Anthology
Of Winning Writing

2014

By Oklahoma Students and Teachers
Anthology of Winning Writing 2014
About the Contest

Writings included herein are winning pieces in the 2014 Writing Contest for Oklahoma Students and Teachers, sponsored by the Oklahoma Writing Project. Students and teachers from across the state are encouraged to enter their writings in the annual competition. Judges select the top ten percent in each category as winners. This year there were 154 entries from twenty teachers. This anthology was printed at no cost to the citizens of Oklahoma.
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From the Judge

To each of you:

Reading the heartfelt and skillful work of Oklahoma students and teachers this spring has been a joy. Has been humbling. And an education. Like a mind blend affirming the worth and the uniqueness of each of us in the moment in the flow of the whole of human experience. Own all that you are. You are precious and make a difference just by being here in the now. Life would not be the same without you. Be true to your inner core. Study yourself as you write and learn, for to learn about you is to learn about everyone ever. Be as adventurous and bold as you were when you entered this contest. And know that I found talent in each piece that I read. Grow it. And yes, I wonder too, who am I to judge? I do not know what good I have done in my life to warrant judging your work, but I am glad of it.

Thank you,

Mike Angelotti

Read one of Dr. Angelotti’s poems and his biography on pages 55-56.
The Day We Put National Geographic Covers on Our Walls

Me and you, you and I. Us.
We were unconquerable in our youth, from eleven to seventeen
We could only dream under the rich Oklahoma sky
Sisters till death do us apart.
You would look at me as you were about
to delve into the rich deep blues
I would whisper, don’t you regret it, it isn’t worth it
And you would dive, head first. The water would escalate
into ripples as you submerged
Under the deep blues. I would wait, heart beating, skin glistening,
eyes squinted.
Where were you, I worried, fifteen seconds had transfixed
into a subliminal abyss.
Your silhouette shot back through the surface, you were reborn.
I stared at you.
To state you were my concern was an underestimation,
I couldn’t understand
The meaning of growth, personhood, existence, without you.
But you were all right, I was all right, we were both all right.
I carried my arm around you, shivered next to you,
hugged you until our body heats were identical.
We would go back to Auntie’s, sit under the cherry tree,
and drink our soda pops
Till our tongues turned a faintish resilient blue, just like the river
where I thought I lost you.
We talked about men, their complexities, and we pondered the cosmos
and cried.
Aunty came back out, the magazines, stacked and stacked on her hands. Where was she?
She paused and tipped over like a bubbling tea pot ready to burst, and the magazines scattered.
The vibrant photographs flashed before me. I was utterly confused.
National Geographics were astray before us, the deepest of heavens had answered to us--
Russia, China, Healing the Heart, Marco Polo, Recycling, The Great Owl--
Our inquiries had yet to be answered. We lay head to head, touched and felt the Mesmerizing and cold photographs which emboldened the definition “human”
Our sundresses pulled up, grazing our thighs, and the weeded grass surrounded us.
The sun beat against our heads, beckoning for us to keep reading and feeling
And being astonished at all the perspectives vividly beckoning our curiosity.
Ab! These! you exclaimed into my throbbing ear,
These will go up on the walls!

Adiba Khan, Grade 12
Norman North High School
Patricia McDaniels, Teacher
Lingering Radiance

The lingering radiance
from an evanescent dream--
like a string
tied 'round a forgetful finger--
basks briefly,
blissfully beaming,
beckoning bold,
begins to blend bare beliefs.
Zealous thoughts hover in the air,
bees buzzing beside blossoming flowers.
Ideas burst forth;
melodious,
a sparrow’s song.
All this zest’ from a single
glimpse
of the finale
from an extraordinary dream.
Imagine living
in a world
without dreams,
an achromatic world.
A wretched world.

Mercy Bhakta, Grade 10
Shattuck High School
Rebecca Owen, Teacher
Infantryman

He is not afraid.

Cool as ever, he sits in the
Blood-stained dirt –
Red poppies in brown ground
And broken weapons piled in the
Trench.

Rifle lying lazily across his chest,
He surveys the wreckage.
Cigarette smoke seeps through his nostrils
While gun smoke curls in the air.
The sun no longer shines.

He is not afraid.

His backpack is heavy,
But his shoulders are heavier
Because the world rests on them.
Somewhere across the pond his wife
And son
And little girl
Wait for justice to be served.
By him.
And his brothers.

He is not afraid.

In the distance,
There is a commander telling them
To move, move, move.
Black boots pound,
Giving birth to footprints
In the mud.
Slowly, he rises,
Smirking at the sky.

He is not afraid.
Shots fire.
His ears sing separate songs.
The atmosphere ignites.
Shells descend like rain.
Barbed wire decorates the terrain
Like deadly
Christmas
Tinsel,
And men drop
Like dominoes
Touched by the
Hand
of
God.

He is not afraid.

Calmly, he takes aim,
Letting the bullets fly.
They are the only things flying
Because birds can sense
Danger
Almost as well as he.

Something yellow curls
In no man’s land.
Heaving the sigh of an exasperated parent,
He retrieves his gas mask.
Vaguely, he wonders how ridiculous
He must look.
Does he resemble a sea monster?
A saucer-eyed pipe-dog?
Laughter threatens to spill from his lungs.

He is not afraid.
It’s business as usual.

Annie Witter, Grade 12
Norman North High School
Kathy Woods, Teacher
Fading Smiles

What happened to the baby girl,
Crawling all around,
Couldn’t make it two minutes,
If she didn’t make a sound?

Why does she sit alone in class,
Her music turned up loud?
Why does she always feel alone
surrounded by a crowd?

What happened to that little girl,
With a real smile on her face,
Running through the church
In a dress covered in lace?

When will she drop that smile,
Give up her greatest lie?
Finally let down her guard,
Be honest, and just cry?

Where is the girl that couldn’t sleep
Without a kiss goodnight,
Who always begged for someone
To lift her up and hold her tight?

What happened to her that she’d shudder
At a touch so light?
What made her think she needs to hide,
That she’ll never be all right?

Please help me find that girl
Who needed band aids for a scratch.
That innocent child that was terrified
To even light a match.
Who made this monster,
With scars littering her wrists and her thighs?
Who stole the light that shone so bright
In that little girl’s eyes?

Why did you take that little girl
Who really knew to smile?
I’m begging you, please give her back,
Just for a little while!

Just last night that little girl
Slipped a bit too deep.
And now the “happy” girl is lost
To the eternal sleep.

So tell me now, who did this?
Who brought her to this end?
Why didn’t you help?
You claimed to be her friend.

Or perhaps, she never knew
Just who she could trust.
She did everything for you,
As she knew a true friend must.

If there’s one thing that she knew,
It’s that life is never fair.
Maybe that’s why she was all alone
As she whispered “Goodbye,” to the air.

Shilo Risenhoover, Grade 10
Hydro-Eakly High School
Alayna Leppke, Teacher
Butterflies

A little girl, perhaps six or seven, would wait in her mother’s car in a remote parking lot for hours after school while she gambled away their savings and keepsakes at a nearby casino. Six or seven years old that night when she saw a man get shot because he had not a single dollar of payment for “his fellow men.” Right there in the lot. Right there in front of her. She saw it all through the windshield, and she will never be able to erase the images which were imprinted in her mind. She was six or seven years old when she dipped her fingers into the ashtray next to the ignition and wiped the gray dust on her knees. The man was kicked aside, dragged behind a dumpster to the shadows behind the neon signs. And her mother returned, some hours later, penniless and drunk. Clinging to the handle on the car door for dear life, she thought about Church.

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Sweet is the sound of my newborn wings as I stretch them out to dry. It is the first day of three. My familiar chrysalis clings to a vibrant leaf among the thousands of leaves covering the branches of a tall oak tree in the center of a green wood. Newborn butterflies flutter about through their childhood hours, listening to the soothing words of swaying foliage capable of lilting even itself to sleep like the tired way of the red sun. It is newly spring. The last of winter's ice has finally melted, and I have emerged into the western hemisphere of a planet the spirits of the photosynthesized call Earth, or The Between.

The Between is a fateful, vast expanse where humanity is put to the test. It is we butterflies who mend the scorched, restless Between so it looks at peace, at least for its funeral—the time it takes for its inner core to cease upon the quiet death of our sun. Butterflies. Creatures who will not live more than up to a few days, and, in those few days, allow the trees, flowers, cacti, and many other plants breathe into us the wisdom of ages and memories from early millennia at the kind mercy of a yellow sun. We, during our short, innocent lives, must soak in that wisdom and spirituality and keep it alive in thought. This is, at least, what is taught to be our purpose.
The plants speak, and the butterfly understands. I understand. Every detail of the past, present, and foreseeable future, the butterfly understands. I understand. The breeze blows, momentarily flattening my golden wings against the Oak’s wrinkled skin. It smells of water. I cling to the bark.

Water, the Oak starts, is a source of nutrients for all living things. Without it, nearly all life on Earth would be depleted. Remember this smell for as long as you live and follow it. I try to fly off the Oak towards the river that runs through the wood, to follow the scent of water as he instructed. With my thin legs, I push off while stretching my wings outward to catch the rushing air, but moving toward the wind, against the current, I fall clumsily to the tall grass below.

Grass is a plant. Plants speak to me in my mind. The grass shouts to me words of encouragement as I toss and turn and curl and scramble among the encroaching broad green blades, attempting to regain an upright balance so I can attempt again to fly away.

The grass tells of times when butterflies fall from neighborhood trees and humans mow them over carelessly as they groom their garnished lawns. Humans can live up to just over a hundred years, yet they take pride in silly things like neighborhoods and lawns. And they take for granted how lucky they are. Lucky to be assigned the duty of living, powering the ethereal device that is the Universe. Lucky to be alive—and happy, if they choose to be.

They are usually greedy. Greed has killed Luck and every language in the world. Humans speak, but they do not listen. That is why every language is dead. The astounding eclectic enchantment and passion of language could still be heard by all if such greed had never so plagued the planet. I will hear enchantment and passion for a short time until I die, until I become an adult. Above, I hear the Oak.

From this point on, you will go where the flow of the sweet atmosphere takes you with the guidance of the wind that has touched me and your purposefully mandated wings. I am the Oak, your guardian and miracle, your beacon of stability which has just introduced you to your intricate life in this slow-spinning world. Your chrysalis, which I held for weeks, tenderly, on my most comfortable branch to keep you safe and warm, shall fall to the ground among others and decompose, its remains sinking to my roots, replenishing the soil with its exuberance of life and the weight of all that was happening throughout the Universe at the time of its falling. So go forth now, to the crumbling land of The Between, and when you are in
need of my voice, call on me in your buzzing little mind, and I shall thus heed. Here, in your thoughts, with you.

And so, I go forth, learning things from the singing plants along the way. Any time I feel a breeze now, I spread my wings and let it take me, take me, take me. First, through the great pavilion of the wood, where I meet other butterflies, like me, who are also putting all their faith in the breeze. One has a wing pattern I know I will never forget. Indiscernible, yet familiar images of a quilt, blue like the egg of a robin, flood into my mind at the sight of this pattern. The butterfly to whom it belongs is very shy and will not be communicating telepathically with me at this time. I communicate telepathically to her anyway that I am not offended by her shyness. The awkwardness of this inappropriate interaction subsides when a nearby Wildflower, close to the riverbank, tells both of us in our minds that a “robin” is a type of bird. A bird is a feathered animal capable of flying for sustained periods of time to arrive at destinations relatively quickly. Robins can live up to three years and lay colorful eggs.

“Birds sing to the humans,” the Wildflower proclaimed, internal, with an air of pride in her wisdom unmatched by any other existing plant. “And, I’ll have you two know, domestic garden flowers that are grown by humans are much snootier than us wildflowers. They undeniably possess the touch of greed that seeped into their home soil from the human hands that planted them there.”

She spoke to me. This is something that, not long ago, I had thought only the wise Oak could do. I gaze at the Wildflower, dancing about her petals and wondering for one costly hour of my life. Remember, I have a very short lifespan. During this time I imagine she has a face. Blue and pink. Eyes and lips. Do I have a face? Something so lovely in nature must have a face, I think to myself. Then, very suddenly, out of the infinite blue expansiveness, after my quite considerably absurd thought, the Wildflower responds to my subconscious compliment. She enters my mind again.

“Drink my nectar. Suckle sugarwater at its natural source, and rejuvenate the Earth’s surface with the pollen that sticks to your wings and your legs. Take it with you into The Between, just past the tree line at the eastern edge of this wood. You will find yourself headed eastward toward a place the humans call Las Vegas, or, ‘The Meadows.’ Follow the dividing line of black tar they call a road until you see the large structures they call hotels and casinos. If you lose sight of the road, allow the breeze to take you once again with the flow of predestiny. This journey is intended for you.”
Intended for me.

I call on the Oak. He tells my conscience, with a knowing laugh, to do what seems like the right thing to do, as if it does not matter, like letting the breeze take you when you don’t know which way to go. So, based on an instinctual feeling, I drink the Wildflower’s nectar. It is as if I am gaining some form of righteousness from this leap of faith, entrusting the Wildflower as I had the Oak. Perhaps the Oak and the Wildflower are connected somehow; perhaps they are linked in spirit.

As the Wildflower predicted I would, when I left the wood to follow the broken, desolate road to Las Vegas, I eventually lost sight of it due to fatigue. It is a taxing thing to navigate through the darkness. You see, butterflies rarely rest; there is simply not enough time. So, I float through the night, dusting the Wildflower’s pollen over the landscape as I go with the breeze, until the dawn breaks and before me lies the hollow abandoned city of Las Vegas, gleaming blood red in the morning sunlight. It is the second day of three.

As my surroundings rouse from the shadows, I see that I am hovering above a sort of hill on which stands a single cactus and a labyrinth of large red rocks. Not the rich red pigment of the sunrise. Not its brushstrokes on the washed-out paint that once uplifted the thousands of casinos, clubs, hotels, and other grotesque buildings below me. But an earthy, desert red. I strain to hear the silent cactus at first, but a new voice arrives and I must leave in a hurry. I feel its vibrations, its fullness, indicating it is audible. A true voice. I fly toward it with help from the breeze, toward the imagined face of the Wildflower, blue eyes and pink lips, toward the promise of the Oak, toward the end of my second day of three.

After several hours of searching for miles under the sun, I come upon a figure sitting alone. She is singing language—astounding, eclectic, enchanting, and passionate—though I cannot determine the words. I float there for a time. I begin to feel lighter and lighter still until I am weightless, and I hear her at last. I can now see her face. It is the face I pictured of the Wildflower. It is also mine. Years had passed and that girl had become a young woman of reality. It is the third day of three.

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She sits now on a bed of soft earth with her back to the wind, away from an artificial life. Her hair flutters about her like golden wings, and she feels as if she is about to fly away. Her mind wanders to memories of oak trees that whispered, to butterflies and wildflowers,
to the comfort of the sewn blue quilt from her grandmother beneath her, to more beautiful things.

She stretches her arms out in front of her. She strokes the stitching with her fingertips. Forth and back, like a runaway pendulum, out and in, too, farther in and out each time like rolling tides. Her movements become careful as her hand reaches the frayed edges of the quilt and she touches the fragile, transparent wings of a ghost who cannot speak to her. She reaches into the canvas bag which she wears across her chest and feels the pill bottle embrace her palm like the handle of a loaded gun. Then, she pops the bottle open and swallows the capsules dry, clinging to the quiet frayed wings for dear peace.

When she closes her eyes, she sees the faces of those she has shared her life with. Eyes after eyes after eyes, always changing color and shape with each staggered breath like the twirling dimensions seen through kaleidoscopes until her vision dims to blackness, and her final breath leaves her, taking flight with the wind she had so come to ignore.

Ashley Pfannenstiel, Grade 12
Norman North High School
Kathy Woods, Teacher
High School Short Story

A Couple's Adventure

His dark eyebrows, shaggy red hair, and hazel eyes glistened from the early morning sun. The 25-year-old man relaxed in his big net stretched out between four trees. His name was Retep Sille. He lived in the Washington woods known as the Hyda’s. He had built himself a paradise that no one could possibly imagine having. His cabin built into the trees overlooked a huge mountain range. He could also see a little house that had been built on the other side of a wide river. The house belonged to a woman he had known all his life. Her name was Areis Nedlo. She was a soft-spoken, quiet, natural girl that reminded him of himself.

Retep slowly arose from his relaxation. He climbed down the wooden ladder, landing on the crunch of freshly fallen fall leaves. Retep got on his bike and rode down the long winding dirt road to his paradise. He arrived at his huge house he had built himself and opened the oversized, painted door. Retep slowly walked through the kitchen making very little noise as his big feet strutted across the concrete floor. He entered his bedroom and went over to look through the window to see the sun high in the sky, just before noon he determined. Retep had to be at work by noon, so he decided to start getting ready.

He hurried to put his clothes on, rushed out the door, hopped on his bike, and headed down the long drive to Areis’ house. He and Areis owned a camping supply store together just down the road. Retep arrived at Areis' house just in time to head to work. Retep and Areis had started their business just about a month ago when they decided to move to Washington to have the life they wanted. They were trying hard to have their store ready for its grand opening in a few weeks.

They arrived to the store. "The outside of our store looks kind of plain don't you think, Retep?" asked Areis.

"Well I think it looks fine, but we could paint it if you want," said Retep.

This is when it was determined that it would be redone. Areis was incredibly artsy; after all, she had designed the interior, so painting the outside would not be too challenging. As the project began, Retep
could not help but think about how to do it, how to propose. He had been planning on asking the question for months, but how? They finished up the second side of the building and decided to take a break and go for a hike.

"Hey what do you think about buying some kayaks and boats for people to rent from the store to use at Thompson Lake down the road?" said Retep.

“Yes, that sounds like a good idea. I can look up and try to find the best deals for them online later tonight,” said Areis.

They had almost reached the turnaround point when they heard the noise. They looked back to see they were surrounded by a pack of wolves. Growling and whining, the wolves came closer and closer. Trying to keep calm, Retep pulled out the dagger he always carried with him. All of a sudden, the wolves started their attack, one after another. Retep stabbed the first one and then the second. Terrified, he yelled out telling Areis to run. Continuing to fight them off, he felt the salt from his tears burning his wounds.

He turned around quickly to see if Areis was okay. He saw she was lying down, swinging punches at a wolf on top of her. He rushed over to her, still trying to fight off the last two and stabbed the wolf attacking Areis. Shaking, he leaned over and cradled Areis. “Hey you’re going to be okay. I am just going to bring you home and we can call a doctor. You’re going to be all right.”

He looked down at her terrified and saw she was bleeding from a bite on her side. Retep set her down, ripped his shirt off, and tied it around the gushing wound.

As he stumbled through the woods, he became more and more eager to reach his cabin. He took Areis inside and tried to keep her calm, telling her it would be okay. He rushed over to the landline and dialed his best friend, a doctor that lived just down the road. The phone rang once, then twice. Finally on the third ring, his friend picked up. “Hello?”

Stuttering, Retep replied, "Aries, she's hurt can you come over right away?"

After a few minutes of praying, waiting and comforting Areis, the doorbell rang. Retep ran over to the door, letting in Dr. Mark, and led him to the couch where Areis was lying. He cleaned her wound and stitched it up, disregarding her crucial pain so he could get the job done more quickly. Finally, he was done. He came over to Retep in the kitchen to tell him the uplifting news. Retep fell to the ground yelling, “Praise the Lord, Praise the Lord!”
As Retep arose and wiped his shaggy mop out of his eyes, the doctor told him what he needed to do, writing down a list of daily instructions for the healing process.

A few days went by, and Retep and Areis slowly began to recover from the incident. Finally, Retep was able to return to the store to start working on it again while Areis rested in order to heal. Retep consistently worked on the store, trying to meet the opening date coming up in only three days now. The store was completed just in time for the grand opening. Retep finished stocking the last shelf at 2 a.m. on opening day. Meanwhile, Areis thought all this time he was just running errands, getting her medicine, and going to the church to pray. Areis’ healing made it promising that she would be present opening day.

The morning of opening day, Retep led Areis out the door as he covered her eyes with a bandana and helped her into the jeep. Curious, Areis could not help but ask questions: “What are we doing? Where are we going? What is going on?”

Retep just replied, “You’ll see,” as he smiled so big that his dimples showed.

They pulled up to the store, and Retep hopped out of the ancient pile of metal to escort Areis to the sidewalk in front of the store. He took off her bandana and told her to keep her eyes closed. He held her hand, bent down on one knee, pulled out a diamond ring and told her, “Open your eyes.”

She opened her eyes, beginning to cry, and quickly held out her left hand. He put the ring on her long, delicate finger. At that same moment, she realized where she was and that the shop was painted just how she had imagined with the name, “A Couple’s Adventure.”

Sierra Holden, Grade 10
Fletcher High School
Jenny Beathard, Teacher
The Price of Silence

The bus was still here, the same way it’s always been. It never occurred to anyone to destroy it, it’s just a bus they said, but they don’t know. They could never know exactly what happened on this bus. I walked up to the driver’s seat, stepping over candy wrappers and wads of gum. Somebody’s watch was on one of the seats. I picked it up carefully. It was someone’s precious memory after all, and all that was left of them. The watch was broken and the numbers behind the grimy surface were frozen at 3:00, permanently looping the same day, over and over, in the winter of 1999.

The memories rushed at me, and I stumbled back, dropping the watch as though it had burned me, deaf to the sound of the glass face cracking as it hit the ground. Hands flew to my head, trying to fend off an incoming headache as images flashed by too fast for me to comprehend, until suddenly, it stopped. I found myself standing once again, in the same bus, and yet it was entirely different. The seats were new, the leather coating not yet cracked, the aisles clean, and the floor devoid of the miscellaneous objects common to bus floors. And there were kids…just elementary school kids. They were sitting and chatting with friends, reading or just looking out the window. I saw the kid whose watch I had dropped, leaning over the aisle where I had just been standing. They couldn’t see me, as I didn’t exist here, and yet, I did. I existed in the very last seat of the bus, next to the window, and sometimes in the little crawl space behind it so I could wave at people driving behind us, and see my peers through their reflections in the glass. It’s where I was right at that moment and what had ultimately saved me—and doomed me.

I closed my eyes, not wanting to relive the memories yet unable to escape the horror to come. I had to watch it through, through to the end. Through the bus stopping and the doors being wrestled open, through the hulking shadow of a man running down the aisle and the children falling one by one, like green leaves on trees felled by a cruel wind before their time. I stood there and watched, watched as they dropped, clothes fluttering behind them like wings.

And then I saw myself, frozen in place as the bullets ricocheted, and I was disgusted, disgusted at my passive silence, despite my knowing, despite being the only one to know, through some primal instinct, that this carnage was imminent. I know now that that was the
real reason, the real reason I sat in the back, isolated, ignored, safe. A coward.

Standing there, a being without existence in the surrounding chaos, I remembered all the times the bus had passed this particular spot that year. All the times I had seen that man, standing on his porch away from his rotting lawn with the tin watering can perched precariously on the steps beside him. It swayed with every step he took, yet it never fell, and I would sit and wonder if it ever would, as I watched the man watch us.

He would stand there and peer at the bus, his expression unreadable, making sure to be there every day, even though he himself had no kids on our bus. Raising his hand, he would mime shooting the bus with his finger whenever we stopped at his neighborhood. I could see his concentration and his mouth form the popping sounds as he did it, as though he were one of the kids on the bus playing cops and robbers. All his neighbors ignored him, used to his antics, but it amused me, made me laugh every time. There was really nothing I enjoyed and looked forward to more than watching this crazy man try to shoot us down. Never did occur to me, not once, that I should tell someone about it, and never did I see him as a threat, despite the small nagging thought at the back of my mind that I would quickly quash down before it could fester.

It wasn’t until a few months later, however, that I came to regret my decision. It was December and only a few days until winter break. An excitement buzzed through the air that not even the frigidity of Jack Frost could subdue. We’d stopped at the end of the neighborhood, and just like always, I turned to watch the man. Except that day, something was off, something had changed, and a chill went through me, much colder than anything winter could produce as I saw the hulking beast the man had become as he pulled something out of his jacket pocket. Its cold silver exterior gleamed meanly at me as he held it up, and suddenly the action was no longer funny. Yet still I remained silent, I’d said nothing, because what was there to say? This was the man, the harmless man I’d been watching for so long. This was the strange creature who was a novel and continuous source of amusement, who couldn’t hit the broad side of a barn, I was sure. He was no threat. How could he be? To even think that something like that would happen…things like that only ever happened on TV. Late night horror stories that made parents get up and check on their kids, hand over heart in relief to find them safely asleep in their beds. They didn’t happen in real life. They didn’t happen to people like me…
And so I’d sat there, quietly continuing my vigil, trying to ignore a creeping sense of foreboding rising up within me, watching with disbelief, illusion clouding my vision as he pulled the trigger, and behind him the tin watering can fell to the ground in a deafening crash: a prelude to the chaos that would follow.

I awoke then, gasping for air as though my memories had drowned me, and then, looking around, I was me again, and the bus was old again, and I saw that somehow in my delusions I had ended up right where I had cowered all those years ago. On the seat there was a newspaper, folded over and faded, but I could still make out the headline, “Miracle Boy Survives Shooting,” and revulsion tore through me, shaking me down to the core. I didn’t bother reading the rest, because this was a story I knew, an ending that had been spoiled early on by the cruel reality of life that allowed the random squiggles of ink to have meaning.

The Miracle Boy survived the shooting, continuing a life that had cheated death at the expense of others. A life that trudged on in the years to come, dragging behind it an unwilling shell of a mind, postmarked with labels of shock and depression, devoid of feelings and wishing its own existence to be snuffed out like it should have been.

The boy grew up, went to law school, became a defense attorney, fighting for others, all futile attempts to rid himself of the parasite called guilt that had latched onto him early and embedded itself in the essence that was him. The essence that is me.

But nothing had worked, and so amongst the wails for the dearly departed, the transcending deceased, I walked on, blind to everything but that which had made me who I am, and stamped me as a coward in the society of the selfless until one day, I could walk no more. So I came back, back to the dump, back to the bus, back to everything that had haunted me and chained me to this place. And once again, I came face to face with the horror that persisted in the empty air and silence, a horror that transcended reality and branded itself on your very soul where it continued to exist until the day you ceased, too.

As I stood there in the back of the bus, hand in my pocket, looking out at the reflection in the window of the emptiness behind me, I thought of that man—the man who’d shot himself in the end, and I thought of those kids—those kids who’d been my friends. I thought of them and of myself, of how quickly the taste of life could turn bitter, of how they’d left me behind, alone in the dust of their ashes, and something shifted, a faint flutter in the reflection before me,
but I didn’t dare move. And then I saw it again, in the reflection, as a small pudgy hand reached out from behind one of the seats and gently lifted the watch I had dropped. I watched until one by one, small faces peeked out at me from every seat, and in that reflection I saw a man standing behind me, looming over the children, alone in the aisle. He was nothing more than a black figure, so familiar to me, as though I saw him every day, and yet a stranger. He walked down to the back, down towards me until he stood right where I stood, the shadow of his form merging easily with mine. I saw in that reflection that odd mixture of a man and a shadow raise his hand and something gleamed in the night as he pointed it at me. I guess they hadn’t left me behind after all.

Sara Ishaq, Grade 12
Norman North High School
Kathy Woods, Teacher
Racial Slurs and Growing Up

Pearly blue skies stuffed with voluminous snowy puffs. A warm wind rolled in the air. Chills ran down my back as the sandy grass shook before my eyes. It was a perfect afternoon. I was sitting on the miniature slide in the playground, the cold metal one with a stubby little slide that was never much fun. Other children romped and hollered in the fields, playing tag or football, smothering themselves in grass stains and laughter. But I liked to sit at the top and watch the clouds, inhaling the barely there scent of red pine from the wood chips below, trying to catch the cloud’s still movements as they drifted away.

Cloud watching gave me an odd sort of feeling. Watching them let me focus my mind on them while letting nature envelop my body and warm me with beams of soft yellow. And suddenly, I would become so small and light, like a flaxen little duckling. As I breathed, the background would blur into round, earthy greens and robin blues, and I could feel myself melting into the loamy soil, growing into the earth and its history. It was a kind of curious feeling, the kind that made me want to just lie there and explore its depths until the sun disappeared into the trees.

Then my perfect sky darkened. The storm clouds above opened and a forest rained upon me, crashing into splintery pieces and pelting my shocked body with wood chips. By now I was hanging by the threads of the clouds, trying to climb back into my dream world. A discordant “HEY!” shot out like cannon, and I fell to the ground, to reality. I opened my eyes. Thunder had rumbled into my ear in the form of a wiry boy with eyebrows narrowed down like arrows. His mouth was stiff with an emotion I couldn’t then quite name. “SLANTY EYES!” he yelled, scooping up another handful of red pine. “You CHINK! You suck!!” I felt the forest once more and I smelled the sharp acrid odor of his hatred in the red pine. “CHINK!!” he cried again.

In between handfuls, he would sometimes pull back his round eyes into slits thin as yellow bamboo. While holding this pose, he’d jump side to side with his tongue out. Then he would throw a few more handfuls of wood at me before whirling away, “Slanty eyes” still flying off his bitter tongue. I just sat there, bewildered beyond belief.
and covered in carmine wood. I didn’t cry. I was only confused. I had no idea what he meant, only that he was being mean. However, I brushed both the wood and his comments off; I’d seen him around school, walking with a swagger blown up like the creamy sails in my books, baptizing other children with crude names and disrespecting any sort of authority that dared to counteract that turbulent force. I could do nothing about my new name. I was still myself, but to him, I would be “Chink” or “Slanty eyes.”

Now as a nearly independent sixteen year old, I hardly find the time to dream in the clouds. My playgrounds have been swapped for drab linoleum hallways devoid of spirit, my clouds traded in for digital oceans. I’ve learned about new beliefs, theories, discoveries and new words. It’s been years since I learned what a racial slur really was, and even longer since I realized what that boy had said. I never dwelled on why that boy had been so rude to me, but I felt better knowing that I knew what his words meant and feeling like I’d uncovered another small part of the world. True, it was an unsavory part of life, but to be ignorant of the dark side was equally bad.

That unique feeling only happens occasionally now, but when it does, I feel it more strongly than ever. My body no longer needs the smell of pine or the warmth of sunshine, for my mind transcends physical bonds; I soak in the earth’s history in my mind’s sky, predicting the unknown. I am never right or wrong, but now I can explore my mind’s depths until the moon tucks itself into a diamond blanket.

Bea Kim, Grade 12
Norman North High School
Kathy Woods, Teacher
Two Paths of Superiority

Everyone strives to find the purpose of their existence. Some imagine themselves as the masters of the canvas, the artists of the lab, or the experts of the operating table. In seeking to attain a purpose, people end up living to serve themselves and their goals, doing whatever they can, sometimes without adherence to human morality, to achieve them. People run from one place to another, living fast-paced lives in a universe in which they are the center and holding tight to their aspirations with their own weak, fluctuating gravities. It is in this way that few realize that they are doing the opposite of attaining purpose. When they no longer can move their feet, they will look back upon those days of running and wonder why they never slowed, never realized that there is no meaning in existence, but in coexistence.

When I was in kindergarten, I had a typical child's capacity for empathy. I lived for me--running when I wanted to, falling from heights too tall for me, crying when I felt pain so that another would serve me, if only so they would not hear my shrieks any longer. And when I would return from school after a full day of running, falling, and crying, our grassy backyard beckoned to me.

We had a pet rabbit, Mr. Bunny. He was a snowy white and sought each day to escape the confines of our fence to destroy the neighbors' flowers, so my mother sent me to make sure he hadn't found a way through a new crevice. Along the side of our house, across from the humming air conditioning unit was a pile of bricks, they the leftovers from a path my father had laid to keep his girls from tracking in mud from the bottom of our yard's hill, where the rainwater would run off. Nestled there in the bricks was Mr. Bunny, shimmering in the light as always, one ear always cocked at attention while the other laid lazily across his scruff. I crouched, arms extended, coming up on his round rump as quietly as I could muster, but he bounded away. I started after him until I accepted that I never would be able to pluck him from the grass.

Kicking the dust that Mr. Bunny left behind, I was distracted by a peculiar blue against the red brick of the path ahead. My eyes already in the early stages of atrophy, I approached the oddity to make it take shape. When I came upon it, I was disappointed to find it was an empty egg shell, common below thick oaks such as the one that
loomed over my head, its branches encroaching across the fence. Uncommon, however, was the pile of sticks in the dirt, neatly woven with natural artistry and the occasional scrap of ribbon. I lifted the nest, thinking it quite worthy of show-and-tell, but was startled to hear the high-pitched chirps of two baby birds, greeted by the light. Naked and alien, one chick lifted its unformed wings to greet the monster before it with courage and unopened eyes. His brother, however, still wore his powdery blue armor and struggled weakly to poke through it much more than his hungry beak.

Fearing for their safety in their huge new world, I carefully placed the nest back over them, drenching them in the safety of darkness once more. Then I turned on my heel and ran to the glass door, the pane scarred by our dog's scratching. Lurching it open, I called to my mother, informing her as intelligibly as I could what I had found. She went to fetch a shoebox, and I ran ahead of her to wait with the lonely creatures. I assured them that the place they had fallen would not be the place they would lie.

In no time at all, my mother trotted along with a purposeful gait toward the three of us. Hands gloved and held aloft like a surgeon's, she lifted the nest gingerly and placed it in the shoebox. Then she wedged her fingers under the blind birds and returned them to their bed of sticks. I danced around her as she took them into the house, circling them like their mother should have been, reluctant to lose sight of them.

My mother tasked my sister and me with digging up worms to feed to our newcomers. The most lucrative digging sight was beside our rabbit hutch, where the mud was exposed. I enjoyed the task, the sifting through the earth for sustenance. It reminded me of the images I had seen of Native American women gathering food during harvest, preparing for a long winter. The only difference was that they sought to preserve themselves, whereas I did not struggle to eat in the colder months -- the food I gathered was for lesser, innocent beings that lacked self-sufficiency.

When my father returned from work, he tooted with him a towel which, when plugged into the wall in our kitchen, heated to the perfect incubating temperature. It was there, on the wall beside our dinner table that the birds would make their new, temporary home while they gathered strength. My mother used an eyedropper to drop crushed worms into their eager throats, as their mother would have from her own beak. Equipped with tweezers, my father gingerly peeled lingering eggshells from the younger bird, as he was too weak to emerge from
them himself. His brother had a much stronger voice than he, and
there was a matter of time we feared he would not improve in health --
but he surpassed our expectations and picked up weight, growing a
velvet layer of down on his pink skin. He then chirped as loudly as did
his brother, and even fought with him over their surrogate mother's
nourishment.

After a few weeks in our care, we determined it was time to
give them back to nature. One afternoon, my father ascended on a
ladder with their nest to a safer, sturdier tree. He fastened it to the
branches with twist-ties from our local grocery store, then placed the
birds back inside their home. We thought we would be waiting for days,
carrying food up to them until we saw her, but it was mere hours
before their mother returned. My own mother and I watched from the
window as she flew away and back again, elated to have her children
returned to her in good health.

When I think of the world, I think not of the billions of
human beings on its surface, but of the many interconnected
ecosystems which function within it and in return, allow it to function.
As the human population grows, it takes away from those ecosystems,
destroying habitats and damaging valuable lineages. At no other point
in our planet's history has there ever been a species so toxic. We hunt
animals in droves with guns and other crafted weapons to make up for
our own lack of defense mechanisms, but end up overcompensating
and becoming cruel eliminators of life. When one holds in one's hand
something so fragile as a newborn bird, one should ask oneself which
is more tempting: to nurture it, or to crush it, just because one has the
power to do so?

With the power to destroy comes the power to restore. And
because of that, humanity has a responsibility to protect and respect
the world around it, as it does not only belong to us. Rather than
searching for a meaning to one's own existence, one should realize the
meaning in the existence of all things. We as people must slow our
breakneck pace and impulsive way of life, because otherwise, when we
finally look behind us, we will see only a trail of fire. And with only fire
behind us, what else but fire would lie before us? Rather than
embracing the excessive and narcissistic behaviors of our species, I
would rather dedicate my life to the preservation of life itself.

Madison Allen, Grade 12
Norman North High School
Kathy Woods, Teacher
I twisted uncomfortably in my sheets for the seventh time that night. It was three in the morning on a Wednesday, and I still had yet to fall asleep. *Give me a break, it’s summer. All I should be doing is sleeping,* I thought, finally giving up and throwing the covers off my sweaty body. I needed some water. The acid taste of my purge from earlier in the evening still clung tightly to every pore in my mouth. I grabbed my phone and walked across the hardwood floor to the stairs, my footsteps echoing throughout the silent house, my mom and brother having gone to bed hours before.

The cool water felt refreshing, healing, sliding down my throat. I poured myself two more glasses before washing the cup out and placing it back in the cabinet. I made my way back to my room, instantly feeling better. I opened my windows wide in an effort to catch a nonexistent breeze. I suppose I could at least brush my teeth and finally get rid of this terrible taste in my mouth. I turned on my heel, but before I could make my way past the door of my bedroom, my dormant phone sprang to life in my hand. Puzzled, I looked at the screen of my phone for three seconds too long, finally answering on the third vibration.

“Hello..?” I asked tentatively, heart gradually picking up speed. “Sam…” the voice of Abe’s mother sobbed from the other end of the phone.

“Hello? Joyce? Hello? What happened? Joyce?” I called out to her repeatedly, hearing only sobs.

“Joyce, are those sirens? Joyce, what in the world is going on? Is Abe okay? Where is Isaac?”

“…Norman…Regional…” she said through the sobs.

“I’ll be right there.” Suddenly wide awake, I changed out of my pajamas and into denim shorts. Scribbling a quick note to my mother, explaining the situation as best I could, I rushed to my car, reversing out of the driveway before my seat belt had time to click.

*It does no good to speed,* I reminded myself. *We don’t need you in a bed next to one of them.* I slowed by two miles per hour, still going fifty-eight through the forty down Robinson. Thoughts raced in circles around my mind, colliding into one another and demanding my attention. But if I listened to them, the tears started.
I pulled into the parking lot outside the emergency room of Norman Regional, taking up two parking spots with my poor parking. Sprinting full out, I raced to the desk, scaring the poor nurse in charge.

“Wallace… Abe… or Isaac… Wallace…” I gasped.

Her face paled and she nodded, taking my hand in hers and leading me through automated double doors. The panic lifted as I was led through sliding doors, timed perfectly, eliminating the need to think or pause.

We slowed to a stop outside one of the rooms, fluorescent lights humming overhead. Without a word, she extended her hand to the closed door on my right. Hesitantly, I raised my trembling hand, clasping it around the door handle, and pushing in the door.

I couldn’t make it past the door frame.

In the bed, huddled in the white sheets, shrouded in a cloud of hospital smell, Abe was laid out. Tubes and sensors were on his hands, on his forehead, under his Star Wars T-shirt, my gift to him the previous Christmas. His wrists were bandaged, the fresh, crimson blood staining the sheets he lay on.

The air rushed out of me in one quick burst, and I stumbled to the bathroom, emptying the remaining contents of my stomach.

In the corner, his mother sat, holding Isaac close to her. Ben stood, hat nervously held between two hands, as if unsure whether to comfort his dying son or his grieving wife. I ran some cold water, splashing my face a few times.

I composed myself, grappling towards my dearest friend. I took his right hand in mine, fearing to go near the left, knowing he would have been thorough. Along his veins I ran my fingers, refusing to let go. Still holding on, I turned to Joyce. “What happened? What did he do?”

She may have heard me, but I doubt it. Repeatedly, she kissed Isaac on the head and wiped his tears away, staring at the far wall of the dismal room. My eyes searched, finding no answers in the faces of the Wallace family.

I turned back to my best friend, my rock.

His eyes fluttered.

“Abe, Abe? Can you hear me? Abe, please tell me you can hear me.” I squeezed his hand tighter, leaning in. Slowly, his eyes opened. The nurse in the room let out a soft, “Well, I’ll be damned. Lucky bastard made it.”

“Sam…” Abe breathed, lifting his hand to my face.
“I’m here, I’m right here.” I exhaled, releasing the breath I hadn’t realized I was holding.
“Sam…”
“Yes? What is it?” I searched his face, willing his eyes to remain open.
“I’m s-sorry,” he said, wincing.
“What on earth for?” I asked, leaning still farther in.
“For…for not being th-there for you tonight, wh-when you needed…me.”
I wanted to laugh, wanted to cry, wanted to slap him for being an idiot.
“Don’t pull this stunt again and you can be there for me next time.”
“And the next time,” he said through a smile.
“And the next time,” I promised, smiling in return.
“Miss, I hate to ask you to leave,” the nurse interrupted, “But we technically have a family-only policy in the Emergency Room.”
I squeezed Abe’s hand one last time and allowed myself to be escorted from the room. Glancing back, hoping in vain for one last look at his smiling face, I saw only Isaac’s back, muscles rigid and tensed beneath his black shirt.

I woke up with the arm of a waiting room chair digging into my back, being shaken by Isaac.
“Sam, he’s awake. He’s asking for you.”
I leapt to my feet, pushing past Isaac and forcing my way into Abe’s room. He held out his right hand, and I sat at the foot of his bed, taking it in mine.
We sat there, looking at each other. I was afraid to be the first to speak, the first to break the silence pulsating in the room.
“Sam…” he said quietly. “I know what you did yesterday.”
I looked at him seriously. “And I know what you did yesterday.”
“You binged and purged again, didn’t you?”
I nodded imperceptibly. “And you tried to cut off your left hand and drown your organs in prescriptions, didn’t you?” I asked quietly.
He nodded. He looked up at me, “But you promised you wouldn’t anymore…”
“And you promised you would never try to leave. Remember?” I rebutted.
“I remember…” he said, looking down at our hands on the rough blanket.
“New promise?” I asked.
“Definitely.”
I untangled my hand from his and held up my right pinky and cleared my throat.
“Repeat after me. I, Abraham William, solemnly swear that I will see myself as good enough, that I will always remember that I am worth something and that I am important to someone. I will always remember that I am never alone, I just need to take the time to ask for help.” He obliged.
“Your turn.” His chocolate eyes looked deep into mine.
“I, Samantha Lee, solemnly swear to look in the mirror and be content with what I see. No, scratch that, sorry, content is the wrong word. Start again. I, Samantha Lee, solemnly swear to look in the mirror and to see nothing but beauty because I am nothing less than the perfection I am meant to be.”
We sealed our pinky promise and our life-long bond with a quick biting of our thumbs, just in time for the nurse to hastily kick me out again.

Samantha Huckabay, Grade 12
Norman North High School
Kathy Woods, Teacher
Butterflies

As the time runs out, the band starts prepping for half-time. I have been jittery all day. I can’t seem to shake the butterflies from my stomach. I breathe in the chilly night air. It helps because I’m sweaty. I’m just so nervous! I keep telling myself, “Don’t lock your knees; you’re gonna pass out.”

I breathe in and play a series of notes. My fingers fly over the keys. I can feel the coldness from the night on my clarinet. The wind blows powerfully. I smell nachos, hot chocolate. My stomach cramps up. Just thinking about food right now when I’m about to play makes my stomach hurt.

My band director is talking. I can’t hear her. All I can hear is the fans’ cheering for the cheerleaders. I walk over and peer at how many fans are here. My blood runs cold. It’s almost full except for the spot where the band sits. I walk back under the bleachers. The wind is biting into my unprotected face.

We are doing some last minute checks, seeing if the trumpets and trombones have been oiled, the flutes have the right tone, the clarinets are not flat or sharp. I put my head against the back of the bleachers. Someone taps my shoulder, Karli. She tells me it’s time to go. I nod and smile weakly. The butterflies are flying really fast now. I tell myself again, “Don’t lock your knees; don’t lock your knees,” and I walk onto the field.

Caitlyn Manley, Grade 9
Okeene High School
Tara Fisher, Teacher
My Journey

I’ve been going to Journey Church for about four years now. This past year my family and I have been going every week and volunteering as much as possible. My mom and I have been volunteering at LoveWorks, an outreach program my church sponsors, for Norman Public Schools for middle school aged students. At LoveWorks we teach leadership, self-confidence, and skills for students to pave the path for a successful future. We teach the kids how to help people who are less fortunate than they are.

One weekend we went to the DreamCenter in Tulsa, Oklahoma. There we spent the whole day. We walked up and down streets and asked people if we could clean up their yards or even mow and weed-eat them. The girls would go and pick up trash along the side of the roads. When we came back, we cleaned the windows, swept, and cooked food for the workers there.

It was amazing to see middle school students dedicate their Saturday, from 6 a.m. to around 6 p.m. They saw a lot of sad things. They saw how fortunate they were.

Another night LoveWorks hosted an event called BoxCity. It was a Friday night from 7 p.m. to 6:30 a.m. That night the kids learned what it was like to live like an orphan. Everyone brought an appliance-sized box and blankets. That was their bed for the night. That night was the worst night in October. There was rain and wind; the temperature was about 28 degrees. We had a DJ there, and we had a box decorating contest. The only food LoveWorks served was beans and rice.

What was most memorable about that night was the kid that won the box decorating contest was going through something painful. That little boy’s mom has had cancer, and he put on his box a pink breast cancer sign that said, “Find a Cure.” That was touching.

With LoveWorks not only did I teach the kids. but they also taught me. They taught me that you don’t have to be anything else to make people like you. Just be yourself. Those kids are lionhearted. They go to schools and talk about bullying. They stand up for people in need, and they have huge hearts.

Not only do I volunteer as a leader at LoveWorks but I also volunteer in the 4-years old nursery, which I love also. I love to see all the kids run in the room and play. Then we do the music. All those kids
get up and sing and jump around. They know our key concepts by heart. That is an amazing feeling to know that when you teach the little kids that Jesus loves you, they remember it. We also do a Bible story, which is heart-touching. All the kids get into a circle and they stare at you big-eyed and smiling. They know almost all the Bible stories. They know Jesus came as a baby to save them, they also know Jesus died on the cross for our sins.

Then we all do arts and crafts. We do all kinds of things. One time we made an ornament. We glued the virgin Mary on a plate then angel Gabriel over her. There are two little kids who I love to death. They always want me to hold them. One of them always gives me their arts and crafts. What makes my day is seeing all those kids leave and they all give me a huge hug and say “I can’t wait to see you next Sunday!” Every Sunday I miss, I feel guilty.

All those kids have an impact on me. From LoveWorks to the Nursery. From the ages four to eleven-to-thirteen. They honestly probably have no clue that they have an impact on me. They all make me want to be a better person, even when they’re not around me. They look up to me. And I think of them all the time. I try to always do something that they would be proud of me, so they wouldn’t be ashamed to tell someone that I am their role model. That is really all I want to be. I want to be someone that all these kids in the future or even now can come up to me and tell me anything because they trust me. They affected my everyday life. I want to be someone they are just proud of and someone that they want to grow up like.

This is how my Journey really started to begin this year. Because of my church. The things my church sponsors and hosts. I am very proud to say that Journey Church is my church. Because this time last year I would not have, I am more proud to pass up opportunities with my friends for church and LoveWorks. Those kids changed my life and made me a way better person than I used to be. I am so very thankful to have them in my journey.

Tatum Sanders, Grade 10
Moore High School
Amy Treadwell, Teacher
Hands

Small and wrinkled, my grandmother’s hands are worn by years of hard work. Her fingertips are flat from long years and working decades in a little factory, earning money by crafting shiny car decals to be sent all over the world. Her hands are swift from cooking for her loved ones three times a day, and her eyes crinkle with laughter when I teach her old hands how to navigate new technology. Silent burns from clothing irons and invisible little pinpricks litter my grandma’s thumbs from sewing my mother’s clothes when she was a kid, and I feel her hands full of love when they hold mine.

Cindy Pan, Grade 10
Jason Stephenson, Teacher
Deer Creek High School

The Wasteland

“Thud, thud, thud!” The sound of stones hitting the hard, packed sand echoed across the desert. Gritty sand, thrown by the falling boulders, danced through the air. One minute you’d nearly make something out in the dull cloud, only to see it disappear before you. Pale shapes ran across the scorching sand, dodging boulders with nimble feet. The moon, dark against the starless sky, lit the desert with a soft glow. Creatures, more beast than human, thrived underground in that desolate place. These beings, with faded coats of tangled hair, dove past boulders into holes in the constantly shifting earth. Tunnels ran through the ground, always collapsing as new paths appeared. By following these beasts, you would find an underground society. Each creature seemed to have a job. Some tore through plants unlike anything seen before, with colorful splotches and oddly shaped stems. Others scavenged through the blowing sand, searching for objects of use. A society, thriving, where life should not exist.

Shilo Risenhoover, Grade 10
Hydro-Eakly High School
Alayna Leppke, Teacher
Weight of the World

I can't look at him, I just can't. Several of my muscles twitch, tense, and relax. I can feel the blood rushing through my veins, and I wish it wasn't. I know I did wrong, that knowledge only carves a bigger hole in my chest. Tears force their way through my eyes, and find freedom on the other side. I have felt all this before at some point or another. The word that sums it all up presents itself in my mind: shame. A deep, painful shame. I attempt to look him in the eye, yet the tears form a blurry wall preventing me, from seeing his disappointed face. Nothing I say will make up for this, so I say nothing. I only grab my things and walk off. The world presses down on my shoulders, and I can't carry it anymore.

Kaitlynn Velasco, Grade 12
Fletcher High School
Jenny Beathard, Teacher

High School Essay

With Geeks Nothing Is Impossible

No matter the situation, the time, or the location, stereotypes play a role. Categorizing other individuals based on looks, race, grade point average, and athletic ability has been at the epicenter of our world since day one. In David Denby’s excerpt from “High School Confidential: Notes on Teen Movies,” he dives deep into the high school world of stereotypes and makes the argument that “geeks rule.” I agree with Denby’s statement that geeks in fact reign because the emotional toils they go through on a daily basis make them emotionally stronger. Add that to their all ready great mental strength, and they can conquer the world.

When the word geek comes up in a conversation, one image comes to mind—an up-tight school grade freak who wears awful clothes and big glasses and normally never speaks more than two words unless it’s to the teacher. But why do we jump to this
conclusion? It’s because of all the movies, such as She’s All That, that color the character as such. In this movie, the main character Laney Boggs (a geek) gets asked out by the most popular guy in school because of a bet. Furthermore, she turns into the prom queen but soon falls back down the social ladder because of her geeky past. Even though it may have looked like she failed to the movie viewers, her experience just made her stronger. This is the case in most geek stories. The geek gets ridiculed on a daily basis, which would easily wear them down, but they use all of these emotional toils to make them stronger, more hard headed, and in the end, more successful.

Another strength geeks have that mentally makes them “untouchable” in our world is the obvious power of their mental capacity. Without geeks, we wouldn’t have Microsoft or any of the smart phones we all love so much. Our lives revolve around technology and the pleasures that come with it. Without the intellectual minds of the geeks, our world would be a very simple, black and white place. However, the number of complicated ideas and inventions that geeks create, make this planet a complex, original, and amazing shade of gray.

In conclusion, we need geeks, and eventually they’ll rise to the top. No matter how much they get ridiculed in high school or college, they will gain their composure every time they get knocked down and strive harder for their dreams. These dreams will change the world we live in forever. So, the next time the word geek comes up in conversation, we don’t need the image of what we all think of; we need to think of flying cars, jet packs, holograms, and other farfetched inventions we can imagine because with the geeks we have in this world, there is nothing that is impossible.

Shelby Dobrinksi, Grade 12
Okeene High School
Tara Fisher, Teacher
Light as a Feather

“I have to go. I'm sorry,” she stuttered as she fluttered away with inhuman speed. She was out of Martin's sight before he could whisper another word. He just stood there, shaking his head. No. I just misunderstood, he thought as he slowly trudged to lunch, staring at his feet, still in a trance. She's amazing, pretty, and phenomenal—but an angel? A sliver of something on the floor instantly caught his eye as it shined in the incandescent hallway light. He picked it up and gasped. In his hand was a perfectly shaped white feather.

Anna Chandler, Grade 12
Fletcher High School
Ms. Jenny Beathard, Teacher

Alone Time

It wasn't unusual for my brother to be alone in his room. Most nights at dinnertime he would fill his plate and immediately return to isolation. I was often invited into his private world where I observed little happiness and much sorrow. He never actually told me how sad he was, but I could sense it, and I made sure to tell him often how much I loved him. My parents never regretted how little attention they paid to him, until, without warning, we found his body, lacking a pulse, lying next to a note addressed only to me.

Whitney Stewart, Grade 11
Moore High School
Eileen Worthington, Teacher
Middle School Poetry

**Fantasy Haiku**

Never have I seen  
A green lion fly away  
Across a pink sky

Josie Lankford, Grade 6  
Weatherford Middle School  
Pat Lightfoot, Teacher

**Margarita Party**

Salsa wishes, salsa beat  
Salsa dancing, whirring feet  
Smells like coffee, clementines,  
Strong perfume and homemade wine  
Black high heels and barefoot toes  
Here she comes, our Spanish rose!  
Old ones, young ones twirl around,  
Flip their hair and stomp the ground  
Margaritas, tambourines,  
Long red skirts and old blue jeans.  
In she glides with sweet night air,  
Big, red lips and soft brown hair.  
Sip sangria. Have some more.  
One more knock comes at the door.  
Mustache face starts smiling so  
All his yellow teeth will show.  
Young ones fly and lovers meet.  
Golden moonlight soft and sweet.

Gwyneth Atkinson, Grade 6  
Alcott Middle School, Norman  
Maxine Cunningham, Teacher
“She was a friendly lady,”
says the big, open windows.

“A ballet teacher,”
says the gigantic mirror
and the long wooden barre.

“She taught children,”
say the jar of lemon drops and
the posters of dancing animals.

“She taught older kids, too,”
say the dirty yoga mats and
posters of ballet moves.

“She directed ballet shows,”
Say the pictures of posing kids,
And the hundreds of costumes
In separate rooms.

“Nobody is here,”
says the white paper on the door that says,
“Come back on Tuesday!”

Madison Stephens, Grade 6
Weatherford Middle School
Pat Lightfoot, Teacher
Courage

It was a hot June day. My family was knee deep in the middle of wheat harvest. My brother, Grady, was in the grain cart. My dad was on the combine, and I was riding by his side. My grandpa was in the truck waiting on a load of wheat.

My bother came across the radio with a hesitant voice, and I knew immediately something was wrong. As it turned out, my brother had fallen asleep while driving the tractor. The tractor crashed into a waterway and automatically shut off. My dad had to get off the combine to assist my brother, but before he did, he looked at me and said, “Drive the combine like it is a lawn mower!”

The next thing I knew, I was in the combine completely alone. I told myself it was time to put on my big girl shoes and woman up. After my first round of cutting the wheat, the pressure began to lift off my shoulders. I was able to relax and sit back to enjoy the ride.

I had been driving for what felt like forever. Finally my dad came across the radio and said Poppy was coming, so I stopped to let him in. Poppy told me he was so proud of me and told me what a great grandchild I was. I guess John Wayne was right when he said, “Courage is being scared to death…and saddling up anyway.”

Landri Chaplin, Grade 6
Weatherford Middle School
Laurie Wood, Teacher
Middle School Descriptive Paragraph

*Pop and Leo*

Only a faint glow appears on the horizon when a lone cowhand begins his job. Work-hardened fingers grasp his smooth, Stetson hat. His thinning, iron gray hair is covered by his treasured possession. Once the soft stampede strings secure the hat under his chin, he gently folds his faded bandana. He ties it over his face, inhaling the scent of sweat. Some of the salty particles cling to his mouth, reminding him of the difficult cattle drives of years before. Grunting softly, he bends over to pick up a soft cloth. In short, stiff steps he ambles toward his horse. Recognizing his rider, the seasoned light brown gelding nickers softly. A rare smile crosses the cowhand’s weathered face, accompanying a scratch given behind the horse’s furry ears. Even through the test of time, their friendship stands as strong as the rugged Rockies.

Reagan Stephens, Grade 7
Weatherford Middle School
Jessica Pool, Teacher
Nutcracker

People flood into the building like a human river. Cherry-red seats in flexible curving rows begin to be smothered as the lights grow dim. Dancers with powdery, smiling faces appear on stages as the music starts. Overflowing glass bowls of punch and chocolate clink when maids sit them down. Vivid multicolored party dresses swish as their owners twirl around Clara. Mice swarm the stage. They wear hoods that work as heaters under the scalding lights. The Nutcracker marches on with his gleaming sword and red and gold coat. Dancers with hair so hard it resembles a helmet arrive. Across the stage, snowflakes flutter in light, elegant, and soft skirts. The foreign dancers, who represent candy, tea, and coffee, flash across the stage like lightning while others slide by like molasses. All too soon, Clara swishes away on her fluffy, welcoming bed, and the adventure ends.

Madison Stephens, Grade 6
Weatherford Middle School
Laurie Wood, Teacher

Annabeth Chase

Tiny Annabeth Chase wears flannel pajamas and holds a hammer that is as gray as her eyes. The smell of car exhaust makes her feel sick, and the polluted air burns her lungs. Police sirens and screams make her ears feel like they will burst. Gigantic buildings tower over her, as cold and terrifying as the people around her. Her hair flows from her head, down her shoulders, like a rippling river on a windy day. Once was golden blonde, it is now dirt-colored. Her face is dirty, grimy, and wet from her tears. She lies down on a park bench. As sleep embraces her, so do the nightmares. Tiny Annabeth Chase is haunted by dark, dangerous memories of her troubled past. She rolls in her sleep, and usually fluid movements become jagged and sharp like rocks.

Delaney Smith, Grade 6
Weatherford Middle School
Laurie Wood, Teacher
Middle School Flash Fiction

Let Them Think I’m Dead

Ashley was running through her front yard, late for work again, when she heard a whizzing sound. Oh my gosh. Someone is shooting at me, she thought in dismay. As she dove into the grass behind a tree, she felt liquid spreading across her stomach. She had been shot. It was her blood she was feeling. It took her a while to calm down. Well, let them think I'm dead. She finally got up the nerve to see how bad it was. Then she realized it was just a Nerf gun that had knocked over a water bottle.

John Paul Pierce, Grade 6
All Saints Catholic School
Melanie Vincent, Teacher
The Evolution of Rock 'n' Roll from the 1950s to the 1970s

Rock and roll music has had major influence over fashion, politics, and it promoted rebellion. Rock and roll music completely changed the teenage mindset. It showed large companies what age it should try to reach. In the 1950s, everything from ginger ale commercials to telephone commercials had rock and roll themed music in the background to help sell their products. The new format of the 45 rpm quickly came to dominate the recording industry. Not only did it make music easy to carry around to a sockhop or sleep over, but it was cheaper. The Top 40s and the “singles” became the teenage rage and the financial driving force of the recording industry.

Rock and roll music is not an American original. It originated when the slaves were taken from Africa. While they worked in the fields, they sang slave songs. The slave songs focused on rhythm instead of the tone. These rhythms consisted of a combination of three drum groupings. They created a rhythmic tension with their different tones, the father tone, deep or iyá, the mother tone, middle or itotele, and the child tone, the higher pitched or okonkolo. The father drum led by dictating the rhythm changes and led the conversation. The mother drum played the fixed pattern while the child drum played repetitive and fixed pattern. These three drums eventually evolved into the modern day drum kit we know, the bass, tom, and snare. Some slaves that had lived in the Islamic regions of West Africa brought with them Arabic rhythms which mixed with the tribal rhythms. When combined with European melodies, based on the diatonic scales (do, re, me fa, sol, la ti, do), it formed a “Blues” sound, which flattened the fifth and seventh notes of the eight-note diatonic scale. For the guitar sound, they ran knife blades or bottle necks along the metal strings of the fretboard to produce the pure notes. Another technique was to slap
and pull at the strings to give another sound effect rather than the usual strumming. In the American South, there was a long-standing tradition of both slaves and free black musicians entertaining audiences of mixed races. The slave musician usually learned music by ear, otherwise by apprenticeship. They utilized and adapted whatever could be made into an already instrument. The black musicians approached the European instruments with an African consciousness thus contributing to the new sound and form of music. The “Blues” music evolved into the recognizable 12 “bars” sometime around the start of the 20th century and recordings of this African-American music began during the 1920s. The songs were an hour long, when you include the improvisations. When they cut the songs down to three minutes and sped it up, it made the song sound more upbeat therefore making rock music. It inadvertently became a new hybrid of music, an American music, something their creators never intended it to be. During the following years, the general public came to accept the mixture of sounds. The note bending, slurring, ‘call and response’ vocal pattern and shout songs were becoming the new language of mainstream “Rock ‘n’ Roll.” Recordings of the most famous bluesmen of these time were Charley Patton, Son House and, most importantly, Robert Johnson.

Rock n’ roll changed the landscape of teens in many different ways. In early rock ‘n’ roll, the medium was irreverent and a threat to dominant culture. It was a powerful medium which continued to develop over time. In the 1950s fashion completely changed. Skirts that touched the floor where now history! Poodle skirts and Bermuda shorts were the coolest thing to wear. Every girl had a pair of well-worn saddle shoes along with her favorite pair of cat’s eye glasses. The older generation did not approve of white people dancing like blacks. They also did not approve of black people’s taking center stage. Many segregationists tried to put a ban on rock and roll but to no avail. Teenagers started to rebel against their parents. The stereotypical parents would not let the kids listen to rock and roll because they believed it was corrupting their mind. Also in the 1950s, they believed that it was a sin for children to listen to “black music.” Another reason parents disapproved was because of the political comments hidden inside the lyrics, showing the teenagers of the 1950s that it is okay to speak up and out against their parents’ wishes. Magazines always publicized how cool it was to defy your parents. An article in the popular magazine, Seventeen, was titled “Mother vs. Daughter.” With the close of the decade in 1959, the fatal plane crash of the rock ‘n’ roll
stars, Buddy Holly, The Big Bopper, and Richie Valens, was an end and a new beginning of rock ‘n’ roll sound. This was the message of Don McLean’s well-known claim, “the day the music died” in his song “American Pie.”

Rock ‘n’ roll also had an influence over voting. In the 1960s, the United States became increasingly more political. In most of the music there was a political comment in almost every song. Bob Dylan was at the forefront of the political singer songwriters. In his song “Masters of War,” Bob Dylan speaks against the companies and individuals that make money from war. He even goes and says, “Even Jesus could not forgive what you do”. In the song “Blowing in the Wind” he asks the question, “Will man ever learn that war is not the answer?” Even the Beatles had a protest song called “Revolution” that talked about changing the world, but not through violence. Songs like these helped change the culture of the 1960s.

Rock and roll evolved into different styles of music. In the late 60’s and 70’s, rock music had a psychedelic twist to rock as drug use increased in young people. The music of the 1970s went into different directions like hard rock. Led Zeppelin redefined rock in the 1970s. They were as influential as the Beetle’s were in the 1960s. Then glam rock took center stage. It produced many different kinds of stars in the 70s that incorporated androgynous appearances which included the use of make-up and dressing like girls. Marc Bolan, David Bowie, and Queen were in the forefront of this genre. A new style of rock emerged in rock ‘n’ roll in the late 70’s called punk rock. It was a return to a simpler form of music that was less technical and could be played by almost anyone. The Ramones and the Sex Pistols emerged during this time.

Rock and roll continues to be the music of the young and the rebellious. Like art, it reflects the society around it. From the first guitar chords of Elvis Presley to the machine guitar playing of the Sex Pistols, rock music will always be the choice music of the young. Rock music continues to have a significant impact on politics, fashion, and the business of selling music to the public. Rock music has evolved from vinyl records played at 45 r.p.m. to lightning speed digital downloads. Every generation identifies with their particular rock style of music. Like the 1950s anthem, “Rock ‘n’ roll is here to stay!”
Bibliography


Isabella Curling, Grade 8
All Saints Catholic School, Norman
Melanie Vincent, Teacher
Hidden Warriors

Prologue

“Run, run faster!”

The faint words rang in my head as I carried my kits to an undergrowth. Struggling in, I accidentally fell in, catching dirt in my mouth. Turning around, as I waited for Skull, my mate, the unthinkable happened. I saw a black and white pelt stumbling in, landing roughly.

“Are you all right, Skull?” Waiting for an answer, I started to panic.

A reply slightly came out in a low deep tone. “I am all right. What about you and the kits?” he said as he was standing up.

I started to giggle in relief, “They’re all right. I never thought those dogs would find us! How did you know carrying six kits in a big leaf would work?”

Skull’s reply came rasp, “It doesn’t matter. Let’s just find food and water for the kits.”

I nodded in approval and walked toward the kits. I never had a chance to name them yet. Since Skull went out to hunt, I named each and every one of them. Lava, Lizard, Ghost, Moss, Star, and Arrow were their names. I smiled happily at them and hope for a great future for them.

Chapter 1

“It has been a sad week for all of us.” Lava said, depressed. “It is not a time to grieve, we must go on living.”

It had been three days and everyone was still feeling bad about the accident that happened to Arrow, which brought back to their thoughts about their mother and our father, run away in depression. Lately we have been seeing Arrow in our dreams, making us cry and stutter in our sleep.

“Moss and Ghost, would you like to go hunting?” Lizard asked.

They never spoke a word, just got up and stalked out together. Hopefully tomorrow would be better. As soon as they left, Star went to her den. Never had Lava seen such a sad day in his group, especially his
brothers and sisters. Life will get better in the future. We can go back to saving lives and helping others, and maybe even make our own clan, Lava thought.

Later that day, Moss and Ghost came back with plenty of prey. As I expected, we all ate in silence. Everyone’s stomach was filled with delicious mouse meat as we all went to our dens for rest. Next thing I know, I fell asleep.

***

Lava woke up in a forest similar to where he lives. He was apparently, lying on the ground in the soft, smooth sand. Lava got up and started exploring around the forest.

He waited for something to happen, sound, movement, anything. As soon as he thought that, a stick cracked right behind him. He spun around fast, looking frantically.

“Hello, Brother,” A voice came out of nowhere.

It sounded like Arrow. Am I dead? Am I dreaming? Lava stuttered out, “He… Hello?” No answer came for a moment then a figure popped out of the bushes.

“Hello Lava, what a fine night it is tonight.”

It was Arrow! Arrow started to circle Lava, looking at him in a kind of strange way. “Would you like to go for a walk?” Arrow asked differently.

Lava nodded and followed Arrow. As they walked in silence, Lava noticed a path they were taking was the exact path he had taken to hunt with Arrow. Lava finally had the guts to ask, “Have you lived here the whole time? I mean, after…”

He got interrupted by Arrow, “The incident? Yes, this is my home now, I met some other cats and they call this place Starclan.”

The walk must have token the whole night because it was starting to become day time. Lava felt something dig into his side, trying to wake him up. Lava tried hard to stay here, but the pain was getting to him. He wanted to stay with Arrow forever. Lava dug his paws into the soft ground. “It’s okay, Lava, wake up. I’ll be here for our next adventure.”

Lava stopped struggling and saw a rainbow of light hit his face as he woke up to find Lizard talking to him.

“Lava, Lava wake up. You were whispering something in your sleep. Did you have a bad dream?” Lizard started asking questions, but I ignored them because all I could think about was, There is more out there than the eye can see.
Acknowledgements

I got my ideas from the author(s), Erin Hunter, the authors that wrote the Warriors Series, Survivors Series, and Seekers Series, especially the Warriors Series, where cats can live in clans in the wild and fight for survival! After I read a lot of Warriors, I decided to write a little about my story of Lava, later known as Lavafang. I give credit to Erin Hunter for the awesome series they wrote!

Jonathan Richards, Grade 8
J. L. Capps Middle School
Jennifer Prince, Teacher
Chapter 1 Gina

Leah walked to school in the cool fall weather. It was the first day of school, the worst. Leah’s backpack was filled with books, pencils, and all sorts of other stuff. Soon she heard loud screaming and laughing. She knew that she was close to school. Right when she walked on the school grounds, the bell rang. Leah ran as fast as she could but dropped all her stuff. Then came Gina, the meanest girl in school. She made people feel bad about themselves, especially clumsy people like Leah. Gina was walking by and purposely tripped over Leah’s stuff.

“Ooww….Watch where you put your stuff, you clumsy dork!” scolded Gina.

“Watch where you’re walking,” said Leah. Gina walked away giving Leah the evil eye.

Leah picked up her stuff and walked to class. She was five minutes late and her teacher was taking lunch count.

“Leah?” her teacher asked.

“What?”

“What would you like for lunch?”

“Oh, sorry, I’d like pizza.” The class started to laugh. Leah put down her stuff and started unloading her backpack.

“Get out your math books, and turn to chapter one,” her teacher said. Leah got out her book and started reading. By the time she was done, it was time for lunch.

Leah packed up her stuff and stopped by her locker. She never liked going to her locker because it was right above Gina’s. Leah was getting her lunch money when Gina walked by. Gina pushed Leah out of the way and said, “Move, you’re in my way!”

“It’s not my fault my locker is right above yours,” Leah said. Gina snatched Leah’s lunch money out of her hands.
“Hmmm, five dollars…not enough to buy me a cinnamon roll.” Gina ripped the $5 bill in half.

“Hey, that was my lunch money!” yelled Leah.

“Not anymore.” Gina laughed as she walked away.

Leah had to do without lunch and headed to the library. Miss Thompson was the librarian. She was one of Leah’s only friends. When Leah walked into the library, Miss Thompson greeted her saying, “Hi Leah, what book would you like to check out today?”

Leah replied, “Let me look around for a while.” Leah searched and searched until she found the perfect book, *Night Dream*. Leah’s Mom had told her about this book, and she really wanted to read it. It was about a girl who could make anything happen with her mind. She could practically do anything in her own world.

Leah sat in a library chair and read her new book. She sat and read for an hour until the bell rang and it was time for math. After math she had social studies and French class. When school was over, Leah walked home…. alone and starving.

When she got home she rang the doorbell and her Mom answered. “How was school today honey?” Her Mom asked.

“Horrible. Do we have any snacks?”

“In the pantry.” Leah sprinted towards the pantry. She grabbed potato chips, a power bar, two bananas, and some milk. Then she sat on the couch to watch T.V. Leah watched and ate like there was no tomorrow! She ate the whole bag of potato chips, the power bar, and the bananas. She was stuffed!

When she was done, she headed upstairs for bed. She washed the potato chip crumbs off her face, then snuggled up in her bed. Her school year was off to a bad start.

Leah slept until 8:00 a.m. Thank goodness it was Saturday! Leah walked downstairs and turned on the T.V. After a while, Leah’s dog Rascal started scratching at the door. “Rascal, be quiet! You’ll wake mom,” Leah said. She let Rascal inside and the dog sprinted towards his food bowl. “Oh, I forgot to feed you. I’m sorry.” Leah pet Rascal on the head and went to get his food.
Chapter 2  More School

When the weekend was over, Leah woke up and got ready for school. She brushed her thick, messy, brown hair, and washed her face. She put on jeans and a dirty tie-dye T-shirt. Then she headed downstairs for breakfast. “You hungry?” Leah’s mom asked.

“Yeah,” Leah replied.

Leah’s mom got her an apple and a waffle. “Have a good day at school!” her mom yelled.

Leah sighed, “I hope so.”

Leah waited at the bus stop. She only rode the bus on Monday because Mr. Robinson drove the bus that day. Mr. Robinson was another of Leah’s only friends. On all the other days, Mrs. Powl drove the bus. She was like a 75-year-old Gina.

“Howdy, Leah” said Mr. Robinson.

“Hi,” Leah replied. Leah always had to sit near the front of the bus because the cool and older kids get to sit in the back. She walked past a few boys throwing paper and girls tripping other girls then laughing all weird. Sam, Bea short for Beatrice and the Pecko twins Tommy and Timmy were the other kids that sat near the front with Leah. Bea had these braces that made her talk weird. Sam still picked his nose and was a smartalic. The twins still loved superheroes and watched Spongebob all the time. Leah just sat with them because she couldn’t click with the cooler, older kids.

“Do yous thic I’mv cools?” Bea asked Leah.

“Umm…yeah, sure,” said Leah.

“Oh’s good,” Bea responded.

“Have you seen the new Superhero show? It’s so cool with Batman and Superman,” Tommy said to Sam.

“Ummm…no, but I bet you could be a superhero in math if you studied,” Sam responded. Tommy rolled his eyes.

Leah walked to class. Same old boring science, Leah thought. She sat down at her desk in the front of the room. The cool kids liked sitting in the back and goofing around. Bea was on her left, and Timmy was on her right. Worst of all, Gina was behind her. “Class, get out your workbooks and turn to page 7,” her teacher said. Everyone got out their workbooks except Gina. She got out a plastic bag with a slimy fat worm in it. She slowly opened the back of Leah’s shirt and dropped the worm down her back. Leah jumped out of her seat and started grabbing at the back of her shirt. The class laughed.
“Oops!” Gina said. Then she started laughing.
“Leah? Leah? Leah?!” her teacher yelled. She stood still and the worm fell right out of the back of her shirt.
“Eewww!” all the girls shrieked. The boys just kept laughing.
“Please sit down,” her teacher sighed. “Now, where are we?”
Gina leaned over her desk. “You got lucky this time. Next one goes in your lunch,” Gina said with an evil eye.

Leah finished science then headed to lunch. With every bite of food, she looked carefully. Leah was tired of all these jokes. It was time to step up her game.

Audrey O’Rear, Grade 5
Cross Timbers Elementary, Edmond
Jenae Standingwater, Teacher
The Backyard at Night

Steeped in moonlight
tapped by a breeze
I stand under the midnight sky of Oklahoma,
boughs of a redbud overhead,
as the blink of a firefly
draws my gaze outward,
away from the dog by my side
beyond our backyard fence
toward the open field
where grasshoppers rustle upward and down,
urgent foragers, survivors.
The spiraling glow of the firefly
could be a sliver of the moon
or a wayward star come to earth
briefly bright. How many generations
past did a pioneer fill her soul in this very spot,
vibrating with life, a sliver of shimmering,
nested in midnight under arcing redbud boughs,
the breeze flirting with her hair?
I, immersed in midnight,
head toward the door
as the moon glows for us both.
Teacher Prose

Harley Writers

Writers are a different breed--unique, as distinguished as the Harley rider--the vagabond of the literary world. Be it the pencil, the pen, or the keyboard, the story calls to us, speaking our names. Beware the family of writers. For each birthday and Christmas, there is sure to be another story, poem, or memoir gifted. No scrap of paper is safe; the napkin at the restaurant or the program handed to you at the door of a graduation become victims, fallen to the pen. No doubt the perfect story lies within pages of our Bible, bookmarks for our current novel, ideas scratched in a frantic awakening in the night tucked safely in the chaos of our night stand, or one of the many journals--blues to browns, softened leathers--lining the bookshelves. Whether inspired by nature, a song, a child’s laugh, a dripping ice cream cone, or an elderly couple, they are all deserving of our pen.

Jenny Scott Beathard
Fletcher High School
Composing

I sit behind you in shadow as you write
at the old Adirondack in the biting October wind
red-cheeked in blue wind breaker blond hair blowing
perfectly blended into the foreground scene

the Illinois river silver canoes white-pine deck
you the writer rhythmically reflecting
pressing thought to print vertically moving
perpendicular to the horizontal flow
of the rain heavy river flashing in its rushes and swirls
the clean bright of the morning sun
parallel to the muscle-bound oaks making their way
downward to the water's edge

I need to catch this interplay I think poet in nature
nature in poet but you rise up and the whole thing is lost
but no I word you in from image in mind marveling at
the natural composition incomplete without you
hoping my brush strokes are true.

Mike Angelotti, Ph. D.
University of Oklahoma
Meet the Judge

Mike Angelotti has published his poetry and essays in literary reviews, professional journals, newspapers, chapbooks, books and online. He currently is marketing Double Vision, a poetry chapbook, and Diary of a Hawk-eyed Wanderer, a longer poetry collection, as well as composing a handbook on the processes and teaching of Making Paint-Write Happen. Most recently in Oklahoma he has published in Red Truck Review, travelin’ music: A Poetic Tribute to Woody Guthrie and Cross Timbers. He has served as poetry editor of English International and English Journal; Director of the Oklahoma Writing Project, and Oklahoma Arts Council Artist-In-Residence for creative writing. He founded and still coordinates the Fountain of the Muse open-mike poetry readings for the National Council of Teachers of English annual meetings. As a new emeritus faculty member (mangelotti@ou.edu) in the Jeannine Rainbolt College of Education at the University of Oklahoma, Mike teaches courses in English Education that emphasize creative approaches to teaching literature, language, and composition. Each summer, he offers creative composition (paint-write), a unique four-week workshop course that allows graduate and undergraduate students opportunities to personally explore how the interplay between visual and verbal art [mainly spontaneous painting (think Jackson Pollock), poetry (think Walt Whitman, Jack Kerouac) and other modes of free aesthetic expression] can serve individual growth.
About the Oklahoma Writing Project

A site of the National Writing Project, the Oklahoma Writing Project is a professional learning community that celebrates good teachers and good teaching. Every summer the Oklahoma Writing Project brings together experienced teachers in the area to attend our annual summer institute. Together, these fellows prepare for leadership roles by demonstrating their most effective practices, studying research, and improving their knowledge of writing by writing themselves. Since the founding of the OWP in 1978 on the University of Oklahoma campus, more than 300 teachers have attended summer institutes. Through its summer institute for teachers; in-service to schools; and youth, family, and community activities, in the last five years the Oklahoma Writing Project has generated over 120,000 contact hours in programs for students, parents, teachers, and schools in Oklahoma. The Oklahoma Writing Project is sponsored by the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, the University of Oklahoma, and the Jeannine Rainbolt College of Education.

Oklahoma Writing Project teacher-consultants are available to provide in-service for teachers at all grade levels, preK through college.

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