

**Our Own Expressions**  
**Teen Writing & Art Contest**

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and creativity in youth

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**TEEN**  
**Writing & Art Contest**

**2019 Winners**

# 2019

## Winners

**Congratulations** to the more than 900 talented students who participated in the 23rd annual Our Own Expressions Teen Writing & Art Contest.

Volunteers, including Pierce County Library System staff, reviewed the entries. Writers C. Rosalind Bell and Renee Simms selected this year's writing winners, evaluating originality, style and general presentation. Photographer Megan Gallagher and artist Collin Veenstra selected the art winners based on composition, artistic skills, creativity and effective use of media.

The Pierce County Library Foundation awarded the winners with cash prizes and the winning entries are published in this book.

The Pierce County Library System gratefully acknowledges the contributions from the Pierce County Library Foundation and Pacific Lutheran University to help fund and support the contest.



# Poetry Winners

## Grades 7 & 8

### 1st **Glass**

Mattae Magat                          Mountain View Middle School

### 2nd **Picture**

Jillian Jean Lombard                          Goodman Middle School

### 3rd **Dishes' Lives**

Colby Cantrell                          Home School

## Grades 9 & 10

### 1st **Eternal Summer**

Julia Fisher                          Covenant High School

### 2nd **I am from**

Anique Jones                          Home School

### 3rd **Student's Expectations**

Janelle V. Chin                          Franklin Pierce High School

## Grades 11 & 12

### 1st **Midnight Dance**

Amelia Day                          Sumner Senior High School

### 2nd **Tacoma**

Annika Van Vlack                          Home School

### 3rd **Grasping Time**

Madison Stephens                          Covenant High School

# Drawing Winners

Grades 7 & 8

- |            |                             |                 |                                 |
|------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|
| <b>1st</b> | <b>Bartholomule the Pig</b> | Mariah Schauf   | Home School                     |
| <b>2nd</b> | <b>"Imagining"</b>          | Adrienne Redman | Columbia Crest Academy          |
| <b>3rd</b> | <b>Freedom</b>              | Kali Ofield     | Glacier View Junior High School |

Grades 9 & 10

- |            |  |                      |
|------------|--|----------------------|
| <b>1st</b> | <b>Float like a butterfly sting like a bee</b> |                      |
|            | Angelina Cruz                                  | Home School          |
| <b>2nd</b> | <b>Starry Peacock</b>                          |                      |
|            | Hunter Tichy                                   | Covenant High School |
| <b>3rd</b> | <b>Ryan</b>                                    |                      |
|            | Trinity Travis                                 | Bethel High School   |

Grades 11 & 12

- |            |                                 |                 |                         |
|------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|
| <b>1st</b> | <b>Huckleberry &amp; Bandit</b> | Addeline Piippo | Bethel High School      |
| <b>2nd</b> | <b>Annuit Coeptis</b>           | Madison Sternod | Clover Park High School |
| <b>3rd</b> | <b>No Shelter</b>               | Hannah Davis    | Bonney Lake High School |

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## Photography Winners

### Grades 7 & 8

#### 1st    **Reflections in the sand**

Joscelyn Barenaba              Home School

#### 2nd    **Beneath the Surface**

Denaya Dyke              Other

#### 3rd    **Sunrise at the Waterfront**

Madison Robbins              Key Peninsula Middle School

### Grades 9 & 10

#### 1st    **Leading Lights**

Lindsey Langham              Steilacoom High School

#### 2nd    **Penny Paid Professional Pike Place Pianist**

Joshua Kim              Steilacoom High School

#### 3rd    **Reach for the Sky**

Layla Stennett              Home School

### Grades 11 & 12

#### 1st    **Surreal Bliss**

Jacob Million              Steilacoom High School

#### 2nd    **Daguerreotype**

Jordan Hayward              Rogers High School

#### 3rd    **A Touch Of Sunshine**

Jennifer Oh              Curtis Senior High School

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# **Short Story Winners**

## **Grades 7 & 8**

### **1st Peacock's Beauty**

Maya Mendoza                      Sumner Middle School

### **2nd The Legend of the Night's Edge**

Armaan Khanuja                      Seabury Middle School

### **3rd A New Case**

Kelsey Liggett                      Aylen Junior High School

## **Grades 9 & 10**

### **1st Like A Coward.**

Alice Tang                      Kalles Junior High School

### **2nd The Cost of Ambition**

Honor Tamminga                      Covenant High School

### **3rd For a Kingdom**

Chloe Rutherford                      Graham-Kapowsin High School

## **Grades 11 & 12**

### **1st The Masked Man**

Helena Burk                      Curtis Senior High School

### **2nd Mr. Elgar**

Martina Preston                      Covenant High School

### **3rd Boo**

James Castle                      Covenant High School

# Table of Contents

## Poetry

### Grades 7 & 8

1st	Glass.....	2
2nd	Picture.....	3
3rd	Dishes' Lives .....	4

### Grades 9 & 10

1st	Eternal Summer.....	6
2nd	I am from.....	7
3rd	Student's Expectations.....	8

### Grades 11 & 12

1st	Midnight Dance.....	10
2nd	Tacoma .....	11
3rd	Grasping Time .....	12

## Drawing

### Grades 7 & 8

1st	Bartholomule the Pig .....	14
2nd	"Imagining" .....	15
3rd	Freedom .....	16

### Grades 9 & 10

1st	Float like a butterfly sting like a bee .....	18
2nd	Starry Peacock .....	19
3rd	Ryan .....	20

### Grades 11 & 12

1st	Huckleberry & Bandit .....	22
2nd	Annuit Coeptis .....	23
3rd	No Shelter .....	24

---

# Table of Contents

## Photography

### Grades 7 & 8

1st	Reflections in the sand .....	26
2nd	Beneath the Surface .....	27
3rd	Sunrise at the Waterfront .....	28

### Grades 9 & 10

1st	Leading Lights.....	30
2nd	Penny Paid Professional Pike Place Pianist .....	31
3rd	Reach for the Sky.....	32

### Grades 11 & 12

1st	Surreal Bliss .....	34
2nd	Daguerreotype .....	35
3rd	A Touch Of Sunshine .....	36

## Short Story

### Grades 7 & 8

1st	Peacock's Beauty .....	38
2nd	The Legend of the Night's Edge .....	41
3rd	A New Case .....	45

### Grades 9 & 10

1st	Like A Coward.....	50
2nd	The Cost of Ambition.....	53
3rd	For a Kingdom .....	57

### Grades 11 & 12

1st	The Masked Man.....	62
2nd	Mr. Elgar .....	65
3rd	Boo.....	69



# Poetry

Grades 7 & 8

Poetry Drawing Short Story  
Photography

OUR OWN  
PROFESSIONS

# Glass

by Mattae Magat

## First Place

Glass, such a fragile, yet dangerous object.

I am glass, I am the glass polluting the ocean of trust.  
The ocean that shows its beautiful blue surface,  
While hiding the murk of deceit and anxiety.

I am the glass that can be easily broken  
Hurting everyone around me, needing to be swept away.

I am the glass needing to be taken care of,  
But only there for others light to shine through me.

I am the glass that is filled with a mixture of anger  
and sadness for others to consume.

They know I'm poisonous... yet they stay.

I am the broken bottle lying in the waste  
of my own insecurities.

I am the broken glass that can only give relief to those in pain.

I am the glass to be broken for others enjoyment.

I am the glass tinted with resentment and hate,  
whose only purpose is to cut the wrists we call pain  
And let the miserable life drain from the pained bodies  
of those who've only felt like a nuisance of this world,  
by those who were in as much pain as them.

To those of the pained souls, who've only brought more pain  
to the ones who loved them.

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# **Picture**

by Jillian Jean Lombard

## **Second Place**

Framed a perfect photo but evidently slanted to the right  
Where a stone cold shoulder on the photo deposits a sacred light  
A buoyant family standing on grainy sand smiling  
All wearing designer shoes and their hair, all the same styling  
Four flawless people with matching bright eyed grins  
Only one of the four could express the hidden truths within  
Small girl with blameless glossed over eyes  
She imitated a smile properly in a time of hushed up lies  
Daddy grins happily relaxing his hand on Mommie's arm  
Little did anyone understand of that simple hand's harm  
Baby brother seeks to copy father so he can be like him some day  
While the strings of love, truth, and strength that hold them together  
start to slip away  
The wails of help by little girl are surely heard  
Mama takes action quickly consequent to her beloved child's word  
Father is not the dad we all thought he was  
But little boy still and will always want to do what his Daddy does  
This picture tilts rather to the right  
It's the last of many photos of families with four members  
without dust on site  
They are all happy; things are better no  
Their minds their souls got past this catastrophe-somehow.

# Dishes' Lives

by Colby Cantrell

## Third Place

The table is set, for seven plus four.  
The glasses are shaking, because of the floor.  
The plates are not worried, nor are the bowls.  
The hot soup is bubbling, the baskets have rolls.

Now there's a treble, a rumble, a roar,  
As kids charge to the table, to dishes' horror.  
The silverware pounds, the pitcher goes pale,  
As mom brings the turkey, all covered in kale.

Everyone sits, and a prayer is said.  
And when it is over, a voice says, "Please pass the bread."  
The plates are all covered; the glasses are chilled;  
The bowls are broiled; the pitcher has spilled.  
And when it is over, to the dishes delight,  
They're taken over at a great height.  
They're set on the counter and forgotten about,  
Till they get rinsed by the very wet spout.  
They're set in a box, and trapped in there too,  
And washed of their gunk and even their goo.  
When it is over they're carried to the cabinet,  
Where they wait for the next drooling pallet.

**Poetry**

**Grades 9 & 10**

Poetry Drawing Short Story  
Photography

**X OUR OWN EXPRESSIONS**

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# Eternal Summer

by Julia Fisher

**First Place**

Far off goose honking  
Under the bridge on a stone cold day  
Cars pass overhead and never know  
That sunshine doesn't always reach  
The shadows  
And the frost that touches the inside of the trees  
And the curled up half-sprouted ferns, dead as the cry of the wind  
over a desolate field.  
They stay-  
Grey,  
Brittle to the touch, like the feathers on the bare patch  
Where the creek almost reaches as it bubbles over, trying to busy itself,  
to ignore the shadow  
Dropped by the wedge that trumpets over the grasses that are  
Standing,  
Fallen soldiers, wishing  
They could join the geese in the search for  
Eternal summer

# I am from

by Anique Jones

**Second Place**

I am from grey

I am from fog and rain, Barren trees

Smog, Industrial factories were just “cloud makers” to me

Mud smudged across the kitchen floor

Water leaking across the basement tiles

We always miss yard waste day

I am from used cars and second hand clothes

Three-year-old shoes I got from my sibling

Overdue library books, Hours spent, in a different world, fantasy

Old movies are our favorite

I am from love

Sabbath dinners

Hello, Goodbye, I love you, have a good day.

Tucked into bed, say your prayers

The same house, for twelve years

Dinner dates and movie nights. Windows open to let the lights in

I'm from insomnia, Late nights and long talks

Mental illness wrapped in short relationships and denial

Black lights, low music, Glazed eyes

I've never know anything else

# **Student's Expectations**

by Janelle V. Chin

## **Third Place**

Alright students, teacher says

Remember to raise your hands quietly during class!

Oh students students, the teacher says

Remember to remain quiet during class!

Students students! Class class! The teacher says oh says!

Make sure to be RESPECTFUL towards one another, another,  
and another!

Alright students, teacher says

raise your hands quietly

covering your head

there are bullets ahead

oh students oh students, teacher says

remain quiet in class

remain quiet in class

remain quiet as time pass

students students

class class

teacher says oh teacher says

make sure to be respectful towards one another, another,  
and another

# Poetry

Grades 11 & 12

Poetry Drawing Short Story  
Photography

X OUR OWN  
PROFESSIONS

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# **Midnight Dance**

by Amelia Day

**First Place**

The Night tripped The Moon in the dark of himself,  
and she fell in the middle of a cloud-fluff shelf  
“I apologize, Ma’am,” said The Night solemnly,  
as he straightened out his cloak made from depths of the sea  
The Moon’s silent glow, shining shy and sweet,  
overcame every word as he pulled her to her feet

Staring at each other in encounter wrought by chance,  
they began to spin together in a rhythmless dance  
The stars and the winds and the shadows howled round,  
but there in their circle they could hear no sound  
But the beat of his heart in her chest as they swayed  
in the thunder of the melancholy art that they made

Every night since then, when the rain becomes restless  
and the wind grows weary of its usual directive  
They meet at the corner where the clouds meet the sky,  
and weave their blinding tapestry of darkness and light

As their rumbling rays reach the earth down below  
The whole world trembles at the beauty they unfold

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# Tacoma

by Annika Van Vlack

**Second Place**

Winter's prelude,  
and this city is resting  
at my feet, all worn-gray,  
dirt-stained, gold-plated,  
and lovely.

These pavements: my road;  
the mattress of the cold,  
the destitute and voiceless.

These tinny noises  
echoing across her streets,  
through the thin cold air,  
nonexistent, and somehow held  
in gummy golden amber.

These downtown shadows  
making her seem  
like the stage of a quiet  
and eternal play.

This, my last winter,  
the last flashes of a dream  
before waking.

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# **Grasping Time**

by Madison Stephens

**Third Place**

I see a room of white and grey. The wall  
rains tears of distant memories and pain.  
These tears composed of moments 'oh so' small,  
observing those you love leave you in vain.  
I watch the petals fall onto my head,  
and witness life be taken from my hands.  
I ponder life as I begin to dread  
my judgment once the final petal lands.  
The battlefield of life will someday end.  
This soul will travel onto better times,  
and I will see that petals cannot mend.  
I'll suddenly be charged for all my crimes.  
My moments passed. I'm here to say farewell;  
the petals shed and life I cannot dwell.

# Drawing

Grades 7 & 8

Poetry Drawing Short Story  
Photography

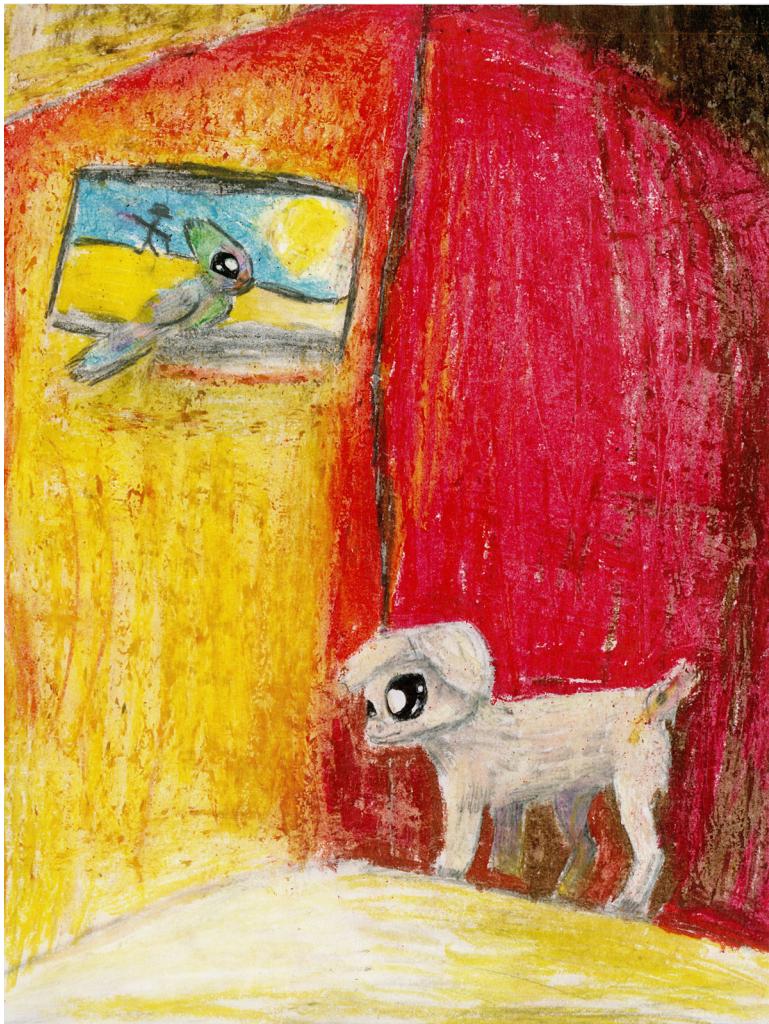
X OUR OWN  
PROFESSIONS

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# **Bartholomule the Pig**

by Mariah Schauf

**First Place**



# "Imagining"

by Adrienne Redman

**Second Place**



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# **Freedom**

by Kali Ofield

**Third Place**



# Drawing

Grades 9 & 10

Poetry Drawing Short Story  
Photography

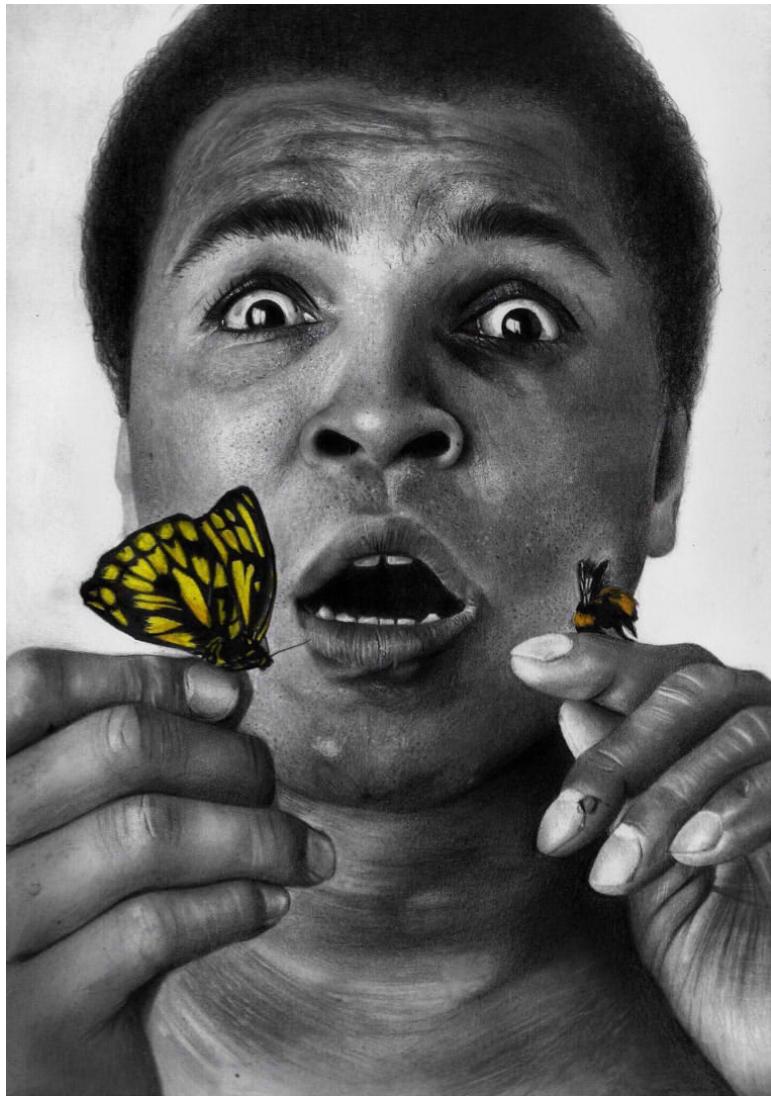
OUR OWN  
EXPRESSIONS

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# **Float like a butterfly sting like a bee**

by Angelina Cruz

**First Place**



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# **Starry Peacock**

by Hunter Tichy

**Second Place**



# Ryan

by Trinity Travis

**Third Place**



# Drawing

Grades 11 & 12

Poetry Drawing Short Story  
Photography

X OUR OWN  
PROFESSIONS

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# Huckleberry & Bandit

by Addeline Piippo

**First Place**



# **Annuit Coeptis**

by Madison Sternod

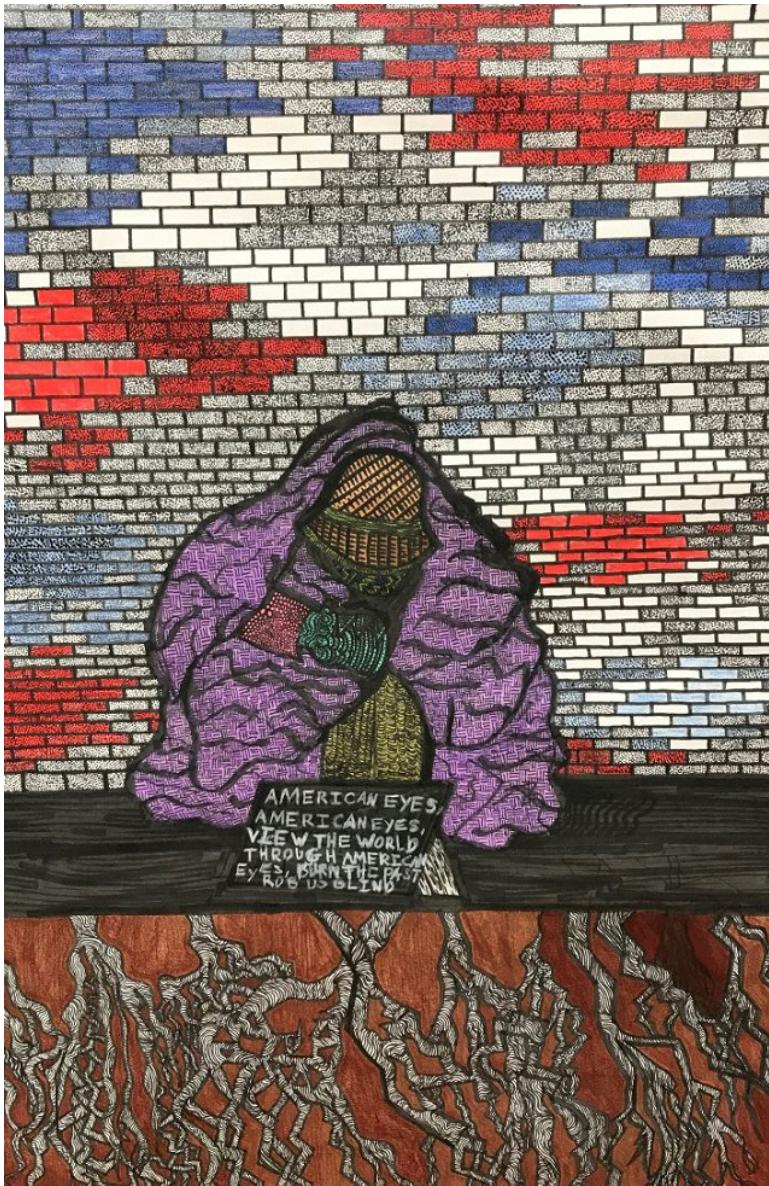
**Second Place**



# No Shelter

by Hannah Davis

**Third Place**



**Photography**

**Grades 7 & 8**

Poetry Drawing Short Story  
Photography

**X OUR OWN  
PROFESSIONS**

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# Reflections in the sand

by Joscelyn Barenaba

**First Place**



# Beneath the Surface

by Denaya Dyke

**Second Place**

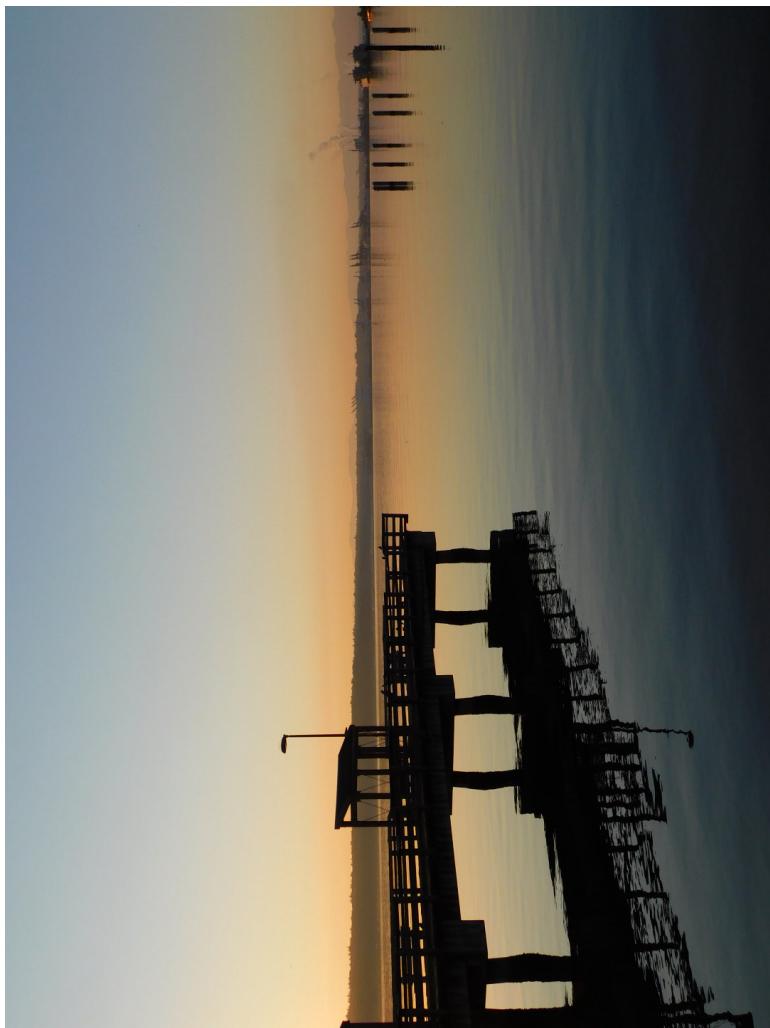


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# Sunrise at the Waterfront

by Madison Robbins

**Third Place**



**Photography**

**Grades 9 & 10**

Poetry Drawing Short Story  
Photography

**X OUR OWN EXPRESSIONS**

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# Leading Lights

by Lindsey Langham

**First Place**



# Penny Paid Professional Pike Place Pianist

by Joshua Kim

**Second Place**



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# **Reach for the Sky**

by Layla Stennett

**Third Place**



**Photography**

**Grades 11 & 12**

Poetry Drawing Short Story  
Photography

**X OUR OWN EXPRESSIONS**

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# Surreal Bliss

by Jacob Million

**First Place**



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# Daguerreotype

by Jordan Hayward

**Second Place**



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# A Touch of Sunshine

by Jennifer Oh

**Third Place**



**Short Story**

**Grades 7 & 8**

Poetry Drawing Short Story  
Photography

OUR OWN PROFESSIONS

# Peacock's Beauty

by Maya Mendoza

## First Place

Peacock preened his perfect blue and green feathers, raising his head proudly before elegantly stalking past the other birds. The crows and earth-colored birds watched in awe at his rippling feathers that shone like water. However, they didn't do so in an admiring way, for Peacock thought himself as the best of them all.

Peacock pierced them with this gaze, and in a voice filled with practiced authority, "Good evening, woodland birds."

He didn't even try to disguise the disgust he felt for the birds whom had no will to be beautiful or elegant.

The crows, in their cracking voices, whispered uncomfortably before flying off. The birds tried immensely to be mesmerized by Peacock's beauty, though they had no respect for his obsession with himself. They knew Peacock wanted to be awed at, so they better bite the bullet, for he would have it no other way.

Without another glance at the woodland birds, Peacock gracefully crept over the forest floor, not letting a pine needle crack.

Peacock's years of reputation had taken a toll on the creatures of the forest. They were antagonized by constantly pleasing Peacock, being unable to express inner beauty, having to abandon themselves.

Peacock made his way home, a prodigious cavern, draped in vines and flowers. Once inside, he gazed into a mirror of water and stared as if it were his most prized item. And the birds believed it was.

"Ah, I am beautiful, and therefore, I am content."

Peacock strutted out into the woods, just as the birds began to flutter to watch him. He had unfolded his entralling fan of tail feathers. Each feather bounced as he walked, and Peacock took his time with the slow rhythm of the walk.

Shocked and confused calls of alarm broke out among the birds. Peacock, who had been closing his eyes, opened them in confusion.

"What is going on?" he demanded, anger swelling inside him.

His keen eyes followed their bewildered gazes. They landed on a frail and unkempt wood pecker. He was thin and scrawny though his eyes burned with wisdom.

The woodland birds instantly respected the elderly bird. He had an old and wise demeanor, which added all the more to their admiration.

Peacock bore a disgusted expression, angered by their quick changed loyalties.

"What do you want?" Peacock inquired tartly.

The woodpecker studied him for a moment, sizing him up judgingly. "Peacock," his voice was clear and formal, like liquid, "how have you appreciated your admirers lately?"

Peacock scrunched up his face in revolt, immediately perceiving it as a challenge.

"Have you only come to hinder my reputation?"

The woodpecker narrowed his shrewd eyes as if he had confirmed a decision.

"Have you know respect?" he answered calmly.

"What respect have you to question my motives?"

"I've come to warn you."

"Of wat, old bird? What can you to affect me? You're nothing but a scrawny old woodpecker!"

"You should be more careful," the woodpecker glared at him sternly, while the onlookers were stunned Peacock would openly insult the elderly. Peacock, however, faced him with a sour look, as if Woodpecker had insulted him, or worse, damaged his reputation.

"You listen here, old crow. I'm the elegant, perfect one here. You can't just come and pretend you can do anything to change the way things are. So go back to your next, wasted scrawny woodpecker!"

With this, Woodpecker's eyes flooded with cold fire. He unfolded his mangled wings and screeched.

"Peacock, you have not the respect for anyone and do not deserve such high stature! You will be permanently changed so that you are no longer the most beautiful bird of all!"

Fear sparked in Peacock as an invisible fire burned in the heat of the conversation. But it wasn't his words that baffled him. Woodpecker was changing!

The contorted wings gave way to vibrant, glowing wings, and the frail figure was replaced by a muscled, beautiful creature. Peacock had never seen something like it. He felt dull compared to this bird, and he could feel his reputation diminishing.

"Is this what you've done?" Peacock's voice was ringed with sickening guilt and regret. "Made me nothing but a dull, mangy bird?"

But this new bird wasn't finished. A cold rippling washed over Peacock. It felt as if ants crawled beneath his feathers as he felt the change.

Shocked, fearful cries sounded around the scene. Unimaginable fear coursed through Peacock. He raced to the nearest puddle and choked at what he saw.

The once dazzling, shiny blue figure had been replaced by something more mangled and frail than Woodpecker had ever been. The once mesmerizing Peacock had been replaced by an old crow.

"What have you done to me!" Peacock wailed in agonized pain. Humiliation throbbed through him. Woodpecker, now a stunning tropical bird watched merciless along with the other woodland birds. Now, he really was a dull mangy bird.

Months had passed since Peacock had been transformed to a crow. Now, every morning, Woodpecker, the new most beautiful creature in the woods, would strut the forest floor.

The woodland creatures would stare at him in awe, but now with a new admiration. For Woodpecker would warmly greet all and compliment the woodland creatures.

And what had become of Peacock? He wasn't a sour old crow, staring at Woodpecker with unmasked hatred.

Instead, Peacock watched the elegant bird with sharp regret. All those times he had made them fear him, when he could have been the one they looked up to. The pain of his decisions hurt much more than the bird he had become.

# The Legend of the Night's Edge

by Armaan Khanuja

## Second Place

When Peter was younger, he dreamed of being a famous knight by finding the fabled sword, The Night's Edge. It was so strong that it could cut through flesh and bone as easily as if it were bread. But at night, it was even more powerful. It could summon storms and turn people to dust.

Peter was small, and all the other kids made fun of him. One day, when Peter was 13, he left home and vowed to never come home until his name was heard throughout the kingdom. He was going to find The Night's Edge.

He brought a blanket, a map of the kingdom, the story of The Night's Edge, enough food for a month, all the money he had, and his pet lizard, nicknamed Flame, for his bright red color.

He had found Flame out in winter a couple of years ago. It was very cold, and Flame was almost dead, but Peter took him in and saved him. The lizard was grateful and followed Peter everywhere.

When Peter left, he walked for a long time. Soon, the village fell into the distance. He walked until nightfall. Peter was so tired, he was having trouble staying on his feet. It was so dark, he could barely see his hand in front of his face.

Suddenly, he heard growling coming from right in front of him. It sounded like a wolf, but Peter couldn't be sure. He spotted a bright red color out of the corner of his eye. It was Flame! Peter followed Flame, and Flame guided Peter to a cave. He found an indentation in the cave, and he crawled in and covered them with the blanket. He got a sandwich out and ate it. Then we went right to sleep.

Peter had odd dreams. He dreamed that he had left the cave and went through the forest to meet an old man. The man said that he could help Peter find The Night's Edge. "Come to me, Peter," said the man. Then his dream ended.

When he woke up, the sun was just rising. He didn't know whether to try to find the man or go on the normal path. He decided to let Flame choose. He set Flame down on the ground and said, "Which way, Flame?" Peter pointed in two directions. Flame scuttled straight into the forest. Peter had to run to catch up to Flame.

He ran for 2 hours before they came to a small hut in the middle of a clearing. The man in his dream was waiting outside his hut.

"Hello Peter. Come inside," said the old man. He was about 5 feet tall, with black hair and dark brown eyes.

Peter entered. There were papers and books scattered around the floor.

"I apologize for the mess," said the man. "Have a seat." They sat in 2 chairs around a table.

"Who are you?"

"My name is Abraham. I am the creator of The Night's Edge."

"But The Night's Edge was created centuries ago. If you created it, you should be dead!"

"I am immortal, my dear boy. You see, I was an alchemist. I was born so long ago — I don't remember exactly when. We were very poor, and we did not have much food. I met a man who knew alchemy. I begged him to teach me. Finally he agreed. I learned many things, including how to become immortal. I created The Night's Edge hoping that someday, someone who was worthy would find it and become The Protector. I have helped only a few people try to find it. I believe you have the potential to find The Night's Edge."

"Me? But I am only a child."

"That is what makes you stronger than others. Children think outside the box. You can find the sword."

"Ok, maybe, but how do I find the sword? I have no idea where it is."

"It is in this kingdom. But it is very hard to get to. It is underneath what is now the king's palace. The only way is through a tunnel that lies in the basement of the palace. I placed a guardian there, who you must pass to get to the sword. If you get to the sword, you must say the words: Anahan Nyan. It is a passcode which will allow you to take the sword without experiencing a painful death."

Peter rose, but Abraham stopped him.

"Rest for today. Tomorrow you can leave for the palace."

They slept, and got up early in the morning, before the sun had risen.

"I hope you get to the palace safely," said Abraham. "Oh, and one more thing. Your pet, Flame, is very smart. He will protect you. Goodbye, Peter."

Peter brought out his map and compass and headed toward the palace. He traveled for 3 days before he reached the village next to the palace. He bought himself a room in an inn. In the morning, he ate breakfast at the inn, then left for the palace. When he got to the palace, the guards did not let him in, no matter how much he pleaded.

He went back to the inn and ate lunch. While he was eating, someone came to his table.

"Can I sit here?" the boy asked. "All the other tables are full."

"Sure." The stranger looked to be about Peter's age but was taller and had light blue eyes.

"My name is Isaac," said the stranger.

"I'm Peter."

What brings do you to this part of the kingdom?" asked Isaac.

"I need to get into the palace. Do you know of any way?"

"Yes, I do. Disguise yourself as a stable boy. The guards won't know the difference."

Peter did as Isaac had advised and managed to sneak into the palace. He made his way into the basement and entered the tunnel.

He heard a roar. Directly in front of him was a dragon the size of his hold house. The dragon lunged at him. He dodged to the side, but the dragon's teeth bit into his pack. Flame fell out of the pack. Flame hissed. The dragon stopped. Flame hissed again, but this time, he blew fire out of his mouth. Flame was a dragon.

The two creatures circled each other. Finally, Flame rushed toward the bigger dragon. Peter thought that Flame was going to be eaten, but they were just playing.

Peter walked on, and finally, he saw the sword. He remembered what the old man had said, and said: "Anahan Nyan." The chamber

rumbled. Peter grabbed the sword and returned to where the dragons were playing.

"Let's go now, Flame," he said. Both of the dragons followed him. Suddenly, the bigger dragon disappeared. He realized that it had made itself invisible.

He walked out of the palace and found Abraham. The old man was overjoyed to see him, and found a cave for the dragons to sleep in.

After that, the land became peaceful and prosperous. Eventually, Peter became old and died, and his will said that we wanted to be buried with the sword. The sword is in his grave, waiting for someone worthy to come and find it.

# A New Case

by Kelsey Liggett

## Third Place

As the bright sun shined through Aria's window, she woke up with a groan. Another day, another case. Aria wondered what today's client would bring her. Getting out of bed, she threw her caramel curls behind her. "Mom! Make me some coffee stat! I have a good feeling about today's case!" Aria yelled down the echoing hallways. "Sweetheart your 9, you don't need coffee." Her mother replied. Aria didn't think her mom understood the danger and importance of her job, how hard is it to understand saving the world?

Yesterday's case was a hard one, Little Susie's favorite dress had been found missing. Although the culprit had left no trace they had ever been there. Aria and her best friends James and Allie had helped her interview the whole neighborhood, until finally they found out what had happened. Turns out that Little Susie had gotten soda all over her dress and tried to place the blame on someone else, that mischievous child. But Aria had a feeling that today's case would be the hardest one she'd faced since the Great Disappearance of Timmy Carter, who had fallen asleep by the river and gone missing for 3 hours! Eventually she had found him and became the neighborhood hero. What could be harder than that? Aria couldn't think of anything, so in a moment of desperation she ran to Allie's house.

"Aria where are you going?" Her mother yelled after her, but she got no reply. As long as Aria followed her one rule, she would be fine.

When Aria got to Allie's house, she did the secret knock to let her friend know she was there. "Aria! Quick get inside!" Allie whispered, pulling Aria into her house. They ran to their secret hideout and quickly set up shop. "What is it?" Aria asked. "Rumors have been spreading around that today's case comes from outside the neighborhood!" Allie replied excitedly. Aria took this into great consideration, as her mom's one rule was to not go outside the neighborhood. She didn't want to go behind her mom's back, but this could be a life changing case. Aria needed more details before she took the case, she needed to meet with the mysterious client.

"Allie get James, we have to make a group decision on this case." Aria proclaimed grabbing her prized notebook and pen. "Meet me in the treehouse in ten minutes, no later than that. Got it?" Allie nodded knowingly. As Aria ran to the treehouse, she kept thinking about the case. What if it was out of the neighborhood? Would her mother allow her to take it? How dangerous was it? Pushing these thoughts out of her brain, she focused on getting to the treehouse.

About ten minutes later, Allie and James joined Aria in the treehouse. As the gang put out the 'open' sign, they deliberated whether they should take the case or not. "It might be fun, I mean we barely ever leave the neighborhood except for school and stuff with our parents. A change of scenery might prove useful in later cases." Allie argued. "Yes, but we don't know the other neighborhood, we could get lost! Or worse, grounded!" James shuddered. "While you both bring up some very interesting points, I do believe we need more information before making any decisions." That was all Aria could reply. Soon enough, an unfamiliar face joined the treehouse.

"State your name, age, and the case you need to be solved." James demanded. "Um... my name is Hugo Winston. I'm 7 years old and turning 8 in August." Hugo looked frightened and skittish, Aria found this intriguing and further questioned why he was there. "Well... uh... I come from the neighborhood across the river and have heard of your greatness. Our neighborhood has recently um... ran into some problems with a new kid. He's older than us and really mean... I was hoping you could help us out, please." Aria had never handled a case like this before, she badly wanted to take it. James and Allie seemed interested too, they had a look of excitement on their faces. "Hugo, we will now discuss your case. Please step out, we will call you back in soon." Allie stated, a little too joyfully for Aria's liking.

"We have to take this case!" James and Allie exclaimed, looking hopefully at Aria. "Let me think it over for a second." She replied. After a minute, Aria agreed to take the case as long as no one told her mother. She couldn't risk not being able to have an adventure. "Hugo, we have made a decision." James exclaimed as Hugo's little head came into view. "We have decided to take your case!" They all proclaimed. Hugo just lit up, he kept saying thank you and wouldn't stop telling the gang how amazing they were. "Now, take us to this bully." Aria said, her voice shaking.

"There he is!" Hugo exclaimed nervously once they got to the new neighborhood. The bully was a tall, heavy set male with hair the color of honey and eyes that could kill. He turned around and stared directly at us. Hugo squealed and hid behind James. As the bully got closer, Aria felt her knees go weak. She would not fall, it was her job to protect the people. He kept coming closer, Aria was suddenly very aware of her surroundings, a swing set on the left, a house on the right, James, Allie, and Hugo all backing up behind her. She wanted to run, the bully was at least 6 inches taller than her and could easily beat her up, but she was stuck. Aria couldn't move. In the blink of an eye, the bully was standing only a foot away from her.

"What do we have here? A new person?" He smiled down at Aria. His voice was low and gravely, he only looked to be about 14. Aria straightened her posture and stared into the bully's eyes. "My name is Aria Rose Jensen and I have heard word that you are bullying the kids of this neighborhood." Upon saying this, the bully just burst into laughter. Aria was so taken aback she just stood there with a dumbfounded expression on her face. "What are you going to do about it?" He said, still laughing. Now that pushed Aria's buttons, she kicked him in the shins. The bully let out a yelp of pain. "I can do a lot worse, now promise me you will stop bullying!" Aria yelled. "I will! I promise to stop bullying!" He said this quickly and without hesitation. Aria looked at her friends, who were just standing there with shocked expressions on their faces. "Let's go home guys, I don't like this neighborhood as much." Aria laughed.

Once Aria got home, her mother grounded her for leaving the neighborhood. Apparently, nobody knew where she and her friends had gone, and people were starting to worry. After apologizing over and over again, Aria's punishment was reduced to one week of having to stay inside. Although Aria knew it was worth it because no one has reported bullying in the neighborhood since.



**Short Story**

**Grades 9 & 10**

Poetry Drawing Short Story  
Photography

OUR OWN  
PROFESSIONS

# Like a Coward.

by Alice Tang

## First Place

Leo hadn't seen monkshood in years.

He hated them, more than he hated marigolds, and that was saying something. Marigolds represent confidence, pride but also despair. Monkshood were the symbol of caution.

In other words, they were a warning, a reminder.

A reminder to run, like the coward he was.

So here he was packing up again. His sparse closet was emptied in mere minutes. He had no time to dwell on the months he had spent here, and the few acquaintances he had found. As for that bouquet of flowers, they were discarded, shoved into a plastic bag and set outside his door. One last here, and then he would go on the run again, lie low for a long while.

The apartment complex left no traces of Leo's life. No photos, no personal decorations. Nothing but the slight scent of food and trash bags of paper bowls and a few pairs of wooden chopsticks. Everything was disposable. He had even considered throwing away his clothes once, but decided it was too expensive to keep buying new ones. He couldn't risk being seen too often, taking money out of his account. The money he inherited would sustain him, but he worked some odd jobs to, just in case.

He paid his rent to the landlord, his getaway pack slung over one arm. He stepped out back into busy streets once again, with no place to call his, no place to return to. So he stepped onto the subways.

His American passport hasn't expired yet, he could still book a flight overseas, live in the ghettos or something. Something cheap, so that he wouldn't miss the luxury of a safe home when it came time to run.

He could never stay, because he was a coward. He was a deer, racing away from a lion, dodging death every time he moved.

His hand closed over the strap of his backpack, leaning on the train's wall, careful to keep track of his surroundings. Normal college students, probably out to have a break on this sunny Saturday, an elderly couple,

one sleeping, and the other reading a newspaper. A bunch of business people, checking their watches, conducting calls. Children with their mothers, fathers promising his kid they'd get that really good chicken place for dinner.

Leo envied them. Envied the college kids the most. They were on their way to getting a decent job, with pretty damn good benefits, and here he was, running away again. Running away when all he had to do was go straight back to China.

Except he wasn't ready to face his mother and what she would say about the long disappearance he had pulled. It wasn't like she cared about his well-being or anything- but even during his younger years, she had shown not even a hint of affection for her only son. Leo was simply a heir. Merely a heir, someone who would keep the business going, someone who could satisfy her spending even his father retired from the scene. Oh, Leo was not a person to his mother, just like he was not a person to the institution of mad scientists who had experimented on him for who knew how many years.

As he stepped off the subway at the next stop, he dialed his best friend's number. Yun Tianzhe, also more fondly known as Zhian, the cute heartthrob idol singer. Leo had no idea what he was doing or what show he was on, but he hoped he was catching him during a break. A long one, preferably.

Instead, he got his voicemail, "Hello, you've reached Yun Tianzhe. If you're a fan, please leave a message on my socials instead. If you're my idiotic best friend, I swear you're not annoying-

Leo hung up, sliding his phone back in his pocket, knowing that Tianzhe would call him back after seeing his name pop up on his call list. He continued his rhythmic, casual stride, though he was hyper-aware of everyone around him. Every time he passed a flower shop, chills slid down his spine, flashing back towards the bouquet of marigolds and monkshoods he had left behind this morning. He couldn't rest until he got out of Korea.

He stopped in a small town for lunch, which turned out to be a Chinese diner, run by a middle aged couple. He ate quickly, paid and left a generous tip. Then, before the couple had time to wonder why such a young boy was out and about alone with only a backpack on him, Leo had disappeared back into the crowds, his small frame blending in with the faceless people surrounding him.

As he boarded another subway, his phone rang. In a hurry, he picked up, grinning because it was Tianzhe.

“You called earlier?” Tianzhe’s lazy mixed accent greeted him. Leo was about to nod, but then he realized (quite sheepishly) that Tianzhe wouldn’t be able to see him.

“Yeah, I did. I gotta leave Korea, they found me again, Tianzhe,” Leo spoke, as he surveyed the subway car. Sixteen, maybe seventeen adults, two school aged girl and three males. Two mothers with their children, an elderly man sleeping. He heard a shuffling, then some of Tianzhe’s favorite Chinese curse words.

“Where are you heading to now?” he asked. Leo considered not telling him, but he also knew he would give him hell for keeping him in the dark in times like this. In any case, Leo figured it was best to just tell him.

“I’m on my way to Seoul right to catch the last minute flight,” he replied. He had booked a flight earlier, when he had been eating his lunch. He heard Tianzhe hummed, then exchange a rapid succession of Korean with an older man, probably his manager. Finally, he got back to Leo.

“I’ll meet you at the airport, I probably know someone who can get you a cheap apartment,” Tianzhe said. Leo could hear his footsteps, pounding against the floor- then it became dull and muffled, along with the addition of the city sounds. But before Leo could answer, Tianzhe had hung up. Typical.

Leo smiled though, knowing that he had someone who would always have his back.

Even if he kept running away like a coward.

Leo surveyed the subway car once more, then froze, fear grabbing at his throat, and pinning him to the ground, the wall he leaned on. He wasn’t sure how he hadn’t seen the man before, his white lab coat stood out here more than anything else. Leo stared at him as the man came closer, rooted to the spot. The monkshood insignia stitched on the left pocket of his lab coat was the bloody color of red he remembered, a burning memory he hated.

And he hated this, how he couldn’t move, when he came face to face of with one of the institution again, panic restricting his breath intake, fear whispering vicious words in his mind.

He didn’t move, like the coward he was. Not even when the man leaned down close to his ear, a sinister smile on his face.

“I found you, Leo.”

# The Cost of Ambition

by Honor Tamminga

**Second Place**

The day was cold and wet. Drops of rain rolled down Edith Taylor's bedroom window. The room, like all the rest in this old house, was clean and comfortable. In the corner was a pale brown, suede chair. This was where Edith sat. In her hands was a copy of Plato's Republic, but Edith was not looking at it. This crisp book was the newest addition to Edith's library. In her younger days, Edith knew, having a brand new copy of the Republic would have been a dream come true. The little old lady smiled as she remembered the first time she had read this great work. It had seemed like every page held a new secret written just for her. Now, somehow, the book had lost its charm. Edith would almost say it was boring.

Edith's eyes drifted to the window. The day of her college graduation had been much like this. Edith recalled the feeling of her gown and cap, drenched, as she proudly celebrated with her classmates. That was a treasured moment, for that was the moment that Edith really started life. Or at least, that's what her younger self had thought. Now, Edith thought sadly, it still didn't feel as if she had really lived.

From her little brown chair, Edith gazed around her room. On the wall, was her college diploma, given her on that rainy day in 1954 when she graduated, top of her class.

Edith's ambition drove her to defy the expectation of marriage and motherhood. She went to college for a degree in science, and took as many extra classes as she could. Her literature classes gave her a love for the classics she had never lost. And her science classes gave her the degree she had so craved.

Next to the diploma was a newspaper clipping, boldly proclaiming, "Female scientist helps develop vaccine." Edith remembered clearly the reaction that had gotten. The first impression that she had ignored her obligations as a woman soon changed to respect for her courage to step boldly into a "man's world" and follow her dreams.

Edith grew immensely successful. Almost painfully so. The awards that lined the walls testified to this. She was well known among scientific circles, but with every step up in her world of work, the gap between herself and her family widened.

All of Edith's friends became mere acquaintances, and visiting family became an obligation, instead of a joy. But in her youth, these things seemed to matter little. If she chased her ambitions, she was sure, all else that mattered would follow. If friends and family did not, clearly they weren't worth her while. But now, with the wisdom that accompanies age, Edith was not sure her philosophy was true.

Her eyes scanned these awards and trophies of her life. Edith frowned. Something was missing. Among all the recognitions of her past life, there were no photographs. No letters from old friends. Edith made her way to her desk. She carefully drew out one of the drawers. Edith paused as she looked at the sadly small bundle of mementos from friends and family. Birthday greetings, postcards, and a very few memories caught on camera greeted her.

The rain continued to blur the windows, and tears began to blur Edith's eyes, as she flipped through the stack. Looking at these remnants of her friendships and family, Edith realized that even her vast accomplishments had failed to bring her joy. The dream was reduced to only a few pieces of paper. Edith knew that the few pages from friends were far more precious than those of her successful career.

Edith laid the faded jewels of love out on her bed, and climbed on like a little girl counting her Halloween candy. Her eyes lighted on a faded photo of herself with a young man. In the corner was scrawled the words "To Edy, with love."

James was the only one who ever called Edith "Edy." And she could never imagine him calling her anything else. Everyone, including Edith, thought that she and James would make a match. The two had been childhood friends, then high school sweethearts, then practically engaged. But when James saw that his Edy's dedication to her work was far more than her love for him, he gave up on her like all the others had.

Edith was bitter, but could not blame James. She chose her path

of success, and knew she could not, or at least would not, walk it with him. She was convinced that he would not only hinder her work, but also force her into becoming the housewife she would once have been humiliated to become. Now, Edith would give anything to have the love she knew James would have given, and the children and grandchildren they would have loved together.

A child's laugh from outside brought Edith back to the present. The rain had stopped, and her tears had dried. Edith carefully put her treasures away. Somehow, this trip down "memory lane" had lightened Edith's heart. Her new sadness brought with it a fresh understanding of life and love. Yes, Edith knew, her career had been important, and still was important. But far more important was the love she had lost.

Edith smiled as she saw the child running around in the puddles joyously. His mother held a baby in her arms, and another little boy by the hand. In a moment of pure impulse, Edith pulled on a pair of seldom used boots, and stepped outside to meet her neighbors for the first time.

"Good morning!" she called cheerfully. The woman looked up and smiled.

"Hello! You must be Miss Taylor. My name is Flora Wright."

"Oh, Flora. It's nice to finally meet you. I ought to have introduced myself long ago. Please call me Edith. And your children are...?" Flora adjusted the baby on her hip.

"This is Janey, Kyle, and Chase is..." Flora sighed with exasperation, "the one ruining his new coat in the mud." For the first time in quite a while, Edith let out a full and hearty laugh.

"Would you like me to hold Janey and Kyle for you, Flora?" The younger woman, without a moment's hesitation, passed her children to Edith.

"Kyle," she said as she started toward little Chase, "this is Miss Edith. Please be a good boy for her for a minute, while Mommy goes to get Big Brother." To Edith, Flora added, "It does get hard when my husband's away at work." Edith smiled wistfully, as she looked at Flora chasing after her little boy. This was what she could have had, if only she had let love lead her life instead of ambition. The chaos, the laughter, and a real life.

Kyle looked up at Edith. In a small, lisping voice, the little boy addressed her, “You’re Mith... Edy?”

“Yes, dear, that’s right.”

Plato was famous for saying, “Every heart sings a song, incomplete, until another heart whispers back.” Now, Edith knew that to be true. Yes, she had lost the whisper from her past, but Edy could hear a faint whisper now, and a second chance for love.

# **For a Kingdom**

by Chloe Rutherford

## **Third Place**

Maron entered her office to the sight of her royal ambassador bound to a chair, surrounded by guards. He had failed to come to an agreement on a trade deal with the neighboring kingdom, unfortunately for him, no one is allowed to fail in Queen Maron's court. Swiftly, she crossed the room and stopped before the ambassador. His mouth was pressed in a thin line. Maron could tell he was trying to keep his composure but she could easily see through the facade. A small smile tugged at the corner of her lips.

Without much ceremony, Maron plucked a dagger from a guards hand and ran it through the former ambassador's chest. She twisted the blade and watched him slump against his bindings. Turning on her heel, Maron left the office. She had a party to attend.

Maron entered the palace gardens. She had arranged the decor to look like a chess game on the grounds. The masquerade guests were adorned in glittering costumes, the only colors in the otherwise monochrome decor. Maron chuckled softly to herself, her eyes roaming over the guests. She searched for anything to break the monotonous sight of nobles peacocking to whoever pays them enough mind. Glancing over the grandeur of the masquerade Maron rested her gaze on two particularly interesting figures huddled in the shadows.

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Aumi tucked her forged invitation into her costume. Weston had already disposed of his. She thought it unnecessary but he was insistent. They were tucked behind shrubbery on the outskirts of the party. They discussed in low whispers.

"So, we're here. Now what?"

"Now, we kill the Queen. That was the plan remember?" Aumi knew she and Weston had gone over the plan numerous times. She was here to assassinate the Queen no matter the cost. Maron had

ordered a raid of her village over a petty dispute with Varleks king. She had only been a child, her whole family was slaughtered in the raid. If she got rid of Maron, perhaps the aching in her chest would lessen when she dealt the justice deserved for her village. Weston ran a hand through his tousled hair. Aumi resisted the urge to smooth back his auburn curls.

"Aumi, I know the plan, you kill the Queen. What comes after? What do you possibly think you're going to gain from this?"

"I'm just setting the cards right. Whatever comes next... comes next."

Weston didn't seem satisfied with that answer, the only response he gifted Aumi was a roll of his eyes. Aumi looked past the bushes and saw the Queen. She grabbed Weston's arm.

"Weston, it's almost time." He nodded and looked off into the party.

"Is something bothering you?"

A muscle jumped in Weston's jaw. It looked like he was biting back his words but he managed a mumbled, "nothing." His curtness did nothing but set Aumi on edge but she had no time to gripe about it, because when the duo walked out from behind the shrubs they were immediately faced with their target.

Before them stood the ruler of Entralia, Queen Maron. Aumi dropped into a clumsy curtsy, a million things racing through her mind. She couldn't form a single coherent thought other than the thought of her family lying dead in the ruins of her home. Everything in her life brought her before the Queen, but she could hardly move.

Maron tipped her head and Aumi regained her composure. Forcing herself back into the memories of being a scared child, watching her life collapse around her. Aumi steeled herself against Maron's calculating gaze and smirked at the Queen. Looked at her like she had nothing to lose. If she really thought about it, she didn't. Everything she had died in the attack, the only thing she gained was Weston. Who she had only known for a few short months. What would become of him should she go through with her plot against the Queen? She could worry about that soon but for now, she had a Queen to kill, and justice to serve.

As Aumis thoughts soared a long living flame within her burned brighter as she stared at Maron. Aumi flicked her arm and caught the blade she had secured in her sleeve earlier that night. After she attacks the Queen, there's no going back. Aumi flicked her gaze back to Weston. After this, she would be sure to thank him for being with her through this. Aumi looked back to the Queens' face only to see her staring at Weston. Maron looked back to Aumi and something shifted in her face. She began to back away.

Aumi reached her arm out to grab Maron and finish what she had come to accomplish. Screams erupted from all around her, temporarily halting her movements. She turned to find Weston. Weston, who she came to trust. Weston, who she considered a friend, the first in a long time. Weston, who she told about her family, the stories she held closest to her heart. Weston, whos' gentle friendly gaze changed to something she couldn't recognize. Weston, plunging a dagger into her abdomen.

The betrayal hurt Aumi more than the stab ever could. The first person she had truly come to care for in years, in an instant turned into someone she really hadn't known at all.

She watched as the Queen reached for Weston. With trembling hands, he reached back.

Aumi shut her eyes.

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*Aumi truly was a fool,* Weston thought to himself as the Queen and her guards escorted him into a luxurious guest room in the palace. The room was illuminated by a bright sunrise. Looking through the window he watched the sun that Aumi would never see again. He scolded himself. It was for the best. Her motives had always been in the wrong place. The only thing fueling her was revenge. There was nothing for her beyond that. As for Weston, he had drive. He had a world to change.



**Short Story**

**Grades 11 & 12**

Poetry Drawing Short Story  
Photography

X OUR OWN PROFESSIONS

# The Masked Man

by Helena Burk

## First Place

The mountains that towered over the brightly colored houses along the shore of Lake Como held a secret. It was said there was a man who dwelt within those picturesque hillsides and towering peaks that was nearly as old as they were. There, he would wander under the pine trees in the night with blood like the wild rivers pumping through his veins. He was tall and olive-skinned, and his dark eyes shown through the slits of a fearsome wooden mask.

Although the man of the hills never came to town, the inhabitants of Varenna knew he was there. He was an ever-constant presence haunting the northernmost reaches of the Italian Alps. Occasionally, they could see him hiking across the mountainside. Sometimes they would find his tracks in the yellow light of the moon. Whenever someone saw a shadowy figure high up on the hills, they would cross themselves and ask Mary to pray for them.

Some claimed the man to be the relic of a time older than the Church. Others said he was more ancient than the days of the Romans. However, whatever the belief someone held of the man's origin, all the villagers told their children to keep inside once the sun set.

Emilio and his brother Fiorenzo had heard the tale thousands of times. While some claimed the man was an ancient, or a spirit from a forgotten time, their mother claimed he was the devil.

"His eyes are blacker than sin," she would say as she walked across the kitchen with a pot of steaming vegetables in her arms and smatterings of flour clinging to her apron, "that mask of his makes it more obvious than the light of day. What kind of man would wear such an abomination?"

Every night, she would stop in the doorway of the brothers' room. Her arched nose and dark hair were eerily enhanced by the light of a single candle as she warned them to latch the windows and stay inside.

"That devil in the mask would love to steal children such as you away from your mamas," she would say as she clutched the crucifix that hung from her neck. "Stay inside, my boys, and say your prayers."

One day Emilio and Fiorenzo sat beneath the shade of a large tree, watching the people that passed through the town square. The evening air was warm, and the setting sun cast a rosy glow across the hills as the boys lazily ate the nuts and berries they had picked that morning.

"Fiore, do you believe in the masked man mamma talks about?" Emilio asked as he tossed a berry into his mouth.

Fiorenzo looked down at Emilio from where he sat above him on a tree branch. "Do you mean if I believe the masked man is the devil, or if I believe in the masked man?"

Emilio shrugged. "Either, I suppose," he began to say. "I mean, some people in town say he's some sort of ancient spirit, but others say he's just a myth. Who knows what to believe?" he admitted.

Fiorenzo leaned his back against the tree trunk and sat silently for a moment in thought. "Well," he finally started to say, "I don't know. I think there must be something to the story, but I don't know if it means the masked man is the devil."

"So, you're saying you think he exists?" Emilio concluded.

"Well, something must exist that's enough like him to make the tale," Fiorenzo responded logically.

"Like a shadow, or a traveler whose imagination got the best of him?"

"Sure," Fiorenzo agreed as the speckled sunlight through the branches cast shadows against his tanned face. "Something like that. What do you think, Emilio?"

Emilio looked up at the looming mountains through the leaves with a tilted head and a curious expression. "I think he's real," he admitted. "I just don't know what he is."

Fiorenzo laughed. "You really believe in the masked man?"

Emilio glared up at him. "You believe Brigid Accardi is in love with you. I can believe what I want," he announced defensively. "Besides," he continued, "you said it yourself, something must've inspired the tale. Why couldn't it have been a real masked man?"

Fiorenzo rolled his eyes. "Fine. I suppose it could've been. But you don't really agree with mamma that he's the devil, or think he's as old as the hills, because of his wooden mask and black eyes?"

"I don't think he's the devil or as old as the hills because of his wooden mask or his black eyes."

Fiorenzo placed his hands behind his head like he was going to take a nap and closed his eyes with satisfaction. "Good, for a moment you—"

"But I do think he could be the devil because of what's behind the mask," Emilio interjected.

Fiorenzo was so startled, he nearly fell out of the tree. He hurried to look down at his brother from the branches. "You don't really mean that, do you?"

"Sure," Emilio replied, and he regarded the looming mountains in thoughtful silence. "I just think a man can be anything when he wears a mask."

# Mr. Elgar

by Martina Preston

## Second Place

Herman was tired of both life and the old slippers he wore every day. That air-headed nurse who came in at nine in the morning and eight at night to give him his pills said that she couldn't legally go buy him new shoes. Apparently, as long as he was physically able, he had to go to the store in the van on Tuesday with everyone else. Oh, and while she was here, she might as well ask if Herman wanted to go join the Saturday night bridge game? Haley Birdsall won last week's game, maybe she'll win it all again. Joseph Withers might entertain the residents with his piano skills, that's sure to be fun! It'd do Herman good to be out of his room and get to know some other people.

He was sick of all that rot. The shoes weren't warm anymore, and if a man couldn't get a good pork roast on Christmas Day like Betty used to make him, he should sure have been able to at least get a pair of warm slippers.

Besides, he wasn't here to get to know people. One day he ought to tell the nurse that, one day. He was here to stay alive. No attendant had to water that down for him.

Herman's room held space just enough for a bed, a dresser, and that ugly red plaid armchair his son had given him years ago. He lounged in the chair right now, watching the excess of cars in the parking lot dwindle as the usual time for visitors passed. He grunted. That son of his never visited. The chair was from the last time they'd seen each other, and it wasn't even a good chair. The boy couldn't use time as an excuse, Herman knew, the moron illustrated children's books for a living. Herman might look out for Percy's car on special days, except for that the kid probably couldn't afford one.

A series of loud raps on the door. "Mr. Elgar?" Was it eight o'clock already?

Herman cleared his throat. "If you've come with a coffin, leave. I'm not dead yet." At his response, the door opened fluidly, and the nurse breezed in.

"Did you find your new slippers this afternoon?" She tossed the black medicine case onto the dresser, picked up a few of the forgotten papers Herman hadn't realized had fallen out of their stack. Then her movements slowed, and her voice became quiet, almost... he couldn't quite put his finger on it. Sad? "You've been writing, huh."

The chair creaked when Herman leaned forward. Why would she care? Memoirs were an important piece of history. So what if he was just trying to add his story to the rest? "Leave those alone." The words scraped like a piece of iron in his throat. His papers fluttered back to the ground accordingly.

The woman began fiddling with the containers on his dresser, and Herman noticed for the first time how red her hair was. "My wife," he said, as if it was a sentence on its own. "My wife. She had red hair." Herman didn't mind the scraping so much if he wanted to talk.

"Yes, Mr. Elgar, she was beautiful. You showed me your pictures." The woman smiled, but not with her eyes. Betty always smiled with her eyes. She brought his tray over, and talked some more. "You and Mrs. Elgar went on that wonderful trip to Paris for your silver anniversary, you told me. The lights and the Tower and the Seine, right?"

Yes, yes, the lights. But did he tell her about the food? "It was awful," Herman said, continuing his train of thought out loud. The nurse raised her eyebrows.

"Awful? It sounded— oh, sir, don't forget to take the memantine, that one's very important." Herman shook his head and swallowed the drug with his orange juice.

"Oh, forget about it. I didn't mean that."

She smiled again, this time a different sort of smile, and took the tray away. Herman watched the second hand of the nondescript white clock jerk past 9. Time moved slower here, slower since he moved out. Everything was irreversibly slowing down. The nurse caught him staring at the clock and glanced at it also. "He should be here any minute now," she commented.

"Who?" Herman never saw anyone in his room, except for the nurse and his son, four— five? six? years ago.

"Mr. Percy," she said, as if it were common knowledge.

It was not common knowledge to Herman. His son, really, after all this time? Today wasn't any extraordinary date, not that Herman could think of. He pushed himself up from the armchair to examine the calendar on the opposite wall. The stupid thing wasn't even for the right year, it wouldn't be any help. Not a birthday, an anniversary, a holiday. Christmas wasn't for another two months at least—he could keep track of that because of when the decorations went up. Herman looked at the nurse. "Percy?"

She zipped up the medicinal bag and went to the door. "Mr. Elgar, he visits you every day at eight-thirty. I'll let him in when he arrives, so have a good evening." The door closed behind her.

Herman didn't let himself think about what she had said. Instead, he paced around the room, making sure that every belonging was in order. He carefully stacked his papers in their specific order, put them back on the dresser; he fluffed the pillows; he turned around the mirror hanging on the wall so his reflection didn't look quite so excited. The old family photo hanging next to the mirror almost made his face crack into a smile. His son had just graduated university in the photo, and his dark hair brought out his equally dark eyes. He got those handsome dark eyes from Betty. Percy was coming! Maybe he'd see that Herman still had the armchair—come to think of it, it wasn't nearly as hideous as Herman had thought before. He patted the crown of the chair expectantly, willing time to move faster.

Time had never listened to Herman, but it was worth an effort.

The door creaked open. "Dad?"

Herman grinned, but it only lasted for a split second. The visitor's name tag was correct, but the person wasn't. "Who are you?"

The nurse appeared behind the man—Percy? "Mr. Elgar," she said, quietly. "Your son is here to see you."

Their eyes met, one weathered, dark pair meeting another just like it.

Herman blinked first.

He shook his head. How wrong he had been, thinking Percy would have come to visit him after all this time. How wrong he had been, believing that idiotic, gullible nurse. How wrong he had been, hoping for a moment that he could do more than survive in this

confinement. His voice took on an unnaturally vicious edge, and his hand floated above the inside doorknob.

“That’s not my son.”

How wrong he had been.

# **Boo**

by James Castle

## **Third Place**

Everyone knew it was coming. First, the ice caps melted. Then the lakes and rivers dried up. Lastly, the ocean started to evaporate, leaving behind a briny, over-polluted sludge that once was the ocean. All polar life had long since died off, except for one exhibit in the Central Park Zoo. The zoo had long since evolved from anything resembling an animal habitat. Instead, it was more like a lab, with stainless steel and concrete walkways, and glass walls and ceilings. Everything was indoors now, as the air was so polluted it was toxic. In this last bastion of biodiversity lived the last living polar bear, Boo, and it was only a matter of time before he died. His handler, Alathea Soula, begged her supervisors day and night for medication, food, and water for the neglected animal. No help ever came. Very often, Alathea had to barter with the penguin handlers for food and water for her friend.

They felt the squeeze as much as she did. As the oceans became more toxic, and the amount of fish in the world diminished, the price of feeding the animals became extremely high. Business was down, as people did not bother to look at or help animals that were basically extinct anyway. Alathea's bosses had very little money, and what money they had, they gave to exhibits that actually brought visitors and money, not to the polar bear exhibit.

After a month of trading favors for food in lieu of receiving shipments, Alathea realized, I'm going to quickly run out of favors, and Boo will die. I have a few options: increase the number of visitors Boo brought, increase my funding in spite of my competition, decrease my competition, or let Boo die. The first two are nearly impossible, the last two, morally reprehensible.

The box of fish she was able to scrounge off of the penguins that morning was light. Too light. They used to need a forklift for the crates of food for all the polar bears. Malnutrition and lack of crucial medicines had decimated the once proud polar bear exhibit. Now, Alathea could carry the food she could procure. Alathea and Boo

were the only ones left. I need to keep Boo alive not only for his sake but also for mine, she thought, remembering all her former colleagues.

The dull thud of her boots stopped with her musings as she reached the door to the polar bear habitat. She would have to feed Boo quickly; she had a meeting with her boss and the zoo administration to discuss getting more food and possibly medicine for Boo. She held little hope of it going well, however.

She found Boo collapsed by the fake river in his fake habitat. He never appeared to move much from this spot, and attempts to move him with food or treats, when she had them, were met with a disinterested flop of his head. Instead of proud growls, he gave pitiful groans, and his brilliant white fur had long ago turned a dull yellow. She left Boo with his fish, hugged his bony neck, and ran off for her meeting, saying, "Bye Boo, I'll try and get us out of this mess ok?"

The atmosphere in the conference room was undeniably tense. Her boss was the first to speak, "We all know why we are here. Miss Soula wants more money for food and medications for the polar bear to keep it alive or ease its passing."

The director of the zoo was next, "Unfortunately, we do not have money to give you. We have donors backing out daily, and we barely have enough funding to pay our staff. We cannot increase your funding."

"But you can't just let him die!" Alathea's protest was quickly cut off by the director,

"Unfortunately, we have no other choice. However, if you can increase traffic to see him, we may be able to squeeze in some funding."

Alathea's heart sank. Any funding will come from someone else with an underperforming exhibit. Realistically, any new visitors aren't going to be enough to support the upkeep of an exhibit. Still, she had to try.

"You may use any supplies in the office to try to attract more visitors, but I would not have much hope," added her boss.

"Thank you, sir, I will do my best."

The meeting came to a close, and Alathea ran off to spend more time with Boo. The president and Alathea's boss stayed back.

"She has spirit. Were times not like they are, she would be wonderful in administration," noted the president.

"Yes, she's one of the best. However, I think she would always prefer to stay with the animals."

"She cares a lot about them. Unfortunately, simply caring doesn't bring in money. If I could, we would never have to lay off any of our workers. But you can't pay them all."

"No, you can't." With that sad remark, the two went their separate ways.

On the way back from her meeting, Alathea passed the loading and shipping dock. It would be so easy to sneak in and steal some food for Boo, she thought for a second. But I can't do that. The other zookeepers have their own animals to deal with, and they need the food too. She passed the loading dock and went to work.

Alathea worked hard. In the week following the meeting, she printed flyers, made posters, and put up signs all around the zoo leading to the "The Last Living Polar Bear." Her hard work had not seemed to pay off, however. She had a total of seven visitors, and none of them stayed for very long. No one cared about Boo except her, it seemed. "It'll be okay, Boo, we'll be alright." Early in the week, she was met with whimpers. Then the whimpers stopped, and Boo would just raise his head. By the end of the week, the only response Boo could give was a look as she force-fed him the meager amounts of food she could give him.

At the end of the week, the zoo president met with Alathea's boss again. "Miss Soula has been unable to increase visitation to the polar bear exhibit, despite her valiant attempt," began the president.

"I think it is cruel to not feed or medicate the polar bear. I think it is wisest that we euthanize him to ease his suffering."

"Sadly, it must be done. Humans are vulnerable to endangerment. While polar bears are extinct in the wild, we must do our best to stay alive and pay our employees in these hard times. I'll leave you to break the news to Miss Soula."

A few hours later Alathea's boss came with the Environmental Services to break the news to Alathea and take Boo away.

She sat crying as they disposed of Boo. She could probably count the number of days she had a job left on one hand, and it was a matter of time before she ran out of food just like Boo.