

YOUR WORDS MATTER.

2020 Young Writers Anthology



The Power of Our Students

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.



Oklahoma Council of Teachers of English

Table of Contents

DESCRIPTIVE PARAGRAPH

1. "The Hickory Smoked Double Bacon Cheeseburger"	Cooper Osborn	Vinita High School	11th Grade
2. "Running In My Mind"	Kaitlyn Chen	Norman High School	11th Grade
3. "The Beauty of Our Earth"	Kennady Roach	Vinita High School	11th Grade
4. "A Winter Wonderland Arrival"	Caroline Draper	Owasso 7th Grade Center	7th Grade
5. "Late Birthday Present"	Cole Collins	Taloga Public Schools	7th Grade
6. "Christmas"	Katy Foster	Owasso 7th Grade Center	7th Grade

EXPOSITORY ESSAY

1. "Night Sky"	Quincy Guzzy	Classen SAS	10th Grade
2. "Under A Painted Sky Book Review"	Lucy Kershen	Alcott Middle School	7th Grade

PERSONAL NARRATIVE

1. "Couleur Additive"	Juliana Giusti Cavallin	Norman High School	12th Grade
2. "Death Is Not Like The Movies"	Jerri Daugherty	Stilwell High School	12th Grade
3. "Childhood Chains"	Chloe Schmidt	Edmond North High School	10th Grade
4. "Secret Santa"	Drew Dousette	Highland East Jr. High	8th Grade
5. "I Could Not Understand"	Gwen Gilmore	Taloga Public Schools	8th Grade
6. "Mom and the Frog"	Brooklyn Landrum	Highland East Jr. High	8th Grade

leave your mark!

Table of Contents

POETRY

1. "I Know"	Caleb Powell	Wayne High School	11th Grade
2. "Lazuli"	Danny Ly	Classen SAS	9th Grade
3. "Who's at Fault?"	Mattie Gore	Taloga Public Schools	10th Grade
4. "Roller Coaster"	Kaylee Peery	Owasso 7th Grade Center	7th Grade
5. "The Owl and The Squirrel"	Lucy Kershen	Alcott Middle School	7th Grade
6. "Snow"	Aubrey Pope	Byng Elementary	6th Grade

COMIC

1. "Stumbling"	Maddison Kirkpatrick	Freedom ISD	8th Grade
2. "Demons"	Michael Page	Freedom ISD	8th Grade
3. "It's Dark"	Jack Morris	Freedom ISD	8th Grade

SHORT STORY

1. "The Civil Nightmare"	Dacee Highley	Vinita High School	11th Grade
2. "The Paradiso Anomaly"	Zane Smith	Vinita High School	12th Grade
3. "Coma"	Memphis Godwin	Norman High School	9th Grade
4. "A Flicker of Darkness"	Leah Stallings	Riverfield Country Day School	7th Grade
5. "Pete Down the Street"	Madelyn Ward	Whittier Middle School	6th Grade
6. "A New Tall Tale"	Ethan Li	Whittier Middle School	7th Grade

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Descriptive Paragraph



"The Hickory Smoked Double Bacon Cheeseburger"

Cooper Osborn, Vinita High School, 11th Grade

The toothpick slowing being removed from the neatly wrapped wax paper causes a crinkling noise. The aroma flowing from underneath the paper spoils the surprise. Hidden in the paper are two thick hickory smoked, pure Angus all beef patties drenched in sauteed onions and mushrooms. The sear marks charred on the patties make the burger look even more satisfying to eat. Topping that is thick cut peppered bacon with aged cheddar, spicy pepper jack, and provolone cheese, all oozing down the side of the delicious double bacon cheeseburger. Then there is the crisp green lettuce that is cool to the touch and just the right number of dill pickles, which, are not too sour or too salty. Resting on these is the ripest red tomato that is sliced evenly to ¼ inch thickness. The secret Ranch House sauce is drizzled all over. Perfectly toasted golden brown buns with every sesame seed in its own little spot on top of it all. The hickory smoked double bacon cheeseburger is not alone. Accompanying the burger is a pile of delicious golden brown curly fries that are crisp and lightly salted. These fries are even more savory when dipped in the homemade ketchup sauce that is made fresh every day. An oval shaped white plate holds this scrumptious meal. The burger and fries are piled on the plate. This appetizing and flavorsome meal will be even tastier than its enticing appearance.

"Running in My Mind"

Kaitlyn Chen, Norman High School, 11th Grade

I can see the finish banner spanning the pavement, yet it seems miles away. Seconds of running warp into what seems like hours of intense sprinting. My shoulders are stone, my rib cage is tightening around my panicking heart, my core is practically ripping away with each stride. Regardless of my pain, I know I didn't suffer the brutal months of training to give up on this last stretch. I owe it to myself after all those miles ran on sweltering, blistered feet, all the burning tears that stained my cheeks as I'd push through a calf-destroying workout. It's my time to reveal everything I've put into this passion, to demonstrate the hours spent frying under the sun, the everyday choice of continuing to run when the choice to breathe seemed out of reach, to prove that I am strong enough to conquer this mental battle. I never thought I could escape the torment of my doubts, but breathing through the finish line, hauling my tense muscles over that final bit is such a humbling feeling. Traces of the words, "I finally made it," echo over the beating of my heart.

"The Beauty of Our Earth"

Kennady Roach, Vinita High School. 11th Grade

On a blazing hot summer day with a sky rocketing heat index of 100 degrees, my family and I were at the lake all day, exploring below the dam. We walked along the water on the hundreds of different types of rocks: sedimentary, shale, andsite, and mudstone rocks. Then up the hill we walked to look out to the huge lake ahead of us. Since it was such a hot day, many people were on the water. Waves were clashing off the walls of the dam and on the shores. Surrounding us were geese with black and white feathers and skinny necks and big bellies walking on the grass. As sunset approached, the majestic colors of violet purple, magenta pink, and tangerine orange, created a beautiful sunset. I just knew I had to stop what I was doing to take a picture. This sky turned to cotton candy. While sitting on the shore of the lake, I took a deep breath. The summer air I was breathing was so delightful making my soul feel at peace and calm. The splashing of the waves approaching the shore and the sound of the few cars passing by the mile-long bridge relaxed me. In the distance, birds flew across the sunset, soon looking like little black creatures flying in the dusk sky. As the sunset began to fade, we continued to sit on the shore. The colors of purple, pink, and orange in the sky developed into a black night sky with sparkling little stars shining down on us. The blood moon that night surprised us. As it started to come up, we saw the colors in the moon clash together to create the "blood" color. The bottom of the moon started with a bronze orange, then it went into a deep red color, and the top was mixed with red and some black. Not only were the colors amazing but the size of this moon was bigger than a full moon. The lake reflected the orange sphere. While seeing all these beautiful sights and experiencing that whole day, I felt joy and accomplished. Joy because being outside on a nice summer day makes me feel so much happier. Accomplishment because I had been outside all day and I had seen many of our Earth's perfections.

"A Winter Wonderland Arrival"

Caroline Draper, Owasso 7th Grade Center, 7th Grade

The forest in December is the best time of year. You and your family call it "A Winter Wonderland," which has no exaggeration to it. With evergreen trees that really are forever green, and old birds nests to discover, you can't wait to go to Michigan each Christmas. At the arrival of the forest, it is so quiet, you can't hear a thing, except the satisfying crunch from the spotlessly white snow - with twigs, trees, a few dead leaves, and brown logs sparsely scattered across the ground - from your warm winter boots stepping across the cold, colorless ground. Looking up, you would see dead, brown, bare trees with used bird's nests from summer and spring. The smell at this point was only cold, with a smell of petrichor, that wet smell after it has just rained. Right before you step into the warm house, you look up at the exterior to find a medium-sized cottage with many windows that held a big, red bow and a green wreath, too. The Christmas lights shone multi-colored red, green, and white on the rooftop and the doorway lining. Snow covers many, many areas, but not the old spruce wood planks creating the exterior walls. You move your head downwards and see the door leading into the house, and the gray, rough cobblestone pathway leading up to the cottage from the car. The freezing cold grasps you, so you put your hand into your pocket and feel a soft fuzz on the pocket outside of the inside of the pocket and a mini peppermint candy cane wrapped in plastic. You pull it out, rip it open, and pop it into your mouth to taste a wonderful flavor full of peppermint and Christmas joy! Your little brother runs into the cottage and pulls out his green, blue, red, and yellow wooden toy train and starts to make the most ANNOYING noises ever! After your feet move themselves willingly inside the house and your suitcase comes with it, a feeling of happiness gushes through your body from the peaceful, Christmassy interior! Your mom comes up behind you. You can feel her body warmth transferring over to your cold one. She tells you to go upstairs and unpack, so you do. As your walking up the stairs, you notice that the carpet ahead of you looks as if it hadn't been touched in years, but cleaned so much that when your shoe touched each beige-colored stair, it made a crisp indent in the carpet. The candy cane dissolves more and more, and soon you feel the pokiness of its tip touching your cheek. Once you arrive in your vacation bedroom, you take a deep breath, close your eyes, and smile in peace and joy at how you're finally back in "The Winter Wonderland" and its cozy holiday cottage. Your Christmas spirit gets the best of you, so you run downstairs like a cheetah, excitedly belting: "It's finally Christmas!"

"Late Birthday Present"

Cole Collins, Taloga Public Schools, 7th Grade

Days after my 9th birthday, I dislocated my right elbow. All I can remember is the throbbing pain in my bones. It felt like my bones were grinding together like a wet stone to a knife. My elbow down my arm was numb. It was scary because I thought I wouldn't be able to use it; it made me feel hollow on the inside just thinking about never using it anymore. My mom was the one that rushed me to the hospital, and I was glad because she was a lab tech there so I didn't have a bad feeling when I was with her that day. I remember feeling the smooth slick leather of the Chevrolet Suburban. I remember smelling the calming dust shooting out of the air vents. Then it hit me: the adrenaline wore off and I was in pain. I could feel the bone shifting back and forth under my skin. It felt horribly and was disgusting to look at because it looked just like the letter "S". We were maybe going 30 mph, which is very fast through the center of town. It felt like a decade before we arrived to the hospital. I remember my blood curdling screams and so does my mom. It felt like someone was stabbing my bone, chipping away at it. The hospital smelt like linen and the bed I was in was warm and soft. The next thing I know is I wake up in the hospital after the anesthesia wore off and my mom is waiting in the other chair in the room. She jumped up and told the doctor I was awake. I still don't remember much. Even looking at my trampoline still has quite an effect on me.

"Christmas"

Katy Foster, Owasso 7th Grade Center, 7th Grade

When I was little I celebrated Christmas with my fathers side of the family. At that time I lived by the Gulf of Mexico, so it was rarely cold. The bright blue skies and palm trees swaying felt normal. Little did I know that on Christmas, a stereotype is that it snows! One Christmas I spent with my mothers side of the family, up here in Oklahoma. I ended up staying with my grandma for quite a while so I could possibly see my first snow. Welp, I did! That was the year it snowed quite a bit. The bright white snow lit up my eyes and I could not stop playing in the fluffy cold snow. Around 2015 my parents split up and I moved to Oklahoma. Here we started some new Christmas Traditions. Now - my mom, my step-dad and me decorate our home. This year we have dark green garlands with red ornaments on them, hung on our mantle and above a few bookshelves. Our 13 foot tree has off white, almost a gold colored set of lights on them. Our Christmas tree is fake, because we are allergic to real ones. The green tree has a nice silver star on top. The tree is decorated with all sorts of ornaments. Little ones from when I was in elementary. Even ones from last year. The stairs are strung with a dark green garland with tiny off white lights hung on them. My tree is a dark green with Frosty white "snow" on the tips. It has red ornaments hung on it. My tree that is hung with shiny red ornaments has a red and black plaid tree skirt underneath it. I wrapped an empty brown cardboard Amazon box with a snowflake wrapping paper. A tiny red ribbon is wrapped over the box. My queen sized bed has a gray snowflake blanket and two Christmas pillows. My parents' bed has a Gingerbread man comforter and pillow set. Their Christmas tree has two settings. All bright white lights or rainbow lights. The front of our two story home is strung with lights. The three triangular domes on top of my house are strung with rainbow lights. The rest of the bottom part of the roof is strung with all off white glowing lights. We have a gigantic 7 foot wreath that is put in front of the door, so you have to walk through it. The enormous wreath has a red glittery bow on top, and has white lights on it. In our very decked out living room, under the 13 foot tree that has lots of ornaments on it, is a tree skirt with a four car train that glides on the tracks. The train makes a slight chugging noise as it moves. Me, my mom and my step-dad sit on the brown leather couches watching Home Alone, for it is the night before Christmas.

Expository Essay



"Night Sky"

*Quincy Guzzy, Classen School of Advanced Studies, 10th
Grade*

Night Sky

I used to love the night sky
But there are only so many nights you can spend
wishing upon stars before you give up the hope that you will ever find serenity
I have spent too many nights listening
For what
I do not know
But I wish the stars would answer

There are only so many nights that can be spent
writing letters addressed to the man in the moon
I never did get a reply
And ever so slowly
The stars became nothing more than stars
And I became nothing more than carbon, nitrogen, and sorrow
They tell me they are carbon too
I think
I think I understand now
All these years longing for home
The stars
Finally
They tell me
"Come home"
I am filled with it
This feeling I cannot name
This warmth
The sorrow
The sorrow is gone
I awake
I am grounded

I used to love the night sky
now it stands as a reminder
For I lay here
Grounded
And those stars
Are
So
Far
Away

"Under A Painted Sky Book Review"

Lucy Kershen, Alcott Middle School, 7th Grade

Stacey Lee's *Under A Painted Sky* will, as one reviewer said, "likely win over even readers who do not think they enjoy historical fiction or who never considered reading a western." The story follows a young Chinese girl named Samantha living in St. Joe, Missouri, in 1849. In the beginning of the story, Samantha's father dies in a tragic fire, and she is left with nothing. Having nowhere else to go, she takes a room at the hotel owned by her landlord, the seductive Ty Yorkshire. However, Mr. Yorkshire has plans of his own, and out of sheer self defense Samantha kills her landlord after an attempted rape. Fearing for her life, Samantha sets out on the Oregon Trail with Annamae, a runaway slave, and the two form a fast friendship. Despite the two girls' resilience and teamwork skills, they soon realize that the open prairie is no place for female minorities with bounties on their heads, so they disguise themselves as two boys, Sammy and Andy, headed for the California Gold Rush. This proves to be useful almost instantly when they meet three cowboys with whom they form an unlikely bond. After this point in time, their story centers on the day-to-day life of cowboy pioneers-- crossing rapid rivers, herding fickle horses, illness and near death, even "cowboy lessons" for the "chicos." However, for Sammy it's not all about life on the trail-- as she gets to know the cowboys better, she comes to find attraction and eventual romantic feelings, even with the ever-present threat of her identity being exposed.

This book is a fast-paced, action-filled read that keeps your eyes glued to the page and your brain a mile ahead, trying to figure out what's going to happen next. The sharp twists and turns of the events in the story combined with Lee's lyrical writing full of grace and sophistication makes this book very enjoyable yet slightly challenging to read. As a writer, Lee's style of leading you into the character's heads connects with the theme of finding your inner strengths while staying true to yourself. Furthermore, I very much appreciate how nontraditional the story is-- here is a western where the cast of characters is diverse, Native Americans are not portrayed as villains, and characters work hard to achieve goals and to find (if temporary) happiness. Sammy makes many mistakes while on the trail, and yet she keeps working hard-- a good message for teens and young adults alike. My only critique would be that at times the story is hard to follow, and you must reread to really understand what is happening.

Although most teens would probably enjoy some aspect of the novel, the target audience would be young people interested in history, who also yearn for a diverse look at culture, character strengths, and experiences. Fans of the Dear America series as well as other historical fiction books would likely enjoy this book thoroughly. However, for those not well suited to the “adult” concepts of sex, racism, and sexism, this book is not for you. Racial slurs such as “chinkie” and “blackie” are used once or twice, as well as the stereotype that Asian people are “yellow.” However, even though the author uses these slurs, the novel centers on the message of acceptance. For instance, at one point in the story, a Mexican-American character states that Chinese people should be able to marry whoever they want. Also the diverse cast of characters who all achieve great things sends a clear message: No matter where you come from or who you are, you can always overcome obstacles to find happiness.

Personal Narratives



"Couleur Additive"

Juliana Giusti Cavallin, Norman High School, 12th Grade

After Carlos Cruz-Diez's "Couleur Additive" mural

Black, blue, red, and green are the lines at the airport. They cover the ground and the walls. Witnesses to every departure, they have become synonymous with goodbye. A mosaic that accidentally became the last piece of home people see before leaving.

Some just glance their way before crossing to customs.

Others take pictures with them, marking the day they became immigrants.

The most desperate peel off the tiles when no one is looking, stealing the colors that follow them to all of the foreign places they are forced to go.

Then, there is me. On the day I left those lines didn't mean much to me. I've seen them many times before, and I thought that I'd see them many times after that. Now, I realize that each of the colors marked the beginning of the end of an era.

Black

Black was the sky, the buildings and the suitcases in our hands. We left our house at dawn, closing every window and door. Leaving everything we owned to gather dust, to sit in the dark. Our home for almost fifteen years, now only lives in our memories.

Yes, it still sits on the outskirts of Caracas, with our furniture, books and rooms intact, but it's not the same with no one inside. It's not a home now, it's just an uninhabited apartment on the 5th floor. The place we miss does not exist anymore. A home is lived in, and the apartment has been lonely for far too long.

On the way to the airport we all sat in silence, it could have been because of the early hour, but it was probably because we all wanted to absorb every detail on the city, just in case we never came back.

In the night, the lights in the slums shone like the Christmas nativity we assembled every year. To strange eyes, they were a sea of light decorating the otherwise homogeneous mountains. For us, the lights were dark, since each light was family living in poverty, left to live in the everlasting chaos. We were leaving them behind.

Black were the buttons on my new winter jacket. The one which accompanied me to my first day of school. Foreign to my body that was not used to layers, it protected me from the cold, resembling a safety blanket, trapping in the familiar warmth. Now, it has lived with me for almost four winters. Four winters away, four winters I kept my warmth.

Blue and Red

Purple were the pinkies in my parent's hands. They wore the permanent ink with pride. A symbol of democracy, they had voted for the last time. Purple was the materialization of their last attempt to fix the unfixable.

Comparable to the American "I voted" stickers, the purple pinkies told the world of your participation in the electoral process. Even though the elections were more symbolic than anything, being that the same party always won, my parents still continued doing their civic duty. Out of habit? Out of spite? Out of love? Maybe their purple fingers were the proof they needed to ease their souls from leaving their country so soon.

Blue and Red are the colors of the flag of our new home. In every street there is one, a constant reminder of where we are. Always we stand on foreign land.

On the first day of school we stood awkwardly as everyone recited the pledge to the red and blue flag. One that no one had taught us, but that we would learn little by little the longer our stay went on.

Green

Green is El Avila, the mountain range that surrounds our beloved city. On our trek to the airport we left the safety of its enclosed protection. Driving down its long tunnels, we were just another car that had passed through this piece of art never to come back.

Out the window in my parents' bedroom I would stare for hours at our green mural, always looking so peaceful, disregarding the chaos that lay only a few meters down. No matter where I was in the city, I could always look out any window and see it standing there beside me. Grounded. Grounding me in those moments were all I wanted to do was collapse.

Green are our alien permanent residency cards. They give us our new identity, a chance for a new start. They are the biggest relief our family had ever had. They keep us from drifting, grounding us safely to our new home.

We are lucky to have them. We are lucky they came so fast. We are lucky they chose us to stay.

Black, blue, red, and green are the lines at the airport. Those were the colors chosen by artist Carlos Cruz-Diez, who carefully assembled the giant mosaic that bids farewell to all Venezuelan travelers.

Some just glance their way before crossing to customs.

Others take pictures with them, marking the day they became immigrants.

The most desperate peel off the tiles when no one is looking, stealing the colors that follow them to all of the foreign places they are forced to go.

Then, there is me. I took the colors with me by accident. Not seeing that they had remained in my possession long after leaving the airport. They intertwined with my identity, braiding themselves within me. Soon, I learned to embrace them as my own.

"Death Is Not Like The Movies"

Jerri Daugherty, Stilwell High School, 12th Grade

A Death is not like the movies. It doesn't give you a warning. You don't get to say goodbye. There is no talking to the dead once they're gone. They don't wander around the house waiting to talk to you. There's nothing but confusion and the bitter realization that you are forced to go on, even if you don't want to. Sometimes, it goes like this:

You wake up in the morning to get ready for school. You get dressed, do your makeup, brush your hair, and go to the bus stop. You don't wake up your parents to say goodbye, especially not your dad, because he was tired the night before. He was sleeping in the rocking chair in the living room when your boyfriend brought you home.

You head out to school and have a good day. A normal day. Normal, that is, until you arrive at your local vocational college and start to work on your daily module. It's the same old welding module you've been studying for weeks; angles, metals, and so forth. You're joking around with your friends when all of the sudden your instructor asks you to come into his office.

I don't remember all the details. It isn't a time my brain wants to keep. My instructor basically told me something bad had happened and he couldn't tell me anything except that it wasn't good. He looked me straight in the eye and asked if he could pray with me. As a Christian I'm always open to prayer but this seemed different. I let him pray with me.

I checked my phone on the way to the office. Nothing. Yet I felt in my heart that the news would be bad.

When I arrived at the office the most unexpected sight was waiting for me there: my grandma.

She said, "Did anyone tell you?"

Obviously, no.

"It's your dad," she said. "He's gone."

I was completely dumbfounded.

"What?" That was all I could say.

There was no way. He was just asleep this morning in bed with my mom. There is no fucking way.

We got into my grandmother's car and I called mom. My brother answered her phone. He was angry. He just kept saying over and over, "Dad's dead. Dad's dead."

I didn't want to believe it. I called him a liar and kept asking where my dad was. I demanded to speak to him. My mom finally got on the phone, crying, and told me it was real and to get home as fast and as safe as possible. We hung up.

Grandma drove the speed limit on the way to my house. I was stunned and staring out the windshield thinking, "this isn't real, this can't be real". If I'd been in my right mind I'd have asked to drive. I would have sped the whole way home, like my brother did.

When I got to my house I saw an ambulance and cop cars, or maybe just one cop car, I can't remember. What I do remember is getting out of my grandma's car and dropping my bag right there where I stood. I pointed at the ambulance and asked, "Is my daddy in there?"

I was sixteen years old. I hadn't called him "Daddy" in years but that's how it came out that day. Daddy.

I don't remember every single detail. This is all I have: I walked into the house. A lady cop was there and she tried to keep me out. She's lucky she didn't succeed because I think I might have hit her. That was my dad in there. I was getting to him one way or another.

When I got to my dad they had him covered with a sheet-like thing. I grabbed his hand. He was so cold. I started to cry. I shook his hand and begged him, "wake up, Dad, please. Wake up, please, Dad."

I was there for what felt like forever. Then Mom said it was time to go. I remember sitting outside with all my family there. Just waiting. Waiting for them to bring my dad out of the house. They left him in there for hours, there on the ground. He didn't belong there. He didn't deserve to die on the floor, alone.

Too often I wonder if he suffered. Did he call out for one of us? Was he crying? Was he ready? Did he know how much I loved him? Did he know how kind, funny, and important he was to us? Did he take our love with him when he left us?

Did he know how much I loved him?

I was, and still remain, so mad. I was mad at everyone because they weren't him. They were living, breathing, and he wasn't. I was mad at myself for not saying goodbye that morning. I should have awakened him. I was mad at God for taking my dad away from me. My friend. My supporter. My hero. My first love.

After the Important People took my dad's body and everyone left, we all sat in the house confused and crying.

We've made it so far. That's not the whole story. It will never end now. It still hurts. It hurts so bad. I still cry and pray, begging God to bring him back. But He can't.

Can He?

"Childhood Chains"

Chloe Schmidt, Edmond North High School, 10th Grade

I woke up to the smell of burnt toast and Taylor Swift blaring in the kitchen. I blinked the sleep from my eyes as my mom burst into my room, ripping open the blinds. The screeching of curtain hooks followed by a blinding light sent my brain into spirals of confusion. "What time is it?" I wondered out loud. "Time for you to get out of bed! You're not going to school. Get up Chloe, we're deep cleaning your room today!" she exclaimed in a way too chipper mood. Whenever I saw that over-exaggerated smile, I knew the day would end in flames.

Every color imaginable was strewn across my floor in a hopeless attempt to organize clothes from my once full closet. Instead of taking my math quiz that Friday, I was having to tear my room apart. On that day in April, I didn't think there was any point in the unusual madness. Cleaning was one of the things my mom did in her free time; my brother and I became her work since she couldn't keep a job. "We have to talk about something important," she said, breaking the silence, "things between us are not going to work out, are they?" Before she let me mutter an answer, she went on to talk about how we needed some time apart. *Time apart... What did she mean?* "That's why we're cleaning. You need to pack some things to stay with your Dad for a little while," she said nonchalantly as if my heart hadn't just been broken. *Was this her plan all along?*

I just gaped at her in silence; my mind was racing. *How did I not see this coming? She had that look in her eyes since the moment I woke up.* A thousand thoughts were wracking my brain, trying to give excuses for my mother's actions. "Snap out of it Chloe! Are you stupid? Do you hear me?" she said to me as her voice escalated. "I don't want you here anymore; you're out to get me and you never stop lying." I automatically thought of the five dollars I had taken from her purse earlier that week. My words tumbled from my mouth, tripping on my tongue in an attempt to find exactly what to say. *What do you say to someone who thinks the world is against them?* With all of the chaos, my mind had slipped into a hazy nothing. Two hours of my life I can hardly recall; the deafening screams of my mother still in the back of my brain.

Tears poured down my face as I packed up my 7th-grade bedroom. My whole life was shoved into one suitcase; this trip I was being forced to go on wouldn't lead me back into my cozy bed. I begged to stay; I told her I would do anything, that I loved her. Nothing worked. The only words I managed to hear over the ringing in my ears were, "you have no choice." Out of all the things she chose to say to me, those were the words that I heard the loudest. I was being thrown out of the comfort of my mother's arms into the crisp weather of that April morning. Having the door of your childhood home slam shut behind you is a brutal thing to bear, and that was her last shot at me. It was one more way to hurt me; she had found a final way to break me down.

Waiting on the curb for my dad to pick me up felt like hours. It gave me more time to replay the events that had happened earlier that day. As his car rolled into the driveway, I dragged my bedroom across the pavement. Spilling out onto the concrete was every happy memory and ounce of love or respect I had for my mother. Leaving behind the one thing I held dear, my heart was crushed. I'm sure she was sitting there on her phone, per usual, as I lifted the weight of the world into the back of the car. We drove away from the place I had grown up, and my world was spinning.

Second by second, stone by stone, a wall was built in my consciousness. I had made a promise that day; I wasn't going to let anyone in. I had told myself that it would be better if I locked myself in a mental tower. I was unable to feel my emotions scratching at the door of my mental barrier. That was my biggest mistake: I let her get to me. She had been breaking me down my whole life, and I didn't think twice. She was my mother; I thought she wanted the best for me as every mother should. I hadn't known at the time, but she had little control over what came out of her mouth. It was her corrupted brain tearing me down, not the fervent woman I saw before me. After a long while, I learned that you can't take anything to heart that was said by a person not capable of loving you. To this day, I am still chiseling away at the stone tower I built in my mind. Each morning, as I wake up, I allow another part of my emotions to be let in. Heavy chains that once took over my childhood are gradually being unlocked day by day, finally lifting the weight off of my shoulders.

"Secret Santa"

Drew Doussette, Highland East Jr. High, 8th Grade

Snow began falling in the circle drive, with a festively decorated interior visible through a double-paned window. A dark green Christmas tree, which had lost nearly all its artificial pine needles over the years, stood in the warm living room with a velvet red carpet underneath. Inside the house were a married couple of ten years with their two children, a four-year-old girl and me, a nine-year-old boy. An abundance of Monopoly pieces sat atop a colorful board, a lively game going on. A Christmas countdown calendar showed the one thing every kid in the world wants to see. It read, "One" signifying that there remained one night left until the day December 25, 2015, but the night would turn out a little less magical for me.

As the dice rolled, the polished silver dog crossed go for the final time, then landed on the chance spot, finally going bankrupt and ending the game. The younger child started to yawn, signifying that her bedtime had arrived. I grudgingly agreed to go to sleep as well, realizing it would make the morning come faster. As I climbed into my twin bed and attempted to fall asleep, the clock read "10:14."

I awoke after two hours or so, this time the clock reading "12:07," I rolled around, struggling to return to my slumber. Then, realizing the date, I leaped out of bed, pushed my pillow under my Lightning McQueen blanket to make it look like I remained sleeping, and peeked through the door to get a glimpse of Santa. When I saw no sack of toys or jolly red coat, I crept down the hallway past my parents' and sister's rooms. I went into the kitchen expecting to find an empty plate and a downed glass of milk. As I crept into the doorway, I found myself disappointed. A full plate of gooey sugar cookies and an untouched glass of whole milk sat on the tabletop.

"Santa must not have gotten here yet," I whispered quietly to myself.

Reassured, I walked into the messy living room where presents from my parents sat, yet none were from Santa. As I began walking back to my room, realizing that Santa hadn't yet come and might not for several more hours. I sighed in defeat, I was heading back to bed when I heard a creaking sound, followed by footsteps. I was thrown myself into a flurry of panic and excitement. "If Santa came from anywhere but the front door, he'll see me!" I worried. "Wait, no he won't because our house doesn't have a chimney." I heard the door open, but it wasn't the front door, but the door to the garage. I backed into a nearby closet and closed the door, leaving a crack for me to see out of. The garage door swung open, but it wasn't Santa. It was my dad. He carried a few colorful boxes.

Shocked, I mumbled to myself, "What in the..."

He deposited the presents under the tree, positioning each with care. Still hidden in the dark closet, confused as to why my father had stayed up so late, I accidentally knocked over a dusty mop, and the sound made my dad look my way. I sat there with my heart beating, willing him to look away, as I stood as still as I possibly could. After what felt like an hour, my dad went back into the garage. Hurdling an armchair and tripping over the left out wrapping paper, I raced back to my room. I jumped into my bed and acted like I had remained asleep throughout the whole ordeal. I heard my dad's voice humming Christmas songs.

"Here comes Santa Claus, here comes Santa Claus right down Santa Claus lane,,,,,"

Lying in my bed, I realized that Santa wasn't real. My parents had acted as Saint Nick the whole time. I should have figured something weird was going on when I hit six and realized we didn't own a chimney. Devastated, I drifted off to sleep, knowing Santa wasn't real. Then I realized that my little sister didn't know, and we could keep the magic alive for her.

I still think of that night and my disappointment. However, I now appreciate the fact that my parents wanted to create a special time for us when we were little kids.

"I Could Not Understand"

Gwen Gilmore, Taloga Public Schools, 8th Grade

Many men came to my childhood home, but this man was different. Every man who came into the house smelled like alcohol and smoke. The scent of smoke smothered on his clothes seemed to linger in the air, on my clothes, on my mother's clothes, on the couch, in my bed. All the men that came into my house never disturbed me, but this man did. His name was Jake. I had this burning hatred for him. I don't know why, I just did. Mother never cared what he did to me. She never stopped any of the men.

He swooned her. He was her insomnia, dancing with her throughout the night in ways I didn't understand. She loved him, but I know he didn't love her, like most men she brought over. She seemed more dazed than usual. She participated in his behavior, ignoring me.

He decided to take us to a foreign land: Nebraska. I didn't know much about it, but the echo of everyone's voice discussing and shouting at each other always lingered in my family. Everyone berated her for going with him. . . for putting me in a situation where I could easily be harmed. My grandparents asked me if I wanted to go with my mother, or stay with them. I couldn't bare my mother getting hurt. I had to go with her.

It was the most enchanted place I had ever seen in my life. There were blooming trees with small worm-looking strings sprouting from the middle. Their smell was a mix of cool fall wind and cherry candles. It was lovely.

One day, my mother put drugs in my backpack so she could hide it when the landlord came to our house. I kept it hidden for most of the day, but at school when we were packing our bags to go home, I forgot about the marijuana, and I grabbed it out of my bag. My teacher saw it and reported it immediately. I went home, and Mom said I had to go to another home for awhile because of her smoking habits.

So, I went to a foster home in Omaha. We ate breakfast, lunch, and dinner together. We hunted and went to church, and did everything like a family, like watch T.V. or eat. The family was nice- much better than my mother. I felt remorseful feeling like that. I loved my mother, and she tried her best to provide for me. How could I say this family was better?

On Halloween Mom, Jake, and I went trick or treating through the town. It was the most fun I had with my mother. . . ever. She wasn't drunk, or high, or anything else. She was herself, for the first time. Finally, Christmas day came. My mother saved up for months to buy me a bike. I was excited to ride it.

That night I couldn't sleep. I felt tension in the air, like something dreadful would happen at any moment. The darkness seemed to creep on my walls like blood streaming down an arm. I finally mustered up the courage to get out of my room. I crawled to my mother's room, trying to keep hidden. I looked into their room, and my mother was clothes, and a dark figure of a man was at the end of her bed. My mother had black and purple spots on her, as usual. But something was different. She was emotionless. Her cold, vacant body lied there. The dark figure grabbed her ankles, and slung her body off the bed. As the dark figure came in front of the bright T.V light, I noticed it was Jake. I had to save her. I was frozen in my spot. I couldn't help her; I would get hurt.

He dragged her lifeless body outside. I cracked the door and peeked outside. He drugs her out to the ditch, to leave her for dead. It was frigid outside; I couldn't possibly go help her. He started to come back, I ran into my room, and hid under my pillow and blanket. I played on my DSi to escape the feeling of guilt and fear.

I woke up the next day- no one was home. The house was deathly silent. I was going to get my shoes from the basement, but I was too scared. I went outside in the frigid snow with my socks on. I had two neighbors: one stood a block away, and the other right next to our house. I went to the one closest to my house. By this time, warm tears were falling down my cheeks, as I wondered if my mother was okay. An elderly woman opened the door to see me sobbing. I asked her if she knew where my mother was. She said no, and welcomed me into her home. Her husband contacted the cops, whilst the woman gave me breakfast. I was distracted by their cat, it was pure black, with deep blue eyes. By then, I had stopped crying, and was playing with the cat.

The lady who took me to my foster family came and took me to a hotel. I asked where we were going, and she said we were going to see my grandparents. I was excited to see them after almost a year. I hesitated to open their hotel door. Something wasn't right. I heard wails and yelling. I opened the door slowly, to see my grandpa with his head in his hands, and grandma crying in the mirror. I ran over to grandpa and sat with him. I asked him why he was crying. He sat me on his lap, and told me my mother had passed away. I said I was sorry for his loss, and hugged him. I tried to comfort them, but they kept on crying. I didn't understand why, they just did.

"Mom and the Frog"

Brooklyn Landrum, Highland East Junior High, 8th Grade

Late spring rains had arrived, and for days it had poured for hours on end. Finally, the sky beamed bright and clear, so my six-year-old brother, Ryder, and I decided to go outside and play for a few hours. As we raced outside, the smell of wet earth tickled my nose, and the air felt cool and moist. The song of birds, frogs, and leaves played in a beautiful chorus. Frogs of all different sizes and colors hopped around the yard. We competed to see who could catch the most frogs, and then I released them. However, Ryder insisted on keeping one of the frogs he caught because it squeaked like a dog toy when you picked it up. I argued for what felt like hours trying to explain why he should let it go.

"You can't keep the frog, Ryder," I explained for what felt like the millionth time.

"Why not? I'll take care of him," he whined.

I counted the reasons off on my fingers, "Ryder, you can't keep the frog. First, we have no room for a frog. Second, we don't have the right materials to care for it. Third, that frog was born outside, it's not meant to be kept as a pet."

He ignored me. He grabbed an empty box, sticks from the neighbor's yard that the tree had shed, and soft grass for his new squeaky little friend. He ripped up the front lawn like it was Christmas morning and all the presents were for him. I shook my head. "Dad will blow a casket when he sees the lawn in the morning," I whispered to myself. I gave up trying to get him to listen. Honestly, I don't know why I even tried, since he never listens to me.

We went inside for the night, and I informed my mom about Ryder and the squeaky little frog sitting in the garage. She told me she would take care of it. I headed to the shower, and Ryder went into his bedroom.

As I washed my hair, I heard very high-pitched girly screams that I knew belonged to my brother. However, I didn't think much about it, assuming it was most likely my dad tickling him. Then, I heard the bathroom door open, a long, loud creak coming from its hinges. I poked my head out of the shower to tell whoever was entering that the room was occupied. I wondered if they didn't hear the shower running.

“Hey! I’m in --.” I was interrupted by a big fat frog to the face.

I screamed at the top of my lungs, gripping the shower curtain so I didn’t fall. I look up and see my mom holding a huge frog and my brother howling with laughter behind her. She laughed along with him. I growled in fury. They left me to finish my shower, Ryder closed the door with a smug grin on his face. After I dried off and put my pajamas on, I went to look for them. I saw my mom sitting on the couch, my brother nestled in her arms. Slamming my hands on my hips, my eyebrows furrowed, I marched up to her and demanded to know where she got the frog,

“When I was letting the little frog in the box go, that big guy came hopping into the garage. I wanted to scare Ryder, telling him that his frog grew,” she giggled, ruffling my brother’s hair. “It was Bubba’s idea to scare you.”

I have never wanted to punch my brother so bad in my life, and I nearly always want to punch him. My mom assured me that she had let the monster of a frog go after they left the bathroom. I learned that day that my mom isn’t afraid of those weird hopping amphibians, nor do I trust her with them anymore.

Poetry



"I Know"

Caleb Powell, Wayne High School, 11th Grade

I know

I know what I do is wrong,
I know I sing death's song,
I know that it will cause pain,
I know there will be no champagne,
But I can't help myself,
It's like a book on it's shelf,
A car in it's drive,
A heart keeping someone alive,
A songbird singing it's well known tune,
The stars coming out with the moon,
It is wrong and this I know,
But who can tell water not to flow?
I just run my course with every curve,
Down the falls with no reserve,
I drive the roads the same,
I am the heart beating with no shame,
And though my song may cause some tears,
The stars will still shine for years and years.

"Lazuli"

*Danny Ly, Classen School of Advanced Studies Northeast,
9th Grade*

Lazuli

I watched you burn
Bit by bit, little by little
Pupils focused sternly on you
As you burst in red, white and orange ——
My hand behind my back,
And a small twist in my mouth.

Like a burnt picture, the frames frayed
And the faces scratched out
You, like a fragile frame holding images
Will be shattered over and over again.
And your most precious
Will burn again and again.

Watch me burn in Antarctic temperatures
Blue ice becomes blue flames
The tears from my eyes becomes gasoline
Brilliant blue lazuli,
I'm burning just like you.

In a flame started by black hearts,
You stare at me from below the glass
Like a phoenix rising from flames,
You don't seem to fade at all.
Oh, you look almost like a ruby ——
As the flames envelop you
Like a bursting, unfitted cape.

In the mirror, I look so beautiful
Just like a brilliant blue lazuli
As I burn away from this world
And as I reach my hand towards you,
Your hand reaches me.
Your name is Hatred, I'm sure.
And as for my name,
It is a lost tale among the flames.

Nowhere else to go except down
I will meet you myself,
My fatal flaw is your red aura
And the grief it causes in my soul.
Blazing blue lazuli, I am
There is no red lazuli,
But if there was —
I'm sure you'd be one..

"Who's at Fault?"

Mattie Gore, Taloga Public Schools, 10th Grade

Who's at Fault

He hid me behind a lovely tree,
amused by the stories he would tell me about the tree.
The beautiful tree was my protector
until the tree betrayed me.
The limbs strangled my small body.
The leaves covered my mouth to hold me quiet.
I did not understand why the story teller's hands were upon me.
He no longer told me stories,
He now had a new purpose for me.
As the pink and purple butterflies on my underwear moved,
I no longer trusted the once lovely tree.
I am five years old.

A boy the same age as me: a friend.
Groped me in front of everyone.
Every lingering day, I would dread going to this building of embarrassment.
Each one of them would mock me,
I assume this is why he would do it.
He was never stopped or told it was wrong.
I had enough.
He grabbed me, like every other morning.
I fought back this time.
I punched and kicked him to the floor.
Tears of relief fell down my face.
As I continued to kick his fouling side until he cried for help,
I knew I was in control of the hurt now.
I was sent to the principal's office for hurting him.

I was the one punished.
I am twelve years old.

He was too old for me to like him.
I was warned.
Maybe his age distracted me.
The choice to pursue brought myself climbing into a truck
filled with a twisted sense of view.
7&7 by Turnpike played
as I screamed no.
I pushed his hands away,
and he decided to stop trying-
He laughed in my face.
I could feel the embarrassment creep down my stomach.
I was blamed when I told my friend:
"It was your fault."
I am fourteen years old.

"Roller Coaster"

Kaylee Peery, Owasso 7th Grade Center, 7th Grade

My sweaty hands tremble and shake,
I realize that I've made a mistake.
My stomach fills with butterflies,
As I clench my teeth and close my eyes.
I feel lightheaded as we move up higher,
My face is so red it feels like fire.
I already feel dizzy as we're about to ride down,
We're up so high that we can see the whole town.
I let out a huge scream when we zoom down the tracks,
I really regret eating all of those snacks.
After what feels like forever, the ride finally ends.
Although it was torture, I want to go again.

"The Owl and The Squirrel"

Lucy Kershen, Alcott Middle School, 7th Grade

The Owl and the Squirrel
For Two Actors
By Lucy Kershen

OWL

Nighttime is on the rise,
So,
I fly out of my den.
I'm looking for a meal.
And I am hungry,

Ready to rise.

I fly past the stream,
When something catches my
Bright yellow,

Slowly blinking,

Eye.
A small pattering creature...?

A meal!

Oh...I know, how the squirrel
Quivers in his quiet paws,
But...

SQUIRREL

Nighttime is on the rise,
So,
I race back to my den.
I've had my evening meal.

Tired,

Ready to drift away.
I run past the stream,
When something catches my

Miniscule,

Anxiously darting,
Eye.

A huge swooping animal...?
An owl!
My much-feared foe will make a
supper of me.

But...

Winter's coming.
Is it my fate
To starve when the frost sets in--

I'm not wrong.
I'm the predator.
The upper hand.
But...

Don't I have a life, too?
Shouldn't I do the things I do?
I don't kill for fun.
I want to eat.

Is it my fault
That I was born the way I am?
The feared predator.

I look down now,

The cogs turning in my head,
And try, just try to think,
To put my very own self
In another's timid hide.
Now I imagine how it must be,
Living in constant fear of one like me,
And in such a small and skinny body.

After this thinking,
I see a new light,
And most of all I look
Down

Winter's coming.
Is it my fate

To never see good Spring again?
I'm not wrong.

I'm the prey.
The weak, meek prey.
But...

Don't I have a life, too?
Shouldn't I do the things I do?

I am good the whole way through.
I never eat meat, best stick to nuts.
Is it my fault
That I was born the way I am?

The harvested prey.

I look up now,
The cogs turning in my head,
And try, just try to think,
To put my very own self
In another's brawny hide.

Now I imagine how it must be,
Trying so hard to catch one like me,
And if you fail you just go hungry.
After this thinking,
I see a new light,
And most of all I look

Up

At the squirrel

And I think maybe
It would be better
If there was something different
All along.
And so I've decided

To be more compassionate
And when all's done and said
Things in the forest will change.

At the owl

And I think maybe
It would be better
If there was something different
All along.
And so I've decided

To be less afraid
And when all's done and said
Things in the forest will change.

Owl and Squirrel



"Snow"

Aubrey Pope, Byng Elementary, 6th Grade

Snow

Written By: Aubrey Pope

I see her sitting across the road

Where she lives, I don't know

She's never alone though

They pick on her, smothering, like snow

I try to help, it's no use

She always runs, afraid of abuse

Wishing she could fly away

Away from the snow into another day

Comic



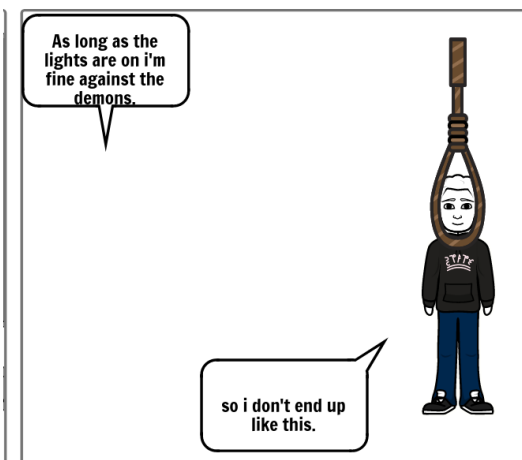
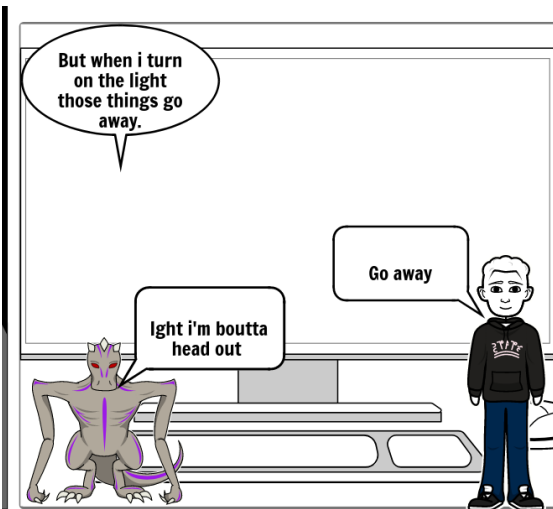
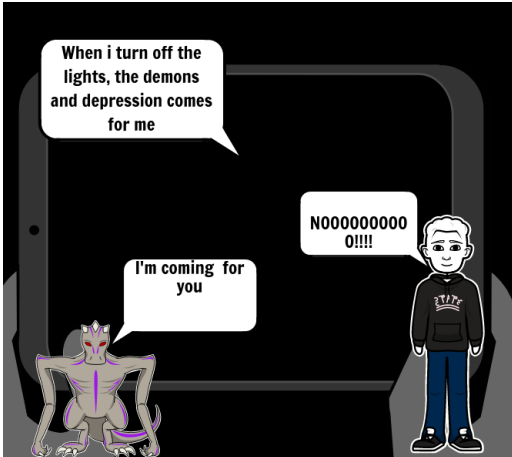
"Stumbling"

Maddison Kirkpatrick, Freedom ISD, 8th Grade



"Demons"

Michael Page, Freedom ISD, 8th Grade



"It's Dark"

Jack Morris, Freedom ISD, 8th Grade



Short Story



"The Civil Nightmare"

Dacee Highley, Vinita High School, 11th Grade

The Civil Nightmare

When my grandmother died, my family and I moved into her house. Grandmother's house had been a Victorian beauty, but it had an old, creepy vibe.

When I would stay at her house before she died, I would hear gunfire coming from my room. This noise would wake me, but I would then find nothing in my room. The oil lamps I used in my room would miraculously stop working with half of a can of oil left. Also I would find mysterious footprints in my room, but these prints were definitely not mine - too big for my foot.

Several times I spoke to my family about the things I heard and saw.

My mother would reply, "You're just letting your imagination run away with you."

"Duties and studies are more important. Stop being immature!" my father would tell me.

I tried to convince my brother to come to my room but instead, he said, "You are plum crazy!"

"I am not!" I bellowed. Unfortunately my father heard our argument, and I was punished for aggravating not only my brother but also my father.

I tried to brush it off, but it nagged at me and ate away my brain during my waking moments during the day/night. Giving up, I marched down to the town's library to find more information about Grandmother's house.

"Ms. Louise, would you help me?" I pleaded to our librarian.

"Miss Grunt, how may I assist you this fine morning?" Ms. Louise responded.

"Is there any information about my grandmother's house?" I asked.

"Let me see," Ms. Louise replied as she stalked down the aisles of books. Every now and then I would hear her "tsk" and "hmm."

"Now, Miss Grunt, you must understand what little I have here is mainly about the actual Civil War battle and not the actual house," Ms. Louise stated. "Maybe this will provide the information you wanted."

"Thank you," I grinned.

"Please remember, take care of the books on loan." Ms. Louise never failed to remind all to take care of the library's books.

I was too eager to take the books home. Instead I read, skimmed, the information about the Civil War battle.

"Battlefield hospital resides in Baxter's own residence." Those words snagged my attention. I realized the owners and the house itself were that of my grandmother, but it wasn't until I read the last sentence that icy fingers up my spine, *"Northerner murders patients and then self."*

Slamming the book, I hurried from the library. I wanted out of the library, away from the horrible words.

"You are stupid," I called myself. "Why go to the library? Fat lot of good it did you!"

Arriving in the late afternoon, I slowed my pace in hopes of slowing my heart. It seemed to work, or it could have been the constant barrage I had with myself.

Slipping in and down the hallway, "Mother! Mother! Where are you?"

"Why are you causing such a racket?" my mother sternly replied while wiping her hands on her apron.

"Did you know our house was a hospital during the Battle of Baxter Springs?"

"Yes, everyone knows that!"

"Yes, yes, but did you know a Yankee slaughtered several men and killed himself?"

Mother looked flummoxed.

At that moment Father entered the kitchen, "Now, sis, you know better than to believe everything you read," my father stated. "When I younger than you, people all said that Herschal Atkinson's place was the sight of the battlefield hospital. Heck, Hersh never let us forget it or the ghosts."

At 3 o'clock in the morning, at least I think it was 3:00, I heard a loud bang. In a cold sweat not knowing what was happening, I rose from my bed.

After opening my door, I peered around. What I saw could not be believed unless standing there with me. Figures in Civil War uniforms moved toward me. I scrambled backward, landed on the floor by my bed, and slid underneath it.

Watching in horror, I thought I must be dreaming. No dream. No notice of me. Not wholly there, missing limbs. I fainted. In the morning, I scanned the room, nothing.

During breakfast, I stated, "Early in the morning, I saw ghosts down the hallway and my room!"

"Stop," my father demanded. "If not, I am going to bust your hind end raw for making up ludicrous tall tales!"

That night I placed the candle by my bed, within reach of my outstretched hand. I believed it would keep the spirits at bay. The night was peaceful, but I received no sleep.

I rose wearily that morning, feeling quite ill. As I walked into the glaring light of the kitchen, my stomach and head both revolted. Quickly I grabbed what I could of my knees and vomited what little I had in my stomach.

"Jeffrey! Come quick!" my mother bellowed.

My father knew by her tone of voice that something was wrong.

"Put her in the car," demanded my mother.

I wasn't really aware of anything but the fuzzy feeling in my head and stomach. Once in the car, the blackness overtook me.

My mother sped to the Doc Harris' place.

"What seems to be the problem, little lady?" Doc Harris questioned my mother.

"She vomited and passed out this morning. Isn't like her."

In Doc's examination he found a rash covering my back, torso, and neck.

"Scarlet fever," Doc Harris stated matter of factly.

He gave orders for complete bed rest for a week along with some medicine to help the sore throat, pain, and discomfort.

"It'll have to run its course."

Mother nodded in agreement.

Once home, mother demanded I march straight to my room and begin knitting. This was not only to punish me but to teach me to be a proper lady.

After what seemed like hours of knitting, I set it aside.

"Mother!" I yelled from the landing.

"Are you all right?" Mother questioned.

Pleading, "What can I do for the itching?"

"Hot bath with oatmeal," she stated. "I'll have James bring it up. Stay in your room until he calls down. Clean the tub afterwards!"

I wondered how in the world oatmeal would help.

Removing my gown, I felt an icy breath upon my neck. Turning slowly, I looked around the room.

Mother knocked on the bathroom door to tell me my bone broth was ready. Once supper was over and my siblings were cleaning up, my mother came to my room to stay for awhile. When sick, she would read from her favorite author, Shakespeare. Tonight, she read my favorite, *Hamlet*. Her voice lulled me into a drowsy state. I slept the whole night snuggled in the warmth of my quilts and wool covers.

The next morning, the sun woke me by peeking through the window. Breakfast aromas filled my room. Immediately jumping from my bed, "Mother? Can I come down for breakfast?" I questioned.

"Should be well enough, for a little while," she responded. "Make sure father knows breakfast is getting cold."

"Yes," I replied.

My father stood wiping the front door.

"Father," I swallowed, "what...?"

"Darn fools. Trying to scare folks," father replied.

"Halloween is soon, but this doesn't look like something my friends would do." And it wasn't what we would have done.

My father walked into the house - I scurried inside too. Thoughts crowded my head, filled with nonsense.

After breakfast, I grabbed more yarn. Knitting was never my best talent. But, I knew mother would check in. I had to show improvement or at least attempt to. Once she came to see my progress, but she determined to send me away.

That night I fell asleep without dinner or a bath. From a deep sleep, I was awakened by the startling sound of laughter. I realized tonight was Halloween. The laughter of the children racing up and down the lane wasn't ghosts, so I drifted back to sleep.

In the night, I woke to terrifying, blood curdling screams. First, I believed it arose outside, but something told me it was inside, close inside. Reaching for the candle, I knocked it off the nightstand. I knocked the matches off too, I dashed for my door.

"Come on," I muttered, pulling, and jerking the doorknob to no avail. It wouldn't budge.

A wispy voice filled around me. Gradually, I turned. The vision before me was a myriad of Civil War soldiers - half removed legs, bloody stumps, gouged eyes, filled my vision making it swim. Rushing, I threw the covers over my head in hopes they would leave. The covers were ripped from my hands. Shaking with fright, I covered my eyes. NOT REAL! I kept this dialogue to "cope."

Rocking, one soldier came forward with what was left of his corporeal form. Bending, his eyes bored into me. His bloody stump reached for me. Tears filled my eyes, screams choked my throat, and acid permeated my stomach. Another soldier, with only one arm, placed his finger to his lips, "SHHH..." I couldn't make a sound. I swallowed in hopes to scream. Again another quiet motion, but more insistent.

Others silent and watching. The first soldier stated, "Be quiet, young one, or this will be your ruination."

It wasn't until he spoke that I realized he was holding a pistol. Wetness soaked my gown and the area closest to me.

The longer the soldiers stood waiting, anxiously waiting, the more horrified I became. My heart raced and my head swam.

The next morning, my room was trashed - blood, mud, bullet holes, and broken wood. Suddenly, my mother walked in pale as a ghost.

"MOTHER!" For it frightened me that she might have become a spirit too.

"What have you done?" my mother screeched.

I tried explaining, "The soldiers visited me again..."

"Downstairs! NOW!"

As I stepped around my mother, a drop of blood landed on her cheek. We both stop moving. Stifling a scream, we stared at the bloody scrawl on the ceiling.

This is our house. Trespassers, your youngest son has paid the price.

Before I could move, my mother was out and moving down the hall. Almost immediately we met at the door. It would not budge. The hellacious noise meant something amiss. Father, with his brute strength, broke the door.

My beloved baby brother was pinned to the wall. Nails studded his limbs and his eyes were missing. There wasn't a way to comprehend what we beheld before our eyes.

Father sent my oldest sibling, my brother to the sheriff's office.

The sheriff came. He asked to speak to my father alone. Then he spoke to my mother. He left without a word after speaking to my mother and father.

The funeral director, Mr. Thomas, followed the sheriff's exit. Mr. Thomas said he could have everything ready for the funeral within a day.

A fierce storm blew gale-like winds and torrential rain. Mud sucked at my shoes while standing graveside. Mightily, I held onto his baseball glove. I meant to drop it in the casket with him, but I just couldn't do it. Something stopped me.

My mother couldn't keep it together. Her wailing, flailing, and throwing herself upon the casket, left Doc Harris no other recourse but to sedate her. Doc led her to his awaiting car and drove her home.

After the funeral, father went to our house. He collected mother and our possessions that could be quickly carried away.

"We will send for the rest." Father stated coolly. "NEVER speak of your brother again."

A whimper emitted from mother and tears rolled down her face.

Although told to forget "that night," I wasn't able. I promised myself to never forget that night, nor forget my brother. It would haunt me on darkest days and fill me with horrific visions. To this day, I am unable to understand the why of it. How could the ghosts make me kill my brother like that?

"The Paradiso Anomaly"

Zane Smith, Vinita High School, 12th Grade

The Paradiso Anomaly

As an astronaut, I naturally work for the IASA or the Intergalactic Aeronautics and Space Administration, the super organization that replaced and absorbed NASA and all the other world space agencies once humans finally put down their spears and stopped trying to kill each other. On October 21, 2237 the IASA began detecting multiple anomalous readings through the various telescopes and satellites they have sent into both inhabited and uninhabited galaxies. The readings were initially written off by brass as individual solar flares which had temporarily fried on-board computers, yet as more reports filed in, a pattern was developing. The readings were only being observable on the far reaches of the galaxy and in places where there was no evidence of any celestial bodies.

After six months of continued disturbances, whose rates were only increasing, it was decided that a secret exploratory mission would venture to visit the site of the anomaly, as not to alarm the public. Once the team of seasoned astronauts arrived upon the location of the anomaly, they were shocked to gaze upon a green orb through the glass of the cockpit. The team tried to capture the planet with the powerful exterior cameras of their vessel, but they were stunned to discover that it simply did not appear. Their photos were blank, showing only the vastness of space behind the intended subject. Next, the team directed radio waves toward the planet's surface. The mission's chief engineer estimated they would be reflected back to the ship within a matter of minutes. The team sat motionless in the void of space for seven hours. It was noted by the team that during the entire duration of observation the team noted no "spin" and the planet did not appear to orbit, leading the team to conclude that the anomalies were somehow not affected by gravity. Furthermore, the team concluded that there was no "dark side" to the anomaly and there existed no appreciable "night." The team subjected the planet to a battery of tests, none of which could prove the existence of any object where the planet before them plainly was.

The team returned to Earth with their findings and reported them to the Board of Directors of the IASA. It was determined that it was imperative to discover the nature of these anomalous bodies and thus missions would be sent to ten of the nearest anomalies as quickly and quietly as possible. Each mission would be issued a specialized space shuttle capable of landing in a variety of terrains thanks to harrier engines, which enable vertical hovering and take off and a pressurized pod, or HQ, that would serve as both our living quarters for the duration of the mission and as a communications array.

Each of us were sent alone to various parts of nearby galaxies. I have been given the mission to investigate an anomaly which arrived unannounced in the Segue 1 galaxy. Its nearest neighbor was the habitable planet Paradiseo, the intended site of a new human colony, thus it was of above average importance to the IASA. Beatrice, my wife, begged me not to accept, but compelled by a sense of duty, I have accepted the mission. We all departed from earth on September 23, 2238. I arrived shortly thereafter.

The anomaly appears yellow and craggy as I look on it now from the window of the cockpit. I have been surveying the planet's surface pensively for the past several hours and have finally spotted a suitable landing zone, a plain. However before venturing to the surface, I launched the IASA's communication satellite into orbit around nearby Paradiseo. Stalling temporarily after the satellite's launch, I began flying the ship into the upper atmosphere and noted that the exterior heat shields were not being used at all, as I noticed this, the shuttle emerged from a cloud of indeterminate gas and I was forced to take evasive maneuvers through the midst of a suddenly appearing mountain range. Jerking the stick, I felt tell-tale reverberations resonate through the hull of the ship as alarms erupted in my ears. With no time to adequately take stock of the damage I frantically searched for somewhere, anywhere to land. Finally, I saw it, my own oasis, a relatively flat outcropping protruding from one of the mountainous walls. Pushing the ship to its upper limits I have forced it to drastically slow and engage the harrier engines. As I descend, I am forced to heavily compensate on the roll axis, a fact which tells me the true extent of the damage. It is entirely disabled.

The shuttle landed hard on the rock below with a resounding thud and I was finally able to momentarily breathe. I rose from the pilot's seat as I pressed the button to release the HQ from its electromagnetic holds at the back of the shuttle. I ventured to the rear interior of the shuttle and began checking the onboard computer. It confirmed my suspicions regarding the left rear harrier jet; it was dead in the water. Taking off now would send the shuttle on a roll straight into the rocky ravine beneath the outcropping and mean certain death. The computer also bore a readout informing me that the exterior atmosphere while lightly oxygenated, was also heavily saturated with sulfur dioxide and other non-breathable gases. With this in mind, I hesitantly donned my suit and helmet and exited the craft.

This world is tinged with a citrine hue and propagated by jagged ridges of brown rock. It resembles the surface of Venus as I had seen it during my early training days with the IASA. I circled around the craft to appraise the damage to the rear jet as soon as I could. Much to my surprise, the damage appeared largely superficial with the key components still largely intact. The ship must have disabled the engine when the exhaust flume was dented. There is a remote hope that I could possibly repair it. Relieved by this revelation, I had shifted my attention to the HQ. The HQ had, by all superficial accounts, survived the crash largely unharmed. I jogged into the primary air lock and waited for the room to vent and repressurize. When the familiar sound of rushing air had finally subsided I removed my helmet and moved toward the communication console. I booted up the computers and began to search for any tools that would aid me in the repair of the engine. I returned to the console with the standard issue IASA tool kit in tow, expecting to deliver the bad news to the eagerly awaiting IASA mission control team back on Earth. But, as I tried to send a message, I was met with an error:

“Message unable to send: frequency in use”

My heart sank, horrified at this revelation, I began frantically cycling through all available frequencies, all of which returned the same message. Not yet defeated, I tried to ping the communication satellite I had launched not an hour ago, but even that was in vain. I grew more desperate and angry with each failed attempt, I slammed my fist against the unyielding aluminum table and tossed the tool kit against the plain, greyscale walls. Exhausted and hopeless I began removing my suit and crawled into the sole bunk of the HQ, sobbing silently to myself while resolving to repair the ship by any means necessary to make it back home.

I awoke some six hours later, at least according to the communication console. I reequip my suit and helmet, gather the scattered tool kit and venture outside. Surprisingly, it was dark. During the mission briefings we were told there was no evidence of the anomalous planets having a day-night cycle. Regardless, I am determined. I retrieved the standard issue work lights and established my impromptu workshop. As I returned to the ship to retrieve makeshift worktables, I spotted something out of the corner of the light of the helmet’s headlamp-disturbed soil. The soil was moved in a way which led away from the shuttle and HQ. I reasoned that a rock must have been thrust away upon landing and continued my work, shaking off the paranoid thoughts of my troubled mind. I began working restlessly for the next ten hours through the darkness on the damages to the jet. Fatigued, I returned to the ship, leaving my tools and work tables outside for another day of work, noting that the nights on this planet must last for at least 12 hours. . .

I awoke from my sleep to an uproarious clang of metal from outside. Thinking that a storm had erupted outside as I slept, I listened and heard something more frightening than any work of weather. It was rhythmic-a pattern. I bolted upright and moved as quickly as I could to the exterior window. I reached the window with just enough time to see several undefined appendages reaching up over the ledge of the outcropping, tearing metal from the shuttle and dragging my tools and table away. Just then, the work lights illuminating the scene were pulled over the ledge and my world was plunged into darkness.

I shut the solar shields of the HQ and spent hours trying to ignore the destruction of my only way home, the only chance I have of seeing my wife again. Six hours had passed and there was still no sign of light. The creature has continued torturing me. It knocks on the exterior walls of the HQ and waits for me to knock in the same place, a twisted game of call and response that has diminished what remains of my sanity. I would have sworn that I even heard a laugh through the chaotic symphony. I stopped responding to the creature an hour ago, but it has not stopped knocking. I can hear it all around me. It hits every side of the capsule at once, a thunderous, macabre cacophony. I'm done playing with it. I can't take anymore of its demented game. It has found its way into the airlock now and... oh God, Beatrice, you were right... I shouldn't have ever left. . .

"Coma"

Memphis Godwin, Norman High School, 9th Grade

Coma

I was driving down the road visiting my family for the summer. Collage has just been let out and everyone was on their way home. I keep driving down the highway while the sun sets and the moon rises. I need to find a motel or I will fall asleep behind the wheel.

I find this old rickety, wooden, shack-like motel. I pull over into the parking lot. The grind of the rocks and gravel gives me comfort that I finally am near a bed. I open the door and it lets out a long and exaggerated creek as it opens. An older man was standing behind a booth you normally see at motels and he smiled with the little teeth he had and asked "How many nights?" I hold in my giggle from his lisp and I say "Just one, I'm on my way home from school". He smiled and handed me a key and said "Down the hall, last on the left"

As I walk down the hall I realize why it's rated two out of five stars. I can't complain though its a roof over my head and bed to sleep on. As I walk into the room I lie on the bed and stare at the ceiling with thoughts of rejoice fill my head thinking I will be back with my parents and siblings. Out of the corner of my eye, I see something in the closet as if it's watching me but my eyes get too heavy to look and I fall asleep.

I got up bright and early in the morning to get as many miles as I could. So I pick up my stuff, make the bed, leave the nice old man a check to pay for the room I used and put the key on it, and then was back on the road again.

As I'm driving my mind is racing about what I saw in the closet. I just didn't understand anything about it, why it was there what it was doing I just- At that moment I slam into a car headfirst. Before I pass out I feel that time has stopped. I see everything, the glass shards were fluttering through the air. Then I see the driver of the other car. A grown man somewhere between 20-30. He had a huge gash on his forehead. I look in the backseat and I see it again. The name "Coma" comes to my head. "C-Coma" I speak barely grabbing my words. It fades and time starts again. I go flying through the air. I shot over the car I ran into. I start falling and my life flashes before my eyes. I start wishing for things I haven't done or seen.

As soon as I smash against the ground I end up in a black, empty, lifeless, void. I float around trying to get out and I hear echoed and unclear voices. "Is she.....ok?" I think that's my mom but I'm still unsure I can only make up a few words. "Right now.....stuck...coma" The word coma rang through the void, then I see it again but this time much closer. Its eyes were hollow but some orange aura was leaking out of them. It seemed to be formed from a mist of sorts but I couldn't tell. It slowly walks up to me. I start hearing multiple whispers. It moves closer and closer, they get louder and louder. They won't stop. It reaches out a hand and then I touch its finger than I wake up.

I am in a hospital and doctors rush over to me. They start hooking up machines to me. I don't understand what's going on. The one that looks in charge says that I have been in a coma for 3 months and I'm not supposed to wake up suddenly. That's when I see it in the back of the room. "COMA IS RIGHT THERE, GET IT AWAY PLEASE!" All the doctors look back and stare blankly then look at each other. "Ma'am nothing is there"

~

Weeks pass and I keep seeing Coma but everyone looks at me funny when I point him out. One day different people come to my room and say that they can make me better as long as I agree. I don't remember signing it but I look up and see my signature. "Thank you ma'am" the man nods towards a group of people with a stretcher and they start walking in with it. "Wait, no, no, no, I didn't sign that, it wasn't me". One of the men picked me up and put me on the stretcher "Please it wasn't me it had to be-" That's when I realized it was Coma...It had to be him! "Coma! It was Coma, not me!" While one of the men strapped me down He spoke: "Damn she is away with the fairies, you know what I mean?" "You can't just say that she is right there! She can hear and understand you" The other guy responded pitying me

"Yeah, yeah whatever," They drove me to this tall cement building. It looked like a prison from the outside. They wheeled me into the front desk "Yeah, uh this is patient....Patient 03742 checking in." The nicer man spoke. "Gimmie a minute," The lady behind the desk spoke as she began to type. She stopped and looked over at me in disgust, "Yeah her cell number is #385" They started wheeling me with a jerk and brought me to a tiny cell. It seemed like it was like a closet with a stone bed. They put me on the bed and strapped me down. The men started walking out and the nice man before walking out peered over his shoulder, this was my chance. "Please, you gotta help me! None of this was me, it was Coma!" He shook his head and walked out. The door locked with a clunk and I knew I was stuck.

Coma appeared from thin air and started walking toward me. "Someone please help! He is here again!" I scream at the top of my lungs, using every bit of oxygen I have.

"Hush now, we are safe and no one can hear us," What? He is speaking now? He never has before

"Don't you see it? You are me! I am you! We caused this!"

"No! It was all you not me!"

"Ever since the wreck we have become one, and you almost caught me at the motel but you were too lazy to even look at me! So now everyone will ignore you because you're crazy, and you're a medical oddity. No one is supposed to get out of a coma within seconds! You and I are special and will be spending a long time with me so get used to being crazy because it won't end anytime soon."

"A Flicker of Darkness"

Leah Stallings, Riverfield Country Day School, 7th Grade

Flicker of Darkness

Don't make a sound, don't make a sound, don't make a sound.

That's what I told myself every day for fifteen years.

I walked down the crowded streets, nearly tripping over the many pairs of feet crammed onto the pavement. Everyone was silent, eyes down, itchy masks covering their mouths. Sometimes, I liked walking to school. You saw all sorts of miraculous things when the security guards couldn't watch you. Stolen glances. A flash of gold traded from hand to hand. The occasional pickpocket. Silence shrouded the street like a thick layer of fog. I stumbled up to the giant screen where everyone was gathered.

I nervously click the flashlight that dad gave me for my birthday. I take it everywhere.

"Good morning, my loyal subjects!" Queen Rani said, pursing her lips as the crowd nodded back at her. She smiled coldly. "I just wanted to do a little morning check-in about our silence count. Daniel?" Her eyes scanned the crowd until they came upon a security guard. "Ah, hello, Daniel. How many people spoke last week?"

Daniel held up three fingers.

"And how many spoke this past week?"

He held up eight fingers.

"Thank you, Daniel. Now, do you see what I'm getting at here?"

The crowd was silent, as usual.

"Do you see what I'm getting at here?"

The crowd nodded vigorously. I watched them nod, tears pooling in my emerald eyes. I'm pretty sure I'm the only one besides the queen who truly knows why we're not allowed to speak.

I can do things. Things that no one else can explain.

"Thank you. I just wanted to remind all of you, if you speak, you will be sent to jail." Her eyes darken slightly, but they're replaced with a calm look moments after. "Have a great day, citizens of Silentium!"

Everyone rolls their eyes as the queen's fake smile disappears from the screen. I walk sluggishly to school.

School is a dreary place filled with bratty kids, obnoxious teachers, and a mountain of work educating us on the "importance" of silence.

I settle down in my seat. The bright fluorescent lights send a tingle down my spine. My classmates slowly trickle into the classroom.

As soon as everyone is here, the teacher's eyes scan the classroom. She silently walks over to my desk, her heels clicking on the metal floor. She hands me a single worksheet, then moves onto the next student. I take a look at the worksheet.

How did Queen Rani completely change the way humankind will communicate forever?

I repress a sigh. We really need a change in curriculum.

A low crackle filled the room like a fire was burning in the speakers. "Nora Reedson, come to the office."

My classmate's fleeting glances landed on me as I stood up and walked to the door. I clicked dad's flashlight as my mind wandered. Why was I being sent to the principal's office?

Did they figure it out?

The lights flickered as I turned the doorknob and step inside. My blood went cold.

"Hello, Nora," Queen Rani says, leaning back in the principal's seat. Her black dress hugged her body, a sharp contrast with her pale skin.

I gave her a little wave and winced as I realize I should've curtsied.

"How are you?" She inspected her freshly manicured nails, brushing off a piece of imaginary lint. Everything about the woman was immaculate, from her diamond tiara to her red heels, which were now clacking on the floor as she walked towards me.

I crossed my arms and give her my best you don't scare me look.

She didn't seem to notice. "Now, Nora, I'm going to be straight to the point with you. I think you're The One."

I sucked in a deep breath, pretending to look confused.

She paced mindlessly around the room, eventually coming up to the desk and pushed some buttons on the cell phone. She smiled absently as it rings.

"Hello?"

"Yes, hello, Daniel." She brushes off another piece of imaginary lint, this time on her dress. "Put it on full."

"Full?" the voice asked, muffled by Queen Rani's brown ringlets of hair. "Are you sure, my lady?"

"Yes, Daniel. Full."

"Right away, your majesty."

The lights brightened, a living thing, raging and pumping and pulsing into the air. The walls hummed and buzzed, brimming with energy and light. Electricity was in the air. My palms sweat and my knees clashed together. Red and white rimmed my vision, becoming a swirling hurricane raging behind my eyes. A scream escaped my lips.

Then, it stopped.

The darkness was consuming, but it was a good kind of consuming. It felt like a cool breeze on a hot summer day.

Queen Rani cleared her throat. I jumped, forgetting she was there.

"You screamed," she said.

I nodded.

"You shouldn't be able to do that," she said, pacing around me.

I nodded again, the rest of my body paralyzed. She figured it out. After all those years of hiding the fact that I could control light, that I could talk, she figured it out.

Darkness consumed my vision again, but this time it wasn't the consuming, good kind.

It was the kind when something was about to go horribly wrong.

It was the kind of darkness that implied the end was near.

* * *

I woke up in a cell.

The darkness was there again. I tried to feel for a hint of a spark, something to amplify and create a light, But it was no use. I tried to move around, but after a few steps, I heard metal clanging against the bars. The handcuffs were coiled around my wrists like pythons.

"Great," I muttered.

Something moved.

"Hello?" I shifted around uncomfortably as someone sucked in a deep breath.

"You can talk, too?" A voice asked, gruff and brittle. "I thought I was the only one."

I readjusted myself on the hay at the bottom of my cell. "Can you control light, too?"

All was silent for a minute. Then, the voice said, "No. No, I can't. They only locked me up in here because I can talk. I'm the one who slipped out of their grasp." He laughed softly. "So, you can, like, control the amount of darkness or light in the air?"

"Yeah," I replied, fiddling with a stray lock of hair.

"So you can get rid of all this darkness?"

I shook my head, even though I knew he wouldn't be able to see it. "No. I can't create light. I can only amplify and manipulate what's already there."

He sighed, then slapped the bars of the cell. Or, at least, that's what I'm assuming he did, based on the metallic clang that radiated through the air. "So there's no hope of a way out."

"They don't light up the cells during the day?"

"No," he replied, "I've always wondered why they never turn the lights on. Now I know, I guess."

"What's your name, by the way?"

He sighs. "Liberty."

I snort. "Well, that's ironic."

"Yeah, yeah, so funny," he said.

Silence fills the room. My finger moves in a clicking motion as hopelessness fills my body. Wait...

I have dad's flashlight.

I click the button on the flashlight. I amplify the light, soaking it in, bathing in its subtle warmth. Liberty scrambles around his cell for a solid ten seconds before asking, "Wait, what's happening?"

"I forgot I had my flashlight," I said, fiddling with the wrist strap.

I amplified the light even more, making it grow bigger and bigger until the entire room is filled with it. Liberty turns out to have black hair and startling green eyes.

Rows upon rows of intertwined bars filled the dank room. I spotted something.

A key.

It was just four feet away from where I was standing.

"By any chance, is anyone in here because they have telekinesis?" I shouted at all the struggling jail mates.

No one raised their hand.

"Crap," I whispered.

I shoved my flashlight through the bars and swung it by the wrist strap. The keys clattered to the ground. Then, I reached through the bars with my foot and dragged it over to the cell.

Liberty looked at me in disbelief.

"What?" I asked.

"You," he said, "are a miracle. Unlock the cells."

I turned the key in the lock and listened to the satisfying click as the door slid open. Red lights began to flash and alarms sounded. I ran toward the exit.

But I was forgetting someone.

"Wait!" Liberty begged. "Please! Take me with you!"

I sighed and unlocked his cell.

Liberty was a fast runner. We sped across the room as all the inhabitants of the cells pressed their bodies against the bars, wordlessly begging to be let out. I knew that they were here for no reason.

So, I gave my key to one of the jail mates. "Once the guards figure out we're gone and run after us, unlock all of these cells. Then, escape."

They nodded.

I sprinted towards the exit with Liberty, smelling the fresh autumn air. The door was right there! We could make it!

We could make it!

And so, I stepped outside, out of the past and into the future.

"Pete Down the Street"

Madelyn Ward, Whittier Middle School, 6th Grade

Pete down the street

Pete is the biggest and fluffiest polar bear in all of the arctic. Reese and Lily, the polar bear sisters, admire him. He lives right down the street from them and they get to see him every day! One snowy day in the arctic, one of the girls has an idea.

"I think I will find a way to be as amazing as Pete," said Lily.

"No, I will find a way first!" said Reese.

The girls' anger starts to rise. The war to become the next Pet has officially started. They begin to make their own plans.

"I already have a plan so beat that!" said Lily.

They rush to their rooms and start thinking. Lily wants to make a potion that will make her grow as big and fluffy as Pete. Reese will make polar bear fluff to glue to herself. They both hope for the best.

To get the items Lily needs, she will have to climb to the top of the tallest mountain to get the ingredients she is going to need. Reese will have to find the polar cats to get their fluff. They agreed on a date to see who ends up the most like Pete. Again, they hope for the best.

...

The day has officially come and they are both unprepared. The fluff isn't fluffy and the potion isn't right. The twins say the day is unusual and they probably think everything is ruined. If the mountains weren't tall and the oceans weren't deep, that would describe how the day was. The day felt incomplete, or like things weren't done correctly. They both meet at the meeting point with a sad look. They both look the exact same as when they started.

Soon later, they decided to go meet Pete. They ask him how he is so amazing. Pete explains that his fluffiness is what makes him unique and special. He also explains how they have something special and unique about them too.

As time passed, the girls realize that they are now as big and fluffy as Pete.

"Look at us now!" said Reese.

"We are exactly where we wanted to be."

They now know that they need to respect their unique features and the things that make them special. They have learned that to get the outcome of your choice, time can be the solution.

“What an adventure!” Said Reese.

“I agree, we needed to spend more time enjoying what makes us awesome!” said Lily. This adventure has made the girls learn a lesson. Moral of the story, love yourself.

"A New Tall Tale"

Ethan Li, Whittier Middle School, 7th Grade

Paul Bunyan 2: A New Tall Tale

I'm taking a stroll through Yosemite National Park, breathing in the scent of the trees and listening to the bird's song. Abruptly, my stomach curls in my body, and I double over. My eyes swivel in my head; suddenly, an animation plays in my vision. I see a nation, with millions of starving people all across it, groaning, wandering the streets, desperately eye-locking the ground for a tiny morsel of food.

The aluminum and steel bodies of buses litter the streets, their drivers out of business. The air is white with crumpled and torn resumes, letters, and other official job papers, which I saw were stabbed onto the limbs of trees, posted to the streetlights, trash bins stuffed full to the brim with them, the crushed remnants of a glimmer of hope. I also see that the nation is China, from the writing scrawled on derelict buildings and buses.

When the animation zooms into a stock building, I see the graphs, their lines falling so steeply that if it were a mountain slope, not even I, the mightiest logger and climber of mountains in America, could have conquered it. Stock percentages on all the screens were dwindling at an alarming rate to near zero. Deserted cubicles, each with its own sad story, are lined all about. There's one person who does not share this cruel misery, though. He's laughing an evil laugh, clutching pound upon pound of money in his strong, grabbing fists. He looks familiar, but I'm too engrossed by in this hellish scene to pay much attention.

"I must save the nation!" I think.

Out goes the hatchet from its old, worn leather pouch, off goes my coonskin cap from the wooden peg rack that I built myself and out goes I from the comfort of my warm home, setting off on an adventure of the grandest scale.

Later, I arrive at the scenes of terror. I see that not only are people starving, they are also sick. And, there was the evil man, laughing, holding his clutches of money.

A thorough look at him confirmed that I had seen him before: he was Wang Chen-Han, one of the most selfish, uncaring, and greedy stockbrokers ever to have been born on this planet. He had toppled thousands of stocks all across the world and made millions out of it. He was a billionaire. Now, I realized, he had destroyed every single stock in China, casting everyone into joblessness.

When I arrive, everyone looked at me, even Chen-Han. They gape at me as if I'm from Mars. "Is he an alien?" someone said.

"I am Paul Bunyan. Just a logger I may be, but I am here to save you!" I said.

While I'm saying this, I take a close look at Chen-Han. He's grown fatter and his voice has changed, but his fiery brown eyes are still the same ones, eyes full of unconcern for others. But, my musing over him is broken when Chen-Han says, "What're you doin' here, big dummy?"

"Helping China, of course!" I say.

At the word help, Chen-Han's face grows exceedingly red. It's one of his least favorite words. "What do you mean, help? You're not helping anyone," he emphatically states.

"You'll see."

I turn without a further glimpse at him and stroll off.

Since it's getting dark and I'm far too large for any bed, I decide to head for the Great Wall.

I climb in pure darkness onto the Wall and lie there. Staring at the starry sky, I'm thinking "What's my plan? How am I going to help rebuild the country? Maybe tomorrow, I can try to convince Chen-Han to give up his ways...zzz..."

A sudden pain alerts me to my senses. Still groggy, I look around. It's just beginning to dawn. The scenery is like nothing I've ever seen before, with the bluish mountains rolling in the landscape, the mist floating about like some hungry beast swallowing anything in its way.

But, the pain lands me back to earth. When I look at my arm, it's bleeding hard. Then, I notice words scratched into my skin: "U R LUZER - CH" My pain turns into white-hot anger, at the mere thought that Chen-Han would call me, Paul Bunyan, a loser, and that he didn't even give me a chance to reason with him. Immediately, I spring from my lofty perch and see Chen-Han standing on a beacon tower not far from me.

"I'll make you a deal," he snarls. "How 'bout you skedaddle back to your cabin and I leave you alone?"

"No. I'll save the people here, whether you like it or not."

"You're not saving anything whether it's for your own sake or my sake or anyone's sake." He points with his finger at everyone! And his voice is very mean and hoarse, like that of a school bully whose had two hours yelling at nothing and then another thirty minutes swearing at the pain in his toe because he kicked a rock.

"You can't stop me!" I practically shout.

"Let's see," he says and spits at me but I dodge it and spit at him. My spit is larger than his therefore he can't dodge it as well. So, while he's busy trying to clear my saliva off of his pug face with lots of overly dramatic swipes, I throw him to the ground.

In a flash, he gets out a nail gun but I had just the right tool. While the nails are flying directly for my stomach like so many deadly silver darts, I bat them back with my ax; he tries to escape, but Chen-Han is fat from the hours he's spent gorging on food he's bought using his unrightfully earned money, so he moves a bit slow. One strikes his arm and wounds him. He yells "OUCH, I'LL SHOW YOU!" and his voice is so burning with hate that I can feel the trees withering behind me.

"Aww, you thirsty, here's some pina colada for you mate!" he screeched, with a flask of poison in hand. Seeing this, I rip a tree from the ground and I see a split second of amazement on Chen-Han's face, but he doesn't have time to stare for long because his bottle of poison is in shards behind him, leaking acid green fluid.

The stockbroker's face is now no more than a beetroot with a taught white-lipped mouth and two piggy black, hate-filled eyes. Summoning up all his vocal energy, he booms "SO YOU HERUCLEAN, YOU, HOW WOULD YOU LIKE A LITTLE BBQ?" and gets out his Fire-Whippe, a deadly weapon known to be able to fry anything existing.

While he's firing the thing at me, trying to turn me into a Paul-Bunyankabob, I sneak behind him and knock him cold with a kick to the head, but I have a more painful way of dealing with him, since pain was the last thing anyone who met him felt. Taking his Fire-Whippe, I fry a tree until it is shriveled and very sharp. I then impale it in his bottom. He immediately wakes up and goes wild, clawing at his rear end like mad. But, I pick him up and carry him to his house. His Fire-Whippe is pointed at the outside.

"Chen-Han, say goodbye to your money!"

"Oh no."

BOOM!

The sight of Chen-Han curled up in sorrow at the loss of his mega-mansion fills me with pride at the thought that he should get his rightful punishment. I also decide to make him a servant, helping me cut down trees.

The following day, I gather some financial experts, and we set about helping the people mend the ruined country.

Months later, I go back to my home at Yosemite. My bed is too short and weak for me again since I grow like a weed. After lengthening it and giving the old boards to Chen-Han to sleep on, I lay on my new bed. I fall asleep to the sound of Chen-Han's shrieks of dismay at his being ultimately defeated. As I drift off, I am thinking that for once, China is back to the happy country it once was.

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