



VARIATIONS

2020

VARIATIONS

Literary and Creative Arts Magazine

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North Allegheny Senior High School

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Ms. Natasha Dirda
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Ms. Sue Testa
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The NASH English Department

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VARIATIONS Staff

Editor in Chief

Betul Tuncer

Artistic Editor

Parastoo Aramesh

Layout Editor

Ashley Chung

Literary Editor

Jonathan Ross

Publicity and Business Editor

Saranya Muthmula

Faculty Advisors

Mrs. Kathy Esposito

Ms. Kristin Yakich

Layout Department

Ashley Chung

Literary Department

Saranya Muthumula

Marissa Rodriguez

Jonathan Ross

Betul Tuncer

Artistic Department

Parastoo Aramesh

Junmo Jeon

Christina Zhou

Policy and Selection Statement

VARIATIONS Literary and Creative Arts Magazine is published annually by the North Allegheny Senior High School located at 10375 Perry Highway, Wexford, Pennsylvania 15090. The content of this magazine consists of text, artwork, and photographs submitted by juniors or seniors currently enrolled at North Allegheny Senior High School. With the exception of artwork, the staff is not responsible for returning any submissions to the students. *VARIATIONS* is not affiliated with any one section, group, or organization within the Senior High School.

Each work submitted to *VARIATIONS* is judged fairly without bias on the part of the staff and without knowledge of the author's or artist's identity. Members of the staff are eligible to submit entries, but they do not participate in the evaluation of their own work, allowing all submissions to be judged impartially.

The Editorial and Literary Departments vote on the literary works submitted to this magazine. Entries are judged on literary content using generally accepted standards of evaluation. The staff reserves the right to edit the literary entries for punctuation, spelling, grammar, and syntax.

The Artistic Department selects works based on their intrinsic appeal and perceptible artistic proficiency. The staff strives to incorporate a variety of styles, subject matter, and genres as selections are made.

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All submissions are uploaded electronically to the North Allegheny Blackboard page.

Preface

Betul Tuncer
Editor in Chief

In life we often have setbacks that can drastically change us and the way we look at the world. Lately it seems as though everyone's life has been put on pause, and we're all just earnestly waiting to get back to what used to be normal. This year, we have faced a once in a lifetime setback that will affect us for many years to come. Our hope with the 2019-2020 edition of *VARIATIONS* is that through literature and art we can bring smiles to saddened faces and a sense of familiar normality among all the chaos. We hope that as you, our readers, go through these beautiful student works that you are able to reminisce on the past, be aware and mindful of your present and look towards tomorrow with a bit more hope.

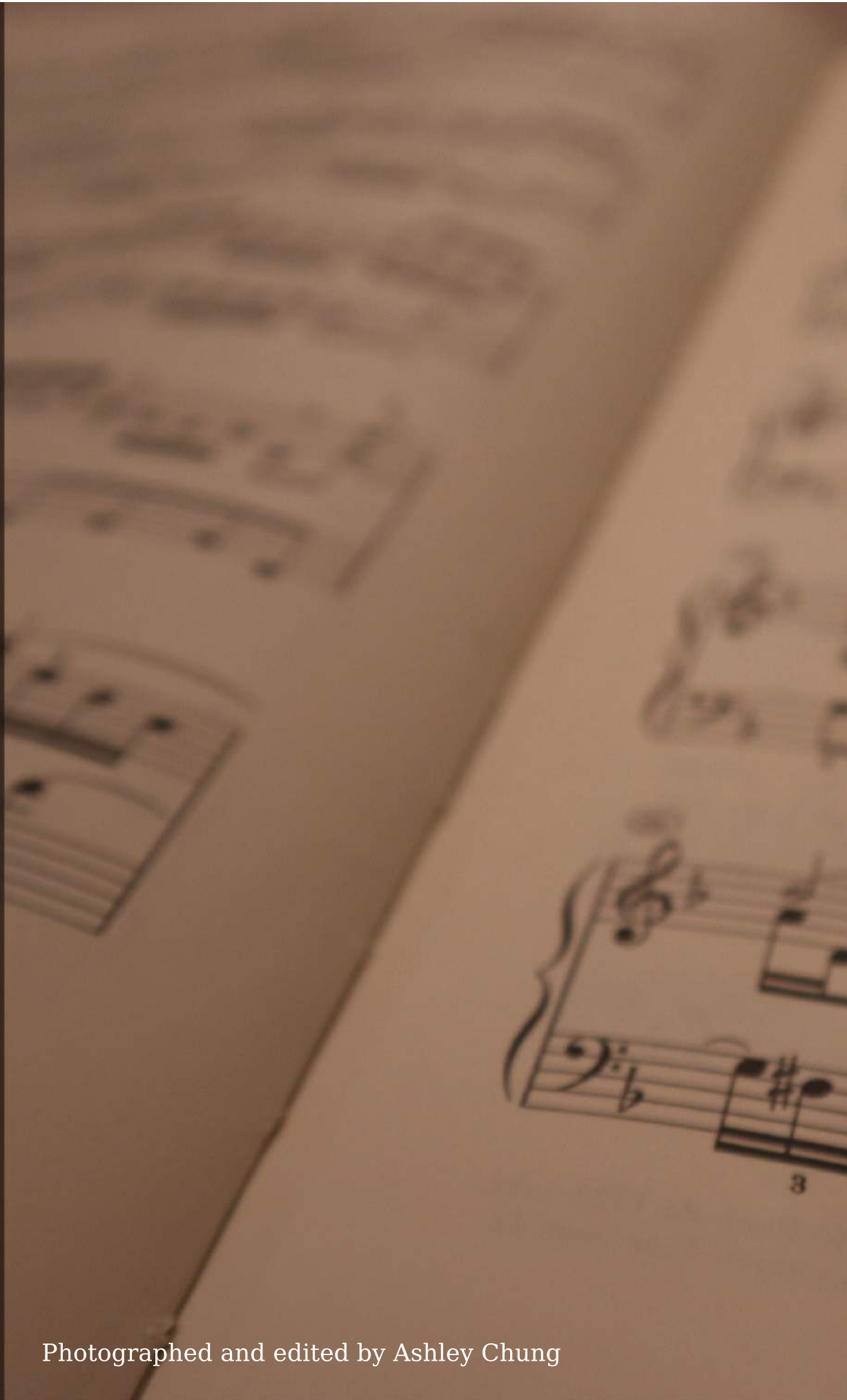
The following pages of this year's magazine will take you on a journey of life and its many frames, from memories to mindfulness to morrow. We start out our journey in the magazine with memories, through student work that reminds us of life before now. These include pieces that make us feel sorrow for what once was, but also pieces that bring us joy through fonder memories. Through this we continue into mindfulness, where we include works that allow us to take a moment to think about how we feel in these very moments. Lastly, we finish off the literary and art journey with morrow, through pieces that move us to look onward and hopeful for the future.

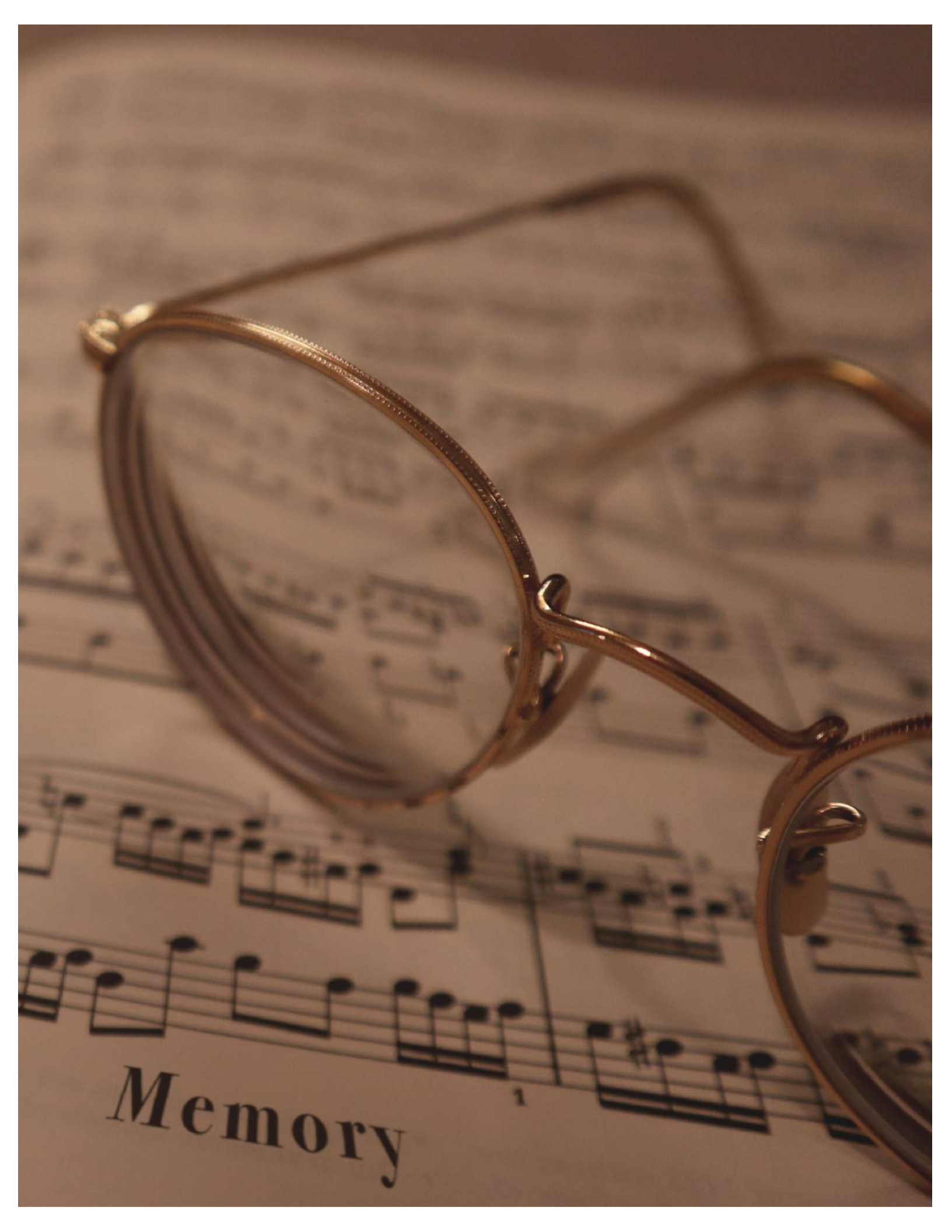
As the 2019-2020 Editor-in-Chief, I have been able to fully understand just how much literature and art can affect the way we look at the world, for better or worse. Seeing the beauty and creativity that lies within every individual poem, story, painting, drawing and countless other amazing works done by my fellow classmates, I do believe that in this case it's for the better. I applaud and deeply thank every one of my peers for being brave enough to share their creativity with us and be a part of this year's vision. I also want to acknowledge our *VARIATIONS* staff for pulling together through an immensely hard time in order to make this magazine and our 20/20 vision possible.

And finally to our readers, I hope that as you experience the frames of life through the eyes of creative students, you are able to appreciate and empathize with them. During these scary and unprecedented times, we have seen just how quickly our worlds can erupt into chaos. However, it is extremely important that we do not let that chaos make us forget our humanity. We mustn't let negative thoughts, hate or anger dictate the way we look at the world. We hope through this concept of 20/20 vision we can all learn to be aware of the past and present and look on the bright side of what's to come. After all, 20/20 is hindsight.

VARIATIONS 2020

Photographed and edited by Ashley Chung



A pair of gold-rimmed glasses with clear lenses is positioned over a sheet of musical notation. The glasses are slightly out of focus, while the musical notes and the word 'Memory' are sharp. The lighting is warm and soft, creating a nostalgic atmosphere. The musical notation consists of several staves with various notes and rests. The word 'Memory' is written in a classic serif font at the bottom left of the page.

Memory

1,548

Julia Poppa

Poetry

I miss the chairs You built for me In the
hillside

Muddied pants And
our tears To plant
deeds

Did they grow? Did
they grow?

One day I will find
them; One day I will
find you

I will build our chairs Into
the hillside And cry tears
To plant seeds

I will save you a seat And
we will watch

Fires

Floods

Rise and fall

Skies ablaze

Chariots crashing

As dilettantes dispute

morality

Infinites end

Holding weathered hands

Watching the world crumble

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Pictures of the Past

Shiloh Feeney

Photograph



Blackening Banana

Brooke Schmitz

Poetry

Ripening,
Aging,
Blackening with time,
Becoming speckled and blemished,
Warped from age and grime.
Color begins to fade away,
As the inky black ensues,
Like an inkbottle tipped over,
Leaving its contents spewed.

Doo-Wop

Sofia Brickner

Nonfiction

The crackle and pop of the record begins as it slowly turns and comes to life. The room suddenly fills with rich, upbeat music from simpler times, a blast from the past.

Doo-wop, a style of rhythm and blues and rock-and-roll vocal music most popular in the 1950s and 60s, is now slowly starting to make a comeback in our generation. Not only is it soulful and romantic, but it is nostalgic in the sense that it brings back memories of popping into a diner or going to a local drive-in movie. Whether it be through a movie, the weekly recommended Spotify playlist, a TV show, or a catchy audio on Tik Tok, doo-wop is resurfacing for our generation to enjoy.

Oddly enough, the term “doo-wop” came from the sounds made by the harmony singers who backed up the lead vocalist singing the melody of the song. The harmonies, which were meant to imitate musical instruments, were as important to the song as the main melody itself. The style won over the hearts of many, as the lyrics were simple and usually about love. The popularity of doo-wop among young singers in urban American communities of the 1950s grew due to the fact that the music could be performed effectively a cappella. Since many performers had no access to instruments, the vocal ensemble was the most popular musical performing group. Often, groups would rehearse where their harmonies would best be heard—anywhere that could provide an echo. From high school bathrooms to street corners or stoops and under bridges, doo-wop was performed almost anywhere during the American mid-century.

Today, teens are constantly listening to newly released music, but many are unaware of the unique, bright style of music of the past. Arranged below is a list of “hidden gems,” doo-wop songs that are as easy to cherish as they are timeless. The more our generation is exposed to music such as doo-wop, the more we can enjoy contrasting genres. Although it may not be for everyone, the heart and soul of doo-wop is sure to captivate almost anyone listening.

1. Sh-Boom--The Chords (1954)
2. Blue Moon--The Marcels (1934)
3. Can't We Be Sweethearts--The Cleftones (1956)
4. Teenager in Love--Dion & The Belmonts (1959)
5. We Belong Together--Ritchie Valens (1958)
6. A Teenager's Romance--Ricky Nelson (1957)
7. Pretty Little Angel Eyes--Curtis Lee (1961)
8. Why Do Fools Fall in Love--Frankie Lymon & The Teenagers (1956)
9. Life is But A Dream--The Harptones (1955)
10. Earth Angel--The Penguins (1954)

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Friends In Fall
Rachel Tian
Ink Drawing

This Is Me

Shivani Gandhi

Poetry

Where I'm from--

I am from the city of steel.

From Krishna and Sudhama, the two best friends.

I am from joyous family reunions and Raksha Bandhan.

I am from the salty taste of lentils and rice, the buttery flatbread.

From Om, Shanti, and Namaste.

I am from powdered rainbows and flying colors.

I am from the three main goals in life: education, education, and education.

From harmonious voices and crafters of the kitchen.

I am from colorful picture books and the sounds of music filling the air.

I am from eat, study, sleep, and repeat.

From failure is not an option to no room or time for mistakes.

I am from the old box in the attic, filled with faded pictures and dusty achievements only to keep growing.

Whispering

Marquerite Ferrari

Poetry

People say demons are bad, are vile creatures of hell,

But people just like to think that, for demons are not all that.

The horns and claws send off red flags, and yet didn't long times ago.

Long times ago, demons were our guardians
They protected your little baby from nightmares
They shielded the lucky child from harm
They played with the lonely toddler
They held the broken teen in dark times
They pulled the tired adult into life

People say that demons are bad, are vile creatures of hell,

But people just like to think that, for demons are not all that.

The horns and claws send off red flags, and didn't when we were young

And didn't just today

Did you feel the light cool air on your cheek just before sleeping?

A goodnight's kiss for a well rested night.

Did you wake up with blankets tucked around you warmly?

A loving gesture in cool nights.

Did you fall asleep feeling safe?

A hug to shield nightmares away.

Did your day go smoothly and nicely?

A shield against all things bad.

People say that demons are bad, are vile creatures of hell--

demons are not all that.

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Winter Trees

Daniel Killen

Photograph

Farewell, Mr. Wanner

Tyler Boyles

Nonfiction/Feature Article

Not only will the second 9-weeks bring an end to the first semester at North Allegheny Senior High School, but it also marks the end to the long and legendary career of physical education teacher Mr. Wanner, who has worked at NA for 26 and a half years. He was recognized before the 2017-2018 school year for his 25 years of service.

Wanner went to school at North Allegheny and graduated in 1978. He participated on the wrestling team during his school years and frequently wore wrestling sweatshirts and t-shirts during his tenure in the Physical Education Department.

Wanner was best known for "Wannerisms," quick and quirky replies he developed over his years of working with students in gym class: "Time for a wrasslin' workout," being one of many such cherished phrases.

"He is pretty witty for an old guy," senior RJ Swanson said. "I will definitely miss his jokes." Among other beloved Wannerisms were, "Don't be a-scared late, guys," when students waltzed in behind schedule, and his famous avoid-the-swear-word-by-stopping-right-in-the-middle-of-it-and-replacing-it-with-a-word-more-appropriate. While teaching the tennis unit, he used the classic slogan, "Low to high, wave goodbye." An all-time classic was, "Don't go thinking on me, son." Perhaps the most iconic was, "Don't worry about it. It's just a gym grade."

Though he presented a hilarious personality, it came with many mysteries. Wanner was never much for the spotlight. He declined an interview with *The Uproar* and rarely, if ever, appeared in an NATV video. His teacher website bio lacks a single word.

Despite being a jokester, Wanner took his job very seriously by serving as program director for North Allegheny's Lifetime Activities for seven years. Lifetime Activities is responsible for bringing rock climbing to the school, along with canoeing, kayaking, backpacking, caving, mountain biking and cross-country skiing. Wanner's legacy will include bringing an active lifestyle to the student masses and giving back.

But his entertaining persona in class will likely be remembered best.

"Mr. Wanner always brought a great attitude and added lots of levity to the class," Nate Gierczynski said. "I will miss him."

Senior Mike Bruzinski had Mr. Wanner during his junior year and is sorry to see him leave. "He made boating and swimming so much better for me," Bruzinski said. "He is just a great guy."

That says a lot, considering that swimming is usually students' least favorite part of gym class. Audric Pastor also enjoyed the gym teacher's humorous style. "That funny man will be missed," he said. "He never failed to make me laugh."

So thank you, Mr. Wanner, for the laughs and happiness you brought to the teachers and students here at NASH. Farewell. We wish you the best. #59.5%.

Oh, and we actually were able to squeeze a quote out of the man before he left NASH for the last time. "I'm finally graduating," he said.

The Death Of a Warrior

Nicole McGaa

Memoir

A shuddering breath.

You've been standing up here for ages.

I couldn't even see the floor. Or the podium.
How long is this going to take?

My notes were on my phone.
Get it together.

Why did I leave that on my seat?
They're embarrassed for you.

My nose was starting to run, too.
You know what? You've already screwed up the whole thing. Just get it over with.

And with a quivering inhale not unlike that of a kicked dog, I said what was supposed to be the concluding sentence of my speech--only that I never got farther than the introduction before beginning to break down.

"He was a dreamer, leader, mechanic, story-teller... and ultimately the best dad I could have ever asked for." I hated when my voice got like that. High pitched. Breaking. Weak.

Coward.

If there was applause, it rang on deaf ears. All eyes were on me, burning, as I walked back to my seat; there I crumbled, staring into parched hands. Decades seemed to pass, but the period for open mic finally arrived. I rose unsteadily and rushed to a side door, avoiding all eye contact.

February had cloaked Minnesota with two feet of sparkling snow and thin grey branches reached upwards into a silver-white sky. The air was beyond crisp; it clawed its way down your windpipe and stung your eyes. But that glittering, inhospitable wasteland was the image of serenity. There's always been something about the stillness of winter, the moments of total silence save for the fine snow brushing over the surface of the drifts, that make the season into something beautiful, striking, powerful, composed.

At that time, I was none of these things.

The snow was bitterly cold. It stuck to my legs as I aimlessly walked straight through the banks, seeping in with a scalding frigidity. Soon, I heard a voice behind me, but it wasn't as loud as that vicious, hypercritical one whispering in my frostbitten ears.

You're pathetic and overreacting.

"Where are you going?"

Stop being dramatic.

My brother sounded calm, but I knew he cared. I thought back to his perfectly

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executed eulogy less than ten minutes ago. Before the ceremony, he had followed me outside onto the icy sidewalk to practice it--of course, it was already flawless. His mischievous story about the arcade made everyone laugh, and both family and friends would ask him for a copy later.

And as for me, despite countless run-throughs on that lakeside path, pacing in the dusty snow, I choked up in front of everyone. My one chance, lost forever. A silent hall full of people with pity.

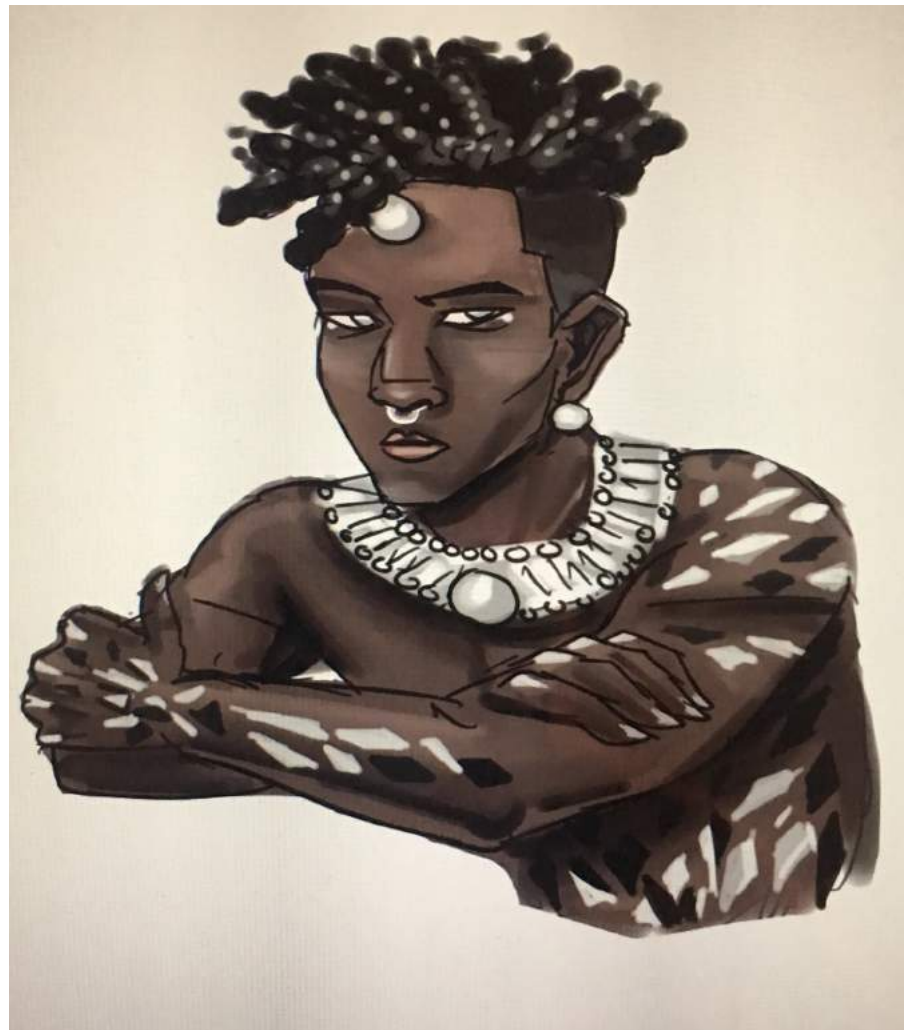
But that caustic voice was always there, always at the worst of times, like some type of sick, spiteful demon. It choked me, froze my lungs, and spat pure, bitter resentment into my paralyzed thoughts with a haunting tone of unsurprised satisfaction at each and every failure. For once, I thought I had a grip on it. For once, I thought I could swallow it down, just for this--but here I was.

"You should look up."

I wiped my eyes with a painfully dry hand, and followed my brother's command. Circling the lake, less than fifty feet away, were two bald eagles. The symbol of a Lakota warrior.

Violent fits of shivering spread through purpled fingers, and what remained of my body heat had melted the snow around my frozen toes. The voice in my head had gone silent, and I stared at the sky in wonder.

Eventually, I turned away and followed my brother back inside.



Zammar

Selena Brown

Digital Art

Morning Rain

Megan Bliss

Photograph



Proof

Benjamin Rohan

Essay

On April 1, 2019 Ethan, my older brother, fooled us all. Not only did he turn 20 years old, but my big brother got his own apartment. Why am I telling you this? Well let me take you back to March 20th, 2003 when I entered the world. I was living the life! I was born in Pittsburgh. I had an older brother to play with and talk to as I grew older. I loved it. Nothing seemed wrong or obscure in the slightest. As I got older, I did my best to be friendly to everyone. However, when I reached first grade I could tell there was something “different” about my brother. He wouldn’t really talk to people, and would even hop around at times. By *talk* to people, I mean he didn’t join in conversations. He would just talk at them about unrelated subjects. I was an innocent little kid. I wasn’t vexed by it at all. At the time, I don’t know if I put it all together that he was different. The only group I had to compare him to were my classmates. Ethan was the oldest. I don’t remember exactly when I finally realized that he was different, but my parents finally revealed why Ethan did all those unique things.

My brother has Autism.

I feel like I may have given my parents a very questioning look probably not knowing what the heck it was at the time. *Autism made him different? What the heck is Autism?* I guess I never wondered why he had it, or got it. *He was just regular old Ethan to me.*

Over the next couple years I started to take an interest in learning more about this syndrome. I wanted to know what the effects of it were, and how I could cope with it as well. The following years were tough and passed slowly. I learned more about the symptoms and impact of Autism. I started to get used to it and grew to accept it. I sometimes barely even noticed Ethan had it until he would say something unusual or funky out of nowhere and out of place.

As I journeyed through middle school, I truly understood Ethan and his personality. I would tell myself, “Ben, nothing is going to change. I have to be myself, and so does he. So, learn to deal with it”. Ethan struggled in school and sadly enough, it wasn’t the actual school aspect. He was very smart in certain subjects. He would come home at times crying and very upset because of bullying. People thought of him as an easy target to pick on. He was called terrible names and treated badly by many of his classmates. Although I was a young kid, I had this anger balled up

inside me just ready to burst. I would always tell myself, "If I ever see one of those kids I'm going to give them a piece of my mind." Obviously, I never saw those kids and my brother struggled his way through middle school. He still describes Middle School as a very dark time in his life.

Seeing him struggle to fit in at school was only one part of my hectic life. Not only did my brother struggle at school, but my family and I would usually get the aftermath once he got home. I had to find ways to manage the stress, and I internalized a lot of my feelings. My parents say I've always been the peacemaker and the voice of reason with Ethan. I would have to remind myself at times--my brother has Autism.

Ethan graduated from North Allegheny High School. Although it was expected, it was far from guaranteed. He represented a different type of determination that has helped me get through school myself. He had so many challenges to overcome that I didn't have. A few years ago he was at a national conference making a speech for the Best Buddies program because he was enrolled as an ambassador. To this day I'll never forget the quote he used in this speech in front of thousands of people that were living a similar life. Half way through his speech Ethan quoted, "In the sky, there is no distinction of East and West. People create distinctions out of their own minds and believe them to be true" (Buddha). I was shocked. I couldn't believe he got up in front of thousands and delivered such a great speech, and I deeply understood this quote and took it to heart. To me it meant that people are quick to assume things about others based on their own beliefs and experiences. Sometimes we judge someone because of differences we see and don't understand. But really we are more alike than we may realize. Ethan's success in Best Buddies inspired him to keep going. He went on to continue helping with our church group and worked briefly in a job training program at a hospital and acquired a part-time job.

Now I get to the part where Ethan fooled us all. Just recently, after all the ups and downs that he experienced, Ethan moved into his own apartment after finding a job at Whole Foods. This had the biggest impact on me this past year. He applied and interviewed on his own. He originally applied for the coffee and cheese position and learned everything he could about coffee and cheese. He didn't get that job, but they were so impressed they sent him to another interview in the same store. They hired him after another interview and the hiring manager's recommendation. He is currently working there making good money for a twenty-year-old kid and is enjoying his life and new independence.

At first I had mixed emotions about this big move. Throughout my entire life I looked out for Ethan, trying my absolute hardest to be a good brother, and now he proved to me that all the hard work and the dedication really does pay off. All the late, sleepless nights of yelling and meltdowns. All the embarrassing hollering and arguing in public places. It all really did turn out fine. He proved to me that if you put your mind to something and work hard, even though times may be tough, in the end everything will turn out fine. I still stop over at his house occasionally to check up on him and see how he is doing. He has changed. He really is a different person--more mature, and it feels peculiar at times. It's a good type of peculiar though.

It's proof. The past years have been a massive whirl of emotions. At times I would be upset, and other times I would be gleeful. One thing I know is that everything that I get in life I must earn. Nothing will be given to me. How can I not be determined now to go out there and get it and live my life the way it should be lived. In the end maybe it's a good thing that--my brother has Autism.



Bleeding Bruises

Betul Tuncer

Acrylic Painting, Graphite Drawing

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Melody

Shivani Gandhi

Fiction/Short Story

Chapter 1

Melody

I heard my mother calling to me in the distance. Starting to come down the branch, the weak limb snapped. Everything slowed down, and a trickle of pain rushed to my head. I felt my forehead, gasping at the sight of blood on my fingers.

I stood up only to fall back down, as **agony** made everything go **black**.

Chapter 2

Anonymous

I heard a faint creak as the door opened. Furrowing my eyebrows, I crept down the staircase. As I reached the ground, I heard a whisper behind me. "Who's there?" my voice quivered. A young girl stepped behind me out of the doorway, holding a knife as sharp as broken glass. The little girl started laughing, and I noticed a trickle of **blood** down her face. Suddenly, she stopped laughing and smiled sweetly. "It was nice meeting you. " She hurled the dagger, and I heard a scream. Then I fell, darkness washing over me.

Chapter 3

Melody

I jerked awake, wincing as the rain splashed on my face. Rolling over, I groaned as I felt a headache coming over me. I sniffed the air around me, a pungent and **metallic** odor wafting off of my clothes. I wrinkled my nose, picking at some stuff in my nails. I stood up slowly, washing my hands in the clear, bubbling creek. I looked at my reflection and grimaced at a long gash on my forehead, blood running down my face. I splashed water on my face, scrubbing it roughly against my face, careful not to touch my forehead. I sat down on the mud, trying to remember how I got this far into the forest and why my clothes were completely soaked through. But then I remembered everything.

In Memoriam

Maddie Kantz

Memoir

I can never find the right words to tell people when they ask about my dad, so I've started being completely up front about it. After all, it's the undeniable harsh reality of my life. My dad died from cancer when I was only seven years old.

I'm always met with the same pitiful and sympathetic eyes from people who are in utter shock at what I just abruptly blurted out. The initial look of shock is quickly followed by, "I'm sorry," almost as if it is a reflex in response to hearing something so tragic.

In recent years, I have noticed how people feel guilty for having no prior knowledge of my circumstance. "I had no idea," they commonly say. But I don't exactly go around in public, exclaiming, "Hi! I'm Maddie. My dad died from cancer when I was only seven years old."

I never tell people that my dad lost his battle with cancer because that's not what happened. The truth is my dad died from cancer. Yes, my dad was definitely actively fighting cancer just as one would fight off a cold, but I don't like to say that he was defeated by cancer.

From the start, my dad never had a fair chance at overcoming the horrid disease.

Calling my dad the loser implies that he could still be alive today had he done something different over ten years ago when he was sick, but that's sadly not the reality. No matter what he did, his fate ultimately lay in the hands of the doctors treating him and the treatment administered to him. From the start, my dad never had a fair chance at overcoming the horrid disease.

It's common knowledge that cancer is wickedly cruel, but we still struggle to accept that cancer is one of the things in life which has an outcome we have no control over. Frequently, we hear about the strength and heroism expressed by those with cancer, but solely do we actually hear about the reality of suffering from cancer. It's uncomfortable to discuss, and rightfully so.

Cancer is unpredictably brutal, and not only for the afflicted. It's physically, emotionally, and mentally draining on both the patients and their families, testing every ounce of strength. Cancer brings heart-wrenching emotions that can linger for years. Many years after the death of a loved one due to cancer, grief will randomly strike while you're lying in the bed late at night alone with your thoughts, leaving you struggling to breathe because you are crying so hard.

For me, cancer meant visiting my dad in the hospital after not seeing him for days but being too afraid to climb up on the bed to give him a hug. Cancer turned my favorite person in the world into a stranger whom I could barely recognize. At the age of seven, I refused to believe the frail, ghostly looking figure lying in the hospital bed a few feet away from where I stood was the same one who was giving me piggyback rides only months before.

I have grown to hate it when people say that time heals all wounds. It doesn't. At such a young age, I didn't truly realize what the death of my dad would entail. I knew that he was gone forever, and I was never going to hear his voice or feel his

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touch ever again, but I wasn't truly able to grasp the gravity of the whole situation until many years after his death.

As I've gotten older, I've become more and more aware of things in my life that differ from the experiences of most kids my age because of my father's death. Furthermore, I have become more aware of everything my dad will unfairly never get to experience.

For most girls, these thoughts will never cross their minds, and I hope it never does.

Cancer robbed my father of the opportunity to watch his little girl grow up, go to high school, graduate, go to college, and even one day get married. I've thought about how I don't have my dad to walk me down the aisle on my wedding day.

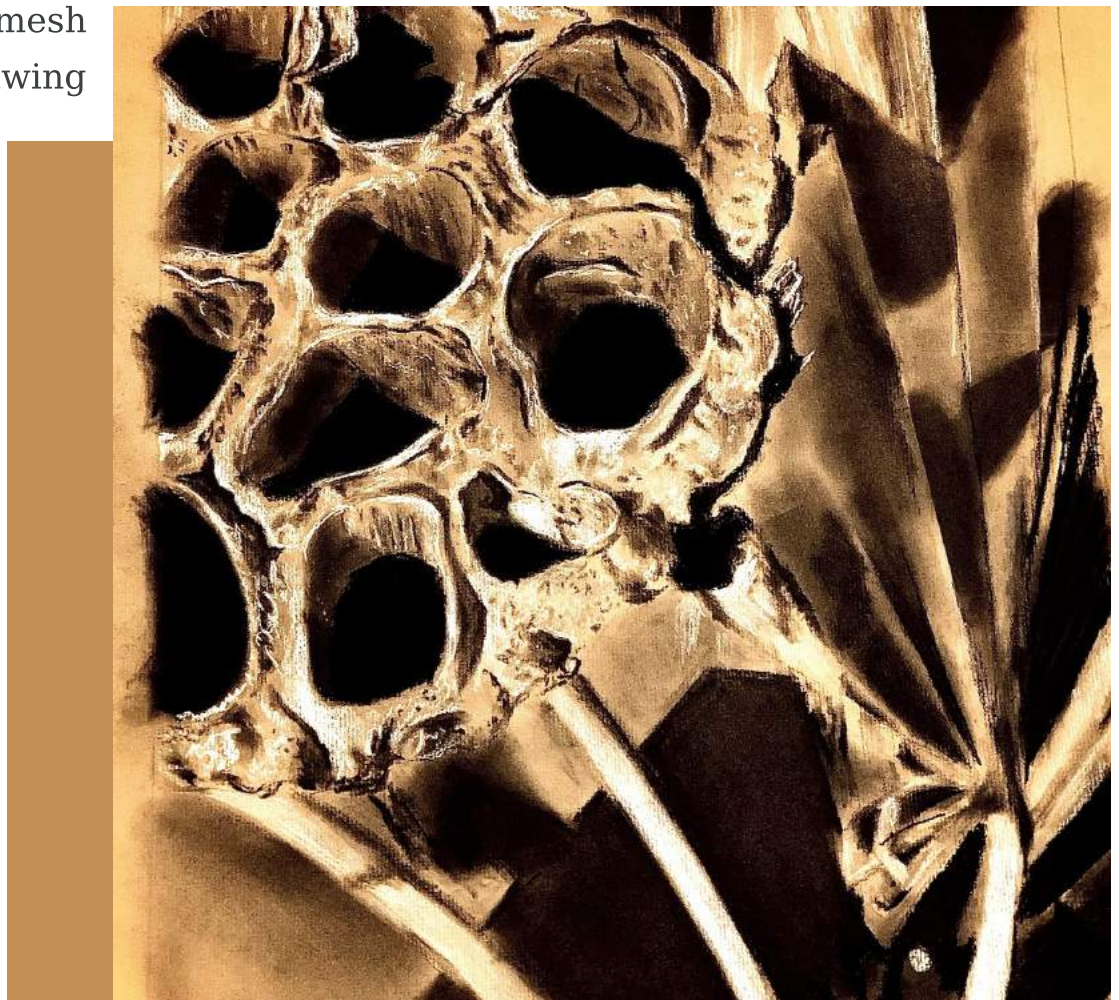
For most girls, the thought will never cross their minds, and I hope it never does.

It's been ten years since my dad's death, ten years since my mom became a widow who had to raise three kids on her own, and ten years since our lives were overturned completely. It's said that everything happens for a reason, but I fail to find the rationale behind years of endless pain and suffering.

I have good days where my mind and soul are at peace with the reality of my life. I also have bad days where the grief hits me in immense waves that overcome my body, and I struggle to cope. But after everything that has happened to me, I know that I can go on as I've done for ten years now. And I know that if the memory of my dad is all that I can have, then I'm determined never to lose it.

Charred Dried Lily Pod

Parastoo Aramesh
Charcoal Drawing



First Love

April McLaughlin

Fiction

“So...Where are you headed?”

I stood on the subway platform with my earbuds shoved deep into my ears when I suddenly heard that voice. I turned to my left slightly and saw a relatively young man staring at me. He was probably around my age if I had to guess, twenty or somewhere close to it, and he had clean-cut blond hair and piercing brown eyes. I'll admit, he was very handsome, and I don't say that about too many guys.

I slowly pulled out one earbud and adjusted my glasses. “I'm sorry, what did you say?” I asked as I turned my attention to him.

“Where are you headed?” He questioned again as he put his hands into his coat pockets.

“Oh...well I'm heading to work. Nothing special. Where are you going?” I asked as I gripped my bag in my right hand tightly, where I kept all my paperwork.

“I'm going to the shopping district,” He replied with a smile as it seemed like his whole face lit up.

Out of habit or a response, I gripped my bag harder and swallowed a lump in my throat. My face suddenly felt hot, yet I didn't know why. “Really? Why are you going there? Just to hang out?” I questioned with a subdued smile.

“Oh no way, I live way too far from the shopping district to go just to hang out. This is a special occasion,” he replied as he chuckled as if I asked a ridiculous question.

“Okay then...Why are you going there?” I said with a hint of irritation in my voice.

“Well, it's my girlfriend's birthday and I wanted to go get her something nice. One of her favorite stores is in the shopping district, so I figured I'd go down and pick up something nice for her,” he sighed as he placed his arms behind his head and stretched.

I dropped my bag immediately, causing some of my papers to fall out. I felt something dreadful in my stomach, a feeling that I didn't like. I placed a hand over my stomach and stumbled back a bit, feeling foolish. Why did I feel so angry? I mean I just met him, what did I expect? That he was single and I could just ask...Oh, never mind. It doesn't matter what I wanted. He had a girlfriend.

Once I dropped my bag the man immediately gasped, “Hey, your papers!” He ran

over and bent down to pick them up. As if I was taken back out of slow motion, I realized where I was again and turned around embarrassed. “Oh no! I’m so sorry!” I cried as I ran over and helped him pick up the papers. He laughed as he stacked the papers and made sure they were aligned.

“What happened there?” He said with a slight smirk as he handed me the papers, “Did you lose your grip?”

I opened my mouth for a second and then I paused. I looked at him as he gave me an expectant stare. You could just tell him. This guy is the first one you’ve ever felt any real attraction towards. You could just be honest. Then I stopped thinking. Really? Why in the world would I say that? It’s hopeless anyway. I looked up at him and gave the strongest smile I could muster.

I cleared my throat and responded, “Yeah, yeah. I just lost my grip.”

New York
Gabrielle Nellis
Photograph



A Rose-Colored Blindfold on a Rainbow Fool

Madeleine Bloomquist

Poetry

My love hath eyes of blue sparkling with
mirth

And flaxen hair, oft swept up in a knot;

Appearances, though, speak not to her
worth:

Geniality sows intrigue and thought.

Ardent infatuation my soul burns:

By day and night she slinks into my head.

Yet for stability my vexed heart yearns,

Is she fickle or true? I feel misled.

In attempts to court her I must take
care,

My status known by many, hers by few.

Is it too perilous of an affair?

Could that deter the love we fall into?

Yet whether foolishly or for success,

I cannot help but chase this
enchantress.



Winter Mornings at Home

Nishka Edlabadkar

Acrylic Painting

24 VARIATIONS

Compact Old Man

Hannah Ledrick

Poetry

Crisp tufts of tethered white hair
crown his head

Looking as though he had rolled out
of bed

The hunched little man was five feet
tall

In hindsight, he had become fairly
small

Delicate grey eyes stood on tired
cheeks

His chiseled face had not slept in
weeks

Crinkled pink cheeks forming the
softest smile Before today it had been
quite a while

A chestnut cane clutched tight in left
hand

T'was as if he was in a foreign land

He came to watch the people come
and go

Always seeing the constant traffic
flow

This was where he met his loving,
wise wife

And so they lived a long and happy
life

A cracked face speaks stories of
simpler days

Coming to realize life always betrays

White whiskers framed his lonely face
Feeble he walked at a slow and steady
pace

He had not always been sunken and
small

But that was before he lost her last fall

She fought the long battle so brave and
tough

But in the end, it just wasn't enough

He held her hand 'till it was time to go

She loved him and that he would
always know

Now he comes here almost every day

To Reminisce life lived another way

A tear stings his experienced old eyes

Wisdom cries and says its final
goodbyes

His soft smile fades aged by time ticked
away

He's lost all he valued but still has today

Children at Heart

Caroline Kasunich

Memoir

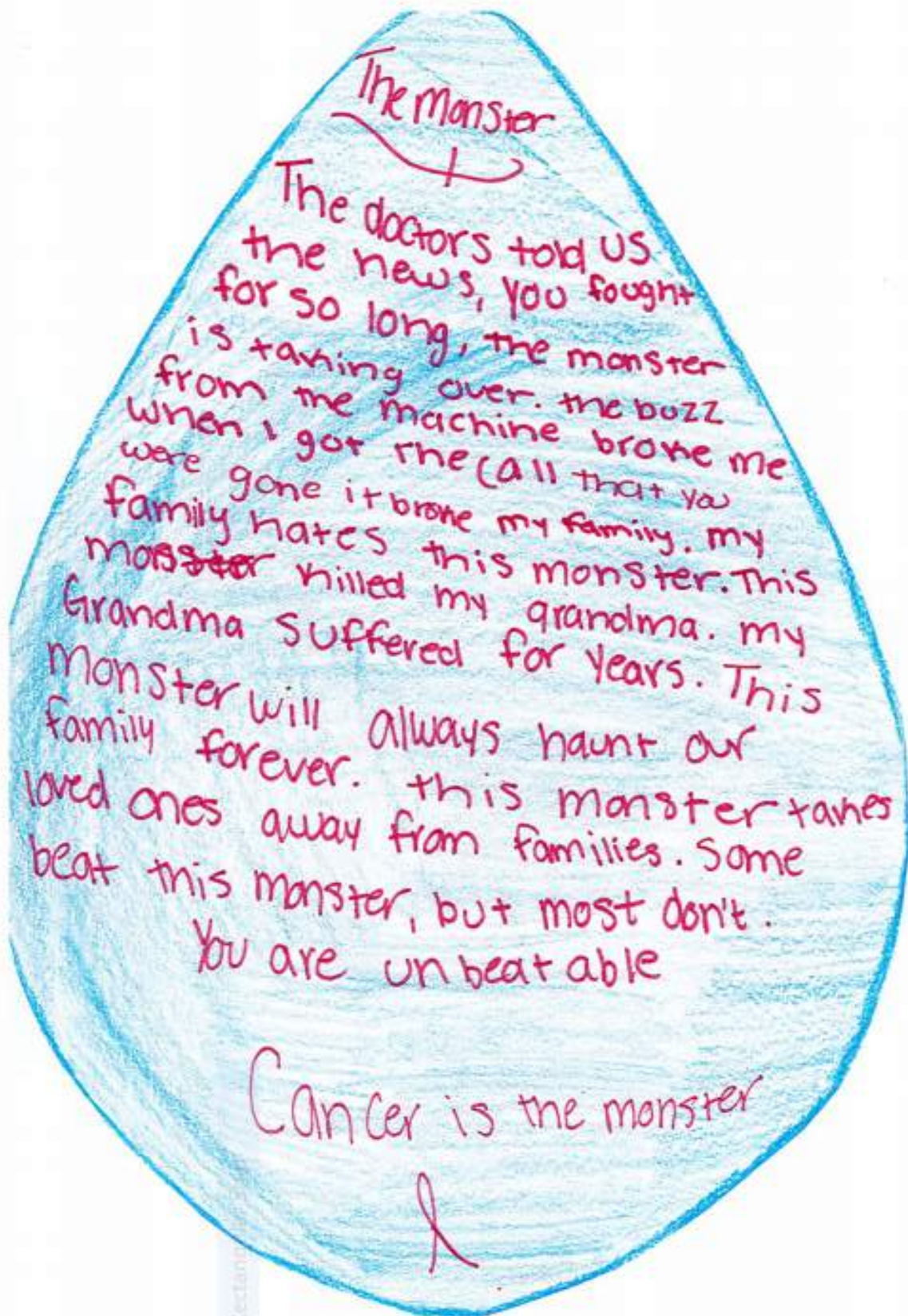
Not too long ago, I was just a little girl. I didn't know where the fifty states were on the map or how to subtract two-digit numbers. I didn't know how to pack my own lunch or do my own laundry because I didn't need to. All I cared about was getting a ride on the swings at recess and tying my shoes bunny ears style. Life was so simple back then. I spent hours exploring in the woods and playing in the sandbox. I didn't need a reason to have fun; I just did. In school, I learned new things and met new people. No one looked at the clothes I wore or the color of my skin. All we could see was the kindness within each others' hearts. Everyone was friends with each other because there was no reason not to be. It was so pure, so worry free. Looking back now, I didn't realize it at the time. That was all I ever knew. It was human nature to love everyone equally on this earth. So what happened?

As I grew older and started noticing the differences among people, I was intrigued. But followed by interest came judgement. I remember elementary school. A muslim girl sat right next to me in class. One day, my friend in the grade above made a rude comment about the girl's hijab. I turned my head to look and didn't see anything wrong with it. However, my friend was older than I; therefore, she knew more than I did. So I nodded my head and agreed with her.

It's so often that one person's opinions or remarks can influence our beliefs. As we grow older, we start to notice the things that make us different. But instead of praising and celebrating those things, we judge them. We place people into groups and stereotypes just because of their dress or the color of their skin or their religion. Not one human is the same, so why should we punish people for their uniqueness? The world we live in today is scary, and no matter how hard we try, everyone is responsible for the negativity in it.

Now, when I walk around the school halls, I feel threatened at times. I am nervous that someone is staring at my clothes or judging what kind of shoes I'm wearing. Society changes perspective, but I will not let it change me. Although these dark thoughts flood my brain, I have learned to let go of my insecure mind and see past the hatred. I know it is hard to do, but I have gathered strength to overcome it.

Yet the innocent child within me remains. I can remember how simple life used to be when people didn't choose who they wanted to interact with based on looks or color, but rather by friendliness. I hope that someday the world learns to live like children playing with each other on the playground. I hope that somehow we can look past appearance on the outside and accept people for whom they truly are.



The Monster

Clara Pavlick

Poetry



Georgia Houses

Jenny Molyneaux

Photograph

28 VARIATIONS

Toy Pianos

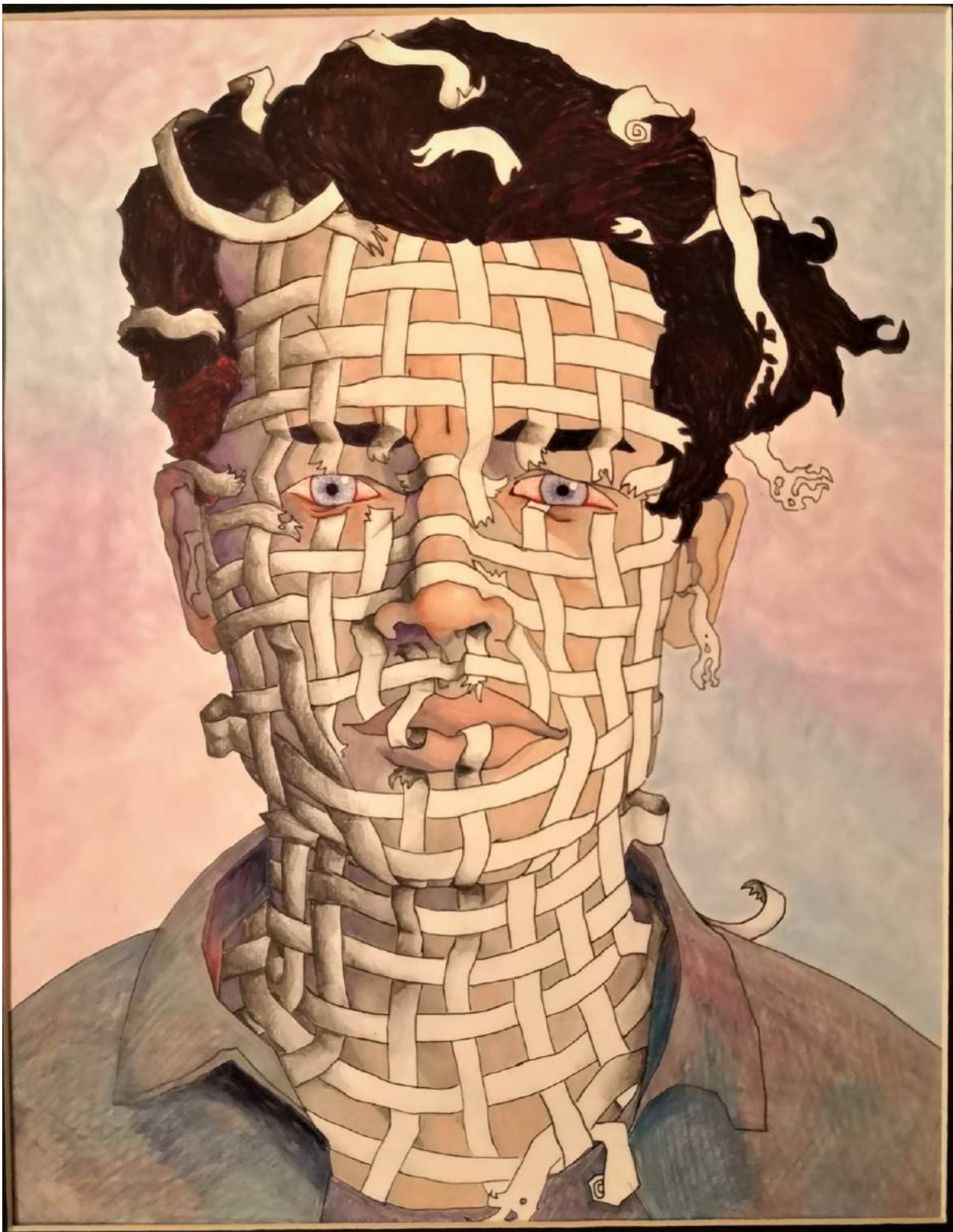
Katrina Evancho

Poetry

the symphony inside my head is jumbled
the notes fall apart
i crumble
my thoughts scatter
letters in scrabble
the music in my head continues to unravel
starving for novelty
in a sea of monotonous tones

take me back to when i was young
when dissonant tones of toy pianos rang
slamming fat fingers on plastic keys
the pitches didn't matter and the notes clashed
but none of it mattered
discordant and ugly
it was my song
and
i didn't know any better

now the music in my head isn't mine
my thoughts are pushed out by a verse that doesn't rhyme
no originality
the dissonance is wiped away by the machine
purging all imperfections
there is only one song
it's
not
mine



Bandages

Hanson Wu

Chalk Drawing, Colored Pencil Drawing

30 VARIATIONS

Horror Film

Julia Poppa

Poetry

My brain projects Old
home movies Onto the
backs of my eyelids As I
drift to sleep
You wonder What
makes me twitch
Why sounds escape
From my lips As I

fall asleep
But your home
movies Are nothing
like mine Where the
genres Horror and
home Share a blurred line
~7.12.19



Sheepwalking

Réka Götz

Photograph

Something

Betul Tuncer

Poetry

Back then I was broken
The night sky enveloped my lost soul
Something was missing
Below the starlight all I saw was darkness
and The embers of what once was--and could have been

even the scorching sunlight couldn't shine away the fog that clouded my
mind

But before I fell to the ground--permanently gone--I was saved

At the Time I didn't know it
but Something had found me
and Built me from the ashes to a roaring flame
The very being of my soul had risen like a phoenix

Something had saved me
Beauty, in its purest form

With a melodious smile it helped my spirit grow from a seed into a
Towering tree

Its rhythmic motions allowed me to think clearly and See the world as it
could be--

rather than as it was

Its falsettos flew me across open skies, allowing me to finally see the
mesmerizing sunrise

It brought me back to the happiness that I longed for

Back then I was broken
Unable to see past the infinite night sky
Yet now I am alive--reborn
Seeing beyond the darkness and into the light once again--

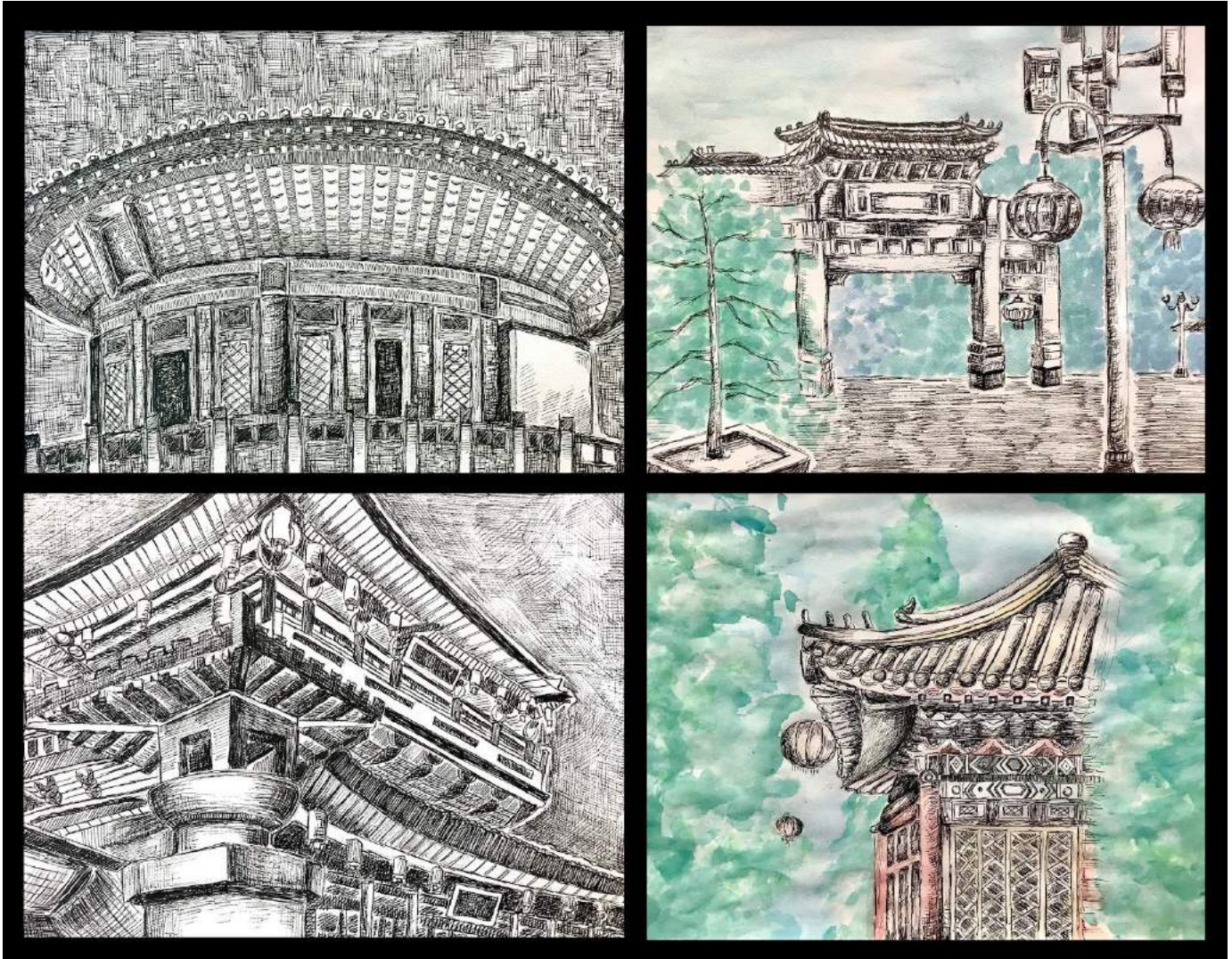
Thank you to the something that saved me

32 VARIATIONS

Oriental Architecture

Rachel Tian

Multimedia Art



Stress

Julian Wilks

Six-word story

School

Tests

Reading

Eating

Studying

Sad.

Little Red House in France

Lola Wilhite

Photograph



34 VARIATIONS

My Childhood

Emilia Cercone

Poetry

I am from North Park
From nature hikes to collecting acorns
I am from the Pumpkin Patch
From falling leaves to bumpy hayrides
I am from the talking tree, shivering,
Longing for hot cocoa

I am from Barbie dolls and paint
From messy fingers to beautiful creations
I am from soft blankets, warm on my cheek
Never wanting to let go
I am from pink walls and pottery
Trophies and medals

I am from beautiful seas and crashing waves
Swimming pools and Disney friends
I am from potato patch fries and upside-down rides
Sandy beaches and salty air

I am from hot summer softball games
Dribbling a ball on the hot gym floor
Graceful dance routines, spinning and twirling
Flipping and tumbling, stunting and bows

I am from dimples and brown eyes
Laughter and joy
I am from always-be-kind-to-others
To warming hearts of strangers
From spreading holiday cheer

Driftwood Bones

Julia Poppa

Poetry

I

Weathered hands

Shaking as they mend what isn't theirs

Seamstress of circumstance

Fingers aching and stiff Pulling at themselves Trying to wring out their fevers
Gnawing at the sanity Twisting Trying desperately to escape these driftwood bones

II

Relapsing

The breath of these lungs When they collapse in on themselves Until they are
nothing but a nucleus Held still in the hands of god In silence Until she exhales

The universe begins again Born from within these driftwood bones

III

These forms have known no boundary

Have known no rest Slammed on

wet glass Indefinitely over again

Trapped outside existence Staring at ineffable darkness That screams back with
Her deafening Nothingness

She is the assassin Of selves unknown

Shivering and gasping And afraid Of the bruises that will eternally mark these
driftwood bones

IV

It is agonizing

To sit in silence A void reflected back Upon Her eyes of which it is made

Waiting Knowing they will be torn to shreds Cells becoming atoms Becoming And
becoming undone So that there will be nothing held together by these driftwood
bones

V

Peace is found only

In the walks alone Weathered basket in weathered palm Excruciating steps taken

36 VARIATIONS

So tensely So cautiously To collect scattered remnants That find their way home To be draped once more Upon this skeleton made of driftwood bones



Still Life

Hanson Wu

Pastel Drawing

Society's Truth

Aditya Bhandari

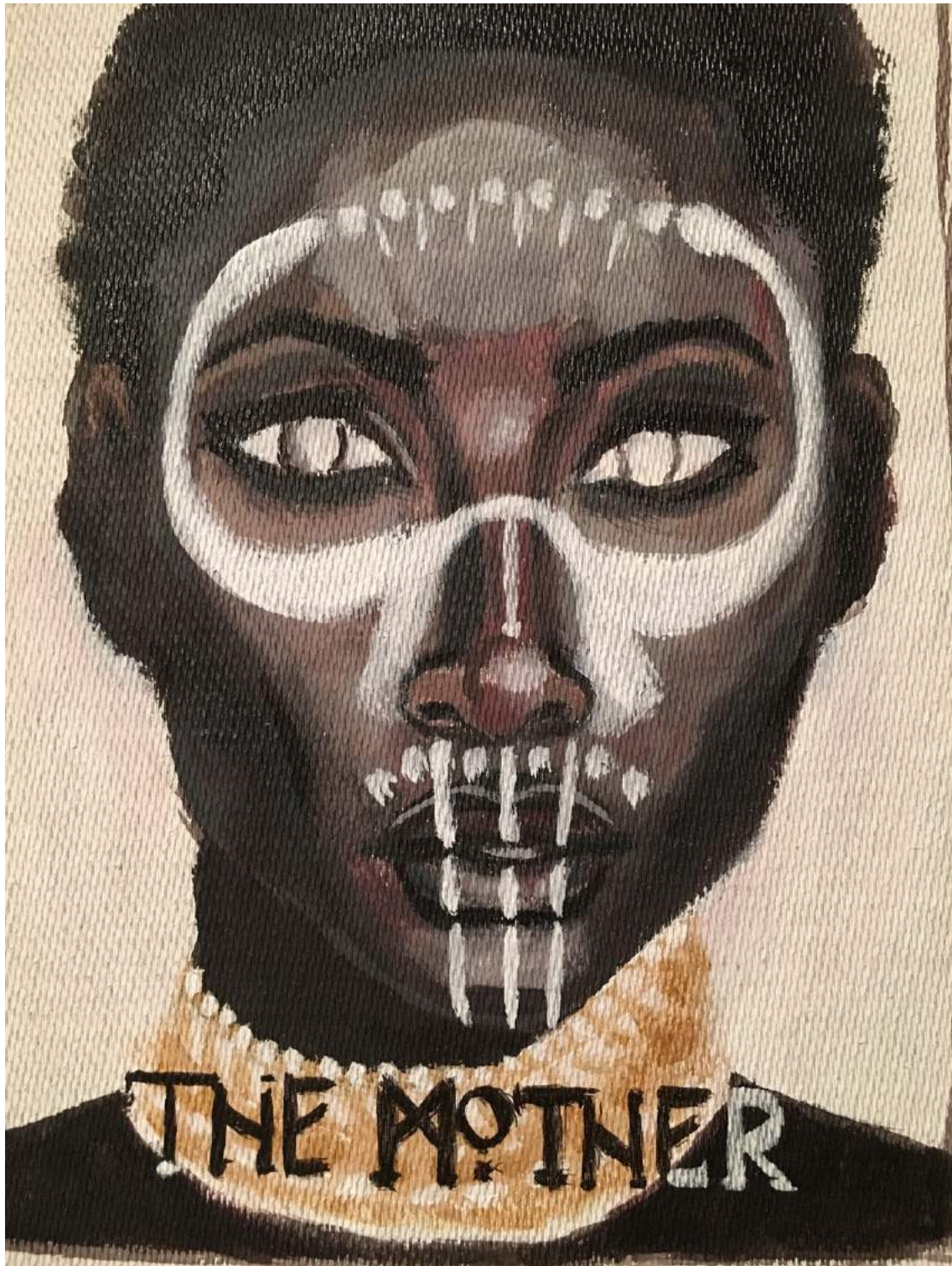
Six-word story

Nobody really cares about each other...

The Mother

Selena Brown

Acrylic Painting



38 VARIATIONS

Where The Tall Tales Go

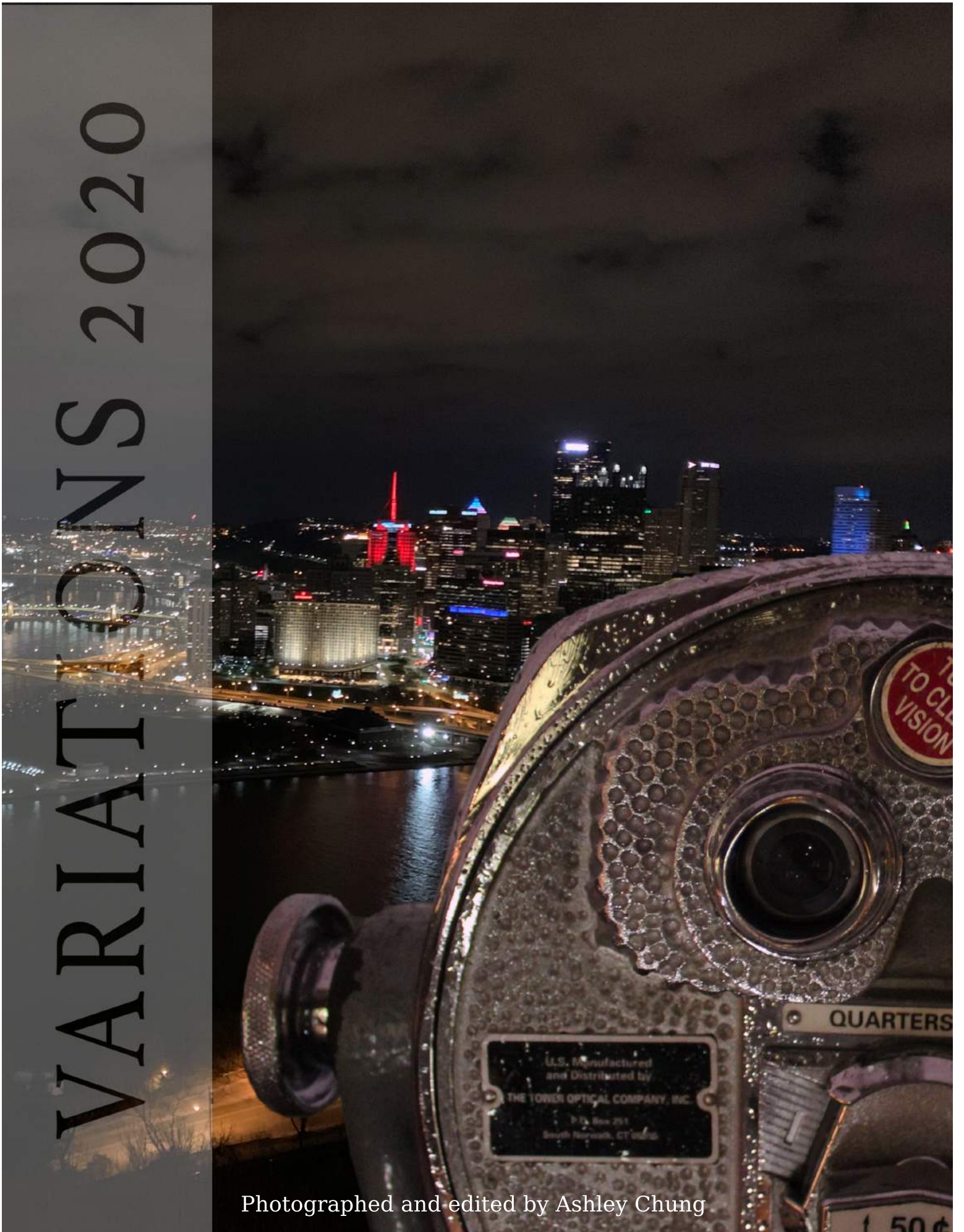
Faith Nguyen

Poetry

when I think of you
I cannot picture a face or
peach memory.
you are a nameless myth that
my mother refuses to tell.
a secret that I am told to forget.
so I replace your vacant pieces in my mind,
crawling through the peppery tobacco
smoke
that escapes the tiger's pipe.
I imagine you look like my forefathers
but smell like dried persimmons.
we meet again and again and
again until our familiarity becomes immortal
under aged, florid sunlight
we wade through fragrant pink waters that
rise above our shoulders,
moving alongside the chattering brown frogs
we drink tea brewed from
milky blossoms and yellowing wolfberries,
telling gray stories to the delicate silkworms
letting spirits escape our words.
we sprint bare-footed
chasing bitter snakes out of rice paddies,
off the face of the earth
and when your bones grow so spent and tired
from leaping over sage mountains
it won't matter
the pumpkin sparrows will lift your arms
and carry you to the moon.

as we sit on its crescent
eating rice cakes prepared by
cottontail rabbits
I ask you
*why must we feel
so much sorrow of this world?*

VARIATIONS 2020



Photographed and edited by Ashley Chung



mindfulness

TURN
BEAR

ONLY

6

Disease

Marquerite Ferrari

Poetry

All I can breath is disease
All I can see is flesh and dirt
My life has turned to a novel
A novel without a happy ending

Disease covers the land
Covering the dirt that cakes my body
Covering the lost flesh of those who've fallen
Covering the places of fond memories

I'm walking a long path
Angels have failed us
Demons have warned us
Both have left us

Disease is all I can breath
Flesh is all I can see
Dirt is all I can see
A novel that promises no happy ending

Transcend

Parastoo Aramesh

Multimedia Art, Watercolor Painting



Never Be Silent

Delaney Haller

Black-Out Poetry



They

Maddy Holman

Poetry

they want to fill me

Up,

and up,

and up,

and up

with gooes and brews

with tinctures and tonics

until my soul

is muted

and subdued

they want me to spill my soul

and give it to a stranger

to analyze,

evaluate,

and scrutinize

to pick apart and tell me

which parts of me should be

covered up and left behind

they say i'm sick

they say i'm anxious

they say i'm depressed

i guess **they** have a point

when all i want to do

is cover my head

and hide from **them**

3/15/2019~11:16 A.M.



Silk Bushes

Parastoo Aramesh

Oil Painting

The Necessity of the Humanities

Magdalena Laughrey

Essay

Science. Technology. Engineering. Math. In our growing and ever-changing world, it seems that schools push these same topics further and further into the brains of students. The number of times I have heard teachers and administrators reiterate to students that STEM careers are on the rise is astounding; they tell us almost daily that many colleges are searching for students interested in pursuing the STEM field.

However, this push by schools diminishes the fact that humanities are just as important to a student as STEM. The humanities—including art, literature, philosophy, politics, history, music, religion, and language—are often seen as inferior to science, technology, engineering, and math, yet they are equally relevant to a young person's intellectual development.

While I am not saying that one field is better or more successful than the other, I want to reiterate that students need to have more of an emphasis on the whole curriculum—including humanities along with STEM—in order to be able to build all the necessary skills for a professional field.

A report by the Committee on the Humanities and the Social Sciences states that the “humanities also better prepare students for the modern workforce. Employers demand workers who can communicate through writing and speech, and ‘think critically about a range of sources of information.’”

Thus, even in a world where technology advances seemingly daily, students still need the skills that the humanities build to prosper in whatever future endeavor they choose. Creativity, critical thinking skills, proficiency in writing, the ability to connect and effectively communicate with others, among other things, fundamentally improve one's chances to secure a job. If a student focuses solely on STEM classes because schools encourage it and do not fully develop the aforementioned skills, they could lose their edge against other candidates in their future competition for employment.

Additionally, humanities classes, particularly the arts and music, give students a much-needed mental break from rigorous academic studies. Recent education studies show that “students who cultivate their artistic talents are psychologically healthier and better able to cope with strenuous academic requirements than those who have no such opportunities.”

Even though some students lovingly consider the arts as “blow-off” classes, those classes inspire kids to use the creative side of their brains, which can allow them to relax and soothe the mental sores that academic courses cause. Often, students become engulfed in work from their required core classes, and some students feel the pressure to incorporate more STEM into their schedule and take additional science, technology, engineering, or math electives. With so many stress-inducing classes, a humanities course can lighten a workload and improve one's mental health.

Without the humanities, we would not be able to perceive and appreciate the beauty in our world around us. Art, history, music, literature, philosophy and

language all display the important work of humans in the past, and it opens our eyes to the artistry they created. While STEM classes are extremely beneficial in the sense that they help us understand why things happen and how they happen, humanities allow us to view beauty. Paintings, recorded music, written works, and many other types of products of humanities studies breed creativity in the minds of the viewer and can inspire students to critically interpret the world around them. Awe-inspiring works can push students to strive to someday create their own work that may have a profound effect on the viewer.

Many dismiss the need for humanities courses for one reason: STEM careers dominate our world today, and the demand for them will only continue to grow. While this may be true, it should not force school administrators to completely gloss over the necessity of humanities for all students. Majors and jobs that fall under the category of humanities still exist and thrive, even in our STEM-driven world of advancement. Careers for writers, artists, historians, and musicians will always need to be filled, no matter how much state-of-the-art technology we might create in the future.

After all, the humanities teach us about how to understand ourselves, and there will always be a need for that.

Glacier Point

Josh Razum

Photograph



Quod Nocet, Saepe Docet

Nicole McGaa

Poetry

Power is freedom, and ambition is the means to this end.

“Self-destructive” is the mislabelling of “driven.”

If it was easy, everyone would do it.

Those *demons* are pathetic projections of self-made problems.

Don't shift the blame, take the credit.

Advice--throw yourself into it, all of it, don't think about it, just sign here; you'll adapt.

I mean, you'll have to.

Commit and find the courage after.

The wolf will be on its way, and urgency breeds action.

So be sure to expose yourself to plenty of these eye-opening, challenging opportunities!

The stress is educational.

I'd much rather deal with the fallout of a crisis than forgive a regret.

Don't pass it up.

Trusting your personal ruthlessness is always in your best interest;

Brutality is an element of perfection.

And at this point,

With these fall colors fading,

And the snow beginning to shower in that delicate way

What? Sorry, no, nothing else comes to mind.

Yes, I'd sell my soul to stay exceptional.

You can't tell me otherwise.

The Force

Caroline Radocaj

Poetry/Haiku

As the workload builds

My tolerance is weakened

Stress is powerful

Never Taken For Granted

Caroline Kasunich

Poetry

I felt the sand between my toes
and watched as the gigantic sea flowed
it amazed me how every little grain knew exactly where to go
lost in thought, I traveled deeper but didn't know.

BAM

I was pulled under into the sand
swirling and whirling I tried to reach for a hand
but the current was much to grand
I gasped and choked, wailing for air
No matter how hard I swam I couldn't get anywhere
splashing and shaking I was so scared
I squeezed my eyes so tightly and uttered a prayer.

Then all at once the waves went calm and everything stopped
and I found my way back up to the top

The sun was still shining and the seagulls still swarmed

When the light touched my skin I was instantly warm
soft music filled my ears
as I looked up at the old- aged pier
and the salty smell of sunscreen on my face
reminded me that everything is okay
but it also told me not to take for granted any day
because anything, even life, can be taken away

Life Is So Unfair

Raashmitha Bay

Poetry

And for the thousandth time, I rant

'Bout, well just everything. the

Couches across from the main office are where I hang out

During lunch, I go off about the unfair things in the world. Like how almost

Every politically influential man in India is there only cause he was an actor

Famous for starring in super hit movies, but lack a decent education

Guess I just

Have to get over

It

Just like I have to get over anything unfair in life. Sometimes it

Kills me to think just how much others are suffering while I

Live a luxurious life. I

Mean, there are children in Yemen starving to death. While girls younger than I are
getting married and

Not having a choice as to whom it will be with

O God this is so unfair

People are so cruel sometimes. Why do people have to

Quarrel over the petty things and “not

Remember” about the important

Stuff

This is extremely

Unfair. Sometimes our

Voices must be heard. There are people out there

With so much potential, but they live in such horrible conditions

Xceptional talent can't be nurtured

Yet, here I sit, well off compared to them with skills that equal

Zero compared to them.

Wiles

Kyle Matos-Perez

Poetry

My eyes turn to stone

I

sway

left to right

mind's blanked

It's

Deteriorated, by verbose thoughts

Dripped out of the sides

Left to right

My mouth, opened agape

I oscillate,

Undirected

left to right

Nothing can affect me now,

I am gone now

bye bye,

bye bye,

bye bye.

I don't want you here. I look of
purtenance. So beautiful. Hi Baby. My
afreet.

The Taj Mahal

Divya Komandooru

Photograph



The Fearless Lioness

Isha Das

Poetry

Always behave child, you say,
Be calm and don't fuss,
Hold your head down,
Dont scream and don't cuss.

You say, look at that girl over there,
How mean, how loud!
You tell them not to be like her.
Not to stand out from the crowd.

You tell them you're scared
Of how reckless she can be.
You despise her words,
How her tongue is so free.

You tell them she's an animal,
A rebel, a street rat.
You say, young girl, be gentle,
Like a deer, like a cat.

But let me just ask you
And please pardon my tone,
Isn't she just the cat
That sits on a throne?

You say fear her roar.
You say fear her stride.
But the truth is
You only fear her pride.

Agreed, she is a child,
What possible could she know?
But she sees the world for what it is,
Nothing to hide, only to show.

Solely because she is not a man,
You all stare and ban.
You spread your hateful lies,
And fail to see your role in society,
That causes so many souls to die.

A girl of such manner,
Should never be tamed.
Her voice should be heard,
Understood and famed.

She fights for change,
And hunts society's ills.
For she is aware that no pretty house
cat
Is capable of such kills.

And while the world might hate her,
She smiles and sighs.
For what business does a lioness have
Being bothered by flies.

L'Homme Disparaissant (The Disappearing Man)

Faith Nguyen

Digital Art



Air Conditioners

Alex Hoare

Poetry

Are we nothing but air conditioners
Conditioning the air?
Do you see that air conditioner--
That one I love over there?
We are nothing but air conditioners
Disguised with the skin that we wear.
We go through life just conditioning the air.
Some condition it hot, that one conditions it cold.



Life is a Maze

Christina Zhou

Ink Drawing

Diwali

Divya Komandooru

Photograph



Dark

Josh Truesdell

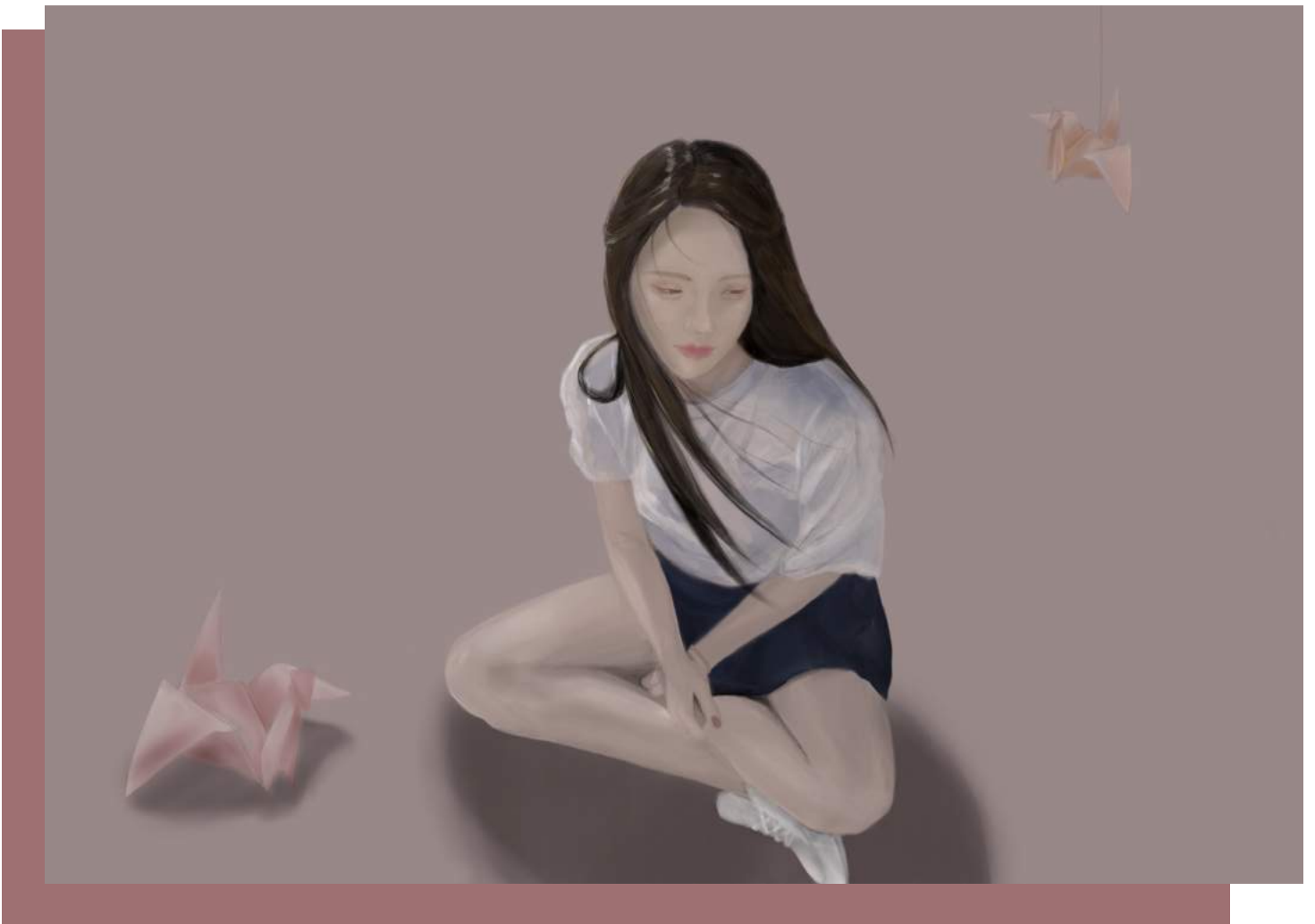
Poetry/Haiku

The dark haunts the night,
All one can hear is beating,
The beat of their heart.

Missing Home

Christina Zhou

Digital Art



56 VARIATIONS

970 Million People

Lily Howard

Poetry

Stretching your arm as far as possible
And still not reaching
That is the toughest obstacle
That is why no one is teaching
About depression disorders

Climbing 100 miles
Then falling
For the next month it just smiles
Followed by another week of balling
Is why people ignore the unpredictability
of bipolar disorders

A four-year-old innocent girl
Switches into a 30-year-old man
Confused and lost-- life is a swirl
Next thing you know they're back to
their host, Dan
This puzzling disorder is multiple
personalities leaving people dazed and
feeling lost

Is that butterfly real?
Just another hallucination
I know the blood isn't real so it's not a
big deal
My house is a complication
Of a mess because schizophrenia makes
it nearly impossible to get anything alone

6 common labels
Different for everybody
Sometimes I leave the table
wanting to change my body

Because my brain+society+pressure
makes the World impossible, almost as
impossible it seems to love myself

Learning to love yourself is something a
person with a eating disorder struggles
with

I am easily triggered
Normal things scare me easily
I heard the door slam and I shivered
And I can't fall asleep peacefully
If I have an episode in public, people
jump to the conclusion of me being
"crazy"

What they don't know is I just got back
from a boot camp

Or just watched my sister die in an
accident

My brain is in recovery; post traumatic
stress disorder takes a long time to heal

I rely and do too much
But it's highly addictive

I commit after one touch

People think I am defective

Which I am not, I want something new,
too

Needing help, but too prideful to ask,
substance abuse is real, no matter how
much you try to ignore it

970 million people in the World

Struggle with a mental or substance
abuse disorder

Seeing that number made me hurl

You can help-- be the change if you cared
a little more

Boundaries

Steve Reybein

Poetry

Keep things hidden away

From **people who** might lead me
astray.

They **want to help**, for that I
forgive

But I need my space, just let me
live.

If I let you in **close**, you know I
care,

And know that when needed, I will
be there.

For some will help, and let you be
you,

Others just want a new mind to
pick into.

After any bad experience, you may
have doubt,

But don't **ever** shut people out.

You will know the difference
between real and fake,

For the real ones will respect the
boundaries you make.

The truthful ones want you to be
okay--

Never let them feel pushed away.

Trust can be a hard thing to come
to, however,

**Keep people who want to help
close forever.**



Stuck in the Middle

Nicholas Palermo

Photograph

58 VARIATIONS

Worthless

Amanda Wang

Reverse Poetry

I am not worth it.
I should never say,
I am beautiful in my own skin
These feelings of disappointment that consume me daily.
I am tired of having
To constantly beat myself up.
I should not have
Happy moments in my life.
I deserve to experience
challenges because I am not perfect.
I know that I can ignore
the pain everytime I look in the mirror.
I also should not feel
Proud of myself for accomplishing different milestones.
I am
also upset with self worth and confidence.
Many people are
happy and positive.
I must feel
I am nothing.
I refuse to think that
I am smart, caring, and beautiful.
This is the path I deserve.

Worth it

What I Have Learned

Miarra Misutka

Poetry

Society--

The one and only thing that I feel is constantly keeping an eye on me.
With its constant pressure and constant change
No wonder people walk around so deranged.

Today, we live in a world where people are scared
So afraid to be themselves that they would be shut down if they dared.
There are so many rules that people feel they have to follow
That break their bones and make their souls hollow.

Here are some of these imaginary rules:

Rule number one...

Make sure that you are never shunned.
Always follow along with the crowd
Even if it means doing things that won't make your family proud.

Rule number two...

Never, ever show the real you.
According to you, the real you stinks
And you are too afraid about what others think.

Rule three...

Make sure you are as fit as you can possibly be.
Who really cares about eating breakfast, lunch and dinner?
When without it you can look like a real "winner."

Rule four...

Make sure you look rich, and never poor.
Make sure you have the fanciest gadgets
Because we all know that you can't possibly live without them.

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And finally, rule five...

Make sure that people know that you are alive.

Make yourself known doing crazy things

But who cares about the consequences these may bring.

Why? Why are these rules so strictly followed,

Even though they make your soul hollow?

Because people are afraid of being judged

So they will alter the truth and make their life fudged.

Throw out these thoughts and make anew

Because you can't enjoy life if you can't be you.

Be healthy and stay strong

So that you will be able to tell right from wrong

Who cares about how much or little that you have

Just enjoy life as it is, live, love and laugh

Never be afraid to just be you

Because ignoring society and being yourself is the best thing you can do!

Knots Berry

Parastoo Aramesh

Photograph



What Happened to My Generation?

Amanda Wang

Poetry

My phone lights up my face as it is blazing my eyes.
It is about the only light I have seen for hours.
I am under the covers in my dark, chilling room
As I text and watch movies all day.
I have not even said "Hi" to my parents.
Why is it so addicting?

What happened to my generation?

As I go downstairs during the midst of day,
I am welcomed by my loving parents.
The food is already made,
Yet my eyes are still glued to the screen.
My little brother asks me to play in the sunshine
Which I respond with a "Go away."
My phone is all I can think about.
I don't even want to spend time with my family anymore.

What happened to my generation?

I then hear my little brother weep.
I can see my family upset.
This device that is rotting my brain is hurting my family.
What is wrong with me?
I start to interact with my family all throughout the evening.
But, as my head hits the pillow, the phone illuminates my room again.

What happened to my generation?



The Popcorn Shoveler

Brooke Schmitz

Acrylic Painting

Smile

Betul Tuncer

Fiction

One! Two! Three! Smile! That's what he did. Everytime someone said, "smile," he'd take out his pride and use it to plaster on a toothy smile. No one ever knew the difference as long as white pearls shined and red petals rose. To everyone around, those smiles seemed to be the only thing that mattered.

No one cared if he had something to say. After all he was just another pretty face. No one ever saw the broken child that lay within. Or the man wiping away salty tears. No one cared. As long as he smiled.

One! Two! Three!

Smile!

Click! Click!

Red

Abhi Ajay
Photograph



Queen of Pain

April McLaughlin
Fiction/Short Story

“Are you alright?” Someone called out from above. I opened my eyes and rose slowly, brushing off the dirt from my short red skirt. The man who called out to me backed away almost immediately as if he was afraid of my sudden movement. He looked relieved yet on edge at the same time. I gazed at him for a moment; my eyes narrowed.

“I’m fine,” I replied, already preparing to move forward.

It’s just another flaw, I can move past this.

“Wait! Can you hold on for just a moment?” The man called out as he lunged forward and grasped my arm. I looked down at where he touched me. I felt my bones snapping, breaking. I winced before whipping around with a mighty rage and slapping his hand away.

“How DARE you touch me!” I screamed without warning as I took a step forward. I raised a fist at him and roared. The man immediately got into a defensive position, cowering away from me. As I watched him cower before me, his eyes struck with fear, I took a step back. I lowered my fist.

I’m doing it again. My pain is controlling me.

I stared at him for a long time until I was able to raise my voice again. The only thing I could muster was, “...I’m sorry.” Then I began to walk off without saying another word.

“Wait a minute--You’re Elora, aren’t you?” I heard the man speak as I walked. I stopped in my tracks almost immediately and turned around.

“What do you know about Elora?” I replied as I crossed my arms.

“All I know is that Elora seemed like a normal girl who went to a prestigious academy. However, things took a turn for the worst when she found out she had 64 VARIATIONS

limitless powers, extremely dangerous powers,” the man explained as he walked over toward me. “Many say Elora was an emotionless girl, a human being with a love for cruelty. She didn’t care about anyone or anything. Needless to say, Elora couldn’t control her powers, and the school expelled her after they found out about them. I can’t say I blame them, she was a ticking time bomb for all the students there.”

“So did you ever meet this Elora? Do you know anything about her? Or is that what a friend of a friend told you?” I replied with irritation. The man swallowed nervously as he could read how angry I became. “To answer your question--yes. I am Elora,” I said with a frown, “And for your information, I am not cruel. Sounds like someone’s been buying into the rumors, haven’t you?” The man merely held his hands up defensively and backed away in response. I sneered. He just realized he made a terrible mistake. “Ah, I see. Now that you know who I am, you don’t want to speak. You want to run away. You want mercy, after you just said all those terrible things about me,” I chuckled as I raised a hand to my mouth to try and suppress my laughter. “You know what? You’re right about me, my powers were out of control. No one wanted to help me, no one knew how to help. However, my powers had so many side-effects. I fainted at random, my bones were much more fragile, I coughed up blood at times. I suppose no one cared about that side of the story though, right?” I turned towards him and grabbed a hold of his hand. I held it steady as I reached into the back of my mouth, ripped something out, and placed it in his palm. It was a rotted tooth.

The man looked down and then screamed, throwing the tooth in the grass.

“Why would you do that?! Why would you give that to me?!” He shouted as he wiped his hand on his cargo pants.

“I’m merely showing you my reality, a reality where everything is weak and fragile, a reality where I am just a vessel for powers I never wanted. Everyone believes in rumors that I’m cruel and emotionless, but no one stops to think of the pain I’m in. If I showed you that rotted tooth then I figured you would believe me,” I sauntered down to the ground and picked up the tooth. I held it out to the man, and he hesitated for a moment.

“Why...” The man questioned right before I reached out and placed the tooth back into his palm, closing his hand around it with my own.

“Next time you want to believe in false rumors, remember this tooth and what I told you. Remember what happened here,” I whispered to the man as I moved toward him, leaving our faces only inches from one another. The man seemed scared and uncomfortable at the same time, merely stuttering after I told him this. He looked as if he was about to open his mouth, but I stepped away from him. I turned my back to the man and moved forward, leaving him in the field confused and breathless.

“I’m Elora, The Queen of Pain.”



Public vs Private

Hannah Shiflett

Essay

A unique perspective on the advantages and disadvantages of different types of education.

As a student who has attended both public and private schools, I have developed a unique perspective and understanding of the two types of institutions and what exactly makes them different. The main difference between public and private schools is quite obvious. A public school is any school that is state-funded through taxpayer money while a private school is funded through students' tuition. Private schools cite that the need for extra funding is to support a "better" education, like smaller class sizes and high academic standing.

When parents--mine included--consider public vs private schooling, their choice depends largely on the area in which the student is living and the quality of public education in said area. For example, when I first arrived in Pennsylvania, my parents contemplated enrolling me in private school, but ultimately decided on public school, specifically North Allegheny Senior High School. This was primarily because my parents saw that public schools in western Pennsylvania were held to a higher standard than others I had previously attended.

I attended my last private school in Florida for a brief nine-month period. The school was actually the only option available to me. My parents had me attend a private school because all the other public schools in my area were considered poor academic schools. Compared to the availability of college-prep level classes at my private school, the education provided at public schools wouldn't have allowed me to academically challenge myself. Private schooling was the only way to go while living in Florida, even though the tuition was equal to about a year at college. We didn't pay the tuition because the school provided a fantastic environment or because it would automatically get me to college, we paid because the private school was *comparatively* better.

States vary in terms of what level of education a student may receive; a private school in one state may be equivalent to a public school in another state. My private education in Florida was similar to my current public education in Pennsylvania, but the public education in Florida that was available to me would have been much weaker in comparison. *U.S. News* ranked Pennsylvania tenth in the country for K-12 education, while Florida is ranked 27th, part of the reason for my choice of private education in Florida.

I'll always be thankful that my parents have enrolled me in schools that maintain high test scores, a good student environment, and great teachers, whether it be in public or private school. However, the social aspect of private schools made me less thankful. I was often in small classes; a private school I attended in Minnesota had only 40 students in my class. Because of this, I would often find myself being particularly careful to whom I talked, hoping not to spread rumors across the grade. Plus, there was more competition to be at the top of the class because it wasn't hard to find out who excelled in what classes.

On the other hand, a public school like North Allegheny seems to negate this issue. The 600 plus students in our class serve as a large restriction on the grade-wide rumor mill. Although this larger crowd can be a challenge for some, it can be helpful to others as they seek to find a balance between academics and a social life. Oftentimes, students here do not have to worry about someone finding out a secret or spreading gossip because more often than not, many students are not in the same friend group and are, therefore, unaware of the details of most people's lives.

While both private schools and public schools have positives and negatives, finding what works best for the individual student is imperative for success. It's a matter of knowing how to thrive not only academically but also socially that can make a difference between which type of school to attend.



Juicy Fruit

Brooke Schmitz

Acrylic Painting

Lunch

Caroline Radocaj

Poetry

Dreaming of my lunch, hungry as a horse

The call to eat is a powerful force

At last I hear the ringing of the bell

Rushing, racing, running down the stairwell

Dodging through the hall, there's always a clown

Who blocks the path and slows everyone down

In the cafeteria, it's too loud

Heading to my table, I fight the crowd

As I close in I see my lunch friends

A needed break puts the morning to end

With eagerness I zip open my lunch

I take out my food and begin to munch

My friends and I open our food and eat

With limited time eating is a feat

The choices of school lunches are endless

What is in school food is anyone's guess

Nacho cheese, walking tacos, double dogs

Calling this "healthy food" leaves me agog

Empty lunch containers are stowed and stashed

Napkins, wrappers and scraps go in the trash

After we finish our "delicious" food

Our attitudes have improved to good moods

Eating lunch with the same group of good friends

What we talk about varies and depends

Sometimes sharing school gossip will suffice

Sometimes, however, we need to give advice

There is not a problem too big to solve

Finding solutions gets us all involved

Middle of the day discussions we share

Makes me grateful that I have friends who care

It is fun to spend time sharing stories

About our hopes, dreams, defeats and glories

As the clock counts down the final minutes

Our time with friends has reached the limit

Plans are made for after school, but alas

It is time for us to get into class

I enter the room and sit in my seat

Back to the grind without missing a beat

With a full stomach I'm ready to start

To do my work with all my heart

Luxurious Life of Influencers

Alexis Franczyk

Essay

Imagine this... surfing in Bora Bora on Monday, and by the time Thursday comes around you're skydiving in Jamaica. School is a distant memory to you, and somehow money is never a hindrance. You are living your dream life.

For most teenagers, this is just a fantasy, something we wish for but know isn't practical. But for a large number of social media influencers, this is their reality. And for the people who are not aware of social media influencers, they are teenagers who have gained a great following through social media outlets like Instagram and Youtube, and they have a significant impact on other teens. Big brands make deals with these influencers to use their products or wear their clothes so that other teens will be motivated to imitate.

I'm sure names like Emma Chamberlain and The Dolan Twins are familiar to you, even if you don't follow them on social media. You know them because they have done a fantastic job of branding themselves. They have actually made it hard for people to not know them. They are in clothing ads, on radio shows, in the news, on Snapchat, Instagram, Youtube, Twitter, and on other social media sites that you've never heard of before.

A more extreme example of an influencer living a luxurious and unrealistic life is Alex Hayes, the Youtuber. Hayes posts weekly videos doing crazy things like surfing, skydiving, snowboarding, jumping off waterfalls, driving expensive cars and so many more things that just aren't a part of most teenagers' daily lives. And to make it more interesting, he edits his videos and adds intense music, making it more appealing to his viewers.

The average teenager goes on one, maybe two vacations a year, making sure to schedule around school and possibly a job. So how do these influencers live their lives jumping from country to country every day? Don't they go to school? How can they just pick up and leave for weeks at a time?

To answer these questions in one sentence, it could be said that their life is their job. Along with selling products, they also sell themselves and the life all teenagers wish they had. They do this by choosing the best parts of their lives and share them with the world. Emma Chamberlain doesn't post videos of her brushing her teeth—she posts videos of walking in New York Fashion Week for Louis Vuitton. Her life on film is much more luxurious than her reality, and that is why people want to keep up with her and watch her videos.

Although it's fun for teenagers to watch these videos and keep up with the exciting lives of social media influencers, they need to keep in mind that what influencers put out online is not the full story. And although they have branded themselves to look like they have luxurious lives, they ultimately deal with the same things that every other teenager does, if not more, because they are in the public's eye. In the end, the "luxurious" lives of influencers may not be so luxurious after all.

Roxen

Aurora Arena

Photograph



Just Another Gen Z Thing

Anjana Suresh

Essay

The start of a new year, especially the beginning of a new decade, is often associated with feelings of hope, promise and the chance to begin anew. But not everyone is in such a good mood this time around.

Just a few days into 2020, I opened my phone to a CNN article notification reading, "Your mental health in 2020: divisive politics, work stress, and environmental perils can leave anyone feeling anxious or depressed. Here are 5 ways to improve your mental outlook."

The notification was spot on. Soon thereafter, tensions with Iran escalated, General Soleimani was executed and the devastating wildfires in Australia began to spread like, well, wildfire.

And soon after those events came the memes.

70 VARIATIONS

It felt as if only moments later social media was swept up in fears of a potential “World War III” due to Soleimani’s death. Twitter, Instagram and TikTok were flooded with ironic memes about what people would do in the event of a draft.

“Immersing yourself in nihilistic internet musings” should have been one of the five solutions on the CNN article.

I found some of the memes to be quite entertaining, and in some cases, even informative—I learned from a TikTok video, for instance, that the Vietnam draft ended in 1973. And, as expected, most of the content creators are a part of my generation, making the memes more relatable.

With the threat of a potential world war and catastrophic climate change looming over our heads, it really is quite a bleak time to be growing up.

It’s common knowledge that our generation is labeled as too sensitive. But with the threat of a potential world war and catastrophic climate change looming over our heads, it really is quite a bleak time to be growing up. For me, and for many other teenagers, social media offers a sense of comfort. By extension, making and sharing memes has come to resemble a sort of coping mechanism—a way for us to deal with the scary unknown in a world where we frankly don't have much power.

Many adults believe that joking about the horrors of war dishonors those who have sacrificed their lives for the safety of our country. It's an understandable criticism, but it's not entirely accurate.

Most of the memes I’ve seen don’t use the plight of affected soldiers simply for likes or followers or merely for the sake of a laugh, and, if a creator were to do so, they would immediately be called out by others.

Actually, Gen Z appears to know where to draw the line. I have yet to see a meme about the Australian wildfires where the creator pokes fun at the situation. Because it is truly a tragic event, no one with an ounce of compassion would dare pass it off as something insignificant. On the other hand, World War III is hypothetical and the chances of an actual global war starting are slim -- and that's not just according to me.

I’ve come to realize another scary truth about the evolution of memes. It seems like there’s been a shift from random and lighthearted content to more serious humor, which now constitutes a much larger percentage of the content I see online today. Movies, books and adults, too, have all told us that our teenage years are supposed to be among the best in our life. But, given what I’ve seen online and have experienced myself, that doesn’t seem to be the case for our generation. Relationship problems, school stress, and school shooters have all been popular subjects for memes within the last year.

Worst of all, phrases such as “I want to die” and “Just kill me” are now commonly seen in memes, making it frustratingly and dangerously difficult to tell what's real from what's fake. However, since social media gives us an outlet to share our thoughts, messages can often be exaggerated, especially for those looking to gain popularity.

Like just about everyone else, I hope there isn’t a World War III. And as odd as it may sound, the memes are already starting to die down, which is probably a good sign for all of us.

It

Maddy Holman

Poetry

Somedays **it** is strong I can
Feel the undertow Begging
me to come a little closer
Begging to drag me out to
sea

Somedays **it** isn't Maybe
there's a little tug But I
wade my way to the beach
And dance in the sun
While **it** lasts

It's not the learning to
Swim Oh no Swimming
Is easily mastered **It's**
the desire to swim
down that will let you
drown

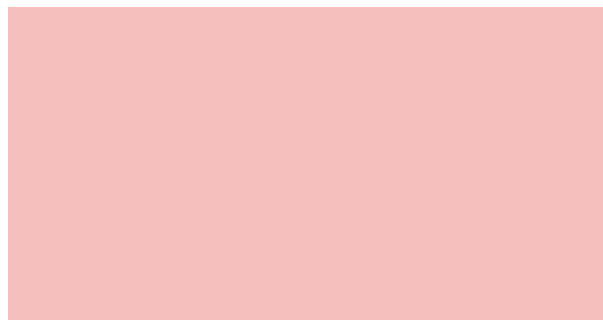
When I embrace the
undertow I feel **it** in my
soul A deep aching pain
Like something was
removed With jagged
rocks

I cough and I cry and I
gasp Trying to overcome
But water starts to fill my
lungs **It** never reaches the
top Before the waves spit
me out

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I almost jump back in But my
mother is setting up a picnic
And my friends have beach
balls So I sit and watch While
it lasts

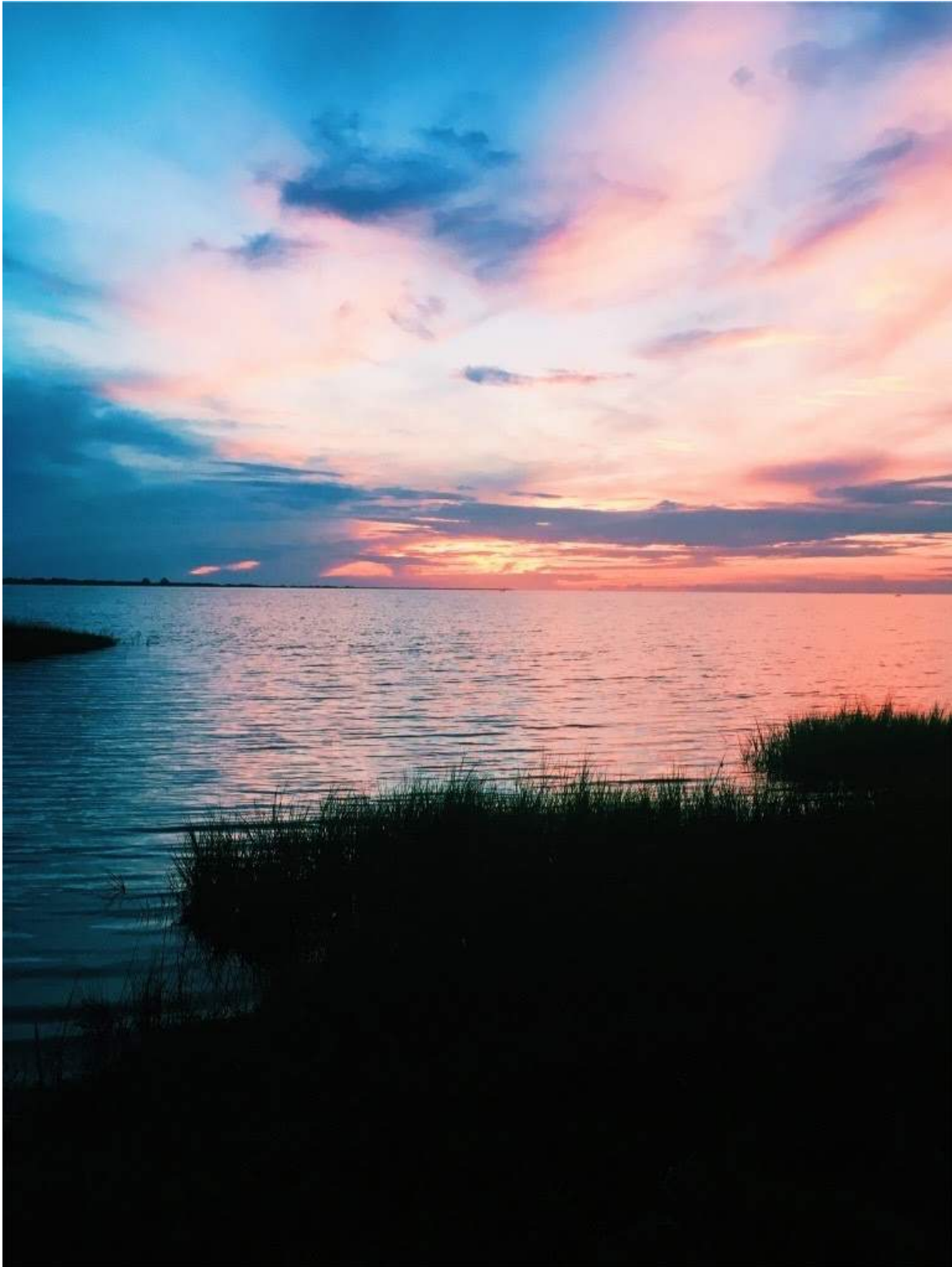
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Summer Days

Mackenzie Williams

Photograph





Tricycle
Almira Kusuma
Photograph

Insanity

Yasseen Sabil

Poetry

They say insanity is
Doing the same thing 1,000 times

And expecting different results.
But as I lay awake

And the night thickens
My mind is flooded with thoughts.

I think of words I could say
Or the actions I could do.

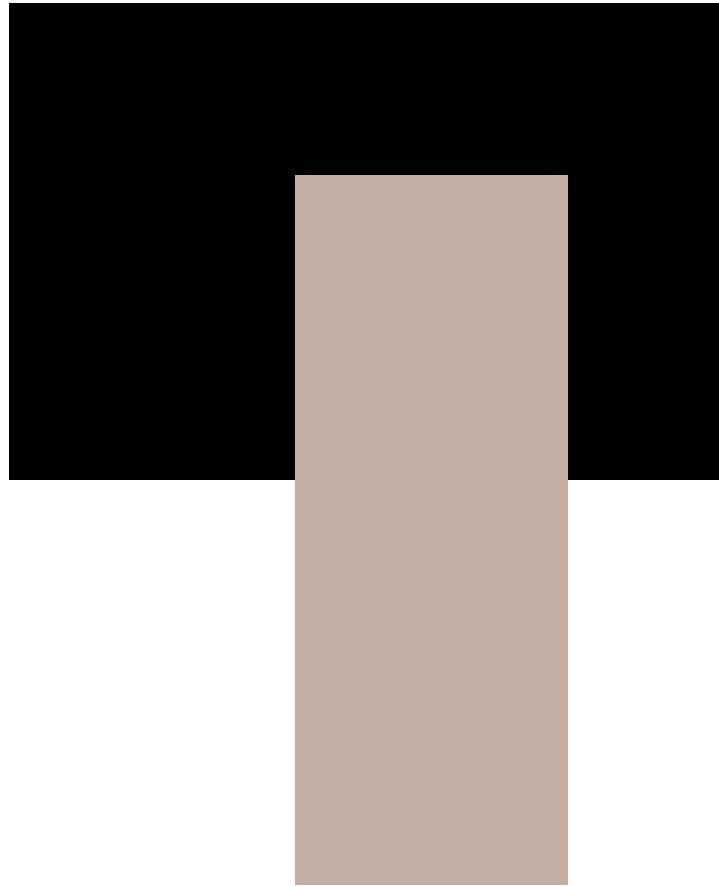
My thumbs do that little dance they do
When they don't know what to type.

More thoughts come in--
Hazel coming out of brown eyes in the summer sun,

Long black hair carrying a subtle scent--
Strawberries.

I hear laughter and giggles and a fountain's gentle water
Crashing on the concrete,

And I realize that insanity
Would be doing nothing at all.



Community Role Models

Isaiah Evans

Essay

Often children are molded by the environment and by people they observe and interact with daily. In *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, Jem and Scout learn many lessons from the people in their family and community. Boo Radley shows them how to have compassion for others even if they are not directly related. Atticus teaches them to be respectful of everyone regardless of race or class. They also learn what not to do through observing Bob Ewell's behavior, as he does not show any regard for his fellow townspeople or even his family. Indeed, Jem and Scout are influenced by the actions of these men that contribute to their understanding of right and wrong.

Atticus believes in justice for all people no matter their race or class. He demonstrates this when he defends pro bono Tom Robinson, a poor black man accused of raping a white man, Mayella. Atticus is a formidable ally for Tom because he is an upstanding and well known lawyer. The town denounces Tom as a rapist and did not want Atticus to "try" during the trial. Atticus tells Scout he would not be able to hold up his head if he did not give Tom a chance. He believes that every person has a right to adequate representation, so he provided Tom with a solid defense. For example, Atticus exposes that Mayella lied while testifying. Tom used to do field work when he was younger and his left arm was caught in a cotton gin making it unusable. In Mayella's testimony she declares that she was hit in the face on the left side, but Tom is crippled in his left arm, so he could not have been the one to hit her. Additionally, Atticus prioritizes Tom's safety over his own when a lynch mob led by Walter Cunningham shows up at the Maycomb jail. The lynch mob wants to hurt Tom for no other reason than he is a black man accused of raping a white woman. Atticus tells Link Deas that he will not let Tom go to the chair without the truth being told. He will not let any harm come to Tom outside of the law, including being attacked by a lynch mob. He puts his life and well being at risk to protect Tom and give him a fair chance. Atticus' sense of right and wrong extended beyond the courtroom. He teaches his children to treat everyone with respect and dignity. This is shown when Jem cuts Miss Dubose Chameleon's flowers after she accuses Atticus of being no better than a "n-word" in the trash. Atticus punishes Jem by making him read to her everyday for a month. This teaches Jem to not judge someone by their behavior and to be kind regardless. Other people's lack of morality does not affect how Atticus treats them, which is always with respect and kindness.

Unfortunately, Atticus is not the only influence in Jem and Scouts lives. Jem and Scout learn what not to do from Bob Ewell, who lacks compassion and common decency for others. His actions further demonstrates that he does not have any concern even for his own children. He keeps them home from school, having them work instead. Mayella, who is nineteen, admits that she only had two or three years of school and that the other children did not need to know how to read or write, according to her father. Furthermore, Bob spends his money on alcohol instead of providing meals for his family, and his kids are constantly sick and unclean. He even physically abuses them. These are the basics of taking care of a

family, to provide food, shelter, and clothing, but he shows no remorse for his actions. Bob's moral shortcomings ultimately impact his children's behaviors. For example, his racism and rage that his daughter would make advances towards a black man influenced Mayella's testimony against Tom. Bob is adamant that Tom raped Mayella, and she believes going against her father is futile so she lies without regard for Tom's well being. She stands by her father's accusation, even though Atticus presents convincing evidence that Tom did not rape her. Tom is one of the few people that is kind to her, and it is obvious that Mayella made advances towards him, but she was too ashamed and scared of her father to tell the truth. Bob's anger ultimately lands on Atticus for defending Tom and making Bob out to be an abuser. He becomes contentious towards Atticus, spitting on him and threatening to seek revenge even if it takes the rest of his life. Unfortunately, Bob's anger is not limited to just Atticus, as he attempts to harm Jem and Scout. Bob's complete disregard for truth and justice provides Jem and Scout with clear examples of what not to do.

Conversely, Boo Radley teaches Jem and Scout compassion and kindness through his actions. Although Boo Radley grew up in a peculiar family, he is considerate, generous and caring. Townspeople believed Boo is crazy and dangerous because he stayed inside his home without being seen for more than twenty-five years, but he is actually gentle and watchful. For example, the night of the fire at Miss Maudie's house, Boo shows his compassion towards Scout. While Atticus helps to put out the fire, Boo realizes that the Jem and Scout are alone, cold and in shock. He attempts to care for Scout by putting a blanket over her to keep warm. He does this without needing to be seen or thanked for his actions. Boo's reclusiveness fascinates Jem and Scout. They try many times to gain glimpses of Boo by peeping inside his home, writing him notes and promising desserts if he will come out. However, because of Boo's benign nature, he continually overlooks their behavior and even shows that he cares for them and wants to bring them joy. This can be seen when he leaves gifts for Scout and Jem in a tree hole on the path to their school. He gives them Indian pennies, gum and soap figures in their likeness. Jem and Scout are excited about the gifts and look forward to passing the tree to see what they might receive. This shows Boo's generosity and ability to see the good in the children, even though their behavior could be viewed as annoying and intrusive to most adults. More evidence of his kindness emerges when he risks his own life to protect the children. As Jem and Scout walk home from Scout's Halloween pageant, Bob Ewell attacks them, breaking Jem's arm and attempting to suffocate Scout. Boo steps in and stops the attack on Scout, stabbing Bob and killing him. Boo knows that killing someone could put his own life in jeopardy, but intervenes for the safety of the children. He is willing to risk his life for them no matter the consequences to himself. Boo's actions demonstrate true compassion and generosity.

Jem and Scout learn many lessons through their interactions with and observations of their family and community. They learned from Atticus to treat people with respect and not to judge based on race or class. Bob Ewell's irresponsible parenting and disregard for his fellow citizens show Jem and Scout the negative impact that can result. Boo Radley teaches them to be kind and courageous. The actions of adults in a child's environment play a significant part to their overall development and understanding of right and wrong.

Bani Adam/Children of Adam

Parastoo Aramesh

Poetry

Human beings are members of a whole
If one member is afflicted with pain
If you have no sympathy for human pain
-Sa'di Shirazi

In Creation of one essence and soul
Other members uneasy will remain
The name of human you cannot retain

بنی آدم

بنی آدم اعضای یکدیگرند
که در آفرینش ز یک گوهرند
چو عضوی به درد آورد روزگار
دگر عضوها را نماند قرار
تو کز محنت دیگران بی غمی
نشاید که نامت نهند آدمی

- سعدی شیرازی

Every Night

Betul Tuncer

Poetry

In the cold night there was nothing.
Not a single star to illuminate the blanket of darkness.
This night was like many others.
It was a night when

A little girl curled up in her bed
knees up to her chest,
yearning for her father.

A teenager sat upon his tiled roof,
looking up at the night sky,
wishing he could fly away.

A mother stood at her kitchen counter,
tears streaming down her cheeks,
hoping her children would remember her.

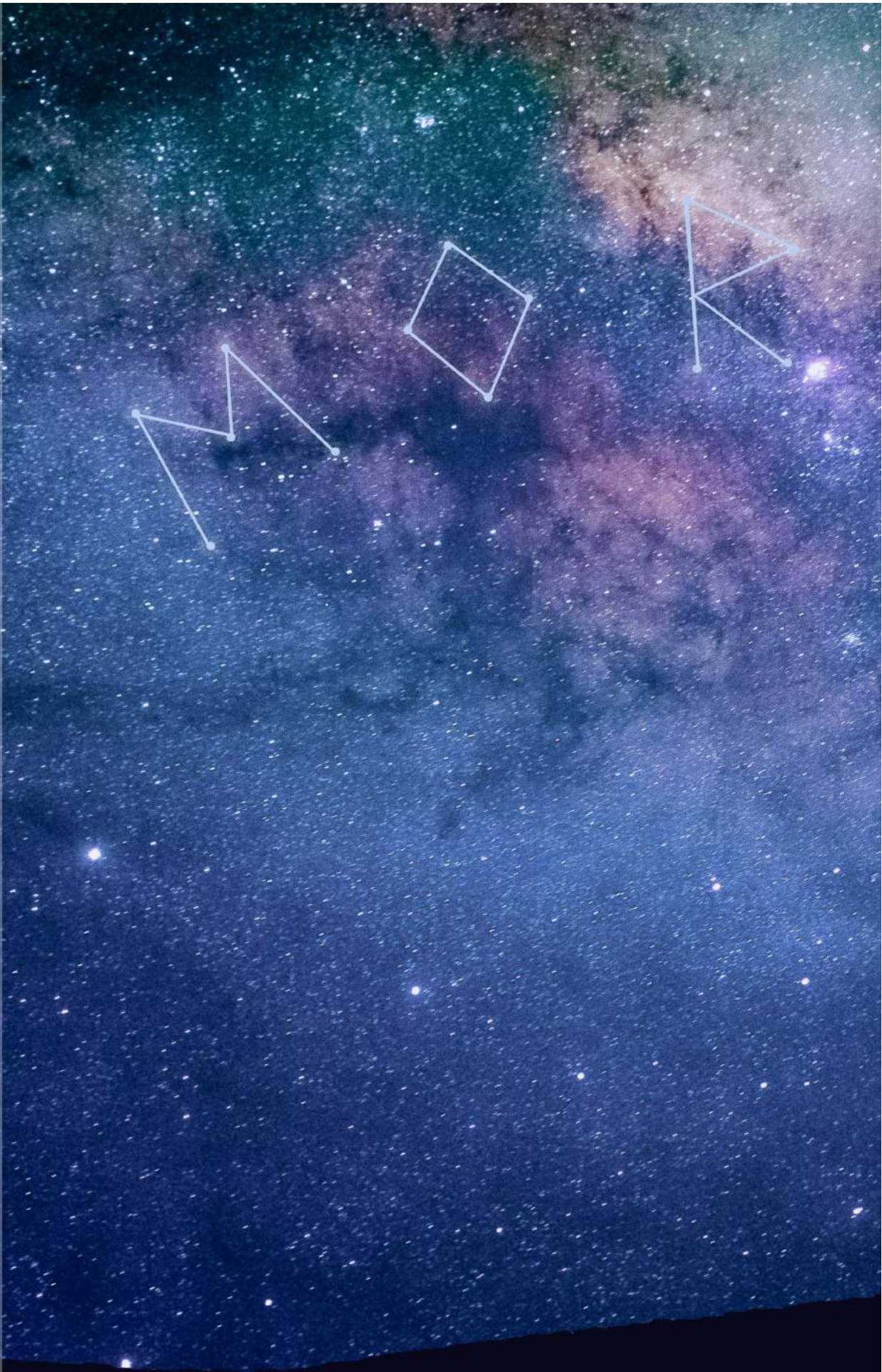
Yet one thing made this night different from the others.

A father balanced on the edge of his windowsill,
loosening his grip upon the cold metal,
cursing at the night.

Every night a similar story unraveled,
For the first time tonight though
It actually came to an end.

And in that end,
the cold night was dark--
Just a void of nothingness.

VARIATIONS 2020



Edited by Ashley Chung



Hands

Yasseen Sabil

Poetry

I will run and I will frolic
I will live and I will experience
All that I can in the years of youth that I have left.
But the capability of wonder available to me know
Will not always be there.
I can look upon my predecessor that is so close to me--
Oh, so very close to me.
I see deep brown eyes like my own.
I look into them, but they do not return my gaze;
They scan the surface, but to claim any depth
Would simply be heresy.
I see his wrists and they look like mine.
I look at the way his nose juts out in the middle
Just like mine does,
And the concept of my own mortality emerges from its shroud
From deep inside my mind
And it shocks me to my core
Because I cannot deny
That his hands look just like mine.



Infinite

Almira Kusuma

Photograph

Morning

Abhi Ajay

Photograph



The Look of May

Alaina Anton

Poetry

Snow washes away
Buds strive for light
Animals come here to stay
Birds in the sky show wings with might
How I love the look of May
The sun flies in the bright blue sky
Like a summer kite
On a suntanned day

Heaven on Earth

Rachel Robertson

Photograph



The Meaning of Life

Jack Gilliland

Six-word story

To learn, to become, to be.

84 VARIATIONS

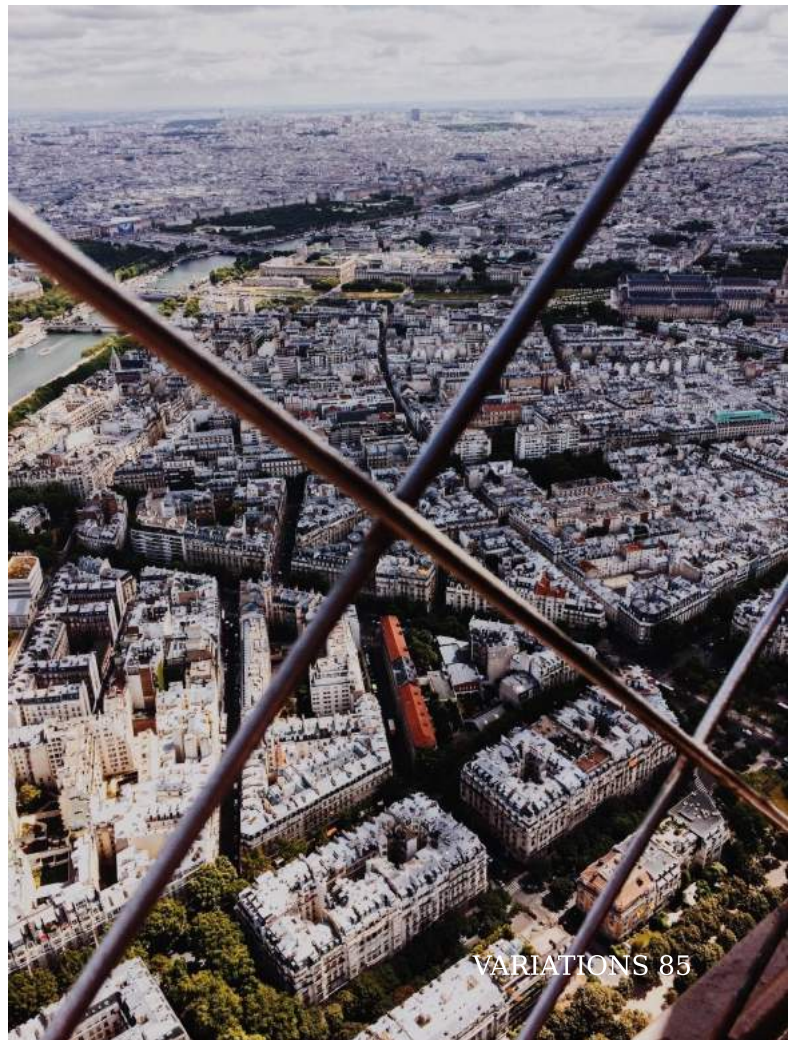
What is It?

Jacob Mann

Poetry

It is something only you will know.
One day it will not be confusing.
One day it will make sense.
If it is not known about now, It will be discovered
later.
Maybe it will be a mystery.
Maybe it will only be a thought.
Why will it not be created? Will it ever be real?
Other people may want it gone.
Other people may think it is wrong.
Only one person can truly know what it is.
What is it to you?

Streets of Love
Sarah Satcho
Photograph



Movie Night

Sydney Bianchin

Essay

Normally I am fine with any movie choice, enjoying most if not all, but on a Thursday night back in January, I made the mistake of choosing *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*. To say I cried is an understatement. My poor little brother walked downstairs to me bawling for a good ten minutes after the movie was over because it was so absolutely terrible. The way the Jews were treated in the movie disgusted me, and the end was overall the worst part. The movie itself though, really says a lot to younger generations.

The prejudice and hate that is in the heart of our society is so ridiculous I can't even fathom how anyone can live like this without yearning for a change. As we all know, history tends to repeat itself, but this part of history is rooted in our everyday life, and most definitely our future has seemingly become inevitable.

In 1492, when Christopher Columbus came to our current home, America, he infiltrated a peaceful land. The Native American people were happy with their lives, and while wary of the newcomers, offered some help and guidance to newcomers. In return, years later the settlers ended up organizing their own form of an unplanned genocide against the Native American people. Native Americans were ripped from their homes, new diseases were spread, and many were forced into slavery. Countless lives were ruined because they were different from the settlers and were forcibly being used for their resources and knowledge. This is where many might say prejudice and hate were first introduced in the documented history of North America, or the United States as we now know it.

History then repeated itself with black rights. After the Civil War, slavery had ended, and those formerly enslaved were given their rightful freedom to live as they wished. Though people had fought for their freedom, many of the former slaves were treated as lower than the white men. It took almost 100 years for there to be a change. People fought and fought for the rights they deserved, and eventually they got them. It is not right that they had been treated so unfairly for so long because of the color of their skin. They had to work hard and fight in order to get the same treatment as others. We are all humans, so why are people treated so differently?

Much later in history, we see similar effects occur in Germany. Adolf Hitler came into power at a time where the people were weak and needed guidance. He organized a very commonly known genocide against the Jews. They were blamed for everything gone wrong in Germany and sent to concentration camps where they were either forced into doing heavy labor or were killed. Watching *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* puts in perspective how the Germans lived compared to the Jewish people. It shows the unfair treatment of those who have done nothing to hurt those around them.

Our history demonstrates some of the most unfair treatments but a lot of it is still around today. Clearly many people have not learned that no one is better than the person next to you--that the color of your skin does not make you superior. Your religion does not put you in a higher position than others. Everyone should be entitled to living as they wish, believing what they want, and being themselves. Anti Semitism, homophobia, racism all need to stop.

As the upcoming generation who will be taking actions in order to keep America running, we need to stop the hate and prejudice. If we don't, this country will be burned to the ground by its own people. No more shootings, no more racial slurs, no more hate, and especially no more living in fear. We can be the ones to end it all, to make everyone equal, but we all must put in the effort to create a change. I'll be out there fighting for what is right, will you?



Roller Coaster

Mackenzie Williams

Photograph

The Good Side

Megan Stewart

Reverse Poetry

In today's world, evil overtakes the good.

Don't try to tell me that

Kindness still flows unconditionally from people's hearts.

Because as we take a step back so many awful things occur every day.

And I don't believe that

The people on this earth still care about one another.

Because Through each decision made

Our society is being pushed into a path of destruction.

I will not accept that

This world can be saved with love

Kindness and hope.

We decide to view

hatred over happiness

And we don't choose

To accept positivity and kindness from those who give endless love and support.

Never forget

Heartless people in life will continue to poison the world's optimism.

I am fully aware that

My outlook

Determines

My attitude.

I have no control over my happiness.

It will never be true that

Even the slightest act of kindness can have a large effect on someone's life.

I have no doubt

Bad people exist in this world.

Even though

Small miracles present themselves every so often

The spark of joy fades away.

I will never think

There is hope.

Zion National Park

Will Shuttleworth

Photograph



88 VARIATIONS





Magenta Eruption

Parastoo Aramesh

Photograph

Paradise

Josh Razum
Photograph



A Piece of the Sky
Parastoo Aramesh
Photograph

90 VARIATIONS

Sunny Skies/What the World Can Be

Miarra Misutka

Song Lyrics

Intro:

The world is where we are.

The world is where we thrive.

Can't we make things better, so we can all survive?

That's what the world can be; that's what the world can be.

Chorus:

With sunny skies, no need to hide,

That's what the world can be.

Verse 1:

The world is filled with anger; the world is filled with hate,

Come on you guys let's stand for joy, and all retaliate.

Chorus:

That's what the world can be; that's what the world can be.

With sunny skies, no need to hide,

That's what the world can be.

Verse 2:

The world should be so happy, and life can be a song,

Where there's no judging others and there's more right than wrong.

Chorus:

That's what the world can be; that's what the world can be.

With sunny skies, no need to hide,

That's what the world can be.

Verse 3:

The world has so much beauty; the world it shines so bright

I know that times get tough, but you just gotta find the light.

Chorus:

That's what the world can be; that's what the world can be.

With sunny skies, no need to hide,

That's what the world can be.

Verse 4:

The world is full of cursing, the world is full of scare

Society is changing, so change it into care

Chorus:

That's what the world can be; that's what the world can be.

With sunny skies, no need to hide,

That's what the world can be.

Verse 5:

Cause nothing holds up stronger than all of us as one

Against the prowls of evil that add up just to none

Chorus:

That's what the world can be; that's what the world can be.

With sunny skies, no need to hide,

That's what the world can be.

Shells

Maria Tassotto

Photograph



Unpredictable

Josh Truesdell

Poetry/Haiku

Churning violently,
The Sea tumbles and wavers,
Then, suddenly, calm.

92 VARIATIONS

Twenty Ways To Get Over a Fallen Friendship

Jaden Razum

Poetry

1. cry
2. cry again
3. cry until you feel that you cannot cry any more tears
4. pick yourself up; it is okay if you fall in the process
5. treat yourself
6. cry once again
7. find a new hobby to do
8. wonder why your friendship has fallen
9. question why things didn't work out
10. isolate yourself; no one needs you
11. try to pick yourself up again
12. try to branch out
13. accept that they have already moved on
14. breathe
15. find new friends
16. connect to them
17. hope for the best
18. don't do what you did in the past
19. don't think about the past
20. Eventually, move on

Flower in a Pond

Jay Pavasko

Photograph





Blank Piece of Paper

Raashmitha Bayyana

Poetry

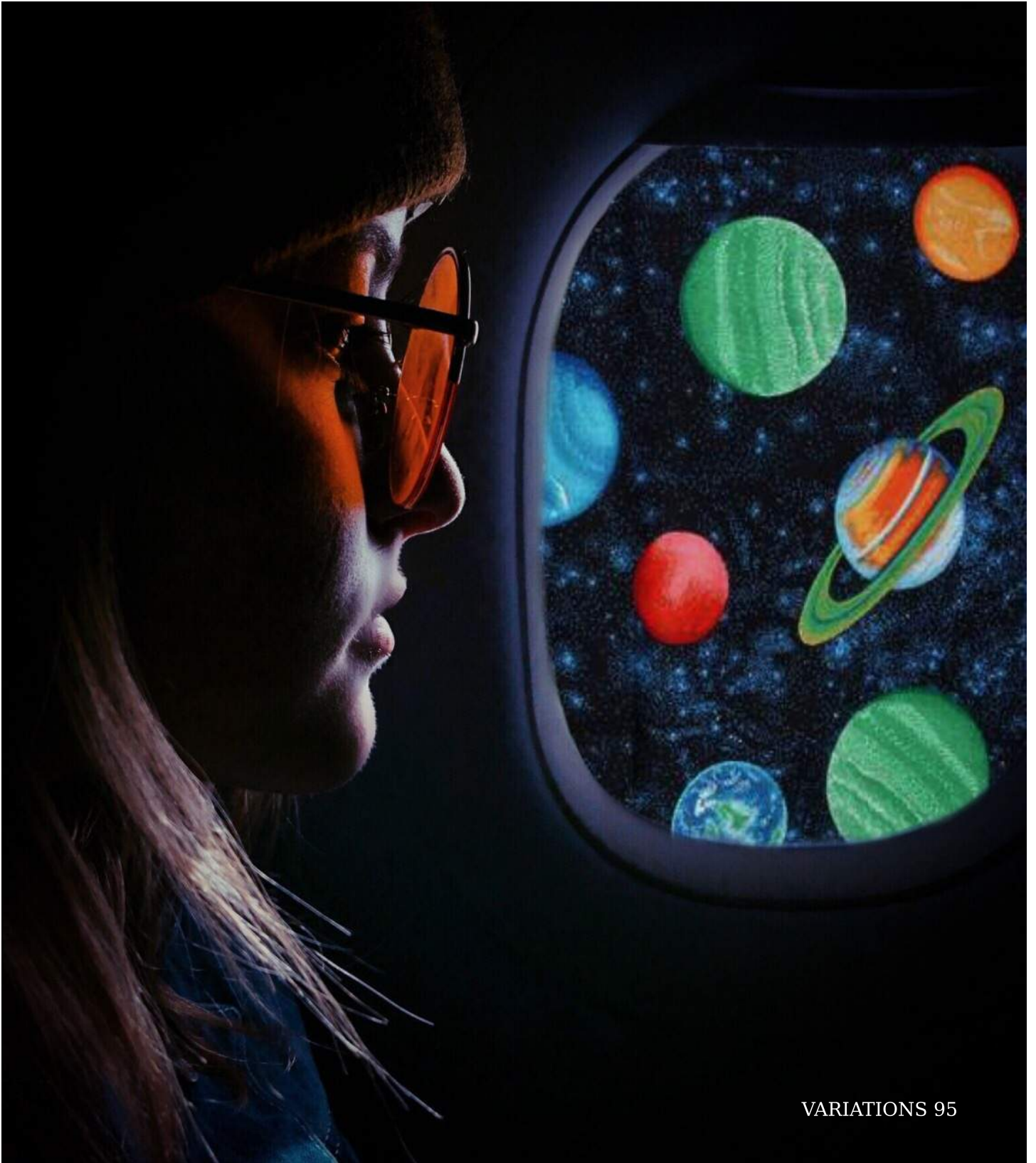
A piece of blank paper is how life starts off,
Colors are added as we start to learn.
As we grow the colors turn into something more.
We define ourselves by the brush strokes,
Hating ourselves if we err.
We think that the world is over
When there is still so much more to it.
Sometimes we must step back and admire the piece of work that we have become--
The art that has grown on the piece of white paper
For no two paintings are the same as we are all unique,
For we are all who we are meant to be.

For we are all who we are meant to be.
For no two paintings are the same as we are all unique
The art that has grown on the piece of white paper
Sometimes we must step back and admire the piece of work that we have become--
When there is still so much more to it.
We think that the world is over
Hating ourselves if we err.
We define ourselves by the brush strokes
As we grow the colors turn into something more.
Colors are added as we start to learn;
A piece of blank paper is how life starts off.

Spaced Out

Meghan Phrampus

Digital Art, Photograph



A Promised Hope

Rohan Puri

Essay

Since the creation of the United States, immigration has helped shape the diversity of the population in the United States. Immigrants founded the United States because they sought religious freedom and other opportunities. They traveled to a new world and established the country as a haven to others--a place for others to flourish. To this day, they retain those traits and bring diversity and valued labor to the country.

Immigrants contribute greatly and regularly to the United States and should have less stringent laws against them. Immigrants are essential to the US economy, and it would fail without them. Immigrants work tirelessly in their jobs and help promote job growth in various sectors. For example, by 2007, immigrants accounted for over 15.6% of the US workforce. They came to the US in order to work and provide for their families, and they did just that by finding jobs and staying employed. Another reason that they are essential to the economy relates to the matter of the United States' declining labor force. In 2007, statistics predicted that "the retirement of baby boomers is expected to result in 80 million workers leaving the US workforce over the next two decades." Young immigrants travel to the US and replace those workers, helping to keep the economy steady with much needed labor. Not only are they essential, but they also promote immense job growth. This is quantified by the fact that "the foreign-born made up about 64 percent of job growth" from 2003 to 2007. This job growth and replacement of lost labor keeps the economy going and even increases its potential in the long run.

Besides helping protect industry in America, immigrants greatly improve the economy in various ways. Foreign workers, though stigmatized as hurtful to the economy, actually help to make it stronger. Harvard educated economist Kimberly Clausing writes, "Protectionism is harmful for most American workers, but even more destructive are policies that make the United States less welcoming to immigrants." American workers are faced with a sense of cruel kindness--many believe that they reap benefits, however, the reality shows otherwise.

Without the labor that the US gains from foreign countries in the form of immigrants, prices and labor costs actually increase greatly. Clausing also states that "fifty-five percent of the United States' billion dollar startups were founded or co-founded by immigrants, and more than 40 percent of the Fortune 500 companies were founded or co-founded by immigrants or their children." These immigrants account for quite a large portion of the United States' wealth in the economy. These large companies also bring a name to America and along with that name, an immense amount of revenue. Finally, immigrants help relieve demographic pressures on the US government. The influx of labor helps bring the retired-to-working ratio down, allowing for more allocation of government resources elsewhere. The immigrants are the glue holding the country's workforce together. However, as Eric Levitz of the *Daily Intelligencer* writes, "In 2018, our nation attracted 70 percent fewer immigrants than it had the year before." If the US continues to lose immigrants at this rate, the country and the economy could

collapse. These immigrants exemplify hard working beings that are majorly responsible for making the US as strong of a country as it currently is, and they should be encouraged to come to the US, not pushed away.

Though immigrants clearly benefit the country as a whole, both legal and illegal immigrants are treated harshly by the government. The US, a first world country, treats immigrants terribly in comparison to how they should be treating them. First released in 2018, leaked footage of migrants in detainee camps at our southern border showed children sleeping on concrete floors and in wire cages. What human being would want this treatment for themselves? These adults and children are simply attempting to make better lives for themselves, but instead they are apprehended and kept in worse conditions than those who have committed heinous crimes. Many reports also state that nearly two-thousand children faced separation from their parents from April to May 2018. This systematic stripping of children from parents is, quite frankly, morally wrong and not in line with the ideals of the US.

Many immigrants also face an immense prejudice based on race, ethnicity and religion. The Trump administration most clearly exemplifies this with its 2017 ban of multiple Muslim-predominant countries in regards to immigration to the US. This is a clear instance of discrimination. The sentiment that laws like this inspires in some groups in the US can even be likened to the Roman treatment of the Jewish people; quite a few immigrant-pointed attacks have occurred in the US as a result. Immigrants work hard and in turn aid the US in its endeavors, so they should not be treated as terribly and should not face the discrimination that they are facing in the status quo.

A main counterargument made in the immigration discussion is that many immigrants are criminals. Hans Von Spakovsky of Heritage writes that “non-citizens accounted for nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of all federal arrests in 2018.” One problem with this study and others of similar topic is that most of those crimes are simply immigration crimes or non-violent crimes. It is true that many immigrants come from bad areas that have a high level of crime; however, many actually come to the US in order to escape those dangerous conditions. One can only imagine the constant conflict with burning cars in the streets and death all around. Alex Nowrasteh, American analyst of immigration policy, cites that “illegal immigrants are much less likely to be incarcerated than native-born Americans.” Though some immigrants commit crimes, it is not fair to group all immigrants as criminals.

vidently, immigrants positively contribute to and influence the US economy and life overall. Immigrants built the US from the ground up, but now new immigrants trying to get into the US have an extremely hard time doing so. They contribute so much, yet they do not get the recognition and respect that they deserve. At a time when the US is seen as one of the highest achieving countries, it has stooped to a new low in its immigration policies. These immigrants should not be treated inhumanely; instead, they should be treated in accordance with the fact that they are essential and welcome to the US.

Staff Biographies



Parastoo Aramesh

Parastoo is a senior at North Allegheny Senior High School (NASH), and this is her second year working on the *VARIATIONS* staff. She joined for the first time last year and really enjoyed seeing the different artwork and talent that came from the school. Besides *VARIATIONS* she is also involved in the NA Fashion Club, National English Honors Society, National Art Honors Society, and Fencing Club. She loves art and plans to pursue it later on in a costume design career.

Ashley Chung

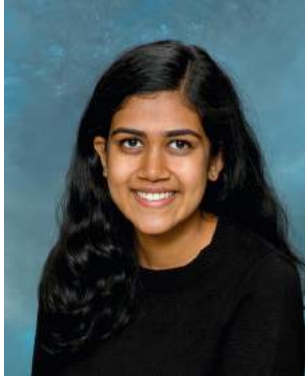
Ashley is a senior and the Layout Editor of *VARIATIONS* this year. This is her second year as part of the staff, and she is grateful that the club has created a unique creative outlet for her at school. She has always loved digital design and photography, as well as various crafts and projects like paper-cutting art and bullet-journaling. Ashley plays NA Varsity Tennis, was a Key Club officer, and enjoys playing the piano in her free time. She plans on pursuing engineering at Columbia University next year where she hopes to find new avenues to apply and grow her passion for the arts.



Junmo Jeon

Junmo wanted to be part of the *VARIATIONS* team but has only taken the initiative to join this year as a senior. He was excited to read and appreciate all of the literary and artistic work from talented students. He likes organizing and decorating, which is why he finds being a layout team member is the perfect choice for him. He is glad to have been a part of the effort in putting *VARIATIONS* together and will fondly remember this experience after he graduates. Junmo also participates in Student Council as a Principal's Advisory Cabinet Head and plans to pursue computer science when he graduates.

Staff Biographies



Saranya Muthumula

Saranya is a senior at NASH, and this is her second year working on the magazine. Poetry and abstract art have always been two integral parts of her life, so working on *VARIATIONS* has given her the opportunity to channel her interests. In addition to *VARIATIONS*, she is also an officer of Student Council and DECA. Next year, Saranya will be attending the University of Pittsburgh and plans to study biochemistry or neuroscience. In the future, she hopes to pursue a career in medicine.

Marissa Rodriguez

Marissa is a senior at NASH, and this is her first year working on the *VARIATIONS* staff. She chose to join, mainly to admire works of writing and art from her peers. She has always appreciated art and English, so she loves being able to bring her interests to the magazine. In her free time, she enjoys reading, writing poems and short stories, and painting. Alongside *VARIATIONS*, she is also involved as a member of the Multicultural Student Union, STEMinsim, SADD, National English Honors Society, and National Art Honors Society. Marissa plans on attending Chatham University to study biology or biochemistry in the fall.



Jonathan Ross

Jonathan is a senior at North Allegheny Senior High School and has worked on *VARIATIONS* for two years. He plans to study International Relations and Economics at Emory University, but he also enjoys writing poetry and short stories in his free time. The creativity of the literary magazine allows Jonathan to combine his many interests in a single outlet.

Staff Biographies

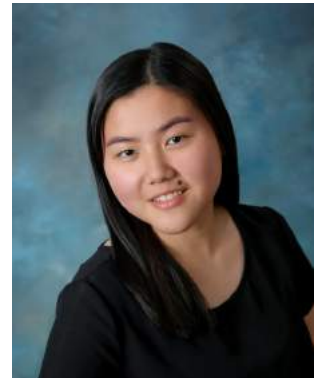


Betul Tuncer

Betul is a senior at NASH and is the Editor-in-Chief of *VARIATIONS* for the 2019-2020 school year. This is her second year working on the *VARIATIONS* magazine, and she is happy to have been a part of the process. In her free time she enjoys writing poems, painting and watching Netflix shows. Besides *VARIATIONS*, she is also involved in the National English Honors Society, the *Uproar*, Girl Up and MSA. Betul hopes to pursue a career in journalism and will be majoring in Communications and Political Science at the University of Pittsburgh.

Ashley Zheng

Ashley is a senior at NASH, and this is her first year on the *VARIATIONS* staff. She has always enjoyed art, painting, and writing creative literary works for class. With these interests, she saw *VARIATIONS* as an opportunity to apply her knowledge to the school's literary magazine. Outside of *VARIATIONS*, she is a pianist and the Editor-in-Chief of the NASH Yearbook. After graduation, she plans on attending Pennsylvania State University, majoring in Supply Chain Management.



Christina Zhou

Christina is a senior at NASH, and this is her second year working on *VARIATIONS*. She has always loved painting and illustration. She submitted many art works to *VARIATIONS* this year. Christina believes that being a part of the staff was a great experience, and she enjoys looking at others' art works and working with other passionate people. She enjoyed her experience with *VARIATIONS* and hopes to keep growing her passion in art. Christina has also won gold and silver keys in the Scholastic's Art & Writing contest. She plans on attending college in either computer science or accounting.

Memorable Note

Betul Tuncer
Editor in Chief

For nearly as long as NASH has existed, VARIATIONS has been a consistent publication that brings student work together. Every year, dedicated students work together to compile the best student artwork and literary pieces in hopes to share it with the entire NASH community and the world- and this year was even more special. With all the recent events that have been going on, though it has been a challenge, the Variations staff has pushed beyond limitations to bring the 46th volume of the magazine to life.

“This is my third year working on the magazine, and this has been my favorite year thus far because of the dedication of the staff members.” stated Ms. Yakich, Variations sponsor and English teacher. “They were so kind and genuine and always surprised me with what they were and are capable of. ”

“The publication process has been different because we had to virtually have meetings using google hangouts to complete the process.” Ms. Yakich mentioned. However, that definitely did not stop the staff from rising to the occasion.

NASH senior and Variations Layout Editor, Ashley Chung, said, “This issue has been particularly enjoyable to arrange even if it was virtually and I really hope it adequately captures the perseverance and spirit of this year’s NASH students.”

As is typical for a literary and art magazine, Variations uses motifs as a way to better organize student pieces. This year the motif is memory, mindfulness, and morrow. Chosen by the staff members, the motif reflects the idea of 20/20 vision.

“The NASH community should expect this magazine to be no different than years prior, just because we had to meet virtually.” said Ms. Yakich. “If anything, I think people will be surprised at how we were able to achieve the same quality while not being physically in school.”

Though there won’t be a physical print copy initially, the magazine will be published digitally on June 1st on the Variations school website and the NASH student information page on Blackboard. It will also be sent out to all students and parents so everyone can easily access and enjoy it.

“I’ve always found Variations to be a special cornerstone of NASH, uniting the visions and voices of students to be read and experienced by others.” Chung stated. “I think this is especially important to share now, with everyone at home and everything so quickly coming to an end.”

2020 may not have gone the way everyone expected, but the Variations team has managed to successfully face all its hurdles and used the motif as a way to inspire others to reminisce and learn from the past, be aware of the present and look forward to better days.

Be sure to check out the 2020 VARIATIONS issue on the mentioned platforms. Now more than ever we need something that will bring us together and appreciate the work and efforts of others and Variations has done so in past years, now, and for years to come.

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Colophon

Designers

Layout Department
Literary Editors
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VARIATIONS Staff

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Lucidpress

Printing Service

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200 Hillvue Lane
Pittsburgh, PA 15237

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