

Skipping Stones

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The Cathedral of Vasily the Blessed, Red Square, Moscow.

David Xiong Goes to Russia

Ever since I was very young, I was intrigued by the political tug-a-war between different parties and countries. From a very young age, I loved listening to N.P.R. on the radio, and was amazed by how the news balanced different perspectives to do their best to paint the most accurate picture of reality.

However, as America goes through the deadly coronavirus pandemic that has claimed so many lives in the U.S. and a racial reckoning following repeated brutal treatment of minorities, I wonder what it means to welcome everyone's perspective and describe an accurate reality. In fact, there are rational concerns about breaches on freedom when strict measures such

Photo (below) by Anastasija Shepeleva.

Continued on p. 19



Oil Painting (left) and Self Portrait (right) by Katherine Han, 16, Texas.

"I want to express a depth and intensity in my art. I like to use darker color schemes and emphasize the contrast between shadows and highlights. To me, the smallest details contribute to the larger picture. As a perfectionist, I am never satisfied with my work and often spend too much time focusing on each element. However, I am learning to be bolder with my pencils and paintbrushes, and art has freed me from my agonizing."



Welcome to our first (and also the very last) issue of 2021! What? Yes, from now on we will no longer print *Skipping Stones* issues. True, that's a big change. We have been at it for over 32 years now, having produced almost 150 issues so far. We have published over 5,000 students (and many adults) from almost 50 countries and four continents in our 4,800 pages. Not a small feat for a nonprofit, non-commercial magazine, I think.

We couldn't have done it without you—the readers, contributors (poets, writers, storytellers, artists, photographers), librarians, teachers, parents, student interns, volunteers, subscribers, donors, supporters, board members, advisors, family, and friends. As you know: it takes a *global village* to make a global magazine like *Skipping Stones*. So the credit really belongs to all of us.

We are still open to your submissions but the 2021 Haiku Contest is being postponed due to Covid-19. We will continue to publish new content digitally, on our website. And, we intend to keep the access to our website *free* for all. As long as you have a device and Internet access, you can read the content whenever you can, wherever you are—at home, school, or library. Please visit our website often and look for new pieces.

Have you noticed that things are constantly changing? Changes are natural. Seasons come and go; morning turns into evening, then night, and then dawn, and then morning... We grow, finish school, get jobs, have family... But in 2020, our lives have turned upside down due to the Covid-19 pandemic induced changes. We're all learning to adapt to these changes.

The Climate Change will bring more changes, some really big ones, to our world. There have been many big wildfires and over a dozen tropical storms in the U.S. alone during 2020. We must prepare to adapt to the changing climate, weather, and ecological and social conditions. New research suggests that to limit the climate change, we will need to employ many ways to absorb (drawdown) CO₂ that's already in our Earth's atmosphere, in addition to a carbon-neutral economy.

We must push our governments to respond sensibly, scientifically, and swiftly. This is possibly our last chance to save the world from a run-away climate catastrophe.

Wishing you a healthy and heart-warming 2021!
Let us help make the world safe for *all beings*. —Arun

Amid the Covid-19 pandemic, more young people than ever are using their spare time to develop their language skills. While we can't travel physically right now, millions are virtually traveling through Zoom calls, books, and videos, preparing for the rich experience of traveling. Learning a new language will allow us to communicate with people from different backgrounds and countries, explore traditions and embrace cultural differences. We will be able to connect with individuals in places that we would never dream of visiting, thus opening doors for collaboration and friendship, and for new, wonderful opportunities.

Countless people have visited other countries and found themselves devoted to a worthy cause. After they return home, they realize they have broadened their perspectives and discovered their true potential. Organizations like *Doctors without Borders* were established after seeing the hardships around the world. Ultimately, we must learn to be tolerant and respect others and their cultures. We live in a diverse world. When we travel abroad, we are able to connect with people and personally experience elements of their cultures. Social media can often lead to the spread of misconceptions. We can never appreciate the true beauty of our world if we don't explore new things first-hand and test the limits ourselves. Traveling gives us interactive experiences that no book, Instagram post, or speech can replace. Whether you are twirling with Mariachi dancers in Mexico or catching a wave in Australia, traveling could change your life.

Learning to appreciate the beauty of other cultures creates a big difference. It allows us to broaden our perspectives, learn about new foods and activities, meet like-minded people, and get involved in life-changing causes. Much of the injustice and tension in our world comes from a large cultural divide. There are a multitude of misconceptions in our world about others, and by opening our minds, we can understand the struggles people face. By having respect for each other, we can come together and solve our problems together. We should have a strong sense of togetherness. Let's learn to be cognizant of each other and start changing our unjust world, individual by individual. As Confucius once said, "The man who moves a mountain begins by carrying away small stones."

—Vaishnavi Kumbala, age 12, world traveler, Louisiana.

Skipping Stones

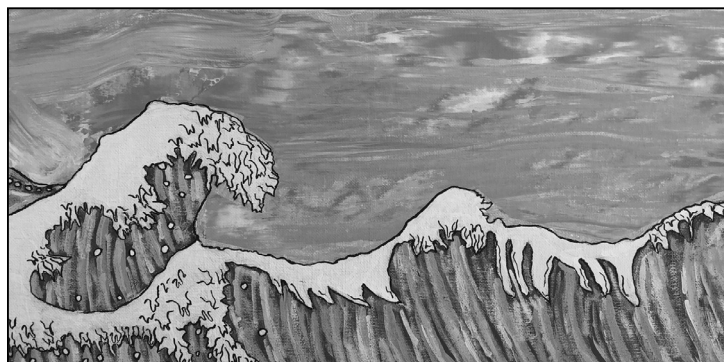
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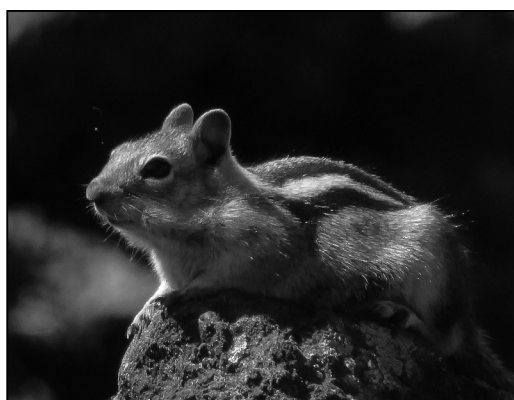
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An Inviting Lawn Sign in Eugene

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In the spirit of ecological sensitivity, we choose to print with soy ink on recycled and recyclable paper with a 30% post-consumer recycled content.



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About *Skipping Stones*:

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 forum for communication among children from different lands and backgrounds. *Skipping Stones* expands horizons in a playful, creative way. We invite you to send us your creative art and thought-provoking writing.

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The Golden Light of Dawn

The golden light of dawn
Bathes the forest in liquid light
Caresses the fur of a young fawn
Gently fingers petals bright

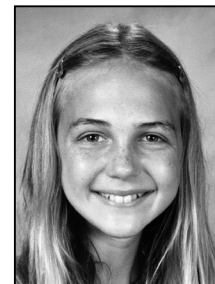
What was once the rushing blue of a river
Now shines like solid gold
The cottonwoods' leaves, no longer silver
Whisper forgotten stories and secrets untold

Like the golden touch of a greedy king
The dawn turns every hue to one
Every animal, every plant, every little thing
Until its job is done

But all the gold is cruelly erased
By the morning and its cold, sharp rain
A beautiful masterpiece put to waste
On its knees, the dawn weeps in vain

But after night falls upon the land
When the sky is dark as a black swan
There comes a light, bright as a brand
'Tis but the golden light of dawn

—Kayla Osborn, 13, California. She says, "I began writing poetry when I was 10 years old, and it has become my passion ever since. My creativity has blossomed during this quarantine period because I am home with a lot of spare time."



By the Border

By the border,
the mourning doves
sing their
sweet, sad song.

By the border,
the wind whispers
come,
come.

By the border,
arms reach for the
bright sun
past the wall.

By the border,
the stars shine
for those who need
shining.

"This poem tries to capture the effort and emotion of a Mexican immigrant attempting to cross the border into the United States. My heritage is important to me, and I often explore it in my writing. I would like to be a writer when I grow up."

—Consuelo Bowman,
gr. 7, Cuban-Mexican-American, Connecticut.

In a shady corner, between a hard place and a rock
 I found a blooming little flower
 It shone and it was so radiant, it lit up the whole scene
 With its vibrant hues of fuchsia pink and green
 It grew there in that lonely corner
 Abandoned and alone yet it grew
 It once rained for two days and a night
 I thought it'd be gone but it was alright
 Blossoming silently and growing into a tree
 It got me thinking of all that I could be
 And as I stared at it, it reminded me
 Of all I have, all the opportunity
 I looked at it long and hard, it made me see
 How full of life we are, the immense possibility
 It made me want to spring up and sing
 End all the suffering and go exploring
 Made we want to study and be smart
 Sit at the dining table and do finger-paint art
 Made me want to go home and hug my mum
 Apologize for being mean and for being dumb
 Made we want to reach out and grab life
 Put in hard work, determination and strife
 Made me want to stop surviving but live instead
 To go outside and step out of my head
 So full of life, it was just so determined to do
 It made the grass seem more green, the sky more blue
 So when the lights all go dark,
 and you feel lonely in a crowded room
 When you're stuck and upset,
 remember you can always bloom

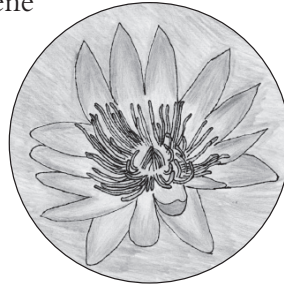
—Nikhita Makam, grade 10, Hyderabad, India. She calls herself a “high school student by day, programming poet by night.” Her hobbies range from gardening to app developing. Her dream is to write words that can change the world.

Reduce the Virus Spread!

Wear a mask or face covering
 Wash your hands frequently
 Keep social distance, 6 to 8 ft.
 Avoid indoor gatherings
 Avoid large outdoor gatherings

Grandma with a Mask

Art by Taryn Wong, age 9,
 Chinese American, New York.



White Is A Color

I am the deep brown
 Winter branches
 Covered with crisp
 White snow
 I am the chocolate chunks
 Implanted in
 White icecream
 I am the jet black
 On the zebra's back
 Painted with pearly
 White strips
 I am the smooth blacktop
 Road
 Topped with glistening
 White dashes
 I am the inky black letters
 Of this poem
 And you are the stark
 White paper
 We shine on

—maggie d., African American poet, Washington.

“The poem erupted from interactions with my friends of European heritage. Many times they saw themselves as not belonging to an ethnic group. I would tell them they came from a colorful culture as beautiful as everyone else’s.”

Where Morning Can Be Seen

Picture a shanty on the shores of Baseco, where instead of naked windows, air. Inside, a young girl can only imagine voiceless street markets selling balut, stifles extending longer than wounds hewed on skin. In a distance, she sees pigeons lined atop the canopy of street lamps, sometimes thinking—birds flying low means soon, water from the skies. Grass enveloping the lamp will begin to thaw, and she won't know about the burning iris. Instead, she eyes a sparrow roosting in the breach of clouds, like thoughts wanting to perish. The way she prays to unsee knees etched on necks, cartridges tracing sidewalks and not skin, her family's aflamed house.

—Jaewon Chang, 17, Philippines.

Second Home

I remember when my parents would take me to the beach near my aunt's house. The beach was crystal clear. The sand, its golden, yellow color shined bright and glowed like treasure. Inside were rocks and shells of different sizes and colors, ranging from an orange-pink to a silvery-black. If you were to step on it, the sharpness of the edges would hurt, yet soothing as the crunching and snaps of the seashells broke beneath your feet.

The waves crashed against the shore, the royal blue water running towards me, then backing off again, in an infinite cycle. As the waves came crashing in, it left new shells, rocks, and sometimes other oddities as an offering, while it dragged out some of the shells and rocks that were at the shore. It was almost like a trade. A secret exchange between the beach and the ocean.

The misty, salty air blew through my hair, leaving a sweet smell that entranced me. The wind caressed my skin, leaving behind goose bumps that pricked.

The beach was always a place where life would exist, with crabs walking on the shore, and fish swimming in the depths of the ocean.

Walking in, I could feel the seaweed brush against my legs, the coldness welcoming me in a sweet yet harsh way. If you swam deep enough, about 25 meters down, you could see a menagerie of creatures, all strange and magical. A coral reef with all sorts of fish. It could be a majestic palace or an exuberant carnival. The mollusks dancing on the ocean floor, fish darting from one place to another, and the coral flashing off their array of palettes, it was truly a sight to behold.

Leaving the ocean and the beach was sad, it was like saying goodbye to a best friend for a short time, but I knew that we would meet again. But this time was the last time it would look so magnificent.

When I came back next year, I saw an appalling sight. My second home was polluted. Destroyed. Wrecked. Plastic trash was scattered everywhere, and the crabs were now gone. The winds were more ferocious than kind and gentle, and the waves were fierce with anger, crashing against the shore in frustration.

The ocean looked, sad. Instead of bringing in seashells and other peculiarities, it brought in plastic after plastic.

I walked in and could feel the trash beneath my

feet. The water was barely higher than before, and when I put my head under the water, I saw the coral reef, the once beautiful place that was filled with grandeur, become a place of darkness. The coral no longer had their bright colors but was instead gray. Fish no longer teamed the coral reef, and metal bins were scattered on the ground. Tires were caught on the coral and some small fish lived inside the water bottles, afraid that more plastic would ruin their old home. Metal rods pierced through the reef, creating holes in the structures. Cable wires were tangled around, some tied in knots.

As I walked up the beach, wet, sad, and lonely, I cried my tears of gloom while sitting cross-legged. But a light appeared all over my body, and I looked up to see the sun. The sun was setting. Smudges of lavender, tiger orange, burnt umber, canary yellow as well as fiery red blended together to create an astounding sight that melted away my sadness, and gave me a feeling of hope. That the ocean could be cleaned, and that the beaches could be repaired.

My last tear fell and hit the sand as I stood up to watch the sun dip down below the horizon. I realized that my home was the ocean. The ocean was my home, and no amount of plastic could ever take that away from me.

—Brenton Lee, 13, New York.

The Planet of Our Existence: Mother Earth

Mother Earth gives us all her share,
But to correctly use it we are not aware.

We pollute her, we dirty her, we do not care,
For our extinction we prepare.

It is our responsibility, its our duty,
To keep her clean and cherish her beauty.

There is something each one of us can do to keep
the earth clean,
To keep the air fresh and the forests green.

The earth is huge but only one,
It's a place we live and have fun.

So, let us come together and save the earth,
For it's our home, and every small step will
be worth.

—Simerah Pinto, age 13, Dubai, U.A.E.



Those Stares

They were staring at us, like they always did. The “Green Dot” rally for climate change at Hong Lim Park was in full swing. The crowd of like-minded youth advocating for climate change gathered at the grassy park, roaring and cheering for each riveting speaker who stepped onto the stage.

But when we arrived, their attention was drawn momentarily away.

I shouldn’t have been surprised. We always were the center of attention wherever we went. People stared when my dad signed to me at the mall. People stared when my mum and my brother crossed the road with white canes in their hands, refusing any help from passers-by. People stared when they saw the unusual look of my adult cousin with Down Syndrome at the hawker centre. People stared when my younger sister pushed the wheelchair of my elder sister in the public library. And right now, my schoolmates in the crowd stared at the boy with autism and his nine-year-old sister with A.D.H.D. joined the rally, along with their weirdo family. If you were there, you would have stared at us too, wouldn’t you?

It’s hard to ignore the looks. To pretend they didn’t exist. To prevent your head from filling with dark, toxic thoughts about “Those Stares.” To stop yourself from getting all worked up. This was partly why I despised crowded places. The people and the thoughts in your head.

As we made our way through the sea of people, we were shoved to and fro. There were both embarrassed whispers with fleeting glances at Mengchen’s wheelchair and low grunts with pointed looks at Mum’s and Xukai’s white canes.

“Those people? Come to this rally?” I heard a teenage girl say. “The deaf uncle even understand what we’re saying meh?” another teenager muttered. *What was their problem? My brain screamed. Is there something wrong for us to even be here?*

Dad touched my arm gently. He noticed. He always does. “Ignore them,” he whispered.

I glared at him. I **do not** like being touched, even by my dad. I started walking faster. I really, really, really hated crowded places.

My mind went back to yesterday night, when Mengchen announced her plans for the entire family—

all seven of us—to not only participate in the rally, but even deliver a speech.

“No way!” I had exclaimed. To me, the idea of standing under the blazing sun, squished between sweaty strangers as noises thundered across the rally venue was a nightmarish horror.

“Have you lost your mind?” Xukai’s jaw dropped. (*Figuratively, I assure you. No hospital bills incurred.*)

“Sunday? But... but... why?” Mum spluttered. “What about Xuheng’s tuition?” She shot me a worried look.

“Don’t worry lah. The rally will only be until *twelve*,” said Hui En, an enthusiastic backer of the idea. “Xuheng won’t be late for Math tuition. Anyway, don’t you guys wanna go? We can meet so many people like us and we can make a speech too!”

“I want to go!” Ming Xuan raised her hand, serving as Hui En’s “hype crew.”

“Don’t go lah.” Mum waved a hand nonchalantly, dismissing the idea at once. “There are other ways to advocate climate change one. Some people, like those teenagers ah, go out and do rally. Some people, like us, do other ways of supporting them. We not suited to do rallies and stuff liddat.”

“I am a teenager,” Mengchen said through her text-to-speech app.

Mum opened her mouth to speak, but the words came out all wrong. “You’re... You’re...”

I knew what she wanted to say. Everybody knew what she wanted to say. *You’re different. We all are different.*

That’s when I felt I needed to speak up.

“I seriously do not like the idea of going to a crowded rally full of people and loud noises,” I started.

Xukai’s voice was full of triumph. “Exactly. Mum and I will have a hard time walking through all those people — ”

“However, why don’t we go?”

Xukai groaned, “Noooo!” Dad tapped his shoulder, a signal for Xukai to let me continue.

“Climate change is something that’s really important to us. It will impact the entire world, and we’ve got to play our part. Going to the rally is a show of support for like-minded activists and a way to spur change in our leaders.”

Seollal

“Come on lah! The organisers wouldn’t like the trouble we bring to them, especially when we have to make a speech,” Mum protested. “Think about your dad! We’ll need an interpreter for him! Think about Mengchen! How is she even gonna get up the stage?”

“We are thinking about them, and they obviously want to go.” Hui En was getting so hyped-up she jumped onto the sofa and began gesticulating excitedly. “Oh come on! It will be so fun at the rally!”

“It’s not for fun,” Xukai snapped. “And I’m not going, no matter what you say.”

“I know you don’t like the idea of going.” Mengchen looked at Xukai calmly. “You don’t like it when other people stare and say those things. That’s why we need to go to the rally. To do something. To join people who care about climate change like us. To send the message to those who stare. *I don’t care about what you think, I care about our planet and our future.*”

That was what changed Xukai’s and Mum’s minds.

As the last speaker concluded his speech, we finally reached the ginormous stage. Dad shot us all a look. *Ready?* he mouthed. I gulped, unsure of my answer. Mengchen answered for all of us.

“Ready.”

That’s the right answer, I reassured myself. Because we belong here, *no matter what they say.* I think of all the activists with special needs I know, the ones who chose to speak up. James Brown, the Paralympian who tried to glue himself to the top of a plane for a protest on climate change. Greta Thunberg, who doesn’t need any introduction whatsoever. My sister, Zheng Mengchen, who helped organise this rally. (Okay, I might be bragging a little bit...)

They were staring at us, like they always did. But we didn’t care. We never did.



—Thee Sim Ling, 13, Singapore.
“I have autism myself, and this story was partly inspired by the fact that a prominent youth activist for climate change, Greta Thunberg, has autism as well. I feel that disabled people with special needs should play their part in important causes such as climate change, regardless of what other people may think about people like us.”

Seollal is a traditional celebration of the Korean New Year.

Clumps of wild flowers bloom between
the rocks. Winter moths camouflaged on the wall
as the blast of cold air surrounds my body.
I can see the peak of Seoraksan Mountain,
smell the savory scent of beef broth soup,
young or old, all wearing traditional patterned Hanboks.
In the kitchen, my aunts fry sliced meat, fish
and vegetables in oil and my uncles gather
in front of the TV with *sojus** in their hands.
I help serve *banchans*—Korean side dishes
from seasoned bean sprouts to spicy radish salad.
My grandmother pulls out my favorite cabbage *kimchi*
from the *Jangdokdae** in the backyard.
All of us pray and sip while waiting for *tteokguk**
and celebrate our new age
with only two bows.
My pockets are filled with golden bills
red and blue *yeons** ready to fly;
wooden sticks ready to be rolled.
We compete against each other
until the full moon becomes visible.

—Haewon Yun, 15, grade 10, South Korea. *Soju: A Korean alcoholic drink made of rice or sweet potatoes; Jangdokdae: A jar used to ferment and store comestible goods, typically Kimchi, soybeans, bean and red pepper paste; Tteokguk: A traditional Korean dish with broth and sliced rice cakes. Yeon: A kite

Me

*Me is such a funny word, to be specific, a pronoun
It can build others up, or quickly tear their confidence down
When the gossip train rolls around, the word is rarely spoken
For if it is, it’s normally a heart that has been broken*

*Me, me, and only me, the motto or anthem for some
A note to them: this is why we find you so bothersome
Attention stops prevention of mention in gossip or such
It’s true, that’s why other people don’t like you very much*

*The word can be a bother or a nuisance or a pain
Rarely the thing that we earn from it is satisfying gain
I’m sorry but time is running out, we must sadly bid ado,
Oh wait, this poem’s not about ME, it’s all about YOU.*

—Emily Greene, 14, homeschooled, Virginia.

Koala Prints

You probably know that you possess fingerprints unique from anyone else's. Looking at a person's "prints" is one sure way to identify that person. But did you know that animals have fingerprints, too? And in the case of koalas, those fingerprints look almost exactly like human fingerprints.

In 1996, at the University of Adelaide in Australia, it was discovered that koalas have fingerprints. Maciej Henneberg, a scientist at the University of Adelaide, commented that the koalas had fingerprints so similar to those of people that they could easily be mistaken for human fingerprints. While handling the koalas in a wildlife park near Adelaide, Mr. Henneberg observed that koalas' fingers had ridged patterns of loops, whorls, and arches eerily similar to those on a human hand. Even more surprising is that each koala has its own unique set of fingerprints just as we do!

But why would a koala need fingerprints? Scientists have suggested several possible explanations.

One reason is for grip. The fine whorls and loops on a fingerprint give animals as well as people better control while grasping and manipulating objects. Fingerprint textures help increase friction, which is a force that holds back the movement of a sliding object, on touched surfaces. According to a team of animal scientists at the University of Adelaide, koalas eat by climbing up smaller branches of eucalyptus trees. They reach out and grasp many leaves and then move them to their mouth. So fingerprints aid in grasping and moving objects in different directions and positions.

A second reason is for sensitivity to touch. Koalas are particular about the gum leaves they choose from eucalyptus trees. Even though there are over 700 species of these trees, they tend to only eat leaves from ten of these. So fingerprints may help koalas select and inspect leaves more carefully.

Although some scientists reason that fingerprint features increase friction on surfaces, others argue that fingerprints actually reduce surface area and friction. This means that since finger pads are slightly raised and ridged, there is less resistance to blistering. According to Dr. Roland Ennos at the University of Manchester, "That is why we get blisters on the smooth parts of our



hands and feet and not the ridged areas: our finger pads, palms, and soles." So fingerprints may prevent blistering in koalas as they climb on rough branches.

Another explanation is that fingerprint features on a koala may help direct water away when the fingertip comes in contact with wet surfaces. Just as treads or grooves in bicycle tires force water away from the tires to prevent sliding, fingerprint features may help a koala hold onto a slippery object, such as a tree branch, after a rainfall.

Here is a simple activity you can do at home to observe features of your own fingerprints as you create and compare your fingerprints to those of other people. You will need an ink pad, white paper, magnifying glass, and Internet access.

First, lightly press one of your fingers onto an ink pad. Next, roll your finger firmly onto the white paper. Create a print of each finger. Now, carefully examine your fingerprints using the magnifying glass. What types of patterns do you notice? Encourage friends and family members to complete this activity. Compare your fingerprints to theirs. What do you observe? There are three different types of fingerprint patterns—loops, whorls, and arches. With adult assistance, go online and study the different patterns to determine each person's fingerprint type. You'll be amazed to see how unique fingerprints are to everyone!

As you can see, scientists are still discovering new things about fingerprints, whether from animals or people. Since that day in 1996 when Australian scientists found the koalas' distinctive prints, they have offered different theories about how fingerprints benefit these animals. With continued research, we expect to learn more about this unusual feature.

—Debby Shade, writer, Texas. Koala photos © iStockphoto.



The Deer

At our old house, we had a garden out back. We had all sorts of plants like lettuce and broccoli and spinach, ready for us to eat every day. It wasn't a big garden but it was enough for all of us, and my grandfather tended to it every day to keep it clean and tidy. It was Mother Earth's gift to us.

Such a gift from the earth was bound to attract unwanted guests like caterpillars and whiteflies and grubs in the dirt that reaped the spoils of our labor, as well as other animals like snakes and toads that helped keep the pest under control but were still not necessarily good. The little insects and animals would take their small portions from the garden, just as we took from the garden. Since it was our garden, we had the task of making sure the animals did not take too much.

In our neighborhood, there were a lot of deer roaming around, periodically emerging from the forest and disappearing again. One day, one of the deer must have gotten lost, or have been attracted by the vegetables because it ended up in the backyard. Then, before we knew it, the deer had a fawn and our backyard became the fawn's home. The mother sometimes left the fawn to forage in the forest leaving the fawn alone. Of course, you know where this is going. The little deer saw that the nearest (and possibly the tastiest) source of food was our garden.

My grandpa, not caring for the fact that the cute little deer was beginning to grow quickly, was dismayed to find that his once bountiful garden was absolutely in shambles. So he devised a plan. He took some yellow rope and proceeded to bind up the poor unassuming deer and put it in the corner to teach it for once and for all to not practice theft. He intended to leave it there for a while and let it go, or perhaps have deer that day. It seemed strange to me but I realized that he probably handled things differently back in China, and was not used to deer devouring his beloved crops.

Fortunately for the deer and my grandpa, my parents convinced him that it was probably the least best course of action to traumatize the young fawn more thoroughly and he acknowledged it, grudgingly agreeing to free the fawn. It promptly ran out through the gate and into the forest, probably thinking to escape the bloodthirsty humans who had tied it up.

My mother and father would always tell me this story, along with other ones. For them it was probably

just a funny story, but for me it was a lesson.

I think that this is a good lesson for us. We sometimes like our animal friends but if they do bad things many times we get furious. We need to remind ourselves that sometimes these animals are just following their natural instincts. For instance, the innocent deer was very young and naturally ate from the garden. As humans we have been tasked as caretakers of the world, to share the earth with all the other creatures, but so far we have done a terrible job.

Society a lot of times makes you think it is all about you. We have neglected our duty to take care of this world, becoming involved in petty tirades and conflicts, while global warming and extinction have been slowly creeping up on us. While we languish in violence and conflict, the earth has been slowly deteriorating from our neglect and omissions. Animals and plants also have a claim on this world but to preserve it, they need us humans. If we go down a path of wanton destruction and death, we will soon be swept away by the foreboding of Armageddon. However, if we choose to begin to look outside our own needs and our own concerns we can see quite a lot of the world is broken. The question now is if we languish in the suffering and pain or do we act. Without the earth there will be no humans. We must save the beleaguered earth or our own desires and wants will be extinguished along with us.

There is an end to everything in this world. Eventually all the stars will be blown out. Atoms will break down as the bonds shatter due to the enmity of time. To that there is no question. The question is; how will we preserve *our* world. The earth will eventually explode into a flaming fireball or something, but how can we extend our time as a species on this planet along with the rest of nature?

All of us can learn.

My grandpa, sometime later after the deer incident/fawnnapping, was outside smoking or resting when he saw a lawn folding chair that was rattling on the inside. My grandpa looked inside and saw a bird stuck there. Of course learning from past mistakes, he opened up the closed chair and gently cupped his hands and lifted the bird out of its prison. The bird acted like nothing had happened and flew away.

—Joshua Wu, 12, Texas. Besides writing, Joshua enjoys playing soccer, rock climbing, and fishing in his spare time.

An Intersection between Social and Environmental Issues

About an hour away from Cancun Airport lies Playa del Carmen, with sandy beaches, blue skies, and stunning resorts. Like Cancun, Playa del Carmen is a popular tourist destination, ranked as one of the top cities in Mexico on TripAdvisor. As tourism is the second largest source of revenue in Mexico and the number of tourists is constantly increasing, Playa del Carmen's economy is heavily fueled by tourism.

Indeed, many of the businesses in Playa del Carmen depend on tourism, such as hotels, tourism agencies, restaurants, night clubs, and more; the tourism sector is one of the largest sources of profit and jobs in the city. However, Playa del Carmen now faces an environmental problem that may single-handedly disrupt the tourism industry: sargassum. Sargassum is a type of seaweed that grows to a length of a few meters long and floats on water. Recently, there was an influx of sargassum, and large quantities now wash ashore. Sargassum can reach lengths of 25 meters on coastlines or become mounds up to 10 feet tall.

This past summer, I looked into how sargassum is affecting the business community in Playa del Carmen. A team of researchers, including myself, interviewed 14 local businesses in the city and recorded their responses with the guidance of a head researcher based in Playa del Carmen. We wanted to understand how the sargassum crisis impacted local businesses while exploring possible solutions to this problem.

I learned that most solutions to the inundation of sargassum have been uncoordinated and environmentally unsustainable. These poor attempts at cleaning have resulted in the loss of sandy beaches, exacerbated coastal erosion, and destruction of animal habitats like sea turtle nests. On May 5, 2019, the state representative of the Tourism Promotion Fund, Pablo Careaga, stated that the government did not have the one billion pesos needed to effectively combat the sargassum crisis. In addition, since sargassum is not considered a natural disaster, Fonden, the natural disaster fund, cannot provide relief funding for this crisis. Even the 240 million pesos aid package for this crisis proved to be mostly ineffective. In fact, the Cancun-Puerto Morelos Hotel Association stated that beach cleanups will require an estimated additional 700 million pesos. However, the Mexican government said that it would utilize its navy to combat the inflow of sargassum, almost one million tons in 2019. Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the President of Mexico, asserted that the navy is well

equipped and has experienced experts with robust knowledge of the region, but it is uncertain whether the government's efforts will be effective or not. As a result of this relative lack of government aid, hotels in Quintana Roo have had to address the crisis by themselves. For instance, some hotels have placed barriers on their beaches to prevent the sargassum from washing up along the coastline. Even with these efforts, 30% of the sargassum continued to wash ashore, negatively impacting the hotels' business. In the first quarter of 2019, hotels in the area reported a loss of \$100 million mainly due to sargassum and estimated that they may need to reduce their rates by up to 15% in the summer of 2020.

Out of the 14 businesses that were interviewed, 6 mentioned sargassum as one of their biggest challenges. The differences in viewpoints towards sargassum might depend on the type of business it is. Tourism-fueled businesses were affected more by the sargassum crisis than businesses primarily patronized by locals; Company A, faced a loss of customers because tourists canceled their trips to Playa del Carmen after hearing about the crisis. Its owner said that his business was working to offer better quality dishes and services to attract more customers. Another company reported that Italians, their main customers, have stopped visiting because of the deterioration of the beaches. However, companies disagreed on the size of the crisis' impact.

The government has done little to provide solutions or aid. It occasionally sends trucks to collect sargassum but does not tell the residents where it is being discarded. Therefore, the locals have suspicions regarding the government's handling of the issue. More efficient methods of disposal are being considered: like using it to create useful products. Sargassum contains vitamins, carotenoids, dietary fibers, proteins, and minerals. In addition, it also has compounds such as flavonoids, polyphenols, sargachromenol, and many more that can help the human body with anti-tumor, anti-inflammatory, and antioxidant activities. Other studies have shown that marine algae can help with female health, beauty, and longevity. Heading into the future, continued research and innovation will be essential in alleviating the situation. Ultimately, this social and environmental issue negatively impacts the Caribbean's ecosystems and economies. The crisis is yet another example of the intersection between social and environmental issues, a duality that we must work to recognize and fix.

—Yongjin Park, 17, Korean American, Massachusetts.

Muted: Fifth Grade Conversations About Slavery

At school the other day in our Social Studies class, we were learning about who built “the greatest country in the world, America.” The teacher started listing names like George Washington and other overrated white historic figures. And I was like, *ummm*, did you forget something about who actually built America? So I got off mute and said, “Actually, slaves built this country.” If you are so proud of America’s history, look at the downsides, too. Own it just like you own how we won the revolutionary war. Own the fact that America is one of, or maybe even, the most racist countries in history. Then people want to be like “We won the revolutionary war, we wrote the Constitution” but when someone says, “Yeah, but you also had slaves,” they say, “That was years ago, get over it.”

Anyway, when I brought up slaves’ contribution to building America, the teacher literally said, “No! We don’t talk about slaves in this class.” She shut me down. I went back on mute. I thought, “Why? Because it’s too depressing?” We learn about the Holocaust, so what’s the issue with learning about slavery? We learn about mass terrorist killing sprees. And even if we do learn about the slavery they only talk about the people that helped slaves, never about the people who upheld slavery, how many lives were lost, and how nasty the history of slavery actually is.

Plus, all the history they teach us is whitewashed and when it comes to Black history, they do not talk about anything other than Rosa Parks, MLK, and Harriet Tubman. Like, why don’t you tell us about the messed up history of blackface, segregation, and cultural appropriation? Why don’t you teach us about the Black Lives Matter movement? Then y’all want to go into full detail about how many lives were lost in the Civil War but not how many lives of Black people were lost due to groups like the KKK and due to police brutality and hatred towards African Americans.

I’m a fifth grader in Texas, and I’m asking teachers two things: First, don’t shut down or mute conversations about slavery. It took courage for me to come off mute and make that contribution only to be shut down by the teacher. That hurts. Second, please teach American history in a way that shows the complex and, yes, racist history of our country. Students deserve to learn the ugly sides of our history so we won’t repeat the same mistakes, and also to learn about amaz-

ing Black historical figures beyond Rosa, MLK, and Harriet. These changes will make me feel seen and comfortable as a Black child in a classroom in America.



—*Iris Haq Lukolyo, age 10, Grade 5, Texas. Iris has also lived in Wisconsin and Uganda. She enjoys international travel and has been to 11 countries. She is on a competitive dance team and enjoys listening to music and creating artwork.*

A Way to Bridge the Gap in Climate Justice

This spring, I took an engaging course from the Global Online Academy called, “Climate Change and Global Inequality.” As a part of it, I created a project, “Stand Up for the Future.” There is disconnect between those who are full-fledged Climate Activists and those who would like to learn more about the current Climate crisis. So the project promotes youth activism in the field of Climate Justice, while educating neophytes to the crisis. My goal was to bridge the gap of the knowledge available for climate change. My presentation has had over 1,000 views so far.

Unfortunately, we live in a world where Climate Change is seen as a myth or hoax, and Climate Justice advocates are silenced or not given a voice. Amidst all of this chaos, it remains vital that we, humans around the world, can join forces in the fight against this environmental crisis. I believe this high school club model is just the start.

A link to the “Stand Up for the Future” website is <https://sites.google.com/view/stand-up-for-the-future/home>.

—*Farah Lindsey-Almadani, 16, Washington. See p. 15.*



Thirty-Five Pages

I sighed and stared out of the airplane window at the vast blue ocean. It seemed to be going on forever. It had no end.

My name is Adhira Ghan, and I was fifteen years old yesterday. My family is miles away, on the outskirts of Krishnapatnam, India—where all my companions and relations are.

You see, thirty-two days ago, Mother, Father, and Grandfather sat down with me in the Main Room.

They sat me down and Father said, “Daughter, we love you very dearly. And we highly value your education.”

“Indeed, Father, as do I,” I agreed.

“Adhira, there are not many opportunities for you here in Krishnapatnam. Especially with you being a young woman. We have been saving up money for your education for a while now, and Grandfather has just made a generous contribution,” Mother smiled, nodding toward Grandfather. I bowed my head to him. Grandfather was very rich, but he was generous also.

“Thank you, Grandfather,” I said respectfully.

“Nā Nidhi,” he starts. The translation is approximately “*my treasure*.” “I want you to have good opportunities.”

“Indeed, sir.”

“We want to send you to America,” Grandfather stated bluntly.

“America?” I gasp. I look around at my family. “Well, I will be very grateful you will be with me!”

“We are not going with you, daughter,” mother shakes her head. “You alone will be going. I am sorry to send you away alone, but we do not have enough money to bring all of us there and to keep us there as well. You shall finish your studies and live on your own until we can come as well,” Mother says earnestly.

Now, here I am. On a flight above the Atlantic Ocean. Playing idly with my sari, and hoping that America is anything like Krishnapatnam.

★ ★ ★

But it isn't.

I inclined my head toward the flight attendant. I was quite offended when he did not incline his head

back to me.

“Adhira!” I heard a woman call. I saw a bronze hand waving, and I went toward it. The woman looked a slight bit like me, except her hair was short and she was not wearing traditional clothes—she wore American clothes—jeans and a shirt. Did she have no respect for India? I looked down at my simple grey sari—it felt out of place.

“Greetings,” I said to her, shaking her hand and bowing. “My name is Adhira.”

“I’m Nandini or Annie for short,” she said cheerfully. How could she be so offhand to someone she had just met?

She said immediately, “I’m sorry, Adhira, I’ve forgotten typical Indian culture is more formal. I’m so sorry,” she said, bowing back. I felt relieved but confused as well. *How could she forget her Indian culture?*

“Your name is Annie? That is a strange name,” I commented. I wanted to make as many jibes at her American culture as I could. Her lack of decorum was frustrating me.

“Yeah, I thought it was too, at first. But I learned to like it. That reminds me—if you want your own American nickname just ask,” she said, leading me into a small hallway.

“No, thank you,” I said coldly. I was not about to abandon my dignified roots for the disrespectful American culture in a heartbeat.

“Okay,” Annie shrugged. “Well, we have an Uber to catch. Let’s not take long,” Annie announced, and she marched me out to the road.

When Annie and I arrived at the university, I was nervous. Would my peers like me? Would there be some respectful Indian colleagues?”

We went to our dormitory. It was a small room, but snug nonetheless.

Annie handed me a red spiral notebook and a pen.

“What is this?” I asked.

“I want you to write everything about India you can remember. The houses. The cities. Your friends. Your family. The food. Whatever it is—I want you to write. And I’ll read it once you’re done.”

Thirty-Five Pages ...continued

I nodded, excited about reminding her about the wonders of India.

“And I’m going to write everything about America that I can think of, and you’ll read it.” My heart sank. I did not want to. But I agreed anyway, and we began. I poured out every bit of India into that notebook, every bit I could muster from my heart.

At the end, we switched. I had written thirty-five pages full of India.

And she’d written ten pages on America.

What Annie had said in that notebook seven years ago was stuck in my brain. Essentially, she’d said Americans of all backgrounds were proud of who they were. Americans are opinionated people, I learned.

Back then, I’d been stubborn enough to think she hated India, that she’d close up the notebook after reading two pages of my memories. But no—she read it until the end. And that’s the kind of friend she was, and always has been since.

I’ve learned a lot about her. She moved here when she was eleven and felt she needed to improve her image to fit America, quite the opposite of my original reaction. She taught me about social skills and slang language, and when it is appropriate to use it. I also am now called Addy, my new American nickname. Annie was right—I got used to it, and eventually loved it.

I graduated with a degree in Psychology. I decided I wanted to be a counselor, and I achieved that after I left Duke.

I am living a very happy life in an apartment in Wilmington, North Carolina with my husband Oliver. About a year and a half after I’d settled down, I received a wonderful surprise—Mother, Father, and Grandfather were coming to live with me in Wilmington!

But they were ashamed of me when they saw me.

“All American,” they said. “No pride.”

So I took out two notebooks. One with ten pages about America.

And one with thirty-five pages about India.

—Quimby Owens, 12, North Carolina. “I love reading, writing, gymnastics, and music. I write to express myself... Writing is my passion, and I specifically enjoy realistic fiction.”

A Sense of Community in E. King County

For the past three years, I have been part of East King County Youth Court, also known as EKCVC. I am proud to be the President of EKCVC.

Located in the eastern division of King County Washington, this youth traffic court has been no doubt an influential and life-changing experience for me. My work with the court has no doubt taught me about the legal process, it has provided high school students a second chance for their mistakes.

Similar to many Youth Courts around the country, EKCVC is a student-led non-profit organization with the goal of providing an opportunity for student drivers (ages 16-17) who receive a traffic infraction to restore any damage they made to the community.

Youth Court is attractive to many high schoolers because the process reduces accumulating court fees and hearings are run entirely by the youth. The roles of judge, attorney(s), jury members are all filled in by actual high schoolers who volunteer their time. Near the end of each hearing, our volunteers form a restorative justice circle to discuss the disposition that would work best for the respondent (the defendant). Therefore, the final disposition for the hearing is ultimately decided by these young volunteers.

EKCVC cultivates a safe environment that aids teenage drivers in taking better care of their community. Our volunteers are dedicated individuals, many of whom frequently give their time in participating in hearings which is essentially their community service. They are selfless individuals.

EKCVC is truly a community effort. Youth Court helps teen drivers restore justice to their community and keeps the community safe from potential harm.

—Farah Lindsey-Almadani, 16, Washington.

On the Front Cover

(clockwise) Emerald Jellies (9 in. x 12 in.) • Selkie Seahorse (8 x 10) • Mediterranean Jelly (8 x 10) • Pineapple Octopus (8 x 10) • Sunflower (9 x 12)

Artwork by Aria Luna, 10, Czech-Colombian heritage, California. Aria Luna creates art to raise awareness of and support for environmental and social issues impacting local and global communities. Please visit her online at www.arialuna.com & on Instagram at @aria.luna.art

The Reckoning of an ABCD Indian

Every time I present my jet black, gold engraved American passport to an Indian immigration officer, my cheeks go flush with shame. It's not that I am ashamed of my American ties; on the contrary, I'm proud to hold an American passport and to be a card-carrying citizen of the nation that so warmly welcomed my immigrant parents and allowed them to escape the blight of poverty that they might have otherwise faced had they stayed in India. My shame with my American passport stems from the fact that it is representative of the many identity struggles I've faced.

I've grappled with the duality of my cultural identity since I can remember. I've always found the Indian-American label foisted upon me by the media and my general surroundings to be egregiously plain, as it insinuates that the two are equal parts true to all, existing in simple harmony with one another. Reality is starkly different. I've found that Americans expect me to be more American than Indian, while Indians will expect me to be more Indian than American. In my formative years, my skin colour notwithstanding, my mannerisms were that of a red-blooded American; I ate meatloaf and steak regularly, I rooted for the New York Knicks with all of my heart, and I exclusively spoke English, even at home. What's more, throughout my formative years, I hadn't been to India, as my grandparents often travelled to the U.S. as opposed to me going to them. In essence, I was as American as could be.

Such assimilation did not come without its consequences. In India, I've come to learn that people like me are mockingly known as "ABCD Indians," American Born Confused *Desi*. It's basically a snarky, sarcastic term reserved for people that are American but parade themselves as being Indian on account of their skin colour and ethnicity. When I eventually *did* go to India, when I was a bit older, adults were too restrained to openly hurl such vitriol at me. But children weren't.

My first trip to what I considered this faraway place full of exotic smells was a joy to me initially, likely because I had heard so much about it but had never been. I took a keen interest as an outsider looking in, enjoying learning about my culture at an age where I could fully understand what was being experienced while feeling a childlike sense of wonder. That feeling dissipated about halfway through. I cringe when I recall that trip. While most of it went well, as I was mostly with my immediate family, one incident soured the whole thing. We were visiting my cousins and all

the adults were holed up in the living room, while we kids were left to play in the nursery. There were five of us: two cousins aged 13, two cousins aged seven, and six-year-old me. The younger cousins were friendly enough, playing with action figures alongside. But the older cousins weren't; often meeting my cheery expressions with scowls. When I asked one of them why they didn't want to play with me, he started yapping at me in Hindi, which I didn't understand, as I spoke none of the language. Immediately after he had finished his rant, one of the friendly cousins turned to me and translated in a somber voice. Apparently, what the cousin had said was, "Because you're a dirty, cow-eating American."

I was met with more veiled difficulties in America, which I believe to be a product of the unspoken that many have for immigrants to fully assimilate. I remember a time on a school field trip a few years after the India incident. We were touring a cheese factory, and when we broke for lunch. I was eating *Kheema*, an Indian dish consisting of stewed beef and other greens. It's quite a grimy looking meal, as the cooked meat is often quite dark and grounded. One of the boys who I was sitting next to asked what I was eating. I politely told him what it was, and instead of simply nodding or keeping his mouth shut, he responded that my food, "looked like dog poop." It was then that I realised that not only would I not be fully accepted in India, but I also wasn't going to be in America. Although the boy probably hadn't meant any ill-will, the casually offensive comment did strike a chord with me.

Such events drove me to find my cultural identity. It wasn't an easy journey; it involved badgering my parents with questions every opportunity I could, reading Hindu scriptures, and contending with the fact that my interests remained starkly more American than Indian, like my preference of rap as opposed to Indian music. After quite some time of identity searching, I realised something; being both Indian and American allows me to reconcile both worlds, and gives me a unique opportunity to be part of two different cultures at once, an opportunity not many people have, if only I can make the most of it. I get to experience the best of two different worlds if I can tune out the ignorant and the facetious. It's given me a totally different worldview; now I can view the events on the news, write, and live as both an Indian and an American, with all the trappings of each. I just have to remember that I define myself, not anybody else.

—Eshaan Chaurasia, 15, Hong Kong.

The Tale of Tulsi

“An only child is a lonely child,” Aunt Nilda said. “Emphatically, when my mother announced the decision to have only one child. I disagreed.

To me being the only child brought me bliss and solitude. For my mother, there was no choice. She had waited too long to have a family because of her education. She had no regrets. She believed that life only gives you what you can handle. Her long hours at work would have made it challenging for her if she had a larger family. She made sure she read a storybook to me at bedtime every night in my early childhood.

When I was six, many people suggested that I should have a puppy to play with. My mother said that was alright as long as I took the time to take the dog for a walk and play with him in the backyard every day.

I knew in my heart that she really did not want this idea to materialize because she never recovered from her loss in childhood. As a child, my mom had a sheep dog named Junior who was the love of her life. Even though she enjoyed playing with her sister and other kids in the neighborhood, Junior was always in the spotlight. They lived in the beautiful town of Simla, high in the Indian Himalayas. When it snowed heavily, the fog wrapped the ground, and the visibility was very poor. Junior would guide her and her friends as they walked through the dense fog. He would fetch them anything that they dropped in the snow. He played with them after school. If anyone lost a ball, Junior always knew where to look for it. He was their hero. Unfortunately, one cold winter, Junior died from pneumonia. Life was never the same for my mother. Everyone told her to move on and find another pet, but she did not have the heart to do so. The pain was so deep that she did not want history to repeat itself.

My aunt Nilda had a different idea. On my seventh birthday, she walked into the room with a big smile and a bowl in her hand. “This is your new buddy!” Aunt Nilda said, as she handed me the bowl. I peeked into the bowl and saw a happy little orange fish swimming around. “What will you name her?” asked my grandmother. I was so delighted that I could not hide my excitement. I took a deep breath before saying, “It has to be a name that begins with the letter T.” They suggested a few names like Tanya or Tara, which I declined since I knew someone or the other with that name.

My mother finally found a name that I thought was perfect. “Tulsi,” she said with a bright smile across her face, and I instantly agreed. Then she went on to

explain the meaning behind the name. “Tulsi is the name of an Indian herb that is considered very special because of its medicinal value. It is also called the ‘Holy basil,’” she said. “Most people in India have this plant in their gardens. They put the leaves in warm tea water along with crushed ginger root to ward off colds and coughs. It also has a healing effect. I am sure that your little fish will bring much comfort.”

She pulled up the picture of the plant on the Internet and said, “Tulsi is also a very unique plant, and it’s not easy to propagate and grow it in Californian soil. Your grandmother has grown one in her garden for several years, but she has not been able to grow it out of seeds for us.”

Over the following months, Tulsi and I became very good friends. As soon as I woke up, I would rush over to see her. When I came back from school, I went straight to her bowl and told her everything that had happened to me that day. Like a dog, she would move her tail from side to side with delight when she saw me. As I touched her glass bowl with my fingers, she would pucker her lips and kiss it.

During the holiday season, my family planned a trip to a ski resort. It was a very cold winter, and we were looking forward to playing with snow. “Can Tulsi come with us?” I asked my mother. I hung my head in disappointment when I heard the painful “no.”

When we returned home, I ran to Tulsi’s bowl. My heart sank like a brick that had dropped to the bottom of the sea. I saw Tulsi’s body floating on top of the bowl. Maybe it was too cold for her that weekend. Maybe she died of sadness not knowing when I will return. I burst out into tears. My mother tried to comfort me, but it was of no avail. I was in so much pain that I could not eat all day.

We decided to bury Tulsi in our backyard. A few days later, I had the inspiration to pluck out some Tulsi seeds from my grandmother’s plant and sprinkle over Tulsi’s resting place. I poured some water over it daily as I spoke to Tulsi like I had always in the past months.

One day a little sapling grew. A few weeks later, I heard my mother scream out with delight as she realized it was a Tulsi plant.

Now as I sit near the Tulsi plant reading my book on a lazy afternoon, I hear the rustling leaves in the wind whisper into my ears, “*Love never dies. It only changes form.*” Tulsi lives in my heart and my home garden forever.

—Tanisha Gunby, 17, Indian American, California.

Comfortable in Her Own Skin

Before they knew her personality, they judged her by size
 Inside was a warrior with might, yet they only cared about her obesity
 And openly ridiculed her plight
 She made herself throw up in private and hung her head low with shame in public
 And before she was given an opportunity, she was banned from loving her body
 And kept trying to lose weight
 Ah! Not even the skinny one was spared—they kept nagging her to eat more
 And no matter how hard she tried, she just could not gain weight
 She had toiled in the gym for years, and finally the results were showing
 Yet they labelled her “jacked,” and felt threatened by her strength
 But how could she lose the muscles she had worked for so patiently?
 She edited her photos to post on social media
 But after all, who was she cheating?
 She wanted to redeem herself in the eyes of other people
 But what she didn’t understand was the concept of inner beauty
 Who are they?
 They are society—they are foolish people who make assumptions based on physique
 After all, they couldn’t take the time to understand a person’s character
 They shame others for something not in their control, all to hide their own insecurities
 Who is she? She is the girl in the corridor who you never make eye contact with.
 She is your mother, your sister, your friend. She is the one sitting in the CEO office.
 These brave, witty women strive to make the world truly free
 For even when slavery is gone, we are held back by the assumptions people make
 Just based on our body size
 We cannot escape these shackles that hold back both men and women alike
 These little biases, all based on our size. After all, why does size matter? Or even weight at all?
 We should be proud and self accepting, no matter our chubby or skinny flaws
 And I don’t care how I look in the mirror, normal or bizarre
 Because I’ve decided to pave my own way, and no matter my size, like a queen I can slay
 And I’m going to face them head on today.

—Anusha Upadhyayula, 13, California.



“As an Indian American whose parents are immigrants, I often have people asking me if I can speak ‘Indian.’ I’m sorry that I don’t know ‘Indian,’ but I can fluently speak, read, and write Telugu, a language popular in South India. I can proudly state that my cultural background, traditions, and family are very important to me. An avid dreamer and reader, I hope for a bright future, one in which

everyone is seen as equals and where no one is judged without reason. In my opinion, one thing that people automatically judge is body physique. There are so many assumptions that we make just based on a person’s size. ‘If she has extra fat, she’s lazy and doesn’t want to workout.’ ‘If she’s too skinny, she’s starving herself.’ However, society fails to realize that everyone’s body is different genetically, so we’re bound to look different too.”



“In The Forest”
 By Katherine Han, age 16, Texas.



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Visiting a Different Russia than the One I Was Told

(continued from p. 2)... as lockdowns and quarantines take into effect, but shouldn't the health and safety of people be the first priority? In addition, African-Americans are victims of police brutality in disproportionate numbers, but some argue that defunding the police isn't the answer, rather improving the police will actually help African-American communities.

Putting away extremist ideologies, it seems hard to concur with the reality when one writes. However, I hope that my piece today of a cultural trip to Russia, combining my own experience with my cultural background of Chinese heritage and also as an American citizen, will help you find unity and see my view of the reality. I ask you to read the knowledge of the world with caution and listen to different perspectives, and then try to see a best, but not perfect, view of what reality in the world is.

Before I visited the Russian Federation, I imagined the Russia the American media portrayed: hackers interfering in our elections, former communists that want to start a revolution, and so on. I do agree with much of the media narrative, and, in fact, I was always a fervent critic of the Russian government and the Putin administration. The narrative of the American media is not necessarily one-sided when it comes to Russia. However, even though I held ideological differences with the Russian people, I had the pleasure of loving every bit of the cultural and musical trip presented by the American Fine Arts Festival, since I was the AFAF International Concerto Competition winner as a pianist. The enjoyment of magnificent and huge concert halls filled with beautiful classical music; wonderful, luscious caviars and soups; and magnificent scenery. Despite the fact that Russia has its flaws, my trip changed my perception of Russia, and was actually quite enjoyable.

After arriving at the famous and familiar JFK airport in New York City, I began to get into my unfamiliar world of Russia bit by bit. Boarding a new, comfortable, and sumptuous Boeing Aeroflot craft, I was amazed by the smooth take-off and landing, which resulted in a huge applause from the passengers, which I later on learned was Russian tradition. I was also surprised that the flight attendants spoke excellent English, contrary to what I was told in the U.S.!

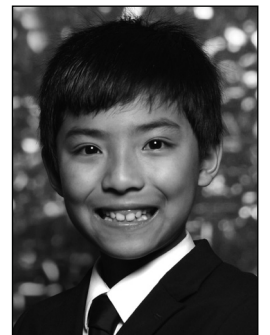
Once I arrived in my first stop, Moscow, I was amazed by the hospitality of the Russian people.

One time, a Russian helped us find a metro station even though she didn't speak English! Another time, we were shown restaurants of vast varieties, including Russian, Chinese, Japanese, Italian, French, and American, you name it! However, my favorite was obviously the Russian food, with the rich, luscious taste of the caviar, which I learned was reserved only for Russian czars back in the day! My highlights of the Moscow tour included going to the International Tchaikovsky Competition. Tchaikovsky was an amazing composer, and I watched virtuoso pianists perform jaw-dropping concertos in front of a huge audience. I even got a chance to have a nice conversation with second prize winner Mao Fujita!

Next, I went to the medium-sized city of Kostroma in the heart of Russia. There, I performed Mozart's Concerto No. 27 with the Kostroma Symphony Orchestra. I met the renowned conductor Pavel Gershestein, and played with his excellent orchestra, receiving radiant applause from the Russian crowd. Hence, I noticed the difference between American popularity in classical music compared to the Russians: Had I been in the United States, I would have received a ten-second moderately-enthusiastic applause, but in Russia I instead received passionate and vigorous applause.

I always humorously tell my friends when we are bantering that my most memorable experience in Russia was that I had the best ice cream ever! Overall, I really enjoyed my trip to Russia, and the experience and atmosphere is different from what I expected, despite what you might hear from the American society including media and general public opinion. The best part was that while there have been many reports of journalistic freedom coming under attack in Russia, I was delighted when an American chain hotel I stayed in had CNN, a reputable independent news media, turned on! Again, sure, every country has its flaws, but once I was exposed to Russian culture, music, and food, I certainly liked visiting this country and I will definitely go back again!

—David Xiong, grade 6,
Massachusetts. Also see page 2.



Nuestro Lugar: Our Place

When I was a child, my one dream was to see my father's childhood home in Venezuela. At bedtime, I drifted off to stories of his childhood adventures, and was left completely captivated by my father's home country. When I heard the word Venezuela, I could close my eyes and there I was: running through his small apartment with him. The most beautiful apartment in the world... The most beautiful country in the world. It was me and my dad, each time a new adventure. After a long day of play I could curl up like a *bicho bolita* in my *abuelito's* arms just like my father always did. I would tell my father that I was jealous of this place, but he told me not to be. It belonged to both of us. So we called it "*nuestro lugar*" or "our place."

My father hasn't seen his home in 20 years, but I see it every night.

Sometimes when I close my eyes, I can still see this place. Our place. Our adventure would always start in the living room of our home. The sofa faced the west so there was a clear view of the sky. As the sun fell into its slumber, the different hues of yellow and pink melted into a sea of blackness. Each color collapsed upon itself, until they lost their individuality and eventually were blended into a clear night. The sofa's placement gave my father a clear view of every sunset. Despite its ragged appearance, the sofa seemed to stand confidently. It had bore the yolk of many, and had gifted my grandfather with countless restful evenings. Most afternoons, my *abuelito* was carefully draped over the love-seat, and his bare chest was sprinkled with gray hairs that peeked out of his white tank. There was always a thick Bible resting on his belly, and it floated up and down, according to the tempo of his steady breaths. His small figure was stable, except for when his brown toes would wiggle in discomfort every so often. He was cold to the touch. My father told me he always was. I always thought that was a little funny. On the inside, my *abuelito* is so warm. The sun peeked through the window, transforming my *abuelito's* tough brown skin into a burnt crimson. The high points of his cheeks glistened, and his small frame was bathed in radiance.

My father would spend his evenings on the porch, looking out on the expanse of buildings that lined the streets of Caracas. To him, it almost seemed like the whole world could be seen from that spot. Some days he simply stood to see the clouds part dreamily and

sink back into the horizon, but other days, he watched the people that walked by. During the day, the bodies below scurried into my grandmother's *florería*, and they left drowning in vibrant color as they filled their arms with poppies, roses, and daisies. Although they were so far below, my father told me he could always see the customers' eyes sparkle as they left the shop. Their eyes, like pools of brown honey, seemed to be filled with this indescribable brilliance that only my *abuelita's* flowers could bring.

But these days, when I close my eyes, the place I see resembles the Venezuela I see on the news, not the place it once was to me. It is a place stunned into stillness and fear. It is a place where the sunlight no longer pours through the eastern window, lavishing my grandfather in its warmth. This is because the windows are barred, the doors are locked, and the streets are bare. When I close my eyes, I see my grandfather's body fidgeting restlessly across the sofa, and the Bible sitting on his belly shaking, rather than floating, with every trembling breath he takes. The sofa has lost its confidence, because no matter how much it serves my grandfather, it will never provide him with the security to steady his shaky breaths, nor the peace to tame his uneasy heart. Down below, my grandmother's *florería* is empty, and the colorful petals that once shone vibrantly, have all been crippled into a muddy brown, left on the street to be trampled underfoot.

Today, when people hear the word Venezuela, they remember the political unrest, they remember that almost ninety percent of its citizens are living in poverty, they remember the sadness.

I know that the world I once knew, or perhaps the world I thought knew, doesn't exist anymore.

To this day, I still dream of the day when I can visit my father's home. However, I've come to terms with the sad reality that it's not the place it once was. But I suppose the real value of our place is that it taught me that strength of words, especially as the food of imagination. It was a place me and my dad shared. It was a part of me, a part of me and my culture that I was so unapologetically proud of. The funny thing is, I don't think my dad even knows how much these stories meant to me. He doesn't know that every night, as my cheek was pressed against his warm tummy, his words created vivid images that kept my little heart... (see p. 27)

Poetry Page

Eternal Return

All that I have to say has already been said.
But it will be repeated time and again,
Long after my entire generation is dead.
“Why am I in so much pain?”
Is humanity’s everlasting refrain.
Some are so content in luxury, while their neighbors are
barely warm and fed.
These weeds of greed are a bane that won’t wane.
They tendrils tightly around their treasure-shed,
The hedgerows, high and hefty, thrive on acid-rain.
Some have tried to cut them down, but they’ve stayed the same.
My conscience is as heavy as lead
With mankind’s greatest shame.
My laments are loud enough to explode my own head.
But no matter how much I complain,
Humans seem to have such a disdain, for simply being humane.
I have pled and pled
Until I’ve gone insane.
It’s easier to say that I’m off my meds
Than it is to make any real change.
For no one cares to listen to a madman screaming in his cage.

—Amehja Williams, 16, African American, Pennsylvania.

The True Radical

I grew up under false pretenses
My name is Alsaeda however sometimes I identify as Al-Qaeda
My Muslim heritage brings me nothing but peace and prosperity
What people fail to understand
Remains the truth
They berate, degrade, and neglect the constructs of such a
benevolent religion
With only the merit of their minds
Rather than the merit of written word
The divine, succinct word of God
Left untarnished
As only the minds of the ignorant remain sullied
What a world I live in
Where the biased beliefs and perceptions of creation
Surpass the divine laws of the Lord

—Roha Siddiqui, a college student and an emerging poet, Texas. Her poetry comes from experience of Muslim oppression and observations of outside attempts to fracture such a strong religion. She directs her poems at those who value the merit of personal judgment over the merit of written word, and therefore, will never fail in trying to tear apart the fortress brick by brick.



A Legacy Without Children

Must I aspire
To inspire?

Can I not simply set my sights
On the undiluted joy that is to write?
Sometimes I dream of bathing in the stars
But my books can also take me far.
My spirit straddles Aether and Earth,
Is my capacity to dream really just a curse?
But all the same I want the world to know
me, and I do not know why.
Perhaps it is because my books will be my
ashes when I die.

—Amehja Williams, 16, Pennsylvania.
She adds: “As a young black girl growing up in Philadelphia, I have always had a love for creativity and learning. But most of all, I am a creator. I’m shooting for the stars and I’m aiming for Mars. I would like to be a member of the first astronaut crew to visit Mars.”

Foreign Land

Feet feel icky
When they graze foreign land
Eyes burn
When they gaze upon foreign land
The ground is slippery and dead
On foreign land
Children are mean and harsh
On foreign land
Life is hard
On foreign land
Food is not like home
On Foreign land
Kids cry
On foreign land
Police comes to my house
Takes me to a dark place
Because I am from foreign land
I don’t have my family
On foreign land

—Isabella Aguado, 17, Florida. “My poetry is largely focused on my community and life transitions as an immigrant.”

Nana Jean: Circles of Care

The level of difficulty for a board game could be: Easy, Medium, Hard, or 2020! This year's crises have left many of us struggling. What to do?

When trouble hits someone in your community, how can you respond? The affected person may be suffering the loss of a loved one, a serious injury, or the aftermath of a wildfire. In my community, 20 people I know suddenly lost their homes in a fire, and many more are struggling with damaged homes and property. My close friends and more distant acquaintances lost precious mementos, well-crafted keepsakes, tools to help them in their work or lives. All gone.

The canyon where I live is coming together to rebuild. How does each of us, who did not lose our homes, show our care for those who lost theirs?

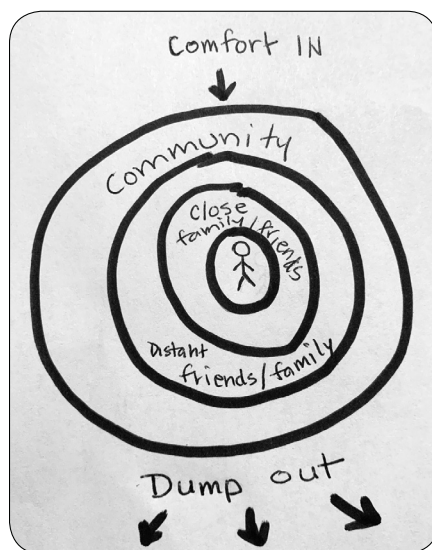
Visualize a *Circle of Care*. Draw a circle and write the name of a person in crisis in the center. Draw larger rings around the first one and write in the names of the people or person next closest to the crisis. Continue outwards. Relatives close and far away, friends both intimate and unaffected, are within widening circles. The entire community itself becomes the outer ring. After the firestorm in Santiam Canyon, in September, people posted encouraging signs saying "Canyon Strong!" and supporters from all over the country sent supplies to resource centers.

I've been in the middle of such a circle, and in other situations I've been in some of the outer rings. What I can say and what I hope others would say to me? When I'm in the center, I do not want to hear someone who has not experienced my sorrow or pain say, "I know exactly how you feel," or "It's for the best." Helping people closer to the center of the circle requires more listening than talking. Compassionate listening along with a simple, "I'm sorry" or "This must be very painful for you," are comforting expressions that honor the person's feelings and loss. Now is not the time to offer advice or even share a similar experience unless you are asked.

When you're in a closer ring and helping someone

in the center of the circle, you may feel their burden and experience your own need to unload further out. If you are shocked or feel like crying or need to express your own feelings or experiences, do it with those further out in the circle. I find this gives me energy to continue helping those in rings smaller than my own. One's efforts should be directed toward the person deeper in the circle. Each of us will have our own time in the middle. For example, as a widow I found great comfort talking with others widows and widowers. And hugs and simple touches helped me most of all.

Wherever you are in the circle of care, think about what you are about to say and do. Will it provide support and comfort to those who need it? Who could you look to for support? Can you support the people who support the people in the center?



Circles of Care

Sometimes it is possible to send or give physical aid, provide food or lodging, offer to take care of children, elders, or pets. Sometimes the damage is emotional. Can you soothe, calm, and console by offering to go for a walk, a run, or a bicycle ride with them? Bring or send a favorite movie, playlist, or puzzle? Even if you live at a distance or can't go in person, send a note by email, text, or regular mail.

Keep in mind, that you, too, may need support. Lean out to unburden yourself and get renewed. Reach in to support and hold others dear.

One of my favorite songs is "Lean on Me" by Bill Withers. Here is how it goes:

*"Sometimes in our lives we all have pain
We all have sorrow.
But if we are wise
We know that there's always tomorrow.
Lean on me, when you're not strong
And I'll be your friend
I'll help you carry on.
For it won't be long
'Til I'm gonna need
Somebody to lean on."*

We all need somebody to lean on.

—Jean Moule, community activist, retired professor, Oregon.

The Joy of Kwanzaa

Dr. Maulana Karenga created Kwanzaa as an African American holiday in 1966, during the aftermath of the Watts riots. He derived the name from the Swahili phrase, “*matunda ya kwanza*,” which means “first fruits of the harvest.”

Kwanzaa is an annual celebration of Pan-African and African American culture. It is held from Dec. 26th to January 1st, culminating in a gift-giving ceremony called a *Karamu*, or festival of faith. The tradition of first fruits is still practiced in Southern Africa, mainly in the kingdoms of KwaZulu-Natal and Swaziland and is celebrated near the winter solstice.

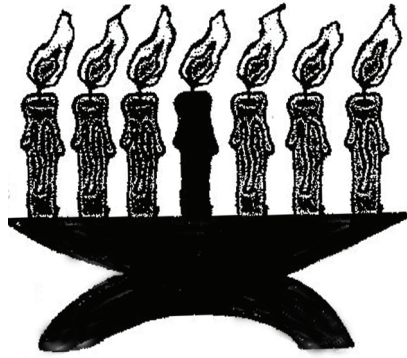
To celebrate the holiday, people decorate their homes with colorful artwork, fresh produce, African *Kente* cloth, and other traditional African decorations. They also tend to wear traditional African attire during the week of Kwanzaa. Many men wear *Dashikis* and *Kufi* caps, while the women wear pullover robes and garments called *caftans* that follow in the tradition of unique West-African clothing.

Children are included in the celebration as they are important to the holiday; they are the next generation that need to experience, firsthand, their cultural heritage. As participants of these festivities, they learn to respect their culture, honor their ancestors, and acknowledge their ancestral roots.

The celebration includes seven basic principles of the holiday, originally called the *Nguzo Saba*, the seven essential principles of African culture. So Kwanzaa is a seven-day festival, and each day is dedicated to one of the seven spiritual principles of the *Nguzo Saba*.

They are: *Umoja*—unity in family, community and race; *Kujichugalia*—self-determination; *Ujima*—collective work and responsibility; *Ujamaa*—cooperative economics; *Nia* or purpose—collective vocation of the people; *Kuumba*—practicing creativity, and lastly, *Imani*—is faith.

Each day, Kwanzaa participants greet each other by using the Swahili phrase, “*Habari Gani*.” It means “How are you?” or “What is the news?” The spoken response is to say the principle word for that day, such as, *Kujichugalia*, or *Ujamaa*.



Over 40 million people still celebrate this festival around the globe. Each day during the celebration of Kwanzaa gifts can be exchanged. Kwanzaa is based upon the concept of the first fruits of the harvest which includes planting, growing, and harvesting because they represent the efforts of a community.

The celebration of Kwanzaa also uses many traditional symbols during the week-long celebration. The *Mkeka* is the central mat of ceremony on which other significant objects are placed. The *Kinara*, or candle holder, is used to hold the seven candlesticks called the *Mishumaa Saba*, representing the seven principles of Kwanzaa. One candle is lit each day. The *Kikombe cha Umoja*, or unity cup, is used for sharing libations, and giving thanks to the ancestors. These symbols represent values and concepts that are reflective of the African culture throughout the diaspora.

Dr. Karenga seemed destined to give us a significant holiday like Kwanzaa. His name, Karenga, means “keeper of the tradition.” His calling drove him to visit Africa to recapture and reconstruct his African culture. Kwanzaa was created, out of rebellion as an annual event that would bring about a drastic change in the African-American mindset. At its inception, Kwanzaa was meant to lend validity to the Peace and Freedom, and Black Power Movements of the 1960’s and early 1970’s.

The final day of Kwanzaa is a day of collective feast and celebration. It’s called a *Karamu*, and happens at the end of the week-long procession. The festivities involve entertainment such as: traditional West African drumming and dance, song and poetry, West African cuisine, imaginative storytelling, performing arts, and an African marketplace.

Many people, not just African-Americans, have come to participate in this processional African, spiritual holiday. The celebration of Kwanzaa began as a Pan-African holiday rooted in rebellion, and resistance to the dominant culture, but has now become a holiday based in reflection, sharing, togetherness, and to strengthen the global African community and culture.

—Odell Johnson, African American author, California.

Pieces of the Past

When you write history, you aren't just writing down what happened, you are writing down how you communicate what happened. That might be what you know, what you think, and even what you want the reader to think. History books are woven with opinions, some true, some plainly wrong, and others simply left out. Yes, we tend to leave out pieces of the past, our past, and those pieces, like those of a puzzle, will be eventually lost, lying buried under layers of our ever changing history. When you write history, it isn't as simple as writing down what you know and think, it is what the world is going to know and think. It's a much bigger picture.

In schools today, required subjects are mostly reading and math. History class isn't required, even though most schools teach it. Many other things are the school's and teacher's choice, depending on what they feel would be best for their students. They have guidelines to follow, but they choose what to teach and how to teach it. History writers know what they want to put in their books; if it's American history, for example, they know they have to include things relevant for their subject. They can also put in strong opinions in their writing, but they have to know that they are blazing the trail for people after them, like historians, politicians, writers, and teachers. In our schools, there are opinions being taught, too. Teaching can be woven with opinions, some true, some plainly wrong, and others simply left out.

One of the most challenging topics of American history is slavery. The fact that we kept other humans as slaves because they looked different is hard to think about: it's upsetting, embarrassing, infuriating, and confusing, at the same time. And one of the challenges of writing the history of slavery is that there are very few written resources to tell us what it was like. Other than signs for runaway slaves, or for selling them at an auction block, we don't have many written resources about the real history from the slave's perspective. Slaves were not taught how to read and write. They couldn't write down their own history. Of course, as time goes on, we have found more primary sources, uncovering the pieces of the puzzle, and history books have become more and more fair and cover plenty of topics. Right?

There are topics that still didn't make it into all the textbooks: like the fact that the first slaves to arrive in America reached Virginia in 1619, that is *before* the Pilgrims, who came in 1620.

We've all studied history. We've gone over the pilgrims arriving: how they came to the new land, how they founded our country, and how they were the first

to reach it. They placed the first stones on the rugged path to the vision of a nation that they got to build. They were the ones. That was what we were taught. We weren't taught that the pilgrims actually weren't first. I said to a teacher: "*The pilgrims were first*," and s/he said yes. You can guess that the teacher said so because s/he had read a history book, and that was what was written on its pages. Or, the teacher had read a history book that didn't mention it. It goes on. Does it end with the person who wrote that book? Or the teacher who covered it up? Or a writer who covered it up? Are people still covering it up? I hope that people's thoughts about American history have changed. I could hope that more people know, now, that it was not the pilgrims, but the slaves who put that first stone down on that path.

Even now, we keep trying to make up for having those enslaved people here at all, but there is that stone, as of today, still sitting there.

We have tried to cover it up, tried to bury it, to pretend that the first ones here were white people, looking for freedom. And it worked. Too few Americans know that it was black people, stripped of freedom, who founded their country. But, all the same, after much too long of a time, we started looking through the window of America and seeing too many missing shards. We uncovered them, held them up to the light, and showed them to others. Then we went out and protested.

And here we are, still protesting.

Now that we have uncovered this shard in this window, we can take a step back and look at our country's history. Splattered with blood, sweat, tears, and faces of George Washington (who, incidentally, owned slaves) and wonder, "*What do we think about it all now?*" Perhaps it doesn't change anything. The pilgrims still reached land and founded America, whether or not their slaves came first. They still stepped onto the very dirt of this country and thought, "*Our new home*," while the slaves were pushed off the boat, hitting the ground at the same time that their hopes drained away. What did the words, "America, The New World, The Promised Land," mean to them? What was independence to them? A fantasy? What did those men think when they were writing the words: "All men are created equal"? And is it possible to ever uncover and interpret all the pieces of the past? Or are we simply on a journey forever, writing and rewriting, reading and re-reading, our footprints eventually crumbling into those ever changing layers, called 'history'?

—Lily Jessen, 11, Maine. *Editor's Note: Native Americans who were here millennia before Whites were also enslaved.*

This is the first issue
 I have wanted to protest.
 I believe in it so bad
 That it physically hurts
 When I see people not listen
 Should I scream?
 BLACK LIVES MATTER!!
 PEOPLE ARE DYING FOR NO REASON!!!

But why should they listen to me,
 A fifteen year old,
 When they didn't listen to:
 "Officer, I can't breath"
 "No, please, he was just reaching for his wallet"
 Will I be able to
 Yell loud enough for them to hear?
 Will our screams of anguish
 Be registered through their ears?
 Or will we be ignored,
 And this cause be buried once more?
 I don't know the answer,
 And I hate not knowing,
 But I will scream
 And I will cry
 Until the day where we can say:
 Black Lives Matter
 Because people matter.

—Katharine Tena, 15, Pennsylvania.

"Fairness & Justice"

How intriguing to have two similar words that mean different things.
 Some say everyone is equal and none should be treated differently: Fairness;
 Some say everyone can always get justice for themselves no matter how tough: Justice;
 Others say both can exist at the same time,
 But I say there was never fairness, justice maybe.
 How can life be fair, when everyone in this world is so unique and unlike one another?
 How can life be fair, when your friend is born wealthy whereas you born poor?
 How can life be fair, when others are fighting for their futures while you slack off, dawdling?
 When life is harsh on you, unlike others,
 You can always get justice for yourself.
 You might have lost at the beginning,
 But, when you stay hopeful, you can survive through;
 When you stay tough, you can thrive;
 When you stay diligent, you may win at the end.
 You can't undo what has been given, but you can decide who you become.
 The future is never fixed, and despite all the unfairness along the way,
 It is up to you to win justice, to win a promising future ahead of you.

I have been standing in the ground so
 Long that my feet are made of clay.
 I throw a stone on the river--
 The first stitch on the watery quilt.
 I let it go and it is like it was never mine,
 It spins and shimmies and dives below the
 Creek, where it pretends to be like the fish.
 The rock does not know that it does
 Not have to pretend. The stone is not trying
 To be a miracle for anyone, just rolling and
 Resisting, but the whole earth yields to it,
 Becomes fleshy.
 Wind, grass, and water watch intently,
 Jealous and in love with it.
 Nothing in the stream recognizes its
 Own subtle magic,
 Everything wearing itself
 Down slowly, the displacing of the elements,
 The coming of sand.
 Music is fine, only because it
 Pretends to be like this.

—Georgia Turman, 16, California.
"Many of my poems and songs are about nature and the universe, often relating to a quest to understand my own existence within the world. My poem is an ode of sorts which explores and expands a small moment in nature, a stone falling into a creek. In observing the small ecosystem of a stream, the poem explores larger themes of self-awareness and consciousness."



"Over the past couple years, I surprisingly found myself enjoying the process of writing poems and how I am able to express myself in a more beautiful language, the language that cannot be spoken but read and felt. As a sensitive person who often feels misunderstood, poetry has become my main outlet for venting my feelings of discontent and appreciation towards my experiences in the outer world."

—Jason (Sihan) Wang, 17, China.

Crazy Rich Asians: A First Step Forward

Months before its debut, *Crazy Rich Asians* had already amassed headlines. Time magazine featured an article on how ‘*Crazy Rich Asians* is Going to Change Hollywood.’ The first movie to feature an all Asian cast since the 1993 production of *The Joy Luck Club*, it is a romantic comedy that loosely follows the plot of Cinderella.

Adapted from Kevin Kwan’s original novel, *Crazy Rich Asians* draws upon Kwan’s personal childhood experiences. Kwan grew up in a lavish home in Singapore full of house staff, and a typical week-end activity might include “having brunch with a princess from Thailand.” (*Refinery* 29) It was not until Kwan moved to the United States at the age of 11 that he became aware of his family’s opulent lifestyle in Singapore. Whenever Kwan returned to Asia, his family and friends would pity him and ask incredulously, “You don’t have any maids? Your parents didn’t buy you a house?” Growing up in the U.S. enabled Kwan to gain awareness of Singapore’s high society and the perspective to write his novel.

With the novel’s stunning success, Kwan received numerous lucrative offers for a film adaptation. According to *Teen Vogue*, one offer included a proposition to change the heroine’s race to Caucasian. Kwan refused to entertain that suggestion and turned down all offers, instead auctioning the film for \$1 to ensure his involvement with the movie’s production. He then focused on the script and finding the best movie director.

Enter director Jon M. Chu. Chu, the son of Chinese immigrants, grew up obsessed with cinematography. As Chu told the *Center for Asian American Media*, he had spent his high school years persuading teachers to allow him to make 15 minute videos in lieu of writing papers. Chu graduated from the esteemed USC film school and had directed eight movies during his decade long career. However, none of his movies had yet explored his own Chinese-American identity. When the producers of *Crazy Rich Asians* solicited him, Chu jumped at the prospect. As Jon Chu told *The Hollywood Reporter*, he wanted to depict Asians in “a way we haven’t seen before” as “contemporary, stylish... funny, sarcastic, and unapologetic. Confident.”

Chu faced challenges casting actors and actresses. As Chu told *Public Radio International*, lists of available Asian actors were lacking because there “aren’t that many roles

for Asians.” Chu therefore utilized a different method. He placed an advert on Youtube. “This is the first all Asian cast for an American Hollywood studio in a long, long time. So it is a huge step for representation and a great opportunity to showcase all the most talented Asian actors out there... I know how much undiscovered talent there is in the world, so we are shouting out to all you aspiring actors and cool personalities with hidden talents to post a two minute video on their social media with the hashtag #CRAZYRICHASIANSCASTING!” said Chu in his video ad.

Chu received a flood of responses. Chu admitted feeling emotional when reviewing videos because he witnessed so many Asians “putting themselves out there so publicly, knowing that their friends and family would all see it.” Everyone involved in the movie understood the impact a Hollywood debut would wield. As Chu told *Deadline*, “[Hollywood] studios have always been in charge of telling us what the history is, what we should be thinking, what is sexy, [and] what is beautiful.” Unfortunately, in the past, Hollywood has either ignored Asians completely, or depicted Asian character with extreme stereotypes. *Crazy Rich Asians* breaks that norm, depicting Asian characters in a modern background going about their normal lives (or as normal as you can be when incredibly rich).

Chu felt pressure to make every detail perfect; his goal was for *Crazy Rich Asians* to lead a charge of Asian-American media and help create greater representation in the entertainment industry. As Chu commented, “It’s not a movie, it’s a movement;” he admitted to *Deadline* that he and the actors “cried almost every day on set,” just realizing that they were “doing this...[making] a Warner Brothers movie.”

Kwan believes the movie’s success stems from its ability to transcend race. Kwan told the *Hong Kong Tattler* that he was often approached by people saying, ‘My family isn’t Asian or rich, but we are just like the family in your books. We are just as crazy.’ Kwan told the *New York Times* that he saw two Caucasian men after a screening of the *Crazy Rich Asians*, one of them admitting, “I haven’t cried in a movie in the longest time—but I cried,” and the other commenting, “Yeah, I cried too.”

As Mike Gonzalez writes in *The Heritage Foundation*, *Crazy Rich Asians* embodies a story that reflects themes “of love, perseverance, family ties, and the pursuit of hap-

piness” that all people can relate to. In other words, the movie portrays universal emotions that allow audiences to “quickly get past skin-deep differences.” It “is a hit not just because it’s about Asians, but because it’s about humans.”

The success of *Crazy Rich Asians* connecting with all audiences became apparent when the film was released on August 15, 2018. The movie brought in \$35.3 million the first weekend alone. It has received critical accolades as well, with two Golden Globes nominations for Best Motion Picture and Best Actress.

The sequel to *Crazy Rich Asians* will be based on Kwan’s second novel, *China Rich Girlfriend*. According to *Town and Country*, the entire original cast is returning, but due to Chu’s other projects, filming will not begin until later this year at the earliest. Until then, the world will wait in eager anticipation. We will look forward to the future—not just for the sequel, but also to all future movies starring Asian American actors and actresses. A future made possible by *Crazy Rich Asians*.

—Jeffrey Huang, 15, California, adds: “I was shocked, because my grandparents never watch movies in the theatre. Apparently, my grandparents had been patiently waiting for months to watch the film. In short, my grandparents loved the *Crazy Rich Asians* and were very excited to tell me about it.”

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Sept. 24, 2020

—Arun N. Toké, Editor & Publisher

Continued from page 20

fluttering... images that gave me hope.

Some nights, when I can’t sleep, I go back there. I go back to the place that gave me peaceful nights, I go back to the place that gave me adventure, I go back to the place that gave me laughter.

I go back to the place that was, is, and will always be ours.

—Tabitha Mascobetto, 17, “My father is from Caracas, Venezuela, and my mother is from Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. I speak Spanish and am trying to learn Portuguese.”

Stories

You have a story

I have a story

That man in the purple skirt has a story

We all have stories of our own

Some are sad

Some are happy

Some are too complicated to even explain

Most are full of lots of feelings

Some are not complete

Some have lost memories

Some remember everything

Even when they don’t want to

Sometimes our stories are scary

And it hurts to remember

But all stories are important

And it’s good to tell your story

Stories are unique things

But that is why they are so special

Tell your story loud and clear

And maybe someday,

Someone else will tell it

Again and again and again

All our stories are different but that’s a good thing

You have a story

I have a story

That man in the purple skirt has a story

We all have stories

And don’t forget that.

—Laila Paulsen, 11, Massachusetts.
She adds: “I love to play sports and write.”



New Normal

I moved to the city on my 20th birthday when the green maple leaves changed colors to a fancy red shade. The countryside bored me, and my father's old-fashioned thoughts ultimately made me leave the town. "You are just a scarecrow who doesn't do anything!" I screamed at my father. Yet, he didn't reply and continued his work. That evening, my father brought me dinner: rice and some side dishes that resembled a prisoner's food. I was sick of this kind of life. Then, I grabbed my father's piggy bank with anger and left. Ignoring my father's scream, I ran to the train station. I rode the train in frustration. On the train, I opened up my father's piggy bank and was surprised by the amount of money. I had never touched this much money! There was also a maple leaf in there. The maple leaf was my hometown's symbol and its unique color was our people's pride. Soon, I arrived in the city but I wasn't greeted with open arms. City people often scoffed at my dialect and appearance. Nevertheless, I promised to myself that I will survive.

After five years of studying and preparing for my career, I finally got a job at a pharmaceutical company, known to hire employees from the countryside. The office life was busy, and the city was hard to adapt to. As I was getting used to the city life, I encountered the worst obstacle in my life: my boss. Other employees called him Mr. Bian Lian since he changed his face and personality just like Bian Lian, a Chinese face-changing performer. My boss was notorious for how he treated his employees: making sexist remarks, being bossy, and committing irregularities. Yet, no one reported him because they were scared. He especially harassed me.

"Hey, scarecrow, how did you get into such a big company?" He would then laugh.

Other employees kept silent as if they were watching a wildlife documentary, as a lion hunts the weak deer. I soon became dull to his bullying and three years passed. One day, I dreamed of the dense reeds along the continuously flowing river, and the sound of my father's broom. When I woke up, I was shocked by my indifference toward my father. Then, I spotted the maple leaf, the only reminder of home in this city. Tears began to roll down my eyes; I didn't understand why!

In the morning, as I drove to work, my friend told me to turn on the radio. "Unprecedented disease, Coronavirus is rapidly spreading and the num-

ber of confirmed cases is 3,000 as of today," the host announced with a heavy tone.

I thought that the name of the disease was creepy but didn't really care. Instead, I was occupied with the images from my dream. When I arrived at work, I heard some conversations about Coronavirus.

"Shouldn't employees work from home since the deadly virus is spreading everywhere?," a brave newcomer in our company asked Mr. Bian Lian.

"I don't care about your opinion," he answered in a tone of disrespect. Then, he got up from his chair and said, "Individual's opinions don't matter in this society."

I was sure that my boss misinterpreted the intent of his question, but I kept silent. However, I was impressed by the newcomer as his bold question was like a glimpse of light in this dark society. As Coronavirus became serious, my boss started giving masks to only his favorites. Of course, the brave newcomer and I didn't get any. After that day, Mr. Bian Lian always wore masks.

"Scarecrow, I am going to the slum. It is really dirty and cockroaches are everywhere," he shouted at me.

At this time, the slum was severely affected by Coronavirus. My boss left the office with a photographer. It was obvious that he intentionally went to the slum to seem sympathetic. Soon after he left, I realized my boss left his wallet and ran to give it back. While running, I recognized that a maple leaf fell from his wallet. I picked it up with curiosity and put it back. When I gave the wallet back, he yelled angrily, "don't touch my things. This is why I hate people from the countryside!" He then said, "after I go to the slum, I will go to the countryside for new branch expansion."

After a few days, I read an article about my boss meeting with a countryman. That man was my father! I was surprised because it had been a long time since I last saw my father. With astonishment, I went to the boss's room.

"Why did you meet this old man?" I asked him, showing the picture published with the article.

"To take his land at a cheap price," he replied. "With this land, I can expand my pharmacy. This country mouse is stupid just like you," he continued his words with mockery.

I was overwhelmed with sadness and confusion. I suddenly wanted to return to my hometown, even if

“You should know how to embrace and forgive others with generosity.”

it was boring. A few days later, I heard that Mr. Bian Lian had caught Coronavirus. Our company finally allowed its employees to work from home. This was a chance for me to visit my hometown. As I arrived in my hometown, the smell of maple leaves tickled my nose. Nothing had changed in the town. The red maple leaves amused my eyes. The sound of the cows entertained my ears. With excitement, I finally opened the front door of my house. As I entered, I saw my father lying on the sofa, without vitality. He resembled a fish out of water preparing for his death.

“What happened to you?” I cried out.

“It’s been a long time,” father said without vigor. “Your suit fits you well.”

“Father, it is obvious that my boss gave you Coronavirus!” I screamed. I took my father’s cold hand, which was once strong and warm when I was young.

“This is not your boss’s fault,” my father said. “You should know how to embrace and forgive others with generosity.”

“Nonsense!” I cried, “You really haven’t changed a bit.”

I called the hospital for help, but the surgery and medicine were too expensive. I returned to the city to work hard to afford my father’s surgery. A few weeks later, my boss returned to work healthily, and I was extremely enraged. I thought that society is unfair since nice people are always sacrificed. Later that week, my father passed away. It was hard for me to keep working in the company since I was overwhelmed with guilt and depression. I gave my resignation letter to my boss but he didn’t care. Rather, he seemed happy. His company now had one less employee from the countryside. I decided to move back to my hometown with a simple life and lots nature. Meanwhile, I heard my boss was in trouble. His sexual harassment, violence, and corruption problems were finally reported by some brave employees. His reputation dropped quickly, and articles about him were in the newspaper.

One morning, I was walking by the river, and I spotted a man trying to kill himself. The man turned out to be Mr. Bian Lian. I decided to ignore him since I despised him. Yet, I remembered my father’s words: “You

should know how to embrace and forgive others with generosity.” I immediately ran and stopped him.

“Scarecrow?” My boss asked in surprise, “Are you from here?”

I nodded, and he removed his masks to talk. After our conversation, I learned that he was also from this town. He tried to conceal the fact to avoid any discrimination. However, after his wrongdoings were exposed to the public, he felt homesick and tried to commit suicide. I was shocked to see how he regretted his past and how he loved his hometown now.

“How about devoting your life to genuinely help others, instead of dying irresponsibly?” I suggested with prudence. Then, he started sobbing and promised that he would do anything to make the society better.

As we sat next to a maple tree, we noticed how beautiful it was. We named our new venture as “the Maple Charity.” The first order of business was providing masks to the public because the society should treat all people with respect, regardless of where they’re from.

—*Sungjin Park, 17, senior at Seoul Scholars International School, South Korea. He plans to study sociology.*



“Take a moment and really try to appreciate what you see. From the luscious green to the blue skies, nature surrounds us in all places. So, put down that phone, get off social media and try to really appreciate the world in its most purest form: It won’t be with us forever.”

—*Fadie Arabo, age 16, artist and passionate scientist, Michigan.*

A Passion that Continued for Two Generations

Feeling a bit dizzy after digging through piles of books in those yellow shipping boxes for nearly 5 hours in the garage, I finally saw nine stacks of tiny books buried below some weighty albums. I carefully took them out and migrated them to my room. The excitement overwhelmed me that I didn't even realize I left the garage door wide open for the entire afternoon. As I flipped through those tiny books, it reminded me of that afternoon nine years ago, when my dad handed me the first, what he called those tiny books, Xiao Ren Shu.

I stared cluelessly at those tiny books that my dad laid all over the floor while the warm afternoon sunlight shone down on my cheek. Those Xiao Ren Shu were small, about 5 inches long, old and yellowed but well maintained. They looked really different from my Dora picture books that my aunt gave me on lunar new year; rather, Xiao Ren Shu has the picture covering the entire page with some tiny caption on the bottom. I grabbed the one next to my lap and flipped to the first page where simple lines built up the trees and a small village setting in 1898. As I flipped through mine, I heard my dad laughing at the naive brothers and sisters in his Xiao Ren Shu, "Pipi Lu and Lu Xixi." I abandoned mine and begged him to tell me about the story in his book. I then spent the entire afternoon listening to his talking from the story of "Pipi Lu and Lu Xixi" to his childhood.

He put down his "Pipi Lu and Lu Xixi" and continued, "usually, I would go to the street vendor near my school where they would lay out all those Xiao Ren Shu on old bed sheets. Kids like me could use an ID or pay a cent to read Xiao Ren Shu next to the vendor.

"Well, I usually would stay there for a long time because many of the stories were connected, so then I would just read and read and read until that series

ended. They were addictive sometimes.

"I don't recognize many words and characters by then, but just by looking at those pictures, I could guess the drama behind it. Many of those Xiao Ren Shu were martial arts stories, and kids during that time were attracted to those. But later when I learned enough words to read a book, I didn't spend much time on Xiao Ren Shu, rather, I spent more time on those martial arts novels by Jin Yong. I loved martial arts novels so much that I even dreamed of being one of those heroes!"

After that afternoon, I always carried one or two Xiao Ren Shu wherever I went. However, just like my dad, those Xiao Ren Shu only accompanied me through elementary school.

But fortunately enough, I found another way to continue that passion abroad. I read the first American comic book, Smile by Raina Telgemeier, in ELL (English Language Learner) class, and follow that I read other comics by Telgemeier and some Marvel comics as well. Not until later that I realized those comic books helped me to learn many action verbs through captions like "trip" and "stumble", and abbreviations and dialect through dialogues. Abbreviations were really practical; I could use them through texting (like "lol", "FYI", etc.) or just in daily conversation. Dialect, too, could be practical in reading novels based on colloquial or dialect, such as *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Of Mice and Men*. That being said, comic books, just like video games, and K-Drama, might be doubted on their usefulness once in a while, but they might not be completely detrimental.

—Emma Tong, 17, Washington. "I lived in China for twelve years... Language was a huge barrier for me when I first came to America. Comic books helped me through the language obstacle and through other lowlights in my life. This short story was inspired by my comic companions."



The Rabbit on the Moon

By Katharine Lee, 14, California

I am a 14-year-old Asian girl living in Southern California. When I tell people I am an ABC—American-born-Chinese—they need a moment to process the information. English is my first language, but I can speak Chinese fluently. I am a master chopstick user, but I do not like rice.

When I heard of Skipping Stones and the opportunity to write to promote international diversity, I was thrilled. Although Asian culture is gaining more prominence in the media, I was surprised to find how little people truly knew about it—me included! After all, I was someone who looked unmistakably Asian, proud of my Chinese roots, and yet I still stereotypically thought of dumplings and mooncakes when I imagined China. I realized that I was acutely, painfully uninformed of my own race and culture. I sought to write this piece to change this problem not just for myself, but for potential readers as well. Culture and traditions are such a beautifully multifaceted thing, and there is always more to discover! Truly, what better way to get a feel for a country, its people and culture, than through traditional folklore and celebrations?

I chose to write about the legend of the Jade Rabbit and his appearance during the Mid-Autumn Festival, a holiday that had always fascinated me. To me, the Jade Rabbit is especially important because he symbolizes values of selflessness that are epitomized during this global pandemic. Rabbits are signs of new beginnings, and in the small, fluffy creatures I found core values that are incredibly valuable in the human population today. And so in the old lands of China, with an Emperor, rabbits, and overcrowded markets in mind, I sat down, opened my computer, and began to tell the ancient, yet timeless tale, of the Jade Rabbit.

One day, a man fell out of the sky.

There had been no warning, only a low rumble of thunder, a flash of arcing light, and there he stood amongst the villagers—one common, sun-tanned face in millions.

He had tumbled through the clouds, trails of water vapor plummeting in his wake, before miraculously landing sturdily on his feet in the bustling farmer's market. Nobody turned to look; hands continued to feel for the plump ripeness of fruit, vendors shouted at each other.

Perhaps it was because the old man was not a majestic being to behold. His face was gaunt, hollowed through by sickness, and his breaths rattled inside mere shells of lungs. He hobbled when he walked, supported by a cane gnarled as he, but he had something no villain possessed: the heart of a king.

The Great Jade Emperor roamed the lands of mankind often. He was the Supreme God, Ruler of all Heavens, Earth, and Underworld, but he proved to be a compassionate god. From the lands of milk and honey far above, the Emperor saw how mankind suffered, the bouts of starvation, anger, war. It pained him that not everything could be good—that out of the wonders of life stemmed corruption and evil.

As the great Emperor walked through the village, his vessel a mortal ravaged by illness, he understood life more keenly—he, a god who had never known suffering. He wondered in his creations' compassion, if they were worthy of the pure souls he had breathed to life. All day he wandered across the land, rasping out a single word: "Food."

Soon, aid came. Monkey swung down from the trees, chattering excitedly, arms laden with fruit; Otter politely provided fish; Jackal a lizard and a pot of milk curds. The Emperor was pleased and accepted their gifts accordingly.

Only Rabbit stood with nothing to give. All around him rippled the taunting dance of grass. Grass, Rabbit's life food, was of no use to the starving man.

The man had constructed a roaring fire now, which he sat by to warm himself. Rabbit saw how the man shivered and curled up weakly beside it, all hope lost in his eyes. And Rabbit knew then that without meat—without Rabbit's own flesh and the healing marrow of his bones—the man would surely die.

Without a moment's hesitation, Rabbit had bounded into the flames, frozen in time as the flames stretched their tongues up to meet him. Heat crackled around him, and when he glanced fearlessly upwards to face Death, he glimpsed only the strong, surprised features of none other than the Jade Emperor.

Rabbit had not burned. To his surprise, his fur shined with the white gleam of new snowfall, red eyes still gleaming with unmistakable intuition. His body was lifted from the flames, and before him stood the magnificent stature of the Jade Emperor, whose dark eyes welled forth with emotion and love. The Emperor had never believed in such selflessness in his creation, this small white creature who had nothing to give and so had willingly procured its own flesh and blood.

"For your sacrifice," said the Emperor, and a mortar appeared in Rabbit's hands. "For your courage." Next, a pestle. "You will earn your place among the stars, Jade

The Rabbit on the Moon *continued*

Rabbit, and live your life as an immortal, a healer in the tools I have provided you.”

Silvery whorls of stardust swirled around Rabbit, who tilted his face up to the sky in peace. He was carried upward to the pale surface of the moon, this mysterious, creamy orb that Rabbit would call home. And so he settled contentedly there, waiting to emerge when the light fell just right—on the night of the Mid-Autumn Festival.

★ ★ ★

Underneath the bridge, the water is perfectly still. It seems to stretch to the ends of the earth, unbroken, reflecting on its glassy surface the winking, silver slice of the moon, shaped curiously like a rabbit holding a mortar. You shift your gaze upward, taking in the sky dark as onyx, as if one of the gods had accidentally overturned an ink well and spilled its contents across the heavens. You hold your breath; a single exhale could shatter the perfect tranquility to a million fragments.

And then it begins—thousands of lights flickering into existence, one by one, as ethereal as will-o’-wisps in the night. Dragons roar to life on the water, their scales glinting in underlying patterns of red and gold. Pagodas cast shimmering purple lights into the night sky and onto the canal, spiraling in fantastical shapes across the water. There is color and sheer vibrancy, so much of it and so sudden, that the breath is whisked away from your lungs.

There is a lantern in your hands, papery thin and structured by bamboo rods. A flame ignites within the paper dome. All around you, the sprawling crowd follows suit, illuminated by the ethereal glow of soft lantern light.

One by one, thousands of lanterns leave fingertips, buoyed upwards by wishes and blessings, becoming swirling pinpricks in the dark sky. They rise as if dancing in a beautiful dream, winking in and out. Your heart swells as your lantern bids you farewell, taking its place among the stars—until all that is left is the selfless rabbit smiling at you, all the way from the moon.

★ ★ ★

The Mid-Autumn Festival marks the end of the autumn harvest. It's a time to celebrate the gods while the moon shines at its brightest and lunar legends pass down from mouth to mouth. The Jade Rabbit symbolizes fertility and new life. Rabbit's courage and noble, altruistic spirit are values we see during the Covid-19 pandemic—humans grateful for the joy of life, helping others without personal gain—not just on the Mid-Autumn Festival, but each day of our beautiful lives.

Fast Fashion: *The Beast behind Beauty*

By Eric Yoon, age 17, California

It's the first day of school and you want to show-case your best outfit. You scrupulously pick from your closet and confidently stride out. At school, you get all the oohs and ahhs. Meanwhile, the other clothes in your closet gloomily collect dust. They dread their looming fate: the landfills. Fast fashion is hurting the planet and your clothing's feelings.

So what exactly is fast fashion? It's cheap and trendy clothing made in a *fast* fashion. If you're shopping for the hottest holiday deals, fast fashion! You buy clothes affordably, and stores make profits. Nothing wrong in the ideal consumerist scheme. Right?

As always, the answer is *No*. Numbers don't lie. Here are some that you wish were untrue. According to a *Nature* article, “*The Environmental Price of Fast Fashion*,” over 1.5 trillion liters of water are used a year to make clothing. The fashion industry is also the second largest industrial polluter and responsible for about 10% of global carbon emissions, largely due to the increase in production and consumption.

If statistics aren't enough, the tell-all story lies in the Bangladesh factory incident. On April 24 2013, a factory building collapsed, killing more than 1,000 workers. The company was the second-leading exporter of clothing. The incident seems accidental, but it was actually inevitable. Building foundations were subpar and on top of that, these hazardous conditions were desired to necessitate high production. This disaster remains as a lasting reminder of the abominable labor conditions shrouded underneath fast fashion.

An average consumer may tout fast fashion as a model of democratization, enabling cheap and trendy purchases. While the latter portion is true, fast fashion ensnares workers and exhausts our natural resources. Its proponents may say that we can recycle our clothes. However, most recycled garments undergo mechanical processing that degrades quality. What we need is a revolution, not a fabrication of the truth.

We need to change the fast fashion industry. We need to change our impulse to snag clothes off the rack. We need to significantly ameliorate working conditions and distribute wages fairly. We need to make clothing more compostable and recyclable. We need environmental pricing systems. We need new designs to make clothing more durable and eco-friendly. But what we need remains unaccomplished without proposals and protests. In order to rise up against business conglomerates, we must unite. Innovators, speakers, writers, you and I. ★★



BOOKSHELF

Benjamin Banneker: *Pioneering Scientist*, by Ginger Wadsworth. Lerner Publishing. Born in 1731, Banneker grew up a free Black person on a farm in Maryland unlike most Blacks of that era. He built a wooden clock when he was 20. He wrote almanacs and helped survey D.C. area where the U.S. capital was built. Ages 7-10.

Letter from a Plow Nation (bilingual English & Amharic), by Worku L. Mulat. Ready Set Go Books. An illustrated introduction to the African country of Ethiopia, its people and their traditional life. Ages 5-9.

What On Earth? The Environment: *Explore, Create and Investigate!* by Jonathan Litton & Pau Morgan. Quarto Publishing. This book encourages hands-on activities to introduce the way environment works and how our actions impact the ecosystems. Ages 8-12.

Hope: *Project Animal Rescue*, by Alyssa Milano & Debbie Rigaud, illustr. Eric Keyes. Chapter book. Scholastic. Hope, age 11, wants to help a local animal shelter that's being shut down. Her relatability, kindness, empathy, and can-do attitude will inspire the readers. Ages 8-12.

Ocean Anatomy: *The Curious Parts & Pieces of the World under the Sea*, by Julia Rothman. www.storey.com. There is more to the oceans than meets your eyes; more than big waves and salt water. The book introduces the aquatic life and reminds why we must conserve our oceans and their diverse creatures. Ages 11+

Don't Check Out This Book! by Kate Klise, illustr. M. Sarah Klise. Algonquin Young Reader. This is a wonderfully engaging but very unconventional book, comic yet courageous. Go with Appleton elementary's fifth-grade sleuths as they follow their small town scandal.

Courageous Creativity: *Advice and Encouragement for the Creative Life*, by Sara Zarr. Beaming Books. We are all creative at heart, but often we procrastinate, or are afraid of being criticized or rejected, or feel vulnerable... This great book encourages us to do whatever creative projects we have in mind. Ages 11-18.

The Civil Rights Era, a series for ages 12-15 from the Nomad Press, offers these four books: **Sitting In, Standing Up:** *Leaders of the Civil Rights Era*, by Diane C. Taylor • **Singing for Equality:** *Musicians of the Civil Rights Era*, by Diane C. Taylor • **Changing Laws:** *Politics of the Civil Rights Era*, by Judy Dodge Cummings • **Boycotts, Strikes, and Marches:** *Protests of the Civil Rights Era*, by Barbara Diggs.

Take Charge of Anger, by Gill Hasson, illustr. Sarah Jennings. Free Spirit. This book offers tried and true ideas to cope with anger. The **Kids Can Cope** series offers ways to cope with difficult feelings. Ages 6-9.

Will You Survive?: *Follow the adventure and learn real-life survival skills along the way!* by Paul Beck. b&m!kids/Quarto. In this book we take a journey through many dangers and adventures. At every turn, we have a choice to make, and the actions we choose determine our path through the rest of the trip. Engaging! Ages 11 and up.

Practicing Mindfulness: *Finding Calm and Focus in Your Everyday Life*, by Jerry Braza. Tuttle. Do you want to learn to live mindfully, moment by moment? Then this book is for you. It will help you lead a more peaceful and productive life by offering many time-tested practices for your daily life that will enhance your personal relationships, health and wellbeing. Ages 15 & up.

Historically Inaccurate, by Shay Bravo. Wattpad Books. After her mom's deportation, all Soledad wants is for her life to go back to normal, but everything has changed. She wants to fit in, but does she? Ages 13-18.

As the World Burns: *The New Generation of Activists and the Landmark Legal Fight against Climate Change*, by Lee Van Der Voo. Timber Press. Are our governments obliged to protect the livability of our planet for the future generations? This book follows the very important case—Juliana v. U.S.—being litigated by Our Children's Trust. We learn about the 21 young plaintiffs, and how climate change is impacting us all. Ages 14-99.

For Which We Stand: *How Our Government Works and Why It Matters*, by Jeff Foster. Scholastic. This is a great book that will help you understand how our government works. It describes the various branches of federal, state and local governments in the U.S. Ages 8-12.

You Call This Democracy?: *How to fix our government and deliver power to the people*, by Elizabeth Rusch. HMH Books. Political power is not being shared equally among all the citizens of the U.S. This timely book explores big problems in our democracy—the Electoral College, Gerrymandering, unrepresentative Senate, dark money in our elections, voter suppression, people barred from voting, citizens shut out of statehood (D.C. & Puerto Rico) and as a result, without adequate representation or federal funding, and more. The book examines the issues in sufficient detail and also offers workable solutions to fix our democracy. Ages 13-19.

Self Discovery

I am a Korean-American, and I can fluently speak and write in both languages. I was originally born in the U.S., but my family and I immigrated to Korea when I was about 3 years old. For the following 7 years, I began to consolidate my identity as a pure Korean as I attended a regular Korean elementary school and learned & practiced the traditional Korean culture. Then in 2014, my family and I immigrated back to the U.S., and since then, I have been attending regular American public schools and accepting myself as a Korean-American.

Besides my cultural background, I aspire to attend medical school and subsequently become an anesthesiologist or a pediatrician. I have always adored the idea that a small deed from me can cause significant joy and relief in someone's life, which is why the medical field appealed to me a lot. I also love listening to and playing music, as I have been playing the violin for about 9 years now. I highly enjoy playing in orchestras as nothing excites me more than building new relationships or strengthening already existing friendships, not only in the musical context, but in general.

I have always had a passion for creating & sharing my artwork, but the *Skipping Stones* magazine appealed to me in a more personal way than any other platforms I have shared my drawings on. As a bicultural teenager living in the U.S., a highly diverse country, I encounter discrimination but also appreciation towards my race on a daily basis. I consistently lead and enjoy discussions about races and culture because as someone who has experienced two cultural identity transformations (*Korean-American to Korean to Korean-American*), I always feel compelled to share my unique insights with others. That being said, I wanted to approach a new way of sharing this time, not through words, but through art.

Here are four of my drawings and paintings.

Incomprehensible Truth. This piece (*next page, top right*) depicts the language barrier that I experienced when I immigrated back to the U.S. from 7 years of living in Korea. At school and on the news, I remember everybody would discuss the tragedy and violence that were occurring in the world at that time. However, as a recent immigrant who could barely form a proper sentence in English, I couldn't comprehend anything,

which is illustrated through the letters not entering the bottle that I am holding.

New Nature. This piece depicts a memorable moment of my life in which I truly encountered the unique nature of the Pacific Northwest through Mt. Baker. Of course, I have seen and appreciated numerous mountains in Korea, but Mountain Baker spoke a message to me. It reminded me that the foreign land I am living on is a beautiful place that is stunning in its own way different from my motherland. (*next page, top left*).

9 in One. (*bottom right*) This piece depicts 9 different figures of me that are different... but also the same me. Each one of the figures represent myself in different situations, such as when I am at home, at school, surrounded by Koreans only, by myself, and so on. Even though I speak different languages and act differently in each of those 9 situations, I am still the same person at the core, and realizing that was quite a journey for me.

—Grace Park, 17, Korean American, Washington.
Please see Grace's four art pieces on page 35.

Spring!

Flowers are blooming,
birds are singing,
I might as well hum along!

First signs of spring,
beginning in May or April,
might as well start the rain!

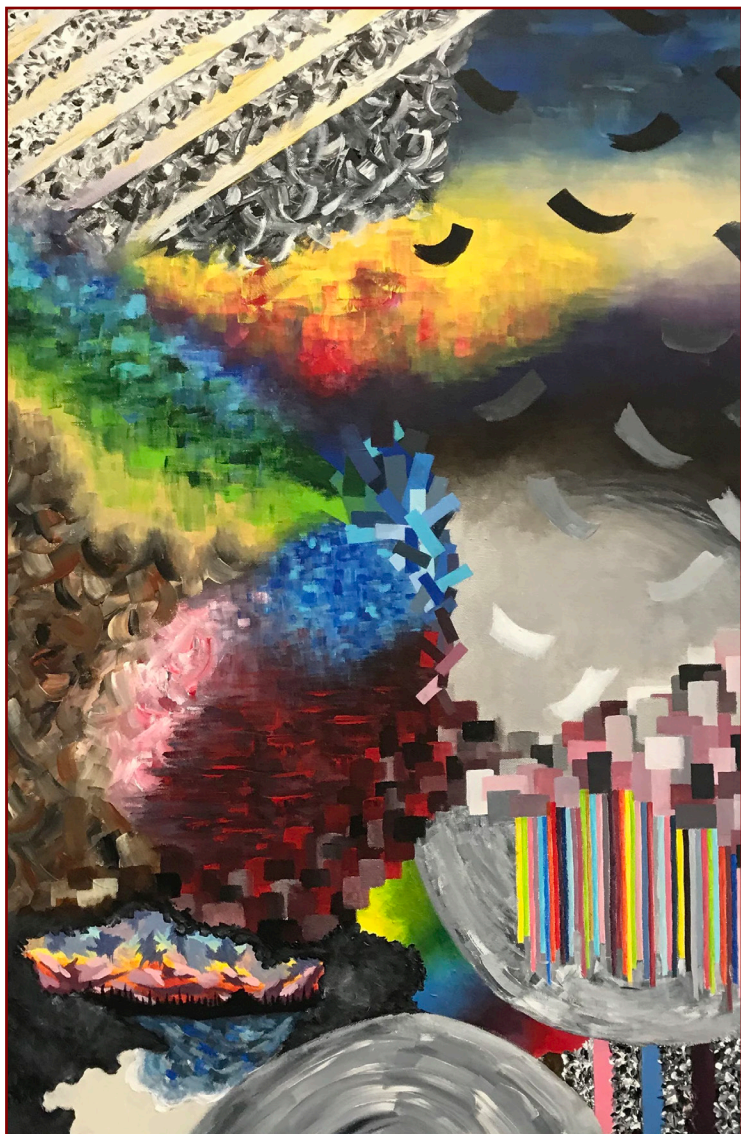
Coldness to warmness,
no scarfs or jackets,
just a perfect day for a sundae!

We might now know,
spring is here, winter is now gone,
and might as well play outside!

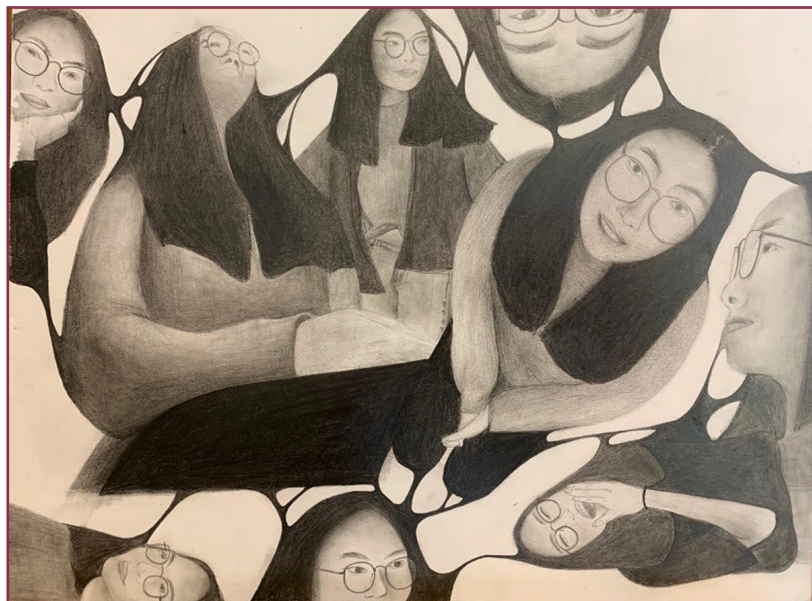
When I got out, oh, I must say:
"Yes! It's finally
Spring!"

—Aily Wei, grade 4, Chinese American, New Jersey.

"I started having my dream as an author because I was inspired in ELL class and reading by my fourth grade teacher. I also have started typing a few stories, and one of my books is called, *Nature Poems*."



• **New Nature** (top, left)
 • **Incomprehensible Truth** (top, right) • **9 in One** (below), and
 • **Harmonious Diversity** (left):
"My diverse 5th grade class was a sharp contrast to my Korean class, which was a perfectly homogenous community with each classmate being pure Korean. Though I struggled at first, I soon came to appreciate the beauty of racial diversity in America: despite the clashing cultures and beliefs, they all comprise a harmonious world. The variety of brush strokes, patterns, and colors depict our diversity." —Grace Park, 17.



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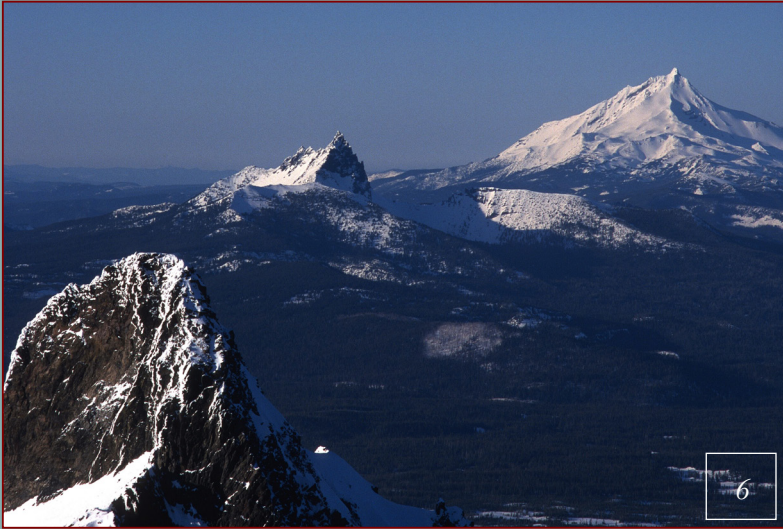
Skipping Stones

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1. Sunrise Ceremony, Blackfeet Indian Reservation, Montana 2. Clouds on Galatin Mountains, MT 3. Rainbow over the Missouri River, Montana 4. Patches Miller Mountain Bicycling on Volcan de Agua, Guatemala 5. Northern Lights, Glacier Bay National Park, Alaska 6. Winter Snow in the Cascade Mountains, Oregon. Photos: Paul Dix, Oregon.