

2017 YOUNG WRITERS ANTHOLOGY
MORE CREATIVE THAN ever!



MORE CREATIVE THAN EVER!

This anthology contains the winning works submitted for 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. The winners, ranging from grades 6-12, submitted works for short story, personal narrative, comic, poetry, descriptive paragraph, and expository essay. To the winning young writers, congratulations on this prestigious achievement.



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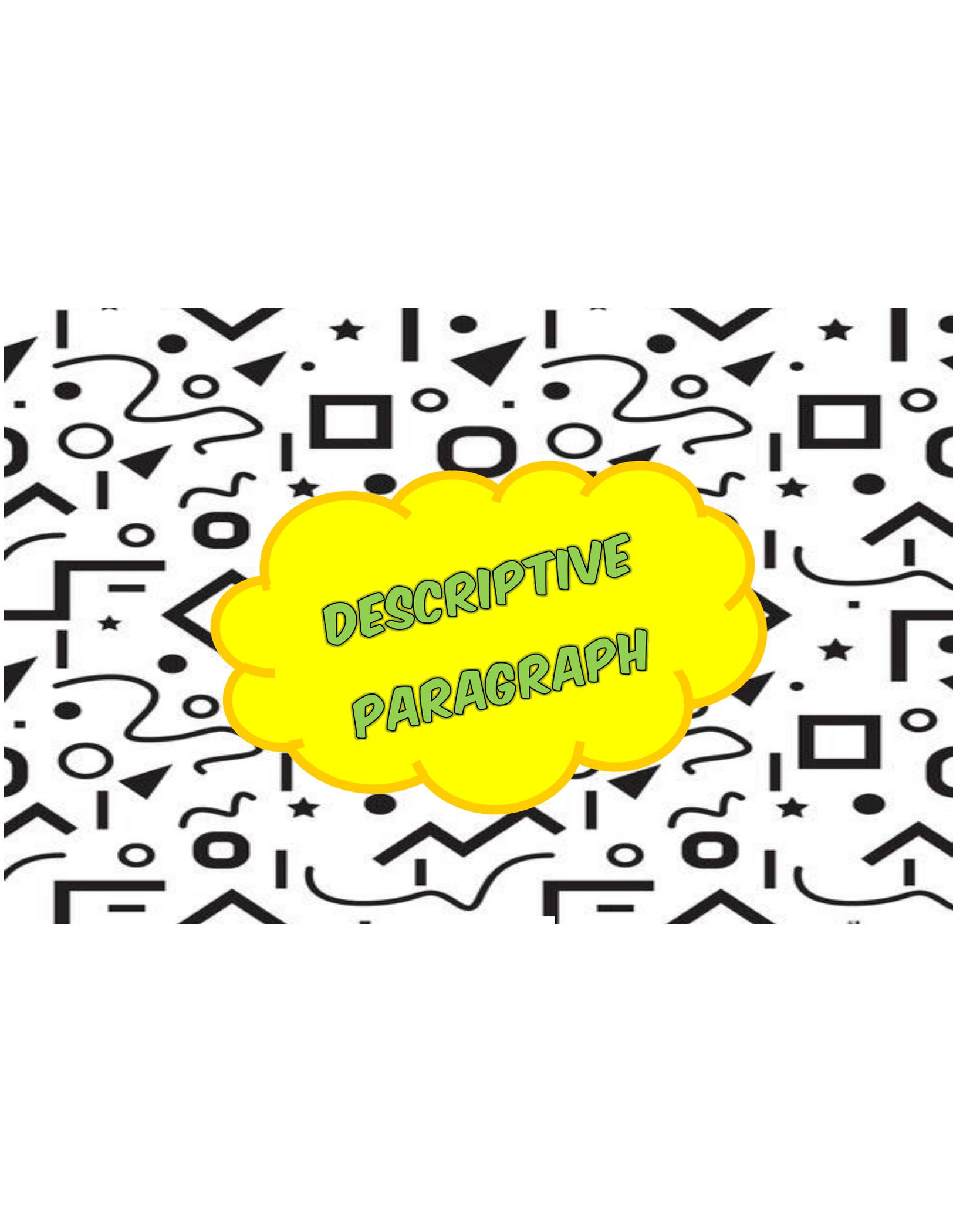
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**DESCRIPTIVE
PARAGRAPH**

“Escape”

Ruth Asante, Weatherford Middle School, 7th Grade

Heaving as though its tired lungs would collapse at any given time, the small, frightened being sprinted as fast as its little legs could go, dodging every shrub, tree branch, or boulder that dared to interfere. A cry of agony escaped the creature’s mouth as an unseen thorn bush trapped its leg, piercing its skin so deeply that it may as well been sharp daggers. Ignoring the intense pain that was throbbing in his leg, the wounded creature freed itself and continued to run for its life as it heard the roar of anger bellowing from its enemy close behind.

“A Long Distance Relationship”

Elizabeth Blazek, Norman High School, 11th Grade

I started sneaking out at night during my freshman year of high school. It wasn't my intention for it to become a regular thing, but I have lost count of the number of times I have gone out since that first night. The first time I snuck out was for a lunar eclipse in October 2014. It wasn't anything particularly spectacular. The noisy lights of Norman crowded out the stars on the Eastern horizon. The constant sound of crickets soon faded into white noise. Even the moon, which had been vividly advertised as a 'blood moon' was closer to burnt orange than a true red. Every once in a while a car would pass by, the only reminder that time still passed even as everything seemed frozen around me. Still, as I stood out in the yard getting eaten by bugs and losing feeling in my feet, I thought about how I had gotten there, on that night. Some large rock had happened to crash into our planet, creating the moon. The moon happened to be aligned with the Earth, and the Earth with the Sun, in a way that the Earth happened to cast its shadow on the moon. At the same time, the moon happened to be at the shortest part of its somewhat elliptical orbit, making it look larger than normal. I happened to stumble across that article, and so I ended up standing outside looking up at the moon at the same moment that all these coincidences were aligned. It was at that moment, with the improbabilities of the universe laid out before me, that I realized I loved the night sky. It is because the night is time for me to sit, and be still, and watch the motions of an oblivious universe. The stars do not notice me; they do not care. There is something freeing about that. About the smallness of my place in the cosmos. The universe owes me nothing. I owe nothing to the universe. I simply am.

“Close Your Eyes”

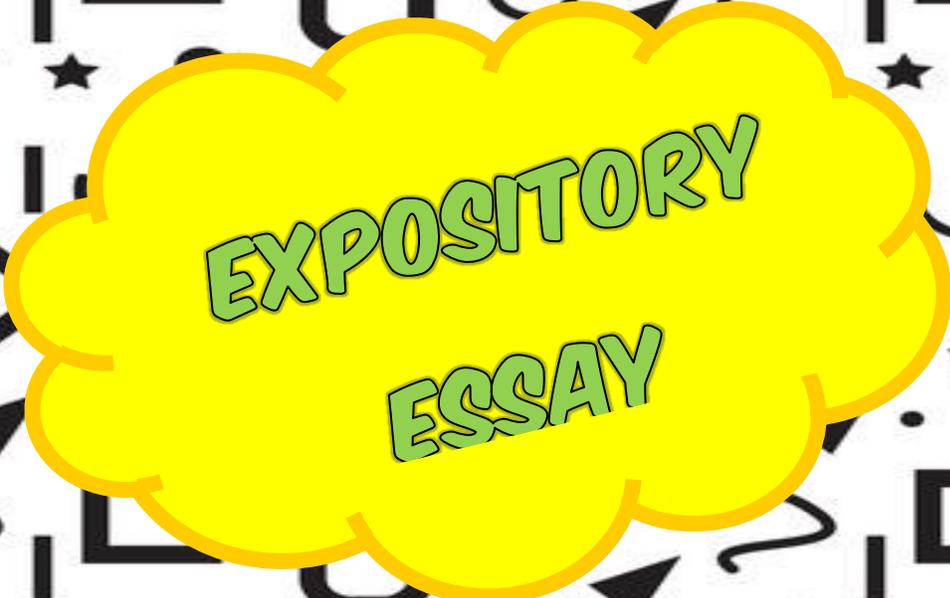
Natalie Boaldin, Norman North High School, 11th Grade

Close your eyes and imagine: your life is actually a movie. First you shrink into a box, the world around you is now small and frail. The lights dim, the music booms in your ears, and everything seems to pause. Curtains burst open, confetti rains onto you, and people begin to cheer. There is an audience, but they tower above you and they follow your every move, ready to see you fail. You are picked up and placed onto a couch. After a while of no movement, your body starts to melt into the cushions, and your skin melds with the fabric. The couch curls around your body until it's fully engulfed, and out of fear you close your eyes. The second you open your eyes you see that you're now in a seemingly endless milky white abyss. In this place, time is sped up and has complete control over you. Your thoughts aren't yours anymore, they are the words of the people around you. You feel a sharp hot pain all over your body, but it can't be seen from the outside, therefore it doesn't exist. For what feels like years, you scream for help. No one hears, because no one is listening. Suddenly, it begins to viciously storm. The water fills the room, and the thunder and lightning shake the ground. Eventually there is no air left to breathe. The flood covers your body fully. You scramble to the top, but you can't get past the barrier. There is no way out this time. Complete darkness, then a burst of light. You open your eyes again, this time you are in your room. The alarm rings in your ear, and Steph, your younger sister barges in. Thank God it was all just a dream, until tomorrow when it starts over again

“Gone Fishing”

Dacia Miranda, Weatherford Middle School, 8th Grade

Cool water rushed by as the boy sat, ever patient. His fishing pole waited in eagerness on the fork-shaped twig he shoved into the sandy bank. A red and white bobber floated peacefully in the middle of the wide river. Suddenly, it bobbed once, twice, and disappeared into the murky depths. Sam’s hand shot out and gripped the pole as he attempted to pull in his catch. Left and right, the line danced as the monstrous fish desperately tried to break free. Water foamed and jumped as Sam reeled the writhing fish closer and closer to shore. With a mighty tug, the fish leaped out of the turbulent waters it had created and landed on shore with a thud. It gasped and flopped frantically as it tried to breathe. Sam sprinted to his lucky catch and held it up triumphantly, beaming with pride as he trotted home with his delicious dinner.



**EXPOSITORY
ESSAY**

“Teenagers Matter”

Ashlyn Evans, Central Junior High School, 8th Grade

It was a Sunday morning and I walked into my church in a bad mood. We were early, as usual, and I was ready for a good worship session. I walked into the sanctuary and my favorite worship leader, Hilary Burkhart, is standing on the stage with her light colored guitar slung over her shoulder. I had a feeling my day was about to reach its peak before 9:30 in the morning, and for some reason, I was happy about it.

Hilary starts singing and she starts to sing a new song, a song she wrote called “I Need Jesus”. I was totally into it and was overflowing with the Lord’s love. Then when the song was over she started strumming the melody of my favorite song, No Longer Slaves, while looking right at me. She starts to speak calmly, but passionately. She says, “Some of you may already know this, but our youth group had camp in Anadarko last week and I had the amazing opportunity of joining them.” I knew exactly where this was going. We had talked about this a couple days before. I was excited to hear this coming from her mouth again. She continues, “I was able to join them in all of their night services including worship. I’m going to sing a song that seemed to really stand out to them at camp. When you are in a room full of teenagers while they worship our God in their favorite way, it is a special thing to be a part of.

All of the youth in the room were jumping with their hands held high to the LORD shouting the lyrics of the song. There is nothing as powerful and moving as that moment right there, standing in the middle of the greatest worship session. I had forgotten I was in a room full of teens at a church camp in the blazing heat. Guys, teenagers matter. The youth can change the world. They changed my heart in three minutes. Teenagers matter, they really do.” She stops and starts to sing the lyrics of the song that changed her life, mine too.

That moment was so special for me because I knew she was thinking about me. She was looking at me the whole time. As she sang, I was shouting the lyrics to the LORD and was once again, I was overflowing with the LORD'S love. Hilary has always been someone I adore and look up to, she always will be. A message to all the adults out there that think teens are nothing but small minded immature kids—teenagers matter, they really do.

“Futbol, Not Football”

Joseph Hicks, Vinita High School, 11th Grade

Looking at any nation, a sports team can usually be remarkably reflective of that people’s attitude and mentality as a whole. Specifically, fútbol (soccer) is very indicative of the nation itself, in its style and world-wide appeal. Even smaller countries usually have a style specific to themselves, originating in and resonating with the population. The traits of a populace generally translate to their performance on the pitch, in both players and tactics. As a small example of this correlation, three nations, Brazil, Germany, and Russia and their soccer teams can be contrasted as proof.

First the most popular soccer nation in the world: Brazil. Their national soccer team, *Seleção*, is a hugely successful and has players from clubs all over the world. Yet most maintain the Brazilian style, reflecting it in their play. The Brazilians are fast and skillful, bringing excitement and awe to the fans. This accurately reflects Brazil’s culture, and of Carnival, a fun, flashy spectacle, full of merriment and passion.

Another notable soccer nation, sharing almost as much success as Brazil, is Germany. The Germans approach the game vastly differently from their South American counterparts, taking a more direct style. Their team, *Die Mannschaft*, plays more workman-like, picking out practical passes and routes to the goal, with great attention to positioning and efficiency. Their best players are renowned for the astounding utility they provide their team, the most famous of which being their captain Manuel Neuer, the pioneer of sweeper keeping, acting as both a goalkeeper and an outfield player simultaneously. Much like the German people, *Die Mannschaft* is economical, acting with boundless energy and practicality. *Die Mannschaft* is constantly innovating the game, just as German industry manages to do at every turn.

Lastly, a less successful soccer nation: Russia. Their team, affectionately nicknamed the Red Army, is a great reflection of the national mentality. While not as successful as other sports, Russian soccer still is very relevant internationally, providing serious competition to top teams. The Russian stars are not skillful, but ruthless in front of the goal and in defense. Their defensive champions (one being the captain) are the Berezutskiy twins, brothers who have played for the same club and country for their entire careers. The team plays collectively, either being strong overall, or passive and ineffective, much like their people, modest, yet strong and proud. Their great unity is shared with their nation of origin, most of the players having grown up in the USSR.

Soccer is “the beautiful game”, reflecting its international appeal. Some nations do play “the beautiful game”, such as Brazil, as their people have more flamboyant traditions. Russia plays roughly and proudly, while the Germans cooperate to play efficiently

and practically. Other countries interpret soccer differently, though, resulting in a style unique to that culture. These cultural variances reflect some of soccer's mass appeal, giving life and exclusivity to more local games. These are only a select few examples, however, as this phenomenon can be seen all over the world.

“Save the Oceans, Save the World”

April Kunselman, Dimensions Academy, 12th Grade

Over the course of a few decades, the quality of our oceans has decreased in a significant way. Problems like depleting sea life from various components and a lack of understanding about the oceans have caused dramatic changes in ocean environments. As humans, we could not survive if the ocean continues to decrease in life and increase in temperatures. Many influential people and well funded organizations, such as the Oceanic Preservation Society, are fighting back to save our oceans; but we need everyone's help to save our oceans and, in turn, our world.

One of the main factors of failing oceans is the depletion of sea life. Many elements cause ocean life to decrease; pollution from boats, beaches, and sea-front businesses. These factors fill our oceans with toxic chemicals and oils, killing much of the life in the oceans. Garbage from beaches and humans is ingested by animals and can cause health issues ,and eventually death. Farming causes runoff, or draining of unsanitary water, into waterways, causing dirty and often unlivable water for plants and animals. Illegal capture, such as bottom trawling and dynamiting, in oceans has caused species to become endangered and even extinct.

Without the ocean, we could not survive as humans, and we're on the track to losing all life in our seas. The ocean provides us with fresh energy, clean drinking water, and employment. According to NOAA, about one in every six jobs is marine related. So, why are we losing our oceans? Pollution plays a key role in dying oceans. An excess of carbon dioxide from fossil fuels is building up in our atmosphere, causing heat to be trapped within. Raising temperatures on Earth and oceans absorb the extra heat. This causes melting icecaps, and as the glaciers melt, the ocean rises a remarkable amount. The extra heat kills off sea life because it's not used to such high temperatures for living. The added heat affects weather patterns all over the world, changing small thunderstorms into raging hurricanes.

With all the negativity around that our oceans are unsalvageable, it's hard to think we could do anything to change the fate of our oceans, but there are simple things we can do to help save and protect our oceans for future generations. Volunteering your time and helping clean up beaches and saving injured wildlife is an excellent way to help not just our oceans, but our land as well. Always use reusable bags when shopping. Avoid products with excess packaging for less waste, and most importantly... Recycle!

Over the last few decades, ocean life has decreased dramatically. Exhausted sea life and a lack of understanding of the oceans have changed the quality of the ocean. Being humans, we could not survive without healthy oceans. Therefore, many organizations are working hard to save and protect our oceans, but we need everyone's help to save our oceans and our world. If everyone does their part in working towards a better ocean, we also work towards a better world.

“If I Were Mayor”

Reagan Lacey, Piedmont High School, 9th Grade

If I were mayor I would create a place in my town that would benefit the community as a whole. As mayor I would petition to the city councilman to allot a section of the town park to be used to construct a dog playground. People would purchase a dog park membership at the Town Hall. All the dogs will be able to be identified as a paying member by the special tag they will receive for their collar. All the proceeds from the park will be used to fund an adjoining safe haven for homeless and unwanted dogs in the community. As mayor I would be in charge of planning fundraisers that would include different social gatherings with your dog. The entry for these activities would contribute to the cause. The safe haven would be run by volunteers. To get the younger people in the community involved, I would encourage student organizations to volunteer their time which would benefit not only the dogs but the students. I was inspired to write this essay because I recently lost a cherished pet. We adopted Ally from the Human Society. She would have loved a dog park. I am not sure where Ally came from before the Human Society but without them who knows what her life would have been like. Who knows what m future holds but I hope that someday I will be able to make this essay a reality. That’s what I would do if I were mayor.



**PERSONAL
NARRATIVE**

“This Old House”

Annemarie Cuccia, Norman High School, 11th Grade

I recall how before my hand could even make contact with the solid oak door, it would swing open, almost off its hinges. I never needed a key, never needed to make a sound, the house knew I was there. Today, I know there is nothing behind the door.

I emerge in her hallway, immediately disoriented. I have never seen these walls before, unladen with pictures, not leaning from the weight of a thousand frames and memories. Suddenly I feel I am in the home of a stranger, somewhere I have never been before and have no business being now. I can see the light spot where my framed handprint used to be, and I place my hand to the cool wall, unsure if it's for nostalgia or to steady myself. Slowly, I make my way down the hall, hanging all the pictures up in my mind. There was my mom, curls cascading down her face, looking happier than I can conceive now. There were my cousins, holding aloft an enormous green fish, beaming. There I was, hidden under a magenta floppy hat, mischievously searching for my grandma. There. There was the place my mind always went back to, the home it refused to vacate. I imagine I see her, lying prostrate on the ground, the echo of a scream in her mouth. I dig my toes into the bare carpet, and force myself to stay upright, something the last person who stood here had not been able to do. My feet itch to take a step forward, to see what lies in wait for me just a mere foot away, but instead I swirl around so fast the carpet burns my foot, and the hall spins around me. There will be time to walk forward later, but today I hurry back down the corridor. The house no longer feels abandoned, just full of things halfway there.

I emerge into the living room at the door, and I peer out the peephole to see what she must have seen. The blackness of the night shocks me. I know no one is coming, but still I wait at that damn door, tired of being the only one on either side of it. Finally, I swing it open. Today, I am the ghost letting people in. I throw a glance over my shoulder, expecting to see a family waving goodbye, but all I see is a pillow placed squarely on the center on the couch, reminding me of the love of a grandmother. Nodding, I close the door and turn my key in the lock. I give the knocker three loud taps, and though they ring through the neighborhood, the door remains stubbornly shut. I close my eyes and see the house again, awash in familiarities and oddities, and a tear travels down my cheek, caught by the upturned lip of a smile. This is how I will remember it.

“Life is Beautiful”

Brandon Jones, Whittier Middle School, 8th Grade

Life it is something no one can understand, we all work hard ,we all have jobs and the ones we get paid for are not usually our main jobs. Life hits people in the face all the time. It can beat you down and tear you apart. Life it is the most terrifying thing in the world but that is what people don't understand, It can also be the most beautiful thing in the world at the same time. When life tricks you and you fall for it, it feels like you won't ever be able to take one more hit but this is what i learned about myself if I'm down and hurt i won't only get back up and fight some more I will see someone on the ground next to me and I will help them to get back up and fight. When you're still hurt that is called Love but this is something for life. There is always love to help you get back up weather the love is for something or someone or some place think about it next time life hits you.

“What About Me?”

Hanna Lea, Classen School of Advanced Studies, 10th Grade

It did not take long before I realized I had to grow up. No more childishness, no immaturity, and no overflowing emotion. I had to accept becoming jaded, and face reality. “An accident is what they kept repeating, but what went in one ear had gone out the other.

I recall spending the rest of our four hour car trip paralyzed and speechless. I only really remember the cold saltiness of tears, and how I couldn’t hide. My insides were out and in the open, completely exposed. The feeling of emptiness while everyone stole parts of me for what they considered “comfort” is something I’ll never forget. That forever pitting feeling is with me to this day.

I know that those around me were also greatly affected by the incident, but what about me? I had been informed. Facts and figures about fires that were of no use. Given useless details and stories that just haunt my memory. Told and left for dead was what I always thought, but when I actually stopped, gathered my heart, and cleared the smoke that was shielding my eyes, I finally saw, I saw others going through my pain, some more intense than others, but we all shared deep heartache. I realized I was not alone in this, it was not just me. There were others. But what hurt the most was when I saw that harsh reality and acknowledged, I may be empty and feel hopeless, but I need to move on. The dumb, ignorant question of “What about me?” was naïve and useless. I knew the answer and was only looking for pity.

I look back and hate myself for wishing people would have cared about me more, or had fixed my broken heart. Like I said, I had to grow up fast. Whether by choice or not, I had to. The loss of my best friend taught me what life was, and gave me a taste of its bittersweet acidity.

I may still ponder, and wish on stars that it was all a lie, but I know you left me changed; even though I may have a yearning heart and cold emptiness inside, I now you gave me warmth and filled me with joy. I know meeting again will come, but my journey till then leaves me with new scars and makes me more jaded. But I am happy to say, I don’t wonder anymore, I don’t ask, “What about me?”

“My Big Break”

Hunter Trejo, Wayne High School, 10th Grade

Have you ever wanted something so bad that you would do anything to get it? I mean like sell your soul to the devil (just kidding); push yourself so hard that you're in physical and mental pain. The saying is “No pain. No gain” and that's exactly what I had to go through to get where I'm at today, and I wouldn't trade a single minute of the blood, sweat, and definitely tears that it took for me to make history here and be able to called myself Wayne's ever male cheerleader. This is my story if my first game.

The whole bus ride to Healdton seemed to take a lifetime and a half; I was listening to my playlist I have for Friday nights. It's pretty much any song that's fast and loud. With each and every passing mile, I felt the butterflies growing deeper in my stomach. It wasn't until we entered Healdton that I realize this was first game ever as Wayne's first male cheerleader. What if people had their opinion about me and if I didn't show them I was capable of that then was my new title inadequate? I finally calmed my nerves down enough to walk off the bus and I made a decision that I still carry with me today: anywhere I go there will always be people that have something they want to say about me, but I will not change myself to please the hecklers and be someone I'm not.

After that I walked to where we put our bags and did our run through, and in that moment I smelled the sweet aroma of the field, the chattering voices up in the stands, and the sea of orange that looks like waving wheat on the prairies. I think I stopped breathing for a moment, and I was ready to give this all I had and just be the best I could be. But the bright lights are enough to blind you, and my beating heart went 1 Mississippi...2 Mississippi, and now I'm so nervous I feel like I might even faint. My heart is in my throat, I have to blink to hold back the tears, this is too much for me to handle: I just want to quit. But if I was to quit, then all my hard work I've put into 3 years would just be wasted time. From the outside I looked cool, calm, and collective but on the inside I was like a little kid who got separated from their mother at the supermarket. I was trying my hardest not sweat through my uniform, but that didn't help. The more I tried not to sweat, the more I perspired like a big pig. Since that night I've never looked back, and I can safely say that I am over joyed to be Wayne's first male cheerleader.



POETRY

“Traveling Inn”

Macy Bratcher, Norman North High School, 12th Grade

My head is a traveling inn,
It seems, to house the guests
That inhabit my dreams.
Their voices always changing,
Accents heavy in my ears,
Crowding the common-rooms
Of my cranium with cheers.
Weighing down my skull
With their leaden carpet bags,
Whispering hushed opinions
Of mice and shrubs and hags.
They seem to take much pleasure
In denying me my sleep.

“Apology Notes”

Mackenzie Copeland, Weatherford Middle School, 8th Grade

When I look up at the darkening sky,
Twinkling stars gaze wistfully down upon me.
I love how,
If you squint your eyes just right,
Those stars transform
Into tiny porcupines of shaky light.
They wander alone in the dark,
Dipping their bright quills into the inky blackness
To write apology notes
For all those unanswered whispered wishes.

“Roller Coaster”

Dessa Miranda, Weatherford Middle School, 6th Grade

It was our turn next.
We got on and started to go
Up...up...up

Time to raise our hands, then
Whoosh!

D
O
W
N

We go.

Here comes the loop,
Then finally, we
Stop.

We get off the ride,
And I say,
“Can we go again?”

“See That Over There?”

Subihi Setiwaldi, Norman North High School, 10th Grade

See that moth over there?

Far away, its unadorned and dark, opposite of a butterfly.

Up close, there's much more to it.

Little bits of fuzz hidden by delicate, sprightly wings.

That's what it is when you look closer.

See that old, broken down house crumbling on that gloomy street?

Far away, it's abandoned, unsightly, nowhere you'd want to live.

Up close, there's much more to it.

Hints of creamy yellow visible under the thick, wide vines, sprouting with tiny buds preparing to bloom.

That's what it is when you look closer.

See that old, crouched dis pleasingly thin woman?

Far away, she is a overly wrinkled prune, nose spotted with warts that rumor her a witch.

Up close, there's much more to it.

Kind eyes, aged face that has seen both wonders and cruelty.

That's who she is when you look closer.

See the sky, so up and unreachable?

Far away, it's endless and powerful.

Up close, there's much more to it.

Colors sprinkled everywhere, stars winking down at the world.

That's what it is when you look closer.

See the world?

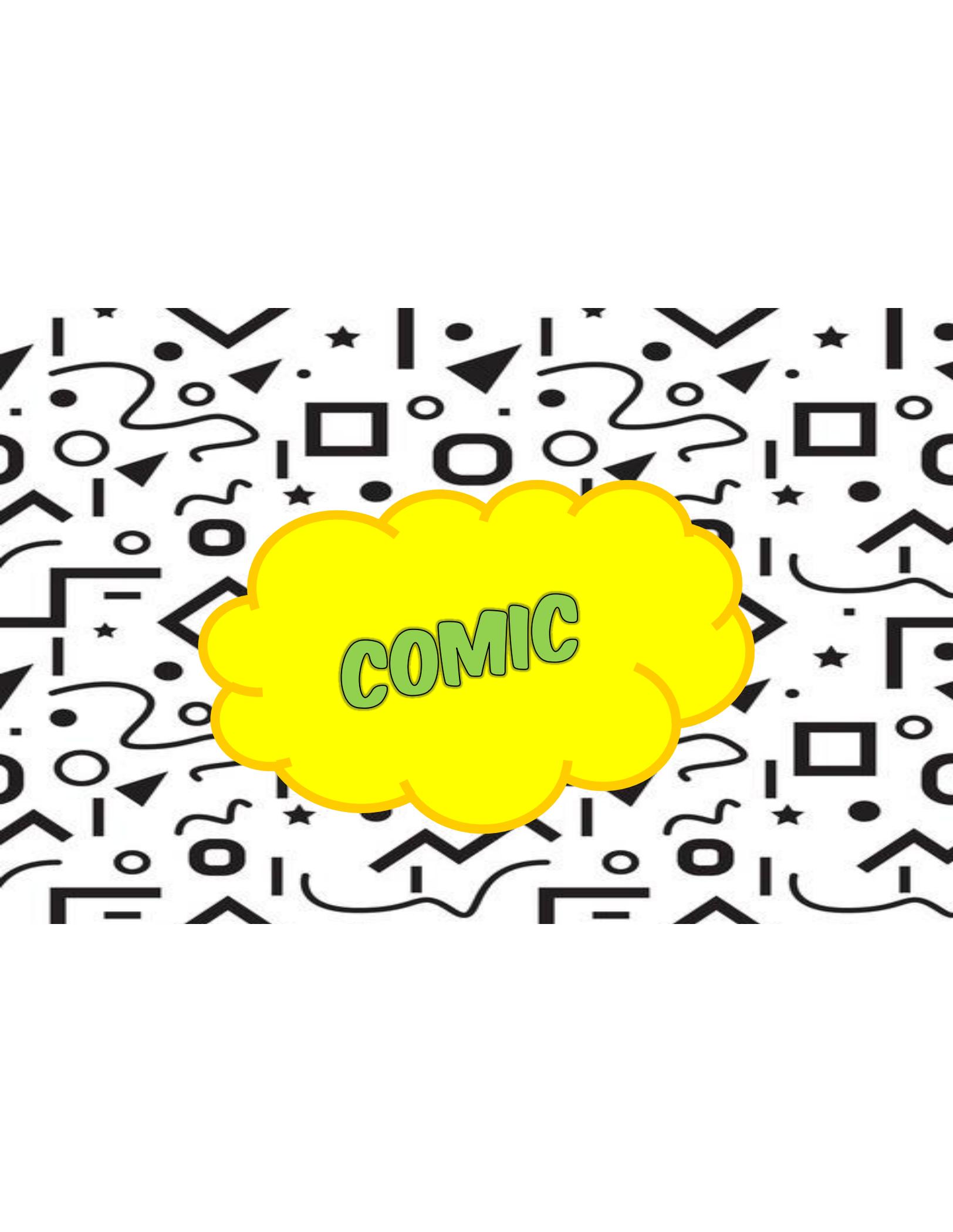
Far away, it's anything you think it to be.

Up close, it's unimaginable.

A vast world filled with with everything: fear, love, anger. Sadness.

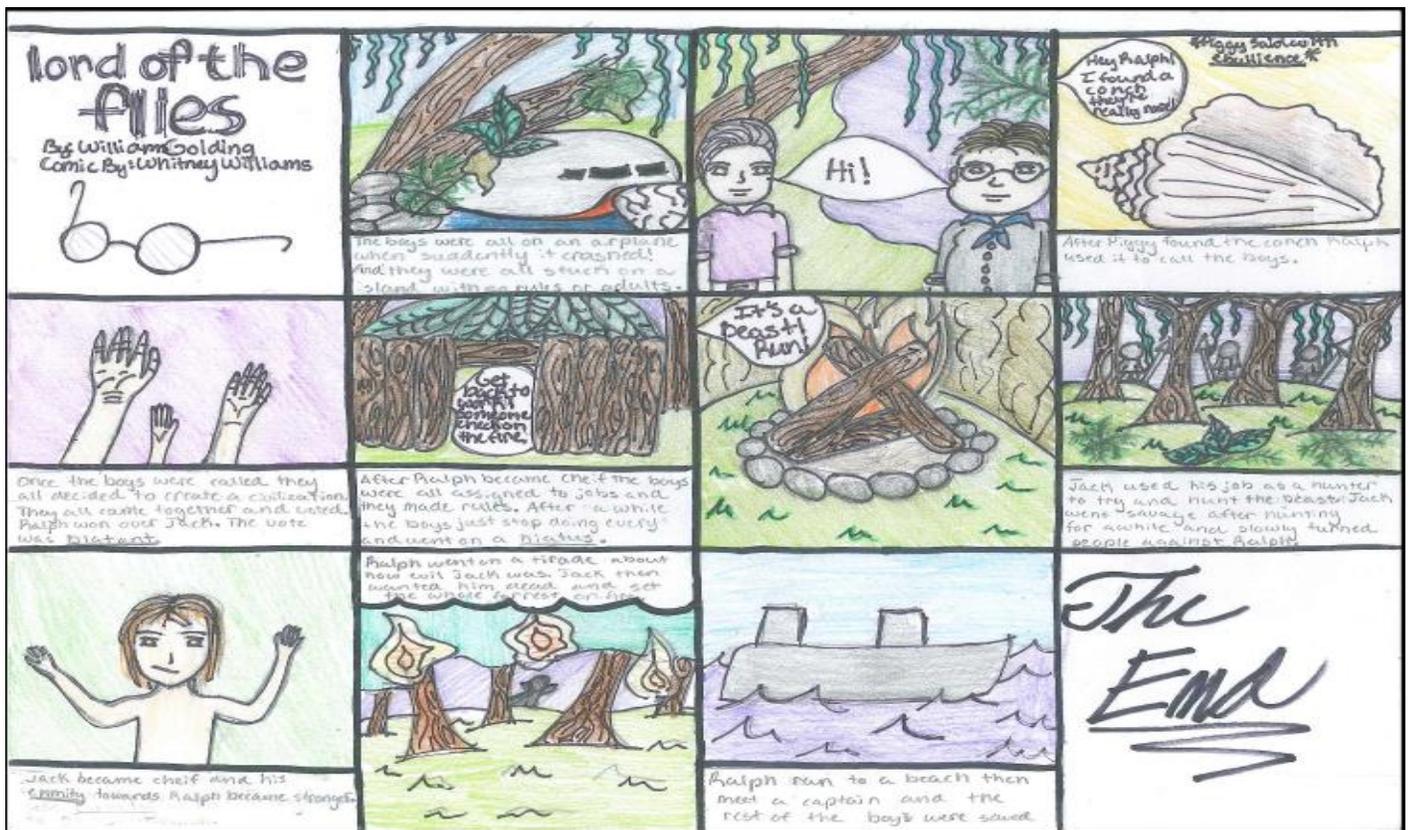
That's what it is when you look closer.

And do look closer, much closer.



COMIC

Whitney Williams, Whittier Middle School, 8th grade



Avery Draper, Whittier Middle School, 8th grade



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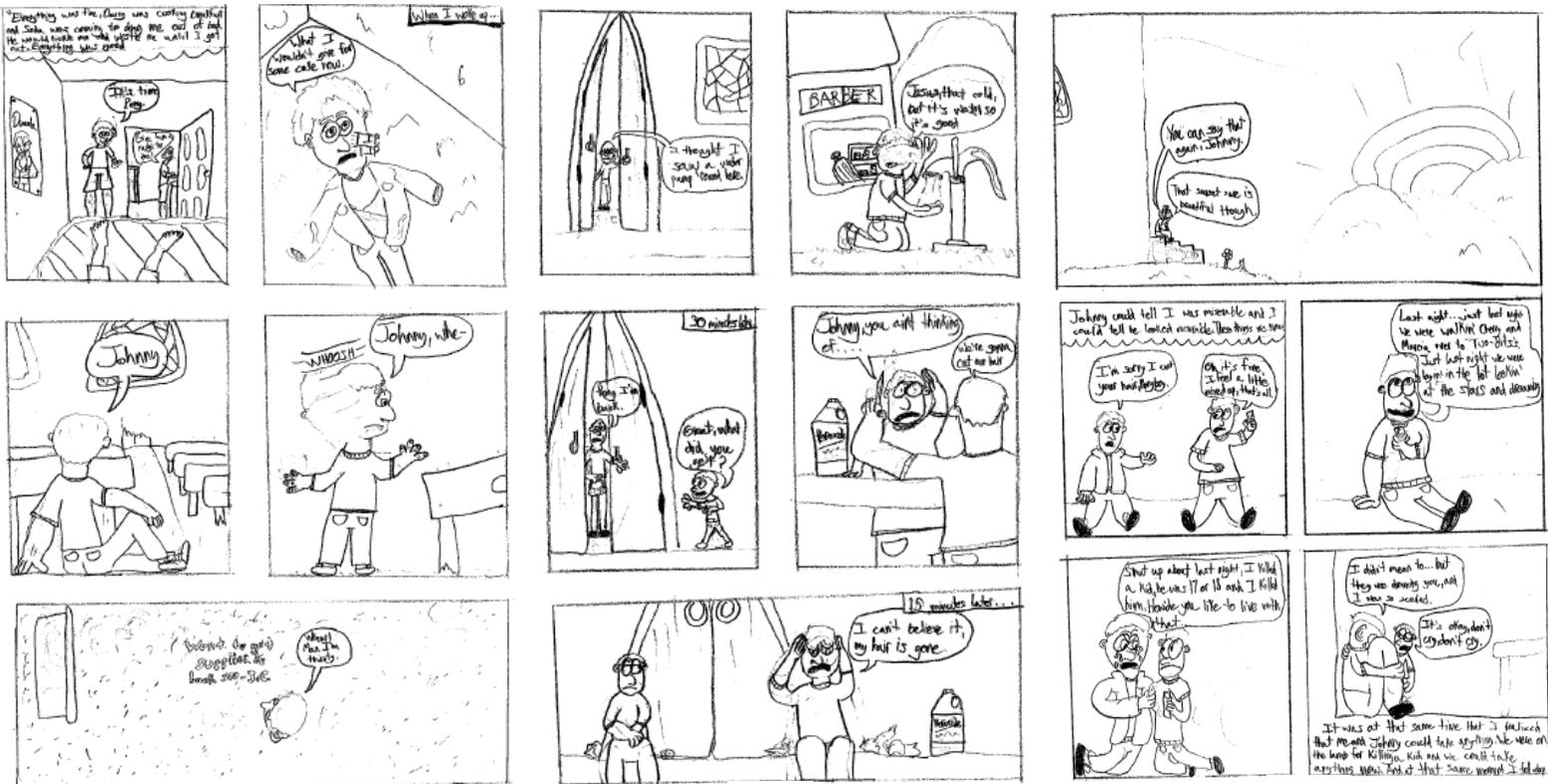


2



3

Henry Jenkins, Whittier Middle School, 8th grade



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2

3





SHORT STORY

“The Wall”

Kara Kay, Norman High School, 12th Grade

You were born in a hospital, through the womb of cement and wooden framework. You were built by neon vests and approved by business suits and settled by scrubs and paper gowns. Your town praised your birth, even in the wake of the cholera. Your ribbon cutting ceremony was announced as trumpets announce kings. You, a wall in the hospital in the west wing, painted beige and covered by generic paintings, are magnificent, an observer of the wonderful and tragic, a connoisseur of the extraordinary in the ordinary.

You never forgot your first day. The purity of the room behind you. The eagerness in the voices of the staff, ready to make a difference, ready to be a place of purpose. And even you couldn't shake your own blissful emptiness--the kind that is excited to be filled with knowledge, with experience, with importance, excited at the life ahead of you. But then comes the red flourishes, the squeak of the wheels, the thrills, the madness. His crimson jacket is fuming out in its own slow speed. You feel the doctors and nurses dancing to the beat of panic, checking pulses, and rhythmically circling around the room as the beeping of machines and blood spills interrupts your silence. The boy was too young. You see his others, wearing the same jackets, wheeled into the entrances between the other walls, covered by cloth and you still hate bad news and wish you could choose when to be a wall and when to be a moving ectoplasm. The room is dizzy and you are caught between moments. The boy is sent to surgery and stains your beige with crimson. He is screaming as mountains do. You learn that people are better remembered by their screams than their names. The blood never washes off and 849 decibel screamer survives surgery. You see him the week after, talking to a kind woman as he prays alone and is sent out of your room to be replaced with a new roommate with a new thrill to be cared for. Even when you don't want to move on, you must.

Five years later and you see the complexities of grief and joy. You find theatrics in every childbirth and you remember each one with its own page in your mental scrapbook. Today brings the Walkers and a beautiful day. You see the clouds rise and watch a woman enter screaming, your most frequent method of entering. You cue the orchestra. Enter him: carrying two cups of ice chips and enough nervous energy to light up Manhattan. He almost runs into you on the way in. You are a containment of energy, a bee buzzes. Cue she: blissfully aware and shouting “I'm gonna be a big sister!” to any nurse who would listen. Together they can overcome the world. You see her brown hair drenched and the paper gown expanding and hands holding. “Push!” says the nurse. Oh the joy! The anticipation! You are here and they are here and the tree blooms, the roughness in the air settles. There is no crying. There is merely the frozen. The suspended time, the nurses anticipating a reaction, them rejoicing in what they believed was forever, and she, seeing

life in its rawest form. Enter doctor: snatching the child from their selfless hands and whisking it off to the nursery before you're able to finish your mental scrapbook page. She places a "#1 big sister" sticker over your blood stain. You wish you had hands to assure them and words to tell them and the legs to walk to them. But you are a wall and must let people learn alone for better or for worse. The curtain closes, the bee will never buzz again. Together, they must overcome the world.

You are ten years older and people are finding better walls. They migrate to the glitzy hospital across the river and you become the Kansas to their Emerald City. Granted, your roommates mean more now because they are your solace in your increasing alone time. You befriend the cancer patient with two dalmatians (fifty two spots altogether) and you watch The Mary Tyler Moore Show together every day. You listen to them on the phone, ranting as their boss didn't give them that promotion two years ago ("You deserved it!" you say) and their existentialism brought on by terminal cancer made them buy a boat last week ("I know a guy who would buy it from you!" you say). They become your best friend and you are theirs without either of you knowing it. You become increasingly aware of the 10 o'clock news. You worry as nurses fade and doctors stop showing up. The men outside stare at you and wait for you to crumble. But you have your dignity. You are there for them when the chemo tilts the world 45 degrees and they can't breathe and can only find comfort in grasping firmly onto you. You grasp back. "Just stay positive!". "You'll be better before you know it!". You hate them. Because they are selfish, because misguided optimism is the shield to brevity, because they'll never know. But you stay constant while others go through the five stages of caring until it's too inconvenient. You hear wheels gliding on linoleum and the sleepy, confused whispering of your best friend. "We're going to Rosewood Regional", the nurse says. "We were bought out last night by Red Seed Villas. You will be in great hands at Rosewood I promise." "I don't want to go!" asserts the patient. And ironically you don't want to stay. Your best friend is leaving and for once, you're the hurt one in this hospital. You just want to matter. You just want to go where the people are. You want to live and watch and meet. And tonight, you are alone; surrounded by empty wall outlets and uncertain futures and no more episodes of Mary Tyler Moore. You thought you were Kansas, but you are Mars and life on this planet is gone.

You are a phantom of the corporate future. You are a true business suit loather even though you were once built by one. You overhear plans for demolition and after seeing so many deaths, begin to prepare for your own. You remember the look on that boy's face nearly fifteen years ago when the doctor told him about his parents and remember that no one will ever be that sad for you because you're only a wall and they'll never know that you know. But you realize you mattered--like heartbeats matter to survive or light matters for electricity. You mattered so much that you did not need gratification or recognition. You just were. You think of all the joy you've seen. You think of the happy deliveries, the minor diagnoses, the routine tests that never ended in unexpected phone

calls. You have found love in a place monetized by morbid. The men in business suits kick you and scrape off your history. You just wanted enough time to love everything.

“TEAR IT DOWN!” screams the construction worker as he turns on the bulldozer. The bulldozer inches and inches as it rips your dignity from your roots. But you remember why you were born. The bee buzzes and the world turns and you are on the mountains of Austria. You are a man in Brooklyn at a beat poetry reading, you are a CEO executive in Detroit, you are Puccini, Monet, and Hemingway. You are the Sydney Opera House. You are the streets of Calcutta. You are bigger than stagnant, louder than screaming. You feel nature grasping away. You feel the days begin. You are moving. Rewind. Revolve. End. You died in a hospital, by the tomb of cement and wooden framework. You, a wall in the hospital in the west wing, painted beige and covered by generic paintings, were magnificent, an observer of the wonderful and tragic, a connoisseur of the extraordinary in the ordinary.

“Smile for the Camera”

Emma Rose, Norman High School, 12th Grade

There is little doubt in my mind that I am dead. As far as I can tell have no heartbeat, no clear brain activity, and the blood stain blooming from the center of my chest is certainly not a good sign. However, my body continues to walk around, and on more than one occasion it has attacked and devoured people. Which is a revolting and unnerving experience to witness. But it seems I have no other purpose on this earth other than to watch my corpse stumble about the barren world.

I don't know how long I've been watching my broken remains wander around, but I do know that I have no control over them. I seem to exist as a separate entity entirely, trailing slowly along beside my body as it travels along in search of its next meal.

I don't want to be tied to this earth watching a twisted version of myself roam tirelessly. I don't want to see my flesh become grayer or smell my body begin to rot. I want to leave. While I do not know a lot about the afterlife, I feel cheated out of being able to move on.

My body feels nothing. Or I don't believe it does. I have seen it pierced by knives, and bullets. I have seen it fall from a story up, and I have seen its bones rip through its skin. Even now its left arm dangles uselessly at its side, a bone in the lower arm jutting violently out. None of this seems to bother my body. It moves on and on. Stumbling slowly, one foot dragging behind the other.

I almost feel jealous. I miss walking. I miss walking barefoot in the grass, feeling closer to the earth in some way. I miss running. I miss lacing up my shoes and sprinting. Feeling the air around me part as a speed through it, letting me go faster. I miss...

I miss a lot of things. It's hard to remember now. I can't remember so many things from my life before this. It's not like my mind has been wiped completely clean, but it has become blurred. The memories have mixed together and I am left with vague emotions and desires. But I see it through a lens with the wrong prescription, and if I try to see things clearly my head begins to ache. It feels like my very being will be ripped in two, so I let it go. I let it flow away and watch as my corpse walks.

It's disgusting to look at. The entire body had started to decay once my spirit left it, and now it is held together only by its desire to consume. The clothes I had been wearing at my death are now tattered and covered in dried blood. The nails on the hands have been ripped off and several fingers have been broken. Every part of it reeks. If I could kill it myself, I would.

I wish the first bullet that entered my body had ended me.

My death is the only part of my life that I can remember. The thirty seconds before the bullet hit and the thirty excruciating seconds as I bled out have been imprinted onto my soul. I remember the taste of the air in the moment before, dry and acrid. And I

remember the taste of blood and iron in my mouth as I lay on the ground gasping for air, begging God to let me live. I can't remember the sound of the shot, but I could feel the world change as the bullet sped towards me. I could feel the sound of the shot as it pierced through me. The air warping around the piece of metal, and causing a ripple to spread across my skin. And then the bullet hit the building behind me and I fell. But I didn't die. I laid with my face pressed against the cold, coarse, concrete. I felt my life flow out of me, my heart still pulsing and pushing more blood from me with each beat. I couldn't breathe and only wished for it to end. I wanted it all to end. The pain to stop. My heart to stop beat., - to stop beat.. - to sto...

I do not remember when all my blood had drained out, or when my heart finally gave up. I remember waking up to the stars glowing softly overhead in the night sky. The air was warm and a breeze blew softly around me. For just a moment I thought I had reached heaven.

The moment was shattered by a loud groan and I turned my head and came face to face with myself.

I screamed, but I heard nothing, and my double did not react to the sound or my presence. It jerked in place before dragging itself to its feet and lurching forward. Disgusted and confused I looked down at myself and found that I could see nothing. The only way I knew what I was experiencing was real was because of the feel of the earth shifting around me. Despite being formless I could feel the world breathe and thrive. And I also felt myself being pulled forward, trailing slowly behind my other form. I have tried to leave my physical body many times. But I can never escape it. And so I follow behind. Watching it decay, watching it stumble, and watching it feed.

I did not know true horror until the moment I saw my body consume its first victim. The attack itself was gruesome and gut wrenching. A young girl with no supplies turned the wrong corner and almost ran directly into my body. She realized her mistake almost immediately, but the corpse reacted quicker and pounced upon her form. As she screamed and struggled it bit into her neck, ripping through her flesh. Rearing its head up, my body wrenched a chunk of the girl's neck out. Blood seeped from the wound and from my mouth, staining the ground below. Swallowing loudly, my body leaned down to take another bite, devouring the girl while she still screamed. She died soon afterwards, a small mercy.

I watched as all the events unfolded, unable to move due to the fear and disgust coursing through my being. I wished I had at least tried to help, but instead I simply stared as my body began stuffing itself with flesh. I wanted to be sick, to puke. But with each noisy swallow my body took, I could feel my being filling up, satisfied with the meal. I could not share my body's pain, but I could feel it grow stronger with each bite.

The tears I wanted to spill did not come. Instead, despite the strength I received from the meal, I could feel a dull, hollow, ache somewhere in my chest. I felt like an accomplice to the gruesome display, and for many days after that I allowed myself to become a true ghost. I did not think or attempt to understand my situation. I let my being be pulled aimlessly along with my body as it searched for its next meal. I watched emotionlessly as my body consumed more people, and I felt strength flow into my being and then ebb away. I let myself be.

I woke myself from that state on a stormy day as my body traveled through a forgotten city. I could not feel the rain, but it did seem to adhere to my form, giving my being a shape I could almost see. It made me feel close to normal again. As I enjoyed the rain, my body began to slow, becoming worn down by its drenched clothes. As its gait continued to decrease with each step, a low groaning sound could be heard in the distance, and by the time I started to pay attention to my surroundings, I could see another group of corpses walking towards us.

Like my own body, they were all in various states of decay and traveling slowly. My attention shifted from them, to the shimmer in the air all about them. Connected to each body were beings just like me. The rain outlined their shapes and as I passed by, and I reached out to one of them. Rain slipped around my arm as it stretched out, desperate for some kind of contact. For something to remind me of the human I once was. A hand reached out for mine, and for a moment I thought I could feel my heart beat once again.

The hand passed through mine and I felt nothing.

After that day I forced myself to become a more active observer. I did not want to face the horrors of the world, but more importantly I did not want to accept my fate here. So I thought of ways to escape this world, and I prayed to every god I knew. I became desperate and obsessed with a way to leave. Many times I would reach out towards my body to try and stop it, and each time I passed uselessly through. A part of me held onto the simple hope that if I could reclaim my body I could reclaim my existence. But nothing seemed to work, and I thought that maybe I truly was cursed to haunt the world forever.

And then my body got shot through the heart.

It did not have any effect besides ripping the already tattered heart into pieces. My body's only reaction was to turn around and face the source of the intrusion. It happened to be a small group of young children and one older child with a gun in shaking hands.

The sight was not one that could strike fear in anyone, and I had not felt fear since my sentence had began. However, there was something about the group that made me feel like my heart should be racing. If I had a need to breathe, my breath would have

caught in my throat. My body did not seem to feel the same way, and once it was facing the small group it straightened up, and then charged.

In the same instant I reached for my body to stop it, they were just kids for God's sake. I had witnessed so many deaths and each weighed heavily enough on my conscious, I did not need the souls of the kids on it as well. I would not let my body kill the children. I would not do nothing. I would not kill these children.

Something connected and suddenly I was not facing my body. I was facing the children. They were getting closer and I realized I was running towards them. And so I stopped. I stopped my body. My head turned down and I could see my body. Bloody clothes, broken limbs, rotting skin. I could see my body. I could see myself.

I lifted one of my twisted hands to my face and stared in awe. I was here. I could see, I existed. My gaze turned towards the children, whose eyes were wide, but not frightened. The one with the gun tightened his grip and raised it to be level with my eyes.

I pulled the corners of my mouth into a smile.

I heard a shot.

“Remember”

Ashli Simpson, Whittier Middle School, 8th grade

". . . Tadpole? Can you hear me baby?"

A disembodied voice called to her. It sounded comforting, it sounded . . . familiar. Lilli's eyes slowly opened. She was in a plain white room with dull green linoleum tiling. The lights above gave off what seemed to be a very somber light and buzzed monotonously as if to prove they were still there. There was a man next to her bedside. He looked disheveled and tired, like he had been there all night.

"Here, Lilli, why don't I get you something to do, huh?"

The tired man pulled out a table from behind her and slid it over her bed. On that table was a bundle of crayons tightly wrapped in rubber bands and 10 sheets of neatly organized, drawing paper.

Lilli hesitantly pulled the table towards her, wincing at the screeching wheels. She undid the rubber bands and picked up a crayon. Dark blue flecks scattered as she rubbed its dull edges. Lilli stared at the untouched paper. Her mind was blank.

"Hey . . . I got an idea. Why don't I brush your hair with your favorite brush? How about that Lilli?"

Her favorite brush? What does he mean? She looked up at the man. He seemed so eager to hear her answer, it seemed that her only +possible answer was yes.

"O-okay . . .," she croaked. It pained her to swallow and speaking hurt even worse. She felt the brush's plastic bristles comb through her tangled locks. It was surprisingly calming. She picked up a different crayon, a purple one. She examined its scratched logo for an unknown place. The logo seemed so . . . distant, but familiar, as if it was far in the past, but recent at the same time.

"Oh, I remember! One second."

The man stopped brushing and went to get something. Lilli pulled up her covers for warmth, the fabric scratching against her soft skin. Her eyelids grew heavy lids began to droop. The man returned to her bedside with a pony doll and an eraser.

"No! No, please . . . stay up a little while longer, Tadpole. Maybe we could watch your favorite movie. Then I'll leave, okay?" His voice was beginning to falter. He quickly he pulled out a disc and hurried to the television in the top right corner of the room. The disc's back glinted in the light with an array of prismatic colors.

The lights were dimmed and the movie began. As the main protagonist flew over a village, Lilli felt her eyes droop again. The TV screen blurred into a mass of pastel colors. Despite the barrage of color and sound, she could hear something discomfoting; stifled sobs coming from the back of the room. She was too frightened to even speak. Did she do something wrong? Why couldn't she remember who this man was to her?

About 30 minutes later, the surprisingly short film was over. The man quickly tidied the room and headed toward the door.

"Good night, Lilli. I love you," he said. His voice was barely a whisper as the door creaked shut. The silence persisted for a long time, until she broke it.

"I love you, too."

“Hello My Bully”

Isabella Tijerina, Classen School of Advanced Studies, 8th Grade

RING! RING! RING! I slowly roll around in my bed to glare at my alarm clock, but my anger quickly dissipated when I saw that the time was 8:10! I'm late, oh my gosh, I'm so late! My classes start at 8:20! I quickly jumped out of bed and tried to get together a half-decent outfit, which ended up being a shirt I wore a week ago, some leggings and black flats. I put my hair in a ponytail, brushed my teeth, took my daily pills, grabbed toast for breakfast, and bolted out the door. I knew it would take too long to get my dad to drive me and I missed the bus a long time ago, so I was stuck with running. When I was young that wouldn't have been a problem because I used to be on the middle school and elementary track team. *Used* to be in track. It's been a while and gained a few pounds since then, so running to my school in the cold, foggy air was not the most pleasant experience. When I did get to school I checked the time. Yup, I was gonna be late, but if I hurry it won't be too bad. Of course, I didn't take into account how long the bag check ladies would take. Usually, the teachers would be here but since I'm late they had to go to class and I was left with the old printer ladies and they take forever! I set my bag on the table and the lady slowly looked up.

“Oh, hello, is this your bag?” I groaned. I didn't have time for this. I nodded my head. I knew if I spoke I would've sounded rude. She then slowly put her book down then slowly unzipped my bag and slowly looked through all my stuff. Geese, this lady takes forever! Then she finally said ok and slowly put her hand down, but I wasn't waiting for her and with the zippers still down, I snatched up my bag and ran for my class. When I got there, I burst through the door. The problem was that I accidentally flung my bag and all the contents of it came flying out as well. Some students screamed and others ducked while I was standing there perplexed, tired, angry and panting. After the initial shock, everyone glared at me and the teacher, Mrs. Wright, glared.

“I'm. . .” And after that, I gathered my scattered things and took a seat. Mrs. Wright continued the lesson while I was scrambling to get the morning assignment done. All the while I was thinking *oh my gosh oh my gosh oh my gosh oh my gosh* and I was on the verge of tears from the embarrassment. All of a sudden something hit my head. I turned around, but nobody seemed to have done anything. I went back to my work until I turned to my side and saw *her*. She was sneering at me and giggling. Who is *she*, exactly? Well *she* is Sheila. My bully. The bully that has haunted me every day of my life since fourth grade. I mean, I'm a junior and so is she, so you'd think she would've stopped by now, right? No. She *never* stops. I looked away. I didn't want to deal with her crap right now, but of course what I want is always ignored.

Hey there, Shiloh! What's up? You late again? She giggled. I scrunched up my face.

“No, this is actually one of the first times I’ve been late. It was an accident.”

Oh really? But what about those other times, hm? Like the time you slept at lunch and walked in while we were in the middle of warmups during P.E.? Or the time that you talked too long during transition time and then we had a lock-in so the teacher couldn’t let you in? Oh, and what about the time –

“Ok! Ok, I get it, ok!” I hissed at her. “Now shut up and let me work!”

“Shiloh! Is your little conversation more important than my lesson?!”

“No, Mrs. Wright. . .” Mrs. Wright grumbled and went on talking about proper essays and citation format.

Hmmm. . . Seems like Mrs. Wright doesn’t like you, huh? I wonder why. She loves me, Shiloh! Maybe you’re just not good enough? I sighed. It was true that Mrs. Wright didn’t really like me, but there was no way she loved Sheila more than me.

“Geez, Sheila, don’t you have anything better to do? How about talk to your posse,” I teased.

I would if they weren’t in cheer practice.

I smiled.

“And why aren’t you in cheer practice?”

Because I don’t need practice like they do. What are you implying? That I didn’t make it? Ha! You and your pitiful dreams. Just because you didn’t make the team doesn’t mean I didn’t.

“I didn’t want to make the stupid team anyway. . .”

Oh, I wouldn’t have guessed that since you went crying to Auddie saying you didn’t make the team! I didn’t speak to her anymore. I didn’t speak to her anymore. I just continued with class. Thank god she didn’t have anything else to say. It just confuses me why she is in literally every class I have. It’s so not fair. Why can’t I have Auddie instead? Oh, well. That’s common teen talk. They always want to be with their best friends.

All of my first classes breezed by. Of course, there was the usual mocking and giggling from Sheila and her posse, but other than that things went fine. I was really excited for lunch, but then again I always am. Yeah, it’s pretty short, but that’s one of the only times I get to see Auddie. I walked into the cafeteria, got my lunch, and began to search for Auddie. I looked around and, as usual, she was in our special spot at our special table. I went over and sat down and began eating my taco. It was Taco Tuesday, after all.

“Hi, Shiloh! How were your classes?”

“Hmm?” I replied, “Oh they were good, but pretty boring. .” She nodded. I always thought Auddie was weird. She never ate school lunch, or at least I never saw her eat anything from here. She always brought her lunch from home. It was usually leftovers from their dinner and today it looked like runzas. “Leftovers again?”

“Yeah! My mom always cooks a lot so we have a lot left over. Do you wanna try a bit of my runza?”

“No thanks. My taco is good enough.”

“Ok. Your loss. Hey, Shiloh, can you go get me a milk carton? I forgot to bring something to drink.”

“Yeah, sure. I get a slushie or popcorn too.” I got up and threw away my tray as I walked to the student store and I heard Auddie yelling. “CAN YOU GET ME A SLUSHIE TOO?!” But I kept walking, of course I would get her a slushie. As I waited in line I hoped beyond hope that Sheila was nowhere nearby because I know that if she saw me getting this “junk food,” as she calls it, she would immediately make fun of my weight. I mean, I’m not *really* chubby, just a little big here and there, you know? I went up to the counter where one of the lunch ladies was and asked for two slushies and some popcorn. She looked me up and down.

“What size?”

“Um, excuse me?” She sighed and rolled her eyes and pointed at the sign that listed the available sizes. “Oh! I didn’t realize, uh, one of them can be a medium and the other a large and just small a bag for the popcorn.”

“Mhm, I could’ve guessed those sizes.” I frowned. What did she mean by that? Was she saying I was fat? I’m not fat! I’m . . .not! She handed me the snacks.

“You know we also have salads?” I just walked away. I wasn’t dealing with this, ever since I came to this school most of the students and even some of the faculty has hated me. I don’t know why, maybe I’ll never know. I went over to the milk fridge. School milk was free since it was cheap, and they make quite a profit from the student store. I walked back over to Auddie’s and my table and slammed the medium slushie and the milk in front of her. She jumped up from reading her book.

“Shiloh! What happened? Are you ok?”

“Oh yeah, Auddie, I’m fine! Just peachy!” I snarled.

“Woah, woah, woah. Ok, I know something happened. Can you tell me what it is?” I took a sip of my slushie and told her what happened.

“Oh my gosh! That’s so not right! You know you could report her for that.”

“Yeah, I’d love to if any teacher in this gosh dang school actually cared about me!” I snapped a nearby plastic spoon clean in half.

“Shiloh, they do care, that’s their job!”

“Oh, yeah? What about Mrs. Wright? Or Ms. Austerman? Or that freaking lunch lady, hmm?”

But then I stopped. I was hit with a major realization. I was sounding like Sheila. It was quiet for a while. We didn’t say anything, we just drank our slushies. I felt bad for Auddie after snapping at her like that. She’s just as sensitive as me and every time I hurt her I feel so guilty. Unfortunately, my thoughts were interrupted with the bell ringing. We quickly stood up and headed to class together. Luckily, we had our next class together, which was a relief since this was the class I hated most and the teacher hated me just as much. It was Math with Ms. Austerman. I sighed knowing that, like every class, it was going to be very hard with Sheila and Ms. Austerman and the fact I suck at math. Sure, it won’t be pleasant, but on the bright side I have Auddie. At least I hope I do. As we continued walking, I decided to try and apologize to Auddie.

“Hey Auddie, I know you may not want to talk to me, but. . .I just want to explain what happened back there and say that I’m really sorry. I know I shouldn’t have snapped at you. It was wrong and I really am sorry. . .do you forgive me?” I was expecting her to say no and leave without me, like everyone else has. You see, Auddie isn’t my first best friend. She’s actually best friend number 27. Yes, I keep count. All of them just left me on the side of the road like garbage if I hurt them. To say the least, I haven’t had the greatest memories with friends, but what Auddie did I never would’ve expected. She looked at me and stopped in the middle of the hall. She smiled a huge smile.

“Oh, Shiloh! You’re fine, all I wanted was an apology,” she shouted. “Well, with that fixed, let’s go!” I was ecstatic. I realized Auddie really was a true friend, and with that we quickly walked back to Math hoping we weren’t in trouble. However, by now in this class specifically, I’m used to it.

Thank goodness I got there on time. If I hadn’t, who knows what kind of a punishment I would’ve gotten from Ms. Austerman. Like, seriously, with that yardstick in her hand and the strict way she runs class, it’s terrifying. I’m also really glad I got there in time because after the punishment, I would’ve been subjected to Sheila and her gang. Of course, the usual giggling and mocking ensued, but it was ok because I had Auddie. Auddie has bad hearing so she doesn’t ever directly hear them, but by my facial features, she can always tell when something’s wrong. She has that special ability of being able to read faces and emotions very well. I wish I had that ability, but instead I’m stuck with being the clueless girl that I am, or at least that’s what Sheila says. I was so lost in my thoughts that I didn’t hear Ms. Austerman call on me until Auddie tapped my shoulder.

“Hm? What?” And then the entire class erupted into laughter. Great, more embarrassment today.

“Alright, quiet, quiet, everyone. Now, Ms. Shiloh, tell me what could be so important on your desk? Is it more important than me?”

“No. . .but—“

“No ‘buts’ in my class, you answer yes or no!” I shrunk back in my chair. Everyone knew that Ms. Austerman hated back-talking, but after today, I didn’t care.

“You know what? Yes, it is more important than you. I mean, come on, how on earth are we going to use shapes and angles and vertices in the future? That’s right, we aren’t. And you always wonder why we’re all failing your class! It’s because you do a freaking crappy job of teaching us!” The entire class was silent. Just me and Ms. Austerman staring into my soul. I was glaring angrily at her. Then slowly, Ms. Austerman sat down behind her desk and started to cry. Guilt filled me immediately. I got up to go to her and apologize but she stuck out her hand.

“NO!” Shiloh, please, just go sit back down. . .Everyone, free class time. I’ll get a sub for the rest of the day.” And with that she stood up and left. I was left standing at the front of the class. I turned around and everyone glared at me, all but one. . .Auddie. She looked at me with sadness in her eyes. I guess this is why they all hate me. What was I thinking? Of course they hate me, I just made a teacher cry! I knew I shouldn’t have said what I said, Ms. Austerman really takes her teaching very seriously. And yes, she’s strict, but deep down she really cares about us and our learning. I felt so awful. I couldn’t take it and ran out. I knew of one place that was always safe; the girls’ restroom. I ran in and sat down on the floor and sobbed. It’s not in my nature to do things like that. It’s not *Shiloh*, if anything it’s *Sheila*. She must be having quite the impact on me. As I continued to sit there and cry, I heard footsteps coming into the bathroom. The lighting was dim so I couldn’t see who it was, and I assumed it was Auddie. Oh, how wrong I was. Instead of Auddie, it was the person I did not want to see under any circumstances. Sheila. Thank goodness she was alone. I put my head back between my legs and ignored her. I could feel her sit down next to me. For a while she was silent, but then the beautiful silence was broken.

You really messed up in there. You know that, right? I didn’t say anything. She sighed. You know you really are a jerk, with everything you do, with your whole defiant act. I mean, come on, why can’t you be normal like the rest of us? Huh, Shiloh? I think it would make your life a whole lot easier.

“So what? You never cared and I bet you would be happy to see me fail.”

Oh, I am, trust me. It's quite entertaining, really. I mean, you have literally nothing going for you. You're chubby, your hair looks like hay, you're not smart, you're late to every class, no one likes you, and you have literally one friend in the entire school. So yeah, you're certainly not gonna win 'favorite' or 'most beautiful' in the yearbook polls.

I couldn't take her ruthless bullying anymore and I sobbed even harder.

Geez Shiloh, don't act so surprised, you already knew it. You always knew it. Look at yourself! And with that, I did. I got up and looked in the mirror. I didn't want to believe her. I couldn't believe her. She had to be wrong!

"No. . .I'm not anything you say I am! I'm amazing and gorgeous and not chubby!" I turned to face her with a triumphant look on my face, but she just stood there unfazed.

And you're weird, too. Who talks to themselves anymore? She burst out laughing. I just stared at her. What did she mean, talking to myself? I don't talk to myself. I'm not that pathetic.

"What on earth are you talking about, Sheila?" she giggled.

Oh,, Shiloh, you know better. My name's not Sheiila.

No. She won't me me say it, will she? I can't. . .

"What? Of course your name's Sheila. It. . .It has to be!"

Shiloh, Shiloh, calm down, you're yelling again. And to answer your question, no, no, it does not have to be Sheila. It's something else. I turned away and stared into the mirror. *What's my name, Shiloh?* I took a deep breath.

"Your name is Shiloh."

And with that, Sheila disappeared.

I looked into the mirror. "I'm so ugly, I'm so fat, I'm so messed up and mean and I'm a jerk! I'm so lonely, everybody hates me, I'm a trouble maker, nobody in the world will ever like me, and soon Auddie will leave me too. . .Just like everyone else has." And I continued to say things Sheila had said, for they weren't Sheila saying them

Thank you to all students and teachers for their submissions, and to the hard-working judges who picked winners from hundreds of superlative entries from across the state.



Oklahoma Council of Teachers of English