

THE ART OF WRITING

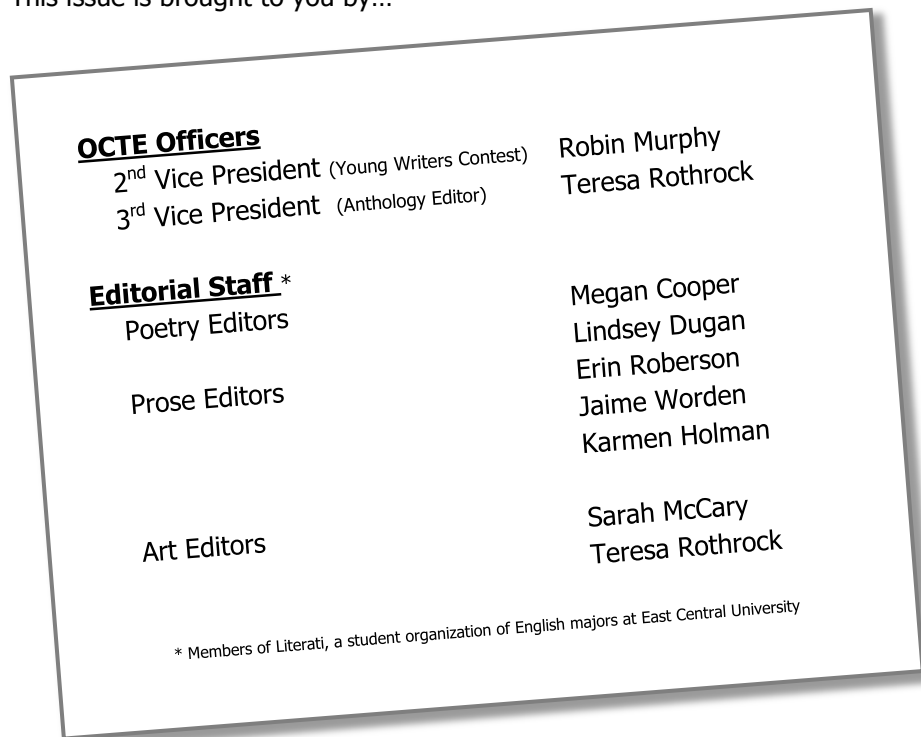
2012 Young Writers Anthology



Oklahoma Council of Teachers of English

The Art of Writing, the 2012 Young Writers Anthology, represents the best works of poetry and prose of Oklahoma students (elementary through college) who competed in the annual Young Writers Contest, sponsored by the Oklahoma Council of Teachers of English, the state affiliate of the National Council of Teachers of English.

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Meet the Judges



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Nathan Brown is a singer-songwriter, photographer, and award-winning poet. *Letters to the One-Armed Poet*, his most recent book, is out on Village Books Press. A previous collection of poetry, *Two Tables Over*, won the 2009 Oklahoma Book Award. Other books are *My Sideways Heart*, *Not Exactly Job*, *Ashes over the Southwest*, *Suffer the Little Voices*, and *Hobson's Choice*. Nathan also worked as a professional songwriter and musician for fifteen years in Oklahoma City, Nashville, and Austin. He holds an interdisciplinary Ph.D. in Creative and Professional Writing from the University of Oklahoma, where he currently teaches for the Human Relations Department.



John M. Yozzo was awarded an Honorable Mention for Poetry in the 1972 OCTE Anthology. After 34 years, he retired from teaching college English, with stops at East Central University, the University of Alabama—Birmingham, and the University of Tulsa. Dr. Yozzo currently resides in Tulsa where he pursues the perfect love poem, dabbles at construction, and apprentices as a farmhand on some acres near Morris, Oklahoma.

Quiet

by Kylie Cheree Durkee

"Quiet," He says,
But when is it really quiet?
When the word is spoken,
the silence is broken!
But before the word is said,
Is all silent?
Leave rustle in the wind,
Cars horns blare,
Dogs bark and cats meow.
Birds chirp,
TV's have this constant buzz.
Someone, somewhere, is talking.
We all are breathing.
Our hearts are beating like a drum.
Every time we move, our clothes crinkle.
Every time my pencil moved across this paper,
Soft sounds bounce to my ears.
Every time you take a step,
Your feet make a pounding on the ground.
And every time you turn a page,
Your flip makes a sound.
"Quiet," He says,
But are you ever really quiet?

8th Grade
Ms. Shelly Durham
Central Junior High, Moore

Retrieved from Mr. Nikola Tesla's Writing Journal

by Kyle McKinley

Streets bustle
Pedestrians hurry
Lights glow
As the orange sun sets on the horizon
And Lady Liberty waves her torch
Outside of my laboratory window

Shadows flicker as children steal a glance
They've heard of the "Wizard of the West" within
Lightning flashes from metal spheres
A glow appears from nowhere
A fireball materializes
And is extinguished as suddenly as it was created
Light bulbs on the table are lit
With no wires to be seen

Hammers meet nails
Plasma cracks the air
Ozone and sweat burn the nostrils
Muffled horns honk through the windows
Someone knocks at the door

Dare I stop work to greet the visitor?
What should happen if I do?
I may not remember my ideas, floating freely in my mind
They shouldn't mind if I don't reply
If it's important they shall return later, no?

Adrenaline pounds through my veins
As ingenious new creations appear before my eyes
Anger bubbles up as distractions continue to taunt me
Focus and patience soon triumph, however,
When my invention is completed
But, alas, the cycle restarts
With yet another flash of brilliance

There is work to do
There is work to do
There is work to do

8th Grade
Ms. Dee Richardson
Heritage Hall, OKC

Where I'm From

by Anne Wayland Plowman

I am from tree lined campus streets,
From dew on the grass and picket fences.
I am from herb gardens in the backyard
(green, blooming,
and fragrant).
I am from pecan trees
That swayed in the summer wind.

I am from long bike rides and cream sodas
From plastic light saber battles and Disney Monopoly.
I am from tree forts and blanket tents
From crème brûlée and bratwurst
Imagination and creativity
From family get togethers and feuds.

I am from Minnesota's clear, cold, water
From water skiers and fishermen
Canoe trips with the cousins and heated games of marbles
I am from cross-country road trips and capture the flag
From fire poles and raspberries.

I am from broken family to new beginnings
Pilots and electricians
From hard partiers and even harder workers
Engineers and scientists.

I am from surgery and sports injuries
Years of baseball and red dirt
From back trails and dirt jumps
I am from strawberries on knees and busted foreheads.

I am from Marsh and Traynor
From Richard and Anne
From the tree with roots extending deep into the ground
And branches to the sky.
I am from overseas and somewhere close to your heart.
I am from the dusty mantel where medals of achievement rest.
I am from leaders and trend setters.
The non-existent photo book documents the triumphs and failures of
Where I'm from.

8th Grade
Ms. Dee Richardson
Heritage Hall, OKC

Best Friends

by Lindsey Marsh

A beagle named Lilly
And a black and brown bloodhound named Pearl;
Lilly is brave and silly, round and roly
Just like a black, white, and brown roly-poly.
Pearl is a skinny scaredy-cat
Hating baths, blankets, and the vacuum cleaner
With her watery chocolate eyes and floppy ears,
And though the two are opposite, they are still best friends.
Sometimes they will groom each other,
But if one gets attention
And the other doesn't then they get in fights.

People can also act this way;
They help each other,
They get jealous of each other,
But whether you're dog or human
You can still be best friends
If you choose to be.

8th Grade
Ms. Debra Boyd
Kenneth O'Neal Middle School, Hobart

Barbies

by Alanna Schack

Their patches of hair missing,
Perhaps a leg or an arm also.
Their ragged clothes and mismatched shoes,
We wed the girls with girls, having no Kens.
Marched them down the floor in jeans,
A wedding fit for the poor.
No wine, food, or flowers.
Just two ugly Barbies joining their hands
In marriage underneath the sun.

11th Grade
Mr. Jason Stephenson
Deer Creek High School, Edmond



Lipgloss

by Presleigh Watson

A symbol of maturity
A big girl's secret weapon
Cheap purple sparkly goo

A question: been kissed
A lie spat out between bells
Strawberry-flavored hot pink mess

A prom queen's bread and butter
An escape an addiction
Shimmering pink fairy godmother's wand

A butterfly calmer before seeing him
A broken heart's steady fix
Clear inexpensive glossy dreams

A reminder of beauty he's forgotten
A morning starter, a day ender
Red hot disappointing hope

A mind's proof of stability
A sign of rebellion at the nursing home
Bright orange tube of no regrets

11th Grade
Mr. Jason Stephenson
Deer Creek High School, Edmond

My Ocean

by Tori Stover

She yells
And pounds her fists on the ground.
She makes a dent in the earth.
She raises her arms;
She throws water at me.
It tastes brackish.
She runs forward,
Each time coming closer.
She whispers in my ear;
Her breath sends my hair flying.
She runs backwards,
Each time going farther.
She spins in a circle;
Her arms are stretched wide.
She gains speed with each turn.
I squint my eyes to block the sun,
But I leave enough room to see her.
The sun is shimmering in her eye;
Its hue surrounds her.
She finally waves goodbye,
And crashes to the ground.

11th Grade
Ms. Linda Fracek
Grove High School



Photo by Teresa Rothrock

The Siege

by Steven Roberts

I hear that we are leaving now.
So suddenly, as if we
don't have a choice.
Some things are tossed into
boxes and into bags,
but there isn't time to bring it all.
Light shines through a shaded window
less brightly, as if it knows
that we are leaving it behind.
A couch and a side table sit quietly—
no, you can't come either.
Pictures on the wall show faces
only half-smiling now.
They will be abandoned in the madness.
There isn't time to bring it all.
I hear that we are leaving now.
Four, three, two steps
from the threshold between
what used to be something whole
and an unknown future.
I turn around for one more look,
though I shouldn't,
and for the last time I see
through watering eyes
the many things now lost forever.
Laden with the poor spoils
of an unplanned siege,
I watch the door slam on memories
that we didn't stow in our bags,
memories which I would like to keep,
but there isn't time to bring it all.

12th Grade
Ms. Kathy Woods
Norman North High School

What Makes Me

by Sarah Schuler

What do you do when someone asks you:

"What makes you a true American?"

You close your eyes and think of the past you belong to:

The Pilgrims and the Revolutionaries,

To the wondering eyes of Lewis and Clark,

The Johnny Rebs and the Billy Yanks,

And the brave presidents who gave their lives for the country they loved.

But not me.

I am from the rolling green hills of Ireland,

To the cold rainy skies of England,

From the warm weather of Germany,

To the snowy tundra of Russia.

The towering buildings of France,

And the quiet forests of Canada.

I am made from the brave Cossacks, Bolsheviks, and redcoats,
From a curious violet eyed girl looking out her window for fairies playing in
the rain.

I am from the hard-working man, and the suffering serf,
From the orphan on the street, to the man who lost his way.

I am a mixing pot of emotions,
My heritage and past too colorful to understand.

The joys and the heartbreaks
Make me not one or another, but keeps me whole.

None of this is American,
But it is the mix, the chaotic pasts and dreams.

That makes me a true American.

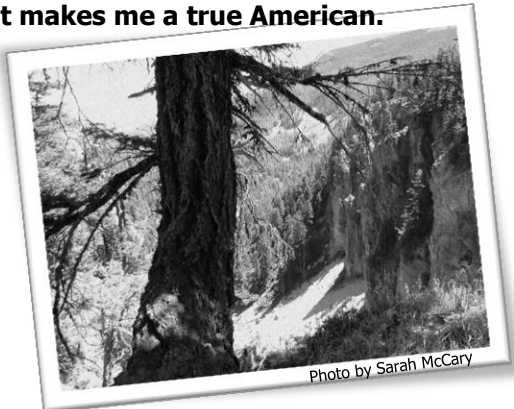


Photo by Sarah McCary

10th Grade
Ms. Linda Fracek
Grove High School

Where I Am From

by Henry Marsh

I am from starry night skies and worn wool blankets
From smoky s'mores and snow cones on a hot Sunday

I am from many changing places
But never leaving the loving faces and sweet memories

I am from the fields of Texas wildflowers
And the canoe races on the river with sunrays peeking through the trees

I'm from late night movies and scary stories by the fire
From cherished grandparents and an incredible mother

I'm from "Turn up the radio I know this song" to
"I hope it snows all day so we can stay in our pj's"

From "I love you more than the hairs on your head" and
"Don't forget to say your prayers"

I'm from "Silent Night" every Christmas
To "This Little Light of Mine" in Sunday School

I'm from Oklahoma's "Oh What a Beautiful Morning" and gracious southern
Hospitality from all the jazz soul in Louisiana

I'm from steaming hot beignets in the French Quarter
And cool homemade strawberry ice cream

From the most memorable summers with my grandparents
And all of the extended family adventures

From every moment spent with the people who matter most to me
The saying goes, "It's not about where you are going but where you've
been."

10th Grade
Mr. Jason Stephenson
Deer Creek High School, Edmond

Worst Place to Write a Poem

by Kendyl Reed

A rollercoaster,
swirling and twirling through the sky
is a place to scream and laugh

Not a place to write a poem.

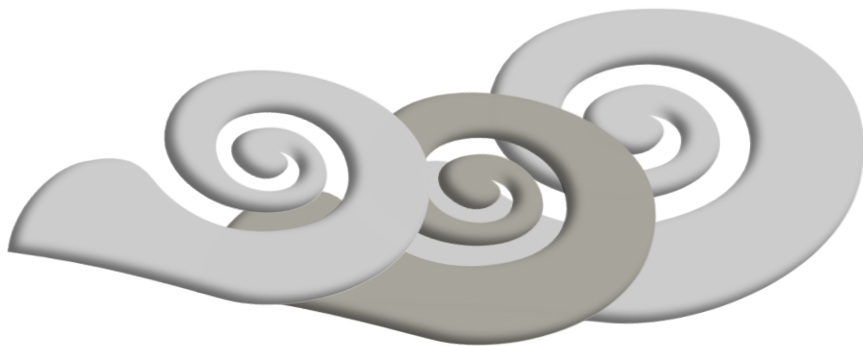
The pencil could slip out of your hand.
Your paper could fly away, never to be seen again.
Your thoughts would be jumbled,
just like the metal tracks in the sky.

But maybe it would be a lovely place.

The wind through your hair
could be such an inspiration.
The free falling feeling
could be described in countless ways.

But don't forget
If you plan on holding a pencil,
you'll have to let go of the safety bar.

10th Grade
Mr. Jason Stephenson
Deer Creek High School, Edmond



Almost, Always, and Never

by Christina Roode'

I am almost sixteen today.
I am almost sixteen tomorrow,
And the day after.
But I will always be
That four-year-old girl he left behind.
Never will I be the strong,
Pure-hearted child I promised to be

I am fifteen, but never truly.
I am Hope, but never hopeful.

I am, I am almost, Never will I be . . .

I almost sixteen today.
I am almost sixteen tomorrow,
And the day after.
But I will always be the almost
Five-year-old girl he left behind in America
Two days before her birthday.
Never will I be the fifteen-year-old girl
Who keeps her head high as she waits for her father to come home.

10th Grade
Ms. Linda Fracek
Grove High School

Not Even God Can Outshine Times Square

by Shelby Spradling

As I stepped out of the subway onto the littered New York sidewalk, I looked up at all of the lights, in awe. Times Square is a beautiful creation that man has made. Not one star that God has put in the night sky shines as brightly as the multitudes of advertisements in Times Square. So, there I stood, in the middle of chaos and peculiar beauty. The lights, the noise, the people; it was all so surreal! The cement sidewalk was littered with empty, broken beer bottles and foil from bags of potato chips. My feet found it impossible to avoid the crunches. The air reeked of sewage and at every corner; I could not escape it. The curtains of the night could not shield Heaven from Times Square's light. The people that were lined up and down the streets were starving for everyone's attention, as if their next meal depended on it. Men on the sidewalk drew, some sang, others danced, and many sold souvenir hats, key chains, and shirts. Car horns blared a warning to other cars; it was nothing but a competition and a race. But, despite all of the flaws and unfathomable commotion, this man-made spectacle was absolutely stunning.

11th Grade
Ms. Dianna Just
Vinita High School

Sea Gazer

by Kate Hardberger

The breeze tickles my skin as I make my way down the long, never-ending strip of white sand, my toes sinking in with every step I take. To savor this moment of perfection, I slowly shut my eyes and listen. Sounds of seagulls calling to each other, the crashing of the white-capped waves, and the whispering noises of the wind flood my ears. While my hair whips my face, I open my eyes and walk. Taking in my surroundings, I observe the cold, graying German watchtowers that are slowly crumbling but are still remaining. Breathing deeply, I taste the salty sea air. Tipping my head back, I gaze at the blue sky scattered with little wisps of clouds. Suddenly, I run splashing into the ice, freezing water as the tide rescinds the little grains of sand underneath me, but then I freeze because a massive, blue whale is jumping in the horizon. I feel like that blue whale and I are the only ones in the world. It could be a scary thing, but in this case it is not because I yearn for this perfect little world to be only mine. Since I have an insatiable feeling inside me, I slowly lie back into the sand and allow the warmth to embrace me as the serenity envelops me. As I awake, I think someday I will return to Ocean City.

8th Grade
Ms. Dee Richardson
Heritage Hall, OKC



Photo by Sarah McCary

Hidden House

by Catherine Harlan

The quaint white house, my favorite getaway, crowns a hidden hill on the outskirts of Prague, Oklahoma. A blue sky, bright and cloudless, sends waves of heat down to the spacious front porch and cooks the cement and surrounding air. Situated above a triangular pond, the cottage surveys the shimmering water. Rays of sunlight reflect blindingly off the ripples in the surface, and the edges ease into a smooth dark blue. Green shoots of grass spring up from the freshly cut field surrounding the pond, and the clean greenhouse scent of the trim wafts through the air. Creeks slice through the valley behind like gashes in the earth's surface. Tall trees spread their limbs, covering the mile of earth to the next cleared hilltop. There, the expanse of land, untouched by humans, finally reaches the vast sky.



Storm Show

by Hayli Wagers

Dark clouds reached out with grasping hands to embrace each other across the sky. The sun backed away bowing out during the final curtain call of the day. Thunder crackled like an applauding audience in the distance. Lightning flashed, stage lights sparkling through the aerial theater. Silver tipped wings flashed against a spotlight of lighting as a falcon wheeled through the rain soaked air. It spiraled to the ground, pulled up just in time to land on the outstretched arm of its owner, the director of those sky-bound theatrics.

12th Grade
Ms. Nancy Kunsman
Tahlequah High School

10th Grade
Mr. Jason Stephenson
Deer Creek High School, Edmond

A Karma Venti, with Extra Whipped Cream

by Nina Nguyen

A woman walks into Starbucks, her hair frizzled and her business suit wrinkled with a small red stain on her shoulder. Her eyes hang heavily as she trudges up to Denny, the cashier.

"Give me a Caramel White Chocolate Venti, no whipped cream, cream-based."

My eyebrows lift, and I blink twice. *A Caramel White Chocolate Venti, no whipped cream but...cream based?* I shake my head, a small smile on my face. My simple black coffee sat in front of me silently.

"I'm better than that Venti," he whispers, his voice bittersweet.

I roll my eyes and cast my look back onto the woman tapping her five inch heels. And huffing noisily at the fact that her coffee is taking more than five seconds to make. Her phone rings, and she quickly picks up, answering with a quick, "Deborah Sampson. Speak."

Everybody in the small cafe is staring at her now. Her attitude screams for attention. My hands wring themselves back and forth, a nervous habit. The dreary clouds set forth a shadow that hid me in the dark. Deborah can't see me. *Why is she so harsh?*

"No, of course not. I would never-" she barks.

"Ma'am? Your Caramel Venti?" the barista says.

Deborah twists around and awkwardly squishes her head to her shoulder, holding the phone in place. Grabbing the fancy, preppy drink, she walks away without even a single "Thanks," much less a tip.

Walking too quickly, her heels clack loudly toward the exit, and abruptly the rhythm stops. A man has opened the door too hastily, pushing into Deborah. His mouth is open in shock. The shop is dead silent.

I burst out laughing as she turns to glare at me, but I couldn't be helped.

Her fancy Caramel White Chocolate Venti, no whipped cream, cream-based coffee was now dripping all over her.

9th Grade
Mr. Jason Stephenson
Deer Creek High School, Edmond

The Piano Lesson

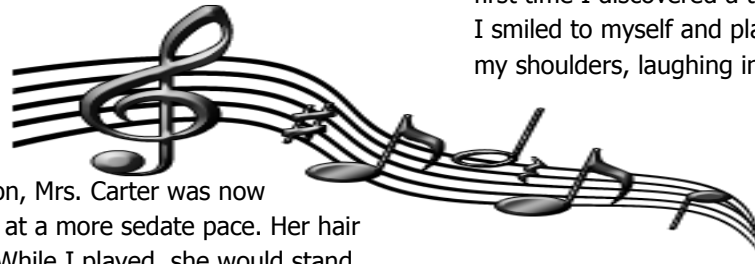
by Irene Lim

A retired professor when she took me on, Mrs. Carter was now pursuing her lifelong passion for teaching piano at a more sedate pace. Her hair was blonde, and it grew white as I grew older. While I played, she would stand at my shoulder and sing my music with me. She nurtured my talent and helped me realize that music is all about passion. I am still playing piano today because of her.

My first student, Alex, was newly graduated. I had bitten my lips all day before our first lesson. I clutched the lesson book in my hands and read it over and over. *What if I tell him something wrong? What if I cripple his hands because I tell him to sit incorrectly? What if he decides this is boring and never wants to learn piano again?* As I walked to open the door, I had cold sweats and goosebumps. And he was there. After flashing him a smile that was probably creepily cheerful, I led him to the piano. He sat down and looked at me expectantly. I puffed out my cheeks. "Well," I said. "Let's get crackin'." I opened the lesson book, edges slightly damp. "How to sit at the piano!" it proclaimed at the top. He placed his hands on the keys. "Like this?" he asked. I placed my hands lightly on his. All of a sudden I could feel my teacher doing the same thing. *Her wrinkled hands, warm and soft, were a lot bigger than my 6-year-old hands. Her deep voice floated over my head. "Imagine there is a bubble, or an egg keeping your hand up. Your palms need to be nice and curved."* "Keep your fingers loose. Relax- sitting at the piano should be natural." He nodded and shifted. I tried to stop worrying and trust that he was comfortable. Now ready to get started, I explained basic vocabulary to him, echoing my teacher from ten years ago. He nodded and smiled, and with that, I knew that I needed to trust myself as well as my teacher. We flew through the lesson book in an hour. I let him discover connections the way my teacher had first introduced them to me. The continuous look of wonder on his face probably reflected my own little one ten years ago. Even though we had some stumbles, we didn't actually fall. I knew I could catch us. When the lesson ended, I opened the door for him to leave. He walked out, then turned and said, "Thanks, I look forward to next week." And so did I.

I walked back to my piano. I sat down and began to practice for my upcoming solo recital. As the ethereal melody filled me, I thought back to the

first time I discovered a truly beautiful melody that I could shape and mold. I smiled to myself and played throughout the evening with my teacher's spirit at my shoulders, laughing in time to the music.



12th Grade
Ms. Kathy Woods
Norman North High School

And Then Tomorrow Came Rolling Over

by Samantha Mason

I was sitting on the edge of tomorrow, waiting for what was to come in a breathless haze of anticipation. My bow was tightened, my strings tuned carefully. Sir Elgar's endless, enduring mantra was arranged meticulously in front of me. I was sitting first chair for the very first time and I was ready.

Except I wasn't.

As much as I tried to convince myself that this wasn't any different than any other concert, I couldn't forget why I felt my insides twisting as Ms. Wagner approached the podium. And I certainly couldn't overlook that even though tonight was my debut as first chair cellist of my abbreviated high school orchestra, it was something much more important. Tonight was graduation night.

Not for me, obviously. I got first chair because the two senior cellists were walking to our melodies. They were the ones this was all about, the people I'd known since first grade, the ones I'd toddled behind as they got bigger, smarter, and unfortunately, older. I was a mere spectator to the real action; playing for them as my last plea for them to wait up.

In ten minutes, they were scheduled to leave me in their dust.

Parents had already taken their seats, talking amongst themselves like a regular PTA meeting. They weren't as on-edge as I was. *They'd* had eighteen years to prepare.

It was only in the past few months that I began wondering how this day would play out. Would I cry, or could I choke back the feeling of my friends leaving me for adulthood beyond? Would they see how proud of them I was? Would today be exactly like graduation last year, or would it be more potent

because I cherished those who were being graduated? These questions that struck out at me like thorns, stinging when I saw the seniors I couldn't help but love. They were already gone. And I....

This train of thought gave me pause. It wasn't often that I thought beyond tonight, past the pomp of the march and the hurt of watching the people I adore outgrow me. But as Ms. Wagner raised the baton, I began to ponder the after. Come the first day of school, I would shed my junior skin and slip into something new, something I wasn't even sure of yet. This incredible indefinite future excited me. Next year would be my last year of high school, *and then* I'd start college *and then...*who knows? Suddenly, my anticipation was not only for the inevitable end to my friends' senior years, but the inevitable beginning of mine.

I sucked in a deep breath as the baton fell. Tomorrow came rolling over to the tune of *Pomp and Circumstance* and the beat of tonight's seniors making their way to the seats I would soon fill. It was not the dramatic shift in the balance I had anticipated, and yet I couldn't help but wonder if this was what I'd been waiting for all along.

12th Grade
Ms. Kathy Woods
Norman North High School

Queen of That Place

by Rachel Pollock

When I was a little girl, I used to have a big imagination. I was around eight-years-old in the good old days when it didn't matter what you wore to school and you could play dress up, though I didn't play dress up. I used to live in a little white house with green shutters on the two front windows.

There was a man who had a little junk yard and he would let me go in there and roam around. There were so many cars and I loved them all. There were all kinds—fat, skinny, big, small, and with so many different colors. I fell in love with the junkyard kittens and cats. I fed them and watered them and played with them. I miss being there, well, not being there, but being that age. It was easy to live back then.

My cousin, who could come and stay with me, and I had a lot in common. We would go into the junk yard and play. I would act like I was a queen of that place, and my cousin was my sidekick. I don't remember it sounding so funny, but now it does. It seems like yesterday when we would look forward to going there. But when it was raining, my grandmother wouldn't let me go because she thought it was dangerous. So I obeyed her word.

Instead, she would let my sisters and me go play in the rain. I can remember we would run up and down our streets laughing and using our imagination to entertain us. We would jump up and down in the ditches full of water and catch rain in a bucket and say it was soup.

I would dance and sing on the back patio. My sister Melissa would laugh at me and say that I was weird, which I was and proud of it. We had a pond nearby and we would walk to it and talk about how pretty it was. I love that pond. I had a happy life when I was just so easy.

Then one day we had a notice on the door. We had been evicted from our house. My favorite tree was in the backyard. I was really sad. That meant new house, new school, new friends. I was ready for a change because I knew it would happen someday, just not so fast.

I remember wanting to grow up faster than anything. I thought that's what I wanted and what I needed. Looking back now, I should have taken more time. I miss living easy.



Photo by Teresa Rothrock

10th Grade
Ms. Shaun Perkins
Oaks Mission High School, Oaks

The Rival Game

by Esperanza Maldonado

It's the day of our last game against our rivals, the Sentinel Lady Bulldogs. We are all at school thinking about tonight's game. I don't think any of us can sit in our seats much longer. We're all waiting for the clock to strike 3:10, so we can hurry up and change, and then we pile up on the bus.

We are on our way to the field by 3:30. We haven't lost a rival game in five years. Sentinel might even want it more than us. Plus, it's our last game of the season. On the bus we even do some chants to get us even more fired up.

When we finally get there, I'm one of the first ones off the bus. We sit and wait until everyone's ready to go warm-up. While I run, I think of last week's game. I try to remind myself of my mistakes so that I don't make them again, but my thoughts are interrupted by Jamie trying to talk to me.

"I want to win this game so bad," she says.

"I know. Me too," I say. We kind of giggle and keep on running and stretching.

Sentinel arrives. We can't stand the Lady Bulldogs. They just always seem a little snotty. I watch them warm-up. I look at how they handle the ball, at the mistakes they make, and that their strengths and weaknesses which they are doing an okay job at.

First inning, for defense we get three up three down. Up to bat is Jada. She's our leadoff hitter. Jada hits the ball to a gap in center field. It's a double. My blood is pumping. The next two batters hit a single, but the two after them strike out. I'm the next batter. The bases are loaded. I get positioned. First pitch is a ball. Second is an outside pitch. I get another strike. Third pitch is down the middle but high. I get a strike. The fourth pitch is an inside corner. It's a swing and a miss. I struck out. All I'm thinking about is how I let my team down.

The next two innings are slow, but at least the score is still 0-0. "Man, we better win this game. I wish it'd get exciting though," Mariah says to me.

"Well, throw some strikes, so they can hit the ball, and I'll see what I can do," I say.

"Deal," Mariah giggles.

I smile and walk to center.

The fourth inning starts. I'm standing in center field wanting the ball to be hit to me. Mariah pitches one right down the pike, and the ball comes flying straight to me. I run and dive for it, and I barely catch it. The umpire calls the batter out. Mariah turns around in the pitcher's circle and smiles at me. I just have to laugh. The next five batters score. It's our turn to bat, and we get three runs by Madison, Mariah, and Aubrey. Although the next three batters are either out at first base or get three strikes.

"Haha, Kellie. We make such a great team!" Mariah tells me on the way into the dugout.

"Duh! We should totally strategize more often," I say in a girly voice. We both just look at each other and burst out laughing.

The fifth inning begins. All I can think about is winning. I'm watching Mariah pitch. She gets three outs. We glance each other's way and make a face. "We might win this game," I think to myself. Jamie's up to bat. I stand in the dugout wanting to bat so badly. I've struck out every time I've been up to bat. Jamie, Madison, and Mariah all get singles. I'm up to bat. My heart's beating fast. Chelsea, the pitcher, throws two strikes and three balls, so it's full count. The next pitch is right down the pike. I don't know if I want to swing at it or not, so I just swing. I make full contact. The ball goes all the way to the fence. I round first, second, and third. The coach tells me to go home and get down, so I do. I slide face first and hook my body around. I'm safe. I just hit my first Grand Slam! The team runs out to congratulate me. We are all screaming.

The coach pulls me aside to talk. "Great hit, Davis. You need to start hitting like that more often. How many times have you been told you can do stuff like hit a home run or a grand slam if you just want it that bad?" He ask me.

"A lot," I answer.

"Well, do you know now what we all see in you?"

"Yes, sir, I do."

"Well, then," he smiles at me, "now go and celebrate with your teammates."

The score is 6-5. The game's over. We won! The crowd cheers, and my teammates lift me on their shoulders after I rejoin them. I had made the winning run! This might as well be the greatest day of my life! We finish the season with a record of 14-2. It has been one of the best seasons I could have asked for!

8th Grade
Ms. Debra Boyd
Kenneth O'Neal Middle School, Hobart



Deception

by Tessa Fontanez

The moment I see her, something dark swirls around in the pit of my stomach. I can hardly stand to look at her. My mother, sitting there all nice-like in her car, unaware of the knowledge I now have, knowledge that she withheld from me. She turns and sees me, smiling and waving unbearably; smiling with the same lips that she lied to me. Kids are streaming out of the building from all around me, headed home. Are their parents as deceiving as mine have been? Frowning at the sky, I haul myself into the backseat of the minivan.

"How'd your day go, honey, did you have a good day?" she asks in her Mom-Voice.

I mumble incoherently, not wanting to talk to her.

"What's wrong, honey?"

She's an observant one, my mother.

"Well, today a ki-," I falter, my mind racing and my eyes go wide. How's a boy supposed to look up to his parents, to trust them, when he discovers that they've been lying to him for almost his whole existence?! I'll tell you how my day went, it went horrifically! I remain silent. Disappointment glues my tongue to the roof of my mouth. Our eyes meet in the rear-view mirror, and I tear my eyes away, avoiding her gaze. A tense silence falls between us.

The passing scenery is dotted with unnaturally cheerful colors. It reminds me that this should be a time of good-will, trust, and sharing. This realization proves to intensify my gloomy outlook. We pull into the driveway, I throw open the door and leap from the van to escape the insufferable tension. I trudge the snowy sodden yard, bumping into a giant inflatable Santa. Oh, how I want to pop it. Stick a pin in his stupid giant smile and in his stupid giant belly and hear the hissing of his death.

Resisting the urge, I carefully step around Santa and walk into the house, not bothering to wipe my shoes on the welcome mat. My feet carry me up the stairs past the gaudy decorations to the haven of my room. I slam the door, blocking out the sounds of merry.

Turning around, I see that my mother has taken it upon herself to drape every possible surface with tinsel. I can see her, dancing around my room with the spirit of the holidays, distributing tinsel like the jolly man himself. The thought of her effort to bring me happiness momentarily softens my hardened heart. I slump on the bed, defeated.

Part of me wants to confront them, but part of me can't bear the thought of facing them.

I can't believe I was so dim-witted to believe such a charade, but who wouldn't? The deception is so widespread, how could everyone be so involved? Even the newsmen reported about it as if it were fact. And now it comes forward, the truth unraveling right before me. I mean, it makes sense... what one man could possibly go around the world in a night and deliver gifts to all the good kids out there? And what about the kids in Africa and other underprivileged children? They wouldn't be as underprivileged if they got presents from Santa. I guess wanting Santa to be real so bad blocked my logical thinking around the holidays. Or maybe it's the eggnog...

Either way, my parents – the teachers of my life, the bases of my moral character – have failed me. I know that now, all because a kid in my class was talking about all the Christmas presents he was going to get. He's getting a new bike and a dog and a remote airplane and an Xbox, he swore. A girl piped in and said that she didn't get that many presents from Ol' Chris Cringle. How come he gets more? The first kid argued that it was 'cause he was better than the she was and that the she was bad. She started to cry and that's when my teacher snapped and broke the code of silence. Only I didn't tell my mother any of that. Instead here I sit hiding in my room.

The longer I sit and think about it, the angrier I become. I hear my father burst through the front door, booming "Ho! Ho! Ho!" and just like my teacher, something in me snaps. I leap to my feet and rush toward the door, determined to confront them with their cruel deceit. I want to see their shocked and guilty faces when I called them out. Intent on telling them that no number of wonderful gifts can ever make up for my broken trust, I reach for the doorknob. Then, those wonderful gifts from Santa come floating back to my mind.

The Lego pirate ship, the drum set, even my red BMX bike... All of the best gifts I've ever gotten were from Santa. The thought paralyzes me, hand gripping the doorknob. If I confront them, there will be no more gifts from Santa. A cold chill sweeps across me. I yank my hand away as if the knob were a snake. The anger drains away as the horror of the dilemma dawns on me.

What should I do?

Should I sacrifice the glorious gifts in order to unburden my soul, or should I join in on this conspiracy and keep the Santa sleigh flying? I stand in front of the doorway, pondering my options for several minutes. Perhaps this is what my parents faced in their childhood, the same awful choice. But it's time to make that choice.

I feel the childlike innocence and trust die in me; I now understand the power of this conspiracy. Opening the door, I am no longer a simple boy but a corrupt adult, twisted and warped from life's hardship. I too, will bend to the ways and indulge in this pretense.

Gathering my face in the brightest smile I can muster, I skip down the stairs. A thought flits past my mind. My friends, should I tell them the

truth? No, I will not force them to grow up as quickly as I have. I will not burden them with this weight.

Turning the corner to my mother and father, I beam up at them and ask, "Can we bake cookies for Santa tonight?"

11th Grade
Ms. Dianna Just
Vinita High School



Innocent Reminiscence

by Brianna Collins

Asher glanced up from her work to check on him; he was still sitting with his black leather boots kicked up on the table. He shifted in his sleep causing her to jump. She bit back a frightened whimper and continued to scrub the silverware.

In the dim light, Asher spied her reflection in a spoon. She timidly brought a hand to her face and gently traced the fresh bruise around her eye. It stung, and, with that pain, memories of last night bubbled to the surface of her mind.

She had begged him not to. She had pleaded. She had cried. She had tried to reason with him. Nothing had worked. Not a lot of people had shown up to the circus. Those nights upset the Ringmaster, and when he was upset, he took it out on Asher.

Being a mature sixteen-year-old, Asher blinked back the bitter tears swarming in her eyes. She wanted to fling the spoon at the Ringmaster, but, if he woke up, he would just rape her again. So, instead, she gently sat the spoon down with its brethren.

Before getting up, she gave every piece of china a quick once over then dashed off to her room, her footsteps a muted roll of circus drums.

The Ringmaster's rough hands cupped her face, his thick thumbs gently brushing each cheek. Asher's spirit wanted to fling itself away from this man. From all the pain. From the misery. From the disgusting smile that was plastered to his face with alcohol. She wanted to run, but her body didn't budge. Not even her shoulders rose when she took a breath.

"Sweet dreams, my pet," he growled in a husky tone. O yes, Asher knew he's be in her room later tonight, once desire fully took hold.

His lips locked onto hers in a heated kiss. The worst thing about Ringmaster's kisses was that each and every one rammed hatred down her throat like a sticky medicine that's taste would linger for the day.

Asher held everything inside as she timidly embraced her captor, her monster. She hugged him once then ran off to her bed knowing her night would be filled with agony.

Asher gasped in horror when she glanced down at her knee; the moonlight turned the hot, pulsing blood black as it oozed from the wound.

A blood curdling shriek ripped itself from her throat as she fought to stand up. Tears streamed down her face, leaving trails in the dirt that had collected there.

"YOU WHORE!" Ringmaster yelled after her. Asher could practically feel his steel-toed boots digging into her ribs with each fury filled stride of his legs. Each step he took away from the circus tents would only worsen her beating. She had to do it. She had to try.

With every fiber of her being, she willed herself deeper into the forest. Mother moon's icy gaze followed her through the trees, giving her strength to continue away from her hellish life.

She was gasping for every breath. Gulping every ounce of air. Her legs pushed harder. Her heart hammered against her ribs, threatening to break free, her pulse filling her head with a cadence of fear. Harder. She sucked in a breath. Faster. She struggled to catch another.

Harder. Harder. She was flying. Her heart was about to burst. So close! Faster! Harder!

A strong hand came down on her shoulder and jerked her back.

It had been a few days since her escapee, yet the pain of that night felt burned into Asher's body. He refused to look in any mirrors. She avoided distaste. Asher spent each night since praying maybe he would hit her just a little too hard next time. Maybe. Hopefully.

Asher brought her hands up to her face and with her fingers gently caressed every bump covering the upper left side of her face. She felt tears swell along with self-hatred as she traced each scar from the Ringmaster's acid.

She stifled a frightened shout as someone entered her tent. Not the Ringmaster; the steps weren't heavy enough. Asher warily listened to the soft patter of bare feet approach her cautiously.

"Hello?" a soft voice chirped from behind Asher. She turned to her right, big brown curls framing the normal side of her face. Suddenly, Asher was face to face with another girl.

"Hi, I'm Kimberly Anne Walker," the little girl chirped uneasily. "You can call me Kimi."

Asher licked her lips. "Hello," her voice cracked. She gathered herself a little. "My name is Asher. Why are you here?" she asked bluntly, her eyes now wide with wonder and curiosity. She frowned when her scarred flesh pulled against her eye.

Kimi gasped suddenly, just noticing the puckered flesh around Asher's left eye. "What happened?" Kimi asked horrified; cautiously peering at the sickening scar.

Asher frowned, her gaze resting on her feet. Chocolate colored curls hid her face. "I was bad," she whispered, venom dripping from her voice. "Very bad."

The redhead sat down, her legs folded under each other. Her hands gently rested in her lap.

"He brought you here, didn't he?" Asher sighed, still staring at her feel. "The tall man."

Kimi nodded, "Yes, he told me I could live here, so long as I performed." Kimi absent-mindedly twirled a strand of short copper hair.

Both girls jumped as a cough interrupted their chatter. "Kimi, dear, don't speak with Asher," the Ringmaster sweetly scolded as he strode in, his boots clinking muted by the tent's dirt floor. His gaze lingered on Kimi's body too long for Asher's comfort.

"Asher was a very bad girl. Tell her." He moved to behind Asher and not too gently nudged her in the back with the cool steel of his boots. Asher remained silent. Tears down her face, yet she did not say a word. "You stupid whore!" he growled as he slapped Asher with the back of his hand. The force was enough to send her frail body a foot to the side. He crouched over her and grinned. She just glared up at him with red-rimmed eyes and a thick stream of blood dripping from her bottom lip. Asher spat at him. The Ringmaster chuckled cruelly and left Asher alone. Kimi glanced back as the Ringmaster drug her off. Fear clouded her rich green eyes.

Asher viciously scrubbed the china, her slender fingers bright pink – rubbed raw by her anger. Kimi didn't deserve this. No one did. Asher threw a plate angrily. The dish ventured to her left and became a blur in the vision of her destroyed eye. She reveled in the crash the white saucer made.

A small sound broke her thoughts. Asher searched for the source. She noticed the Ringmaster's door was slightly ajar.

"Stop!" as soft voice squeaked from inside.

Kimi!

Bitter tears were collecting in Asher's sixteen-year-old eyes. He was destroying Kimi. Destroying her innocence. It was like he was destroying Asher all over again. Asher picked up a knife out of the dishwasher and crept in through the door.

He was on top of Kimi, one hand covering her mouth. Kimi tried to scream, but he brought one big hand down to leave his mark on her face. She whimpered. He slapped her again. Asher stood frozen, quietly

watching as he tortured this stranger. She almost turned to leave until Kimi changed.

The fourteen-year-old bit the Ringmaster's hand. She kicked and squirmed. Her frame thrashed like an angry fish. Asher watched as Kimi fought for her innocence. Her freedom.

Suddenly, Asher found herself sprinting towards her master. She leapt onto her captor's back, and with all the force she could muster, Asher shrieked and drove the knife deep into the Ringmaster's fleshy throat. She felt a sickening pop as it pushed past each layer of skin.

She leapt off his back as he turned, his hands wildly clutching at his throat. Blood filled his mouth and splattered onto Asher's face as he rasped and wheezed. He reached for her, his hands gripping her arm. She tried to jerk herself free, but he was far too strong. Asher thought for a split second that he'd die on her. He would fall and die and keep her his forever.

Asher let her body be jerked backwards by Kimi's strong arms and out of the Ringmaster's grip. She just watched her master, her captor, her monster convulse violently in a pool of his own blood as Kimi drug her into the night.

10th Grade
Ms. Stephanie Crawford
Tahlequah High School

The Story of Coulora: the Goddess of Color

by Sarah Winburn



Long ago on the ancient city Olympus, there lived a beautiful goddess. Her name was Coulora. Coulora was the goddess of all the world's color. This beautiful goddess turned heads and broke hearts without a thought. She had eyes that could hypnotize even the strongest of men, and a smile that shined brighter than Helios's light. Coulora had long, stunning hair. Being the goddess of all color, Coulora's hair color would change according to her mood. When she was angry her hair turned a fiery, burning

red. When she felt loving or loved, her hair turned pink. When she felt playful and fun, her hair took on blonde appearance. Brown meant she was calm, black meant dark and vengeful. If Coulora was feeling down, her hair would change to a gloomy blue.

Coulora was engaged to be married to the son of Cupid and Psyche. This young man's name was Panguo. Panguo was the god of trust and faithfulness. Panguo was the most handsome and elegant of all unmarried gods, after all he was the Aphrodite's grandson. Panguo was only a mere two day older than Coulora. At their birth, Zeus announced that by decree of the gods, the two would marry during the spring season when they were the age of sixteen. This was always a wonderful thought for Coulora to keep in her mind, for she was very much in love with Panguo. Coulora would dream of spending all eternity with her one and only true love. Panguo, however, only saw Coulora as a friend and was not in love with her.

Not long before the wedding, the couple decided to come off Mt. Olympus and explore the mortal village that lay beneath the home of the gods. While down, they passed by the tiny farm of Mr. Ammithis. This mortal farmer took much pride in his beautiful farm. However, his real treasure was his astonishing daughter, Zephyanna. She was tending to her father's horses when Panguo first spotted her. Panguo took one glance at her and was beyond amazed. This mortal woman looked as though she could have been a goddess herself. She had eyes brighter than ten thousand blue skies. She was the most beautiful mortal girl he had ever seen. This fascinating woman that defied the limits of beauty was singing. Her voice shot through Panguo's heart like a wave of pure joy and satisfaction. Panguo finally felt what Coulora had felt for him her whole life. He knew then that this overwhelming feeling could only ever be fulfilled by this mortal woman to whom he had never even spoken a word. Coulora noticed that her fiancé was awestruck by this mortal woman. She did not know what to think. How could her only love look at this mortal woman in a way that he had never looked at Coulora? A slight tint of red showed in Coulora's long hair. Now feeling extremely self-conscious, Coulora demanded that they ascend back to their dwelling immediately.

The next morning, Coulora woke to a note from Panguo. This note that would unexpectedly change Coulora's life read: "Dear Coulora, I have

chosen a different path. Panguo." Coulora didn't know what to make of the note. Coulora had planned her whole life based on the fact that Panguo was to forever be her partner. She would not accept Panguo's goodbye until she had discovered what caused the death of her seemingly perfect relationship.

Coulora knew a sure way to retrieve any information that she wished to know. She would pay a visit to her friend Artirith. Artirith was a gossiping garden She knew everything about anything that went on within, and beyond, the boundaries of Mt. Olympus.

When Coulora found the nymph, she asked, "Have you seen my fiancé, Panguo? He's left me a note, but I'm sure I have just misunderstood the situation."

Artirith wore a melancholy expression upon her face. Usually, she would jump in joy at the chance to speak of such interesting gossip. However, the nymph cared very much for Coulora, for Coulora had always been extremely generous with the vast amounts of color that were displayed in the garden of Artirith. She did not want to be the one to breach here dear friend's fragile heart. However, Artirith went on to tell the tale that she so badly did not want to speak of.

Artirith uneasily aid to her friend, "Late last night while most were soundly sleeping their beds your love Panguo descended quietly to Mr. Ammithis's farm. Panguo found the room of Zephyanna and proclaimed his undying love for this woman whom he had never met. The mere mortal was mesmerized by Panguo's inhuman beauty. In her daze, Zephyanna quickly gathered her things and escaped into the night with Panguo. These two lovers ascended the hill of Mt. Olympus with quick pace. They went to the grandmother of Panguo, whom you know to me Aphrodite. They begged to be united in their true love by the unquestionable authority of Aphrodite. Because he was her only grandson, Aphrodite granted his request. I am in a state of deep sorrow as I must tell you that they are now married!" Artirith scurried away in tears after telling this saddest of all tales.

Coulora was in shock. Aphrodite was the goddess of love. If a couple were married by Aphrodite, no one, not even the almighty Zeus, could undo it, She descended down Mt. Olympus not knowing what to do, but with the hope of finding her ex over. Coulora could not accept that her love for Panguo was never to be returned by him. She had waited her whole

life to be able to call herself the proud wife of Panguo, the god of faithfulness. She never imagined being betrayed by this immortal man. Coulora's hair flashed blue, and then turned to a mix of black and fire red.

"He has broken the god's decree, along with my heart!" she proclaimed to the sky. The in her rage, she stood atop her temple and washed all the color from the world. Everything was now black and white.

Atop of Mt. Olympus, Zeus saw this phenomenon occur and was outraged. He knew it had been the workings of Coulora. She was the only one who could possibly contain the ability to remove all the world's color. On his descent from Mt. Olympus, Zeus saw what used to be the blue sky as a dull shade of grey. He saw daisies and dandelions reduced to nothing without their brilliant colors. Zeus's anger swelled as he descended further down Mt. Olympus seeing more and more of Coulora's work. Zeus finally reached Coulora in the mortal village.

"Coulora, you must restore the color into the world," he demanded.

"I won't. I won't until Panguo is punished. He broke the decree. He broke your rule!" she exclaimed back, as her hair still burned great shades of red and black. Zeus pondered this for a moment. After all, she was right.

I know what I will do. I will transform him into a bird; a bird that cannot fly and must live in the coldest place at the bottom of the Earth. No, Coulora, does that sound like a fair penalty?"

"Yes, very fair," Coulora answered, her hair turning to more of a brown shade. After taking a moment to fully calm herself, Coulora then restored all of the world's color.

Zeus called on Panguo to receive his punishment. However, just before Panguo was to be turned to a bird, Coulora called to him.

Panguo, traitor to my heart, you have received you sentence from the gods, but you haven't gotten one from me." She then took all the color from Panguo, leaving him black and white. Zeus then turned Panguo into the flightless bird that he had promised Coulora. "I will not put back color in the place you are going to reside now. You are going to have to suffer, having no color in your life. Your kind will multiply and there will be

thousands of others like yourself. However, you will always be alone. You will always be separated from you bride whom you never should have wed."

With that, Panguo was gone. Forever banished to a place of never-ending coldness and no color. Now the penguin goes around the constant whiteness of Antarctica, feeling alone while surrounded by thousands of others. He is now living his life in a world of black and white.

10th Grade
Ms. Stephanie Crawford
Tahlequah High School

Spiral

by Sarah Capps



The man had robes as red as pomegranate seeds.

"Are you quite sure you understand the situation, Sandrino?" the man asked, his tone suggesting another question. *Are you quite sure you weren't born with half a brain, Sandrino?* Sandrino frowned. He wasn't sure of anything anymore. Anything, except that those robes were impossibly red. Every time he looked he felt as if his eyes were going off at right angles. They were the color of flames. How had they managed to make them so red?

"Blood," said the man. "They'll atone for their heretical natures in blood, if that is the way it must be. Do you understand what God calls you to do?" Sandrino remained silent, studying the gold crucifix that hung, dangling, over the man's aging shoulders. It was adorned with precious stones and their savior, fixed in the beautifully sculpted torment of his final earthly moments. It was awe inspiring to study, really, its craftsmanship impeccable. And it had cost more than most families would see in seven generations.

They had climbed so high. They had so far to fall.

"Has it really come to that, your Holiness?"

"The Franciscan teachings are a moral poison. They must be stopped."

"And what would you have me do?"

"*Burn them*," Cardinal Raffaello ground out, his features contorting into something that more closely resembled a ghoul than a man. "Burn *all* of them if you have to. Anyone who claims the absolute poverty of our Lord is a heretic and wishes nothing but the downfall of our great Church." He waited, eyes wild under thick, salt and pepper eyebrows, daring Sandrino to say a single word in their favor.

The abbot found himself suddenly parched, his voice a crackling gasp. "Of course, Your Holiness. Christ owned his clothes, as everyone knows."

At this, the cardinal's face returned to a more human-like expression though it still retained a look of bitter disgust. "Yes, everyone who listens to the wise teachings of his Holiness the Pope, as all good and faithful Christians should do."

"Of course."

Cardinal Raffaello leaned back, putting more distance between himself and the abbot in order to better analyze the facial twitches of his now rather harassed host. After a minute of careful examination, the cardinal took a step toward the abbot, placing a hand on his shoulder. He said, "Come with me. There's something I'd like to show you."

With a nudge that was surprisingly forceful for his old age, the cardinal led the abbot through his own abbey. Not once did the weight of Raffaello's hand leave Sandrino's shoulder, guiding the abbot through clammy corridors, prodding him under colossal archways, and making him so nervous he could feel the incessant itch of a single drop of sweat, frozen in place halfway down his spine.

He would have let out an audible sigh of relief the moment Raffaello finally removed the stifling limb had it not also meant that they had arrived at their destination. The entire time the cardinal had been leading Sandrino in the direction of the abbey's small school room, which was used in the daily instruction of a relatively small number of boys who had been left to the church's care. They were there, even at that moment. It must have been a daily break time, for about six boys were sitting on the floor in the most open part of the room, amusing themselves by lining up rows of thin wooden blocks which had been hand-painted a deep red. Sandrino recognized the objects at once as belonging to one of the abbey's more

eccentric monks. He had made them on his own in the span of a week, informing the entire monastery that they were absolutely indispensable in his newest experiment which, he had whispered to them, revolved around the mysterious movement created by a heavy bob when suspended from the ceiling by a string.

"What do you see?" came a whisper in the abbot's ear, startling him from his thoughts. Sandrino jerked his head to the left, finding Raffaello standing behind him.

"Just children at play, your Holiness," Sandrino stuttered.

"Yes, quite so. In a way, that's what the entire world is, don't you think, Abbot? Children at play? They're all so easily influenced, so simply altered by outside opinions." The cardinal shot Sandrino a meaningful look. "Especially, it seems to me, those outside opinions which lead this world to the worst of ruin."

"Ah, I quite agree, of course."

"Of course. If they are the children, the Church is, through the wisdom of God, the caring adult. We have been given the task of guiding them in the right direction, watching them diligently to ensure that they make the right decisions."

"Including theological decisions, Your Holiness? Surely your average peasant has no interest, no clue at all when it comes to the absolute poverty of our Lord." A warning glare. "Or lack thereof."

Cardinal Raffaello sighed. "No, they don't."

"As I expected."

"Not *today*, they don't. But, perhaps in the figurative tomorrow they might catch on. Opinions would spread say, over a period of one hundred years or so. Like children, the masses learn complex thoughts slowly but, it would seem, fairly well in the end."

The abbot breathed in, wiping beads of perspiration from his wrinkled forehead with the sleeve of his white robe. "The Church follows the example of its Savior. If the peasants come to believe that our Lord was quite without material possessions . . . where does that leave us?" he questioned, his panicked eyes darting over the carefully carved arches of the

abbey and the jeweled rings that rested on both the cardinal's and his own fingers.

"Determined," the cardinal snapped. "We've declared their stance to be unfounded and now all there is left to do is support that ruling. We shall distribute writings from our best theologians to the most prominent colleges and each thesis will expound our belief . . . no our *certainty* that Christ did, in fact, own the clothes on his back. We have the advantage because, you see, this is the way things have always been."

"You don't believe the theologians will turn against us?"

"No, to alter the way the Church is now would take considerable effort. Effort which I'm sure they'd rather expend on other activities." The cardinal paused, his eyes fixed on something intangible off in the distance, beyond even the walls of the school room. "And why shouldn't things be as they are?" he murmured. "His Holiness the Pope is the voice of the Lord on earth and, truly, deserving of finery equal to his status."

Sandrino fixed his gaze on the rows of red blocks, following their careful line as they spiraled in a dizzying pattern into one cramped center. Once again he experienced the feeling that his pupils were moving off in opposite directions of each other, sure that it was not a normal phenomenon. The delighted shout of one of the young boys brought his gaze away from the blocks and towards their faces. The movement of the children was less intricate and this calmed his eyes somewhat. However, as he watched them, his vision blurred in and out, almost as if he were falling into a deep stupor. And here it was that Sandrino saw a most frightening thing.

A man stood on a raised platform, his face passionate, his eyes bulging, and his hair flying in all directions. As the abbot listened he could catch snatches of parables, teachings, and verses which had been spoken by none other than the Christ himself. However, Sandrino realized with shock, they were shouted out to a large audience, not properly in Latin as they should have been, but instead in a filthy and guttural vernacular. Sandrino studied the speaker, quickly realizing in revulsion that the man had also forgone the use of the ceremonial robes which were *always* used in the conduction of mass. Instead he was dressed entirely in black in a style with which the abbot was altogether unfamiliar. As Sandrino's vision darkened

before shifting back into focus, the preacher seemed to grow very distant. When he found himself once again staring into the small school room, Sandrino felt his heart sink and his stomach rise.

"Our traditions have been upheld for over a century," Cardinal Raffaello exclaimed from his left. "They shall not fall!" As he said this, the youngest boy of the lot gently pressed the back of his index finger to the very first painted red block in the line. With little resistance, it toppled in an instant, bringing with it the next block and setting off a chain reaction until all the blocks had spiraled to the center and collapsed in upon themselves.

12th Grade
Ms. Kathy Woods
Norman North High School

Birth of a Demon

by Skyler Flewellen

It is five hours and twenty-six minutes past mid-day, the day of the week is Tuesday, and it is the twenty-second day of February. Today marks the eighth year since I lost my wife and child. Thoughts of the Senate elections circled through my head. I must secure my seat on the Senate; I fear those that are trying to take my seat will only corrupt the city. The elections are a few months away, and there is so much to do. I hope I have enough time—I know the people will do what is right for our city.

While reviewing my paperwork, I heard sudden screams through my tower window, the screams of which were the most horrid and frightening screams I have ever heard; they came from the dark alley below. With no train of thought, I rushed out of the door to the alleyway. By the time I arrived in the alley, the sun had already begun to lower. The bitter coldness of night, which reminded me that spring is soon to come, ran down my spine. The alley was dark and cold; fog filled every inch as far as the eye could see. As I gave away a sigh, I could see the breath leave my mouth. I was alone in this cold, dark place. I stood still for a moment, pulled out my pipe from my coat pocket, and lit it. I inhaled a few times as I continued walking down the alley, the smoke blended in with the fog and circled me. The air grew heavier and thicker as I made my way deeper through the

alley, then I could see the dark silhouette of someone lying on the ground before me.

As I came to the figure, I knelt to the ground to investigate the scene. I removed my pipe, exhaling smoke one last time, and put my hand on the body. She was female, middle-aged; her body was turned to the side with her back facing me. Her neck was bruised and broken and her head was turned to the side in an awkward position. Her mouth was open and blood dripped out. Her face was smooth and beautiful, so pure and clean except from the dirt dispersed from the alleyway, but it was cold and still with death. Her soft hands were lifeless; one of which was curled by her body, there was a struggle I assumed, her other arm was outstretched with her hand extended flat on the ground. Her clothes were tattered and her blouse was forcefully ripped off leaving little cloth covering her back. Her naked body was almost perfect: curved and tight, her pale skin was sensually soft, her legs were long and toned leading up to a perfect backside, and a lovely arched back, and her long, black hair matched her beautiful body. I could not believe how anyone could murder such a goddess.

I moved my hand hesitantly to the front side of her body and turned her over on her backside. I covered my mouth in shock and disgust almost vomiting on the ground. Her body was scratched everywhere by her attacker. Her chest... it was completely ripped open. I stood over her for a moment, then I exhaled a deep breath and began to fixate my hand into her open chest, what I felt both surprised and stunned me; there was nothing—only a pool of blood. I removed my bloodied hand and sat in awe. Her heart... it was completely gone. And as it would be I lost my stomach contents on the ground next to the dead goddess. Paranoia settled in and I no longer felt alone in this cold, dark place. As I stared down the dark alley, I could have sworn—maybe it was only a hallucination—but I swear for the briefest moment I saw these piercing red eyes appearing momentarily and vanishing merely into the darkness.

Weeks passed and nothing had changed; two more civilians were found murdered with their hearts torn out. Whatever it was, it was still out there, it was still feeding, and it was growing stronger. I still had no answers, my options were limited. All I could think of were those red eyes. I have no other choice; I must seek audience with the Council. I will bring

this city up from the ashes; my city with all of her grace, my city Ragnorok will rise once again!

The night grew late; the ravens took their roost and the moon gleamed through the vivid sky. The sun had gone to sleep and so must I. Laying my head down to sleep. I felt secure; tomorrow I would seek the attention of the High Council.

I awoke and quickly gathered my purse, then left. Half a day had passed when I arrived at the Grand Cathedral where the High Council resided. The Cathedral was at the very end of the city where no light could escape to; there was only darkness. I made my way up the stairway to the megalopolis; the Cathedral itself was a city of its own. The buildings were very Gothic, large black spires and temples, made with stained glass windows. There were many bridges and cross-sections that all connected to the main temple. Three towers circled the main temple in the middle, two on the side, and one in the back. After reaching the end of the stairs I was greeted by a large gate. The guards signaled to open the gate and I proceeded upward until I arrived at a large wooden door painted black. It opened as soon as I approached it, they were anticipating my arrival. I stepped through and headed into the Council chambers.

As I made my way to the inner chambers, the ceiling grew higher and columns filled the room for support. I came to a double door made of red glass and opened it. There the Councilmen resided. Red and black markings were painted on the ground where I stood, all circling and connecting to an even greater, larger circle that I was centered in. The Council seats were balconied around me in the circular room; 45 seats with one seat in front of me, which was larger than the others and made of pure gold: High Councilman Kalgrimm's seat. He stared at me with eyes of contempt as he began to speak to me.

"You are where you do not belong, Cassius!"

"I seek the vision of the Council. I need to know who is responsible for the hedonistic murders that have happened, as I'm sure you are aware of the mangled bodies that have been lying around the city."

"Yes, word has reached my ears of these unfortunate incidents. But tell me, Cassius, why would I call upon the spirits of the dead to reveal to

you a vision? Why would I give assistance to one who dares try to take my seat on the Council?"

"Because people are dying! Because our city needs us! Because it is right!

"Hmm, you humor me Cassius. Very well, we will give you your vision. I do this not to help you, but because revealing you a vision puts you in debt with the Council"

"Very well, do this for me so I can cleanse my city. And I will offer my assistance to the Council when it is necessary."

"Hmm, yes...yes you will!" The High Councilman said with a sick smile on his face.

The Council members all murmured their witchcraft in the dark. They all raised their arms and continued chanting, the runes on the floor beneath me began to light up and spin in rotation. Holes opened around the circles and smoke emitted out of them. The smoke circled around me and brought images. I began to grow dizzy, the room spinning around me, and I fell somewhat unconscious as if I were sedated. I could hear the distant, maddening words of Kalgrimm as he revealed my vision.

When I awoke, I was in a strange, dark place. It was the same alleyway where I had encountered the dead goddess. I frantically looked around and collected myself. Silent whispers echoed; I was not alone. I quickly turned around, dagger in hand to meet my opponent. What I saw stunned me and left me crippled. It was a malformed creature with such a horrible deformity I could not describe. The face... the face was that of my son. The creature's red eyes glistened with hunger. It came at me as I remained crippled; its hand had found its way through my chest. I could not move, I could not feel the pain, but death had gripped me. From the shadows a figure formed, and Kalgrimm appeared. The creature looked at him with great intent, removed his hand from my chest and held my heart.

"Come now, my son." The two walked away into the darkness.

12th Grade
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Perception of the Black Male

by Jarrett Love

"The life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination." These are the great, leading, and inspiring words from Martin Luther King Jr. African Americans are constantly on trial in this society on how they carry themselves. Being an African American in America is still a daily struggle due to the fact that there is a negative vibe when it comes to the perception of being Black. Although there are things that African Americans partake in that doesn't help towards the perception of them, (I'm an African American myself), and so there is a deeper understanding of both sides. There are two sides to this story that will be told, about being an African American in White America and the perception of them, from all other races and heritages.

African Americans were brought to this country unwillingly, as slaves. From the first time they put foot on American soil, they were at a major disadvantage. They were not considered people, but property due to the growing financial opportunities with cotton. Bought cheaply, they were put to work without any pay, compensation, or consideration for their feelings. Families were separated, and lives were changed. Eventually, African Americans were released from slavery, but it could be said that the conditions did not improve at all. There were new state legislatures that passed laws designed to keep blacks poor and the position of serving. There were "black codes" that stated that no Blacks who had a steady job or source of income, could be forced to go to jail or pay a fine that they could not afford. Blacks also could not buy land and did not get the fair wages for the work they did.

There is a negative vibe when it comes to the overall perception of Black males in America. They are thugs, ignorant, and don't understand the concept of having decorum. These are stereotypes that come from the way some portray themselves and it's sometimes correct and sometimes it isn't. The majority of African Americans aren't financially stable due to the fact that their parents and grandparents did

not receive the same education that all of the other races did. The jobs that Blacks had, were low paying and highly stressful on the body and soul. The poverty went from generation to generation. This being so, blacks were more focused on how they are going to get their meal at night, rather than being able to go to focus on the bogus education that was offered to them. With a poor education, comes poor jobs and blacks are solely a product of the environment they live in. The goal should be to rise out of the ghetto, and make a difference in your society, but some of my fellow black males don't understand that, and some aren't willing to do that due to the position they are in. Blacks feel deprived from the benefits that most other races get to enjoy, so that is the reason for the ruthlessness and reckless actions on which some of them partake in.

On the other side of the argument, African American males are lazy, don't respect women, and are poor fathers. The sad thing about this is some of these stereotypes are true, but that's why they are called stereotypes. In the eyes of other races, all is seen is the deadbeat fathers who don't support their children and force their child and mother of the child into deeper poverty. The evidence of their opinions is clearly available, and it is easy to see how opinions soon become facts.

Black male entertainers are probably the roots of all evil if they do not use their power, influence, and image in a positive way for the young blacks to look up to. Music videos and actions that entertainers have on TV just fuels to the negative vibe that other races have against them. Other races believe that the only way a black man can make it in America is if he is a star athlete, or a rapper. If you aren't one of those two, then back to the ghetto you go, and stay there. Most races don't want to see blacks actually figure out that the way to make it is how everyone else that doesn't have a special talent makes it. A college degree that took hard work and effort to get, yet in the end the reward that you get will be worth it. Once African American males figure out this concept as a whole, the status of them will only improve their social image. When whites brought Africans over from Africa, it was known that they could not give blacks the same education that whites received, because they would become equal and possibly even superior. African Americans are thieves; African Americans are gang members and so on. It all comes back to the fact that some of it is true, but at the same time

there are the other African American males that carry themselves in a proper manner and do the right thing in life, and make decisions that will only benefit their future.

African American males have a struggle to go through daily to make it in this world. Being a black male, you already have a strike against you. The decisions you make are extremely important in how your life will become, because once you make the same mistakes the others made, you become another one of them. Society wants blacks to fail. This should be a motivation to blacks. Martin Luther King Jr. simply asked for equality, shortly after a white male who didn't approve of the positive message he was sending out murdered him. This means that the life that African Americans deserve won't be handed to them. Blacks have to go above and beyond just to be successful in this world. Once the black man does so, it will only make the road to success that much greater. Take advantage of the things some take for granted.

12th Grade
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