experienced over our short, but promising lives. I am not saying life will be as easy as tying your shoe.

Hypothetically, think if you are having trouble with a teacher and your first thought is to go off on the teacher as soon as you get on the chance to prove your point. Then you think on a much more mature level. And you choose to talk it out with your parent. It might help you in a number of ways. It could help you to be a better student, you can achieve more than you could imagine, and -believe it or not- it could help you prosper in your adult life. And remember, the foundation is your motivation.

*Imani Lenox
John Early Paideia Middle
Eighth Grade*

SHOULD STUDENTS BE PAID FOR GOOD GRADES?

How many school children receive some type of monetary compensation for good grades? If this question was posed to students, most would raise their hands. Nationwide, students are being paid for every A they make. While this may seem like a great plan since it offers basically a reward to otherwise unmotivated children, it isn't. It is unfair to students whose families may not be in a position to hold out this carrot. It teaches students to make good grades for the wrong reasons and contradicts the message of responsibility that parents should be sending their children.

The editorial staff of the *Dallas Morning News* takes the position that the unfairness is easy enough to see if there is more than one child in the family. For example, a child in the their grade would have an easier time making all A's than a child in the tenth grade. Another scenario may be that one child is innately more intelligent than his or her siblings and good grades come easily although the second child may try valiantly but still struggles to maintain his or her grades. Is this not sending a message that the latter child's effort are not worth as much? Might this not create a feeling of inferiority in that child which could last a lifetime?

In *Capital Times*, a Madison, Wisconsin newspaper, Melissa Porkorney stated that students should be paid for making good grades because it motivates students to keep their grades up. This may be true since some students, knowing that money is forthcoming for academic achievement, will work harder. This would also force them to learn more. However, Ms. Porkorney also stated that some educators feel that students would then be learning only for the sake of the money, not for the knowledge it would bring them. I agree with this because if a student is under enough pressure, it may lead to cheating. Some students might even seek any means necessary just to get that A, copying from Internet sources or even paying another student to do their work.

Kelly Sloan, also from *Capital Times*, makes a valid point to students that it is their job to get good grades like it is a parents' job to provide a good home. He goes on to say, "Sometimes you need to be responsible and not be paid for it." If children are taught that responsibility comes with a material reward every time, they might expect money for every right thing they do. Responsibility is doing what is right because it needs to be done, and if children are paid for grades, they will have a more difficult time grasping that concept. Dana Bishop of the *Times* feels that if grades are important enough to students, they should want to get those grades without needing money for a reward. If the advantages of good performance in school are reinforced often and early, most students will see that good grades are sufficient unto themselves. If a child does not see the necessity of doing well in school after being made cognizant of the benefits, that is a problem in itself and should not be compounded by bribery.

Students do not need to be paid to make good grades. The payment will come later in life when they are offered scholarships to college or jobs with a good salary. This is when they can expect reimbursement for their schoolwork. Until then, they should know that the money is on its way. Financial motivation is not the positive reinforcement that children need.

*Delali Kwami
MLK Magnet School
Tenth Grade*

WENDY'S DRIVE-THROUGH

“Straw! Straw! She didn’t know how to say straw!” ranted my friend as he sucked with enthusiasm at his Frosty, compliments of the kind Latino woman who had handed it to him. Yes, she had not understood what he meant when he’d asked for a straw as she handed him a spoon. Yes, that would probably be a convenient word to know when you work in the fast food industry. No, I had no sympathy for my friend. He’d gotten his straw, hadn’t he?

Getting his straw apparently was not enough to mollify my dear friend. He held the opinion that many of my contemporaries firmly believe in: if a person lives in the United States, he or she must speak English. And he held this opinion in the superior, one-dimensional way. I have always wondered how he would act if suddenly he found himself in the Latino woman’s place. What if he was in Mexico, and he didn’t understand it when a hungry teenage boy asked him for a straw at a drive through window? Whose fault would it be then?

The answer to me is obvious. His! If a person is going to live in the United States, he or she should know English, in Mexico, it’s necessary to understand Spanish, and in Zimbabwe, one had best know Shona. This lack of compassion and willingness to understand and learn is one I see spreading around me insidiously, and one that frightens me. It seems that every Latino person is from Mexico and is wrong for not having learned English yet, every Middle Eastern person is planning something seditious, and every person of Germanic heritage glares when he or she passes a synagogue.

If some people were willing to understand and embrace the diversity around them, they would learn that the woman at Wendy’s was actually from Peru, and that she had been here for only a few weeks; she was still learning. They would understand, that maybe the Iranian woman on the bus wears her hijab not to hid a crime, but out of respect and modest for her god, Allah. They would feel compassion for an elderly German priest, who was forced as a child to enroll in the Hitler youth, and now has to carry the burden of a prejudice for a crime he didn’t condone or commit.

What if my friend had simply accepted the spoon he’d been given initially? He would have been in a much better mood, and he still would have enjoyed his sugary treat. In fact, his Frosty probably wouldn’t have melted if he had. Maybe, if he’d used the spoon he would have tasted the real substance, not the bland and misleading slop that gets left over when anything passes through something so narrow. I should think that then, he would understand the importance of embracing diversity.

*Amy Hill
Hume-Fogg Academic High
Twelfth Grade*

POETRY

A FUN DREAM

If I could climb into a
Shuttle and shoot into the sky,
Head to the stars that twinkle
In my eye.
I'd lay on the moon
And jump from star to star.
Look down at Earth
From way up far.
I'd say, "Hello!" to the man
On the moon.
And ask him if he ever
Catches balloons.
I would gaze at the planets
As I floated through space,
And find a comet to chase.
I'd dust off the flag and
Say the pledge.
Then jump in my shuttle
And blast off the edge.

*Taylor Booth
Hermitage Elementary
Fourth Grade*

WHERE I AM FROM

I am from the land of Quietness, where everyone barely speaks

I am from the land of Funny, where people tell humorous stories.

I am from the land of Brains and Brawn, where everyone is mentally and physically fit.

I'm from the land of Might and Gentle people, where everyone helps each other and all are friendly. This is my land.

My life is sometimes as hard as a rock, but can be as soft as cotton.

My life has twists and turns and ups and downs like a roller coaster.

But my life also has straight paths. My life can be happy like a mouse to cheese or sad like a death in the family.

My life is like a haunted house on Halloween night, unexpected and surprising. This is my life.

My hobby is playing with a round, rough, and orange ball.

I can hear a swish and thump sound as I take a perfect shot. I can feel the roughness of the ball and hear the bouncing sounds as it comes back to my hand like a yo-yo.

Swish, bounce, thump. This is my hobby.

This is my land, this is my life, this is my hobby, and this is Where I am From.

*Kolby Newsome
Meigs Middle Magnet
Fifth Grade*

TWILIGHT

the power of pride,
or was it something else?

he must've been content
although [practically] he couldn't be
(heaven was practically his)
second-in-command was (2nd place)
meaning he was [useless] and [imperfect]
(he couldn't see that
that was a lie)
some things, his pride told him,
weren't meant to be

[he told himself this was.]

content did not mean he was 'happy'

[he put on a (fake) smile for the other angels
he smiled only for the stars.]

glory.
cold and broken

he must've known what he was up to
(must've) known the consequences
[in the back of his perfect mind]
of overthrowing an omniscience
because, what are wings and a halo to
transient glory?
no morning star,
no matter how lovely,
has the power to outshine the sun.

CATERPILLAR FINANCIAL SERVICES STUDENT WRITERS SHOWCASE

yet...
there is something hauntingly
majestic
and beautiful
about a star that dares to
defy
the entire universe

*Katie Lane
Meigs Middle Magnet
Seventh Grade*

FULL CIRCLE STATION

I'm the smoke in your brain, the dopamine in your lungs
I'm something good in the wrong place
I'm the guy talking poetry under a newspaper on the train
Just to show you
You look too stressed; let me give you something to chew on
As I lash your back with your problems and secrets
I'll bring you from your life to a crazy, excited trip
But before I do, I change

I'm the death of a loved one, the empty abyss
I'm pain and suffering
I'm the guy stabbing you under a flickering light in the bathroom
Just to spite you
You look too smug, let me give you a dose of reality
As I tear through your insides with a hacksaw
I'll bring you from your euphoria to a gaping hole
But before I do, I change

I'm the kind of unexpected love, the sun on your shoulders
I'm a tingling feeling and warmth
I'm the honey standing in front of you on the escalator in line
Just to tempt you
You think too much, let me let your feelings guide you
As I jerry-rig your heart to a boulder and swing from the rope
I'll bring you from the cliff to a sweet breeze of mixed emotions
But before I do, I change

I'm the train in the station and you're on the tracks
I'm your wake up call
I'm the clink-clank rumbling underfoot in the tunnel
Just to seize you
You look too blissful, let me take you now

CATERPILLAR FINANCIAL SERVICES STUDENT WRITERS SHOWCASE

While you're ahead of the pack
I shine my lights in our face

And you realize the breeze is really a hundred tons of steel coming straight at you
There's no more changing, no turning around now
So climb aboard
Let's leave this station
I'm sending you back to the beginning
But we're switching tracks at every junction

*Keith Hine
MLK Academic Magnet
Tenth Grade*

A HYMN IN DIRGE

Look: it's Catullus' sparrow, just
moments before it's unlucky demise.
With an intense and hollow hunger,
Grasping for the unreachable, flitting towards
a beautiful Light, which can be folded
over the reveal the heavy Night, like
parchment littered with sczons----
but turn it over and discover and ode
to love. Look: the bird had one too many
kisses, too many encounters with the shining
one, a mild travesty, but without death
can there be any beauty? At last,
succumb to the slim truth that, no, such
brightness can never be possessed, a realization
that has eternally prolonged the life of a little
sparrow and the devastated man who watched it fly.

*Carolyn Park
Hume-Fogg Academic Magnet
Twelfth Grade*

SCRIPTWRITING

NOT SO SWEET REVENGE

Setting: Green Bay High School

Main characters: Jane Murray and John Calloway

Spotlight shines on Jane seated at her lunch table in the center of the stage. She is covered with a mess of food from head to toe. John stands next to her as if frozen in time, holding an empty tray.

Jane's soliloquy:

Aggravation; frustration; humiliation; food stains. All these words fit into my situation. I was sitting at my lunch table today minding my own business eating a delicious turkey sandwich, when John Calloway spilled his lunch tray all over me. The cold chocolate milk gushed into the roots of my hair. The mushy mashed potatoes slid down the back of my shirt. The gooey peaches were in my hair mixed with the cold chocolate milk. I was a mess.

Stage direction: Jane stands up slowly with the food dripping from her, with sounds of students' laughter, facing John. At first, John is visibly embarrassed by his perceived clumsiness and the student's laughter. In order to save face and hide his embarrassment, John now pretends it was on purpose as he joins in the laughter. John reaches down and picks up Jane's sundae dessert.

John C: "Forgot your sundae?"

Stage direction: John purposely smashes the sundae in her face. More sounds of students' laughter, even louder than before, Jane quickly gets up wiping food off her face and then runs off the stage as the lights fade to dark. Sounds of student's laughter continue for a few minutes then fades to silence. Spotlight shines on Jane as she returns to the left corner of the stage.

Jane's soliloquy:

The whole lunchroom laughed at me, their big mouths opened to a perfectly round zero. Their loud voices echoed off the walls. As I ran out of the cafeteria, I collided with one of the lunch ladies carrying a whole tray full of more triple scoop sundaes.

I was a pink and white blob on the floor, covered in ice cream and bananas. Bolting to the girls' locker room, leaving a train of pink ice cream, I dashed into the showers, turned on the hot water, and sat down letting the food go down the drain. All I could think of was John Calloway. I had to get him back somehow, but how? Revenge is always sweet. I looked at my soaked clothes checking to see if I was clean,

I was clean. I stood up, turned off the water, and walked out of the locker room. My shoes squeaked every time I stepped as water squished out. All the water that clung to my clothes was now dripping to the floor. My baggy pants were even baggier by the weight of the water. My shirt stuck to my skin like that. That's it, glue! How could I have not thought of it before? I ran to the supply room grabbing a buck, a bunch of glue, rope, and feathers. It didn't take me long to setup the trap that was suspended about Mrs. Lander's room, the room John was in.

Stage directions: A school bell rings. "DING! DING!" John is always the first one out of the classroom, and he opens the door, steps out and comes face to face with Jane.

John C: "Hello Jane." (Smiling with a wide grin.)

Jane: "You're a crafty person John, I hope you like glue."

Stage direction: Jane pulls the rope that turned the bucket of glue over. John drops his books with a bang. Jane throws the feathers onto him making him look like a chicken.

Jane: "Cluck like a chicken, Calloway."

Stage direction: Sounds of students' laughter. Jane stands with her hands on hips, smiling devilishly at John. John looks shocked at first, and then his eyes fill with sadness. Stage lights fade to dark as the sounds of students' laughter continue for a few minutes then fades to silence. Jane steps to the center of stage as the spotlight shines on her.

Jane's soliloquy:

I saw little tears forming in John's big blue eyes. There was another side of John that I hadn't seen before, and there was another side of me that I hadn't seen either. Suddenly I regretted all the mean things I had done to him. Worst of all, I had stooped to his level.

Stage directions: Lights return. John is center stage, still wearing the feathers and glue.

Jane: "Calloway, as much as this pains me to say this, I'm sorry. I'm sorry I covered you with glue and feathers and embarrassed you. Come on let's get you cleaned up.

Stage direction: Jane reaches out to help him up, getting her hands covered with feathers and glue.

John C: "I'm sorry, too. After I accidentally dropped my tray on you, I got so embarrassed; I acted like a big jerk so the kids wouldn't laugh at me. It was wrong to do that."

Stage directions: Jane and John exit the stage. Lights dim. Spotlight returns to corner of stage, as Jane appears.

Jane's final soliloquy:

This experience didn't seem like a harmless prank. I had done something I will always regret. Revenge is not sweet; it leaves a bad taste in your mouth.

Stage direction: Spotlight fades to dark. Curtain closes.

*Skyler Sanders
Head Middle Magnet
Sixth Grade*

TROUBLE WITH A CAPITAL 'M'

Characters

Mrs. Melanie Manetti-a sweet, caring Mother to her children but a bit scattered

Eduardo Manetti-a no nonsense, funny Dad

Scooter Manetti-oldest son, somewhat of a prankster

Dewey-the next-door neighbor, friend to Scooter, who won't go home

Zip Manetti-a "special" daughter who makes sounds more than words

Tess Manetti-a typical teenager who likes to talk on the phone

Serena Manetti-the middle sister who everyone seems to forget

Katherine Manetti-the oldest sister who has recently become engaged

Geoffrey Cunning-Katherine's fiancé who has a secret

Grandma Belle-a sweet, but often confused elderly lady

SCENE ONE

(Geoffrey and Katherine walking in CS. Geoffrey is carrying two suitcases.)

Geoffrey: Do I really have to meet your family this weekend?

Katharine: I really want you to, and they'll love you just as much as I do. Don't worry.

Geoffrey: I know it will be fine. So, remind me again about your family.

(The characters enter one at a time and form a group freeze position in character on SR.)

Katherine: Well, there's Scooter, my oldest brother, his best friend, Dewey, who never goes home; Tess who is thirteen and pretty popular at school' my parents, of course, Melanie and Eduardo Manetti. My Mom is my role model, and my Dad, well, he's my Dad. Oh, there's my Grandma Belle and sister, Zip. Zip is special. There's one more, I think. Oh yeah, Serna. I don't remember if she's my sister or not.

Geoffrey: (looking at the family members as they form the freeze grouping) O.K. I think I've got it.

Katherine: That's good, honey. I'm going to go the last bag from inside I'll be back in a minute, and then we can leave.

Geoffrey: Okay.

(Katherine leaves, and Geoffrey's phone starts to ring. He answers.)

Geoffrey: Jeff Cunning, New York Times. Oh, hey boss. Yeah, I'm getting ready to leave for the assignment. (Looking at the family in group freeze SR) It should be easy to make this family look horrible, and then I'll save the day. It will be front page material. I'll be back to New York in two weeks. Yes, remember, the name is Geoffrey while I'm gone, so be careful

when you call me. I'll see you soon. Bye, boss. (Katherine walks in with the last big bag while Jeff hangs up.)

SCENE TWO

(Stage is set for the Manetti living room.)

Mrs. Manetti: (enters calling to kids off stage) Children! It's 7:14. The bus is leaving in three minutes.

(The children enter and line up by age, starting with the youngest, Zip.)

Mrs. Manetti: Zip, sweetheart... (she tries to straighten Zip's hair, but Zip playfully bats her hands away.) (She moves to Tess, who is talking on the phone and takes the phone out of her hand) Tess, no phone before school. (She fixes Tess's hair.)

Tess: OMG, Mom! Move on!

Dewey: Hey, Mrs. Manetti.

Mrs. Manetti: Dewey, you don't live here. Go home dear.

Dewey: O.K. (exits SL)

Mrs. Manetti: (moving to Scooter and ignoring Serena) Sebastian, sweetheart, just look at that hair.

Scooter: Ma, it's Scooter. I'm gonna be wearing a ball cap anyway.

(Mrs. Manetti hands brown bag lunches to all the kids as they exit while Serena remains.)

Serena: Uh...Mother???

Mrs. Manetti: (looking at Serena as if she doesn't know her) Yes? Have a nice day, sweetie.

Serena: What about my lunch.

Mr. Manetti: (hands her a dollar bill but doesn't let go of it) Here's a dollar. (Serena and Dad move the \$\$ back and forth until Dad finally lets her have the \$\$) I want change back.

(Serena exits with the other siblings for school leaving Grandma Belle on stage with Mrs. M)

Grandma: Are you picking me up, or am I riding the bus home?

Mrs. Manetti: Mother, what are you talking about?

Grandma: Where's my applesauce?

(Mom, Dad, and Grandma exit as the lights fade down to black.)

SCENE THREE

(Begins with an empty stage of the Manetti living room, as Dewey enters with a bowl of cereal, sits down, and proceeds to eat it. Serena enters.)

Dewey: Who are you? You don't live here!

Serena: Who am I? I'm Serena. I live here, Dewey! I'm Scooter's sister.

Dewey: (stands holding cereal spoon up) Home invader! You better get outta this house before I...

(Dewey is interrupted when Mr. And Mrs. Manetti walk in.)

Mr. Manetti: Hey, hey! Enough of this bickering. Dewey, stop bringing your girlfriend over. Both of you go home.

Serena: What?!? Both of us? Dad, I live here!

Mr. Manetti: Only my children call me Dad. Both of you go home.

(Serena gets aggravated and stomps her feet.)

Mrs. Manetti: No, no, Eduardo. She does live here. You remember Selena.

Serena: It's Serena, Mom.

Mrs. Manetti: Oh, yes, that's right. Serena.

Mr. Manetti: All right...I guess...well uhm...then Dewey, you go home.

Dewey: Fine. See ya, Mr. Manetti. Mrs. Manetti. (Dewey exits happily)

Mr. Manetti: Well, dear, I'm off to work. I sure hope that kid (referring to the \$\$ he gave Serena) brings me back my change.

Mrs. Manetti: Have a good day, dear.

(Lights fade to black.)

SCENE FOUR

(Lights up. The stage is still set in the Manetti living room, as we see Mrs. Manetti enter. We hear door knocks.)

Mrs. Manetti: Katherine, is that you...? (the Manetti kids, and Dewey, burst into the room)
Why didn't you children use you key?

Scooter: Zip ate it again, Mom. (Zip smiles and makes happy sounds.)

Serena: Of course she did.

Mrs. Manetti: Please, children, don't mess up the house so much. Your sister is coming soon.
(door knocks) Who is it now?

Katherine: (entering from SL) Mom!

Mrs. Manetti: (hugging her daughter) Katherine!

Geoffrey: (walking in carrying two bags) Hello, you must be Mrs. Manetti. I'm Geoffrey.

Mrs. Manetti: (shaking his hand) Hello, it's a pleasure to meet you.

Geoffrey: (walking over toward the kids and handing the suitcases to Serena) Oh, and these must be your gorgeous kids!

Mrs. Manetti: This is our youngest daughter, Zip...

Geoffrey puts his hand for Zip to shake, but she attempts to bite it.)

Geoffrey: Hello, Zip.

Katherine: Careful! She bites....

Mrs. Manetti: And this is my second youngest, Tess...

Tess: (waves her hand and gives him a flirty look) Hi. Charmed I'm sure.

Mrs. Manetti: And this is Sebastian, my oldest...

Scooter: It's Scooter to you, chump.

Geoffrey: Okay.

Dewey: Hi. I'm Dewey. Jeff? Is that your name...Jeff? I'm gonna call you Jeff...

Geoffrey: (with sudden anger) NO! Do not call me Jeff! (more calmly) My name is Geoffrey, okay?

Mrs. Manetti: Dewey is the neighbor that never goes home...(others nod in agreement)

Katherine: Dewey. Go home.

Dewey: See ya, Jeff. (he exits SL)

Mrs. Manetti: Oh, and this is my mother...

Grandma Belle: Larry? Is that you? (moving toward Geoffrey to hug him Kids, it's your grandfather! You came back! You came back!

Mrs. Manetti: Mother, Dad passed away ten years ago!

Serena: Hello. I'm Serena.

Geoffrey: (shaking her hand) Why, hello...

(Mr. Manetti walks in looking confused.)

Mr. Manetti: Who the heck is this guy?

Geoffrey: I'm Geoffrey, sir.

(They shake hands, but Mr. Manetti doesn't pull his hand away as he looks at Geoffrey.

Mrs. Manetti: Eduardo, honey, his hand is turning purple! (Mr. Manetti lets his hand go.)

Geoffrey: Well, I'm going to take our bags upstairs....

Katherine: Second door on the right.

(Geoffrey exits SL as Grandma chases after him.)

Grandma Belle: Larry! Come back!

Mr. Manetti: No one answered my question. Who the heck was that guy?

Scooter: I think it's Katherine's boyfriend, Pa.

Katherine: Well, actually...he's my fiancé! (Katherine puts out her hand to show off her huge diamond ring. Zip "freaks out" and runs around making sounds.)

Mrs. Manetti: (walking with Katherine as they begin to exit SL) Oh, we have so much to do! Book the church, get invitations, buy a dress...

Mr. Manetti: (watching them exit as he speaks to the audience) I still don't know who that guy was! (Lights fade to black.)

SCENE FIVE

(Lights up as we see Mrs. Manetti and the children, along with Dewey, sitting in the living room. Mr. Manetti enters with Geoffrey.)

Geoffrey: That sure is a fine World War II collection you have there Mr. Manetti...

Mr. Manetti: (stepping over Zip, who is on the floor, to get to his chair SR) Oh, well, thank you...

(Geoffrey trips over Zip and falls. The girls stand up with surprise and Zip giggles with satisfaction.)

Mr. Manetti: (to Geoffrey) You know, you really should be more careful. (sitting with the kids)

Geoffrey: (getting up but giving Zip a "dirty look") Yes, I'll do that.

Mrs. Manetti: Geoffrey, you can sit here. (Geoffrey sits)

Mr. Manetti: Where's the channel changer?

Serena: Dad, you're sitting on it.

Mr. Manetti: Where's the darn Channel changer?

Serena: (louder) Dad! You're sitting on it! (Mr. Manetti continues to look around.)

Tess: I think you're sitting on it, Dad.

Mr. Manetti: (standing to find the remote) Oh, here it is!

Mrs. Manetti: So, Geoffrey, what do you do for a living?

Geoffrey: Well, I'm a therapist, and I...

Mrs. Manetti: (interrupting Geoffrey) Zip, sweetheart, wipe your face. I'm sorry Geoffrey, please continue.

Geoffrey: As I was saying, I'm a therapist, and I got my PhD from Harvard. You know, I've been watching your family lifestyle and I think you all could use some tweaking if you will...

(Scooter and Dewey, who have been crawling secretly over to Geoffrey's chair, stand and throw paper balls at him. Chaos begins, as the children react to this.)

Mrs. Manetti: (to Scooter and Dewey) Both of you to your rooms!

Geoffrey: No, no, it's perfectly fine. Boys will be boys, I always say. Besides it's family time....

Mr. Manetti: All right. Well, sit down and clam up! (everyone sits back down)

Geoffrey: As I was saying, I have been noticing your family's unusual style. I was wondering if I could stay here for a few days or weeks and maybe observe your family to perhaps help you all become a little more "normal." I mean, I am a therapist, and I really believe....

Mrs. Manetti: (interrupting Geoffrey again) I'm sorry, but where are Sebastian and Dewey?

(Chaos begins again as kids react to Scooter and Dewey throwing more paper balls at Geoffrey. Zip runs around making sounds.)

Grandma Belle: (shaking her walking cane) The British are coming! The British are coming!

Mrs. Manetti: I'm sorry Geoffrey. It's late. Could we continue this discussion in the morning? Off to bed everyone.

(Kids exit. Lights fade to black.)

SCENE SIX

(Lights up as the stage is reset for the kitchen table in the Manetti household. The Manetti children, along with Dewey, are sitting around the table.)

Scooter: Dewey, pass the pancakes. (Zip throws an orange juice carton at Dewey.) Quit it, Zip!

Tess: Zip, eat your food.

(Geoffrey walks in, sighs, and slowly takes a seat at the head of the table.)

Scooter: Well, well, well...if it isn't Geoffrey pants himself.

Geoffrey: Good morning, Sebastian.

Scooter: Call me that again, and I'll skin ya!

Geoffrey: (in anger) I'd like to see you try...

All: Ooooh!

Geoffrey: Shouldn't you guys be in school anyway?

Serena: It's Saturday.

Zip: Sah-dur-day.

Scooter: Besides, shouldn't you be staying away from Katherine?

Zip: Kafurin!

Geoffrey: (stands) Look, if I get any more trouble from any of the five of you, there will be serious consequences. And don't try telling your measly parents, because I've got them wrapped around my little finger. And I hear any more about ... (Zip pantomimes pouring orange juice all over Geoffrey.) Why, you little monster!!

(Mr. and Mrs. Manetti along with Katherine enter the breakfast room.

Mrs. Manetti: What happened here? Did someone spill something?

Katherine: Oh Geoffrey! Your pants are soaked.

Mrs. Manetti: What's this mess?

Scooter: I think that he broke one of your china plates, Momma.

Mrs. Manetti: China shouldn't even be used for breakfast!

Geoffrey: It's quite all right. Tess was just trying to be nice by using the good plates. It's really quite fine.

Serena" What? Tess? I set the table!

Mrs. Manetti: It's fine. It's fine. We'll clean this mess up later. Kids, Geoffrey, your Dad and I talked a little more this morning about what we discussed last night, and we think a little change in the family might do some good.

Geoffrey: Oh, that's wonderful

Scooter: But, Momma...!

Dewey: But Momma...!

Mr. Manetti: Sit down, Dewey. (Dewey sits.)

Zip: Ahhhh! Eeeek....mimimimimimimi.....

Tess: But, Mom, that's like so totally unfair!

Serena: Mom, this is so stupid. We're fine.

Grandma Belle: Metamucil!

Geoffrey: Well, this is just great. I was thinking about it last night, too, and I think that I have some great starting points for you all. For example, you youngest daughter Zip.... she is your daughter right?

Mrs. Manetti: Yes! DNA tests prove it.

Geoffrey: Right. Well, just look at Zip. She wears the oddest of clothing, and eats metal objects. It just isn't...normal. Zip needs to be put on a regular diet and needs to start wearing regular clothing.

Zip: Ahhhh! Momomomomomo! Ekkkkk! Ugh! (moves to Scooter)

Scooter: Don't listen to him, Zip, he's not telling you the truth.

Tess: You've got it all wrong, Geoffrey.

Mr. Manetti: Zip Zip, hand over my electric razor.

(Zip shakes her head and shrugs her shoulders.)

Scooter: Just give it to him, Zip.

Mr. Manetti: Come on, Zip. (Dad extends his hand to get the razor from a reluctant Zip.)

Scooter: Just give it to him, Zip. (She does.)

(Mr. Manetti starts to walk away, and Zip crawls over to him barking like a dog. Mr. Manetti quickly turns and hisses like a cat at Zip, who moves quickly back to Scooter.)

Geoffrey: And now, just look at your second youngest, Tess. She talks on the phone way too much, and she doesn't know about the good things in life like love and family. I think that her phone needs to be taken away for at least two months.

Tess: What?!?! OMG, this is so like not cool.

Mrs. Manetti: Tess, give me your phone, dear.

Tess: But, Mom....

Mrs. Manetti: Tess, hand it over. (She does.)

Tess: (to Geoffrey) You're not that cute, anyway.

Geoffrey: Now, look at your oldest son, Sebastian. And, of course, Dewey. Dewey needs to just go home. He needs to have his own life.

Dewey: hey! You don't know what it's like out there. It's cold, and I'll be lonely.

Geoffrey: You have your own house. Go home. And Sebastian...or Scooter...needs to get into sports twenty-four seven. He needs to be dribbling the basketball, kicking the soccer ball, passing the football. He just needs to be consumed in sports and school.

Scooter: What? No way! This is not cool.

Geoffrey: (to Serena) And...this girl...well, she needs to home, too.

Serena: What? I live here. I'm Serena. The middle child. I'm one of the daughters!

Geoffrey: Yeah...okay...whatever. Oh, and your mother, I honestly think she should be in an H-O-M-E.

Grandma Belle: Hey! I can spell you know.

Mrs. Manetti: Geoffrey, why don't you get out of those wet clothes.

Geoffrey: Yes, that's a great idea.

Katherine: I'll put them in the washer for you. (Geoffrey and Katherine exit.)

Mrs. Manetti: Okay. As of tomorrow, Zip will be wearing new clothes, and I will be in charge of when and what she eats. Sebastian will be consumed with sports and school. Dewey will only be allowed to come over if he's invited and both Eduardo and I approve...

Dewey: (Putting his arm around Mrs. Manetti) Scooter, can I come over?

Scooter: Mom, can Dewey come over?

Mrs. Manetti: (looking at Dewey) No. (Dewey moves to sit down and slouch in his chair.) Tess will be without a phone for at least two and a half months and will participate in all family events. (to Grandma Belle) Mom, we'll talk about putting you in a home. And Selena...er...Serena, will..uh...well, she'll just do her homework. Now, but the time I get home, I'd like this juice mess cleaned up. Oh, and tomorrow, at eight o'clock sharp, we will be down here ready for church.

Mr. Manetti: None of this eight fifteen stuff...

Manetti Kids: But, Mom, we haven't gone to church in four years!

Dewey: And I'm a Buddhist!

Mrs. Manetti: I expect this mess to be cleaned up when I return. (She takes Eduardo's arm and they exit.)

Scooter: (to everyone) We gotta do something about this.

Tess: He's ruining our lives!

Zip: Mimimimimimmimi! Eeeeeek!

Grandma Belle: (using her cane for emphasis) Remember the Alamo!

(They all nod in agreement.)

Dewey: Okay, let's make a plan.

(They all get into a huddle CS and whisper together as the lights fade to black.)

SCENE SEVEN

(Lights up to find Mrs. Manetti CS calling to the kids.)

Mrs. Manetti: Children! It's 8:14, and church starts in 16 minutes. (The Manetti kids enter and line up for inspection.) Oh Zip, your pigtails look so much better, dear. Tess, oh sweetheart, you look wonderful. Go ahead and get in the car. (Zip and Tess exit.)

Tess: Thanks, mother.

Mrs. Manetti: (to Serena) Oh, Sarah...!

Serena: It's Serena, Mom.

Mrs. Manetti: Oh, that's right. Run and get in the van (she exits). Sebastian, oh, honey...

Scooter: Momma, do I really have to wear this?

Mrs. Manetti: Good morning, Mom.

Mrs. Manetti: Katherine, you look wonderful!

Katherine: Thanks, Mom. (she exits)

Grandma Belle: (walking through) Come on, Melanie. We'll be late for church. (They exit.)

(Eduardo walks across the stage and stops CS)

Mr. Manetti: (looking at his watch) It's 8:15. We're late! (He exits leaving an empty stage.)

(Dewey runs on stage looking around.)

Dewey: Scooter? Zip? Mrs. Manetti? Where is everybody?

(Geoffrey walks in not seeing Dewey. Dewey quickly hides behind the couch to listen.)

Geoffrey: (on his phone) Hey, boss. Yeah. The story's going to be great! They went to church this morning. Yes. The newspaper article about this crazy family will definitely be ready. Front page material, "Trouble with a Capital 'M'"—"M" for Manetti, of course. Okay, see you soon. Goodbye, boss. (Geoffrey hangs up his phone and exits SL. Dewey stands up from behind the couch.)

Dewey: I gotta tell Scooter about this!

(Blackout.)

SCENE EIGHT

(Lights up on the Manetti living room. Geoffrey is asleep on the couch. The Manetti kids and Dewey sneak in to hide a video camera in the living room.)

Scooter: Let's put the camera here.

Tess: (rigging the camera) Here, Zip, bite this. (she does)

Dewey: Be quiet. We don't want to wake him up.

Tess: How does it look?

Zip: Purrfit.

Serena: Now, we'll have proof.

(Geoffrey's phone rings. Most of the kids exit, but Tess and Zip crouch down back behind the couch.)

Geoffrey: (on phone) Oh, hey, boss. Yeah. It's going great. The article will be perfect. "Manetti Madness" on the front page. They are so messed up. (Mrs. Manetti walks in.) Uh, oh, gotta go...

Mrs. Manetti: Who was that?

Geoffrey: Uh...my Mom. Yeah, my Mom. She was telling me about her...bingo winnings, sure.

Mrs. Manetti: How exciting! I would love to meet her soon. Maybe before the wedding?

Geoffrey: Okay. Well, I'm going to go and take a walk.

Mrs. Manetti: Would you like Katherine to come along? (calling off stage) Oh, Katherine...

Geoffrey: No, it's okay. I'll just take the walk by myself. Thanks. (he exits)

(Eduardo enters with newspaper, passes Mrs. Manetti, and sits on the hidden video camera.)

Mr. Manetti: Hey, honey...

(Zip, Tess, Scooter, Serena, and Dewey run in to the scene)

Kids: Dad, Mom, we have to show you something!

Serena: Dad, get up! You're sitting on our camera!

Tess: Dad, get up! OMG!

Mr. Manetti: Oooops. Sorry.

Kids: Dad!

Mr. Manetti: What in the heavens are you all up to now?

Serena: Mom, Geoffrey is a fake.

Scooter: Jeffy-pants is a fake!

Mrs. Manetti: What are you talking about?

Tess: We taped him talking on the phone and heard about some article he was writing for the New York Times newspaper...front page...something like "Manetti Madness"

Dewey: He's making us look bad!

Scooter: He's a fake!

Mrs. Manetti: I can't believe you children.

Tess: What?

Mrs. Manetti: Trying to make your future brother in law look bad in front of everybody! (The kids begin to improvise individual arguments but are cut off by their Mother.) Every one of you up to your rooms and don't come down till supper! (The kids all exit.) Oh, Eduardo, I'm so disappointed. (Eduardo puts his arm around his wife to comfort her.) I'm going to make supper.

Mr. Manetti: Are we having spaghetti? (Mrs. Manetti shakes her head in disbelief and exits to kitchen SR.)

(Mr. Manetti sits down as Zip runs in with a red story book.)

Zip: Stor-ee, stor-ee, stor-ee! A stor-ee! (giving story book to her Dad)

Mr. Manetti: (looking off stage) Well, your mother said to come down at supper, but she didn't say anything about a story. Oh, I can't resist. You're just too darn cute. (Opens books and begins to read) "Let's learn how to cook the Italian way?" (looks at Zip to make sure this is the book that she wants him to read-Zip shakes her head "yes.") Biscuit Tortoni...sugar...whipping cream, and chopped, toasted almonds." But he was very careful around knives!

(Zip curls up and slowly falls to sleep. Geoffrey enters talking on the phone unaware that Manetti and Zip are there. He walks in DSL talking while the rest of the Manetti family enters.)

Geoffrey: They are so messed up! Yeah, their little kid, Chip, or something, makes the story perfect for the New York Times. Okay, we'll talk to you later, boss.

(As Geoffrey hangs up Scooter and Dewey grab Jeff and sit him down in a chair.)

Mrs. Manetti: (to Jeff) What is this? You should be ashamed of yourself! New York Times. My kids were right. You are a fake.

Scooter: I know this isn't the time for "I told you so." But we told you so.

Tess: Since he is fake and all, can I get my phone back?

Mrs. Manetti: No, Tess. Not the time.

Zip: (points at Jeff) Get outta my house!

Everybody: Zip you talked!

Serena: What else can you do?

Zip: Lots of stuff!

Mr. Manetti: Who are you talking to?

Zip: Jeffy-pants!

(Katherine enters.)

Katherine: Geoffrey, what's going on?

Serena: Katherine, Geoffrey's a fake!

Katherine: A fake, Serena?

Serena: You noticed me!

Katherine: (to Jeff) Is it true?

Mrs. Manetti: We've always noticed you, Serena, but it's been so stressful here lately.

Serena: Katherine, Jeff's only here because he's writing a slanderous newspaper article about our family.

Katherine: (looking at Geoffrey and the family) I'm sorry everybody, but I love Jeff. (pausing to think) Wait. Did you write anything about me in that article?

Geoffrey/Jeff: Well, you are part of the family.

Katherine: (With unpleasant force) You fake! Get out! And I'm keeping the ring!

(Jeff exits quickly as the lights fade to black.)

SCENE NINE

(Lights up on the Manetti living room. Six months have passed. Mrs. Manetti is CS.)

Mrs. Manetti: Children! The wedding is in less than an hour. We're losing precious time. (The Manetti clan lines up facing the audience. Mrs. Manetti walks toward them addressing the audience.) Lots of things have changed in the past six months. Zip learned how to read and write. She wrote her first novel titled, "Life Through the Eyes of a Human Dinosaur."

Zip: (moving toward the audience in dinosaur-like fashion) Roar! I'm a tyrannatorus X!!

Mrs. Manetti" Tess learned the value of a dollar and got a job to pay for her phone bill.

Tess: (moving toward the audience) Do you like want fries with that?

Mrs. Manetti" Scooter graduated from high school and got a scholarship to Harvard. (The others hum the graduation march as Scooter does a celebration dance, throwing his graduation cap up in the air.) Grandma Belle started an exercise program and became a world known kung-fu star.

Grandma Belle: (doing kung-fu moves with a "chop") Hie-Yah!

Serena: Mom, what about me?

Mrs. Manetti: (hugging her) I'm just kidding with you, Serena. We're so proud of you and your new talk show, "Feelings with Serena."

Serena: (to audience as talk show host) Our topic today is fiancés who write bad stories about their in-laws. Come on out Geoffrey. (The other Manettis "boo" Jeff as he enters and quickly exits the stage.)

Mrs. Manetti: (to audience) Katherine is getting married today. (The others clap and say "yeah!") And you'll never guess who the lucky man is. Why, here he is right now, our future son-in-law.

(Dewey enters. Mr. Manetti puts his arm around Dewey.)

Mr. Manetti: It's Dewey!

Mrs. Manetti: And get this, they have their own house!

Katherine: Right next door.

Zip: Hey! Let's go to Dewey's house! Have a little party before the wedding. (All of the family exits happily off SL to head for Dewey's house except for Eduardo who stays behind.)

Mr. Manetti: Hey! Make it quick! I don't want to be late for the wedding! (to audience) None of that 9:30 stuff!

(Lights fade to black as Eduardo exits to attend the party at Dewey's house.)

*Emma Schwartz and Taylor Brashers
Meigs Middle Magnet
Eighth Grade*

DEFEATING NORMAL

Scene 1

Bailey (we open on Bailey messing about with herself in the mirror. There is a voiceover monologue): All of my 16 years of life I've felt just a little... inadequate. My grades are good, but that's about it. But I've never been anything spectacular, no matter how hard I try. There was the time I hennaed my hair... (Flashback of Bailey taking a towel off her hair. It is bright red. Bailey screams.)...that didn't work too well. I've tried going out for sports, running for school office, everything. And nothing works. But one thing that bugs me the most? No one apart from my parents, has ever really loved me. Since my Dad died when I was 9, which leaves one person on the entire face of planet earth, and one is quite a small number compared to the 600 billion people that live here. That's my mom, Elizabeth Mitchell.

Elizabeth: Stop squinting, Bailey, or your face will get stuck like that.

Bailey: But, Mom, I was seeing how I would look without my glasses. I really want to get contacts or laser surgery, maybe some guy will notice me if I didn't hide behind them?

Elizabeth: I think your glasses give you character. You look cute with them and naked without them.

Bailey: Whatever. Anyway, why are you up here?

Elizabeth: Well, before you started complaining about your glasses, I was planning on telling you that Millie's daughter April moved back in with her from London and she brought her son Aiden.

Bailey: (Inwardly) Aiden? That half-English kid from when I was six? That idiot hit me over the head with a toy truck!

-Flashback-

Young Summer: Ellipsis, come play with me, Bailey, and Aiden!

Young Ellipsis: (pulls off dolls head): No, Summer, I do not want to. I am just fine over here. (picks up another doll and starts to pull on its head too)

Young Summer: Fine then, be a big meanie-head! Bailey, Aiden, do you want to play house with me?

Young Bailey: No, Summer, we're playing cars. Do you want to play with us?

Young Summer: Sure! (moves over to where Young Bailey and Young Aiden are sitting and picks up a car)

(Young Bailey picks up a truck that is sitting next to Young Aiden)

Young Aiden: Hey! I was playing with that, Bailey!

Young Bailey: No you weren't!

Young Aiden: Yes I was!

Young Bailey: No you weren't!

Young Aiden: (picks up the truck he has in front of him) Yes I was! (frustrated he hits Young Bailey over the head with the truck)

-End Flashback-

Bailey: Oh, great mom.

(The sound of a slamming door can be heard from the bedroom)

Summer: Where are you guys?

Bailey: We're up in my room, Summer!

Summer: (Summer enters with two girls trailing behind her. She snaps her fingers.) Leave. (The girls turn around and leave, disappointed.)

Elizabeth: I'm going to make sure that they leave and don't wait in the living room.
(Elizabeth exits)

Bailey: Thank God they left! I can't believe your flunkies followed you into my house. (Sigh)
But it must be so cool to have flunkies.

Summer: (Whips out her cell phone) Do you want a couple?

Bailey: No, not really.

Summer: (Summer shrugs and snaps her phone shut) So, Hey! What's new in Baileyland?

Bailey: Aiden is back in town for good. You remember Aiden?

Summer: That idiot who hit you in the head with a Tonka? I bet he turned into a real loser.
But then in England they're all losers.

Bailey: Don't be prejudiced towards a whole country because we met one bad one.

Summer: The Spice Girls? BBMak? The alcoholic pothead Nazi wannabe prince? I'll give you Prince Williams, he's dead sexy, but he's the only good one to ever come off of that island. But then, even he wears Speedos and shoots cute little Bambi's moms.

Bailey: Don't you watch T.V.? Prince Harry was a Nazi for Halloween, and Prince William only wears Speedos when he plays water polo, that and I shot a deer before when I went hunting with my cousins.

Summer: Why would I watch T.V.? I've got cheerleading and student council and yoga and then positively everyone begs me to come over to their little houses and go to their little parties.

Bailey: Oh, yes, go on and complain about how everyone loves you and everyone wants to be with you and blah blahblah blah blah.

Bailey (voiceover): As you can see, Summer is the total and complete opposite of me. And yet, we're best friends-the flunkies are just for image and hairstyling services.

Summer: (Sigh) Bailey, I always invite you to come with me and...um...what are their names?

Bailey: Sandy and Mandy.

Summer: Ehmagod, their names rhyme! How cute. I'm a genius for thinking of that. Anyway, but you're all "No, I want to carve my own path." (Looks out window.) Who's that hot guy going into Millie's house? He would look so cute with you!

Bailey: (Looks out window) I think that's...OH MY GOD! That's Aiden!

Summer: (Grabs Bailey by the wrist) C'mon! Let's go talk to him! You get dibs on this one, he's all dark and sad-looking like you!

(Bailey sputters in protest, but Summer drags her too quickly for her to respond)

End Scene

Scene 2

Aiden (to movers): OK, that one goes to the third bedroom in the house. Don't drop that one's my football, I mean soccer trophies. (sarcastically) Cheers, good job chaps.

Summer: Aiden? Oh my gosh Bailey is that like really Aiden Crutchfield? I'm Summer, but of course you remember that.

Aiden: No, not really.

Summer: Whatever Aiden, that's not what I came out here for anyway.

(Bailey is staring at Aiden and trying to conjure up some words)

Aiden: What-

Summer: Say hi, Bailey. (Summer jabs Bailey in the side with her elbow)

Bailey: You-You have nice grass.

Aiden” Um thanks, I think.

(Summer looks horrified that any friend of hers has such poor conversational skills)

Summer: Since she’s obviously not going to say it, this is Bailey Mitchell. When you were six; you hit her over the head with a Tonka truck. Now, say you’re sorry.

Aiden: Oh, I’m sorry about that. I was young then, you know, “Girls have cooties” and so on and so forth.

Summer: OK Bailey, he’s apologized, now accept his apology.

Bailey: Uhhhh...yeah, sure, that’s fine.

Aiden: So what does a teenager do in such a small town as Coopersville? London always has something to do but it’s rather impersonal. I prefer getting to know people.

Summer: Well, we go to the Emporium and the Town Square park. And, sometimes we drive over to the mall the next town over. And there are like a million parties every weekend to make up for the lack of interesting places around here. Bailey doesn’t like to go to those though, but maybe you could take her to the one tonight. It’s over at Leland’s house. He’s captain of the soccer team and has his own band.

Aiden: That sounds rather enjoyable. So, Bailey would you like to go with me to the party?

(Bailey is still staring at Aiden incoherently)

Summer: So, what do you think, Bailey?

Bailey: (sputters) (blurts) One time I ate a whole watermelon!

Summer: Please try to think coherent thoughts! Do you want to go or not?

Bailey: (voiceover) What Summer doesn’t know is that I’m thinking complete thoughts, all right. I was totally amazed that someone as nice, sweet, cute, hot, and so much like me could just move in next door. And ask me to go with him to a party. Wait, a minute, he just asked me to go with him to Leland’s party. Maybe I should say something. It should be intelligent, witty, and not contain the word watermelon.

Bailey: Sure, I'd love to.

Bailey: (Voiceover) Oh Yeah! I did it! I said a sentence that actually made sense and contain absolutely no sputtering! I used my intellect, strung some words together and made a sentence!

Aiden: Alright, I have to go in and help Mum unpack. Bailey, I'll come and meet you at 8. Bye for now.

(Ellipsis walks into the frame from across the Mitchell's yard)

Ellipsis: (carrying a pair of garden shears) Summer, Mother says you have to go inside. I am preparing for Leland's party. It should be (evil smile) quite interesting.

Summer: Ellipsis, you're going to the party? That's not like you but...do you need a ride?

Ellipsis: No, I do not, Summer. I have made arrangements.

(Ellipsis exits towards the backyard, harden shears poised)

Summer: I've gotta go make sure there's nothing incriminating in her room that she might be using at the party. Like a dead bat or something. Will you be okay getting ready?

Bailey: I'm not really good at this "party" stuff. Could you possibly come over and help me?

Summer: I gotta go pick out my outfit and check out Ellipsis's room, but I'll come over afterwards. (Summer opens her phone and dials as she walks toward her house) You, Mandy. Don't wear the pink sparkly thing. It's so played out. And don't pile up your hair like you did last time. I mean, ew! What am I gonna do with you. Oh, and don't wear winter white, it does absolutely nothing for your complexion (etc)...

Bailey: (inwardly) Oh my God, what am I gonna do? The only parties I have ever been to...were birthday parties! (Bailey runs into her house)

End Scene

Scene 3

(the screen is blank. After a 2-second period of silence, we hear a doorbell. After the sound, Bailey, who is sitting in her room, snaps her head in the direction of the front door.)

Bailey: (voiceover) That must be the doorbell. What an invention, the doorbell is. It notifies you when you have a visitor. So I guess I should get it? Yes. Ok. I should.

(Bailey exits scene cuts to front door)

Bailey: Who is it?

Aiden: (From other side of the door) It's me, Aiden. Here to pick you up for the party. Remember? Unless you don't want to go and I could just sit and talk to my grandmother all night long.

Bailey: Yeah, I'll save you from listening to Millie stories about cheating blackjack dealers in Vegas, and go to the party with you.

(3 seconds of silence)

Aiden: Are you going to open the door or am I going to have to break it down.

Bailey: Oh, yes. Sorry about that. (Opens door) I got a little distracted. Summer is going to drive us because my car is broken down.

Aiden: That's fine, and I might say you look quite smashing tonight Miss Mitchell.

Bailey: Are you trying to impress me with your classy English upbringing?

Aiden: Is it working?

Bailey: Ummm...when I was little I played with building blocks!

Bailey: (voiceover) Wait, wait! Brain that's not the million dollar answer! Answers that would be accepted are 'Yes,' 'Maybe,' and 'Possibly.' I totally just ruined a chance to show off my wittiness and be flirtatious, and I talked about Building Blocks!

Aiden: Okay, me too.

Bailey: Oh, yeah. Ummm...(tries to change subject) here comes Summer and her flunkies.

Aiden: Flunkies?

(Summer's music plays as the girls, Sandy and Mandy, follow her every move exactly, this is all in slow motion. A big gust of wind blows their hair away from their faces, in other words, this is the part where it gets really cliché.)

Aiden: (amazed) Whoa, where does that music come from?

Bailey: I don't know it just always plays whenever Summer walks in followed by her walking cans of hairspray.

Aiden: How...interesting.

Summer: (snaps)

Sandy: I'm like...uh (thinking really hard)...oh yeah...Sandy.

Mandy: And I'm like Mandy.

CATERPILLAR FINANCIAL SERVICES STUDENT WRITERS SHOWCASE

Summer: (to Aiden) Don't mind these two...they're a little, how should I say this...slow on the uptake.

Aiden: Ah, I understand now.

Summer: Sandy! Mandy! Stop staring off into space like idiots in my presence! (snaps) Let's go to this party!!! (walks toward car, everyone follows)

End Scene

*Tommi Quiaiot and Dale Rainey
Hume-Fogg Academic Magnet
Ninth Grade*

CONVENIENCE

ACT 1

SCENE 1

(Curtains open with two men standing in line at a gas station counter. The man first in line is in his mid sixties and talks with a New York accent. He is talking to the clerk. There is a fold-out sign on the ground at bottom center stage stating "Caution: Wet Floor")

FEMALE CLERK

(While chewing gum.)

That will be, Ummm.

(Using her fingers to add and subtract numbers.)

That'll be twelve fifty, Don.

DON

What'd you call me?

FEMALE CLERK

Well, I called you Don, that's what it says on your cute little jumpsuit there.

DON

Only my friends call me Don. Oh...and this jumpsuit? It ain't cute.

(Don gives her a mean look and then slowly starts to walk off. The man second in line begins to walk up to the register, but the clerk waves him back)

FEMALE CLERK

Hey, Don...I mean, sir. You have to pay.

(Don walks back towards to clerk. He shrugs.)

DON

Look miss, you sure got a lot of guts, tellin' me what to do.

FEMALE CLERK

Well excuse me, sir, but everybody pays for things here.

DON

You're lucky I don't have time to argue with you. How much was it again?

FEMALE CLERK

It was twelve fifty.

(Don jumbles through his wallet and pulls out a twenty- dollar bill.)

DON

Here's a twenty. Make haste.

(The clerk opens the register and starts getting out some money.)

FEMALE CLERK

Woopsy, looks like someone forgot to stock the one-dollar bills.

DON

Yeah. Looks like that someone is you.

FEMALE CLERK

Just a second, Don. I have to go get some more from the back.

(Don shrugs)

DON

Look, I told you I was in a hurry, just give me that five dollar bill, two quarters, and two of those lottery tickets.

(The clerk is about to grab the tickets.)

No, Actually I want one of those two dollar ones.

MAN IN LINE

I just need to pay for some gas, could you hurry this up a bit.

DON

Shut your mouth, we're making a business transaction here.

(The man backs away, turns around and shrugs. The female clerk then takes two lottery tickets and holds them up to Don.)

FEMALE CLERK

Do you want a "Jackpot" or a "Triple Seven"?

DON

Give me the "Triple Seven"

(The clerk hands Don the tickets, and two quarters.)

FEMALE CLERK

You have a nice day sir.

(Don shakes his head and walks towards the door while scratching his lottery ticket. He unknowingly walks around the wet area of the floor. The man standing in line, walks up to the counter.)

MAN IN LINE

Here.

(The man in line puts a drink on the counter in front of the clerk.)

And I put uhhh...Ten bucks on num-

(He is cut off by the sound of Don screaming in delight from offstage. About a second later Don bursts through the door and runs toward the counter. Don is holding the lottery ticket high up in the air, and doesn't notice the wet floor. He slips and falls onto his head.)

(Pause)

FEMALE CLERK

Don?

(Don leans up from laying position)

DON

(Breathing deeply after every few words)

I'm okay...I'm okay.

(He puts his arms behind him and begins to push himself up when his hands slip, and he falls back hitting the ground with a thump. He drops the ticket on the ground next to him, and goes limp.)

FEMALE CLERK

Don?

MAN IN LINE

Oh my God, are you alright?

(Man runs towards Don, kneels down beside him, and starts to shake his shoulders lightly.)

Hey buddy, wake up...

(Continues shaking Don.)

Wake up, man.

(The clerk walks around the counter and crouches down next to them.)

FEMALE CLERK

Oh my goodness. I'm going to be fired.

(Clerk picks up ticket from ground.)

MAN IN LINE

I think he's dead. Call the-

(Clerk screams and the man falls over. Clerks starts jumping up and down while laughing.)

FEMALE CLERK

I'm rich! I'm rich! I'm going to buy something expensive!

(She jogs to the door, and opens it.)

MAN IN LINE

Stop!!

(The man stands up and shrugs)

MAN IN LINE

There is a dead man on the floor! I'm just guessing it was your job to clean up this mess over here?

FEMALE CLERK

(Still holding the door open)

Well...Uhh..Yeah, I guess so.

(Man walks up to the clerk, and closes the door)

MAN IN LINE

Well is someone else in the back, or are you the only one here?

FEMALE CLERK

Just me.

MAN IN LINE

Well are you kind of responsible for this?

(The clerk becomes defensive.)

FEMALE CLERK

I was behind the counter, I didn't touch him! I swear!

MAN IN LINE

Calm down! I know you didn't touch him. But someone died here.

FEMALE CLERK

Well, he should have looked where he was going. It's not my fault.

MAN IN LINE

Indirectly...it is your fault.

FEMALE CLERK

(In a sniveling voice)

Is not.

MAN IN LINE

Well are you just going to take his winning ticket, and leave?

FEMALE CLERK

Why not?

MAN IN LINE

For one, you should have cleaned up this mess, and two, you can't steal things off of dead people.

FEMALE CLERK

Why not?

MAN IN LINE

It's wrong. Not to mention against the law.

FEMALE CLERK

What, are you going to tell someone?

MAN IN LINE

Probably.

FEMALE CLERK

(In a whiny voice.)

Why would you do that?

MAN IN LINE

Well this whole thing is on tape isn't it? I see the security camera.

FEMALE CLERK

I took out the tape.

MAN IN LINE

Already? But you've been here the whole time.

FEMALE CLERK

No, no.

(She sighs. She starts walking towards the register.)

I unplugged them after the whole thing...with the beer.

(The man looks surprised. She leans over and grabs her coat from the chair behind the counter.)

MAN IN LINE

What thing? And what beer?

FEMALE CLERK

Oh nothing. That's all in the past now.

MAN IN LINE

Look, the bottom line is, you can't just walk out of here with that guy's money.

FEMALE CLERK

It's not really money.

MAN IN LINE

It's a ticket that gets you money.

FEMALE CLERK

Not always.

MAN IN LINE

(Getting angrier with every word.)

That's not the point! It's not yours!

FEMALE CLERK

Well, it's not his, 'cause he's dead.

MAN IN LINE

Give me that.

(The man starts grabbing the ticket, and they struggle.)

FEMALE CLERK

Stop it! You're hurting me!

MAN IN LINE

For Christ's sake, woman!

(He lets go of the ticket, and she points in his face.)

FEMALE CLERK

You stay away from me, mister!

(She starts moving towards the door again. The man scratches his chin.)

MAN IN LINE

Sorry, But I can't let you leave now.

FEMALE CLERK

(She opens the door and looks back.)

And just why not?

MAN IN LINE

Because I've witnessed you stealing a lottery ticket from a dead man.

FEMALE CLERK

You're not going to tell anybody are you?

(He sighs.)

MAN IN LINE

I think we've been over this already.

(The clerk shrugs and drops her shoulders in disappointment.)

FEMALE CLERK

What, you want me to split it with you don't you?

MAN IN LINE

No, I don't think you get what I'm saying.

(She takes a step away from the door.)

FEMALE CLERK

No, I don't think you get what I'm saying.

MAN IN LINE

What are you saying?

FEMALE CLERK

This is a winning Triple Seven ticket! Seven hundred and seventy seven thousand dollars!

MAN IN LINE

That belongs to the family of the dead man on the floor.

(She starts walking towards the man.)

FEMALE CLERK

Look here mister! I don't give a-

(She is cut off when she slips over Don's body and falls over him and lands on the ground. She stops moving.)

MAN IN LINE
Ummm...Miss?

(He pauses for a few seconds. Then walks toward the phone. He grabs the receiver and pauses again. He puts the receiver down.)

(Pause.)

(He goes and kneels near the clerk, and grabs the ticket out of her hand. He then heads towards the door, opens it and pauses for a brief second, before opening it and leaving.)

(Pause.)

(The man comes back in and goes behind the register and opens it. He takes all the money, and stuffs it in his pockets. He then heads for the door and opens it again and pauses. He lets go of the door and goes towards Don and the clerk, leans down, and starts rifling through Don's pockets until he finds a wallet. He takes the money, and repeats the process on the clerk. He then opens the door and pauses for a second. He flips the sign on the door over, reading "Closed." He then proceeds through the door and leaves.)

(CURTAIN)

*Robby Johnson
Nashville School of the Arts
Eleventh Grade*

SHORT STORIES

WHEN JOHNNY MET THE BEAR

Once there was a boy named Johnny who had an extremely frightful phobia of nature. He was scared of animals, insects, plants, trees, and anything you can think of that has to do whatsoever with nature. The thing that kept him from going crazy was his purple teddy bear named Ralph that he never let go of. Johnny would always stay inside. Whenever he had to go somewhere he would run to his car as fast as he could, and make sure nothing would jump out and attack him.

His parents tried taking him to a psychiatrist, but the psychiatrist couldn't even get rid of Johnny's dreadful phobia. So one day his parents decided to try their own cure, and told him they were going on a camping trip. Johnny, of course, absolutely despised the idea of camping, but his parents forced him to go. When Johnny's parents decided where they were going to set up camp, they asked Johnny if he wanted to help. He just sat in his car, and didn't say a word. Once his parents were done setting up camp they started up a fire and started to make dinner. When Johnny's parents were done they called out, "Dinner's ready!"

Johnny was so busy being angry that he didn't realize how hungry he was. So he ran outside, grabbed some food, ran to the car, slammed the door shut, and ate in the car. His parents didn't mind any of this because they didn't take Johnny camping so they could eat outside. They took him camping to get rid of his phobia, and the only way to do that was to take him on a walk. After Johnny was done eating his parents told him they were going to take him on a walk. Johnny screamed at the idea of going on a walk so his parents carried him just far enough from the car that he was too scared to run back. Johnny's parents tried everything to make him enjoy the walk but whenever they showed him an animal he would get even more scared. His parents said they were sorry, but Johnny knew they were going to try again tomorrow. To prevent that from happening he decided to run away while his parents were asleep and find new parents. He brought food, clothes, a blanket, a pillow and of course, Ralph, his teddy bear. Johnny hoped new parents wouldn't be too far because he didn't want to be in nature too long.

So he started on his way, but it was so dark walking for about an hour he started to notice things in the bushes, and it was so dark it looked like the trees had hands that were trying to grab him. Johnny was so scared he started to sob. Then he heard a loud thump behind one of the bushes so he started to run. He ran until he noticed a small pond, nice and secluded. So he got out his pillow and blanket and tried to go to sleep. (Eventually he did.) When he woke up the next day he noticed something else was in the bushes with him. All of the sudden a bear jumped out of the bushes. Johnny screamed at the top of his lungs. The bear said, "Shh, it's okay. I'm not going to hurt you."

Johnny screamed again, "You can talk?"

The bear replied, "Of course I can talk, all animals can. This news silenced Johnny, so the bear continued, "What are you doing this deep in the forest?" Johnny explained all that had happened from the moment his parents told him they were going to the woods until now.

The bear laughed and said, "How can you be scared of the forest? It is such a great place. Here, I'll show you around."

Johnny figured that the bear wouldn't hurt him at this point so he followed him. After walking about fifteen minutes the bear showed him the Forest Town. It looked nothing like any forest he had ever seen. The trees looked like buildings, houses and shops. The grass was a road for animal vehicles. All of the sudden the forest resembled his hometown. The bear introduced him to all his animal friends. After a while he started trusting the bear and having fun in the forest.

At night the bear let him sleep snugly in his den and the bear became his best friend. It had been almost five days and Johnny was really starting to miss his parents. But he couldn't tell the bear because he had been so nice and he didn't want to hurt his feelings. He hoped the bear would understand, so he finally told him that he had to go back. The bear understood and promised the next day they would find his parents and go home. The boy said, "If we do find my parents, I want you to have my teddy bear, Ralph, to remember me by."

The next day when he awoke he was by the small familiar pond. He wondered how he had gotten there because he went to sleep in the bear's den. Then he heard his parents calling for him and they asked him where he had gone the night before. Johnny was confused, "Last night? But I've been gone five days."

"But we tucked you in your bed last night."

Johnny didn't understand any of this, so he ran back to where the bear's den used to be. The parents wondered where he was headed, so they followed him. When Johnny got there, the bear's den was nowhere to be found. When he ran over top where the Forest Town had been, it just looked like a regular forest. When his parents caught up with him they asked how could he run around the forest and not be afraid. Johnny explained what happened the last few days. His parents told him it was probably just a dream. Johnny began to sob because he had never met the bear and never made friends with him and the other animals. No matter what his parents said, he wasn't afraid of the forest now, whether any of his adventures with the bear had happened or not. His parents were glad he wasn't scared of nature anymore. So they promised him that if he ever wanted to, they would take him camping again. But at the moment, they had to leave.

Just as they were beginning their drive home, Johnny noticed something moving in the bushes. It was the bear. But Johnny thought, "It couldn't be the bear, it was only a dream." Then he noticed the bear was holding Ralph! The bear began to smile, and Johnny smiled back.

*Canny Hummon
Eakin Elementary
Fourth Grade*

A MOMENT OF FREEDOM

Master opened the gate and the slaves ran out like a mob of raging bats, eager to escape the light. *Freedom at last*, I thought. *Freedom is here*. My blistered feet ran fast and my heart felt freed out of its cage. I ran toward the light. I ran toward the warmth of the sun. I ran toward the direction God wanted his people to come. *Follow God and he will lead you; He will lead you out of pain*. I remembered my mama's words as I let go of her thick chocolate hands as I was sold to my master. I paused to take a breath and kept running. I kept running till I was far away from the plantation. I kept running till the sight of the plantation and the master carrying his thick, bloody whip was no longer visible. I kept running till my heart burst open from happiness and exhaustion. And then I stopped. Silence filled the air and nothing but the steady *thump* from the torn feet of freed slaves was heard. The air smelled sweet of honey and pinecones. Rich food and the smell of freedom lingered in the humid air. Sitting down on a tree stump, a feeling of warmth tingled through my body. A humid breeze washed my heart of pain and relieved it with freedom. Freedom. The words rang through my head. I felt the rough edges on the tree stump and felt the smoothness of the middle, the heart. "Freedom has come," I whispered and held the moment tighter. "Freedom has finally come, Lord." I closed my misty brown eyes and opened them again to a new world. A world of freedom and life. With that, I let go of the moment and let go of my old memories. My new memories with freedom entered my body, and my heart was finally out of its cage.

*Susan Moon
Meigs Magnet Middle School
Fifth Grade*

SERENDIPITY PIE

“Come on Pete! Don’t promote me!” I begged latching onto the old geezer’s sleeve as he tried to gather his things.

“Ms. Isabella, get a hold of yourself! You are getting promoted whether you like it or not. And for goodness sakes, stop calling me ‘Pete,’ its *Saint Peter*.” He unlatched my grip from his clothes and strolled off down the golden streets.

“Gosh!” I whined following close behind. “Why me? It’s always me! Why do I have to do the stinky jobs?”

“You have to realize,” Pete began to stop and handed me a manila folder. “I don’t give you these missions, your Lord does.” He quirked a brow, seeing what I could possibly say in response, and when he noticed the statement had shut me up, he began to walk again. “So if you have any fits about the matter, take it up with him.”

I am Isabella Belicia Rodriguez, worldwide angel at your service. Wait! I’m not just saying that, I really am an angel. I have the whole wing business and everything going on. But somebody, that goes by the name of Saint Matthew, won’t give me a halo. It’s cool, I don’t need a halo to standout. I’m a Hispanic angel, and you don’t see those floating around every day.

“Yeah, b-but you don’t understand! I was getting a hang on being a warrior angel, and now...I’m a guardian?” I questioned disdainfully while opening the envelope.

“You want a halo, don’t you? I know I would after sixteen years,” He slyly said giving me a devilish grin.

I rolled my eyes and peered down at the paper. It was my first mission and I already knew it was going to turn out a travesty. But being the angel I am, I was going to have to do it anyway.

“You have me booked for a Mafia dude!” I yelled tossing my hands up in the air. This old man is gonna make me rip out my hair!

“Exactly, he needs a guardian angel,” Pete calmly responded in a reasoning voice. I wasn’t in a reasoning mood.

“You’re insane! Look,” I positioned the documents right in his face. “His name is Lucky Luciano. What’s lucky about a gangster?”

His pale fingers wrapped around the paper and yanked it out of my grip, only to reveal a very scary glare coming from two very intimidating gray orbs. You know, now that I think about it, with his wrinkly face, he sort of looks like a gargoyle. A gargoyle with sugary hair and a dress, excuse me, a ‘robe.’

“I assure you, Ms. Isabella, I retain all of my sanity,” He quietly retorted stepping into his doorway, fiddling with his keys.

“I’m going to talk to the Big J.S!” I threatened.

“Go ahead,” Dang! He countered attacked.

“You know, my complaints can get you fired,” I snapped stomping my foot on the shiny pavement. And with that came a few glances.

“The chances of him firing me are the same chances of you sitting still,” Pete blew off my protests. “Good day, Ms. Isabella. We’ll talk this matter over at sunset.”

“But ? ”

“I said good day!” With that, he bolted the door. And I thought disciples were supposed to be an angel’s best friend!

I sat on the curb and pouted. Today couldn’t of gone any worse. I have to mess with *humans*, gross! Pete knew he had broken my pride, but that didn’t matter ‘cause he knew it was going to be there for him to break again tomorrow.

Somewhere in my mix of angst and irritation, two little hands grabbed onto my hair, and next thing I know, it’s in one huge, chestnut braid. I turned around with a very angry look, only to be met with an innocent face. She frowned slightly and asked, “Did I mess up.”

I stared for a while. “It’s not nice to touch people you don’t know.” She was on the verge of tears. I gasped and jumped up. “No! Don’t cry! Don’t let my antagonism get to you.”

She stared now, with a look of confusion. I lost her at ‘antagonism.’ I sat back down and put her on my lap. “Now sweetie, what’s the matter? I’m just fuming about this big monster named the... ‘Pete-ster’.”

Her face went pale and naively gasped, “I didn’t know there were monsters in Heaven!”

“Well...technically there aren’t, but something really close,” With that said, I glanced up at Pete’s window. “They prey on gorgeous girls like me and you and try to ruin their fun.”

She clenched my hand with these humongous eyes, and I couldn’t help but laugh a little. “Oh yeah, dearest, I never caught your name.”

“Anastazja” She proudly pronounced with an accent. “I am from Warsaw.”

“Oh...that’s fascinating,” Warsaw? I doubt I have to ask for her reason of death. But I did anyway so I wasn’t being stereotypical.

“Um...” Anastazja went into deep thought. “Gas chambers, if I can remember. Maybe a lynching.”

Her blank eyes locked with mine when I noticed something strange. “So...you’re not a new recruit? You’ve been here sometime?”

She sort of shook her head here and there looking for a reasonable answer I suppose. “My soul was trapped in my body for a while...” She fiddled with her own brown and wavy hair. “I guess...I guess I didn’t appreciate what was around me, so my soul just sort of sat there, sort of like a toy in an old bin.”

She looked around seven years old, and had a cut right over her emerald hued eyes. I’m guessing she went through the Holocaust. Whatever it was, she was pretty banged up. But the Holocaust was a good 200 years ago, you would think the wounds would heal.

Anastazja reached into the pocket of her orange dress and pulled out something wrapped in a handkerchief with a golden emblem embedded into it. “Krowki?”

“Never heard of it,” I reared off the subject. “What do you *mean* you didn’t appreciate what was around you?”

She shrugged and bit into the ‘krowki’. “I came from a very rich family. My uncle started this,” she signaled to the candy in her hand, “and a new flavor of vodka, then we were wealthy. I had many toys. Then, someone threw me in a dark place with a whole bunch of people. After what seemed like a gazillion hours, I’m here. Like mama always said, ‘You’ll never know what you have till it’s gone.’” She grinned up at me. “You’re my friend, I don’t want you losing things you’re blessed for.”

My mouth gaped open. Did she just...did she just teach me something? No, not a little kid! That’s unnatural...and somewhat embarrassing.

Anastazja wiggled out of my lap and ran down the street before turning around and waving, “I’ll talk to you tomorrow, okay?” Then she was off into the setting sun...the setting sun! Look how time flew!

I raced up to Pete’s door and practically broke it down. He opened it hastily and snapped: “What is the matter with you!”

I rudely dragged myself in and slumped into the nearest chair while he served me tea. “Man, Pete, You’ll never believe what happened today.”

“You learned some manners?” He rashly assumed while pouring his own serving of tea.

“No, some...kid, made me feel all...weird inside today. She made me feel...guilty in a way,” I admitted uncomfortably.

“Are you talking about Ana?”

“Yeah, that’s her name.”

“Well, you can learn a lot of things from ‘some kid,’ such as - ”

“Such as what?”

“He ogled at me and I clamped my pie hole. “Such as not interrupting for a start.” Then he began to get serious. “Well...I was feeling sort of bad today, about the way I was pushing you into becoming a guardian angel, and matching you up with a Mafia member — what was I thinking?”

I took a deep breath, barely believing what I was about to say, but it’s nothing too surprising. “No Pete...pardon, Saint Peter. I want to take this job.”

His eyes looked as if they were about to pop out of his head. Ok, So maybe it was something that would render him speechless. “O...k...I suppose. If you...really want that.”

Smiling, I reached over and gave him a solid pat on the back. “Our irreconcilable differences and my monstrosity of an ego can’t get in the way of the needs of the world. I was selfish, humanity needs me. And if I’m acting stingy just like every other mortal, why would anyone want to become an angel? People’s arrogance is what gets in the way of peace.”

Now he was gawking, I mean, looking as if he were about to have a heart attack gawk. I massaged his shoulder and walked back to my seat before saying:

“Don’t get all mushy or it’ll ruin the moment! Where’s my halo? I know you have it locked up in here somewhere!”

*Brianna Bell
M.L. King Academic Magnet
Seventh Grade*

ALLISON'S LOCKET

Allison shivered as the cold wind penetrated her ragged coat. Her chapped face stung from the bite of the wind as she stood, silently gazing longingly at the other girls in her class with their nice, brightly colored coats. Winter had finally come with its cold winds, gray skies, and bare trees. It was also the worst time of the year to walk home from school.

It was the start of winter break, and Allison had just been dismissed from her second grade class. It was freezing outside, and all that Allison had to wear was a threadbare coat that she had owned since she was five. Her father had just lost his job and had no money to buy her a new one. After taking one last glance at the girls' beautiful coats, Allison turned away and started the walk home, but she stopped when she heard snickering behind her.

"Do you see her coat? Isn't it ugly? Who would wear that?" Sandra taunted, while the other girls around her laughed.

"Look at her hair! Doesn't she *ever* brush it?" Angela asked.

Allison drew in a deep breath and continued walking. She had finally realized after many days of being continuously teased by those girls that if she ignored them, they would eventually get bored and leave her alone.

Today was not the case, however, for the girls started following Allison as she walked down the sidewalk.

"Tell your mom to get you a new coat for Christmas" another girl jeered and threw a rock at Allison when she didn't respond. Her eyes welled up with tears, and she broke into a run. Her mother had died four years ago.

After running until she was out of breath, Allison stopped and turned to see if the girls were still behind her. They were not in sight, however, so Allison started walking again.

Suddenly, Allison heard a barking noise and turned her head at the sight of a woman walking four puppies down the sidewalk. One of the puppies was barking and trying to scamper towards her. The others started to follow the puppy.

"I think they like you," the woman said and smiled pleasantly at Allison.

Allison smiled back at her as she looked at the golden puppies. Their fur gleamed as they stared up at her with topaz-colored eyes.

"Would you like to pet them?" the woman asked.

Allison nodded her head and leaned down to pet their soft fur, giggling softly as one of the puppies licked her face.

"My daughter's dog just had puppies. We're trying to find a home for each of them," the woman told Allison.

"They're so cute! I want a puppy for Christmas, but my father said that we can't afford to buy one yet. He said maybe next Christmas," Allison explained.

"Well, I hope that all of your wishes come true this year," the woman told her and took something out of her pocket.

“I hope that you find these puppies a home,” Allison said and turned to go.

“Wait a minute, please? I want you to have something. I think it will bring you a lot of luck.”

Before Allison could protest, the woman brought a necklace out of her pocket and slipped it over Allison’s head. Allison glanced down at the simple golden necklace.

“I couldn’t take—,” she started to say and glanced up to see that the woman was already gone. She glanced down at the locket again and shrugged. She’d give it back the next time she saw the woman, she decided.

Allison started walking again and finally reached the apartment complex where she and her father lived. It was almost dark, and she needed to start dinner.

She opened a can of beans and started to heat them in a pan. Allison sat down on her bed and examined the locket again. After turning it over, she saw engraved on the back the words “the wishes.”

Her father walked into her room and said, “Thanks for warming up dinner, honey. I appreciate it.” He leaned down and kissed her on the cheek.

“You’re welcome, Daddy. You’ll never guess what happened today!” Allison gave him a big hug and told him about the encounter with the puppy lady.

“Maybe you get three wishes when you have the locket,” her father said after reading the back of the locket.

“I know what I want to wish for!” Allison told him.

“If you tell me, then they won’t come true. Why don’t you save your wishes for Christmas Eve?” he asked her.

Allison agreed and they walked into the kitchen to eat their meager supper. When they were finished, Allison’s father said, “Tomorrow, I am going to have to look for a job so you’re going to be home alone. Do not open the door to anybody and do not answer the phone, okay?”

Allison nodded and thought about how she was going to fill a whole day by herself.

“I think it’s time for you to go to bed, okay, Sweetie?” her dad told her, and she went into her room.

Before long, Allison crawled into bed and fell asleep.

The next morning her father left to find a job, and Allison decided to make him something for Christmas. It was the day before Christmas, and Allison hadn’t been able to get him anything.

Allison thought about all of the things her father liked and decided to draw him a picture of her mother. She looked around for a picture of her mom to use as a model while she drew. She found one of her mother smiling as she stood next to a tree. Allison knew that this was her father’s favorite picture of her mother, so she decided to use it.

Allison found some paper and colored pencils and started to draw. Although she was the best artist in her class, she was afraid that her father wouldn’t like it, so she took her time with every stroke of the pencil. By the time she had finished, it was almost noon. She

glanced down at her locket and decided to make her three wishes. The first was that her father would get a job, the second was that she got a new puppy, and the last wish was for a new coat. She rubbed the locket as she said each wish aloud. The locket glowed after she announced her last wish, and it began to grow warmer.

Allison waited a few moments and then decided that maybe the wishes wouldn't come true until Christmas Day. At that moment, her father opened the door and walked into the apartment.

Smiling, he told her that he had found a job. Allison screamed happily and peppered kisses all over his face.

"The locket worked, Daddy! I wished that you would get a job, and it came true!" she exclaimed.

Her father smiled and nodded his head, although Allison knew that he thought it a coincidence.

They ate spaghetti that night, since it was Christmas Eve, and Allison's dad read her *A Christmas Story*. Allison couldn't wait for the next day to arrive, so she went to sleep early.

The next morning, Allison woke up to feel something wet on her cheek. She turned to her side and saw a big, furry face staring back at her. It was a golden puppy, and it was licking her face.

Allison giggles delightedly and pets its soft fur.

"Cute isn't he? I met this sweet woman on the street, and she sold him to me for a very cheap price. What do you want to name him?" her father asked from the doorway.

"I want to name him Sunny because he's as gold as the sun," Allison said and picked up the squirming puppy in her arms.

"I have something else for you, Allison," her father said and brought her into the small living area where a box was lying wrapped on the table. Allison shrieked and ran to the table. After ripping the wrapping paper off and opening the box, Allison saw that it was a fluffy blue coat.

Allison screamed excitedly and ran to her father, who picked her up and spun her around. "I have something for you, too, Daddy," she said and ran into her room. She brought back a paper that was rolled up.

Allison's father unrolled the paper and stared at it. Allison saw his eye grow moist and asked, "Don't you like it? I drew it myself. It's Momma."

Her father nodded his head and said, "It's the best gift anyone has ever given me, Allison. I love it." He picked her up and squeezed her in a tight hug.

"I was hoping you would. I know you miss her."

"I do miss her, but I have a small piece of her here with me," he said.

"Where?" Allison asked.

"In you. You act a lot like her. You have her sweet smile, her laugh, her kindness, her hair, her eyes," he told her.

“I love you, Daddy. Thank you for the coat and for Sunny.”

“You’re welcome, sweetheart. Thank you for the picture. It’s beautiful.”

“You’re welcome, Daddy. I’m going to go outside and wear my new coat. I’ll be right back.”

“Okay. Be careful.”

Allison raced outside and noticed that it had started to snow. She twirled around and began to run around. She decided to search for the mysterious woman who had given her the locket. She wanted to thank her.

She walked around for a long time without any time so she turned around and stared walking back home. She paused when she heard two children begging for food at the corner. There were two little girls, and neither one of them had any sort of coat. Both looked as if they hadn’t eaten in days.

Allison walked over to the girls who were huddled together and said to the youngest one, “I want to give you something.” She took the locket off and placed it around the little girl’s neck.

“It will bring you your heart’s desire, and it will make your Christmas wonderful,” Allison said.

Both girls started to protest, but Allison shook her head and said, “Merry Christmas.” She turned around and walked home, not noticing the woman standing across the street, smiling at her.

*Ashton Dunn
M.L. King Academic Magnet
Tenth Grade*

THE DRIVE TO YOQOIEE

Today, I wake up early. I throw my pants on in the dark, as Levi turns over in his sleep. Outside on the front drive, Marie waits in the pickup, the heat of the exhaust fogging in the cold mountain air. I climb into the truck and sit, huddled over, blowing into my hands to keep from freezing.

We do not speak. Marie is not crying, as I thought she might be, but I can see her hands tremble on the wheel. We are driving to Yoqoiee, where her husband lives now with his mistress in a red stucco house. Marie wants her books, her photographs of her younger years and the baby they had and could not feed, as well as the pamphlets and Bibles she gathered for the children of the church.

It is an hour long ride up the mountains, with a steep drop off covered in the tall thin cacti, eerie and ominous in the blue light of early morning. We pass Juxthuaca. I know we are half way and feel my heartbeat quicken as I think of the man asleep who once broke his skin upon Marie's teeth until he too was bleeding.

Marie is not trembling now. She looks at me, smiles faintly and begins humming the song Antonio Tamayo had written, "Jesus, mi padre, mi amore et mi vida."

We arrive at the house. It is at the top of the mountain, precariously so that it is visible where the garden washed away in the summer storms and where they cemented the bottom of the slope to stop the erosion. Surrounding the house in every direction are the desolately dry mountains of central Mexico—covered only in the O'rgano and the Cuachalalà Tree. Here and there throughout the hills are the thatch roofs of the Triki Indians—occasionally when one comes outside for the well for the ban~ao, the flash of the traditional red dress is visible. Marie turns the car off and we get out, noiselessly closing the car doors. She hesitates at the door, rocking back and forth on her heels. When she looks at me, I am smiling gently. I nod, and though my heart is thumping so hard I can feel it pulsing in my fingertips and nearly down to my toes, I try to appear brave.

She opens the front door and disappears into the blackness of the inside. After a time, she comes outside and hands to me the first box. There are books of religion, books on how to speak English, and many more on how to teach children "la palabra del Dios." As I have always been, I am astounded by her perseverance and her desire for more God, more truth, more knowledge.

Next is a box full of pamphlets. Many are in cartoon form, and details topics like, "The Mercy of God," and "Love Unending" I slide them into the truck bed, praying he will not wake up to find her, creeping thief-like in her former home. Praying she will come out without a fight.

Suddenly, I hear a long stream of Spanish, yelled. I can catch only her name, "Marie," slung together in phrases with "puta," which I know to be the equivalent of bitch or whore. Then I hear Marie's voice, "Eldios le bendice!" It means, God bless you. She runs out of the house, and I am surprised to see she is smiling. I jump in the driver's seat and start the car. She jumps in and slams the door. The wheels fumble for traction in the dirt road and then we are flying, much quicker than when we arrived, down the steep slope. In my rear

view mirror, I can see the man as we drive off; he is in boxers and an undershirt. He is soaked and shaking his fist.

“It is stupid I know, but—to see him so peaceful, there—It is only I wanted to, to, let him see that I am unafraid.” As she talks her hands shake. It is the first time I have not seen her hands confident. When she worships in the make-shift church at the Tamayo’s house, with her eyes closed, she sings the hymns with a smile so broad upon her face and such energy in her hands that all around her are moved also. “I threw water on him and the woman,” she says, laughing. Then she shrugs and tilts her head to the side.

In her lap, Marie holds a shoebox. She smiles, softly, as she takes from the box a fading picture of a small baby in a white gown. She is still smiling as she says, “It was her baptism.” Then she stops, her smile grows faint and she is thinking to herself. I imagine what she would have looked like then - younger, thinner, a sleeping baby in her arms, and her husband behind her. Momentarily, he forgets his anger. He runs his fingers through her black hair and smiles.

She sighs, deeply, and places the picture on the dashboard.

When we get back to Oaxaca we drive back to my apartment. I get out and talk to her through the window, saying, “Won’t you come in” I’ll make you some eggs.” But she shakes her head and says no and that now is the time for her to be alone.

Inside Levi is still in bed. I close the door quietly and slip into bed next to him.

“Where have you been?” he asks, putting his arm tightly around my waist, and I jump because I had hoped he was asleep.

“I went on a drive with Marie.”

“Where to?” He has not let me go.

“Her old house.”

“In Yokoe?” he asks, slowly. I say yes. Has he heard the stories? The morning she finally ran as he chased after her with another woman’s lipstick on his collar and blood from her cheek under his fingernails.

“I love you,” he says.

“I love you,” I say and shiver as Levi kisses my forehead.

It is sad because I know that under better circumstances Marie’s life would have been so different. She would live in her red stucco house with her young husband, and the baby would have lived because there was enough to eat that year and that year the rains came at the right time when the corn was ready, so her breasts filled with milk and her baby grew fat and gurgled songs to her in the morning from her cradle.

Marie would plant flowers in the sliding garden that washes away in the rains but she would smile because they were only flowers after all, not the corn that must sustain her through the dry season. In the winter when she grew cold she might turn on a heater, or perhaps only take the baby and place it next to her in bed and kiss its cheeks in the morning with Abejundio beside her, who would have stayed.

*Rebecca Mooradian
Hume-Fogg Academic Magnet High School
Eleventh Grade*

SNAPSHOT WRITING

THE HOMERUN SHOT!

The sky was blue and the sun was high and hot. The scoreboard read 3 to 3, game tied. The pitcher had been throwing strikes all day. We had barely been able to keep up with our opponents. Swish went the ball as it flew past my teammates. Finally, it was my time to bat. As I came to the plate, the opposing pitcher glared at me knowing that because of my bases loaded triple, I was the reason that we had three runs. I could feel my pulse quicken. Boom, boom, boom went my heart. I dug in and took a deep breath. Swish went the first pitch. "Strike one!" yelled the umpire. As the pitcher wound up for his next pitch, I knew his timing as I had been watching all day. Crack went the bat as I got the entire ball on the bat. The ball was hit deep to left field. It was heading for the fence, deeper and deeper it flew as I headed past first base. "Home run!" yelled the umpire. All of my teammates rushed the field, as I had won the game with my home run. As I turned third base, I looked at the pitcher of the other team. He looked sad and he stared at the ground, but he looked up at the last moment and gave me a big smile as if to say I was the hero...for that one shot I got a home run!

*Will Smotherman
Crieve Hall Elementary
Third Grade*

EARLY IN THE MORNING

The sun lifting into the sky with its bright tendrils marks the start of a new morn. Placing its beams to the earth, it kisses the dried leaves of the forest before attempting to shine upon the wet earth floor. The soft green underbed fills the air with the fresh smell of earth. Everything is still, except for the endlessly marching ants. It is deathly silent. Not far from the rotting lot where the ants are, a white-tail stag slowly lowers his head to graze on some soft green moss. His ears twitching, the proud animal makes sure no one is about. No sudden scents, and there are no sudden sounds. Other animals peep out from their homes. Baby birds cry out for food. Squirrels clamber on the rough bark of the trees, chittering loudly. Skunks begin their smelly forage for food. Early in the morning, the animals of the forest have already begun their day.

*Mackenzie Minnick
John Early Paideia
Sixth Grade*

THE STORY TELLER

As he is describing the picture, he sees a beautiful girl, standing on a rock, holding a golden sword on one hand and a crown with jewels on it in the other. Her eyes as green as the wet newly cut grass that surrounds her, her hair black and shiny flowing in the wind. She is wearing a dress as blue as the sky with little patterns of diamonds at the bottom, her shoes as clear as the water from the lake that surrounds the grass. She is standing in front of a burning castle and the girl looks very suspicious. You can see her reflection in the water and her eyebrows are slanted down so she has an evil look on her face. The moon is full and the stars are shining bright.

*Genesis Rosales
Litton Middle School
Sixth Grade*

THE ODDEST EXPERIENCE OF MY LIFE

I still can't explain it. It's the most mysterious event of all my seventy years. The scary part is that we were both in perfect health, peace of mind, and I was well rested, so it must've really happened.

I was a successful artist and recently married. Everything was the way it should've been. Then, my wife asked me to paint a portrait of her. I, of course, said yes.

At first, everything seemed normal— that changed soon enough though. As my painting started to take shape, my wife started aging with sudden rapidity. It felt like with each stroke, she got another gray hair. As I drew near completion, my painting became uncannily lifelike. After my final stroke, I announced "This portrait is just as alive as you are!" I looked over and she was dead.

Out of fury, I burned the canvas. After it was reduced to ashes, my wife slowly regained animation. After that incident, everything went back to normal, except, that I quit painting and took up sculpting in its stead.

*Luke Dodge
J.T. Moore Middle School
Seventh Grade*

THE STONE CYLINDER

A stone wall, wrapping itself around and around into a cylindrical shape, volume enough to hold nearly one thousand stairs. I looked up, but my eyes only led to the next layer of stone directly above. I was falling behind my sister and mom, but I still heard their footsteps and their echoing sound of sighing and tiredness. I touched the wall, cold and weathered. Splotches of white blended into the gray. I passed an arch-shaped window and peered out through its spear-tipped bars. I glanced quickly, and then walked on.

At last I came to level ground. My mom and sister were venturing around the circled shaped area, and I realized there was still one more level to ascend. I led the way this time. Anticipating the top, I quickly (though concentrating all the while so as not to trip) reached the final and top level. I skipped out onto the flat surface and immediately moved to the rail, barred off just enough to prevent an accident. I observed a quietly streaming river as well as the crowded cobblestone roadways below, perpendicular to another paved road that held just a few Tuesday midday walkers. I was gazing out upon hundreds of not-yet-ripe-cranberry-red roofed houses. Stuffed in between these quaint, motley hued houses and buildings were mighty broccoli-green trees. In the patchwork yard of one stood a genial aged lady with white curly hair, glasses that were square with curved edges, waving to us with a heart-felt smile on her face. We waved back to our Oma and finished our 360-degree, self-led tour.

*Michelle LaVone
M.L. King Academic Magnet
Tenth Grade*

KEPT

Your hands grip the steering wheel at ten-and-two, as you were always instructed. Your knuckles are white from your efforts to keep the wheel within your grasp and under your control. How can you possibly hold on to something so tightly and desperately? Your fingers are encased in obscurity as they curl around the wheel, except when they appear in the intermittent illumination from the sickly yellow street lamps every two seconds.

“Turn left here,” I tell you unnecessarily. I know that this is always how it is: I direct you and you move accordingly, until my guiding, placating voice becomes intrinsic to you and I am obsolete. The biting cold bangs on the metal of the car and fogs the windshield, threatening to cloud and obscure your vision entirely if you don’t turn on the defroster soon. But you don’t. The less you can see in front of you, the better. The night is dark but the sky looks yellow. The darkest yellow I’ve ever seen. A paradox right in front of me. It follows me, surrounds me. A paradox right beside me.

I keep my gaze steadily forward into the fog and freezing air outside. Into the weird pale, night sky. But in my peripheral vision I see your profile. I see you more clearly than ever, when my eyes aren’t focused on you. When my vision snatches you from your belief that you are not being watched. If I could photograph this moment, I would. Your eyes are intent and distant. Pale, not how they should be, like the sky right now. Your face is pallid and boyish in the moonlight. In film, I could capture you. I could keep you still and unmoving, raw and graceful forever. I could keep you. But you flip your blinker on and the ticking tears through this fleeting moment. Your eyes now concentrate on the act of turning. You are not meant to be kept.

*Kiri Mack-Hansen
Hume-Fogg Academic High School
Twelfth Grade*

SONG LYRICS

A PERSON JUST LIKE YOU

- 1st Verse Strollin' down the street, saying "Hi" to everyone he meets
Hobo near the road begging for something to eat
- 2nd Verse Plaided shirt he wears, with no socks, and lots of facial hair. His shoe has
one big hole, that's where he sticks out his big right toe.
- Chorus: A person just like you, only in a different pair of shoes. Some cardboard
and his marker is the way that he gets by. Ya! Cardboard and a marker
is the way that he survives.
- 3rd Verse The children always stare, feeling in their hearts they ought to share.
A penny head side up. You know he sure could use some good luck.
- 4th Verse No pillow for his head. Still he dreams of a warm, cozy, bed.
The nights are hard and long, so he'll pass the time
humming a song.
- Chorus: A person just like you, only in a different pair of shoes. Some cardboard
And his marker is the only way that he gets by. Ya!
Cardboard and a marker is the way that he survives.

*Mariah Mehus
Croft Middle School
Fifth Grade*

SMOOTH MOVE

Verse 1

I woke up this morning, mom's voice ringing in my head
I jumped up, turned on the shower and sneaked back in bed
Smooth Move, Smooth Move
Next thing I knew I hear my dad start yellin' cause the water all turned cold
But by the time he reached me I was already dressed
and scraping my teeth of the mold.

Chorus

You gotta be smooth
You gotta relax
Create a flow, make it up as you go
You gotta be cool
Learn to kick back
Get in the groove, and always use
Smooth Moves

Verse 2

I saw her smile at me in homeroom when I looked her way
I stood by her at lunch, but didn't know what to say
Smooth Move, Smooth Move
So I got my food, thought I'd talk to her, while she was waiting for a chair
But I got so nervous I tripped on the way, and dumped mac-n-cheese in her hair

Bridge

You can't always look your best
And sometimes you'll look like a fool
 But just be cool, and you'll always rule
 When you do your best to use
Smooth Moves

*Sina Daraei
Antioch Middle School
Seventh Grade*

DEVASTATED

Verse One

I was only thirteen
Fiddling with guitar strings,
Trying to please you.
I grew up in a world where
I was always so scared
Of what I might not do

So I did it all

Chorus

And here I am now,
Another in a crowd
Of people feeling unappreciated.
Me, my soul, my music
I thought you'd love me for it
Devastated, Devastated

Verse Two

Daughter of perfection,
Pushed in a direction
Clueless as to what for
What some would call a prodigy
Wasn't up to par for him,
For me.
I could always do more.

So I did it all

Chorus

And here I am now,

Another in a crowd
Of people feeling unappreciated.
Me, my soul, my music,
I thought you'd love me for it;
Devastated, Devastated

Bridge
Oh, word after word,
Screaming to be heard.
Masterpiece after masterpiece
Serving as a weak
Substitute
For love from you...

So here I am now,
Another in a crowd
Of people feeling...
Devastated,
Here I am now
Another in a crowd
Of people feeling unappreciated.
Me, my soul, my music
I thought you'd love me for it,
Devastated, devastated.

*Rebecca Powell
Hume-Fogg Academic High School
Tenth Grade*

BROKEN WORDS

Verse 1

Lonely heart breaking
Love that isn't fake and
I can only watch you
What did she put you through?
Your every breath is hurting
How are you still breathing?
Always think of her smile
She is what keeps your heart beating...
I wish you could see
Beyond your misery

Chorus

Your eyes always seem to be searching
For something you'll never find!
You truly think without a doubt that you're hopeless
Am I the only one that sees the poet inside?
The loneliness with which you sigh
Is tearing the walls I put up down!
Every time you deny yourself, you lie
Her broken words have caused me to die...

(Repeat:

I wish you could see
Beyond your misery...)

Verse 2:

Lonely heart falling
Isn't this world so unfair?
Those who truly deserve
Rewarded with hurt.
Speechless glances at her

You keep falling harder
Why can't you see
Beyond your misery?

Chorus:

Your eyes always seem to be searching
For something you'll never find!
You truly think without a doubt that you're hopeless
Am I the only one that sees the poet inside?
The loneliness with which you sigh
Is turning the walls I put up down!
Every time you deny yourself, you lie
Her broken words have caused me to die...

(Repeat:

Her broken words have caused me to die...)

*Felicia Ryder
Hunter's Lane High School
Tenth Grade*

BROTHER OF MINE

Chorus

Crooked picture on the wall
Leans to the side but it just won't fall
Like a green tree blowin' in the wind,
Bringing memories of my big brother again.
Brotherly love is a beautiful thing.
Like a silent meadow or diamond ring.
Yet it seems like so much more to me.
Just you and me so simple can't you see.
You're everything that a brother could be.
So you be you and I'll be me.

The brother in me knows how to care.
When to be gone and when to be there.
This brother in me brings me through.
So I can be with again the brother in you.
So vast and true like the deep blue sea.
Bringing out the best of the brother in me.

Chorus

Crooked picture on the wall,
Leans to this side but it just won't fall
Like a green tree blowin' in the wind,
Bringing memories of my big brother again.
Brotherly love is a beautiful thing.
Like a silent meadow or diamond ring.
Yet it seems like so much more to me.
Just you and me so simple can't you see.
You're everything that a brother could be.
So you be you and I'll be more.

(talk this verse)

To this day I still follow behind.
The one and only brother I call mine.
So one day when I'm feelin' down
I know who to call to reverse this frown.
Look around you what a beautiful day.
Inside I still wish that he was here to stay.

Chorus

Crooked picture on the wall,
Leans to the side, but it just won't fall.
Like a green tree blowin' in the wind,
Bringing memories of my big brother again.
Brotherly love is a beautiful thing.
Like a silent meadow or a diamond ring.
Yet it seems like so much more to me.
Just you and me so simple can't you see.
You're everything that a brother could be.
So you be you and I'll be me.

*Danny Calway-Fagen
Hume-Fogg Academic High School
Twelfth Grade*

SPORTS WRITING

SPORTSMANSHIP

On January 21, 2006, I became very frustrated with myself for “traveling” in a basketball game. I got a technical foul, and I let my team down. No matter what, if you’re 50 points ahead, or losing by 50 points, keep a nice attitude, and don’t blow it!

Sports, sports, sports. They can be very challenging and hard for you to handle because of all the excitement. NO sport was made for fighting, or getting angry. ALL sports are made for having fun and practicing good sportsmanship. It builds character and helps you cope better when you become an adult. For me, that’s what sports are all about!! Some people, however, think sports are about competition, toughness, and power. But they are not.

What is most important about the sport in which you participate is your team and your relationship with them. It’s how you work together. If you let them down, you let yourself down. I let my teammates down that day. I hope I never do that again because their level of perseverance dropped, too. You need to give your team patience, loyalty, and most importantly, confidence.

What I did that day doesn’t set a very good example for younger kids, and you don’t want them to become dirty basketball players! ALWAYS put your best foot forward and set a great example.

If something disappointing happens to you anywhere, whether it’s on the basketball court or the drive-thru at Wendy’s, don’t let the disappointment or anger get the best of you. Figure out a way to let off steam in a positive way.

Everybody goes through the phase where they could just scream and yell and kick...I don’t know of one person who doesn’t feel these emotions. When you’re getting emotional, just take a deep breath and say to yourself, “everything will be fine...just take it easy.” Get some water, then when you feel ready...GET YOUR HEAD BACK IN THE BALLGAME!!

When you’re in school, at home, or at a friend’s house, there is NO excuse for getting angry and behaving like a two-year-old. NO excuse. Even if you’re the best at making up excuses, there is NO excuse for acting like a little brat, and embarrassing your parents, and most of all yourself!

You owe yourself the dignity to behave in the way you were brought up, especially in front of family, friends, and teammates. Don’t worry about mistakes after they are made. Use them as a learning experience. I know I can’t always keep from getting angry, but I don’t have to act it out. Just play the game, and then move on! It’s all about sportsmanship.

*Katie Solomon
H.G. Hill Middle School
Sixth Grade*

RIDING THE WAVE TO A DREAM

I hear the rushing of the ocean pounding in my ears. I feel my heart beat faster and faster as my arms paddle furiously toward the vicious wave forming in the distance. As I get closer and closer, the size of the wave seems to be increasing, as I get smaller and smaller. The wave is almost shadowing me from the sunlight, but I don't let its monstrous size intimidate me.

I hear the voice of the announcer very slightly, even though I know he's using a megaphone. He bellows out "She has 8 minutes left in her set! And she struggles to find a way to get on the wave and ride it smoothly. She needs to win this set if she wants to make it to the finals, where she would probably go to the 2005 U.S. Open of Surfing at the Huntington Beach Pier, and maybe even turn pro! This is a big day in her possible career in the surfing world, and let's hope all goes well for her. "

As soon as I hear my time, I paddle faster and faster towards the wave, all the while thinking about what would happen if I let the wave get the best of me. If I tank it, my one chance at a real sponsor, and maybe even a future in surfing would probably slide through my fingers, like the sand from the beach.

But I won't let that happen. My mind is set on the wave in front of me. I get as close as I can, and then I turn my board around, getting my feet ready to mount the board. I get my feet onto the smooth surface of the board as quickly as possible so I can start riding the wave before it starts to swell around me.

As I'm riding the wave, I feel myself relax, and my eyelids close. The fresh smell of the ocean spray is filling my lungs; all the while the mist of the water is touching my face so softly. I forget the reason I'm in this competition. I feel myself at peace, and the tension filtering out of me, as I stretch my arm out in front of me to touch the glassy surface of the wave.

Then, suddenly, I don't care if I get a perfect score on my set, or even if I win or lose. At that moment, I realize something very important. It took me a wave that big to make me think of how much I love doing this, and even if I don't make it as a professional surfer, I know that surfing is something I do for myself, and the feeling of it is something no one can ever take away from me.

*Johanna Romero
Antioch Middle School
Eighth Grade*

AIN'T THAT A KICK IN THE TEETH

“We didn’t play paintball all summer!” John complained. “Yeah, it sucks, but at least we have all day today,” I answered. We pulled up to the paintball field and paid for the day’s events. As we were getting our gear together, a group was coming back from a game. The ref said we had five minutes until the next game. We walked down the path to the field and were split into two groups; luckily, John and I were on the same team. “3, 2, 1, GO!” shouted the ref, and with a *bang, bang, bang*, paintballs were suddenly flying past my head. I found myself hiding behind a tree so I wouldn’t get hit. John said, “Run on the count of three, and I’ll give you cover.” I yelled back, “you run; I’ll give *you* cover!” “NO!” he replied. “It was my idea! Just do it! 1, 2, 3, GO!” I started running as hard as I could, but after five steps, I tripped on a rock.

Falling as if in slow motion, I hit the ground and felt a sharp blow to my mouth. I realized it was my CO2 tank that had popped me, and with a sudden jolt, I could tell that two of my teeth were missing. I threw off my mask and started running around like a top spinning out of control. Paintballs were whizzing past my head, and the ref was yelling something I couldn’t understand. I couldn’t tell exactly what he was yelling or if he was even talking to me. It sounded close to “Stop shooting!” but then it was all a blur.

Call me lucky, but there was an oral surgeon playing with us who helped stop the bleeding. I sat in the field’s store for about an hour while people came at random intervals asking if they could help, while John and his mother searched in desperation for my missing teeth. “Hurts like hell, don’t it?” one guy asked. I remember nodding and grunting.

John’s mom drove me to the dentist while frantically trying to reach my parents who were at work. The dentist packed my mouth full of gauze to stop the bleeding. Swollen and sore, I couldn’t eat and was anxious about my mouth. The next day, Dr. Roman did his magic on my broken teeth. That was Friday.

Two days later I started my seventh grade year at a new school, complete with swollen lips and two broken front teeth. I went around hiding my mouth. Friday after school started I had my first visit with the orthodontist who put braces on my teeth; the wires had a false tooth to hold the place of the absent one.

Mouth problems are definitely a drag. Three years later, after metal braces and volumes of pain, my bridgework looks great, I have a big grin, and I only occasionally wonder if the game was worth it.

*Andrew Anglin
M.L. King Academic Magnet High School
Tenth Grade*

WNBA: WOMEN A NOTCH BEHIND IN ATHLETICS

It is easy to be intrigued by the unusual sports that are only broadcasted once every four years when the Olympics come around. The peculiarities of curling, trampoline, synchronized swimming, and ice dancing are fascinating to a generally naïve audience. As it turns out, the same could be said for women's hockey, basketball, soccer, softball, and a slew of other women's sports that are never covered or even mentioned on ESPN and other sports networks—except around Olympic time. Our country is quick to support these teams when they are representing America. They become short-lived heroes basking in short-lived fame, for the second they return home, female athletes receive trivial coverage by the media.

Why is it that the everyday American has no desire to watch women's sports? Why do we love our gold-medal-winning basketball team during the two weeks of the Olympics but fail to acknowledge the WNBA like the NBA? The Women's Sports Foundation's website posts articles that cite such issues as the "the media's under-reporting" and "discrimination" as the causes of poor success in women's athletics. While I do not argue that this feeds the problem, I find that the lack of national interest in women's athletics stems from the fact that the games are simply not as exciting. Sure, it could just be a vicious cycle with poor support turning into poor performance, thus creating further poor support, but as performance is something that the women can control, I look first and foremost to that as the cause of low national interest.

It has now been over thirty years since Title IX was implemented in 1972, which stated that any educational program that receives money from the federal government cannot discriminate on the basis of sex. While women's high school and college athletic opportunities have broadened because of this code, the actual athletic ability of these programs—on average—is still lagging behind. Thus, while there are not many women's athletic opportunities in high school and college, the interest is still with the men's games which tend to be more competitive and more exciting.

Comparing the top twenty-five men's and women's basketball teams in the NCAA, the gap that separates the two regarding overall athleticism and competitiveness is astounding. Somewhere around the fifteenth ranked women's team, the caliber of play drops significantly. At the same time, the men's top twenty-five is so strong—even considering the many players who leave early for the NBA—and it seems that the men's teams there are more well-qualified teams even beyond the top twenty-five. The Vanderbilt women's basketball team is ranked in the top twenty-five and should easily make the NCAA tournament. The Vanderbilt men have had a shaky season and are struggling to even capture an NCAA bid. Nevertheless, the men's games are far more exciting, competitive, aggressive, and fast paced. They may have a worse record than the women, but it goes to show how much greater the talent pool is for men's sports, which helps to create a great divide between the men's and women's teams in college basketball.

In association with Title IX is the question of who should get scholarship money at the college level (men or women) and how much they should get. Fairness and Title IX allocate the same amount of money to either sex. In terms of total revenue, men's sports are much more lucrative for their respective schools when compared to women's sports. In terms of production, the line of reasoning of the schools and the programs that would favor giving the men's teams access to more scholarship money is not a radical or particularly

uneconomical point of view, even though it may cross the line of “fairness.” Title IX requires these schools to support women’s athletic programs that may gain little support from any other outlet. It is rather “if you build it they will come” philosophy. This would not be a bad thing if there was an obvious improvement in the excitement and competitiveness of women’s athletics, but as it is it has been built and no one’s coming.

For the moment, Americans can only handle small dosages of women’s sports (particularly team sports) when they are wrapped up in the excitement and prestige of Olympic competition. Even then, there is more interest in whether or not the men’s hockey team wins versus whether or not the women’s team does. However, as I see it, female athletes should be thankful for whatever national coverage they can get, and while they have it, they need to create as much of a fan base as they possibly can. In the end, no Title IX is going to change the way society views women, women athletes, or women’s athletics. Only the athletes themselves have the power to make the viewing public want to watch them. So for the time being, I am going to sit back, relax, and get my fill of Olympic women’s ice hockey before it disappears for another four years.

*Amy Kessler
Martin Luther King, Jr. Magnet
Twelfth Grade*