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Skipping Stones is a nonprofit children’s magazine that encourages cooperation, creativity and celebration of cultural and linguistic diversity. We explore stewardship of the ecological and social webs that nurture us. We offer a unique forum for communication among children from different lands and backgrounds. Skipping Stones expands horizons in a playful, creative way. We seek suggestions, submissions, subscriptions and support.

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As I was bicycling to work this morning, I passed a street corner, where three young people had set up a small, make-shift welcome station. They were offering free muffins and hot drinks to passers-by. I wondered if it was a sales gimmick or, perhaps, some missionaries at work. So, out of curiosity, I got off my bicycle and struck up a conversation with them. I discovered that it was just an act of selfless service, no agenda, just to do something kind and see what happens!

As I sipped on the hot drink in the cool morning air, I shared a few plums I had brought with me from our garden. We talked about the concept of “Paying Forward” (rather than the more common paying back for favors received from people).

During the holiday season, we often think about what gifts we might get from parents, grandparents and others, or what to give them. We feel obliged to give gifts. At times, we even feel that we don’t owe someone a gift because they didn’t give us anything the year before.

Is the holiday season just about commodity exchange? Is gift-giving a trade? Or, is it an expression of our love and friendship? Let’s make the holidays more than shopping sprees and all the stress of finding the right gifts for the right price.

What do you think holidays are for? What would your ideal Christmas, Kwanzaa, Chanukah or New Year’s celebrations look like?

It seems like there are many ways of enjoying this special time of the year: caring and having compassion for others—even strangers, sharing each other’s work loads, offering the fruits of our hard work to others, spreading our joy, sharing our harvest to the extent we are able, creating artistic gifts that express our talents and values, appreciating nature by spending quiet time outdoors, visiting friends or family...

My family and I will be in India during this holiday season. We will visit our family and spend a few weeks at a spiritual center in southern India. Our seven-year-old son will have a seven-week intensive experience that no school program could possibly offer in a classroom.

With this issue, we complete 14 full years of Skipping Stones. It was conceived at a Gandhian Ashram in India, and we derive much of our inspiration from Mahatma Gandhi, the nonviolent warrior. We celebrated his birthday, October 2nd, and our anniversary together, with spiritual kirtans from Sikh and Hindu traditions, charango and marimba music from the Andes, classical guitar, dances and peace songs in Hebrew and English.

Yet, even as we celebrate, we are concerned that dark clouds of another war loom on the horizon. It is our sincere hope and prayer that no country, including the United States, will impose a war on any other people. Great visionaries like Gautama Buddha, Christ, Mahavir Jain, Gandhi and Dr. King recommended only nonviolent means to solve all conflicts. They knew very well that war cannot achieve justice; no war is just! Loving our enemy is the ultimate test of our spirituality.

We cannot just sit and watch our governments prepare to wage wars, while our schools and healthcare systems decline. We have nothing to gain through wars. In democratic societies, where it is easy to let our voices be heard, it is our responsibility to say no to wars.

What if millions of youth actively worked for peace? Let’s declare peace with all, and let’s also maintain peace within ourselves. That might be the best way to celebrate the holiday season.

Peace on Earth and Goodwill to All!
Editor's Mailbag

Deeply Concerned

I am deeply concerned both about the current war in Afghanistan and also about the prospect of war in Iraq. The loss of human life is never a reasonable way to deal with a problem. According to the most conservative estimates, 3,767 Afghani civilians have been killed by U.S. troops and bombs since we began our “campaign” there. Do the math. We’ve already killed more innocent Afghans than the Americans that died on Sept. 11th.

War in Iraq will be no different. The Bush administration would like us to think that we can perform some kind of “surgical strike” and just remove the “evil” without any negative effects. That is simply not true. War is ugly. There will be atrocities, civilian deaths and the deaths of U.S. soldiers. I add that last part because, for some reason, people seem to value the life of a U.S. soldier over the life of a 6-year-old girl in Iraq.

The Bush administration has repeatedly used the horrific events of September 11th to implement the agenda that it wanted to do anyway, but wouldn’t have gotten away with before our nation became stricken by fear. Bush has even gone so far as to claim that lessening restrictions on oil companies (some of which he has stock in) will help aid the war on “evil.”

The Patriot Act, passed blindly by Congress (it was passed so quickly that they literally could not have had time to read even half of it) gives the government broad-reaching powers that they have not had since the Red Scare in the 1950s.

Aside from the inherent loss of life involved in any kind of attack on Iraq, we will also complicate an already disastrous situation in the Middle East. As soon as U.S. bombs land on the soil of one country, the surrounding countries begin to wonder if they are next. If Iraq declared war on Canada, would we stand and watch?

We need to worry now about the next wave of terrorists—the ones who are my age. What happens when they grow up, knowing that their fathers were killed by U.S. bombs?

—Evan Greer, 17, Andover, MA. Evan is organizing a peace rally in Boston on Nov. 3. (ExlEvan@aol.com).

Media Manipulation

On a dreary night in the cold winds of New York’s September, I wrote a poem after a gruesome television report I saw. The report was about September 11th of last year. Of course, as a citizen of the United States I felt sympathy for the 3,000 men, women and children who died in the devastation that no one could have predicted. I could see the uncanny smoke and terror from the windows of my school only a few miles away.

But what the media has done nearly a year later repulses me. I detest the fact that the press can exploit something so private and deep into an extravaganza with marches and speeches. It’s been a year already. I know we have suffered, and it’s nice to recognize such an event, but enough is enough.

The media is doing reports just to get viewers to rush to the TV. Most don’t even care about the impact such a program can cause to life. Maybe eight months ago it was alright, but to manipulate feelings and distort thoughts now is just not the way I would lead my life as an adult.

I was born in Minsk, Belarus, after the Chernobyl accident. My family moved to the U.S. in hopes of a better life. Technically, I cannot complain. In America people have everything: food, clothes, jobs, cultural differences, etc. Despite all these things, there is still a detached feeling among Americans. There always was. In 1865, it was blacks against whites. In 1966, it was African Americans against the Ku Klux Klan. Now, it is whites against Arabs. Such an environment can be quite damaging to a growing child.

The future is uncertain. From the low ridge where I am standing, I can only see so far over the furrows. The rainbow is nowhere in sight, and basing answers on other’s presumptions doesn’t work for me. I dream of words; I dream of literature. Everything else is just details.

—Yelena Levina, 13, Brooklyn, New York.

The new Geneva Declaration of Women for Global Harmony, Peace and Justice condemns all forms of violence against women whether in the name of religion, custom or tradition, and calls upon the world community to outlaw all inhumane and barbaric forms of punishment deployed against women.
Walk in Someone’s Shoes!

I have had problems making friends all my life. That is because I have something called ADHD, Attention Deficit Hyper Disorder.

People judge each other by looks, intelligence, nationality and beliefs. Everybody is so focused on his or her image and couldn’t care less about each other. In my case, it’s a little different. The ADHD prevents me from controlling myself or thinking before I act. It is called impulsivity. I do things that people don’t like, and it prevents me from making a lot of friends.

If it were easy to change, I would have by now. For me it is easier said than done. The ADHD has caused my mind to run three times faster than a normal person’s would. Instead of doing just two things at once, I can do four or five. I used to take a medication that would slow me down. I don’t have to take it any more, but I still have a hard time keeping myself under control.

I had severe ADHD until fifth grade. I had such a bad reputation, and no one liked me. In seventh grade I made great progress in self-control, and before eighth grade I was taken off my medication. Because of my bad reputation many people continued to judge me by the way I used to be. Many kids matured, though, and have given me a chance. Most of the people who have given me a chance like me.

When I am sitting somewhere alone, I listen and I look. I pay close attention to everything. I take mental notes and use the good and bad things I learn to change myself. My notes tell me what to do and what not to do.

When I meet someone who has a similar situation as me, I see them for the real person they are. Try walking in someone’s shoes, someone who is not exactly “popular.” See how it feels to be him or her, to be disliked, to be excluded. Look, and you’ll see it wherever you go. By walking in someone’s shoes, the wall that is blocking the truth about everyday life will be removed!

—Justin Smith, 14, Gibsonia, Pennsylvania.

Factory Farming

I wish that animal cruelty, above all factory farming, could be stopped, but it isn’t. Every day while we brush our hair or clean our teeth an innocent animal dies in a cramped shed, never having seen the outside of the bare walls. We never have to think about that animal. We never have to trample on it to get a rare drink of water. We never have to see its glazed eyes stare up at us without seeing. But just because we don’t see it doesn’t mean it doesn’t happen. I am devoted to stopping this cruelty and writing to show others the truth, which also happens to be the name of a magazine that my friend and I make.

—Holly Maguire, 11, Brighton, England. For a copy of “Show Them the Truth,” e-mail: showttt@hotmail.com
Beware of the Krampus!

Pelzebock.
Klaubauf. Hans Muff.
Bartel. Gumphinkel.
Knecht Ruprecht.

No, these are not make-believe words. They are all different names for what Austrians call Krampus (Krahm-poos).

Austria is a German-speaking country about the size of the state of Maine. According to the 400-year-old Austrian tradition, the Krampus is actually a companion of Saint Nicholas, the man who bestows gifts at Christmas time. However, the Austrian version of St. Nick does not look like the pudgy, white-bearded man in a red suit whom we call Santa Claus. Instead, he looks more like a wise old Catholic bishop.

The Krampus, on the other hand, is an ugly, horned figure who, along with Saint Nicholas, visits little children before Christmas to see if they have been good or bad.

Long ago, Austrian children believed that if they had behaved all year, they would receive small gifts in their shoes and stockings from St. Nicholas, usually food or homemade toys. If the Krampus decided that the children had mostly misbehaved, they would find lumps of coal instead! Of course, the Krampus almost always found well-behaved children in each house.

Today, many Austrian towns and cities have Krampus runs or Krampusläufe (Krahm-poos-loy-fe). Adults and children dress up in hairy Krampus costumes and parade through the streets at night. Many of them wear clanging chains and bells and carry switches (wooden whips), which only add to the spookiness of their outfits. In some communities, people carve their own masks, called larven, out of wood and attach goat horns to them to make their faces even more frightening.

On December 5, as darkness falls on Austria, parents and children line the chilly main streets of each town. A light snow crunches underfoot as the far-off clanging of cowbells sounds. Children squeal as the first Krampus jumps out from behind a corner, and the fun begins! Led by St. Nicholas, each Krampus parades down the street showing off the scary but skillfully constructed masks, while cracking switches and roaring at the crowd to the delight of everyone.

The Krampus runs are fun, exciting events for young and old alike. The cold, snowy conditions rarely keep people inside, since one will also find several outdoor stands along the streets offering hot apple cider and roasted chestnuts!

—Peter P. Chase, Pennington, NJ. He spent three years studying and teaching in Salzburg, Austria.
New Year’s Day is one of the most important holidays in Japan. In our culture we celebrate the new year with family. During Sanganichi (January 1–3), we relax at home, visit relatives, and pay homage at shrines, hoping for happiness and health throughout the coming year. There are many special traditions for this time of year.

On New Year’s morning, the whole family sits around the table and greets each other with "Akemashite Omedetou Gozaimasu!” (Happy New Year!) Parents give children Otoshidama, the New Year’s Day gift money, which of course, is one of the children’s favorite parts! The parents drink sake (a fermented rice beverage), and children drink Japanese green tea or juice with Osechi Ryori.

The Osechi Ryori meal, eaten during Sanganichi, is one of my favorite traditions. Osechi Ryori is associated with health and a good harvest. Each part of the meal has special meaning. It includes specially prepared seafood, beans, eggs and vegetables; it’s high in nutrition and well-balanced. We eat it with special, white wooden chopsticks wrapped in gorgeous paper.

My mother cooks Osechi Ryori during the few days before the new year. To prepare for New Year’s, we clean up the whole house and go shopping. Osechi Ryori can be stored without refrigeration for a few days, therefore, mothers are relieved of their daily cooking burden for Sanganichi. Generally, Osechi Ryori is packed in jyubako, a wooden lacquered lunch box with several tiers. The contents of the jyubako are divided by each tier.

Each part of Osechi Ryori has a special significance. Kurikinton is a sweet confection of chestnuts and sweet potatoes. The sweet potato is made into a sweetened puree. Whole and crumbled chestnuts can be added to the puree. It is yellowish in color indicating gold, a symbol of richness as people look forward to a prosperous year.

Kuromarne is sweetened black beans. Literally “kuro” is black and “marne” means hard-working. “Marne ni kurasu” means “Keep a healthy life throughout the year.”

Tazukuri is salty-sweet fish preserves in sauce. It is a symbol of a bumper harvest, as it is made of multitude of tiny fish.

Kazunoko is herring eggs. It also indicates prosperity because there are many herring eggs in each piece of kazunoko.

Kobumaki is cooked fish wrapped in seaweed. Konbu means seaweed, and yorokobu means delighted. The “Kobu” part of these two words, which means pleasure, sounds the same. Kobumaki stands for celebration on New Year’s Day.

Ebi is steamed shrimp. The shrimp curves at the back, so it is associated with the elderly whose backs are often bent with age. It symbolizes our hope to live a long life.

Unfortunately, the Osechi Ryori tradition is collapsing. Many families do not prepare it at home because it takes a long time to make. Department stores and restaurants sell pre-packaged boxes in the days before New Year’s. Also, people do not want to eat Osechi Ryori all the time during Sanganichi, so many varieties of Osechi Ryori are arranged for people’s preferences. Still, I hope we will continue to respect the traditional style of Osechi Ryori that has been passed down from generation to generation.

—Yuki Nagata, student intern, University of Oregon.
Lupita struggled to open her eyes. The morning sun was bright. As she climbed out of her warm bed, she remembered that today was going to be special.

She could smell sizzling bacon and fresh pancakes from her little room near the kitchen. Abuelita must be up, she thought. Her grandparents were early risers. Lupita knew that even before the sun had shone its yellow face, Abuela had lit the stove and warmed the kitchen.

“Good morning, mi hija,” Abuela greeted.

“Good morning, Abuelita,” Lupita said. She kissed her grandmother’s soft cheek. Lupita stood on a chair and watched as Abuela carefully spooned two little circles of batter onto a hot griddle. A third spoonful gave an upturned mouth to the two eyes. Next came a dollop of batter that covered the toasted eyes and mouth for Lupita’s favorite breakfast, pancakes with smiling faces.

Lupita called for her grandfather who was already in the yard tending to his plants. The three sat at the small kitchen table and said grace. Abuela sat at one end and Abuelo at the other. Lupita sat in the middle on her own special chair.

“Today is Las Posadas,” Abuela said. Lupita remembered that Grandmother had said Las Posadas was a special Christmas pageant. She did not attend last year’s ceremony because she hadn’t come to stay with the abuelos until after New Year’s. “We have lots to do today, mi hija. Misa begins in an hour.”

“Okay, Abuelita.” Lupita said. She gobbled down the smiling circles and dressed in a hurry.

The crisp morning air tickled her face as she walked hand in hand with her grandparents to the parish. The churchgoers buzzed like bees around a hive. They talked nonstop about Las Posadas.

“Abuela, what will you be making for the fiesta?” Lupita asked.

“I’m making my special enchiladas,” Abuela said.

“Will you wear a costume tonight?” Lupita asked.

“Yes, most of the pilgrims will be wearing costumes.”

“You’re going to dress up like a pilgrim?” Lupita was becoming confused. “I thought that was for Thanksgiving.”

“Not that kind of pilgrim,” Abuela laughed. “Las Posadas works a little like a parade. Mary and Joseph lead the parade. The people who follow behind them are called pilgrims.”

Lupita imagined a long line of pilgrims following a pretend Mary and Joseph down a busy street.

“What does ‘Las Posadas’ mean?”

“Las Posadas means ‘the inns.’ It is a ceremony that reminds us about the journey of Mary and Joseph into Bethlehem. They had a difficult time finding a place to stay on the night baby Jesus was born. Afterward we celebrate with a big fiesta.”

“Does Las Posadas last a long time?”

“I’ll bet what you really want to know is, ‘When does the fiesta start?’” Abuelo said winking at Lupita.

Lupita began to think about all the wonderful things the fiesta would hold—the happy music of the mariachis, game booths and prizes, smells of Mexican food filling the air, and of course, a piñata.

* * * * *

Later that afternoon, Abuela showed Lupita the costume she had made for herself. “It’s beautiful!” Lupita said.

Many bright colors and ribbons were on the dress. A matching hat was covered with handmade flowers. What a sight Abuela would be!

“I will also be carrying this staff,” Abuela said. The staff was grand. The tissue paper bouquet at the top reminded Lupita of the flowers a bride carries. Colored ribbons flowed down and curled softly at the bottom. Bells jingled whenever it moved.
“Wait until you see Abuela in her costume,” Abuelo said proudly. “She looks as pretty as a cactus flower.” That made Lupita giggle. Abuelo had many cactus plants, and he especially loved the little pink flowers on the cactus. When the blossoms fell off, a tasty fruit known as tuna grew in its place.

“Wait,” said Abuela, “I’ve got something else to show you.”

She left the room and returned holding a little girl-sized costume very much like her own.

Lupita threw her arms around her grandmother.

“Thank you, Abuela. I love it!”

“Look at the clock,” Abuela said. “We’d better get ready, or Las Posadas will start without us.”

Dressed in their costumes, Lupita and Abuela waited for Abuelo. They clapped as Abuelo stepped out in his best suit. He wore a black hat on his head, and his dark eyes sparkled.

The sun was setting as they walked to the church. People were lined up two by two holding candles. Lupita thought they looked like they were about to enter Noah’s arc. Lupita was filled with wonder at the fine collection of costumes. Excitement was heavy in the evening air, and then the crowd hushed.

Only the clop, clop, clop of a little burro’s hooves could be heard as a young man led it to the front of the line. A pretty girl rode on its back. She wore a long blue veil. It looked as if the picture of Mary and Joseph from Lupita’s prayer book had sprung to life.

The people started to sing, and the procession began. They followed the holy couple down a path.

When they came upon a house with a candle shining in the window, everybody stopped. Joseph went forward and knocked on the door. The crowd sang, “Who will give lodging to these pilgrims who are tired of traveling down the road?”

A gruff voice called back from the house, “We do not give lodging to those who may be thieves coming here to rob.”

“Abuela, why would anyone think that Mary and Joseph were robbers?”

“I don’t know, mi hija.”

Joseph’s shoulders sagged as he and Mary started down the road. The procession followed behind them singing softly.

Again they stopped at a house with a candle in the window. Again the answer was no. House after house, candle after candle, they trudged through the dark streets. Lupita began to wonder if the tired Joseph would ever find a place for Mary to rest. Surely someone would open their home to a poor man and his young wife, she thought. She held on tightly to Abuela’s hand. She sang with the crowd, and she prayed with the crowd. She counted nine houses and nine candles. She closed her eyes and prayed aloud, “Please, God, let them find shelter.”

Once again the procession stopped. This time a rejoicing sound rang from the crowd.

Lupita raced to the front of the line. To her surprise, Mary and Joseph knelt beside a small manger. Mary held a baby wrapped in a soft blanket.

The doors of the house were opened wide. All that had participated in the ceremony were welcomed.

“Come in. Biscochos and chocolate for everyone!” the host called.

The assembly sang “Noche de Paz.” Lupita recognized the tune. It was “Silent Night.” She sang in her best singing voice.

“Now it’s time for la fiesta,” Abuela whispered in her ear.

“La fiesta!” Lupita said.

She hadn’t even thought about it since Las Posadas began.

“Oh, Abuela,” she said, “now I know why we celebrate. Mary and Joseph are safe, and baby Jesus has been born.”

Winter

The winter is cold
The wind is harsh on the face
Then the sun appears.
—Shawn Miller, 11,
Versailles, Indiana.

Remember the Sky

I look out the window, clouded by miles of farmland and family.
Indiana.
Fields span forever, the only mountains cows, barns, rusted tractors.
Fifty years of neglect and rain.
The drone of the engine blended with silence many hours ago, nothing on the radio but honky-tonk.
I yearn for the roar of the race cars, the screaming fans of the Indy 500.
I yearn for quiet fields, a volleyball court beside the corn.
A burlap swing strung between two old trees.
I lay in the back seat and remember the sky that wandered above while I rested on my back, alone in a field of grass.
I recall Thanksgiving on a farm 10 miles out.
The hearth of an open garage.
My uncle stands over the ton of bubbling oil.
Steam fought the cold air and rose from fried turkey and mashed potatoes.
I yearn for the taste of Indiana.
—Jordan Rost, 17, New City, NY.

Snow Crystals

A shower of small crystals descends from a void, white space above spiraling endlessly.
The small flakes rest on the fringe of a nearby chimney ...until their next dance with the wind.
—Meghan Getsinger, senior, Darien, Connecticut.

November Ceased

This still life imprints itself on me.
The braided carpals of branches, their overcooked leaves as feathers, barely tickle the sky.
No wind crawls up their trunks.
The wind is a scantily clad black widow, left unamused.
It is motionless, allowing the constant scent of autumn to disperse slowly; gray clouds of wood-burning fireplaces.
The doorbell rings, but I don’t budge.
I just continue to stare out the window, and then the wind stirs and the lanky trees begin not to sway, but dance softly in the beige ballet slippers of their roots and then, they stop.
—Theresa Rogers, 17, New City, NY.

Snowfall

Freshly fallen snow falling crisply from the trees hitting the ground softly.
—Colin Durborow, 13, Gibsonia, PA.

Art by Sabine Weibringhous-Timm, Bouleurs, France.
Josefina Torres was an eight-year-old girl who lived with her parents and seven younger siblings in La Isleta, Dominican Republic. One Sunday at the end of the school holiday, Josefina was very sad. Her uncle Bolivar was coming to pick her up and take her to his home in the city of Moca. She stayed with her uncle to attend school because in the country the school was very far away.

Clutching a clump of dirt that she had taken from her parents’ farm in La Isleta, Josefina cried all the way into the city. To calm her, Uncle Bolivar put his watch around her wrist.

Later that day, at sunset, Josefina sat quietly in the grassy backyard holding the clump of dirt as if it were a jewel.

"¿Es un recuerdo de La Isleta?" Is that a souvenir from La Isleta? Uncle Bolivar asked, pointing at the clump as he sat beside her.

Josefina did not answer.

"No te preocupes. Pronto tus padres se mudaran tambien a la ciudad." Don't worry. Soon your parents will also move to the city.

That night Josefina fell asleep still grasping the clump of dirt.

The following morning after Josefina left for school, Librada, the housekeeper, tidied up her room. The old woman saw the clump of dirt on the desk. "Esto es basura," This is garbage, she muttered, dumping it into the garbage can.

When Josefina returned from school, she announced, "Tío, mi terrón no está en el escritorio." Uncle, my clump of dirt isn't on the desk.

"Primero almorzemos, Josefina," Let's eat lunch first, Uncle Bolivar said.

"No quiero almorzar sin mi terrón," I don't want to eat without my clump of dirt, she said.

"Librada probablemente lo tiró en la basura." Librada probably threw it in the garbage.

"¿Por qué lo tiró?" Why did she throw it away? Josefina wailed.

"Buscaremos en el cubo grande de basura que está afuera," We'll check the big garbage can in the backyard, Uncle suggested.

Outside, Uncle examined the empty container, then said, "La basura fué recojida esta mañana." The garbage was collected this morning.

A week later Josefina was sitting on the ground under a guava tree counting stones, a little game she liked to play. To her surprise, she spotted the clump of dirt beside a cluster of lilies. Nobody knew Librada had just thrown it out in the yard! She excitedly scooped it up, then noticed that a cornstalk had sprouted from it. Near a patch of sunflowers, she dug a small hole and deposited the clump.

One morning Josefina showed Uncle Bolivar the corn stalk. "La flor de arriba se llama espiga," The top flower is called the tassel, he explained. "Eso que sale del lado del tallo es la mazorca." That part to the side of the stalk is the corncob.

They planted the seeds from that first corncob, and six months later there was a whole row of corn plants. Josefina could see them from her bedroom window waving in the wind. Watching the morning doves swoop and swirl near the rippling corn made her feel closer to La Isleta.

When it was time to harvest the corn, Librada made a special pudding from it. As they enjoyed their feast, Uncle Bolivar said, "Josefina, qué piensas ahora de tu terrón?" What do you think of your clump now? "Puedes decir que lo estamos comiendo!" You could say we're eating it!

Josefina smiled. "Todavía extraño a mis hermanitos y a mis padres," I still miss my brothers, sisters and parents, "pero apartir de ahora aquí en la ciudad tenemos un pedacito de La Isleta." but now there will always be a little piece of La Isleta in the city. She looked out at the row of harvested corn, knowing that next year they would grow once more all because of her little clump of dirt.

-Carmen Taveras, Burnaby, B.C., Canada.

"This story is based on my experiences. I used to live with my parents and seven younger siblings in La Isleta, in the province Espaillat, Dominican Republic, and I was sent to the city for school."
Vamos al Mercado!

When we think of shopping here in the United States, what comes to mind? Super-sized grocery stores with all the conveniences, sprawling malls with every store you can imagine, a food court, video arcade, play areas, automated rides for kids... Well, in many other countries, going shopping means going to the market. It's an indoor or outdoor extravaganza of booths set up by farmers, craftsmen and women selling their wares.

When I went to Mexico, the first place I visited was an American-style mall. It was not very busy inside. I wanted to go where the people were, and I found out later that the action was at the market. In Guadalajara there is an indoor market in the center of town. They sell goods from all over the state of Jalisco. This indoor market was filled with booths selling everything from art to food. Leather shoes and sandals were a big item. Some even used old tires for soles!

There are many outdoor markets in every Mexican town where people buy their produce—mangos, pineapples, oranges, beans, cactus leaves (nopales), peppers, cabbage—and other things they need. I ate diced mango and pineapple chilled on ice and served with fresh lime squeezed over it. It was the most delicious fruit I had ever tasted.

Clothes of all kinds, music, rugs, dolls, dishes, jewelry and art are all for sale at the market. It is a colorful, busy place where people bargain for the best price.

This is how bargaining works. When you see something you want to buy, you ask the merchant, "Cuanto cuesta?" (How much is it?) The merchant may answer with an inflated price. He will tell you more than he really expects for the item. So, you can respond smiling, "No, es cara." (No, it's expensive.) Then you offer less than you are willing to pay, and he will up your ante. You do this until you both agree to a price. A few times I walked away with a smile and came back later to make a deal. It is a fun process filled with much bravado, haggling and sometimes arguing—all in good humor.

Even though bargaining is expected, there were times when I didn't. On almost any street corner at any time of day you will find women and their children selling homemade potato chips, tamales and handcrafted dolls. When buying from these women, I would not bargain because the money they earned was their only source of income. There is hardly any social service system to help support single women and their children, so they do what they can to support themselves.

If I could choose between going to the mall or the market, I'd pick the market every time. It is an experience for all of your senses. Vamos al mercado!

Let's go to the market.

—Photos and text by Angela Lewis, Sumner, WA.
The Dad I Never Knew

Behind the Nose Hairs

My dad's life seems extremely boring, no excitement or adventure, just work. But under his nearly bald head lies a treasure of unique and interesting memories of being a kid. Even though he comes from the hippie age, and myself the technology age, we both have a great deal in common.

Back in the year 1967, when dinosaurs roamed the Earth, my dad still had a thick head of hair and was a typical 12-year-old boy. He liked to launch rockets made of items lying around the house. I also like to launch rockets, but I don’t see how he survived with only three television channels. Dad also liked to buzz around the neighborhood in his homemade go-carts. He built dams in the local creeks that flooded basements. My dad never seemed like he would have been a mischief-maker! We both like movies, from my age or his, like “Dr. Strangelove.”

In those ancient times, hippies, strange, peace-loving creatures, existed on the Earth. My dad wasn’t a total hippie; he was half-and-half. It would be a scary sight to see my dad in bell-bottoms! Trends have rapidly evolved since then.

The economy has evolved too. Back then, things cost much less. My dad could blow his 50-cent allowance on a handful of candy and a toy. Today, all 50 cents gets you is a local call.

In conclusion, the prehistoric times that my father lived in weren’t too bad at all. In fact, I found out more things about my dad than ever. Within that hard-working guy, there is still a small spark of his childhood that exists.

—Kristofer P. Wellman, 12, Livonia, Michigan.

Brotherly Love

It wasn’t the world’s largest hill, but from up on top it sure looked like it could be. I had everything I needed: helmet, knee pads, elbow pads, leather gloves and my skateboard. I had walked to the top with a sense of adventure egging me on. I never had any doubt that I was going to ride this hill. But suddenly I felt a tiny bit apprehensive. I pushed my fear aside as I shimmied myself and my skateboard to the edge of the hill. I took a long, slow breath as...

I closed my eyes and prayed I wouldn’t kill myself.

Then I said aloud, “What on Earth am I thinking? I can’t do this hill! I must be going nuts if I was even thinking of throwing myself down this monster of a hill!”

After I came to my senses, I knew I had better go back down, so I didn’t hold up the impatient line behind me any more. When I made it to the bottom, I decided to go on one of the smaller, easier hills. This was probably the smartest thing I did all day. I cruised down the hill with no problem, doing all of my lame tricks. Now there is something that one must know—to the beginners on this hill, my tricks were the coolest thing they’d ever seen. They all stood there with their jaws hanging open watching me ever so closely. I felt like a king. The crowd was cheering and clapping! I felt like I was stuck in someone else’s dream; it was too good to be my own. Suddenly, I saw a kid zoom past me, and everyone’s eyes followed him. I realized that the crowd had been watching him the whole time. At that point, I was so embarrassed all I wanted to do was go home. Then I saw my little brother, who had also been there skating, looking at me with amazement.

“Hey, what do you say we go home?” I said.

“Well, actually I thought that you were totally awesome on your board today, and I was wondering if you could show me a trick or two,” he said.

With a huge smile on my face, I agreed. It felt so good to be acknowledged by someone, especially when that someone was my brother.

—Diana Skoutelas, 13, Gibsonia, Pennsylvania.
From Brown Skin

I am from beautiful brown skin and nappy hair. From the hot, dry fields of cotton. From shackles that were bound to be broken. From voices like angels, uplifting to God.

I am from sickle cell disease, sadness and pain. From a father who died too soon and too young to understand why God allowed this to happen to me.

I am from get a good job. From work hard, go to school and you must go to college. From don’t let anyone tell you you’re not good enough.

I am from fried chicken and corn bread. From Sunday morning burnt biscuits and sausage. From don’t let your eyes be bigger than your stomach, and you can’t leave the table until you finish all your food.

I am from years of oppression, that I might be something more than what everyone expects. From legends no one talks about, that I may be proud to call myself Black.


"My composition is based on my own personal experiences, being Black and being in a strong family. My experiences are real, and it comes straight from the heart."

The Mother of Mothers

The mother of mothers,
The head of a giant family,
The one who brought it all together.
The symbol of the new age,
No racism, no prejudices,
Just being reliable and giving support.
Quiet and reserved,
Only expressing her opinion when asked,
The most humble person I could even hope to know,
As close to perfect as one can get.
Always baking or doing things for us,
The most loved one in the family,
And respected just the same.
She lived through being filthy rich to being dirt poor,
From having a still-born baby,
To losing an adult child.
Having to take care of a family larger than twelve,
Yet never hesitating to stop for a beggar,
And that being all she wanted.
She earned the life that is everyone’s dream,
Living a life surrounded by love,
Raising her children and then her grandchildren.
Despite the language barrier,
And only seeing her once a year,
I still knew the greatness of this woman.
I didn’t know my grandmother for very long,
But I knew her well enough,
For she was my role model, my true hero.
Having passed away a year ago,
I write this as the least I can do to repay you.
Thank you for just being what you were.
—Kevin Stein, junior, Lynbrook H.S., San Jose, CA.

Great Grandma

Great Grandma, you’re special.
You love me like the wind
Blowing around me.
Your hugs are sweet
Like the scent of lilacs in the spring.
You give me surprises that make me feel
As contented as a happy purring cat,
As happy as a loving hug that isn’t too tight,
As happy as making beautiful music.
You knit me a red sweater that warms me

—Alexandra Winder, 8, Bremerton, Washington.

Like drinking hot chocolate on a freezing day.
You make afghans and rugs that are
As colorful as books on a shelf.
Going to see you is fun
Like playing with my best friend
And climbing trees.
I love you, Great Grandma.
You’re like a piano playing loud songs
In a far away room.

—Alexandra Winder, 8, Bremerton, Washington.
Two Voices  by Kira Lee Suyeishi, Gr. 10, Centennial, CO.

Two little girls, many worlds apart, loved dearly by their families but loathed by strangers of their land. Anne age 13, Yuki age 10. Both with chocolate brown hair, and eyes like the summer's night sky. Innocent young girls, both with dreams and hopes of the future.

ANNE
Hiding in a secret annex,
Taken to a place of death and suffering.
Like others of her kind, six million.
Anne taken to concentration camps,
Beloved friends and family quickly vanish.
Scared in haunted rooms at Bergen-Belsen sleeping on forgotten wooden slacks.
Silently waiting for something to come, anything, death or freedom.
Eating when she can the hard bread and dirty water that came.
Feeling cold drafts drifting in, struggling to be warm.
Wearing the yellow star, a sign of Judaism.
Suffering in sickness alone.
Anne’s last beliefs, “It’s really a wonder that I haven’t dropped all my ideals because they seem so absurd and impossible to carry out. Yet I keep them because, in spite of everything, I still believe people are really good at heart.”

YUKI
Silently waiting,
So fearful to be taken away.
One hundred and twelve thousand Japanese Americans.
Yuki to relocation camps.
Alone at night, thinking of her long-gone brother.
Playing in a cramped, frigid house with Kay-ko.
Preparing dinner in a dimmed, candle-lit room.
Eating rice and vegetables, fearful of going hungry.
Saving up money, thinking of unreasonable expenses to come.
Being set apart from others with her dark skin and dark hair.
Living on to tell her story.
Yuki’s sad regret, “My parents and most of their generation are gone. It is for us to remember and never allow such injustices to occur again.”

Both fenced in by beckoning barbed wire, Hated by outsiders, not much different;
Taken away without a trial, by people of their own country.
Considered political enemies of the State,
Treated like not much more than animals.
Two small voices, many worlds apart,
One voice silent, but the other’s story speaks for both.
Hands as Roots
Dipping hands
Into streams
Roots
Drenched
Sap rejuvenated
Happiness
Complete.

—Virginia Tice, 13, Oakland, California.

My Indian Homeland
A place in which I’ve never lived
One that I do not know
Whose streets are wrapped in shadows
Where mystery lurks
A foreign place
To touch
To see
To smell.
Bright streams of color
The press of faceless people
Sear my brain
Paint my irises.
Liquid orange red purple
Transformed into saris and salwar kameez
As they speak too fast to comprehend.
Vendors raise their consonants
Higher and higher pitched
Doing battle with each other’s vowels
A true war of words.
The ancient buildings
Look down on me
With regal hauteur.
Somewhere here my history hides.

—Priya Bindra, 15, Hong Kong. “I am a Singapore-born Sikh of Indian ethnicity. In many ways I am a third culture kid, one who is at home anywhere but, at the same time, does not have a real home. It was this idea that made me want to write this poem.”

Remember
Don’t try to walk away.
When you run, you will only,
Stumble back in.
Don’t say to forget it, it’s over,
doesn’t matter,
And it won’t happen here.
You haven’t seen the suffering,
Felt their pain.
Where is your right to tell them,
It didn’t happen?
They, who watched their children,
Being killed, dying,
Devoured by the hatred,
Cast on their undeserving hearts.
We may not want to remember,
But we have to,
For which is worse:
Remembering pain,
Or living it again?

—Ruby Arbogast, 15, Corvallis, Oregon.
“I wrote this poem in 7th grade, when we were assigned a project on Anne Frank. This poem is based on hearing about her experience. What I really want in the future is a time when we can all live equally as part of the Earth. It may not be tomorrow or the next day, but we have already come far. I hope we can go farther.”

Grandpa
Before he goes
after he has come,
while he is living,
as he is dying,
God is in his heart,
as the pearl gates open,
before he steps through,
while he looks at the golden floor,
as he steps in to see,
he is not afraid anymore.

—Emily Duke, 15, Harleton, Texas.
Acceptance

There are two factors which have always set me apart from most typical teenagers in America: the fact that I am Indian, and the fact that I am Muslim. As I grew up, most girls in my school had names like Jessica and Brittany, and I always had the name that teachers could never pronounce. When I was younger, I actually lied about my ethnicity and said that I was Hawaiian because I wanted so badly to be accepted.

I have always been grateful that I grew up in the United States, but I wish that I could have lived in an environment where people are more open-minded. Whenever someone sees a girl with a scarf on her head, they immediately think that she is oppressed and forced to wear it. They don’t see that it is just a sign of modesty. Kids today still have the impression that all Indians have heavy accents and work as taxi drivers. So, as I progressed in age, I denied the fact that I was “different.” Like most kids, I thought life was supposed to be about movies, friends and malls. But one day everything changed.

Although I was registered at the public high school where my older siblings attended, my parents suggested that I check out an Islamic high school. All my friends, as well as the life that I had always expected, were at the public high school, but I said yes to the Islamic school. To this day, I don’t know what convinced me to go to the Islamic school, but it was probably the most significant decision I had ever made.

When I first arrived at my new school, I had to adjust to a few things: uniforms, the fact that it was all girls, and much smaller classes. As I started getting acquainted with my classmates, I realized that I was the only non-Arab girl in my class. Although initially I felt out of place, I quickly lost those feelings after making friends.

My new friends always made me feel accepted and taught me everything about their beautiful culture. They taught me so many gratifying things, like how to play the tabla (small drums), and many Arabic terms. Unlike the students in my previous schools, they found the fact that I was Indian intriguing and not loathsome. They asked me tons of questions, and for the first time in my life, I felt proud that I was Indian as well as Muslim. For the first time, I enjoyed attending classes and didn’t hate school.

Months passed and pretty soon I was beginning my junior year. But at the beginning of the school year, a tragic event occurred. The date of this event was September 11th. The school sent students home early that day, and I offered to drive two of my friends home. My friend sitting next to me in the passenger seat wears a head scarf and, because of that, nasty things occurred. Drivers in huge sport utility vehicles were trying to hit my car and run me off the road; some started swearing and honking at us. I didn’t know why. Panicked, I turned on the radio for comfort. The DJ announced that Arabs were the prime suspects of committing the terrorist acts.

I never understood why so many of my friends were harassed during that time. As everyone started putting up American flags on their cars and acting patriotic, I felt less and less American. I didn’t even feel like I belonged here, in the country I was born and raised in. School was closed for 10 days, and I later found out that it was because of several bomb threats. During this time I learned values such as patience, tolerance and forgiveness. I learned that to be accepted in a society, I have to educate the people about my religion and culture. How can I expect them to accept things they have no knowledge about?

A year later, I have just begun my senior year. I am now the student council president and have made some of the greatest friends. Many people lose touch with their high school friends after they graduate, but I know that the friends I have made are for life. Over my high school career I have learned many important lessons from my religion, such as patience, faith, kindness, tolerance, modesty and honesty. These are lessons I hope to carry with me for the rest of my life.

―Fareesa Abbasi, 17, Orland Park, IL. Fareesa also speaks Arabic, Urdu, Hindi and Spanish.
Young Artists from Russia Show us their Best

The Silver Hoof Deer
by Anna Tyulkina, 8th grade

Basketball by Zagirov

First of September
by Sasha Igoshin, 14.
Russian children usually bring flowers to their teachers on this day.

Butterfly and Mushroom
by Novokshonova, 5th grade.

Above: In the Village by Katya Lebedeva
Left: Family by Gabdraufova Albina, 8th grade

This issue’s front and back covers are also by students from The Art School and School No. 6, Kachkanar, Yekaterinburg, Russia.

Russian children usually bring flowers to their teachers on this day.
My Life in Belarus
by Anastasiya Smitnova, 18, Minsk.

I love sculptures. There are a lot of them in Minsk, but unfortunately, ones that are so alive and unusual like this are rare.

Above: Here we are in Girovichy. We had to wear shawls because we were going to church.

Below: My last day of school. I’m wearing the traditional graduation sash and hair piece.

Here is a self-portrait. I am in a merry mood. I love some unusual and interesting photos.
The Change

Throughout my brief time on Earth, I have been pulled in many different directions, which can ultimately lead me to great fortune, great happiness or great tragedy. I was born in Minsk, three years after the Chernobyl disaster. Living in communist Belarus was very frightening. The damage struck quite close to home. So, in the heat of the moment, my parents gathered all of their belongings and moved to the U.S. in hope of a better life. That was in 1995, well after the USSR broke up, and the effects of Chernobyl had sunken deep enough.

I cannot understand what caused such a dramatic change of heart in me. It was unlike anything I had ever felt before in my life. It overwhelmed my heart at first; it was the feeling of sadness for those who will never have the life of freedom they desire, the life of freedom you and I live every day.

It all started on a splendid Sunday morning when I was at home eating a banana. The banana was so delicious that I devoured every little bit of it, except for the peel, of course. Here in America, I have come to think of bananas as just pieces of fruit that give you the proper nutrients, but I hadn’t actually tasted how good a banana tastes in years—maybe even as far back as the time I was living in Belarus.

Even before the Chernobyl accident, the country of Belarus was suffering. There wasn’t enough of anything to go around and support the huge populace of Belarusian cities. Before the Soviet Union broke up in 1991, its leaders controlled all of the products being hauled to and from Belarus and the rest of the Soviet Union. The leaders in Moscow decided how much of the products should be brought to each city. I guess that is why I used to love bananas so much. They were so rare, and just to taste one that was ripe and fresh meant the world to me.

Here in America, the problem is that there is everything you want in the stores, but many people have no money to pay for it. Back in Belarus, the problem was that there was enough money to pay for everything, but since the Soviet Union handled a lot of the products (and used civilian money for nuclear weapons) the stores were nearly empty.

The whole ordeal brought much distress to the poor Russian people, and the situation got so bad that people had to wait four hours just to buy two pounds of cottage cheese. That is quite horrible considering the number of people in Russia’s immense empire.

However, the appalling greed, which once mounted over the Russian sky in a smear of fear, has gone away now. Minsk once again has regained the luminous dazzle it was always destined to have. So this is what caused the sudden change that I felt when I looked upon my life. Maybe I will return to Belarus someday. Maybe I will return there with the hope to see the fresh and lustrous sky beam its sparkled wonders down upon me, just like it did when I was a child.

—Yelana Levina, 13, Brooklyn, New York.

“When I came to America, I learned the language pretty quickly. The world of English poured through my mind in endless clouds overwhelming me with ideas and inspiration, thus triggering me to write.”

Was Johnny Appleseed Real?

Yes, he was, although his given name was John Chapman. He was born near Boston in 1774 and he died near Fort Wayne, Indiana, in 1845. People called him “Johnny Appleseed” because he spent much of his life roaming the wilderness, where he planted orchards of apple trees and sold or gave the seeds to pioneers. He also planted medicinal herbs, but folks didn’t call him “Johnny Medicinal Herbs” because it wouldn’t fit on his driver license.

Okay, just kidding about the driver license. In essence, he did what he did to help people, to give them sources of food and medicine. His wanderings took him far—to Pennsylvania, Kentucky, Illinois, Indiana and Ohio—and he lived a simple life as he went. He slept outside, walked barefoot and ate wild foods from the land. It’s said that he wore a tin pot for a hat (I bet he got headaches in hailstorms). Native Americans and pioneers loved him, and his kindness to animals was legendary. In the end he became an American folk hero.

What can we learn from Johnny Appleseed? We can learn about the good that comes from caring for plants, from treating people and animals kindly, and simply, from giving. His gravestone reads, “He lived for others.” I think that says it all!

—Twig Walkingstick, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio.
Reflecting

Gazing into the
Reflecting pond of water,
She finds herself there.
—Jen Novak, 13, Wexford, PA.

I Know

For the longest time I pondered it all
Restlessly questioning the integrity of my thoughts
A struggle seemingly without end
A losing battle that I longed to win.

There seemed to be no answer to fill in the blank
I strained my mind to the deepest of depths
Every logical solution showed no avail
A paradoxical infinity recycling in my mind.

One day it all came together like a blink of the eye
Where it came from I may never know
But the answer was truly lucid and pure
The struggle was ended, it no longer endured.

One can know the laws of Newton
And the structure of the mind
One can know how the world is designed
But all the logic in the world cannot reveal
The truths behind all the feelings we feel.
Though seemingly irrational, undoubtedly true
Life always questions the things we knew
Creating consequences for the things that we do
Falsifying conclusions that we once drew.

Though not long have I lived and not much have I seen
I have seen these things, and I know what they mean
No poem can explain the process of thought
I know what I can do and what I cannot
I have my boundaries, and in their net I get caught
I know this well, myself I have taught.

But where are the limits of how deep I can think?
There is no restraining order signed in ink
Until someone shows me how far I can go
There is no boundary to how much I can know.
—Roger Casey, 15, McLean, Virginia.

Inside Me

Inside me there is a flame.
Inside me there is a horse to tame.
Inside me there is a tool.
Inside me there is a fool.
Inside me there is a pricking pin.
Inside me there is a collecting tin.
Inside me there is a light.
The light a man uses to write.
—David Evans, Lake Dallas H.S., Texas.

Sidewalk

A sidewalk
may have many a tale,
so you who would,
do not mock.
For how many glories
has a sidewalk witnessed?
How many tears
has it silently beheld?
How many bodies
has it been home to?
How many lives have crossed
on a sidewalk intersection?
How many souls have stood
beneath stale city lights,
lit like flickering candles,
bobbing in the sea of chance?
—Melissa Fuelling, 8th grade,
Los Alamitos MS, Grants, New Mexico.

The Pen

The pen, the pen is held by the hand.
The hand, the hand is worked by the mind.
The mind, the mind is full of ideas.
The ideas, the ideas come in constantly.
The constant ideas, the constant ideas are written down.
That leaves them unforgotten.
—Angela Comstock, 7, Hampden, Maine.
Just a Pleasant Dream

Gently,
The moon shines on my sleeping face
Framed by covers and soft pillows.

My eyelids rise slowly
Revealing a bright light, filling my room.
A white beach outside the window
A ray of sun piercing my eyes
Sea gulls and waves playing softly in my ears.
My feet touch the cold floor
Bring me to and out of the window
And get swallowed by the tiny, sandy grains.
Warmth caresses my face, and I squint from the light.
Inhaling deeply, a breath of flowery air energizes me.

I turn, walk over to the ice cream stand
And find a few coins in the pockets of my jean shorts.
I float and land in the cool shade of a palm tree
With a big cone of vanilla and strawberry.
I stare at the horizon of the sea and sky
Where the summery, yellow sun
Slowly turns to a fiery red, and starts sinking majestically
In the dark blue depths.

Heh...heh...heh...I grin with a little bit of bitterness.
Too bad; time to go.
Picking myself up
My hand runs once again
Through the slowly freshening sand.
I climb back through the window
Look back at the big red sun
Then at the round white moon.
I turn my back to the window...
Crawl into my bed... fall asleep...slowly...

DRRRIIINNNGGGGG!!! ... 7:30 a.m.
Back to reality, back to the present.
Time to do what I do in the morning.
Fast shower, dress, makeup
Orange juice downstairs in the kitchen,
And back to my room.
I pick up my bag, head for the door
And laugh out loud
When passing the window.
A new big yellow sun
Is laughing back at me.

—Ludovica Fabbro, 14, Turin, Italy.

Morning Sun,
Evening Sun

The morning sun greets us as we wake up early each day.
And stays with us all the while
as we run and jump and play.
She stretches out
and touches us
with golden rays above.
And fills us all with that special
feeling of gentle warmth and love.
And in the evening when it's time
for the sun to go to sleep,
she leaves with us a beautiful sunset,
a gift for us to keep.

Art and poem by Jenny Hinson, 6, Douglasville, Georgia.

COLORS

The way the sun shines in the sky,
Makes me want to wonder why,
The people in this world
have different colors.
How the world molds the colors,
How it makes a rainbow
in the sky.
The way it makes me feel so good,
To know that I'm the only one,
With this color,
And I know that forever,
The colors of the rainbow will live.


STARS

Stars are like little golden lights
far up in the sky.
They shine very bright,
and also help me
during the late dark nights.
There is no doubt about it.
I cannot imagine living without.

—Cordelia Charles, 11, St. Patricks, Grenada, West Indies.
All in a Day’s Work

Living with the Steel Dragons

The workers turn their heads upward.
High noon, the sky an inky black.
Pittsburgh’s steel mills, those great steel dragons,
Breathe smoke to the sky,
So that the heavens look more like a hell.
Day and night, the steelworkers toil and sweat
To keep the dragons fed with iron and coke,
Deafened by the shrieks these monsters make as
They gave birth to more glowing metal,
Blinded by the dragons’ fiery breath.

The workers are trapped under the dragons’ hold.
There is nowhere else to go, nothing else to do.
All they can do is feed their metallic masters.
Day after day, week after week, year after year.

These beasts of metal are always hungry.
They devour their iron and coke like starved wolves,
Occasionally swallowing a man alive to wash it down.
They churn out massive steel bars,
Putrid black
Smoke,
Toxic feed for the rivers,
And a few loaves of bread
For their fatigued servants.

But the workers, unimaginable as it is,
Are stronger than these towering creatures.
The dragons crushed them when they tried to rise,
Eventually did.

For the first time in many years,
A beam of sunlight fell upon Pittsburgh,
Was washed away,
Emptied their rivers of poison,
Mills were quiet.

Alice Yu, 13

Land of the Free

America—the land of the free
Born and raised
The land of squealing five year olds
Tiny pink tutus

And as I got older, it became
The land of material things
Green nail polish
Scented hand lotions
So many pairs of shoes
And brightly colored t-shirts

Made in Malaysia

Where there’s no Abercrombie
Or Doc Martin
Or any other doctor
The baby’s mama cries for
Children
Sit on a dirt floor
Stitching pink ballet tutus
The stiff tulle pricks their bare legs
And they dream
Of America
Land of the free.

—Amelia Mango, 13.

A Look Back at Steel Mills

A smoky steel mill
The 24-hour shift
Noises thundering in my brain
The molten steel as hot as lava
Sparks brighter than the sun
Almost impossible to breathe
The possible dangers of a slip or fall
Too scary to imagine
Thinking only of going home
Sweat soaking my clothes
Scared, worried
How much longer?
All this for a better life?

—Brandon Heide, 12.

These poems are from students in Gibsonia, (Pittsburgh metropolitan area) Pennsylvania.
From students at Benjamin Franklin High School, Los Angeles, California.

Minority

Whiteness, the creativity of my story
Persistent minority another number unimportant
What I say—remember the day
My depression you paid attention to my feelings
My poetic lyrics of life.

—Frankz Palacios, 16.

Ain’t It Great

Absent-minded clients exposed
Endo flows, aches make ’em explain
Ascetic pain, ain’t it great
Lakes cook, rivers bake
Turning women and children
Into rain-pelted flakes
Actualized by cars, air turns to bars
Keen of mind stand in line
Under cities of rubble
Where bones crumble
Times fumbled as you drive past the city
Waste turning your face
Roll up your window without haste
Fumes burn my face
Like the world’s ashes
In the world’s vase
Ain’t it great?

—Jacob Warren Wrate, 17.

Voice

Mystical rush through time
Seeking truth
Deep in the ocean.

—Virginia Montances, 16.

Eclipse

Love congealing
A blast of smoke
Shuddering cold full of snow
Incessant wind
The dance of the dolphins’ last eclipse
Crowding toward the sun.

—Aldo Ochoa, 16, and Andres Orquiz, 16.

Hmong New Year

In the Hmong culture we only celebrate one holiday—New Year’s. In the U.S., New Year’s parties are held in big buildings, but in Laos we have one big street party in the entire city. Every Hmong parent comes to a meeting to talk about New Year’s. Also, the children can perform a dance if they want. Anybody who is interested in doing dances talks to the party director. The dancers have to practice a lot.

Parents are each assigned a food to make. Usually the foods are: steamed and fried rice, fried chicken, hot peppers, pork with vegetables and egg rolls.

—Kao Xiong, grade 7, Oronoco, Minnesota.

Hmong New Year is really not a holiday but a celebration of the coming of the new year. In Laos it is celebrated at the end of December. In the U.S., Hmong New Year takes place anywhere from October to the end of December depending on the city. For instance, in California, it starts at the end of October in cities in northern California and ends in Fresno in December. St.Paul / Minneapolis, Minnesota, has a large celebration during Thanksgiving, as does Sacramento.

The celebrations last from two to seven days, depending on the city. New Year’s is a time for family, friends and relatives to visit. It is also a time for young people to meet and make friends. There is always ball tossing between males and females dressed in traditional clothing. During or before New Year’s there are sports competitions in some cities. Food, dancing, ball tossing and vendors are an integral part of a Hmong New Year’s celebration.

—Art & writing by Tou Vong Yang, Sacramento, CA.
Extinct?

Although the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) traditionally has said that the last cougar (*Felis concolor*) in Michigan was killed in 1906, the agency continued to get reports of cougar sightings. No scientific confirmation of these sightings had been made until now.

Ray Rustem, supervisor of the DNR’s natural heritage program, said the department has “never denied that there are cougars in the state. What we’ve said is that we don’t know if there are. And the question is, what is the source? Minnesota now says it has a cougar population. We know that some of these animals, especially young ones, will travel long distances.”

Field studies proved that cougars are living in remote places where they aren’t likely to be seen by people. Cougars on the Stonington Peninsula were using beaches as hunting grounds, hiding in the vegetation on top of the dunes and watching for deer that come down to the lake to drink. Beaches along the Lake Michigan shoreline turned out to be a gigantic natural litter box; it was unexpectedly easy to find cougar droppings there. Footprints and carcasses of several deer that were preyed upon by the cougars were also found. It is now estimated that the area is home to as many as 30 cougars.

Cougars have to be skilled hunters. They feed mostly on white-tailed deer but will also eat opossums, rabbits, mice and even insects if they are desperate. Cougars are night hunters with superb eyesight and hearing. They run swiftly, are agile climbers and can even swim. Cougars kill their prey with one bite to the neck. After feeding, a cougar may cover the carcass with leaves and debris to save it for another meal.

Cougars live in a variety of habitats from coastal swamps to mountain slopes. They are fairly plentiful in some western states, but their habitats are being destroyed by industrialization and urban sprawl.

I hope the cougar population in Michigan will bounce back. They must be protected from extinction by stopping destruction of their habitat. Would you want to neglect such an amazing animal?

—Kristen Wood, 8th grade, Rockford, Michigan.

Story of the Everglades

Living in tall delicate grass,
Whistling in the wind,
Misty and moist,
The Everglades are endless.

We live in a world,
Where sudden cries are heard,
From the sound of the giant machines.

As you see,
We are not what we were,
For our trees are disappearing,
And animals are losing homes.
We are being destroyed.
We are slowly shrinking,
And my roots are breaking.
For now I must go,
I will always be a part of the Everglades.

In that we will rise again!


Eden

The wind gusts waltz
with peach and plum
whose leaves speak tales of spring.

Sunbeams dance
on drops of rain
the heavens painted bright.

Feathered choir
harmonizes,
waiting for the day.

The brilliant lilac’s
sweetened scent
perfumes the gentle breeze.

—Kari Nelson, 17, Roseville, California.
The Origins of Hip-Hop

From African Villages to the Streets of New York

What do you think of when you hear the word hip-hop? Many confuse the dancing on MTV videos with hip-hop, but Jennifer Lopez and Britney Spears are doing what's called funk dance. Hip-hop is more improvisational and individual than funk, and it is a dance form that is rich in African culture and history.

During the Atlantic slave trade, half of the 10 million Africans brought to the United States were from Congo and neighboring Angola. The African people brought with them their dance styles and a form of music called *casse*. In Haitian, *casse* means break, a deliberate disruption of the beat of the drums, which throws the dancers into ecstasy.

Although the origins of hip-hop cannot be pinpointed to one specific tribe in Africa, it was heavily influenced by dances from the west coast of Africa (Ghana, Nigeria, Mali, Guinea, Gambia and Senegal). These dance traditions were maintained during the slave era on holidays, weddings and other special occasions.

The Birth of Hip-Hop

Modern hip-hop began on the streets of New York during the mid-1970s. Much of early hip-hop was unrecorded because hip-hop culture was very experimental, and many considered it "just messing around." Hip-hop was not recorded until 1979 when Sugarhill Records in New Jersey released a song entitled "Rapper's Delight" by The Sugarhill Gang. Before 1979 groups of youth would gather on the city streets or dance clubs and openly express themselves through hip-hop. However, early hip-hop was not just a dance style; it was a culture.

"A hip-hop 'scene' was forged and contained elements of dance, dress, graffiti art and music," said Sarah Ebert, a University of Oregon hip-hop teacher. "When people got together, it was all about the freedom of expression, and they would express themselves through their clothing, music and art. Graffiti was used to decorate or define a space as well as a person's clothing."

One of the most important aspects of hip-hop was the face-to-face interaction of youth. When dancers congregated in clubs and on the streets there was a direct exchange between the rappers and the dancers, Ebert said. The DJs and rappers were like teams—the DJ would back the emcee up with a groove, and they would play off of each other to try to energize the crowd by getting them to dance.

Since the commercialization of hip-hop, street hip-hop has disappeared. The popularity of the dance has brought the hip-hop scene off the streets and into classrooms and dance clubs. Although hip-hop is still danced in clubs, the atmosphere has changed so that there is an absence of art. Most people only think of hip-hop in terms of music and dance because there is no longer that face-to-face interaction.

Hip-Hop's Similarities to African Dance

Unlike the fancy jumps and turns performed by ballet dancers, African dance is more similar to normal pedestrian movement. It is easier for most people to do African dance because most of the dances are modeled after everyday...
activities, such as planting seeds.

Although hip-hop originated from African dance, it is not feasible to determine specific dance moves that bridge together both dances.

“I don’t think we could say that one particular move is from one tribe. African dance is so much about self-expression,” said Rita Honka, a University of Oregon African dance teacher. “Most African dances are based on a set series of movements, however, improvisation is a large part of the movements.”

There are ancient African dances that celebrate and mourn all aspects of life. Although the theme and the mood of the dance may differ from one occasion to another, the movements are similar because they are based on natural everyday movements and integrate an individual’s self-expression.

“The movement celebrates the body in every way shape and form, and we don’t need long limbs like a ballet dancer,” Honka said.

Hip-hop, like African dance, is also a dance style that is rhythm based, individualized and pedestrian based, Ebert said. Examples of pedestrian-based movements in hip-hop are having one’s knees bent and a heavy, grounded pelvis.

“Movements are sequenced through the body,” Ebert said, “but not in a nice and graceful way like in ballet; it’s a very syncopated movement.”

There is no universal vocabulary for hip-hop like there is in ballet. There are specific terms used in break dancing (break dancing includes hip-hop), but that is just one aspect of how people are dancing today, Ebert said.

“Hip-hop is an attitude; it’s a way of life, and I don’t think that one can always separate the movement from the lifestyle,” Ebert said.

In both African and hip-hop dance, the music cannot be separated from the dance because dancers are responding to the music. For example, in African dance, the drummers and the dancers communicate with each other. Drummers can emphasize certain sounds or rhythms, and the dancer gives the drummer feedback by either responding to the drummer or going off on another tangent. Likewise with hip-hop, connection between the dancers and the DJs is extremely important since both groups feed off of one another.

“The old-school hip-hop was a lot about getting together in a club situation and getting the crowd going, just making sounds like ‘Throw your hands in the air!’” Ebert said.

In African dance, dancers also use verbal communication to energize each other. Words don’t even need to have any meaning of their own to help establish a connection between dancers. “Singing allows dancers to establish bonds with one another,” Honka said.

In both hip-hop and African dance, dancers are free to express themselves without words or boundaries, and they don’t need dance steps to build off of the energy of each other.

“In my hip-hop class there’s a lot of groundwork that I lay. I give them the footwork then I say ‘That’s your opportunity to do as you please.’ There has to be that improvisational aspect or else it’s not hip-hop,” Ebert said.

Currently hip-hop and African dance have gained much popularity with teens and college students. Although the nature of early hip-hop has changed since its commercialization, hip-hop dance is still very alive in both clubs and classrooms.

—Devon Karr was our journalism student intern from the University of Oregon.

Photos: Courtesy of Rita Honka’s dance troupe.

Why does tragedy happen? — Kay

Dear Kay: A complex question! Responses might result in an endless list. Instead, I’ll tell you about an incident that helped me better understand the role of tragedy.

When George and Mark’s parents died, both sons, together with their families decided to move to the farm their parents had left them in their will. George, had three children. The youngest, Sunshine, was 10 years old. Mark had one daughter, age 15, named Sophia.

Sophia had endless ideas of what to play, to think about, to do, to create, how to solve puzzles, write intriguing plays, express her inner thoughts. Sunshine adored Sophia like no one else, and Sophia developed a great love for Sunshine.

One rainy day, Sophia watched the torrents pour out of the heavens. Lured by the challenging atmosphere, she put on her rain gear from head to toe and headed toward her beloved river. There weren’t many other brave pedestrians out that day, but along came a woman, walking briskly with her dog. The dog was romping wildly without a leash, and Sophia watched as he took a running leap into the mighty river. However, he did not appear again on the water’s surface. The woman yelled, “Help! I can’t swim! My dog is drowning!” On instinct, Sophia bravely jumped in to rescue the dog. Neither she, nor the dog realized the fierce current created by the storm, and neither rose to the surface.

Mark was utterly heartbroken to lose his beloved daughter. He hid in the barn, spoke to no one and was beside himself with grief, frozen in agony. To spare his feelings, no one dared mention Sophia’s name. Sunshine felt she had to be considerate of Mark’s feelings, but at times she feared she would lose her sanity. She tried desperately not to mention her heroine’s name. Sometimes her mind went dead; sometimes she thought she’d explode. How could she go on living? In her agony, she burst into Mark’s hiding place and sat down on a bale of hay with tears streaming down her face. “She can’t be gone! I wake up during the night and remember things we did. I can hear things she said.” Without stopping to catch her breath, Sunshine burst forth with the deepest memories of Sophia.

She recounted the secrets they had shared. She remembered Mark’s anger toward Sophia once and added, “But she said you never spanked her once. That’s good.” Tears burst out of Mark’s eyes and heart in gratitude for his daughter’s kind words about him.

Mark was amazed at all the thoughts and feelings Sophia had shared with Sunshine, of which he had no inkling. Each noticed that the other was no longer dangerously frozen in spirit. Mark confided to Sunshine, “You have not only opened Sophia up to me; you have given me the courage to see everyone as deeply as you were open to see Sophia. I know she is grateful for what you have helped me see.”

Kay, I see tragedy as a part of our lives. So the real question is not whether we encounter tragedy or not, but what we can learn from such times in embracing whatever life brings.

I think Sunshine and Mark helped each other learn a great deal while overcoming their tragedy.

In Peace, Hanna

Send your questions / comments to: Dear Hanna c/o Skipping Stones PO Box 3939, Eugene, OR 97403
Blossom for Mary Beth Russell

The leaves are smooth with lacy veins exposed to air. One caterpillar inches delicate as the smooth skin of a girl, grown up, out of place.

Out of place wound, slurring, a tornado lifts just below your eyes. Drifting as fog, farther, farther out of sweetness.

Out of sweetness, out of the core of despair, fear licks the rim. Earth sleeps inside you, a chipped eggshell, still teary.

Still teary, music winds around gardens in husky whispers. Children hush. Stars startle, storms stop. The sky peers from hiding. The one house where spring is welcome.

The one house where spring is welcome, the rap tap tap, the thrill of northwingers, thrash of water against bark, the rough bark of a dog. Peonies bloom shivering.

—Jane Warren, 11, Westwood, Massachusetts.

"I have written a lot of poems, and many of them are about nature. I wrote the poem ‘Blossom’ for a friend of my mother’s who had breast cancer."

A Lesson Unforgotten

I remember my palms being sweaty as I wandered anxiously into her classroom. The walls, from corner to corner, were decorated in clippings and posters, all pertaining to deafness and American Sign Language. Pictures of signing hands hung from the bulletin boards. I knew then that I had stepped into another world, one that was unfamiliar and unknown.

Once my classmates had entered and settled into their seats, she began her lesson. She did not speak. Her hands flew about gracefully as she signed, “Hello. My name Ms. Lewison. Your name what?” These signs did not make sense to me until later on that week, but still I sat upright at my desk, unable to blink. My entire first impression of her was silent.

As months passed by, my class developed from 12 independent teenagers taking a course, to an unusually large family. Ms. Lewison was like our mother. When we were feeling troubled for whatever reason, we would just let our hands do the talking. We often had intense class discussions about worldwide issues, without our voices. It was on these days that the lesson became less about following the curriculum and more about life. It was also on these days that I slowly grew into a more sensitive and accepting person.

Ms. Lewison performed a tough task. She successfully replaced all that was ignorant in me with curiosity and tolerance. Then she took my open mind and opened it even wider and still found time to turn me into a fluent signer. When she left our beloved classroom to earn her doctorate and open a school of her own, she taught me that there are no limits, and that my abilities are endless.

Today my fingers are stronger. They have learned to dance and tell secrets that would never have escaped through my timid lips. Ms. Lewison nudged me into the elite ocean of deaf culture. I stayed afloat and have become a strong swimmer in diverse waters.

—Lacey Korevec, 12th grade, New City, NY.
Paul threw himself down on a kitchen chair and asked, “Dad, have you ever really hated somebody?”

His father gave the question his full attention.

“Never for long.”

“This is going to be long. Forever.”

Dad raised his eyebrows. “May I ask who?”

“Sanjay.”

“Sanjay!” Dad whistled. “He’s your best friend! What happened?”

Paul dropped his head in his hands. “He lost Iggy.”

“He was taking care of your iguana while we were on vacation. How could he lose him? He had the cage.”

“Yes, but he went away for the weekend and gave Iggy to Darren to watch. Now Iggy’s gone. The jerk had him outside, and he got away.”

Dad paused. “Then it really wasn’t Sanjay’s fault.”

Paul looked up. “Dad, Mom gave me Iggy... before...” Tears slipped down his face. It had been almost a year, and he still couldn’t say, “before she died.”

“I know, Son. I’m so sorry.”

“Sanjay’s sorry too, but does that bring Iggy back? Dad, he was the last thing...” Iggy had been a gift from his mother on Paul’s last birthday.

“You can have any pet you want, Paul,” she’d said, “and whenever you’re with it you can remember how much I love you.” Iggy was his special link to her.

Was, thought Paul. “We’ll never be friends again.”

Dad sighed. “I hope that’s not true, Paul. You two have always been buddies for a long time. Is there more to this story?”

“Yeah,” Paul sniffed back tears, “Sanjay told everybody at school. ‘Iggy ran away. Darren says he’ll get another one,’ but that’s not good enough.” Paul looked up. “How could that be good enough, Dad? Iggy was special.”

The next morning at school Sanjay asked, “Want to shoot baskets later?”

“No.”

“Hey, come on, I can’t change what happened.”

Sanjay’s dark eyes bored into Paul’s for a second before Paul looked away.

“You’re right about that.”

“I said I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have talked about it to the other guys. I know how important Iggy was to you, but you know I didn’t do it on purpose.”

“Sure.” Paul walked away. He didn’t see Sanjay slam his locker shut with a vicious kick.

At home Paul worked on his model airplane, but he and Sanjay had always built them together, and it wasn’t much fun without him. Paul played some video games, but without somebody on the other controller, there wasn’t any competition. Finally, he flopped down on his bed with a book, but he kept seeing Sanjay’s dark eyes and hearing him say, “I can’t change what happened.”

Paul looked at Iggy’s empty cage that Darren had returned. Good thing I wasn’t here when he brought it, thought Paul. I’d have probably punched him out.

Later that week the phone rang, and Dad answered it. “It’s Sanjay.”

“Tell him I’m sick.”

“Tell him yourself.”

“I’m sick,” said Paul into the phone. “Goodbye.” He hung up.

“ Aren’t you being a bit hard on him?” asked Dad.

“He deserves it.” Paul went back to his math.

Dad took a deep breath. “Does he really? Think about it, Paul, about how you’d feel if you were Sanjay, maybe about how you really feel.”

Paul slapped his books together and went into his room, slamming the door behind him. It seemed he slammed everything around lately, ever since...

Paul slumped down on his bed. Ever since he said he hated Sanjay. How was it really making him feel? He hadn’t lied when he said he was sick. Hating Sanjay was icky, like having the flu. It spoiled every minute of every day.

Paul remembered how sad Sanjay had looked when he’d apologized. If hating Sanjay made Paul feel this bad, how must Sanjay feel? And he’d been right. Nobody could change what had happened. Paul sat thinking for a long time.

Yes, Iggy was gone, for good, but Sanjay didn’t have to be. Paul went to the phone. When Sanjay answered, Paul asked, “Want to shoot some baskets?”

There was a long pause. Maybe he’ll hang up on me, thought Paul. I probably deserve it. But then he heard the grin in Sanjay’s voice when he said, “Sure, my place or yours?”

Paul grinned too, and suddenly he didn’t feel sick anymore. Maybe Sanjay could help him pick out another iguana.

—Nancy Sweetland, Green Bay, Wisconsin.
Hi, Skipping Stones! I was very glad to receive your letter. Our education is very difficult in Belarus. If you want to study in the university you must be very clever, or you must have a lot of money. I have to study a lot, and I have little time to communicate with my friends. Still, I decided to write to you. I very much like American people because they are equal between each other. I like traveling, so my dream is to go to America. I don’t want to live there, though, because I am a patriot of my country. I want to be useful and important for my country. Perhaps, I will save Belarus from harmful substances after the Chernobyl tragedy of 1986. Thank you for reading my letter.

Your Friend from Belarus,
Nastya Agafonova, girl, 16
D. Serdicha St. 6-74
220082 Minsk, BELARUS
NEW YORK, NY: A new national network, Tradeswomen Now and Tomorrow (TNT), recently had its founding meeting. The network will link women mill workers, plumbers, carpenters, electricians, painters, etc. Through TNT, women plan to speak with a national voice at a time when access to higher paying jobs is critical for poor women and their families, particularly those forced off welfare rolls to work for minimum wage. The network will also address issues of sexual harassment and family-friendly work policies. www.tradeswomennow.org.

Excerpted from: Ms. (summer 2002).

GENEVA, SWITZERLAND: For the first time in history, women leaders from various regions, faiths and traditions gathered in Geneva, October 7-9, to take a more active role in global peace building. Some 500 women participated in the Global Peace Initiative of Women Religious and Spiritual Leaders at the United Nations. They declared Nov. 3 as a Worldwide Day of Prayer for Peace. Ammachi (see Vol. 13, #1), was honored with the 2002 Gandhi-King Award.


EUROPEAN UNION: The European Parliament has passed a law requiring many electronic devices to be recycled at the manufacturer’s expense. It will be illegal to send cellular phones, computers and TVs to landfills. Although this may increase the cost of these items, it will keep heavy metals contained in electronics such as lead, mercury, chromium and cadmium out of the groundwater. Manufacturers will have to take back and recycle what they can, while safely disposing of the rest, a process that may encourage them to sell more durable, resource-efficient products.

Source: Sierra (Sept.-Oct. 2002).

Space-Based Missle Debris: The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientist reports that over 100,000 pieces of man-made debris now orbit around us in outer space, each traveling at 27,000 kms per hour! That’s 10 times faster than a bullet. Explode a missile in space, and the debris increases dramatically. The result of ricocheting pieces of metal could be a chain reaction in which each piece breaks other pieces into smaller bits until the Earth is surrounded by a lethal halo. That could spell the end to our love affair with outerspace.

Source: global.beat@nyu.edu.

NEW DELHI, INDIA: Parents say they use physical discipline to teach kids lessons, but Vatsala Sivasubramanian, a counselor, suggests “Learning never takes place in a situation of fear.” Parents spank children to give vent to their own frustration, anger and tiredness. Rajat Mitra, a clinical psychologist who works with criminals, says most of them have witnessed or faced severe violence as children. It’s best to talk with children more and use storytelling as a method of teaching. Also, forming support groups with other parents may help to reduce stress and find solutions to parenting challenges.


CANADA: Five years ago, Canada’s government launched the National Children’s Agenda to ensure that children have a good start in life and that parents can provide proper care and nurturing. The government has now designed a long-term investment plan to help poor families break out of the welfare trap, so that children born into poverty do not carry the consequences of poverty throughout their lives. The proposed increases in the National Child Benefits will help widen access to early learning opportunities and quality child care for low-income families.

The Canadian government is also putting in place early childhood development programs for First Nations, expanding Aboriginal Headstart, improving parental supports, and providing these communities with the tools to address fetal alcohol syndrome and its effects. The recently created National Working Group on Education hopes to increase opportunities for First Nations children, and to take immediate steps to help children with special learning needs.

Source: dmccall@netcom.ca.

PORTLAND, OREGON, USA: Sixteen high school student took part in a week-long workshop that teamed young artists with prominent sculptors, space artists, photographers, poets and videographers. They had spent several weekends together this summer studying how global warming threatens to reshape the Pacific Northwest. Their artwork reflects what they learned. Due to dramatic losses in snow packs from global warming, large-scale summer water shortages are likely for this normally water-rich region.

Source: sustainableresearch@attbi.com.

Shake It, Morena! And other Folklore from Puerto Rico by Carmen T. Bernier-Grand, Illust. Lulu Delacre (Millbrook). Culture is not taught as a lesson; it is lived as everyday life. This colorful book introduces a day in Puerto Rico through songs, games, riddles and folktales. Ages 7–12. ISBN: 0-7613-1910-7.

My Crazy Life: How I Survived my Family edited by Allen Flaming and Kate Scowen (Annick). Teens discuss growing up in families with problems such as alcoholism, divorce, mental illness, abandonment and loneliness. They talk directly and honestly about their own struggles and how they eventually turned their lives around. Ages 13 and up. ISBN: 1-55037-732-9.

Big City Cool: Short Stories about Urban Youth, editors: M. Jerry Weiss and Helen S. Weiss (Persea). These stories give a glimpse of what it’s like to live in large urban centers. Memoirs are set to the beat of city rhythms, accompanied by diverse characters and constant vibrancy. Ages 12 to 17. ISBN: 0-89255-278-6.

¡Sí, Se Puede! / Yes, We Can! Janitor Strike in L.A. by Diana Cohn, Illust. Francisco Delgado (Cinco Puntos). One night Carlos’ mamá explains that she is not making enough money to support him and his grandmother. She is going on strike, and Carlos finds a way to help. Based on the 2000 janitors’ strike in L.A. Ages 6 to 10. ISBN: 0-938317-66-0.

Snow in Jerusalem by Deborah da Costa, Illust. Cornelius Van Wright & Ying-Hwa Hu (Albert Whitman). Two boys, one from the Jewish quarter of Jerusalem and one from the Muslim quarter, are caring for the same stray cat without knowing it. They meet while following the cat on an unexpected adventure. Ages 5 to 10. ISBN: 0-8075-7521-6.


What’s Wrong with Timmy? by Maria Shriver, Illust. Sandra Speidel (Little, Brown). When eight-year-old Kate meets Timmy, she immediately wants to know why he looks and acts differently from other children. Her mother patiently explains about disabilities and the differences between all human beings. Ages 7 to 12. ISBN: 0-316-23337-4.


Multiethnic Teens and Cultural Identity by Bábara C. Cruz (Enslow). In a clear and concise manner, this book explores the history of interracial families, the struggles of mixed-race teens and today’s issues surrounding race. Ages 11 and up. ISBN: 0-7660-1201-8.

One Smile by Cindy McKinley, Illust. Mary Gregg Byrne (Illumination Arts). We never know how powerfully our simple acts of kindness impact others. This story follows a chain of selfless giving, starting with one smile. Ages 6 to 10. ISBN: 0-935699-23-6.

Can you Hear a Rainbow? The Story of a Deaf Boy Named Chris by Jamee Riggio Heelan, Illust. Nicola Simmonds (Peachtree). A child who has been deaf since birth explains the adjustments he has made to a hearing world and his insights into our differences. Ages 5 to 9. ISBN: 1561452688-8.

Bears Make Rock Soup and other stories by Lise Erdrich, Illust. Lisa Fifield (Children’s Book). For countless seasons, animals and people have spoken to one another in dreams. This collection of page-long Native American tales shares the wisdom gained from that relationship. Ages 5 to 10. ISBN: 0-89239-172-3.

A child raised with spiritual skills will be able to understand the source of creativity both within and outside herself. She will be able to practice nonjudgement, acceptance and truth, and she will be free from crippling fear and anxiety about the meaning of life. The deepest nurturing we can give our children is spiritual nurturing. Here are seven ways of looking at life and what it offers:

- Everything is possible.
- If you want to get something, give it.
- When you make a choice, you change the future.
- Don't say NO; go with the flow.
- Every time you wish or want, you plant a seed.
- Enjoy the journey.
- You are here for a reason.

—from The Seven Spiritual Laws for Parents by Deepak Chopra (Harmony Books, NY, 1997).

The Middle of Everywhere: The World’s Refugees Come to Our Town by Mary Pipher (Harcourt). People who have fled some of the most oppressive regimes in the world, live right next door now. These touching stories give a deeper understanding into our newest neighbors and their process of building a new life. Middle grades and up. ISBN: 0-15-100600-8.

The Handbook of the Middle East by Michael G. Kort (21st Century). This reference guide to the Middle East introduces facts about the history, economy, politics, geography and people of each country. Includes an encyclopedia-style section of people and places with photos. Middle grades and up. ISBN: 0-7613-1611-6.


The Jewish Family Fun Book: Holiday Projects, Everyday Activities, and Travel Ideas with Jewish Themes by Danielle Dardashti and Roni Sarig (Jewish Lights). These ideas for personalizing any Jewish holiday or event include historical information, food, games, dance, music, and a guide for Jews on the road. Elem. to Middle grades. ISBN: 1-58023-171-3.


Also by the same author, We Were There, Too! Young People in U.S. History. ISBN: 0-374-38252-2.


What’s Christmas Anyway? by Christa Pandey (cspandey@att.net). This is a guide to Christianity and Christian celebrations for non-Christian youths and their parents. Upper elem. and up.


Resurgence Magazine, Satish Kumar, editor (subs.resurge@virgin.net). Current issue of this international, bimonthly forum for ecospiritual thinking features many essays on So. Africa. ISSN :0034-5970.
Long ago, a boy loved coconuts. When Binaohan first looked at the three dark circles on a ripe, unhusked coconut, he saw a face—two eyes and a round mouth. “A friend,” he whispered.

From then on, coconuts and Binaohan were always together. He gathered coconuts, from egg-shaped nuts as small as a child’s thumb to year-old fruits as big as an adult’s head. Coconuts became characters in his stories. They replaced stones in his tossing games. He floated them in water. He put coconuts on his bed and told them his secrets at night.

But not everyone thought they were so special.

“Stop playing with coconuts and come to dinner!” his family would call.

“Not again,” his friends would groan.

“Can’t you play with anything else?”

As Binaohan grew older, he invented ways to use coconuts. “I’ve been telling you my secrets,” he said to them. “What secrets do you have to tell me?”

Now the people of the village liked eating coconuts. They scraped out the pudding flesh of young green coconuts and ate it with the sweet juice. They chewed the white, crunchy meat of ripe, brown coconuts.

But Binaohan dreamed of more.

He grated crunchy coconut meat, poured hot water on it and pressed out a milky liquid. “Tastes good,” he said. “What could I cook with this?” He created stews with pork or crabs, sweet rice cakes and soups with yams and bananas. He offered samples to everyone.

“Delicious,” they said. Yet as the days passed, they groaned, “Not another coconut dish!”

But Binaohan dreamed of more.

Sitting one day under a palm tree, Binaohan picked up a piece of coconut shell. “What could I make with the shells?” He shaped bowls. He carved beads. He made drums.

He hoped people would agree, “Coconuts are amazing! Look at the many ways you can use them!”

Instead people teased him. “The way you love coconuts, you must have a coconut for a head! Can’t you think about anything else?”

But Binaohan dreamed of more.

One day he stared at the stiff hairs, or coir, of the husk. “What could I do with these?” He bunched them together. “A good brush,” he declared. He packed coir together. “A mattress for sleeping!” He wove coir together and made mats, ropes and fishing nets.

The villagers shook their heads and laughed about Binaohan tinkering with coconuts all day. Some even whispered when they thought he couldn’t hear, “Isn’t he too interested in coconuts?”

But he heard. “I’m dumb for thinking coconuts are so special,” he muttered. “I’m not going to think about coconuts anymore.”

One day a fierce typhoon struck. Its winds were so strong that trees bent over like bodies bowing at the waist. Rain fell like tiny jellyfish out of the sky. Waves lifted and rolled like moving walls, crashing into the land. The buildings of the village were destroyed. Only the coconut trees still stood tall.

“Our village is ruined!” people moaned.

“If only I could think of something,” Binaohan whispered. He leaned against the trunk of his favorite tree, feeling its strong and sturdy support. Smiling, he admired his grove of coconut palms standing tall against the pushing breezes.

Suddenly Binaohan cried, “That’s it!” He rushed back to the village center.

“We will have to move,” people were deciding. “We cannot live here anymore.”

“Wait!” Binaohan said. “Use my coconuts!”

“Stop dreaming for once,” someone scolded.

“The answer to our problem is not coconuts!”

“Coconut trees can be used for building houses!” Binaohan said. “Use the trunks for walls. Use the fronds for roofs.”

So they built new houses out of coconut palms. They used whole trunks for corner posts. They sliced other trunks into boards for walls. They tied fronds together to make thatched roofs. “We’ve never lived in such sturdy, comfortable houses,” everyone said.

Binaohan was a hero. No one made fun of his ideas anymore. Everyone used his coconut creations.

And the people of Filipino villages far and wide came to say, “Use your coconut!” to mean “Think! Use your head!” Just like Binaohan.

—Christine Liu Perkins, Chinese American, Louisville, CO, spent three years in the Philippines.
Painting by V. Petrovanov illustrates the poem “Ruslan and Lyudmila” by Pushkin.

Painting by Tanya Dolbnya illustrates “The Silver Hoof Deer” by Pavel Bazarov.

Above: “Russian Souvenirs”

Left: “Russian Girl” by Tonya Peterimova.

Watercolor by Sasha Igoshin, 11, illustrates the folktale “Exchange.”

Paintings by middle school students in Kachkanar, Yekaterinburg, Russia.