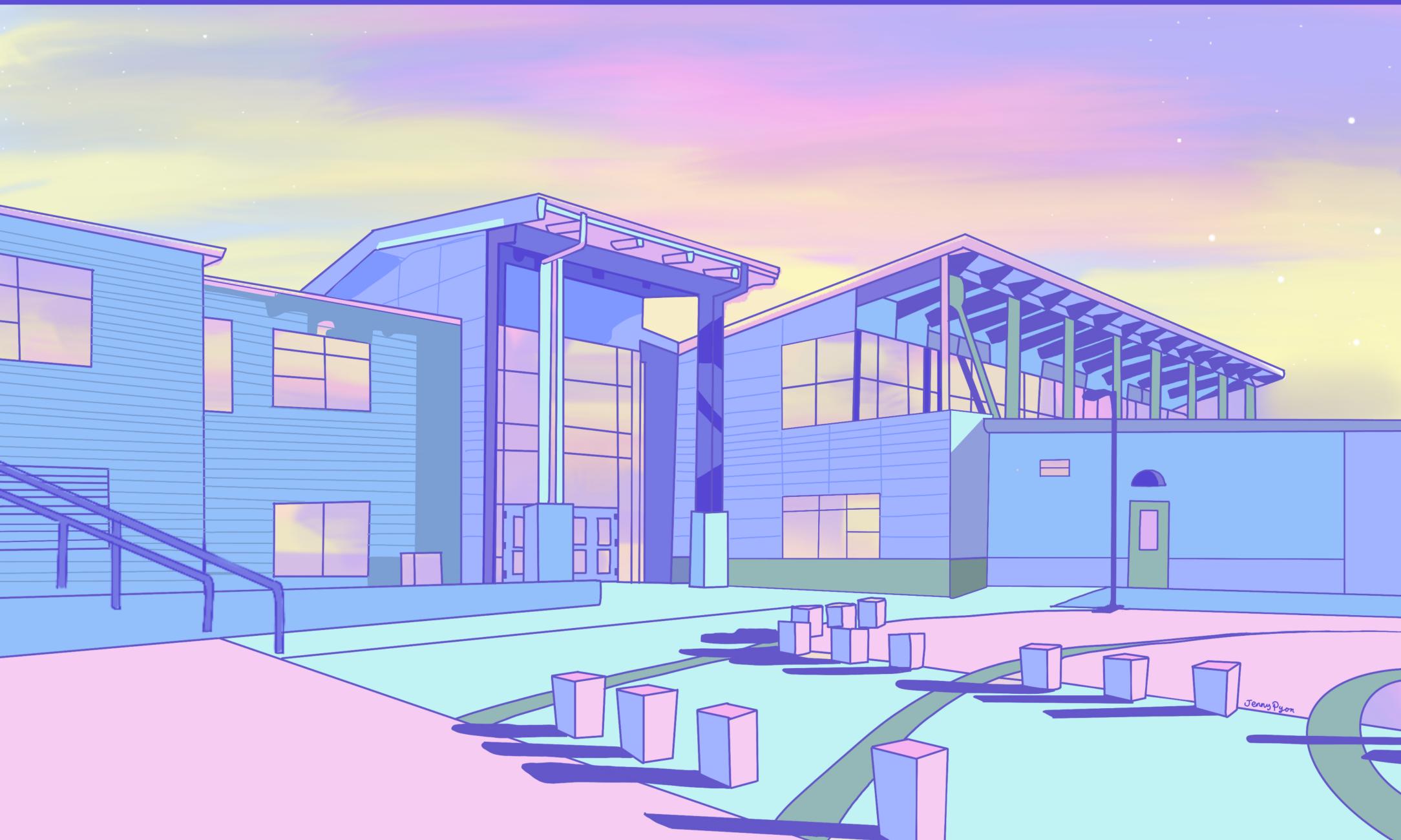


# PYRA 2020



Jenny Pyon

Here it is, everyone, the 2019-2020 Authors Society *Pyra* Literary and Art Magazine! Just like you, our small editorial staff has had to adapt to make this project happen. From voting on and ranking submissions remotely to designing the layout by dragging around PowerPoint slides, it's been an adventure.

The year 2020 at ICS will forever be remembered as one of our collective strangest experiences and as a time when our entire school created community in new ways. ICS's creative flame continues to burn bright, even in darkness.

The wonderful work of cover art this year embodies it: a year, still at ICS, only in a digital world.

We hope this magazine brings you some joy and reminds you of the strength of our community.

*Madeleine Goertz, Ellen Ma, & Eric Shi  
Pyra Editorial Staff*



# Pyra

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## **International Community School Authors Society 2020 Literary and Art Magazine**

**Editor:**  
Madeleine Goertz

**Assistant Editors:**  
Michelle Janssen  
Eric Shi

**Art Editor:**  
Ellen Ma

**Advisor:**  
Lauren Jackson

**Editorial Staff:**  
Yuen Hang Fung  
Aubrey Jacob  
Rachel Li  
Matthew Lin  
Rory McNerney  
Wyatt Moore  
Anusha Parameshwar  
Anna Rowell  
Divya Saenz-Badillos

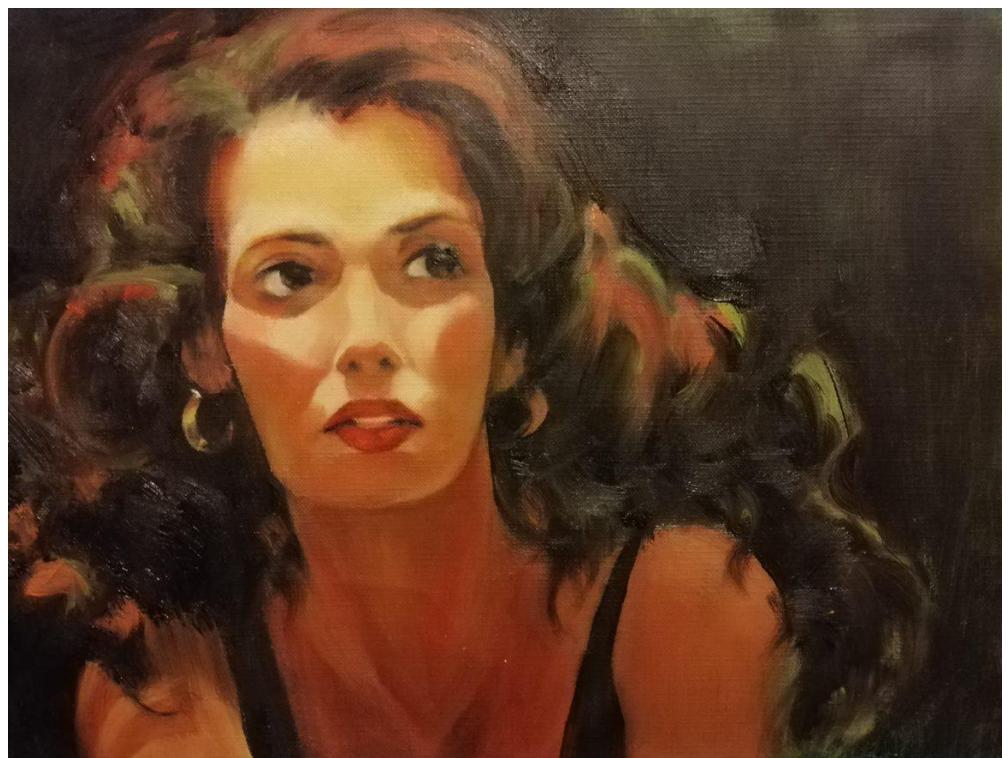
**Layout Assistance:**  
Kaylee Allen  
Jennah Badr  
Clio Erignac  
Riley Garcia  
Aarushi Godha  
Judah Lee  
Melody Sakiya  
Reya Velamoor  
Sarah Welch  
Yilin Zhang

Cover Art:  
School, Jenny Pyon, 9

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Golden Earrings

Ellen Ma, 11

## A Radical Act

Madeleine Goertz, 11

Forgetting is not the same thing as  
Overtly deciding that the  
Righteous thing to do is find the drop of  
Goodness left in you that  
Isn't crowded by  
Vehement bitterness and energetically  
Exacting platitudes and  
Niceties that fail to  
Encourage a singular  
Sentiment of a  
Second chance.

Imputrescible is the sentimental  
Seed of getting to start over.

# The Sand Won't Stop

Shrimayee Narashimhan, 9

As I watch sand flow through the hourglass,  
The majestic tiger takes his last breath.  
His realm as weak as the ice sea I pass,  
Forests ablaze with the odor of death.  
Gas engulfs the air. I cannot inhale.  
Help me fix this abominable mess.  
The sky gasps, for he is about to fail.  
Storms grip every corner. They cause distress.  
A fish believes she wears a plastic dress.  
In reality, it is her deathbed.  
She sinks to depths where she will decompress.  
Time cuts the sky until Gaea is dead.  
Only humans can stop his deadly force,  
The sand won't stop – we can't forget our course.



Plastic Fish

Jenny Pyon, 9

# The Deer in the Backyard

Zachary Damm, 9

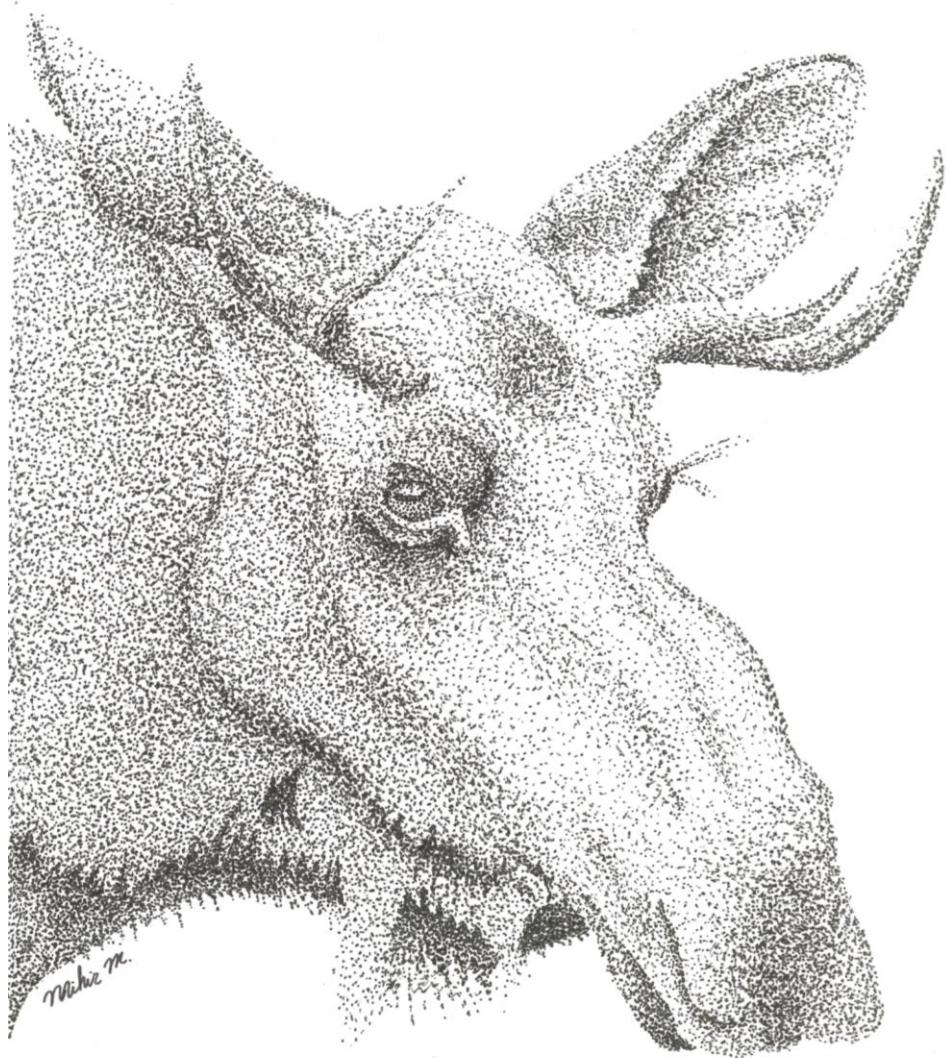
The sight of the woods behind Joe's new house was like no other, well at least not like any other Joe had seen during his first five years living in an atrocious two-bedroom apartment. Joe recently discovered that word: *atrocious*. He would tell you he learned it from the dictionary, but really, he overheard his parents use it a lot, and it stuck with him. He loved the way it rolled off his tongue: A-Tro-Cious. Joe was trying this new word out loud all day. It was probably his new favorite word. The word *exasperated* no longer ranked as his favorite word. That seemed like a four-year old's word, and Joe was five now.

His parents told him this was his birthday present, a new home, but Joe didn't care about the house as much as the backyard. As soon as the car was parked in the driveway, Joe jumped out and ran into the woods. His parents, who had been fighting the entire way to the house, didn't even notice him leave—they were too busy yelling at each other.

His parents had to move out of the city because Joe's dad got laid off, not fired. The two words meant the same thing to Joe, and they sure didn't make his mother happy either. Joe's mother produced movies and still had her job in the city, but now she had a long commute. Joe hadn't thought much of their arguing—he was used to it.

He had been waiting to see this wondrous backyard his father had been telling him about. He ran, jumped, and squealed with joy, not noticing how dark it was getting, or even how far he was going. Joe ran out of breath by the time he reached the river. His father said the river was too dangerous for a five-year-old. Joe didn't listen to his father much. He took off his rain boots and the little red coat his parents got him for Christmas, and he approached the river.

He stopped. Something was off, and he knew it. He felt a warm breath right on the back of his neck. Slowly, he turned around to see giant antlers and dead, red eyes towering over him. He screamed so terrifyingly loud that his parents could hear it a quarter mile away in the car. Startled by the intensity of the child's scream, the deer kicked up its two front hooves, knocking Joe unconscious and into the river's rapids. His mother and father sprinted through the forest to the river but did not see any sign of Joe, just two rain boots and a red coat.



Young Moose

Mihir Mishra, 9



Year of the Metal Rat

Ella Yuen, 11

## Two in the Morning

Keren Inger, 10

Twinkling stars, tiny dots in solitude condensed in the  
Inky sky of sorrows, dripping like a nightfall rain onto the  
Notebook paper sprawled out on a desk made of pearls, the  
Blades of grass, gleaming under the moonlight, enveloped by the  
Crushing sense of failure written neatly into a planner, and the  
Bed on the other side of the world, cold, empty, replaced by the  
White mug full of black coffee, steam rising into pools of dusk, and  
Just when the silence becomes deafening, the darkness gives way to  
Light.



Eye

Esther Lee, 11

# Blind

Aubrey Jacob, 9

Recognized by the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards

Emon had never believed in stories. So why did he follow a legend?

Jagged rocks dragged against his arms as he leaned on the cave wall for guidance. Their smooth facets were slick with water that dripped onto his skin, goosebumps prickling like spiderwebs where the drops landed. His foot faltered at each step, loose stone shifting with an echoing crunch. Somehow the jolt felt like falling every time, and freezing panic shot through him with every step. The water pooled on the cave floor left his feet thick and numb. His sister's footsteps scratched on the tunnel's other side, her breath, like his, catching with every step.

"Mira?" His voice sounded so tired here, raggedness amplified in echoes.

"I'm here." She sounded steady, solid.

"You all right?"

"I'm still fine. Is anything wrong?"

"I'm all right."

"We must be getting close."

He sighed, breath rattling off the walls. Close to a myth, a legend. If it even existed. How could he believe what he had not felt for himself? Why was he here if he didn't believe?

They walked on in silence, leaving breath and grating footsteps their only companions. As time faded, and only sounds remained to chip away the time, an ache twinged to life in Emon's chest. Every step drew them closer to their goal and to Mira's realization that their journey was for nothing, thousands of steps and bruises spent on nothing. He should never have come; he should've stopped Mira from coming because Mira was wrong. Nothing would change, and nothing would get better. Better for him to disbelieve to keep the disappointment from crushing her.

He stopped, stepping away from the wall to still his mind and to gather his thoughts. Their pair of footfalls faded to one, and Mira's receded as she pulled ahead. The crunching sounds of her feet got softer and softer, echoes bouncing through the cool, humid air. Concern and a fear of falling behind swirled up to fill the empty space she had left. With a sigh, Emon reached out his hands and began to search for the wall, grasping for guidance and reaching only air. He felt the wall coming near, could hear his sporadic footsteps bouncing off it, when all sound from Mira cut off without so much as an echo. Emon paused mid-step and turned a questioning ear toward where he had last heard her.

“Mira?”

Silence.

Then, “I’m here.”

“Are you all right?”

“Yes. There’s... something here.” Her voice was awed, distant.

Emon lost his balance and stumbled to regain it. Maybe she had found it, against all odds, their journey not pointless after all. Hope and glory for her, warmth and safety for him. “I’m coming—wait for me!”

She stayed silent. Even her breaths dissipated into some unknown space as he clambered to his feet and scrambled along the wall.

Edges and corners pricked like a sharp click of metal on stone. The ring of his footsteps hung in the air.

Soon his steps echoed outward and up, signaling a cavernous space before him. He sighed at the reprieve from suffocating stone, and the exhale dissipated into the openness.

“This could be it.” Maybe there was something here. The air felt magical, somehow. Special. His voice reverberated for whole seconds in a booming echo.

“It’s beautiful,” Mira murmured. “If it’s going to be anywhere, it will be here. It has to be.”

He knew she overflowed with anticipation. It was in the tightness of her vowels, the thickness of her voice as she tried to control the words that spilled over one another and flowed together like a river in their rush to go somewhere. It was the quaver of her hand as he took it in his own, the tautness of her shoulder as she leaned against him. And it was no surprise. After all, the journey had been hers all along.

Mira had never believed in the stories that so captured his sister’s imagination, never believed in her desire to change the world. He could never have known how fundamental that desire was, a hunger to be remembered and to become one of her stories. Not just to create change but to embody it.

So when she told him she believed in stories of fire, he laughed. Of course she didn’t mean it. She was an idealist, true, and often disregarded her own safety in favor of adventure, but never to this extent. Emon could, as always, talk her down to a more manageable adventure, one that didn’t stray so far from home. His disbelief only broke when she told him she intended to seek out the fire. He could still hear the ring of her voice in that moment, feel the dread crawling up his spine and coiling in his stomach. It was an impossible task, finding something that didn’t exist, and any change it brought would only be for the worse. He should never have followed her. But of course he did, because he would always follow his sister, and because maybe change wasn’t such a bad thing.

And maybe part of him wanted to believe in her stories.

They had wandered through the breeze and wide echoes and smooth stone for who knew how long. Following the wind, cool breezes raised goosebumps on their skin. Mira had never pushed him too hard, traveled too fast, though sometimes her frustration was palpable. But here the air laid heavy, and a weight loomed above him, only his and Mira's faint sounds keeping it at bay as they traveled. His skin crawled with the feeling of being trapped. But they were close to journey's end at last, hands clasped together with the myth of fire at their fingertips.

"You keep following the left wall, I'll take the right. We're almost there. I can feel it." There was the excitement, the rush of rivers in her words. He released her hand and, arms outstretched, felt for the wall again. Patterns formed from footsteps and Emon fell into the rhythm, probing the floor before he took each step and easing weight onto the next foot and the next. Only a soft brush of skin on stone registered as he skimmed his hands across the wall for guidance. Then a sharp line caught him just above the knee, and he toppled forward. The breath whisked out of his lungs, and he sucked down air, struggling to fill the cavity inside his chest. For a few seconds he lay there gasping, but soon enough the air passed through, the panic subsided, and he breathed. The cool stone beneath him calmed his nerves, chilled his skin, and it was so wonderfully smooth.

What in the world was he lying on?

It shifted as he scrambled to the ground, letting out a terrible rasp of stone on stone. Echoes rolled through the cavern, and Emon cringed as they rang through his skull, driving into the cavern's spacious silence.

"Emon? What happened? Are you all right?" said Mira over the ricochetting sound. It echoed too, fading to silence without an answer. Panic touched her words. "Emon, what happened? Did you find something? Are you hurt?"

But he was frozen, ice-cold to the bone, chill water running through his veins. Warmth prickled at his face from just below the lid of the box he had been lying on. And somehow, he knew it was a box, knew just how far the lid had shifted, knew that its polished stone edge lay just inches from his face, even though he had never touched it. His hand trembled as he stretched it out toward the crisp edge of the lid, and he knew when he would reach it moments before feeling cold smooth stone. His fingertips glided over the smooth surface, and he marveled at the delicate patterns given shape in his mind. He lifted his hand and paused, a smile tugging at his lips. With startling surety, he rested his hand on the lid's edge nearest the warmth, fingers never needing to skate along

the surface, never needing touch for guidance. Was this the legendary flame Mira had sought for so long? Had it granted him this magic of finding without seeking, moving without touch?

He tilted his head toward the heart of the box as he shifted its lid aside, the sharp corners biting into his palms. At once the prickle of tears welled up in his eyes, though he felt everything but sadness. On instinct, his arm shot up to shield his eyes which squinted shut as he twisted away, and his perception of the world winked out. His whimpered cry echoed through the room, tapering off through his clothing's rustle as he scrambled up again, searching for the warmth, the guide, the fire, as surely it must be. Suddenly the world snapped back into his awareness. He blinked, confused, and everything flickered, distance and texture weaving in and out of his mind.

Then he paused. He raised his hand to his face and passed it over his mouth, his nose. The world remained intact. But as his hand eased over his eyes, his perception disappeared. He snatched his hand away, already grasping for the wall's stability, for what if he lost this strange new ability? But his new way to experience and orient, this new sense of touch, returned the moment he uncovered his eyes. He still stood above the box; the cave ceiling still arched high above him. One last time, he passed his hand over his eyes, confirming what he had already suspected; the eyes weren't useless after all, vestigial generators of tears. Or perhaps they were, and Mira's storied fire had awakened some magical fifth sense in him alone. Unlikely, but nothing was out of the question now. He could believe.

And if he could believe now, then Mira could too, without fear of losing the dream. They could bring the flames home with them, granting this gift to all, bringing true change to the world. Warmth filled his stomach at the thought, for their journey would not come to nothing. Of course he would credit Mira for the discovery, the journey was all her idea, but he would share in the admiration, the heroism. How could he have ever disbelieved her? And she would be so glad at her dreams made manifest, ready to truly change the world with this newfound gift. His only remaining task was to bring the fire to her, pick it up so she could know this new world too.

Only a few steps lay between Emon and the fire box, but walking was harder now that he had this power. Halfway through a step, he would lose focus, allow his eyelids to slip down and set him adrift in the air, freefalling until he remembered to open his eyes and catch himself with the other foot. The coordination of eyes and feet was excruciating, and yet he was lost without it. How could he ever walk again with this new sense? How could he live without it, if the fire disappeared? Surely, he could not.

The fire was glorious, filling the space in a way which he had no words to describe. It bathed his face in warmth and his eyes in tears if he faced it for too long, though they streamed down his face even when he turned away. Somehow it was as sharp and piercing as the cave's stone walls, as soft as a brush of long hair, as purely alive as any human. Joy welled out of it as freely as in laughter or in song, and though music fit it perfectly, no notes or words or sounds would ever define it. If he touched it, it would feel soft like water, he knew, for nothing else ever moved so freely or constantly as the fire. It even splashed droplets up into the air, though they drifted leisurely downward and never reached his skin as water would. If he reached down, he could just brush it with his fingers, so he did. For a moment he felt nothing—odd, that it was present only in his eyes. Intangible as sound. Perhaps something solid lay in the fire's heart, something he could only touch as he reached farther into the flame. A prickle of feeling met his fingertips, but it morphed in an instant to an angry pain shooting through his hand. He yanked the hand back and cupped it to his chest, the skin rough and aching beneath the fingers of his uninjured hand. What was this strange substance? Intangible, and yet the source of the pain rippling over his skin. Granting him this magical, mystical ability of perception, and yet manifesting as nothing but agony. A fingernail brushed the injured skin, and he cried out. The sound echoed throughout the cavern, booming off the ceilings and weaving around the space.

Mira answered it with a cry of her own.

“Emon! Are you all right? Where are you?”

Emon turned his head in her direction and knew just how far she was, knew exactly the rhythm of her faltering footsteps. Who needed ears or fingers when his eyes could now sense so much? She moved aimlessly, erratically, having lost her hold on the wall. Her eyes were wide open, but she didn't seem to notice the flame. Strange. Her face was twisted, eyebrows drawn low to match the worried strain in her voice. Her face was as lost and as concerned as her voice, the tensions of muscle and sound matching. Could this be a way to communicate? Using the shapes of a face to express emotion without reliance on words or tone? Emon's brows furrowed in thought, and—yes, he did it too, not just Mira. Had he always done this? Or had he changed fundamentally with the fire, its magic breaking some floodgate of sensation and expression inside of him? Had Mira always been this way? Had the world? What had changed?

“Everything,” he breathed, turning from Mira and the emptiness to the dancing flame. It spat and popped, tiny pieces breaking off as his breath reached it. “Everything has changed.” He cradled the fire in his hands, and in the instant before the pain hit, he smiled.

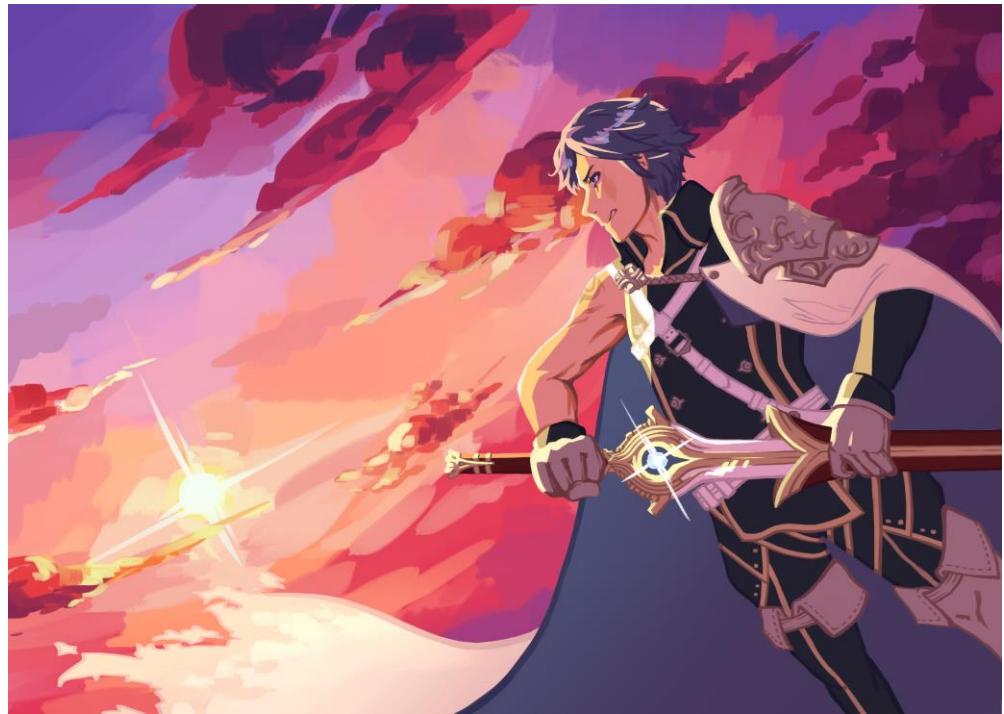
“Everything.” Mira stumbled toward her brother’s voice, her anchor in the absence of the cave’s stone wall. She had lost contact with that long ago, wandering without direction for what seemed like ages in the empty space. Emon’s voice echoed, bouncing off the walls in every direction, and each time she fixed on a location, his voice’s origin seemed to shift. “Everything has changed.”

What?

He had found something, she knew. Was he all right? His cries had only just faded from the air. She moved faster, cold splashing onto her ankles. But she lost her balance, and her foot caught on a rough patch of stone, shooting a jabbing pain through her ankle as she fell and landed hard on the ground. Air whooshed out of her chest, and she wheezed, struggling for breath. Chill water on the cavern floor soaked her hair, cold strands lacing over her face. She tried to climb to her feet, but the motion sent another sharp pain through her ankle, and she collapsed again, hitting her elbow on the way down. She rested her forehead on the ground and sighed. Where was Emon? What had he found? Maybe he had found the fire. Maybe he was changing the world while she lay here in the cold with sharp stone jabbing into her side. But maybe he hadn’t, simply laying hurt and helpless across the cavern as she lay with limbs too heavy to lift. The task was impossible after all, the fire useless even if it did exist. She had suspected it for a while now, but now it seemed clear that their journey was for nothing. She only hoped that Emon wouldn’t feel too crushed when their quest turned up fruitless. How could she ever have hoped to change the world? She had been a fool. He was a fool for following her and for believing in her stories.

But what was Emon talking about? What had changed? Her fingers scrabbled on the wet ground, scrambling for purchase, to hear or feel something, to find a new anchor. A last hope to find her brother. She raised her head up, eyes watering with the pain in her ankle as she swiveled, eyes wide open. But the world was the same, damp and cold and quiet and utterly empty.

Nothing had changed.



Into the Dawn (Fire Emblem Awakening)

Ellen Ma, 11

## Where I'm From

Sophia Dettweiler, 10

I am from warm hugs and fresh, salty *brezen*  
Red wax dripping onto pine needles  
As we giddily rush down the stairs  
From cursive and cousins and snowy sledding days  
Chalk-dusted fingertips and helmeted pigtails  
From roaring laughter and children's songs  
I am from a house full of family and love.

I am from Lake Washington sunsets and the rocky beach  
Sandy toes digging into the sand, watching fireworks  
From technology and road trips and family dinners  
Watching Sunday morning cartoons and picking juicy blackberries  
Raspberry Jello and rainy days and recess  
Too-big dreams and “always have fun!”  
From school buses and Mickey Mouse waffles.  
I am from home.

# Goodbye Not Forever

Jasmine Herri, 10

Recognized by the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards

You bring out the worst in me,

The irritation, the anger.

I thought goodbye would never come.

I apprehensively waited for the acceptance letters.

It all happened so fast.

You got in! The same school as our parents.

Goodbye approached us.

And we were in the sky,

My heart thundered along

With the surrounding clouds.

And when we landed,

Goodbye took a big step closer

And the apprehension stirred within me,

Morphing into the

sinking feeling of dread.

When we

unloaded your boxes

From our two, large luggage

In your small, hot dorm,

Goodbye approached us,

But not yet. The next day,

We sat on a bench

And ate our final meal.

Goodbye lingered close behind us.

I knew when we put down our forks

Goodbye had arrived. And we

Solemnly walked to the car.

The crying wrenches my heart,

I regretted all the time

We lost.

All the time I spent

Spiriting you,

All the time we spent

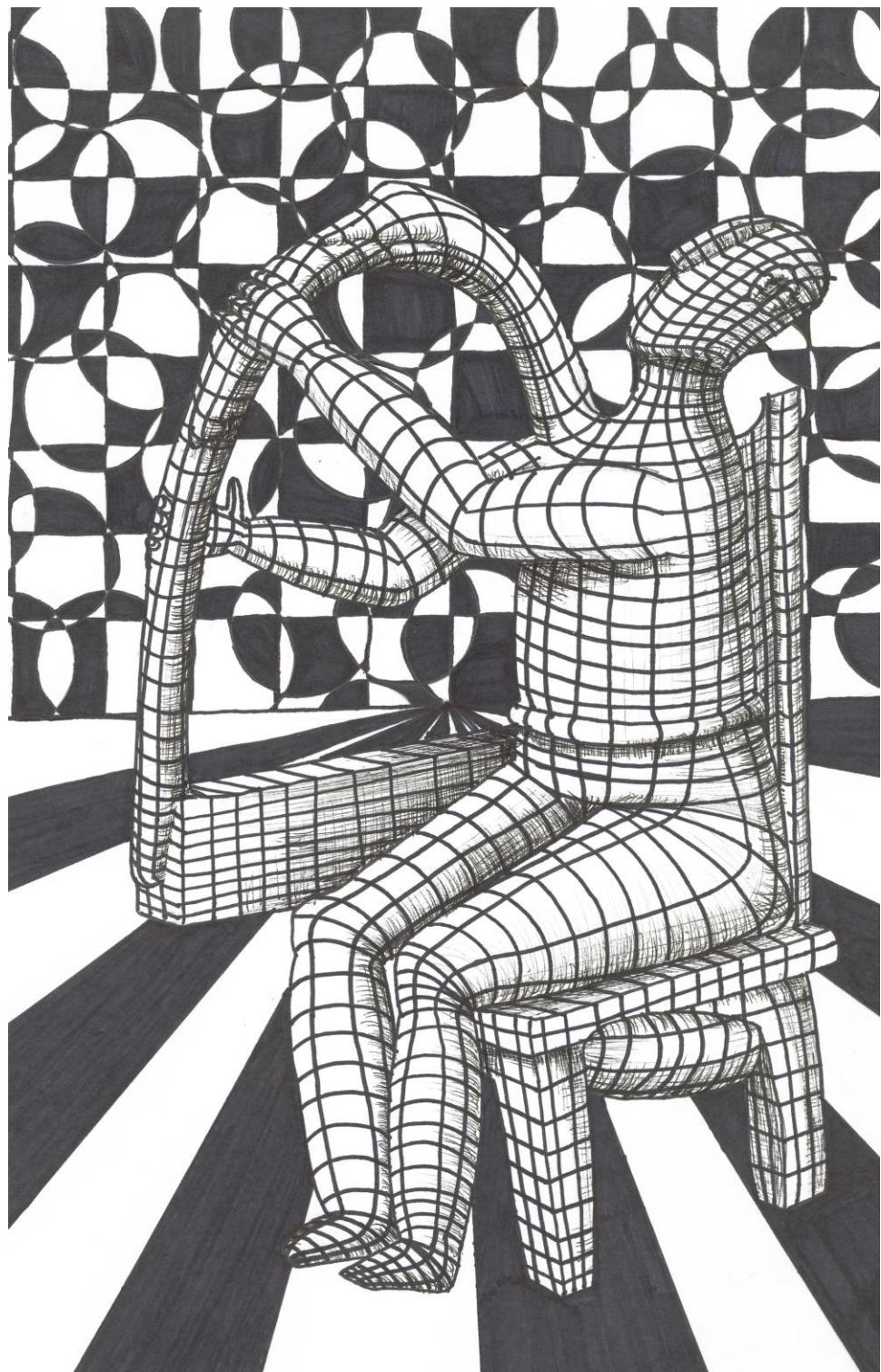
Arguing.

But this is goodbye,

Although not forever;

After all, I'll see you in a couple months,

College doesn't last forever.



Man Playing Harp

Amy Shrivastava, 9

Feathering  
Madeleine Goertz, 11

That day you erupted outside the lines,  
Or should I say the day the lines no longer kept you in,  
Your fractal geometry recurred  
So fast it still makes me wonder  
If you broke the lines  
Or just extended the coastline infinitely.

But were the drops of expression  
You finally let out never heard,  
Kidnapped and taken hostage by the  
Quagmire paper your  
Penned ideas fountained on to?

Maybe it wasn't an accident:  
The splotch of an idea too wet and  
Weighty to be braced by the bleakly blind  
And sterile substrate.  
They tried to keep you veiled through  
Vacillations and vaccinations;  
You vehemently vasculated through.

Were you screaming so loudly  
All we heard was a subliminal silence  
Echoing in an empty exhibit  
Of taxidermized tears?

Maybe the winds finally caught you  
Your outer hand rotated just enough  
To let them fly.

Your cries stretched to silence  
As we D o p p l e r e d  
Into red;  
Us living left you lost,  
Lonely among the  
Loquacious lamented of our late world,  
A leaf lorikeet with only  
Cassowary for company.

Maybe giving way to the wind,  
Willing yourself to whisper,  
Spreading out to  
Not spread thin,  
Let your fragments fly  
Before they fractured in the fire.

Winnie  
Yuen Hang Fung, 11

The Emperor: Yellow, Black, Red and Round.  
Born from the ashes of a dynasty,  
Secretary of China were you crowned.  
Leading demons without humanity.

All fear your inanition and powers.  
Even there, your enemies in the west.  
Consume their idols and make them cower  
Locking them up in camps as you do best

Dismantle the bees-nest and its honey  
Your cravings have been ensured by the laws  
Liberate the workers of their money  
The press cannot overpower your claws

And who can defend 'gainst your merry band?  
None than the sickness brewed by your own hand



Freak of Nature

Praveen Weerasundara, 11

## Fish Cage

Kaylee Allen, 10

My fish are swimming  
In their own filth,  
Unable to see through the  
Murky water of their jail.  
Sometimes I wonder,  
Why they keep swimming  
Around and Around in circles of isolation,  
Surrounded by rusty-metal bars their whole life  
Always doing the same thing.  
They never stop,  
Those miserable, distressed fish  
And, say enough is enough  
We're tired of this  
Dreadful life!  
Let us be  
Done  
And out of our  
1 by 1 cage.  
Do they ever notice the  
Dead fish floating motionlessly at the surface, or  
Impaled by the mock plant,  
Who escaped their prison  
In the worst possible way  
And ponder if it will  
Be them next  
Who is finally free?



Autumn

Keren Inger, 10

# Sestina

Annalisa Mueller-Eberstein, 12

Emerging from the womb of night,  
Fresh flesh, full of life and light.  
Meek grasping fingers, hold  
On tight. The answer to your  
Parent's pleas. This is right.  
This is one's first true love.

Firmly gripping onto love  
But still afraid of night-  
Fall. Find delight  
In your friends' eyes, hold  
Your breath and grow tall. Your  
Time has come to fly, write,

And complete the rite  
Of passage into adolescence. Love  
Thy neighbor, be a gallant knight.  
Promote empathy and share the light.  
You've crossed the threshold.  
Welcome to society. Now you're

Really getting into your  
Life. Time to write  
Off the vestiges of childhood love  
On your next tax returns. Time to enter midnight  
Realms with Eros's power amidst the candlelight.  
Time to welcome another to the household.

And there, behold  
God's everyday miracle as your  
Genes are replicated to co-write  
A novel that becomes a chance to love  
Again. To celebrate the noisy night  
And return to a world of spaceflight,

Dinosaurs, and magic. Savor the spotlight  
With childish glee. Bring death to a chokehold,  
Drink life to the lees. You're  
Just beginning to write  
Your own path, love  
Bringing you to your knees. Tonight,

In the bright of the streetlights at night, hold on. Your  
Time has come. But what's important? What's right?  
Just welcome what is a first true love.

## A Message to My Children

Cora Madison, 10

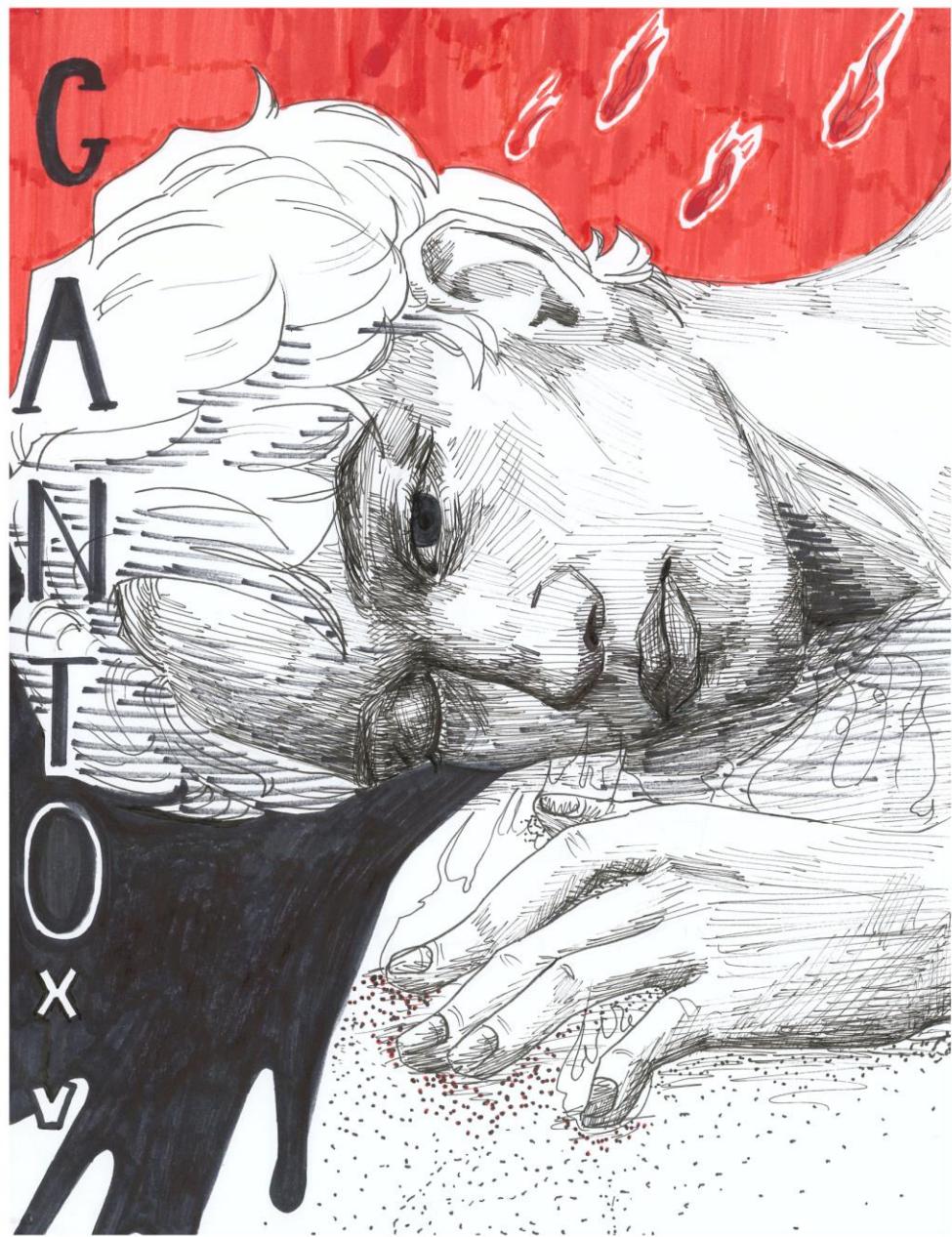
I watched you,  
I watched you learn to walk,  
I watched you learn to eat,  
I watched you learn to talk,  
In your own special way.

I protected you,  
I protected you when he locked us in the basement,  
I protected you when he tried to hit you,  
I protected you when all he gave you was paper bags for clothes,  
Because he loved your brother more.

I came to you,  
I came to you when he crossed the line,  
I came to you at your warm-walled elementary school,  
I came to you in my beat-up Chevy,  
Because I knew he was coming too.

I watched you,  
I watched you as I pulled up to the fire-station,  
I watched you as he came closer, a polished gun in his hand,  
I watched you as he lifted the barrel, aimed at my head,  
And pulled the trigger,  
While you sat in the backseat.  
And I could only say,  
“I love you.”

I wished for you as you went to foster care,  
I wished for you as my sister took you in,  
I wished for you as the neighborhood took care of you,  
Starting with the red-haired teenager next-door,  
And taught you how to enjoy your life,  
The way I would have,  
If I could.



Canto XV

Sharon Oh, 10

Recognized by the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards

# Guardian Angel

Jasmine Herri, 10

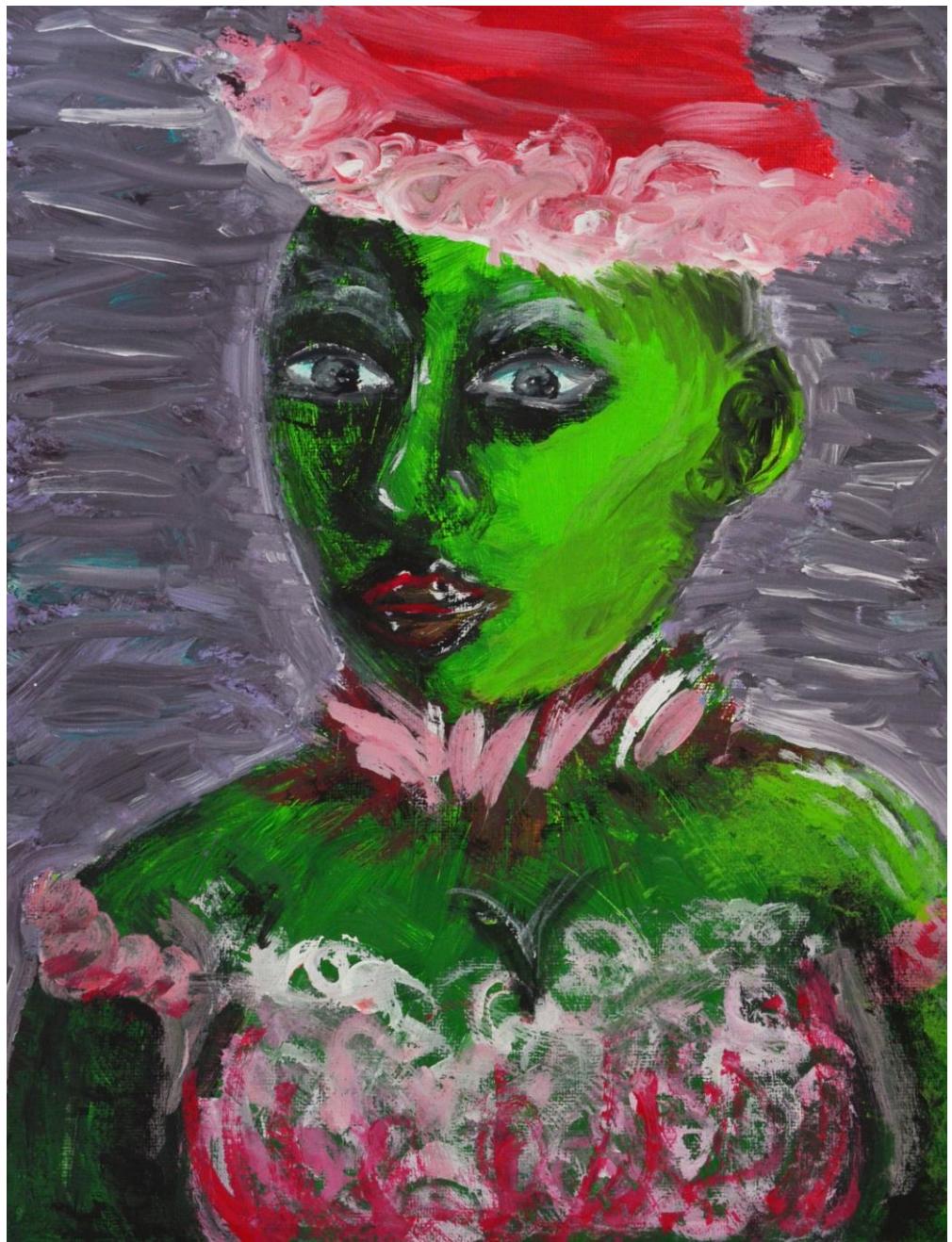
Recognized by the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards

Everyone needs a guardian angel.  
In times of desperate despair, when  
Gravity rushes upward and the air holds  
Its breath, I look to you, perched on  
The top shelf of my desk, glancing delicately  
To the upper right as if conversing with the  
Gods themselves; I feel soothed.  
When the shattering pang of loneliness strikes  
Deep within my chest, I look to  
You. I savor your calming effect, relishing  
The reassurance that eases the tension that  
Keeps my back bent and my neck crooked. I  
Cherish every element you express,  
from the graceful carving of your clay  
Hair, to the slight indentation of your placid smile.  
And when my unforgiving solitude confines  
My soul in an endless abyss, it comforts me  
To know that just two states away,  
Your mirror image hovers over my sister  
As she embarks upon her journey without me.

## Mario and the Forbidden Seaweed

Lauryn Dinh, 9

Once upon a time, there lived a goldfish named Mario. He lived in the early 4th millennium in the ancient city of Atlantis. There were crops filling the cultivated land for as far as the eye could see, providing everyone with meals for days. Deep in the heart of the ancient city, a building lay, surrounded by fortification so no one could even think about breaching the wall. Inside, there was a cache of Mario's special seaweed that he survived on; without this food, he would die. While the crop season was coming to an end, and there wasn't as much food coming in, Mario would go inside of his building filled with seaweed to eat. On his way to his destination, he saw a stream of bubbles from a sea creature swimming quickly in and out of the fortified building, which he decorated with motifs to his liking, but he didn't think much of it. When he arrived, Mario was quick to realize how empty the building was and darted in and out of the rooms, searching for any remaining seaweed the robber might have left. Deprived of food, Mario slowly lost more and more strength until he was no more. Meanwhile, another fish swam away happily with all of the seaweed, jumping from the fishbowl "Atlantis" into the fishbowl nearby.



Verde Madre

Nathania Lim, 10

## The Sisters of Skyrinn: Prologue

Anna Rowell, 9

Sitting around their long, wooden dining table, the four teenage sisters bickered over whose turn it was to visit the island and collect more water from the magical spring.

“I did it last week,” Millicent stated bluntly, picking up a knife and touching her thumb to the sharp edge. She felt underneath the table and traced the carved patterns she had secretly made previously before darting a quick glance at her sisters with her amber eyes. Her hair was a dirty brown color, and it fell just below her burly shoulders. Her arms and legs were finely toned, and lean muscles could be seen under her tan skin.

“There is no need to be so menacing, Milly,” Vivienne said, smoothing over her pink dress. Millicent furrowed her brow. Vivienne added, “If you keep scrunching up your face like that, you’ll look like a grandmother in no time.”

“That’s it!” Millicent twirled the knife around in her hands with a hint of menace. Vivienne, a lean girl with creamy skin and chestnut hair, wouldn’t stand a chance against her tall and brooding sister. Delicate and fragile like a doll, Vivienne had thin, manicured fingers; smooth, dewy soft skin; and bright hazel eyes. However, she knew Millicent wouldn’t harm her or their two other sisters.

“Can you kill each other more quietly?” Aurora asked, lifting her head up from a book she was reading. Her light blue eyes darted between Millicent and Vivienne, analyzing the situation. Aurora was the least athletic looking of the sisters due to all the time she spent inside reading.

“Yeah,” Loralie added, her long platinum blonde hair obscuring her face. Her stormy blue-grey eyes were barely visible. Loralie sat with her arms crossed and back slouched against the chair, her vampire pale skin blending with the white tablecloth. She was an extremely bony girl and almost looked like a living skeleton.

Vivienne exhaled sharply and retorted, “No one asked for *your* opinion, Loralie.”

From the kitchen stove across the room, their mother, Althea, stirred a pot of stew. The aroma of the rich stew wafted over to where the girls were, making them hungry and irritable. Althea was tall like her daughters, her beautiful dark blond hair falling in light waves just above her hips. “Now now, Vivienne. There is no need to get so snappy. You girls know what happens if you start fighting.” She turned down the flame underneath the pot and let it simmer, the metal lid rattling quietly. She sat down at the table with the girls and waited for them to respond.

“We’re just joking! Not another time-out please,” Vivienne pleaded, twirling her chestnut hair with a perfectly polished fingernail.

“A time-out is not nearly as bad as losing our powers,” Aurora piped up, looking at them from her book. “Remember, we always need fresh water from the magical spring, because once we take the water away from the spring, its magic slowly fades away.”

“It’s just as well Loralie can’t use her powers to do her strange voodoo death magic and cause the spring to dry up,” Millicent smirked, playfully jabbing at her sister.

“Don’t think I haven’t tried that to teach you three pompous pigeons a lesson, but the magic of the spring is too powerful for me to change.” Loralie curled her fist into a tight ball, and a plant next to her withered and shriveled.

“Stop killing all of my plants!” Vivienne shrieked, and she got up from her seat to attend to the dying plant. She caressed it gently, nursing it back to health.

“That is what I am talking about, girls,” their mother chided. “You don’t seem to be able to maintain a steady balance among yourselves. You are all sixteen years old. You should be young ladies, not school children.”

Vivienne crossed her arms and rolled her eyes.

“Can’t we go less often to the spring?” Millicent grumbled.

“We’ve done all we can to keep the magic in the water as long as possible, and I don’t think we can do much more,” Aurora announced.

Her sisters all let out exasperated sighs, tired of listening to their sister harp on and on about the spring.

“Think of the magical water as if it were a soda drink. The fizz in the soda drink is the same as the magic in our water,” Aurora continued on, oblivious to her sisters’ lack of interest. “With all sodas, once you open them, the fizz will eventually disappear after a while. With our magical water, we keep it in these special bottles to keep the magic in the water as long as possible.” She lifted up a large, metal bottle. “But after a week or so, just like the fizz goes out of soda, the magic will have left the spring water.”

Althea clapped, proud of her bookish daughter for having paid attention when she explained this to her daughters previously. Millicent let out a long sigh and began to figure out ways to leave the room unnoticed. She took a small sip from a bottle of magical water and slowly began to sink into her chair, blending into the shadows until her shape was no longer clearly discernable. Almost indistinguishable from the shadows, Millicent then tried to sneak out of the room.

However, observant Vivienne saw her. "Mom! Someone is trying to sneak away!" she announced loudly. There was no need to say who; Millicent was known to sneak away whenever she wanted to avoid doing chores. With an exasperated sigh, Millicent appeared out of the shadows and flopped in her chair.

"While I admire your skills of blending into the shadows," Althea began, "you need to remember it is rude to leave a room without excusing yourself."

Millicent nodded, feeling a bit frustrated.

Vivienne took this as an opportunity to begin to gloat. "Blending into shadows?" she said, sarcastically. "That's really useful. Not! Now, for me, I am the Princess of the Living, not Princess of the boring, brooding dark or whatever you call yourself."

"I can do this," Vivienne crowed. She stood up from her chair and gulped down some of the magical water. Then, she lifted her hands into the air, causing all of the plants in the room to quickly grow to the ceiling and snake their way towards Vivienne. They stopped a few inches away from her and made a tight circle of vines, leaves, and flowers, haloing her in plants.

Loralie rolled her eyes, obviously tired of her sister's boastful attitude. Millicent scoffed. "You know I can do a lot more than that! You pretend to forget that I can make it nighttime whenever I like," Millicent proudly declared. She was about to take a drink of magical water, but her mother quickly intervened.

"I'm sorry, dear, but I can't have you bringing night whenever you want to impress people," Althea told her daughter, who slumped in her chair with a sigh.

"Well, just remember if anyone is suffering from nightmares or has trouble sleeping, you can always count on me, Princess of the Night, to bring you fluffy dreams," Millicent said sarcastically.

"You can't bring night to the entire world, just a small area!" Vivienne pointed out. Aurora let out an exasperated sigh, irritated that her concentration was being interrupted by a silly squabble.

"Sure, you can sigh, but at least I can talk to animals! And what can you do? Sigh," Vivienne commented sarcastically, grinning while she talked.

"I can do much more than sigh, thank you very much," Aurora replied, a bit offended. She took a swig of water before snapping her fingers. Outside their house, an enormous thunderclap was heard. A few seconds later, a heavy downpour of rain came pounding on the ground, giving the plants outside a nice drink of water. With another snap, she made all of the rain disappear, and sunshine came bursting through the rapidly disappearing clouds, casting their lush front yard in a heavenly glow.

Loralie, who had been wistfully watching Vivienne show off her powers, said half-heartedly, “And I am the formidable Princess of the Dead. I can kill plants and animals if I wish. Fear me.”

Vivienne shot Loralie a nasty look and she sniped, “No you can’t! You can only make them sick. And you can’t even do that all of the time!”

Althea admonished her daughter. “Stop it, Vivienne! There is no need to be so rude to your sister. As I’ve been telling you girls over and over, each one of you has a gift and you all balance each other: Life and Death, Day and Night. You need to learn how to cooperate with one another.”

Vivienne looked down guiltily. Loralie picked at her nails absentmindedly, apparently so used to all her sisters’ mean comments that they didn’t have any effect on her anymore. Althea gave a concerned look to Loralie, who she saw being shut down and insulted too many times.

“When I discovered I was having quadruplets, as per the prophecy, I was very happy,” Althea said, reminiscing. “They say triplets will always have two siblings ganging up on the third, but quadruplets are more peaceful. I just don’t understand why you three girls pick on Loralie all the time!” The girls hung their heads low.

“We still haven’t resolved the problem,” Millicent reminded everyone. “It’s Vivienne’s turn to go collect water from the spring and that is that.”

“Last time I went, I tore my dress!” Vivienne whined.

“I’ll just go,” Aurora volunteered while reading her book. “I don’t see why we’re making such a big deal out of this. The boat rows itself, and it only takes five minutes to get to the island and then another ten minutes to walk to the spring.”

“There! Now that’s more like it! Thank you, Aurora,” their mother cheered, casting her other daughters a look that said, “Thank your sister.”

“Thank you, Aurora,” they replied in forced unison.

## Where I Am From

Maryam Iqbal, 10

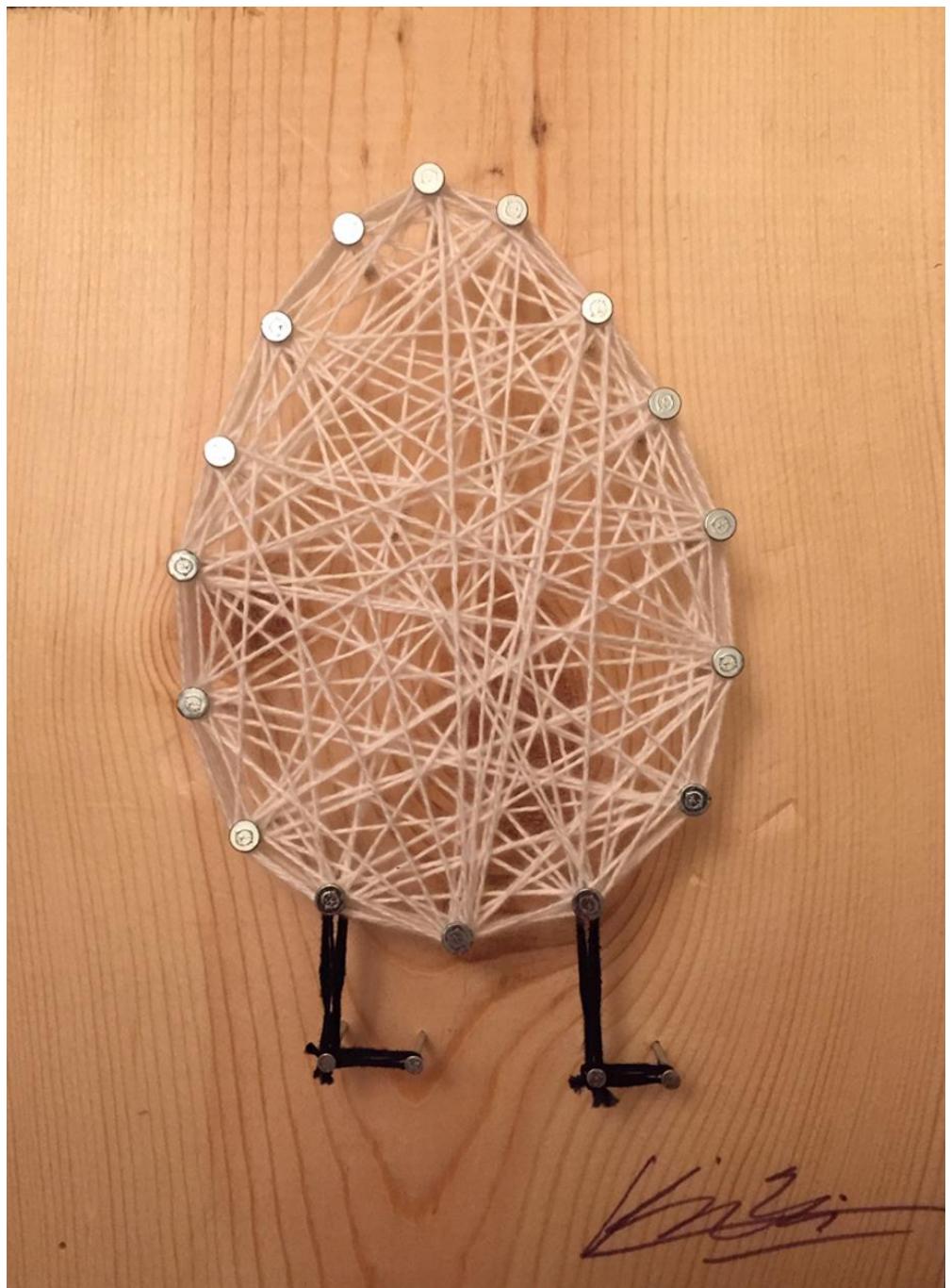
I am from the festival of colors  
From flecks of color dyeing cobblestone roads  
From splashes of *gulaal* painting smiling faces  
From the triumph of *Prahlad* over *Holika*  
From extravagant costumes and *Kathakali* dancers

I am from the festival of light  
From vivid streaks of fireworks lighting the sky  
Glittering clay lamps lining brick houses  
*Rangoli* coloring granite floors and concrete pavements  
*Mithai* shops bustling with customers

I am from the land of Taj Mahal  
From the mighty roar of the Ganges river  
From the brave names that form the powerful India Gate  
From caves decorated with rock-cut structures,  
That tell ancient tales of the Hindu gods  
*Vishnu*, *Shiva*, and the frightening demon, *Ravana*

I am from a place where men with hearts of gold are born  
Men who valiantly fight for their *bhai* and *bhein*  
Who proudly shout with rumbling voices, “Jai Hind!”  
March with thundering footsteps  
At times when there seems to be no light  
Men like Mohammed Khalid  
My hero, my inspiration  
*Mera Nanu.*

I am from a place that celebrates Holi, Diwali, Eid  
I am from a place that honors those who fell  
Defending their *dhes*  
From a place that values diversity,  
Ideas, and inventions,  
A place that I can call home.



Leg Egg

Eric Shi, 11

Row, Row, Row, & Row

Madeleine Goertz, 11

Lines of rubber ducks

Squabble over who prevailed in the

Sculling regatta on a river in

Lane County, Oregon.

Birds

Pranav Gopalkrishnan, 10

I saw a bird outside

That lived in the city.

It was green and grey

With big, orange eyes

What species was it?

A robot, believe me!

Birds aren't real

Their eyes are...

Cameras

Their nose a

Microphone

What of the wings?

An antenna

Wake up sheeple,

Birds aren't real



Purple and Yellow

Annalisa Mueller-Eberstein, 12

## A Day's Work for Aden

Maxwell Robertson, 11

Mike Aden walked into his office. He was early by five minutes exactly, as usual. While on his way to the office, he had made a stop at La Locale, the family-owned coffee shop on 5<sup>th</sup> street; at least Aden thought that was what “franquicia corporativa” meant. That coffee also happened to be his second that day; after all, you can never have too much caffeine.

As he entered, Aden slid the glass office door shut to his company’s WeWork space. The wide central hall was occupied almost exclusively by one long, double-sided table, divided by one-foot-tall glass panes. Of the fifty spots, only five had any sign of use.

Aden luxuriously slid into his prized seat, a Herman Miller Aeron, and opened his 2017 MacBook Pro. With a slow, smooth movement, Mike identified and clicked the mail icon. One new message, as expected. Sipping from his third cup, Mike looked it over. The email was his next assignment, and Mike was sure he would meet expectations.

From his bag, Mike Aden gingerly procured his favorite timer, a rustic cuboid digital-faced clock he had gotten on his 13<sup>th</sup> birthday. Mike set the timer to 20 minutes, ample time for this task, and began pondering.

Eight out of 20 minutes had elapsed when Mike suddenly had a realization. He began typing furiously, the worn-out butterfly-switches groaning with every keystroke. Sitting back with satisfaction, Mike scanned his work. With a nod, Mike switched back to the email client, and sent a quick ping to Legal:

*Hey Layman, just finished this, mind looking it over for me?  
Mike Aden, Advertising Specialist.*

Almost as soon as his finger hit send, ferocious clicks seeped from under the door to the enclosed space behind him, and a reply popped up on his screen.

*Yes, this project seems perfectly compliant. Unless... Oh! It appears you actually forgot this comma here. Now, in 49 out of 50 state regulations that would be perfectly permissible, but if this ad will appear in South Carolina, then you should fix it.  
Layman Lawman, Legal Representative.*

*Thanks as always, Layman!  
Mike Aden, Advertising Specialist.*

Mike sighed, “another daunting task”, and relegated the comment to the back of his mind. The next step was art, as usual. In a new message, Mike addressed “Juliette Artisteek” and pasted in the same thing he had sent to Layman.

*Juliette, have you finished the previous project? Doesn't matter. I have a new one for you. Think you can do it?  
Mike Aden, Advertising Specialist.*

*Of course I can. I wasn't born an Artisteek for nothing!  
Laura Jones, Artist*

*They've done it again! I swear James has it out for me. This is the 7<sup>th</sup> time I will have to remind him that my name is Juliette.  
Laura Jones, Artist.*

*Yes, well anyway. The job's a pretty simple one.  
Here are the requirements:*

**REQUIREMENTS:**

*Three 8 1/2 by 11 printable posters*

*Five 21"/9" small banners*

*One poster, at least 24"/36", At most 48"/62"*

**THEMES:**

...

*[read more]*

*Mike Aden, Advertising Specialist*

*Have them done in 10.*

*Mike Aden, Advertising Specialist*

*I'll have them done immediately. Will you submit  
that form I gave you if I finish it in under 8 minutes?*

*Juliette Artisteek, Artist*

*If it's under 8, sure, Laura.*

*Mike Aden, Advertising Specialist*

It won't matter either way, thought Mike, glancing at the private memo on his desk.

*Juliette gone tomorrow. Happy workday.  
Management*

Mike looked back to his inbox and groaned. Thirteen new messages from “Juliette,” with more key clicks from 2 seats over. What could it be this time? He wondered that silently as he deleted all but the most recent one. *“IT'S JULIETTE!”* The message practically screamed with its abundant capitalization. Reluctantly, Mike wrote his reply.

*Right. When done, send a copy of the poster to the video guys.  
They'll figure it out.*

*PS. Include a comma on the 5<sup>th</sup> text line I specified in the ‘TEXT’ section. It's against SC laws.*

*Mike Aden, Advertising Specialist.*

Mike, cracked his knuckles, hit send, and closed his computer before Juliette could retaliate. “Suppose it’s another short workday.” Mike placed his things back into his bag then inconspicuously strode out the same way he had arrived.



# Epic Dragon

Lucien Yoong, 8

# Princess Peach

Nathania Lim, 10

Here we go  
Again.

Pristine white gloves stuck  
On a steering wheel,  
Pink high heel glued to  
The gas pedal.

3,  
2,  
1  
the alarm blares  
for the millionth time  
in my life.

He presses two,  
And I'm off,  
Again.

Hands moving,  
Not on my accord.

Bright cubes missed,  
I could do better.

Ran into a banana peel,  
My sports car swerves out of control,  
Just like my life.

Hopes of winning,  
Completely dashed.

Last place,  
That's a given.

Honestly, my crown's a sham,  
If only I wasn't spiraling into a ditch  
With zero control over  
Anything.  
I'd win  
EVERY time  
Like a princess,  
No, a queen should.

## He and She

Millie Mi, 9

He sets off on the smooth and easy climb,  
The golden ladder stable and ideal,  
And everyone he meets is sweet and kind,  
Compliant to him, they could never steal;  
She sets off on the tough and brutal climb,  
The rusted metal creaking from the strain,  
Disaster strikes her nine out of ten times,  
Yet perseverance courses through her veins;  
But still he gets the praise and accolades,  
Mistakes and rage are fine because they're men  
And she who labors doesn't get fair pay,  
Nor can she walk alone without a friend;  
She bleeds and works and sweats as much as him  
Yet chances of equality are slim.



Rose

Divya Saenz-Badillos, 6

**I promise myself not to slip  
back into old habit.**



**'cause heartbreak is savvy  
and love is a b\*tch.**

Love is a B\*tch

Matthew Lin, 11

One

Anna Paulsell, 9

Sun or moon  
Outcome is unclear  
As I wait for judgement  
Silver tears drip down my face

Sriya



Racoon

Sriya Pratipati, 9

## Malleable, Muddy Path

Clio Erignac, 9

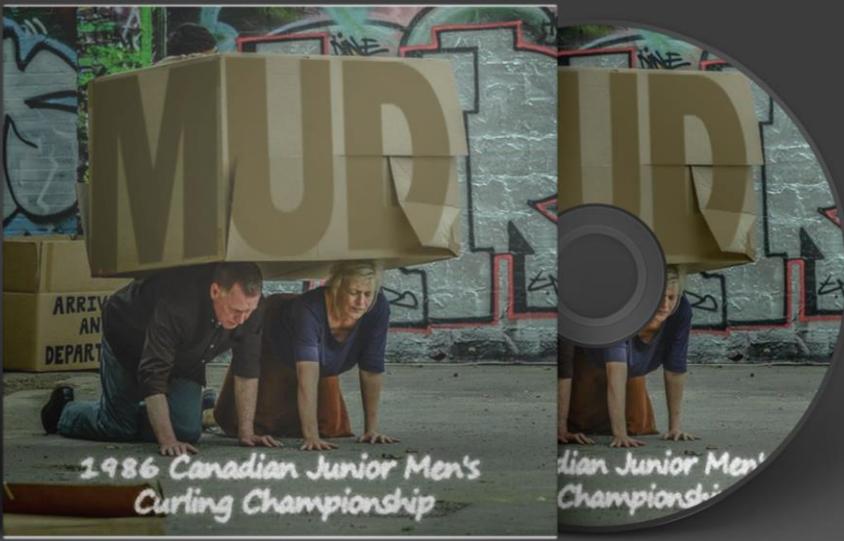
I went for a run today.  
Halfway through,  
You asked me to describe the roads.  
My void mind turned sour in contemplation,  
For I mold the malleable, muddy path with my feet,  
Their varying steps orchestrated by a fluctuating ache.

Your question sent a surging wave,  
One I decided not to ride.  
Discounting the pain in my foot,  
I adhered to a surface-level answer  
That cannot pierce the thick layers of thought.  
The roads are alright.  
I'm still running, aren't I?

Only when the aching boiled through all my limbs  
And yards fermented to miles  
Could I turn my head back to analyze  
To reveal trenches were valleys,  
And fields were patches.

I discovered the tracks of salt on my skin  
Were left by tears, not sweat.  
How could I have noticed?  
The salty pond of my invisible cries evaporated  
In one ray of sweet sunlight.

Never again, I vowed to myself.  
But that curve in the road makes a circle.  
And that crowning emptiness  
Strikes a nostalgic chord.



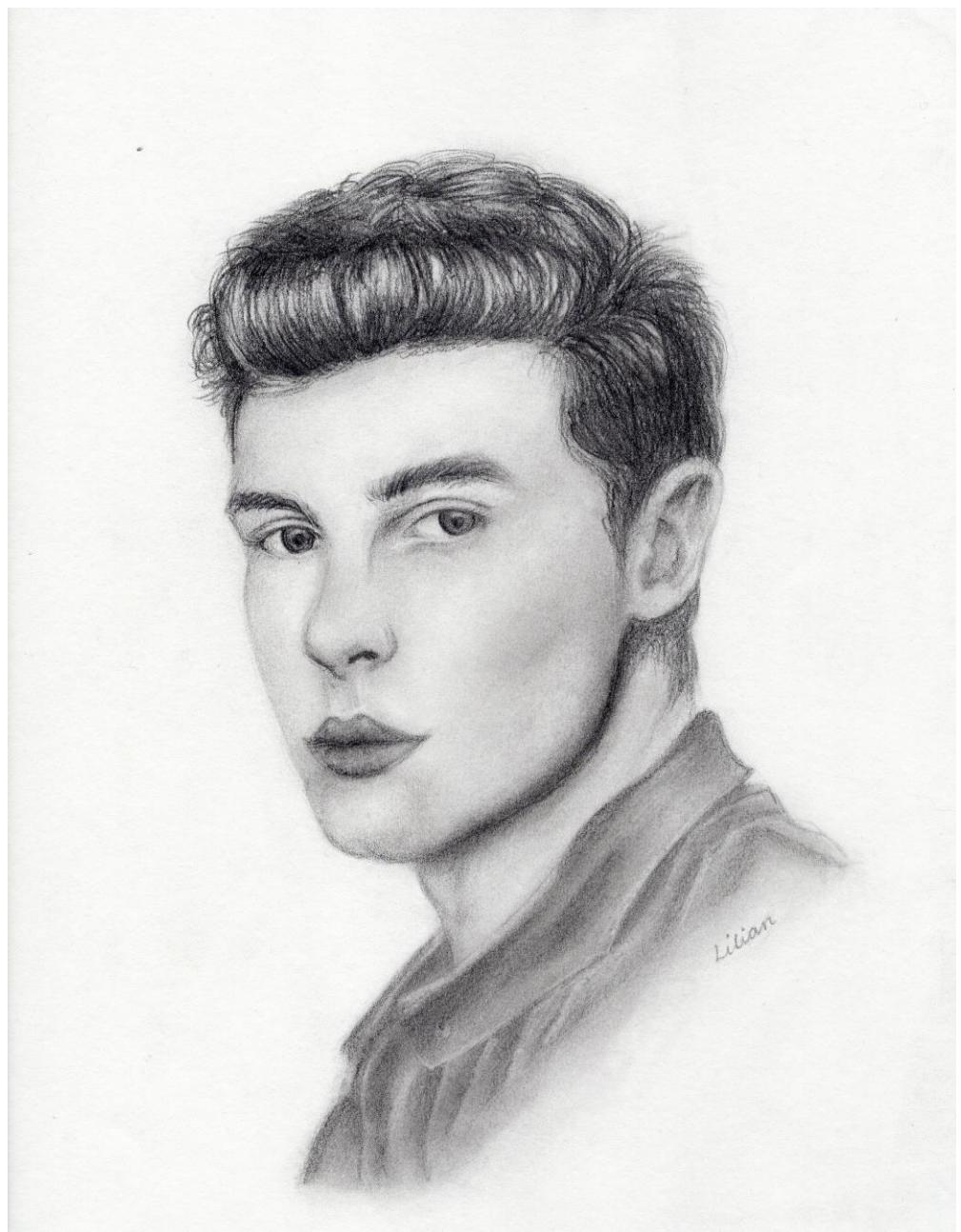
Mud, Studio Album by 1986 Canadian Junior Men's Curling Championship

Praveen Weerasundara, 11

# Anger

Samantha Pollard, 10

Anger is a cup of steaming black coffee  
Unenjoyable  
Too hot, burning your mouth, damaging you  
And once it's done all you have is the bitter aftertaste  
Reminding you and tainting you  
Staining your teeth and thus altering you  
People can sense it  
Smell it on you  
It prevents them from getting too close, isolates you  
There are different kinds of coffee  
Cheap and quick  
Watered-down and runs-out-quickly  
Forgotten before it even begins  
Artisanal and strong  
Brews slowly, yet surely, over time  
Long-lasting  
Burns through you and fuels you  
But when you finish your cup  
You're unsatisfied  
Your thirst not quenched  
You find yourself asking the question  
Was it even worth it?



Shawn Mendes

Lilian Toth, 9

# Burning Bright

Jasmine Herri, 10

Recognized by the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards

She started out small, a trifling celestial orb. Her fire was slight, barely radiating enough heat to boil a little puddle. Yet she always shone bright, blinding to the naked eye. She blossomed into a social butterfly, making many friends throughout the star-flecked sea. Known as the center of the universe, her companions constantly circled her, though they orbited from a distance to not blind themselves with her luminosity.

Lightyears passed, and she became a dazzling, incandescent star they called the Sun. She shone more vividly than those around her, and her scorch became intolerable, burning to the bone. Over time, her beloved friends grew fearful of her glaring glow, never daring to venture close to her leaping flames. She grew lonely, isolated in her own universe, forced to watch her companions merrily chase each other in endless circles around her. She watched them fall in love—Venus with Mars, Jupiter with Juno, and Pluto with Proserpine. How she yearned to love someone like that. But it was impossible for someone to care for a star like her. A star that burns too bright. A star that is the center of all life.

The Sun spent many lonely days drowning in her own fire, unable to escape the light radiating off her celestial body. Suddenly, she found herself cast in a cold shadow, her brightness dimming under the unknown darkness. Looking up, she saw a minor grey star, speckled with mottled patches of black and white. His luster was dull, barely radiating enough luminosity to light a little room. The Sun found herself inexplicably drawn to him, an orb so trivial and small. She watched him, silently and carefully, as he blocked her intense shine for hours at a time, causing darkness in her world of light.

They call him the Moon, bringer of nightfall. Nightfall, such a foreign word. So difficult to form one's mouth around and so delicate that it shatters when dropped from one's lips. The Sun marveled at the Moon's power, so minute yet able to quell her fire and dim her radiance. Never before had her light been overpowered. Never before had her heat been cooled.

The Sun experienced a strange sensation, tickling her wispy flames and running along her fiery, celestial body. Infatuation. She loved his serenity. Oh, how the others poked fun at the small, grey orb. They mocked the Moon for his mottled exterior. Jupiter flaunted his alluring stripes, and Saturn flashed his alluring rings. But she knew. She knew the power he possessed. Only he could match her illuminating radiance despite his lusterless glow. Only he could compare to her exquisite abilities despite his underwhelming size. He himself wasn't aware of his own capabilities. But she knew.

She fell deep into the torrid emotions of love. Unable to help her playful desires, the Sun extended her wispy flames to tickle the Moon's dusty sands. But he pushed her away. Her heart cracked, but she continued to pursue him, allowing her wild emotions to drive her to the brink of insanity. But he said no, further fracturing her fragile core. Again and again, he pushed her away, insisting her love was one-sided, that he would never return her eager sentiments. Her heart finally shattered; pieces of razor-sharp glass floated out into the star-flecked sea. The Sun's tears ensued for centuries, dulling her luminance and causing sheets of rain to fall upon the planets of her universe. But still, the Moon pushed her away, refusing her love, further isolating the Sun in her unbearable lack of solace.

He stared at her stunning beauty, her fiery persona brightening the entire universe. Oh, how he loved her. He loved her fiery determination. He loved her wild emotions. Her loved her blazing wit. He truly loved her. The Moon's torrid infatuation filled his heart to its fullest extent, brimming over the edge and spilling into the quiet void. Every day, the Sun hopefully extended her wispy flames, unaware of his all-consuming love. But the Moon sadly shook his head and firmly pushed her away. Every time. This simple action tore into his fragile core. But he could never allow them to be together. He could never accept her hopeful pursuits. He could never tell her how his small heart was filled with burning love. For he was nothing but a dull, grey orb, and she was a dazzling, incandescent star. How could her fire be with his spark?



Spirit Animal Butterfly

Sofia Heiskanen, 7

*Cat Hotel*  
Diana Albee, 10

*I sit, waiting.*

Waiting for you to get over here,  
But you are so sluggish about it,  
I could take a nap.

Your quality of service is lousy:

1. You take forever to serve the food,
2. The sheets are filthy with hair,
3. The dishes are dirty,
4. The food is gross,

Enough so that *I* want to bury it.

5. The room I have is dust-filled,

Both dirty and damp,  
And has three kinds of mold.

(Alternaria, Aspergillus, Aureobasidium)

Why,  
Must *I*,  
Have to stay here?  
It isn't *my* fault, that  
your couch needed to be peed on.



Tiger in the Flowers

Lucien Yoong, 8

# Invisibility

Aayona Pattanaik, 6

Can you see me?  
Or am I just alone  
In the darkness of the world.  
Feeling unaccompanied.  
Looking around  
At the emptiness,  
But knowing you're here.  
Do you know I exist?  
Or am I invisible?  
Have I always been?  
It couldn't be.  
I can see you.  
Can you see me?



Phantom Isles



Adrian Soetomo, 8

# Leningrad

Zoya Cherkasova, 12

West Hartford painted kindergarten in falling colors—the rain  
soaked me through  
My raincoat and the cold bit just as bad; the radiator hummed just  
as warm. I grew...  
Still, nothing compared. Away from you, I live,  
Leningrad, the city of my parents.

I haven't seen your winters in four years. The Last New Years, I remember, the snow fell soggy and damp. The sky felt blue  
And we built snow men on the field. My father grew on that field.  
I've  
Summer-scraped my knees on that gray gravel. Grass and young  
birches thrive  
There now, abandoned. As well, you grew,  
Leningrad, the city of my parents.



Totem

Ibrahim Karabay, 7

Ontogeny  
Wyatt Moore, 9

Birth, flooding light, experience, existence.  
Chaos, developing slivers of order.  
And turmoil within fast, growing distance.  
Eternal Instant, Primal disorder.

Wild calm, shape forming inside, evolving,  
Gathering itself, Struggle wrought with strife.  
Potential unleashed, with chaos resolving.  
a Primal Ocean, unready for life.

Complexity explodes, stability...  
gives chance to consider and take thought to  
How, Why, and What for this tranquility?  
What *is* this grandeur? dedicated to Who?

Back to an instant, all that we have known.  
We see the past as everything shown.



Still Life Apples

Sharon Oh, 10

## 22 o'clock Café Rats

Cora Madison, 10

It's dark,  
But not too dark,  
There are always lights,  
For those who can't see without them.

So many scents.  
Flowers,  
Allium, anemone, angelica.  
Olive, chocolate, bread, cheese.

Cheese,  
I found cheese.  
Soft and creamy,  
It made a splat when it hit the ground.

A tune drifts through the air,  
Loud voices of giants rumble the earth.  
So many noises,  
It is harder to hear what matters,  
But not impossible,  
Not for us.

A skittering of claws on stone,  
A brush of breeze,  
And gone,  
Off to other morsels.

A coil,  
Dripping red.  
Tomato,  
It smells like tomato.  
Food.  
Yum.

A wall coming close,  
Run.  
A second and it's gone,  
Its moving on to another spot,  
To rest its long leg.

There.  
More food,  
Crunching and cracking as I take a bite.  
Quick,  
In and out,  
Before they see you.

Off again,  
Following my nose.  
Sweet, salty, sour, bitter.  
All from above,  
Not my food, not on the ground.

A twitch,  
A yellow wall, coming quick.  
Run, slide, spin,  
Away, away, away.

No,  
Not there,  
Too bright,  
Easily spotted.

Skitter skitter,  
More,  
Running,  
Away.

Towards the hole,  
Away from food,  
Away from dinner,  
Away to wait for later,  
When fewer giants are about,  
To push us away with their walls.

Away from food,  
Away from dinner.  
Not just our own,  
But theirs too.



Love Witch Inktober

Ella Yuen, 11

# Perhaps I Will

Jasmine Zhen, 7

From her silken, crimson lips  
Tainted with the promise of  
A million scorpions,  
And the trust  
Of the westward sun at dawn,  
She drew those words, soft at first  
Yet louder  
    And louder  
        And louder.  
But before they could  
Be released from the  
Strain and resistance  
Of the devils inside of her,  
She thought once more.  
Could she, would she  
Be able?  
Could she find it in  
Her wretched soul  
Tumultuous tsunamis of  
Regret  
    And guilt  
        And shame  
Piling on top of  
One another  
Like an intricate  
Game of Jenga  
Until finally, they fall  
Shredding, devastating  
The banks of  
Remorse and sorrow.  
Would she be able  
To fish out those salmon  
In that salty stream of tears  
Laden with anger, hatred, and grief?  
Or would the fiery breath of  
Hell itself

Incinerate her soul,  
Merciless and cruel,  
Leaving nothing but  
Her stone-cold heart  
To suffer and  
Die.

But even with those cracks  
Slices of sin upon sin,  
Perhaps it was time  
That a new leaf be  
Turned over, fresh and crisp  
And smelling like a new piece of  
Parchment.

Perhaps it was time  
That the demons  
Be quieted.  
Perhaps it was time  
She become  
Free at last.

And so, from her silken, crimson lips,  
Tainted with the promise of  
A million fireflies,  
She dared utter the words, soft at first  
Yet louder

    And louder

    And louder:

“Perhaps I will.”



A Stroll Through Amsterdam

Jasmine Herri, 10

# Joker: The Genius of Insanity

Eric Shi, 11

*Joker* (2019) is an origin story of sorts, telling the tale of Arthur Fleck, an aspiring comedian suffering from mental illness, who, by the end of the film, transforms into the Joker. At every turn, Arthur gets beaten down and humiliated by those around him, from his own coworkers to even late-night talk show hosts. While at first Arthur chooses not to fight back against his unfortunate situation, as the movie progresses, we, the audience, get to watch his metamorphosis into the Joker. We see as his resolve chips away, and his already cracked sanity begins to splinter even more until everything at last goes to hell. Though it begins slowly, easing the audience into a Gotham ripe with socioeconomic strife, *Joker* (2019) builds to an almost cathartic climax that'll leave many an audience member stuck to the edge of their seat in anticipation and horror.

*Joker* (2019) offers a harshly realistic portrayal of mental illness and of what someone left without government support can become. The success of this film, however, cannot be discussed without mentioning Joaquin Phoenix's terrifying portrayal of the age-old character. As the keystone that the movie rests upon, Phoenix takes on the mantle of Joker and, amazingly, transforms it into something completely new. Unlike the Jokers of old, from Heath Ledger's legendary performance in *The Dark Knight* or Jared Leto's critically panned portrayal in *Suicide Squad*, Phoenix's take on the character grounds itself deep in reality. Joker, or rather Arthur Fleck, has yet to become the purple suited crime lord we've all come to know him as and is more human than ever. Phoenix nails the delivery of each and every one of his lines and loses himself in the character of a mentally ill psychopath. The most iconic part of Phoenix's performance has to be his take on Joker's chaotic laugh which director Todd Philips chose to turn into an illness rather than a voluntary action. Throughout the movie, Arthur Fleck bursts into fits of uncontrollable laughter when it's all too evident that he doesn't want to laugh and doing so, in fact, causes him great pain. This portrayal of Joker's signature characteristic as an ailment that traps him rather than a cathartic exclamation exemplifies the movie's larger theme that mental illnesses, when unchecked, can often control their victims and eventually consume them.

*Joker* (2019), aside from having one of the year's most compelling performances, also contains spectacularly creative mise-en-scenes. In an opening scene while advertising for some defunct store's closing sale, Arthur Fleck takes up only a minimal portion of the

screen, relegated to the lower right-hand corner. The tall, looming buildings of Gotham hang over him and dwarf him overwhelmingly in size. This not only shows the audience that Arthur is an inconsequential part of Gotham city, which is all too indifferent to the plights of a for-rent clown, but also that Gotham's streets are filled with garbage, a by-product of what we later find out are garbage strikes. As the scene progresses, Arthur's advertising sign get stolen, and, after chasing his assailants down an alleyway, he gets beaten and left clutching at his injuries. Following Fleck's beating, Todd Philips situates him in the very center of the screen, broken and bruised, lying on the ground. By breaking the conventional rule of thirds, Philips forces the audience's focus to drift to the middle of the screen just moments before a giant title card hits the screen in bolded letters. This not only catches the audience off-guard, but also intrigues them about what promises to be an entertainingly unconventional film.

In another instance of excellent mise-en-scene, the recurring image of the long hill of stairs Arthur must climb every day to return to his ragged apartment mirrors the mental state of the character. Arthur still regularly receives medication for his mental illness during the early moments of the film, and this relative cognitive stability is mirrored by several shots that show Arthur tiredly ascending the tens of steps that block his path. Though he might be more stable, his medication fails to bring him happiness or even numbness, and so he retains full awareness of his suffering and pains. However, right before the climax of the film, after government support has long since been cut, and Arthur has gone several weeks, maybe even months, without proper medication, he finally breaks. Embracing his deranged side and fully allowing his inhibitions to leave him, Arthur is finally shown descending the long flight of stairs. He dances in an elaborately colored suit, face plastered in clown make up, as he splashes through puddles. For the first time in the film, Arthur's demeanor resembles that of a man finally given freedom. His face no longer marred by expressions of discontent, Arthur looks happier than he ever has before. By finally letting go and letting his mental illness control him, Arthur's descent down the stairs symbolizes his mirroring descent into madness. His final acceptance of insanity frees him from the societal chains that had caused him so much anguish, though this freedom comes at the ultimate cost of sanity and belonging.



Hong Kong Light

Iziash Suklan, 10

Letter to Miss Porter  
Annalisa Mueller-Eberstein, 12

*after Jane Austen*

My Dear Miss Porter,

It has been more than a fortnight since Miss Hall's missive was purportedly sent to you, and I fear, my dearest friend, that despite your intelligence, you have taken her prejudiced words to heart. But you ought not to, for a mere sennight ago, when your suitor called to play piquet, his only conversation consisted of inquiries about you. He is so truly devoted, I pray to be half as fortunate in my suitors.

As for Miss Hall's allegations about my conduct, you ought to perceive through our years together that they are pure falsehood. While my nature is impetuous and my manner haughty, never could I bring myself to speak poorly of you to the family you are so anxious to become part of (made easier by your lack of shortcomings), nor am I so foolhardy as to lay bare the faults of your own family.

I beg of you, do not be persuaded by Miss Hall, for though she has a fair appearance of congeniality and piety, she is no Joan of Arc and only gains by your continued absence, and my dear friend, do endeavor to return to Wiltshire and your suitor with haste. Ever yours, etc.

Annalee Shaw