

Swan Creek School Literary Magazine

2022-23
Special
Inaugural
Issue



*Creations
by the
Creek*

Foreword

Creativity. The act of being creative takes on numerous forms and can be displayed in a variety of ways. Being able to see the world around you differently and make something new, is a gift. The work that is captured in the following pages demonstrates a range of ability, from a range of ages, from students and adults alike. Each allows a glimpse into the mind of the creator and the potential that exists inside.

The creative mind leads to many opportunities. Our current photographers may use their talents to capture the most intriguing images of our time. Or, because they have an incredible eye for detail, they may make a career in crime investigation.

The steady hand of our budding painters could lead to some of the most impressive artwork of our generation. Or perhaps their hand/eye coordination will lead them to a career in surgery.

The prose put together by our poets and authors could lead to works that will be studied for generations to come. Or quite possibly, their gift for assembling the right words, at the right time, may lead them to craft a speech delivered by a world leader that heals a nation, or saves one from disaster.

The possibilities are endless because those with creativity see endless possibilities. They view the world around them differently and make it more beautiful. In return, we are blessed with their Creations by the Creek.

Enjoy!

Mark Truskowski
Principal
Swan Creek School



♫ staff Notes ♫

Welcome to the Inaugural Edition of Swan Creek School Literary Magazine!

Our cover photo was taken along the riverbed of the actual Swan Creek that our school is named after. While the swan was photoshopped in, Swan Creek is real and highlights the Artist's easel at the moment the artist stepped away. In fact, this photo is titled, "The Artist Steps Away," and symbolizes that any of our students from either of the Blue and Green Houses could have been the artist that stepped away to pause to enjoy the lovely painting that was created.

On the pages of this magazine, you will find the inspiration and heart-felt contributions of our community of authors, poets, artists, and photographers that have come together to share the joy of creativity in our school family!

We want to thank our Contributors that trusted us with their Creations!

Please enjoy the Inaugural Edition of our magazine: Creations by the Creek!



Acknowledgments

SCS Literary Magazine Staff 2022 - 2023

Janiya Ball

Catherine Clayton

Elizabeth Gates

Kai Henry-Hunter

Emma Jackson

Mary-Elisabeth Jungwirth

Rachel Miller

Lyndsay Rawlings

Lena Zelaya-Smith

Thank you to everyone who put so much effort into putting this magazine together!

The Staff would like to thank everyone:

Writers, poets, photographers and artists, who contributed their work to the magazine.

It is your creations that makes this magazine amazing!

Co-Editors: Catherine Clayton and Lyndsay Rawlings

Co-Sponsors: Ms. Faith Benser and Ms. Dawn Sinclair

Front Cover Design and Photography by Catherine Clayton

Magazine Layout, Background Imagery and Photographs, and Graphic Design by Catherine Clayton

Creations by the Creek is published annually by Swan Creek School and a volunteer

Staff of Students.

All rights revert back to the author upon publication with the provision that

Creations by the Creek receive initial publication credit.

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“Swan Creek School: The Green and Blue”

by Catherine Clayton

Swan Creek Literary Magazine,

Is the place to be,

For first through 12th grade students in Aberdeen,

The writers, the dreamers all guarantee,

While Our pages are yet Unwritten,

So filled with lots of imagination,

For This, Our Inaugural Edition,

We'll fill our pages with heartfelt interpretations,

Of the art, poetry, music and essays we seek,

To immortalize the preservation,

Of our lasting,

Creations

by

the

Creek..



“I See Me”

*W*hen I look in my bedroom mirror all I see is me.

I see the real me and not the one I pretend to be.

I am not perfect.

I am not ashamed of who I am.

I am not afraid of what the world will bring.

I am not scared of what people might say.

I am just me.

I am an independent young woman.

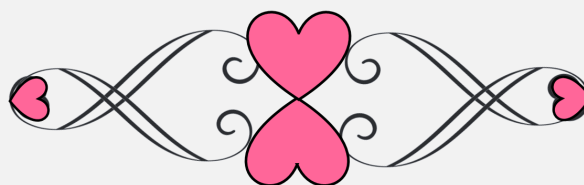
I am a strong believer.

I am an achiever.

I am serious but I can be hilarious.

I am beautiful on the inside and the outside.

Mama always said, “If you can’t be true to yourself, how can you be true to others?”





I know who I am meant to be:

Daughter, older sister, student, role model.

Mama always said, “You must trust yourself, love yourself, accept yourself,
But most importantly be yourself.”

Daddy always said, “If you fail, do not let it get to you.”

If I believe in myself, I will be successful.

Daddy always said, “Use your failure as your motivation to become better.”

Life will get tough.

Some things can get rough,

Some days can turn into bad days.

But no matter how terrible things get, I will never give up.

I am me.

Love,

Mya Phay



Poem About Freedom

by

Aaliyah Miller

For far too long I lived a life that others chose for me, thoughts that were not mine.

But I fought my way to freedom the thing I've always owned where peace and love unfold.

So close yet so far in my grasp but elsewhere.

The day has come to wake myself up to get out into the world and try my luck.

The time is now the place is here to live my life free of fear.

The Loneliest Table Knife

by

Addison Paul

I think my plates are lonely.

My mugs are counting the days.

They have forgotten the sound of their own clatter.

Maybe they're tired of the smell that the old wood holds.

Habiting a loose shelf in stacks and rows.

Forks making friends with silver spoons.

The table knife might just be the loneliest, though.

Too dangerous to near.

Like Icarus to The Sun,

handled with fear and caution.

The porcelain tenses to the dull hum of the blade.

Do they fear the knife block too?

Do they shudder in apprehension?

Oh.

You lonely table knife.



Foster

A single tree stands
It's branches tall and swaying,

Until it's short and still

All eggs leaking yellow,
Shattered

One egg encapsulated
In a speckled shell

Alone and orphaned
A bird swoops down,

Carrying it
To a new home

Forest = Foster

-Anonymous



Nosier

- Anonymous

At last, at last freedom rings
Yet with it comes the stifling

The timeline ticks there's much to do
And everyone is watching you

They pester to see what your future brings
Whatever follows after the spring

And as their hounding increases its ringing
That ticking clock continues its swinging

It's not as if it was not there before
But now everyone must implore

Those not concerned years ago
Now wish to come and enjoy the show

Must be constantly vigilant in case of inquiry
Lest my potential appear to be reaching expiry

The closer to the deadline the more anxiety
The more people take place in your propriety

Strangers who were never met previous
Causing stress as I try not to appear tedious

Counselors and Guardians never spoken to for a time
Suddenly show care for the wellbeing of mine

With the end of my years towards building a foundation
Comes the next wave of examination across the nation

SENIOR = NOSIER



- Syn'cier Fitzgerald

I am from broken doors, from noodles and empty pantries. I am from the never ending cycle of fresh cancer in the air. I am from the foxglove of the garden. The nightshade whose long gone limbs I remember as if they were my own.

I'm from the "We have food at home" and "You'll grow into it" from 'Big Mike' and 'Little Mike.' I am from growling stomachs, and depending on school lunches, and struggling pockets.

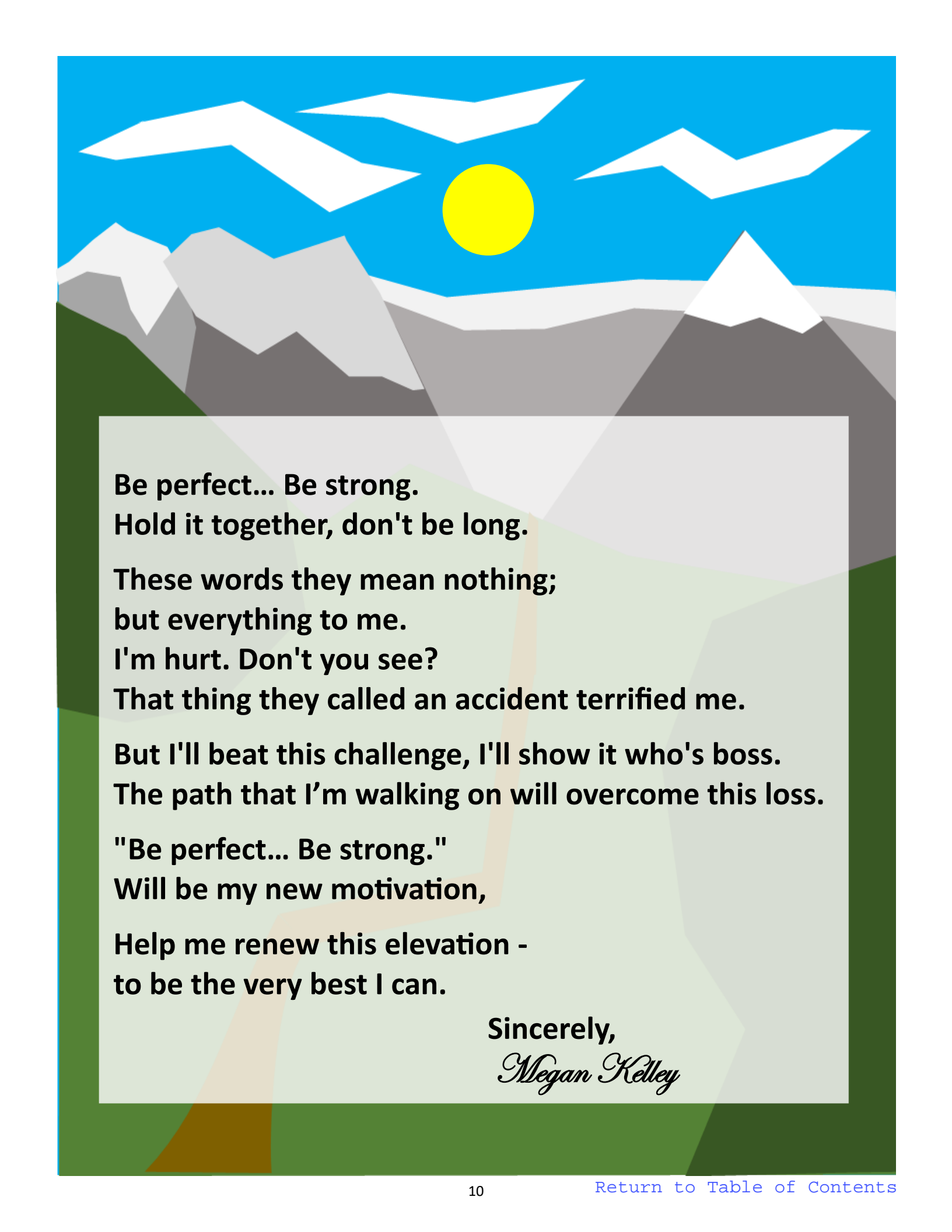
I am from "Not every cop is your friend" and "Neither is the friends you invite in" and "It can all fall down." I'm from cutting towels into washcloths. I'm from The Block and the store.

Peanut butter with honey and jelly with Butter from 50 cents can go a long way at Jay. With my Momma's constant motivation for me -

To keep going with her name across my



-Original concept by George Ella Lyon



**Be perfect... Be strong.
Hold it together, don't be long.**

**These words they mean nothing;
but everything to me.**

I'm hurt. Don't you see?

That thing they called an accident terrified me.

But I'll beat this challenge, I'll show it who's boss.

The path that I'm walking on will overcome this loss.

"Be perfect... Be strong."

Will be my new motivation,

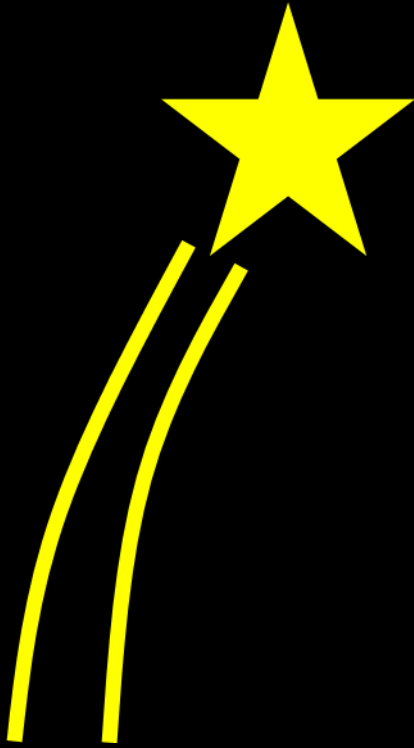
Help me renew this elevation -

to be the very best I can.

Sincerely,

Megan Kelley

"Vision"



I have a vision
And so do you
I have power
you do too

I see my future
just like you
In order to get that
you need to get up and move

You see what you want
Now that's your goal
Now open your eyes
And see what your future holds

by Sofia Sieranski



Watching the Outside World

Looking outside observing the world.

Watching the plants grow.

The leaves falling from the trees.

The flowers blooming from their roots.

The sun coming out from behind the clouds.

Sprinklers turning on.

Running, jumping, and swimming.

And eating popsicles,
as the weather gets hotter and hotter.

by Janiya Ball

The Life She Never Wanted

by Janiya Ball

She felt vacillated.

Her fingers brittle as sandpaper as she wiped the tears off her face. She pulled out a makeup wipe and wiped the dried mascara off, looking at herself in disappointment.

She felt weak, she wasn't stable enough to hold back the tears that came down her face.

Her heart wasn't in the right place, she knew but couldn't back down from the problems in her life, she thought.

She had nobody, not even her parents, to be on her side even if she was happy or sad.

The guilt she felt, feeling like throwing up even if she had spoken. The smile that appeared, even if she felt deficient. Even if she wasn't happy enough.

Everyone used her for her smarts, talent, and loyalty. She didn't want to be like everyone else but herself.

She felt like a flame that would get worse and worse until

Everything was demolished.

This was the life she never wanted.
The life I never wanted.

Swan Creek School

by Lillian Jungwirth

I love going to school at Swan Creek,
My teachers make me smile from cheek to cheek.

There are always lots of fun activities to do,
And you'll leave knowing, "You're the best version of you!"

But if you're not feeling well and you need to call in sick,
Mrs. Walters will process your excuse note with a click.

When you need a good laugh,
to hear that jolly: "Hee, hee, hee!"
You can always crack a joke with Principal Truskowski.

When you come to visit,
you'll see our school spirit.

Best of all,
is our school mascot,
Binx,
The Soaring Bayhawk!



Black Hole

by Kyla Fogle

I don't have anything in common with others.

My pain is sharp, high, don't last.

I may shake your hand, might even laugh and show emotion
on the surface, but there's emptiness inside.

I'm not interested,

or want to know any new knowledge.

Nothing but a black hole.

If I'm not better or nobody sees me as perfect,
my complex will ruin.

Only want to be "not" actually.

This confession meant nothing.

Growing Up

by Patience Greene

It's been a while since I saw my younger body.
I have changed so much to the point it affects emotions.
My feelings are everywhere, don't know what is wrong or right.
Isolated in my room, on this very cold night.

My head has been spinning for a while.
Times became difficult to understand my new changed body.
I asked and seek for understanding,
but it feels like no one knows me.
I've been seeing much more in my new body.
I've seen more stuff I never understood in my life.
Isolated in my room, on this very cold night.

School has become harder when I took form of my new body.
I will have to move out of my family's household.
The more I grow and the more I see. Nothing is getting easier.
Isolated in my room, on this very cold night.

New challenges, new responsibilities I don't understand.
Afraid to fall and never get back up.
My mind has been spinning endlessly of many possibilities.
My younger body haunts me with memories.
My younger body haunts me with laughs of joy.
Isolated in my room, on this very cold night.

Check Boxes
by
Persyffani Barrett

Growing up I thought that people were born with their heads cocked, because that is how they always looked at me.

Boxes: check one, check other.

People do not know and do not furrow between the layers like I do.

They do not switch and twitch and actively make the decision of which...

Well which part of me belongs today?

Which aspect of my personality will offend the least and blend the most,

and work and succeed and bury the lead like a switchboard of traits and I am always an imposter.

Always lost, always asking for directions,

People point my way like a scarecrow, like tornados blowing me whichever way the wind blows.

Well Dorothy doesn't want to play today; she's prepping for the SATS just the scantron.

The box is empty, and it is glaring and daring me to choose one.

Well, I am an expert at boxes,
my whole life can fit inside it, and I've got it down to a science,
I can pack my identity in an hour,
'cause where there's roots there's power,
but I am all topsoil.

My blood runs like water and oil refusing to stick.
My grandmas' old books read in secret nooks.
That camera that locks all my memories in a flash saved for when my recollection does not last.
That lighter that sparked that fire.
All fit in a box ready to be carried from door to door,
but that is not the box people ever ask for.

So many lines in the sand, so many can and cants. I see both worlds clearly, and I skip, jump, dance and fall between, never seen.

I belong in the spaces between,
check all that may apply.

Check the box





“Snow Globe”

Music Lyrics

by

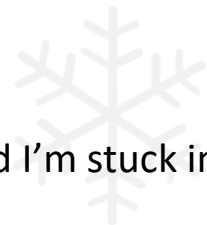
Adriyana Grice



Stars sparkle, the icy air, cold window pane, wind blows my hair, another silent night and coco colored cabins, the dreams we shared. I guess I interfered I guess I got what I deserved nothing to spare just plain old nerve, the flickering flame of the only lit candle, like a fire in the snow globe with the heat I couldn't handle.



Endless winter, blizzard like emotion's, the stage of confusion and your delusional lies, I'll end up freezing but at least I tried. Cold skin, blue eyes, they all turn cold, the promises sold the card all fold, like bread you mold, an underdog warrior call it the Super Bowl.



(Chorus) As I'm stuck inside this snow globe, as I'm stuck and I'm stuck in, as you turn me around and upside down.

As I'm stuck- and I'm stuck in. As I'm stuck inside this snow globe.



凍傷! 私は溺れているのか、生きているのか、凍っているのか?

この凍傷で指先が感じられない

(Translation: *Frostbite! Am I drowning, alive, or frozen? I can't feel my fingertips because of this frostbite.*) (Trust me, it sounds better when you actually say the lyrics in Japanese!)





I'll end up freezing but I least I tried. The ski slopes surround me, the blizzard, it all!

Watch as I crawl, watch as I stumble! The ice in adrenaline! The mountains that crumble!

(Chorus) As I'm stuck inside this snow globe, as I'm stuck and I'm stuck in, as you turn me around and upside down.

I'm stuck inside this snow globe

I'm stuck inside this snow globe

I'm stuck inside this snow globe

I'm stuck.inside.this.snow.globe



(As you turn me around and upside down)



I'm stuck inside this snow globe

I'm stuck inside this snow globe

I'm stuck inside this snow globe



I'm stuck. Inside. This. Snow. Globe.



(End)



The Garden

- Anonymous

The sight of the garden...

it made me feel so joyful.

The flowers are blooming, the air also smells like...

cherry blossoms?

**The way the pond water sounds when that little
waterfall hits the water, it's just so relaxing...**

the birds are singing, the garden is just so... peaceful.

I could lay here and read, then fall asleep on the grass.

It kind of sounds like a beach...

the way the wind blows the tree leaves...

The water...

it's so soothing.

The leaves brushing against each other...

**the way the cherry blossoms fall from the
cherry blossom trees.**

It's just peace.

“Life”

by Ms. Faith Benser

Once I was a delicate flower blossoming in the wind.

Once I was positive of all the hope life would bring.

Not knowing that at one point one would try to strip away,

All that I'd been building every second of every day.

One might say I was naïve, not knowing what would come.

The past was full of building blocks to shape who I would become.

How many times I struggled filled with so much pain.

Hoping that there was an end, a light to keep me sane.

Now I look upon my life, the blessings it has brought.

Think of lessons I have learned, none greater could I have taught.

I had no clue I was so strong and that I could rise above.

I did not know the power and the curse brought by the word called love.

So, life to me means thriving and changing every day.

The act of always re-setting your mind, growing up along the way.

Do not lose sight of who you are or cower beneath the stars,

And in the end be proud and true and celebrate who you are.

Swan Creek Virtual School

by

Ms. Michelle Kling

**Some days might bring tears,
From the ghosting, shy or meek!
But together we overcome our fears,
For virtual learning is not for the weak.**

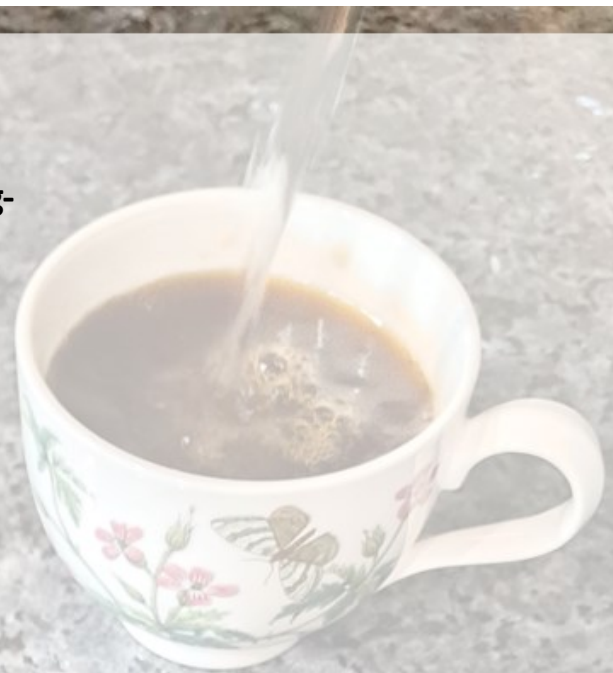
**We support and respect our peers,
Their lives we only see a peek!
Together we switch gears,
To help one another reach their peak!**

**A lot of praise and cheers,
As our students thrive and seek.
To continue for years-
Here at Swan Creek!**

Dawn breaks, the Alexa rings.
It's another day in Paradise, they say.
She cannot begin this day without her mug-
Filled to the last stripe of color, which
Fades a little more each year.

The carousel of caffeine awaits her and
Packed into the steel-rimmed architecture are
The Breakfast Blends, Columbian Roasts,
Dark Roasts, and Green Teas
Tilting and waiting to be chosen
By the sleepy figure.

The maker of energy and flavor
Welcomes her fingertips,
As she brews the perfect blend,
The Columbian morning jolt
She longs for every morning.



The AM Brew Cycle

by

Ms. Dawn Sinclair

Pouring with haste, the Little One tugs
At the loose threads and ties of her sweater.
She can no longer hold onto the mug
And it crashes into bits with caramel colored tears
Onto and into the cracked floor tiles of the kitchen.
Her reflection looks worn today, bags under the eyes
The concealer can't hide them, but her smile will.
There is still the teary-eyed drop-off at the sidewalk,
the AM meeting,
And plans of promise to do.
They tell her to leave the mug and just get ready.



Watermelon and Pickle

- Ms. Dawn Sinclair

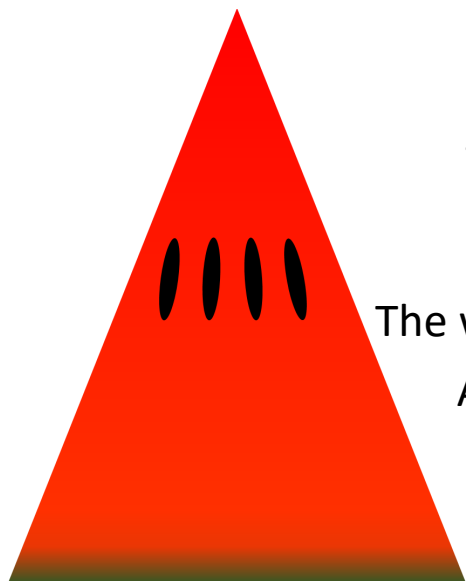
Summer

Time to wade

Time to read or swim

Time to chat and plan

Time to eat

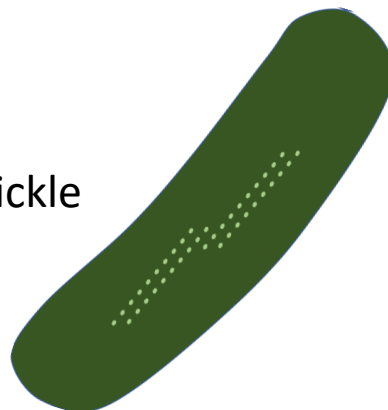


The watermelon and the pickle

A fruit and a vegetable

Friends side by side

Out in the sun



The children sweat beads of SPF

While the moms and dads wear shades

Uncle Sid is grilling "the dogs"

Beer in his claw and yells

"Food's a'ready!" his timing just right

The watermelon and the pickle laugh

Foods together till the end

Meeting desires of all appetites

Summer

Time to wade

Time to read or swim

Time to chat and plan

Time to eat



the testing window

**arriving with last minute snacks
grumpy faces, hoodies flopping**

**no one wants to be here
for here the brain weeps and turns**

**the font is straight and glares with
all buttons perched in corners**

**this is testing - of the memories,
of the skills, of the hours of daydreaming**

**piercing hums with chill irritates-
vacant studio tables rest sadly now**

**all are stuck in a warp of time
they will never retrieve again**

**this testing - of the patience,
of the wills, of the days of learning**

boredom

yawns

tapping

sleeping

this is testing

this is a test

- Ms. Dawn Sinclair



Alone
- Anonymous -

Do you see me over here

Just sitting all alone

Did you know I feel unheard

No one to call my own

I wear a smile and

Bought a mask to cover all the tears

I've helped and loved and

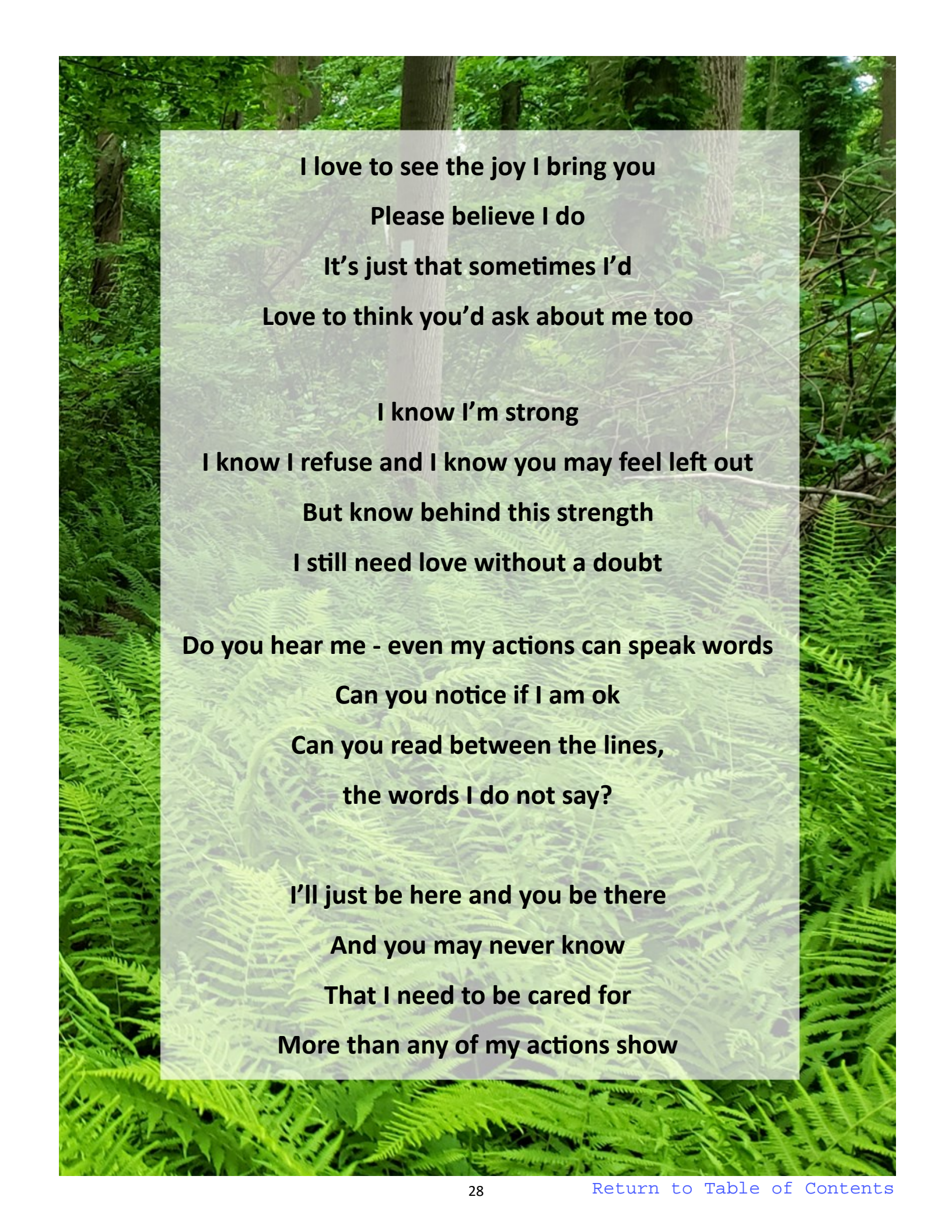
Been there for all throughout the years

I always lend a helping hand

I listen and I care

All the while inside I break

But never would I share



**I love to see the joy I bring you
Please believe I do
It's just that sometimes I'd
Love to think you'd ask about me too**

**I know I'm strong
I know I refuse and I know you may feel left out
But know behind this strength
I still need love without a doubt**

**Do you hear me - even my actions can speak words
Can you notice if I am ok
Can you read between the lines,
the words I do not say?**

**I'll just be here and you be there
And you may never know
That I need to be cared for
More than any of my actions show**

Art



“I found I could say things with color and shapes that I couldn’t say any other way – things I had no words for.”

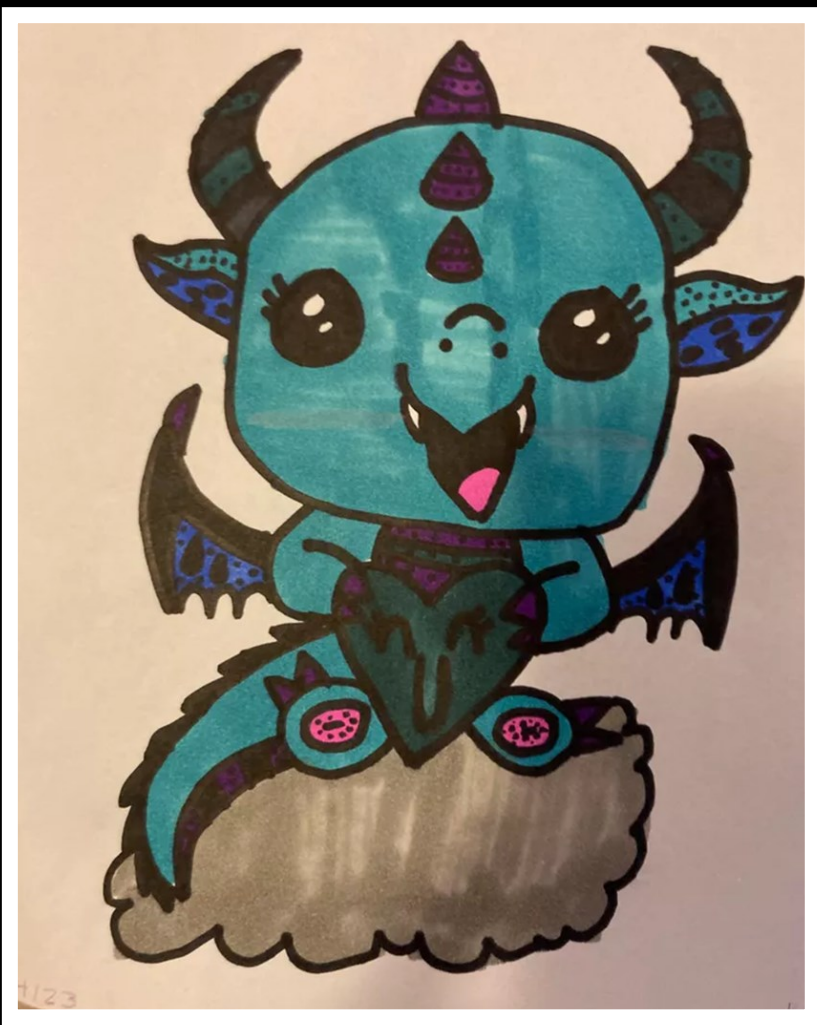
– Georgia O’Keeffe



Lillian Jungwirth

Grade 6

Anonymous



Anonymous



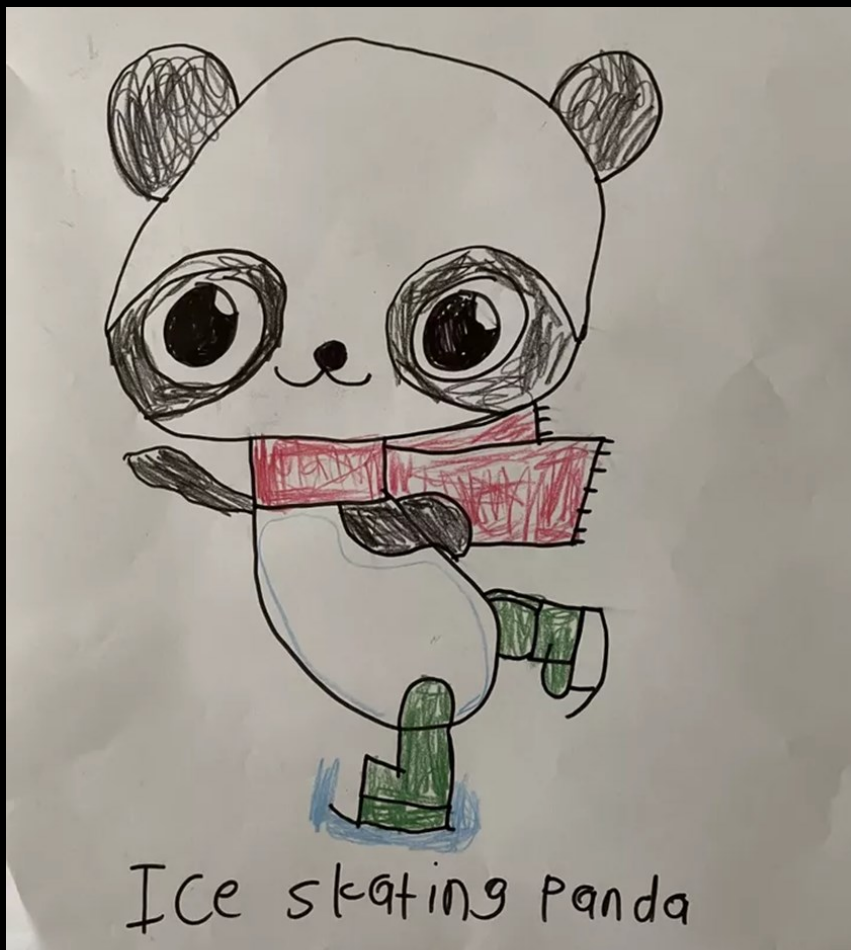
London Walters
Grade 2



Derrick Grice
Grade 2



Levi Duffy
Grade 2



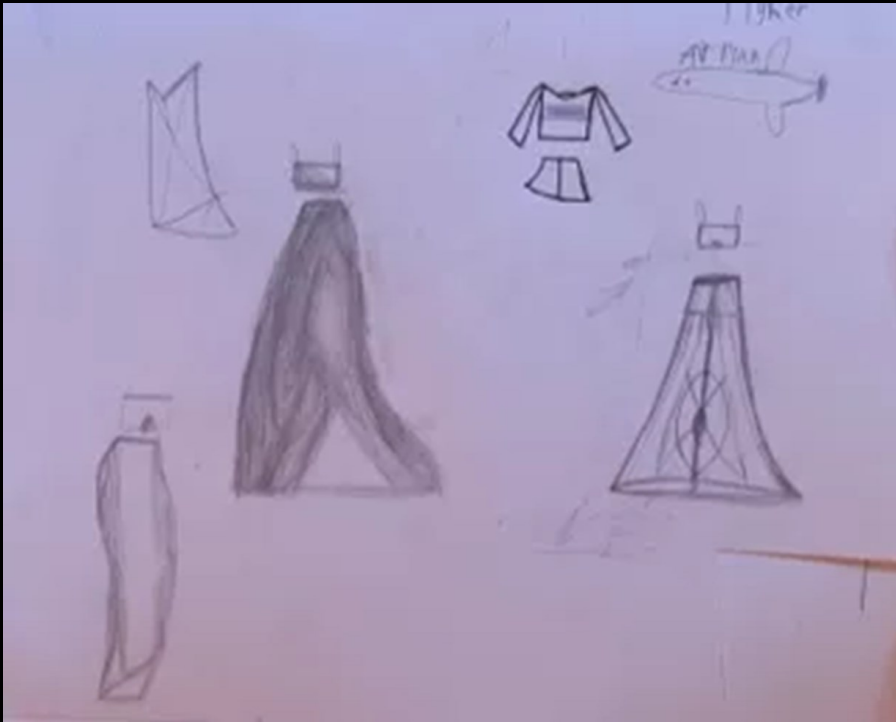
Abrielle Gayle
Grade 3



Julius Carmona
Grade 3



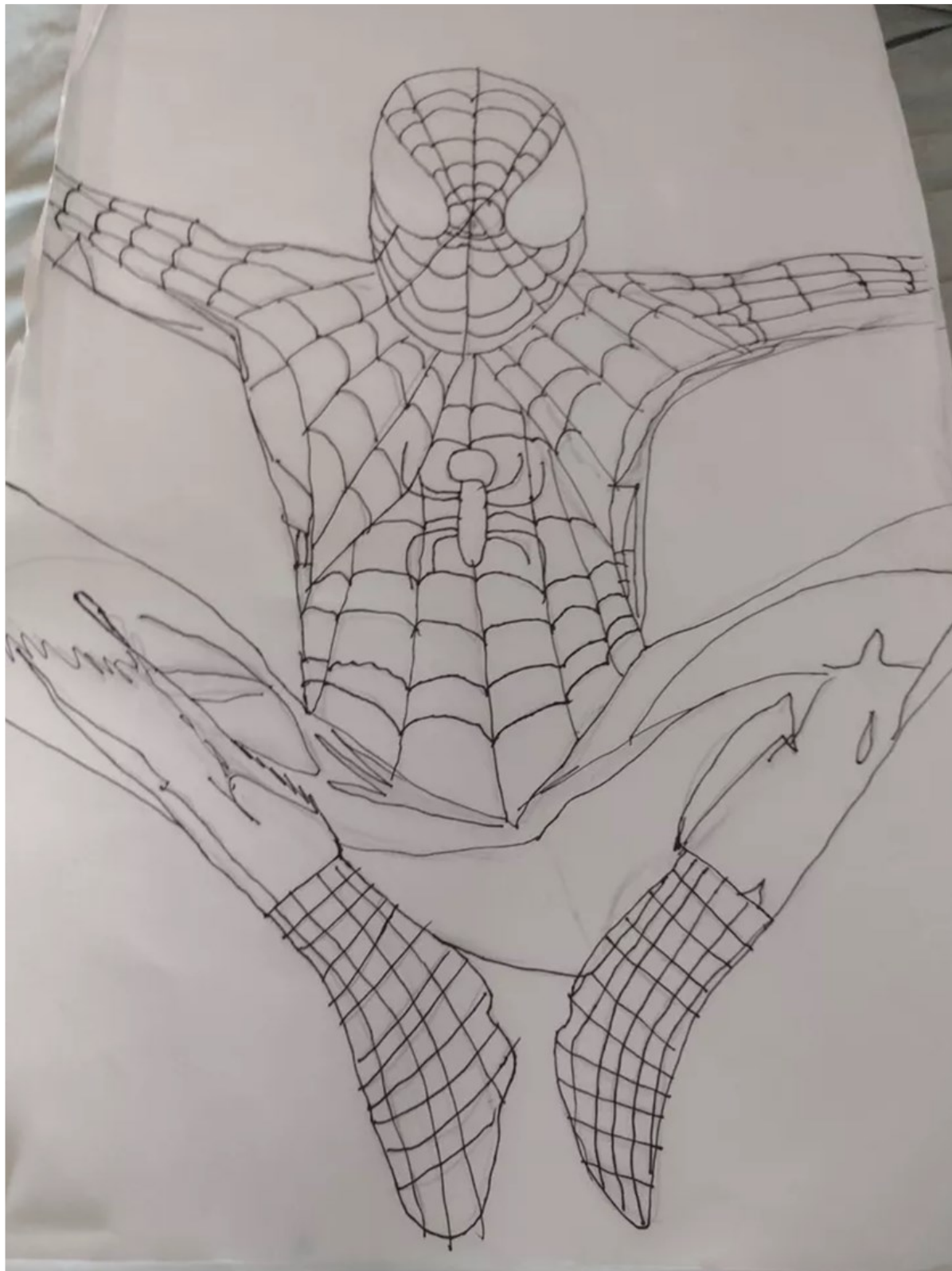
Anna Ly
Grade 3



Lillian Luban
Grade 3



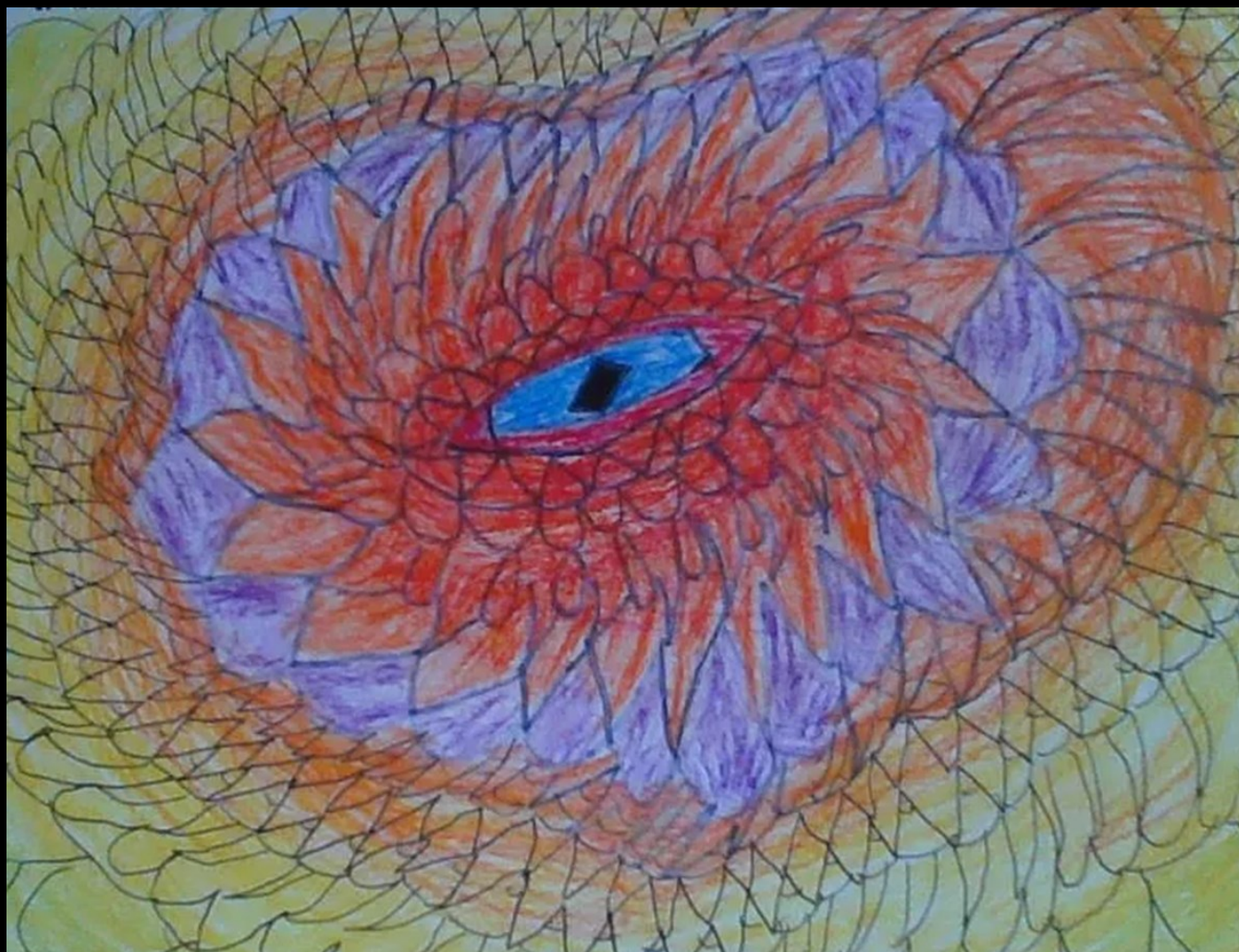
Aubrie Chaney
Grade 4



Helena Bonk
Grade 4



Colvin Rowe
Grade 4



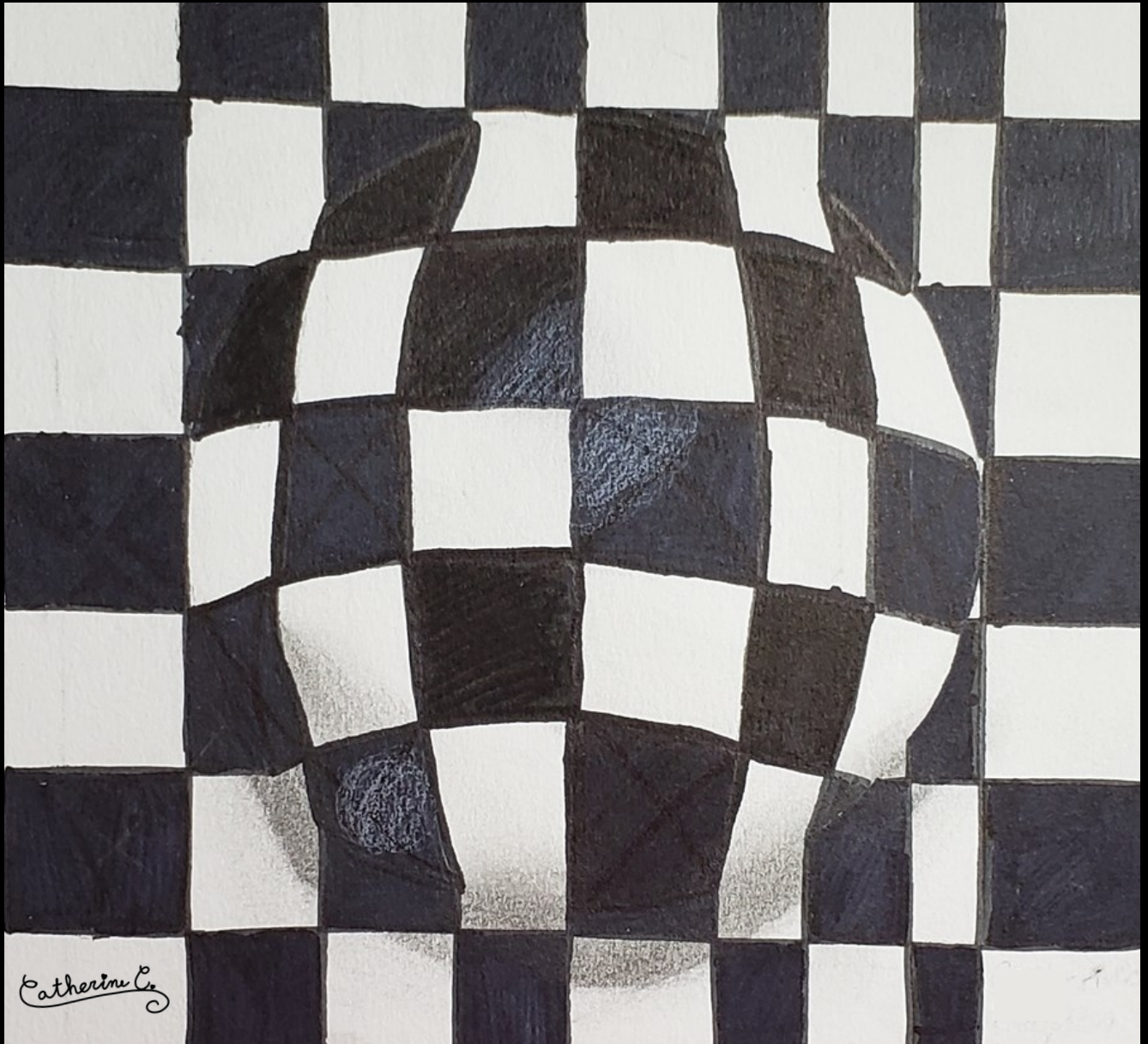
Colvin Rowe

Grade 4



Catherine C.

Catherine Clayton
Grade 7

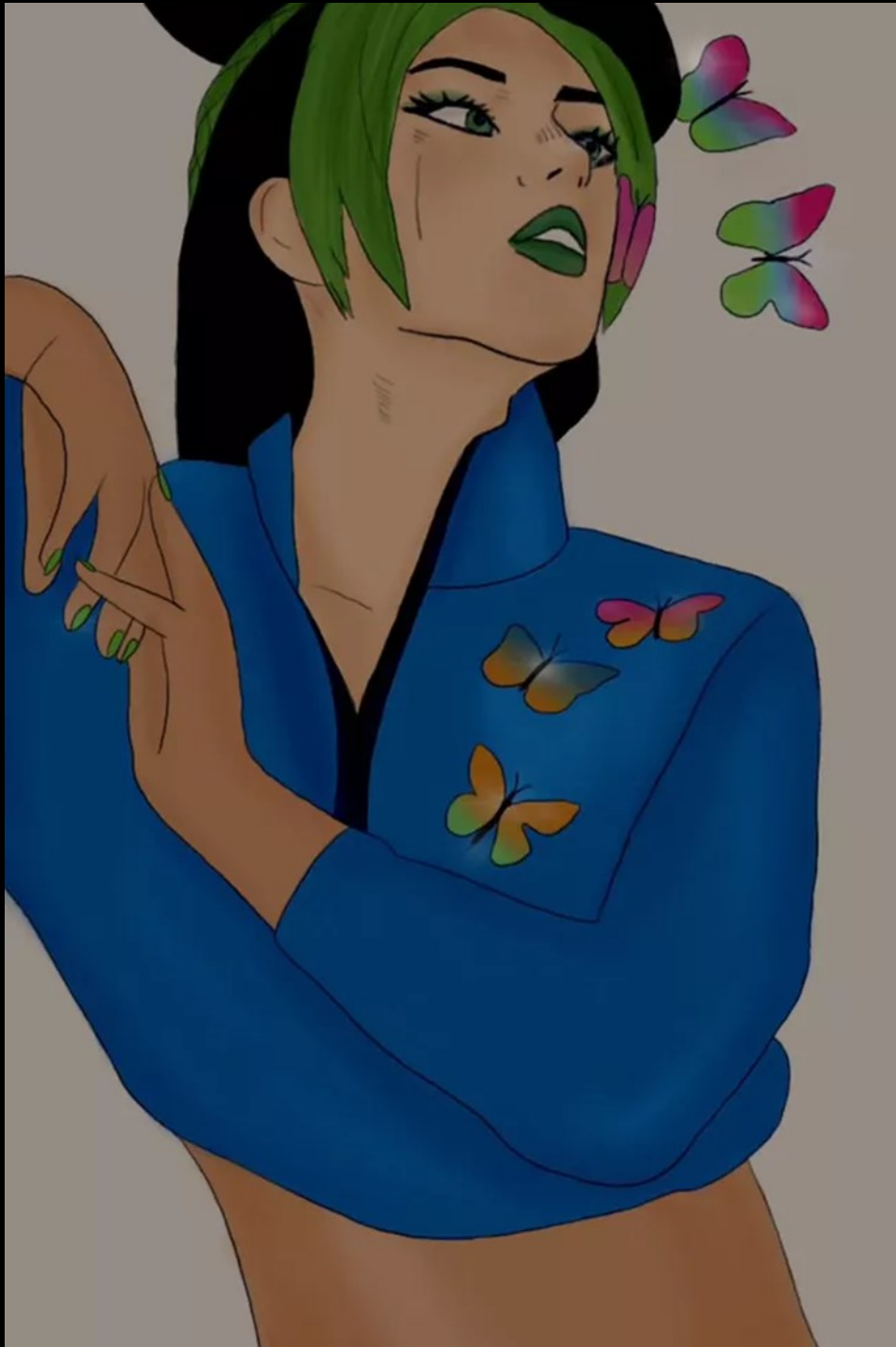


Catherine Clayton
Grade 7



Jada Tharrington

Grade 8



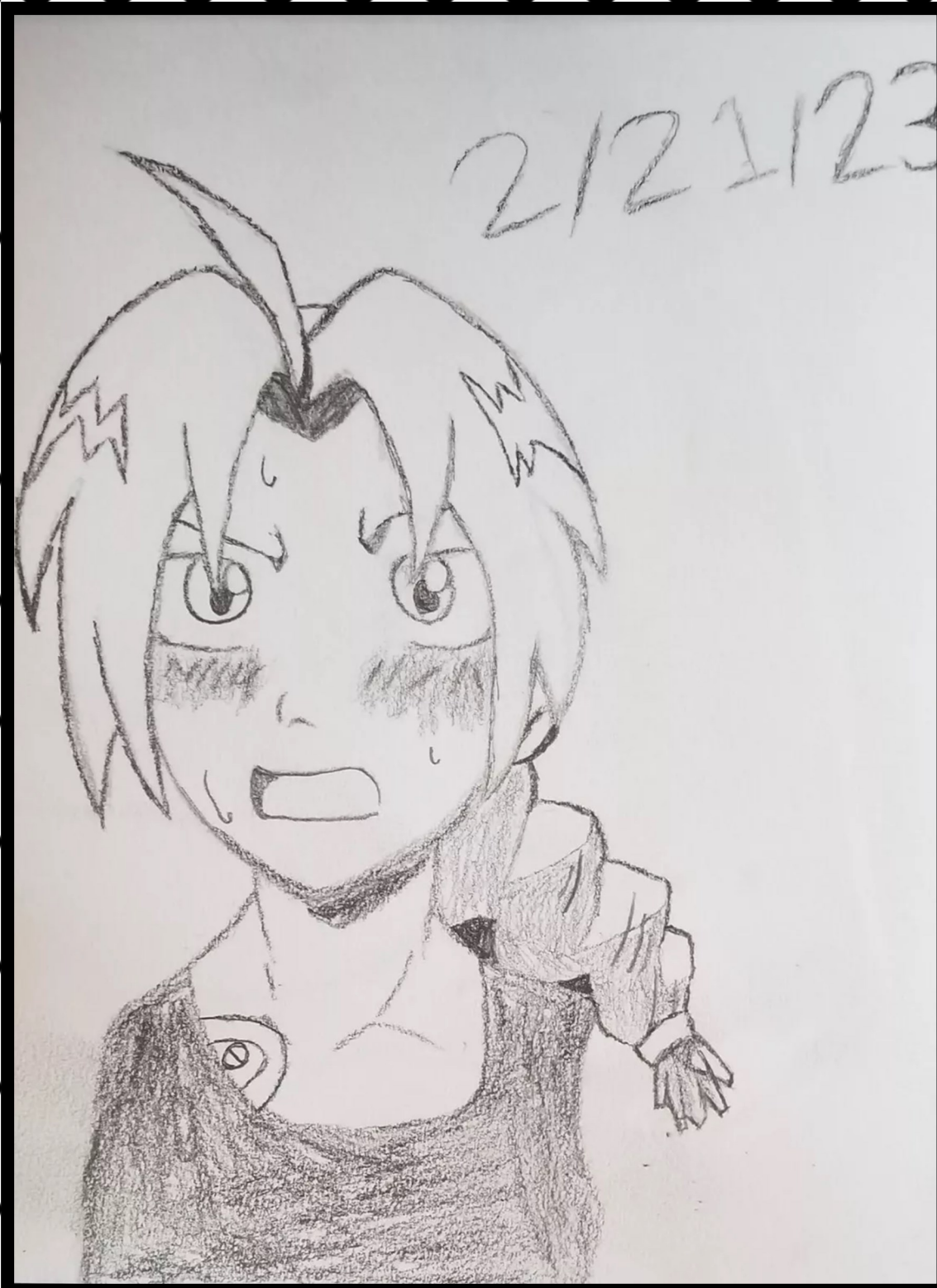
Charlotte Clapham

Grade 9



Paige Wloczewski

Grade 9



Da'Quan Ingram
Grade 9



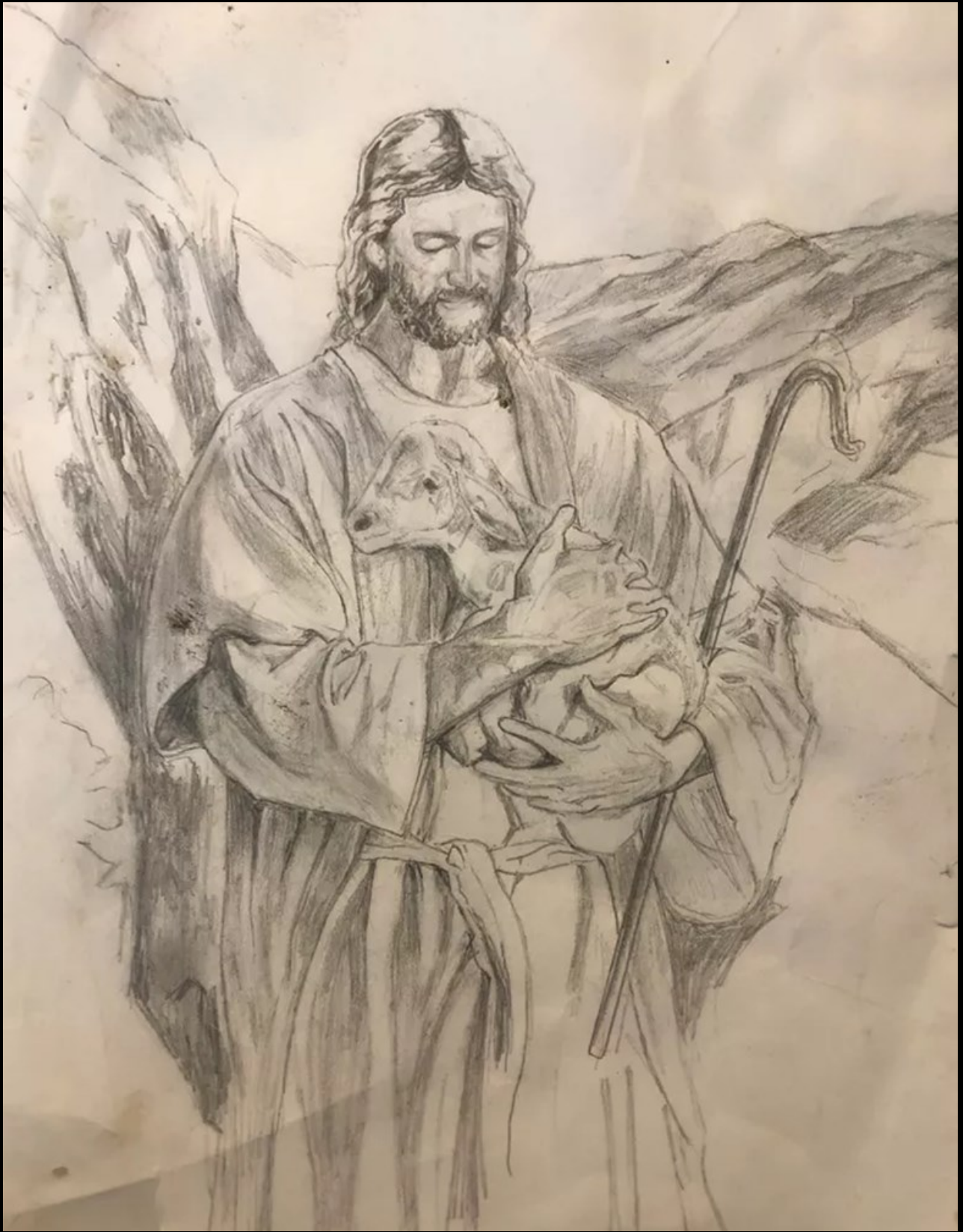
Lyndsay Rawlings

Grade 10

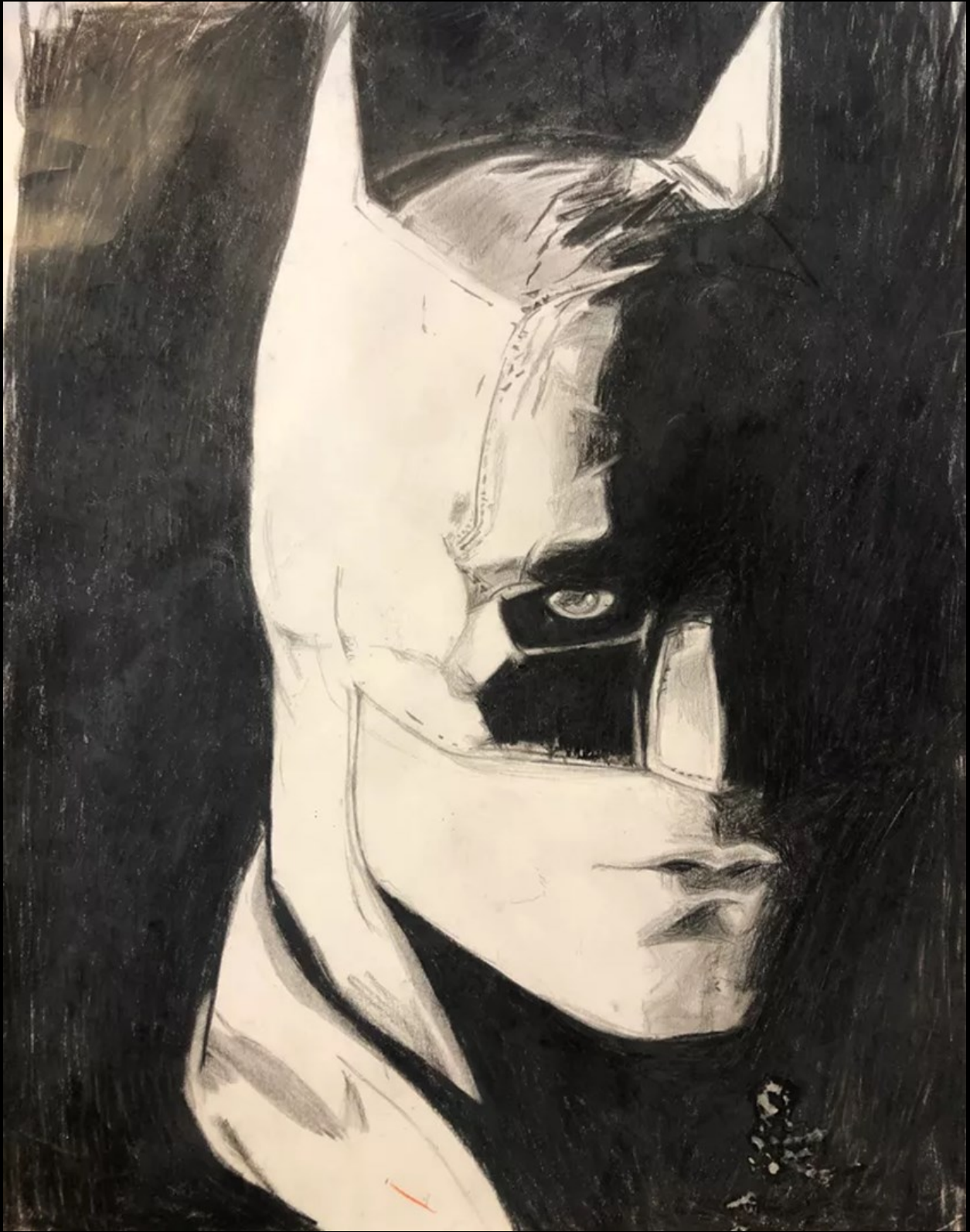


Lyndsay Rawlings

Grade 10



Ronnie Glass
Grade 10



Ronnie Glass
Grade 10



Ronnie Glass
Grade 10



High School Fine Art Prep



Emma Gallo
Grade 10



Emma Gallo
Grade 10



Emma Gallo
Grade 10



Kaylie Stemple
Grade 10



Lily Grissom
Grade 12

Jacob LaForest
Grade 10

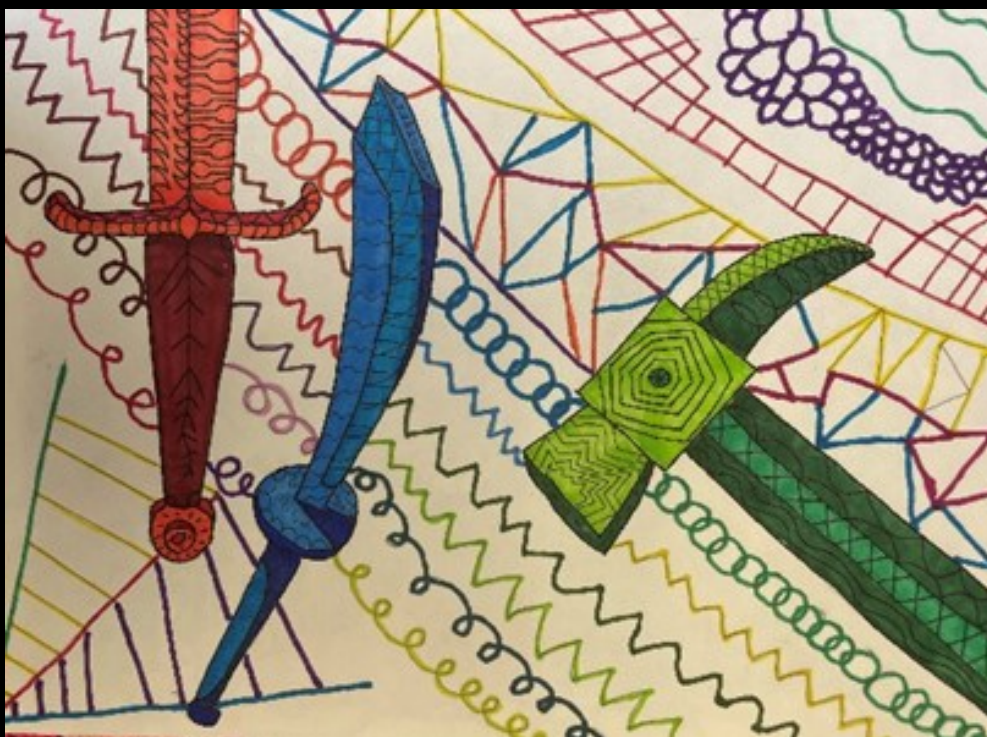


Zy Pappas
Grade 10



Addison Paul

Grade 11



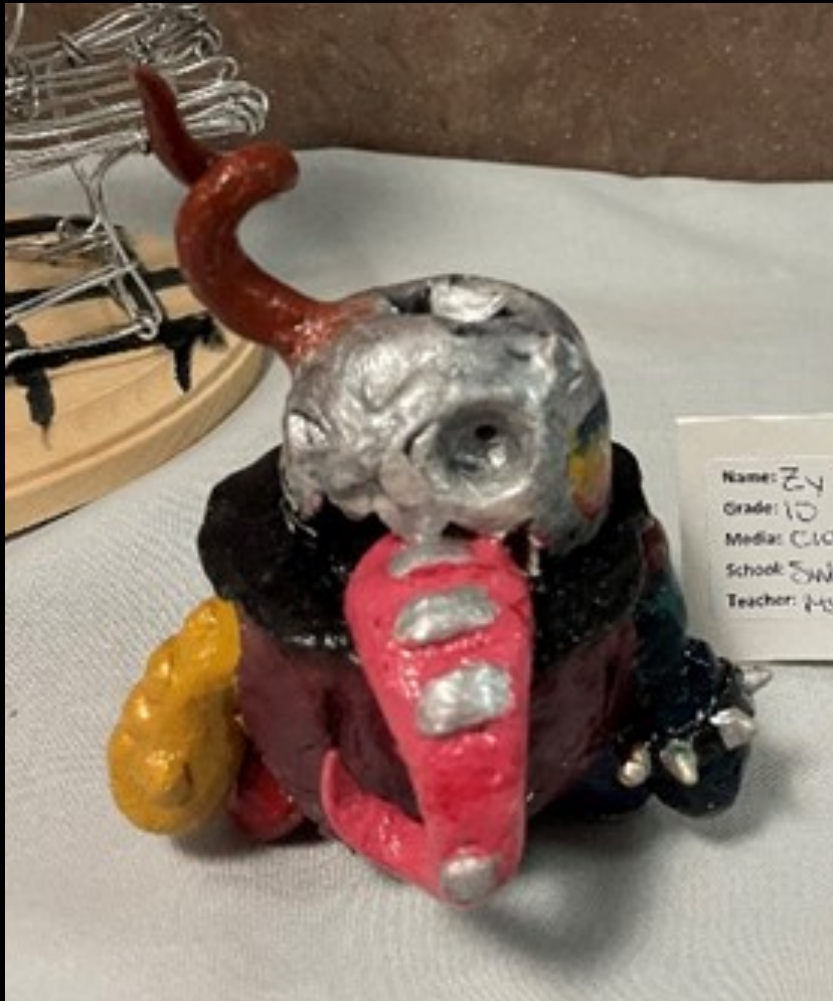
Eric Martinez

Rivera

Grade 11

Lily Grissom

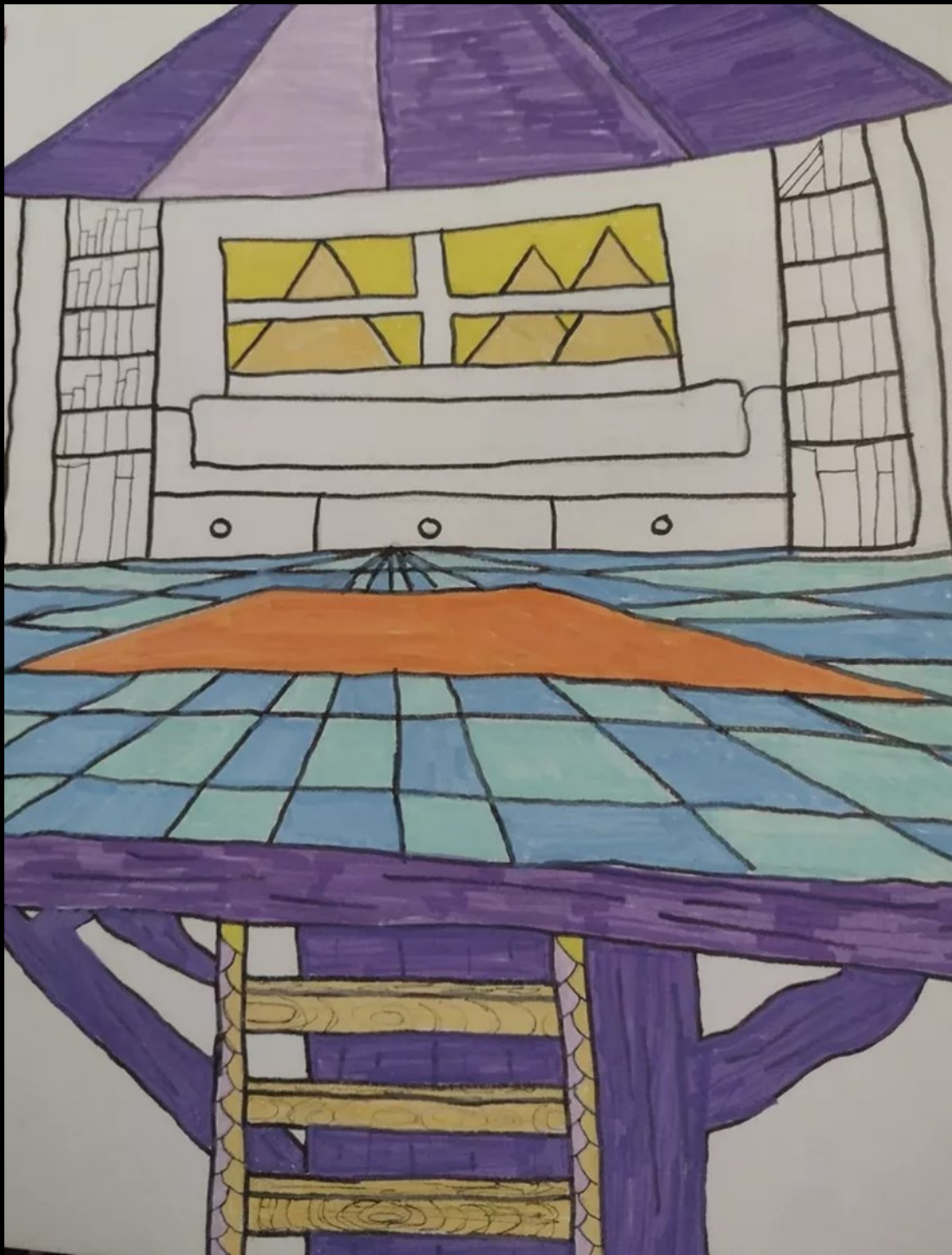
Grade 12



Name: Zy
Grade: 10
Media: Clay
School: S.W.
Teacher: MS

Zy Pappas

Grade 10



Emma Jackson

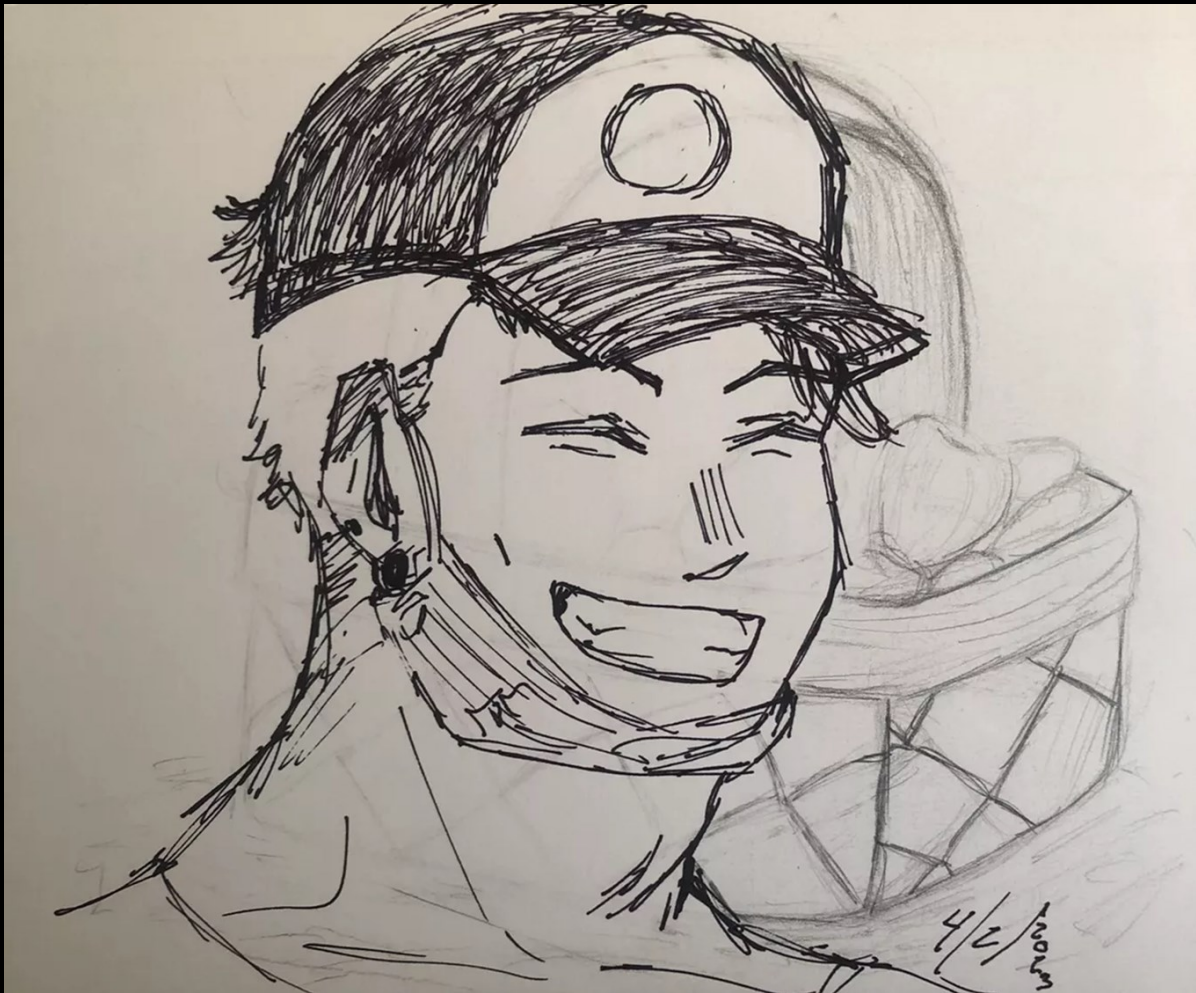
Grade 12



Kai Henry-Hunter
Grade 12



Kai Henry-Hunter
Grade 12



Kai Henry-Hunter
Grade 12



Kai Henry-Hunter
Grade 12





Kai Henry-Hunter
Grade 12



Kai Henry-Hunter
Grade 12



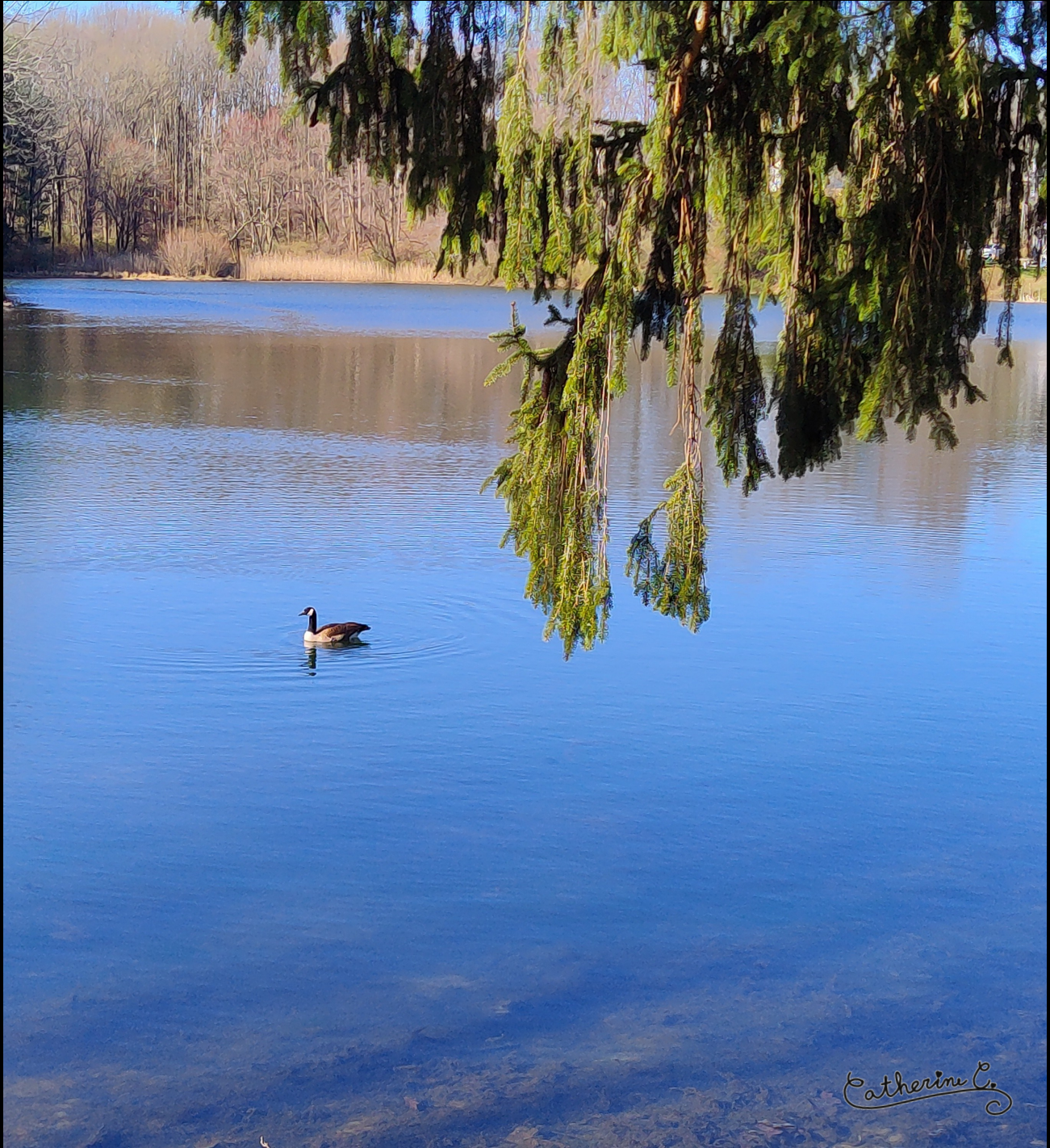
Mr. Charles Gill
Swan Creek School Art Teacher

Photography



“You don’t take a photograph, you make it.”

—Ansel Adams



Catherine Clayton
Grade 7



Catherine C.

Catherine Clayton
Grade 7

Catherine C.



Catherine Clayton
Grade 7



**Mary-Elisabeth
Jungwirth
Grade 7**



**Mary-Elisabeth
Jungwirth
Grade 7**





Tory Thompson

Grade 4



Tory Thompson

Grade 4



Lena Zelaya-Smith

Grade 10



Lena Zelaya-Smith

Grade 10



Lena Zelaya-Smith

Grade 10

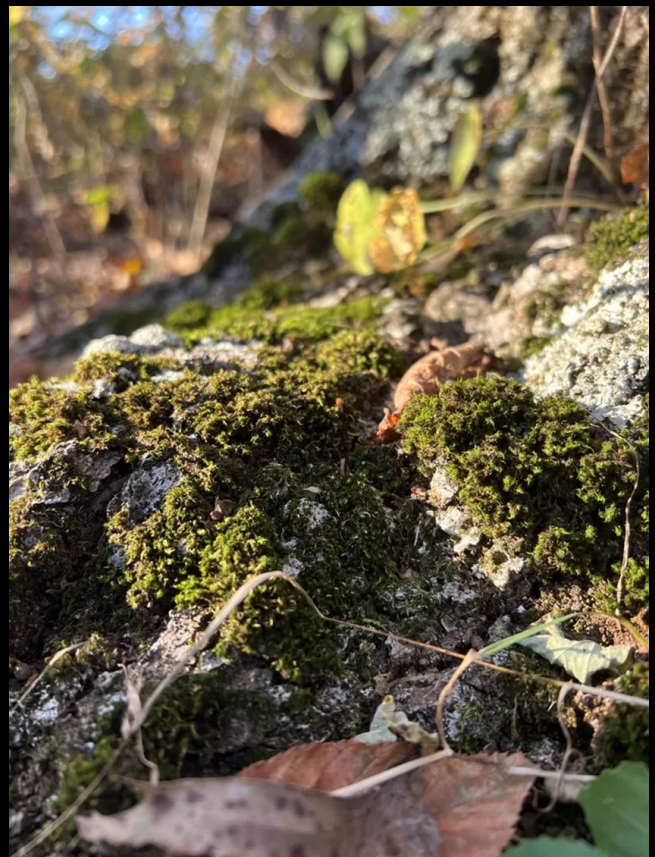


Lyndsay M. Rawlings
Grade 10



Liliana S. do Nascimento
Grade 10

Liliana S. do Nascimento
Grade 10





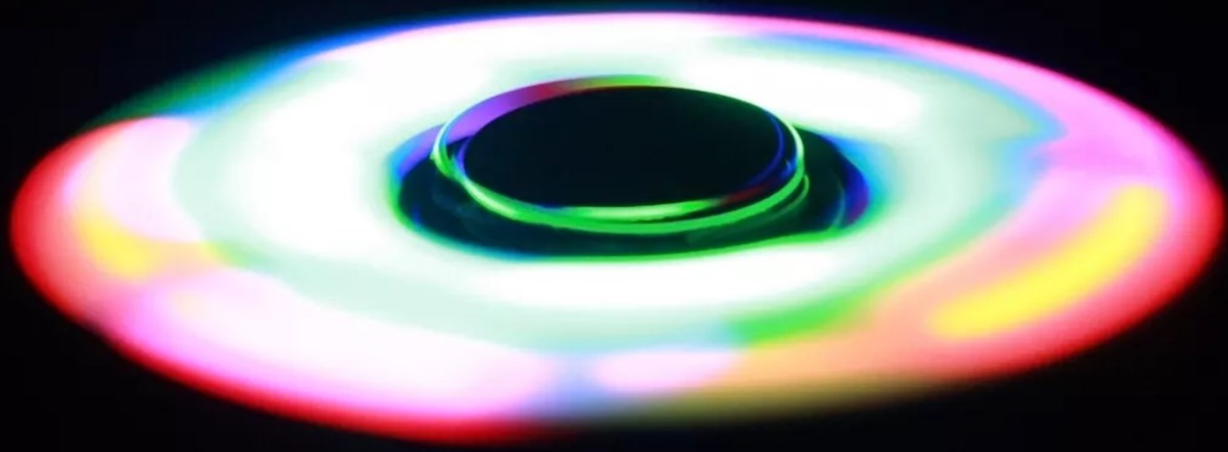
Liliana S. do Nascimento
Grade 10



Kaylie Stemple
Grade 10



Kaylie Stemple
Grade 10



Kai Henry-Hunter
Grade 12





Angelina Brooks

Grade 9



Short Stories

And Essays!

“I’ll give you the whole secret to short story writing. Here it is. Rule 1: Write stories that please yourself. There is no Rule 2.” – O. Henry

Winter Wonderland Has Someone Alone

A fictional short story

by Simone Parry, 4th grade

“Ding, ding!” rings the doorbell.

Faye’s best friend Finji flies past her, but Faye is fast, so she catches up easily. Together, they fly past the shops and go straight to the Tea House in the intersection of Winter Wonderland. When they fly in, it’s already crowded, so they bump into other fairies.

“Sorry!”

“Oops!”

They want to see what all the noise is about. As they reach the front of the room, they see the mayor making an announcement. They really started to wonder, and then she said it.

“I am very pixie sorry, but... we will not have any water for... 2 weeks,” the wise old elf granny said. DUN DUN DUN!

Everyone in the room gasped.

“Oh noooooo!”

The wise granny elf said, “We will still have water for your restroom needs!” PHEW! Everyone was relieved to hear some good news.

THE NEXT DAY

The fairies had gathered so much water as if they were refilling the whole ocean. One day, Faye heard something that did not sound like a fairy, so she decided to investigate. Of course, she needed Finji to help. They flew past the antique stores. Faye saw a big purple thing behind the buildings and she told Finji about it. He said, “Don’t worry.”

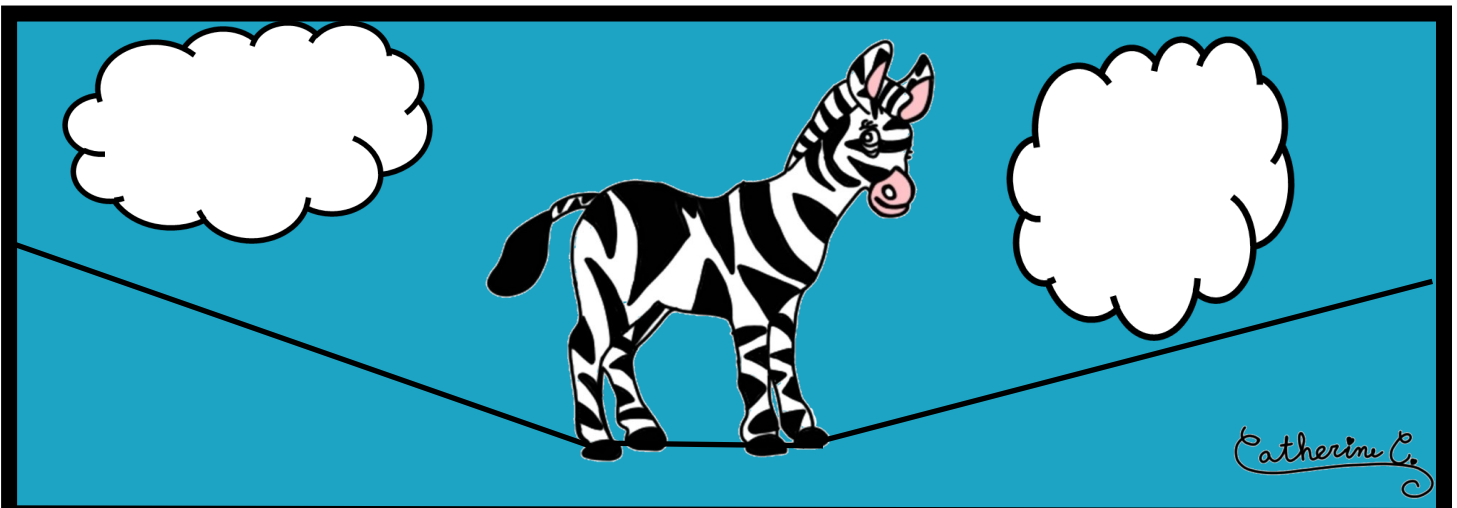
When they got to Faye’s house, Finji went to the bathroom. Faye snuck out to go look for the

purple thing that she saw earlier. A small giant quickly turned around and was face to face with Faye. He had a concerned look on his face, so Faye quieted down. She looked closer at the giant and realized he was sad. All of a sudden, Finji came out.

“I can’t find my way back home!” said the giant.

Within two minutes, they helped him find his home. They all hugged because they didn’t know what to feel. Sad, happy, mad? Then they hugged again and by some miracle, they all felt proud.

THE END



“Alfred's Big Apple Adventure”

by Faith Arnold



Long ago, there was a zebra named Alfred. Alfred lived in a nice Savanna. Life on the Savanna was amazing! Silky, soft yellow grass that was so comfortable for the animals’ hooves was there. Relaxing swamps to lay in to cool off were there also! But Alfred wasn’t happy there, unlike everyone else. You see, this is all because for as long as the animals could remember, there was always an abandoned cottage that was surrounded by trees in the forest part of the Savanna. Over the years, the wood had rotted, leaving the cottage covered in moss, pine, and ivy.

But recently, there was a girl driving an airplane over the Savanna. Suddenly, the airplane stopped and landed in the middle of the Savanna, and the girl came out. She moved into the old cottage, making it her new home. She also had a pet Golden Retriever with her that had a collar that was labeled “Winnie.” Alfred had never seen a human before this girl. But now that he knew who humans were, they seemed so nice! Alfred decided he wanted to have his own human owner for himself, just like Winnie did! But since he was a wild animal, Alfred thought that nobody would probably want him. Alfred believed that they would want tamed house pets. But if someone did want him for a pet, they would probably make him a part of their zoo and hold him captive and locked away from the rest of the world. Alfred didn’t want that. So, he decided later that day to drive the human girl’s airplane and fly away to get some art supplies. He hoped to decorate his coat to make him seem like another animal, more like a cat or a dog. He decided to wait for the girl and her dog Winnie to go to sleep so they wouldn’t notice. Later that night, Alfred took off and flew to the Big Apple, New York City!

A few hours later, Alfred landed on top of a skyscraper that was next to some green booger lady that had a pointy crown. (Which was the Statue of Liberty, but being a Zebra, he didn’t know what that was.) “Weird,” he thought. Alfred then leaned over the skyscraper to see what this building was called. It was called “Orthodontist.” “Whatever that means,” thought Alfred. As he was bending over, he noticed another building next to this that was labeled “Tie Dye Shop.” This would be the perfect place to dye his fur another color so he could look like another animal!



But Alfred ran into an issue! His plane battery had died, and he couldn't fly to the top of the Tie Dye Shop building. He was stuck on top of this building! *"How can I get across?"* he thought. Also Alfred kept thinking to himself because if someone heard or saw him talking, he knew they would be freaked out by the idea of a talking animal. So, he just kept thinking instead of speaking. As he looked around from his precarious perch, Alfred saw that there was a small wire that connected these two buildings. He had the brilliant idea to walk across the building, to be able to get to the Tie Dye Shop! He took a big gulp and swallowed deep in his throat roughly. He feared the idea of this because he imagined himself falling and dying. But he really wanted to have an owner so badly so he wouldn't be alone anymore (since the other animals in the Savanna didn't want to hang out with him.) He shook his head and refused to do this. He thought to himself, *"I might be crazy, but not so crazy that I have a death wish!"* But then Alfred thought, *"Come on Alf! If you don't do this, you could miss the opportunity of this working and getting an owner! You're thinking about what if it didn't work, but what if it did? Also face your fears!"* He thought how his inner voice was right, and slowly put one hoof on the wobbly wire...

Thirty minutes later (since he was slow and steady), he had crossed the long skinny wire successfully! He then unlocked the vent on the top of the skyscraper with his hooves. He went inside which led into a very skinny vent that was a tight squeeze. Still tough, Alfred pushed through and slid down the vent. Finally, the vent ended which made him fall out with a *PLOP!* Alfred had successfully fallen on his hooves, landing right in front of the cash register!

"Welcome to the Tie Dye Sho-Oh my!" said the man at the front desk. Alfred was puzzled and stood still. *"What was I thinking? People will question why I'm here!"* Luckily, Alfred thought of an idea and picked up a yellow post-it-note on the desk and grabbed a purple marker and wrote:

"The circus sent me. Can you please dye my fur? The master who sent me will pay you back later this week."

Alfred slowly pushed the post-it-note right in front of the man's face. The man read it and said, "Uh, alright then. Go over there where my sister Cindy can assist you with the tie dying." "Alright!" thought Alfred.

Alfred clip-clopped to the back corner of the shop and saw Cindy with a pink tie dye bottle in her hand. "Oh my gosh! You're such a cute little fella! Can I take you home?!" Cindy asked. *"Someone actually likes me just the way I am!"* Alfred thought. Alfred nodded. "Actually, Sir, can we get a raincheck on that tie dying?" Alfred asked, walking out the door with Cindy holding him in her arms. Cindy brought him to his new home, where they all lived happily ever after.

Well, at least in my dream. I saw Alfred leaving in my owner's plane, and that's what I dreamt would happen when he left. Who am I, you may ask. Well, I'm Winnie. I guess we'll never know what *truly* happened to Alfred when he went to New York!



Langston Hughes 2023 Youth Oratorical Contest Speech

Introduction: Good Afternoon my name is Anthony Wilder.

I will be reciting an original speech I wrote inspired by

Langston Hughes' poem: "Let Life be like music."

*Life is for the Living
Death is for the dead
Let Life be like Music
And Death a Note Instead*

In this quote, I imagine of the separation between life and death, I imagine about how life could be that of a symphony of notes, but death gets one singular note. I imagine myself riding the road to heaven and I imagine sitting in an empty void called "THE END OF LIFE" or "THE BEGINNING OF DEATH." I imagine the special moments that we share with our families on Christmas Day and I imagine Bombs, destroying countries and bullets, ending lives.

Now, I'm going to break down the poem. Life is for the living and death is for the dead (wait 3 seconds) Life and death are what separate anything and everything. Life is the most precious thing humans have. More precious than money (wait 2 seconds), fancy cars (wait 2 seconds), or anything else that gives us pleasure. Death is your foreverness. After, your life then comes death. Let life be like music. Life is full of wonderful things, and in your life, there is always room to grow or to add new notes just like music. (Wait 2 seconds) And just like music throughout our years we change, our rhythm gets stronger, our melodies rise, and the dynamic gets larger, just like music. We sometimes forget all the positive things in our life because all we are worried about are the negative things in our life. We need to stop, sit down, and listen to music.

I want to really talk to you for a quick second. I want everyone to imagine what you think the overall concept of life is. Is it as colorful as music? Is it as beautiful as an evening sun going to rest? Or is it as dark and frightening as a nightmare in the dead of night? How would you imagine life as it is now?

Would you think of it as a harmonious place with peace, pleasure, and love? Or would you think of it as a raging dumpster fire when a war between countries happens almost every year, and Death a note instead? Langston Hughes said that death is one note. In

many ways we could be that one note. In times of trouble, we are that one note, in times of suffering we are that one note, in times of sadness brutality, pain, and heartache we are that one note. And yet we still have a lot to learn about the notes that have been given to us, and about the notes that we are going to give to our children and children's children.

Maya Angelou once said, "Life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath away." What she means by this is, that life is about the special moments that happen within that life that really mean the most to us as human beings.

Life is described as a lot of big moments. Within these big moments are the smallest moments of our lives, the ones that might pop into our brain occasionally, but that we don't remember right on the spot. The ones that we keep to ourselves when we don't want to share them amongst our peers. The ones that comfort us in times of need and when we just need something to think about when we are alone in the fragment of time we call, "Life."

It's funny how we can think of life as an area where humans adapt and learn but we're too afraid to learn about important topics on the news because we don't want to see the brutality of one human to another human. We don't want to see the weather reports of not yet again terrible weather that we're not supposed to be used to because of climate change that us humans created. We don't want to see reports of how many people are unemployed each year because us humans just must have more money because we think money equals happiness. I'm not going to lie, the ones that turn on the News every day are brave souls in this life, but most of us don't turn on the news because we want to live a perfect, peaceful life.

So let life be like you, let life be that of a symphony of notes, let life shine till it cannot bear not a ray of light and let life be like music.

Ending: Thank you for your time.

The Mandela Catalogue

by

Elizabeth M. Gates

Alex Kister started an independent horror YouTube series in 2021 titled *The Mandela Catalogue*. The series is, to date, the best horror series on YouTube, even now with the most recent release in very late 2022. While the series has evolved and changed over the course of its continuous run, the basis foundation has remained the same, keeping it as the continuous best horror series to date.

The Mandela Catalogue has evolved greatly since the debut of the series, going from analog horror and just being an edited biblical cartoon for kids to now having entire live-action sequences and, as the antithesis, having completely CGI characters that are just as important to the plot. This comes not just as story development, but also the technical skill of Alex Kister improving as he continued to work on this series as a true passion product. Not only did *The Mandela Catalogue* improve in technical quality, it improved fast. Only the second video in the series starting the in-person scenes, albeit it was dashcam footage of driving, it's impressive nonetheless. *The Mandela Catalogue* also has had great audience expansion in its lifespan, much like other large creators such as Wendigoon and Night Mind, making multiple in-depth analyses on the story's rich and complex plot that has been intricately built over the last two years. This has led to most, if not all, people knowing at least *The Mandela Catalogue's* name, which leads them to Alex's channel and gives him more views; from there it's a quality-production budget cycle.

Visceral terror is a term that is thrown around so much that the meaning of it has been kind of muddled. However, *The Mandela Catalogue* has succeeded in being a consistently viscerally terrifying experience from day one. Visceral terror is a scare or a topic that is meant not to get the audience that quick adrenaline shot and more to make them feel a knot in their stomach; the kind of fear that makes the audience paranoid and check over their shoulder every time they're home alone. While a very difficult thing to do, it's well done in *The Mandela Catalogue* because the series plays on very common fears, like fears of being replaced and forgotten, fears of following false idols and fears of one's families or loved ones having been replaced with clones or exact replicas (Capgras syndrome), which are all the kinds of fear that aren't like jump scares that are one and done, but rather a lingering fear that sometimes turns to hatred. These are both emotions that Alex and his team have been very effectively toying with to get their audience to experience. Something that isn't unique to *The Mandela Catalogue*, but that it does best, is using police sketches to characterize certain characters. Police sketches are intentionally sort of creepy and a little off, most of them just barely hitting the uncanny valley so that it sticks with everyone who sees it. Due to *The Mandela Catalogue* using these police sketches, they're successfully stuck in the audience's head, only this time with the horrifying dialogue they're often accompanied with.

When *The Mandela Catalogue* started, most people, if not everyone, thought it was just another analog horror series—a good one, for sure, but one that is the same as the rest. Over time, however, everyone has been more and more pleasantly surprised with not only the quality of *The Mandela Catalogue*, but also how its quality keeps continuously increasing. Getting to watch a content creator grow and improve upon what has obviously been their dream for a long time is a satisfaction that not a lot of people get to experience, but it's an incredibly beautiful scenario to watch unfold. Horror is a very hard thing to do, and an even harder thing to perfect. While Alex Kister may not have perfected horror as a total genre, he definitely gained a solid chokehold on the independent horror series genre.

While *The Mandela Catalogue* is the best independent horror series, it is not the first. Before it there was a series called *The Walten Files*, an analog horror series that is loosely based on, but very heavily inspired by, the popular game series *Five Night's at Freddy's*. In an interview with another YouTuber, Wendigoon, Alex Kister stated, "I would say most of my inspirations kind of came from analog horror when it was in its first wave of popularity before I started out; things like *Gemini Home Entertainment*, *Local 58*, and especially *The Walten Files*." This really comes across when watching *The Mandela Catalogue*. It is, in no way, a dreadful thing, as the inspiration is mostly shown through small homages and maybe even a reference here or there. Alex mentioned two other horror series as specific inspirations: *Gemini Home Entertainment*, a cosmic horror series based loosely on the Indigenous folklore of Skinwalkers, and *Local 58* which is an analog horror series about a radio station taken over by outer world beings. While these are both significant simplifications of the two series' intricate and quite thick plots, when watching them after *The Mandela Catalogue*, or vice versa, the inspirations are very apparent and, in a way, charming to see.

So what if this is all temporary? What if *The Mandela Catalogue* is in its early heyday and starts declining in quality very soon? It is a horror series, meaning that already the audience loyalty can be very finicky because of how easy it is to mess up horror, and it's still a series on YouTube. At the end of the day, quality aside, it is a YouTube series and no matter how technically advanced Alex Kister is, YouTube's algorithm is very broken and incredibly biased, and it is not an algorithm that enjoys horror. YouTube seems to want a family-friendly creator base that will make content that anyone of any age can view, and *The Mandela Catalogue* is just not what the YouTube algorithm is looking for. On top of all of that, the system YouTube uses to determine whether a video should be viewed by the general public is completely automated with very literal human interaction, even that little bit being post-mortem after the automation makes decisions. *The Mandela Catalogue* is a finicky genre on a finicky and broken platform, so there is a chance it could be temporary. However, even if the storytelling and fanbase for *The Mandela Catalogue* deteriorates, that isn't all that the series has running for it. Due to the great gaps between episodes being almost completely full of Alex Kister working on the newer episodes, there are no signs of the video and technical quality of *The Mandela Catalogue* diminishing, and that's what is most important. In truth, at its core, the beauty of *The Mandela Catalogue* is seeing Alex, a 19-year-old independent aspiring filmmaker, grow his own skills and improve upon his own technical knowledge and the audience getting to interact with that. It is also about seeing a community of people, many of whom are also aspiring filmmakers or storytellers that see Alex Kister as a large inspiration. Also, Alex Kister released multiple plushies from *The Mandela Catalogue* and those will never go away.

The Damage of “Leader Not a Follower” Mentality

by

Kai Henry-Hunter

Over the years I’ve noticed that sayings like “Be a leader not a follower” and all those alike can have an effect on someone’s self-development. For starters, there’s the unnecessary pressure that comes with constantly being told to be a leader and maintain this act of leadership. All the time we’re told to think for ourselves and that we should aim to be our own new and original selves. But when we derive ideas or inspiration from outside sources we’re drilled with questions and comment. This can result in someone falling into a state of self-doubt and experiencing imposter syndrome. If the leading thought is that if we’re unable to come up with ideas and decide on things from scratch, then we’re followers. Over time, people are going to lose the motive for trying new things, like picking up a hobby because they watched a show about it, or visiting a new place because everyone they know says it’s amazing without feeling like they’re not being themselves. Naturally, to prevent this from happening, people will start to think twice about keeping you up to date on what they’re interested in. Even more so if your response to a thing is, “It’s just a phase/You’ll get over it.” That way when you do find out it’ll just be this fun little piece of information and not an opportunity for critiques. Aside from this, there’s also a strong possibility for someone to develop a toxic sense of individualism in a way that makes it harder for people with this mindset to operate in a group of people without feeling like they have to either take control of the room, or like they’re unable to contribute anything unique.

Another thing that’s important to take note of when it comes to the “leader not a follower” mentality is that logically speaking you’re constantly flowing between the two when necessary. Of course, some people will lean more to one side than the other. But that doesn’t change the fact that being able to experience both in a healthy way is what truly makes someone a good “leader” be that of themselves or other people. There’s no way to navigate life in a way where you’ll be considered the “leader” of something in every situation. We’ve all done something, wanted to do something, and held off on doing something, based off the response it got from other people rather than be visiting a new place, buying something online, or pursuing a hobby/job. This could be considered using the behaviors of a “follower” to make leader type decisions proving that terms like “be a leader not a follower” only apply to specific situations, and that sometimes the best ways to become a leader is to sit back and observe.

Going back now to how the pressure of this can affect people's curiosity and willingness to follow through with new things; preventing them achieving the individuality we're all told to look for. With there being so much around us, we're bound to be curious and want to try a little bit of everything. But receiving constant criticism on being a "follower," however that may present itself, will stop people from wanting to explore their curiosities. Being told not to try for something just because you didn't naturally come to the conclusion to try it, can prevent you from experiencing new things. You can't discover what you do and don't like without the trial and error of trying new things and exploring the different parts of your identity. Over time, you'll start to adapt to the things around you with a better understanding of who you are as a person making it easier to navigate the world and identify the things you do and don't want.

But all things considered, I do understand that the original point of telling people to be a leader not a follower is to prevent them from blindly following the crowd. Especially when it comes to children that are more naive and susceptible to following the bad influences of others, or caving under peer pressure when it comes to trying new things. This can result in people getting hurt over things that they originally didn't want to do when it could have been avoided. People who don't learn this lesson early, often grow up making a series of bad decisions and won't be capable of deciding things for themselves. That's why it's so important to push for that independence early on. While those are fair points, it's important to understand that it's not what you say but how you say it, not everyone who enforces the "leader not a follower" mentality expands on how you should be more critical of whether or not what you're doing is a good idea or morally the right thing to do before making a decision or going along with what other people are doing around you.

Overall, just like most things, teaching these types of lessons to kids and young adults is all about how you do it. Being too critical of others for trying new things or looking farther into a piece of information can be damaging to self-development. Going through phases is a part of being human and nothing is ever set in stone when you first try it out. We have to allow people to decide for themselves if what they're doing will just be another phase in their self-discovery or something that will stick with them, along with taking away the negative connotations that comes with calling something a "phase" to prevent the negative effects these things can have on self-development.

Abby and Ava
By Nyriah G.
Grade 3

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Chapter 1: California!

“Be quiet you rascal!” said Jaden.

“I’m sorry,” said Ava.

“What do you think you're doing!” said Abby.

“Oh, the little babies came to save her,” said Jaden.

“I will kick you so far that you would make it to Burger King,” said Ava.

“Try me,” said Jaden.

“Ok,” said Ava.

Narrator: “Then Ava kicked Jaden into the janitor’s closet,”

“That was awesome,” said Abby.

“Thanks!” said Ava.

“I do karate every Thursday,” said Ava.

“That’s really impressive,” said Abby.

The next day

Ava went to Abby telling her some awful news.

“I am going to California for a week,” said Ava.

“Oh,” said Abby.

“What’s wrong?” said Ava.

“What if Jaden starts to pick on me, who would be there to help?” said Abby.

Before Ava could respond, her parents called her regarding that they needed to get to the airport before lifting off.

Ava left in a rush.

Abby was speechless.

Chapter 2: Going to Grandpa's House

The next day

The principal announced that Ava wasn't coming back for a week.

"Oh no," said Abby with a dispirited tone.

At lunch Jaden took Abby's lunch without consent, Abby soon came into the janitor's closet and before Abby could react a bunch of cleaning supplies came falling off of the shelves which made a big thud.

Abby was soon stuck inside the janitor's closet, she screamed for help, but nobody answered.

2 Hours Later

The math teacher heard the screams and went to help, she got Abby out of the closet, and she went home.

The next day

Instead of going to school where she disprized, she went to her grandfather's house without her mom knowing.

When she got to her grandfather's house, he was astonished. Her grandfather then said she could stay if she wanted which she could only stay for a week since she couldn't stay out of school for long. They played board games and made cookies, but after that week was over, she went to school knowing that Ava would be back by now.

Chapter 3: Never Bullying Again

Abby left her grandfather's house to go home. When she was close to home, she noticed something in the distance it sounded very isolated like police sirens. Once she got closer to home, she noticed that there were about 5 cop cars outside her home. Also, flyers noting that she went missing. She went running into her house only to find a detective questioning her mother about the last time she had seen Abby.

Once her mom noticed her, she went and gave her a big hug.

Abby's mom questioned where she has been the whole time and why she has been absent from school. But all Abby could do was give her a blank sorrowful stare and stuttered with a response.

Abby went to school the next day and seen Ava; she ran to her with relief telling her all the stuff she went through while she was gone, and Ava was furious. Ava went up to Jaden and slapped him, leaving a hand mark. After that incident Jaden never bullied Abby or anyone else again due to the lack of embarrassment.

Short Story

by Paige Arnold

It was very early in the morning when a strange loud bang woke up Robert. Robert ran down the hall to his daughter Sarah's room. When Robert opened the door, he didn't see his daughter. All Robert saw were large spikes. He ran his fingers down the spikes, which felt like a dragon's back. Suddenly, The Door slammed shut. A silhouette of a face appeared on The Door.

A deep echoing voice coming from The Door said, "Hello Robert." Robert frightenedly asked, "How do you know my name?" The Door said, "I know everything about you." Then he had an evil laugh.

In a panicked state Robert shouted, "Where is my daughter?" "You can see your daughter only if you answer this riddle. You have three chances to get it right or else," shouted The Door. "What has a blade of jagged cut. Keep the quickest hand out shut. Goes in darkness. Wear a ring. One is quiet, many sings," asked The Door.

"Uhhh... an animal?" asked Robert.

"You fool!" The Door screamed.

"How about a sword?" asked Robert.

"You silly mortal, you'll never get this right!" yelled The Door, laughing.

Robert took a long pause and said, "A key?"

Suddenly, through the thick red smoke that appeared, Robert heard Sarah's voice shouting, "Dad? Are you okay?"

Dazed, Robert woke up to find himself lying on the couch next to his daughter.

Sarah complained, "You fell asleep during our movie."

"I'm so sorry Sarah. It must have been a bad dream," said Robert

"Let's go upstairs," said Sarah.

As Robert headed upstairs, he looked up and saw the spikes on the wall again...

**Damage and Light:
a personal narrative
by
Kyla Lampkin**

The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. As her life continues on there isn't a moment she doesn't feel anything. That day her eyes opened to a darker place. A place she wasn't ready to feel as alone as she did when she was sent away. Being there for weeks didn't help her. The therapy. No. The extra care. Not this time. She broke down feeling her whole life she was abandoned, left on her own.

Ignoring a mental illness can cause so much damage to a single person. Depression was never on her list in life, and she endured all of that so young. *I am a disappointment*; she would say to herself. A content, warm life seemed impossible. She got behind in school not able to focus; got sick and didn't eat, *still won't eat, still can't eat. Mom?* And then her life took a big turn as she got older.

But there was Music. To her, it was the therapy that helped to stay connected. But there were times as she got older that she lost herself by putting everyone else first. When good came close, she pushed away, (she lost a lot of good by being stubborn), but that's how she was raised, to never let anyone get too close again. She was used to everyone up and leaving. She failed for a year even if everyone seemed supportive of her to be better. Then they flipped a switch and blamed her for everything. The music was there, but they were not.

One lovely morning turned somber with one look at herself. Life got harder not easier. Her mind didn't get clear by the day it got darker and foggier. She didn't know what to do with herself anymore. She was **stuck**. Lost interest in so much, even within herself. She lost herself within another person trying to please and manage her life for another person's sake. Not a day went by in her room with the same four plain walls, with a slight echo in the room. No privacy, no valid feelings, just bottled-up emotions.

She had no outlet; she had no way to scream and be heard. She knew she could only save herself from her demons. No one believed the pain she endured could have been so strong, but it was. It caused her so much damage. People around her didn't notice her pain because she was taught to hide it so well. Her family attempted to listen, but she couldn't explain it right and they always shot her down wondering and asking her what *she* did wrong.

She knows she isn't perfect; she knows she is a walking flaw. But she learned to accept herself and her scars and check her emotions. She is a work in progress. The days she woke up and thought so negatively, she knew nothing but pain and hatred and abandonment. They'd ask her, *Why do you think your life is so bad?* And her response every time was, *I know it's not, but there were people who could have helped prevent all this.* Now she has that. And the music. She sees brighter days ahead.

She is me.

Depth Of Emotion

by

Jacques Orlando Gardner Jr.

For something school told us would only last two weeks, it felt like it lasted forever. This all started on March 13th 2020. Funny enough, that was Friday the 13th. Bad luck, isn't it? The day that we were leaving the school honestly, something told me that this may be the last time you see a lot of these people in person. So, I was trying to get everybody's phone numbers so we could talk. At first, I think everybody was excited to be off for two weeks. Everybody was just waiting for the two weeks to be over or wanting it to never end, for those who wanted it to continue which, it did for a very long time.

When I look back to those two weeks, I was still really happy I didn't have to do any schoolwork and I was basically able to do what I wanted, when I wanted. After four more weeks of this lax lifestyle, while also watching the news seeing how the pandemic was affecting everything, I think it probably caused me to become paranoid of even going outside. This had to be one of the first things I lost about myself, even though I was an introvert before this just made it drastically worse. I didn't want to leave the house, I didn't want to leave my room, I barely wanted to do anything. The worst part about this is that I was being asked by my mom daily to come back to Aberdeen, but I had already become comfortable with my dad so I didn't want to leave. Plus, my bonus mom was about to have my brother Jonathan and I wanted to be there for him which I'm glad I did. Something that kind of kept me going was honestly my "friends." I think being able to play games with a few of them and staying up with some of them, kept me content and calm even though I was becoming almost a shut-in, until something happened.

Suddenly, I felt like I was losing everything around me.

- First, it was one of my favorite shows “Steven Universe” that kept me happy through my parent’s divorce.
- Two, one of my girlfriends that I had confessed to stopped talking to me.
- Three, all of my male friends besides one, stopped answering my calls.

The last one, is that my best friend Jalen who I thought of as a brother was moving back to Alabama, which made me sad. But he said he should be able to meet me before they went back which made me happy. He would be the first friend I got to see in person after such a long time after not seeing anyone besides family. Yet as fate would have it, he wasn’t able to come.

After these back-to-back blows, I was starting to finally break down. After losing so much, I cried my heart out while hitting wood with an axe. When I came in the house, I didn’t want to do anything. I didn’t even want to eat. When my dad noticed, he asked me what was wrong. Before I broke into tears again, I told him everything that I was losing and explained why I was feeling this way. But the thing that surprised me, was my dad showed me a video of him also breaking down over losing his dad. The thing is, I hadn’t seen my dad cry since the divorce. So, the fact I’m saw him cry now helped me feel like there was someone who understood what I was going through. This had helped me so much, for the time being, before even more stuff started that may not have been as bad, but made me stop where I was.

It had been a few months since that breakdown, so I had finally started to get back in motion. It was hard to get over the fact that a lot of things in my life were gone. But I realized I still had my family, plus me and Jaylen were able to use Messenger so that helped as well making me realize that I wasn't alone as long as I have them. For the time before 10th grade, I had been working a lot with my dad putting down tile, constructing a room, cleaning out houses, and even built up a wall outside with wood. This helped me pass time, get paid and also gave me good working experience with construction which gave me the benefit of actually getting back into a bit of drawing. When the 10th grade started, I was a bit shy since we actually had to be on a video call. But the majority of the time, we didn't even have to have our cameras on so that helped. But this is where the problems started.

It's really easy to keep up with everything honestly since it was the beginning of the year. I was able to like the majority of my teachers besides one which was my English teacher. She didn't like how I talked and she didn't like how I would stand up to her when a person was late when that person was actually staying behind with another teacher to talk about an assignment. I felt as if the teacher did not like me at all. A teacher doesn't really necessarily have to like you to have that relationship as a teacher and student, but this was different. She really did not like me at all. I also feel like this affected some assignments that I would do in class because, either I wouldn't add enough or even when I did add enough she would make an excuse that there wasn't enough quotes when I did the quote minimum. Yet something that I did that helped for while was cooking. It felt like something that I didn't want to let go of. I was able to cook a wide variety thanks to a delivery service called Hello Fresh. It actually helped me focus more for a while in school. Yet without me realizing, I fell behind.

It was slow until I missed a couple of product assignments, which tanked my grade a significant amount. But it took me too long to realize the thing I loved so much was consuming a majority of my time and that I needed to take responsibility while also stop doing the thing that made me happy. As soon as I stopped doing this, it felt as if everything stopped.

The work I was doing, the improvement of my cooking skills, and the happiness I was feeling just stopped. I didn't feel anything, I didn't care. Honestly, I stopped coming to class because I couldn't even find a reason to get out of bed. So I would just honestly sleep or be on my phone. The only thing that snapped me out of it was when my parents started to ask for my grades. This, being the first emotions that I felt in a while, I panicked. But when I showed them, everything got shut down. My phone, and me being in my room during the day got taken away until I was able to get my grades up.

During this time, I saw that I was actually eating a lot more. I knew I was eating a lot before, but this was overkill compared to what I was doing before. But it sort of helped in a good way and a bad way since I was able to get my grades up and I didn't feel as bad as I was after I was forced to stop cooking. Downside is it made me gain a lot of weight, around 20 to 30 pounds. So when I went for a doctor's checkup after such a long time, I was told to go on a diet and to start walking, while also trying to actually talk about my feelings. The walks made me realize something: I haven't truly been living my life. I've just been staying inside, not showing off who I am, not being confident in my ability. This life I'm living isn't truly living. In order for me to grow, I need to take a step forward and hopefully not look back. After this realization, the problems that were there were still there, but it wouldn't stop me. Right now, I felt better than ever and once the year passed I was glad that my life was finally better.

Since the end of 10th grade, things started to change a lot. Jalen and I were getting back into playing music. We were even trying to do video game music, while I also learned different songs to improve my knowledge of piano. This allowed me to do more for the videogame music and also enjoy it myself. Since it was summer, I even started to go on trail walks to explore something new while also taking picture of the trees, the rain, how the leaves were growing, and a stream being created from a river. All of these things showed change just like I was, which, made me think deeper about the small things when there are actually bigger things if looked closer. When the school year started, I finally felt more confident in myself to be more vocal when it came to assignments, to be more out there. For example, I would actually do extra credit, stay after for PLT, and even tried to connect with my teachers and other students.

As the year went on, for the first time in a while I had a crush on one particular girl that was cool, told a lot of jokes, and had pretty funny memes. From what I felt, it seemed as if we could have been in a pretty good relationship, but sadly she wasn't able to be in one. Never could figure out why after Valentine's Day, but after all the times of being sad this didn't get me down even if it hurt that I couldn't be in a relationship with her. I was able to take it and be able to move on with a smile which weirdly enough made me happy.

One good thing that came out of this is that I wanted to join the Gaming Club. This actually helped me make a lot more friends that I honestly was really happy to have. I was able to actually do something after school, with other people who had the same interest.

It kept me on my toes while also giving me a sort of comfort. The more comfortable I got, the more clear my mind became. Then I realized business management was my favorite class and I also was very interested in the subject. Plus, my dad has done business before and does real estate. It was like a mind opener for me that this can be something I can do, while also still getting advice from someone who's already able to do it in my life. When this thought came together it felt like my path was finally clear after such a long time of it being shaded in mist and confusion. Even though it'll take time, the path that I'm going down I can already see the end with the light that I needed such a long time ago.

In conclusion, the time in the pandemic has changed everyone in good ways or bad ways. Whether or not you let it change you is up to you. Whether it be that you finally got the help that you needed or you're able to overcome this struggle alone. Be happy that you were the one who made it, even with all the struggles that the pandemic put on to you, the stress of feeling alone, and never feeling like you could ever go outside again. If someone is reading this now and is going through something and they feel as if they can't do it, please get help or use the people that you have around you as a crutch so that you can get back up again even if it feels as if you're broken. Through all the trials of life and the depression, you need to get back up.

This is what I want people to take away from this essay: Never give up hope that the next day, the next week, the next month, the next year can be better — even if you feel like it isn't now. Because, it will get better and if it feels like it's taking too long, do something and make a change to make it better.

Swan Creek School

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Illustration courtesy of Swan Creek School

Mission: Swan Creek School's mission is to provide an engaging and flexible personalized educational experience empowering our students in Grades 1 to 12 to develop the skills, knowledge and values that lead to a fulfilling life of service and ethical leadership in a global community.

Vision: Swan Creek School's vision is to become the leader in providing personalized alternative learning opportunities that best fit our students' strengths as young scholars in a world that is redefining new norms as they pertain to learning and applying a diverse skillset within our community.