

# Skipping Stones



A Multicultural Literary Magazine

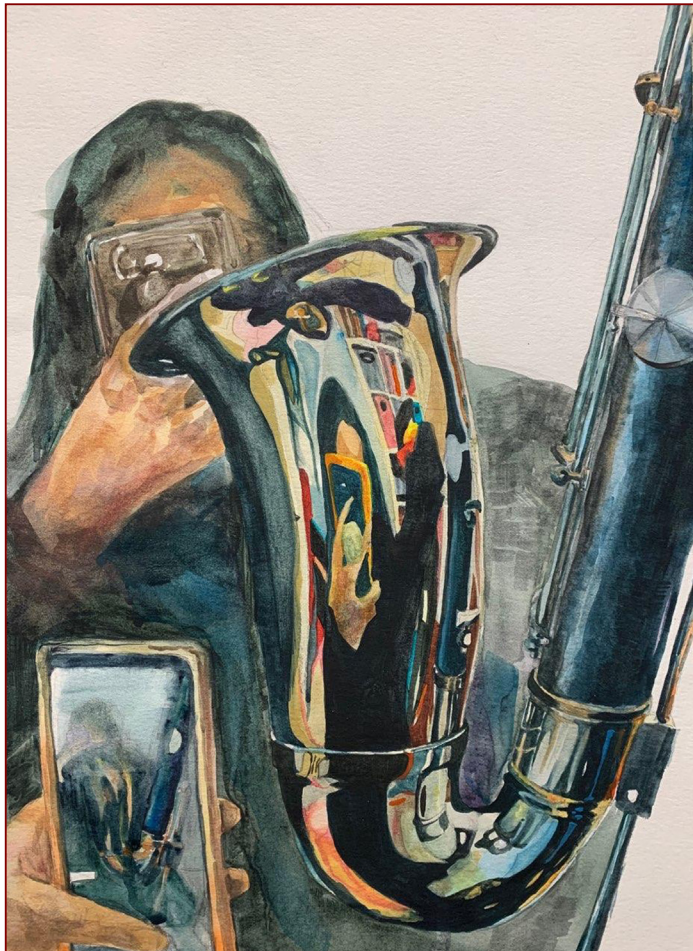
Vol. 32, no. 4  
Oct.-Dec. 2020  
\$7.00

Black Lives Matter

2020 Youth Honor Awards

Art by Christina Schulz, artist, California.





**Rose Ego:** *A girl with vibrant & multicolored hair, surrounded by opaque roses and translucent vines. Watercolor & watercolor pencils. (above)*

She's in a cave that's covered in translucent & lustrous vines that envelope the space around her; but what frames her, and keeps her poised, are the highly opaque roses. The roses keep her from looking helpless and swallowed whole, and instead turn the situation into a beautiful portrait where everything works in her favor.

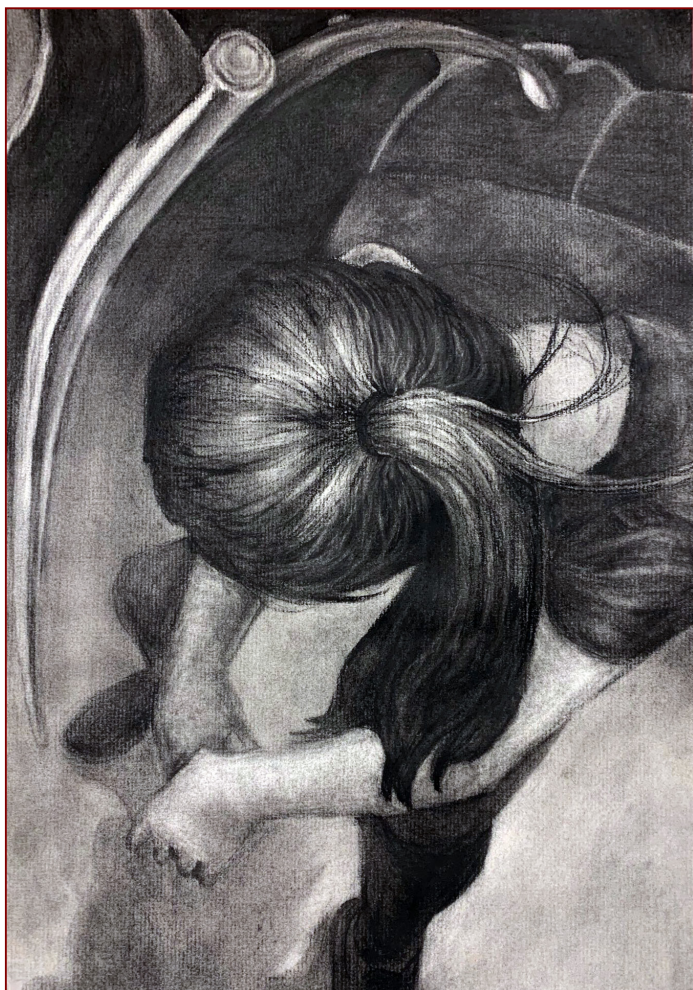
**Mirrored Music:** *The watercolor drawing of a girl holding her phone in front of her face, and her reflection showing on the bell of her bass clarinet and in the background. Shown through her point of view as her phone is in the left hand corner. (top, left)*

Music and art work independently within the same category of art. I personally love art and music, and dabble in both whenever I can. I realized that both mediums are ways that people express certain emotions, evoke memories, or make people think a certain way. The endless possibilities within each medium knows no bounds, and I wanted to emphasize that through reflections upon reflections of me being seen through a mirror in back, on my bass clarinet, and interpreted through the phone in the left hand corner.

**Dimly Lit Frustration.** *Charcoal. Girl's head drapes down, her posture in a resting, slumped position while there are street lights that bend over her.*

She slings her head down, lower than her shoulders as she crouches in clear disarray. The street lamps provide lighting on top of her clear distress, and match her height to signify how her world around her is practically revolving around her. Everything points at her, dimly lighting her frustration. (bottom, left)

—Rachel Yi, age 17, grade 12, Korean American, Washington. My hobbies include drawing, playing the guitar/ukulele/bass clarinet/clarinet, baking, kick boxing, observing movement, and exploring.





Marching in a steady stream of people shouting familiar slogans through face masks, some of them awkwardly trying to socially distance, I found my first protest different than anything I'd have imagined before 2020. That didn't make it any less powerful: the speeches given by both religious and local black community leaders, united in the wake of George Floyd's murder at the hands of police, drew the hundreds of protestors occupying the City Hall into passionate chants and stunned them into mournful silence. Nor did it make it any less necessary:

Mapping Police Violence data found that black people in America are not only 3 times more likely to be killed by police than white people, they are also more likely to be killed while unarmed, culminating this year with the tragic deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. The magnitude of racial injustice in our country only makes it more depressing that many members of the black community have to become activists—even when we are in the middle of a global health pandemic that is disproportionately harming them.

The number of different crises that seem to be occurring right now is dizzying, especially when, once lockdown began, I thought that fighting a pandemic as a country could help bring us together and ease tensions. But we live in a time where my neighbors may or may not wear a mask outside based on political preference rather than public safety. While I have been stuck at home, it has been terrifying to see that the Coronavirus has not only created new problems, but exacerbated a lot of fundamental social issues, from communities of color being more prone to the virus because of inadequate medical care, overcrowded prisons becoming Covid hotspots, and issues that hit closer to home for students like me, like the gaps in our education system. Then there is the fact that I'm a quarantined teenager with little political power, and whose greatest personal hardships during the pandemic have been dealing with the cruel and unusual 2020 AP exams and the abject terror of phone-banking.

As we reach our fourth month of quarantine, I've realized how easy it is to fall into hopelessness. For students who have made the sanity-preserving choice of trying not to care too much about politics, missing

major milestones like graduation or school dances and being in social isolation is more than enough to take a serious toll on a person's mental health. Some of my friends who are activists have similar feelings of burn-out, powerlessness and have to contend with the irony of trying to help other people while being cut off from them because of social distancing. And as we spend more uncertain months at home while problems continue to mount outside and leaders do little to enforce solutions, it's not easy to maintain hope. But as I felt ready to disconnect, and the problems in the world felt like abstract statistics, the one thing that probably got me through the listlessness of quarantine was my sister, talking to my family and friends, and attending virtual climate strike rallies and hearing the stories and ideas and voice of other people. Because individual people and humanity are the things that we fight for when we advocate to end police violence or to improve treatment for Covid patients, or to institute justice anywhere. And that fight has results, such as in the recent example of protests from indigenous people leading to the shut-down of the Dakota oil pipeline.

The Glendale March for Black Lives, the first protest I attended, ended with a candlelight vigil for the victims of police brutality. I didn't feel at all tired, despite standing in the sun for hours, but I did feel an overwhelming sense of collective empathy among every single member of the protest. Despite the tragedy of everything happening in our country, I felt hopeful for the first time in a while, because the fight for justice and equity was ultimately a fight for the side of our common humanity. From the reading I've been doing during quarantine—because, like a very normal teenager, of course I'd assign homework to myself—one thing that has stuck out to me is Cornel West's oft-quoted line, "Justice is what love looks like in public." Even if it's cliché to bring up, the correlation between the ideas of justice, an abstract and sterile concept, and love, another nebulous idea but one that is rooted in the human experience, is fascinating. Even while we're all still stuck at home, I have hope that enough people can find solidarity in demanding justice so that, as the chant goes, we can finally have some peace.

—Miriam Awan, 15, Asian American, California. She is passionate about the environment, equal justice, and animal rights.

# Skipping Stones

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## 2020 Youth Honor Awards



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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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*Resources, Eugene Ed. Assn., and Parent's Choice Awards.*



## The Quilt of Our World

Imagine a peaceful world  
Where nobody shouts bad words  
No violence, no wars  
Where solving problems is as serene  
As putting together a puzzle.  
Where no people take the wrong paths in life  
And no one creates fights  
And calmness would blanket the world  
Like snow covering a house.

Imagine a just place  
Where everybody would appreciate one another  
No one treated differently  
Poor or rich, young or old, black or white  
Mixing with each other  
Like colors on a palette.

Imagine an equal civilization  
No one better, no one lesser  
No one treated with less respect  
Everyone would listen to each other's opinion.  
Opportunities would be presented to everyone  
Like desserts on a platter.

Peace, justice, equality  
All linked by invisible chains  
All weaving together in complex quilt  
All vital in our world.

—Emily Yen, age 10, Texas.

## My Very Own Star

It was one night,  
where millions of stars shone,  
and one was the brightest,  
of them all.  
I couldn't say whether it was just bright because it was,  
or...

It was bright just for me.  
I decided to claim that star,  
as my very own star.  
That would shine my way to my destiny,  
with obstacles that I would have to cross.  
Failure, mistakes, and hard times,  
were meant to be in life,  
but I would always know,  
that brightest star was  
My Very Own Star.

—Aily Wei, age 10, New Jersey.



# Skipping Stones Stew

## On Top of the World

my throne  
above the clouds  
riding wherever  
i want to go  
i can touch the sun  
i can see  
the people far below  
i can reach out  
and stroke  
the dancing  
flowers  
the wind  
teasing my  
hair  
but I laugh  
for nothing  
can hurt me  
while I am here  
on

—Maggie O., 17, North Carolina.  
(PS: Poem written at age 13).

## Rose

More than once  
She caught a glimpse of me  
Smelling her ruby roses  
Curtains fell back  
As her hands withdrew from  
Lace fabric  
I sensed she did not like  
What I was doing  
No longer was the expression  
“Stop and smell the roses”  
A way of turning into life’s beauty  
However a hardy good morning was  
On my lips each week while  
Enjoying the tantalizing scent  
Of her red roses  
They proliferated as months passed  
Then one day the roses disappeared  
Nothing remained but the brown earth  
Looking up I saw a white figure  
Behind an open window  
Smile at me

Both poems penned by maggie d., African American poet, Washington.

**Cover** by Christina Schulz, artist, California.

Christina writes: “As President Abraham Lincoln once said, ‘I don’t like that man. I must get to know him better.’ One of the best ways to connect with someone is to look them straight into the eyes. In that moment we share our feelings and the walls that kept us apart disappear.”

## The Life-Long Suffering Fight

Everyday I wake up in the morning,  
I always worry about who is next.  
If I cried blood every time I cried,  
there would be no more blood inside of me.  
Every single day I see people dead,  
And I always wonder who will be next.  
I remember my mom always told me,  
Keep your head down and they won’t mess  
with you.  
I always dream that she is still with me,  
But I found that it was just a dream.  
Everyday I wake up in the morning.

—Emily Hanna, 14, Georgia.

## The Question

It took a while for the  
Words to sink in my mind  
After all it was a  
Friendship class  
Circular we sat  
Casually introducing  
Ourselves  
Then the question was  
Poied  
What makes you feel “right”  
About yourself?  
Bashfully a student blurted  
“My White male privilege.”  
My Blackness needed time to  
Adjust  
Silently I pondered a polite  
Way not to betray his  
Self-consciousness  
Starkly I replied  
Do you supply pain or  
Empower my people

## Snowflake

*I fall I fall*  
Through the black night sky  
Into the cold night  
What is waiting for  
Me I ask the stars  
*I fall I fall*  
Around thousands more snowflakes  
Fluttering down are they  
Like me I wonder do they long  
To become part of something  
*I fall I fall*  
Through the crisp winter night  
The kind that chills  
That chills all the way  
I see the moon smiling down at me  
*I fall I fall*  
I glance around all the other snowflakes  
Seem content but I’m not  
I long for something more  
I want to be part of something  
*I fall I fall*  
Did I miss something  
Am I wrong, the odd one  
Stupid, dumb, clueless  
Do they know something else  
*I fall I fall*  
Then it happens, I see the ground  
I see the houses scattered around  
And on the ground  
Snowflakes are resting  
*I fall I fall*  
Then I notice everyone  
Around me looks  
Excited, happy  
And relieved  
*I fall I fall*  
Slowly slowly  
I touch the ground and I  
Lay gracefully down  
I feel a part of something, content, happy  
*I lay I lay*  
White covers the town  
I am where  
I’m meant to be  
Home is lovely

—Margaret Brockman, grade 4, Colorado.





# Sunshine and Rubber Sandals

*“The country of Nigeria is a diverse and fascinating country. From its cuisine of hot stews and fresh sole filet, to its rich ecosystems and religious groups, Nigeria is truly a cultural gem. It is also chock-full of untold stories.*

*The basis of all stereotypes, or forms of xenophobia, is a dislike for people who are different from ourselves. I would like to debunk that, and I believe I do so in my short story. I explore one girl’s daily life and her feelings, as well as her intense love for her family. The cultural story of Nigeria is one that is not told often, but is one that I think needs to be told.*

The sun glares down at me. It’s hot and disgusting. The basket I carry is filled to the brim with *ewedu*. Mama is waiting at home with her charcoal pot, so I must hurry. Wind grazes my ears as I begin to run, my sandals clacking against the dirt road. I’m out of breath when I reach our apartment. Slipping my sandals off, I dash inside, and Mama gives me a stern look.

“What were you doing, o?” Mama speaks with a heavy accent. “You could have been kidnapped, *sha*!”

She grabs my ear with one pudgy hand and yanks me up the stairs. Mama is muttering swear words in Igbo under her breath, glaring at me. My brother Anelechi would normally be on the sofa, watching a Nollywood film.

“Where’s Anelechi, Mama?” I ask.

“He’ll be home soon, o.” Her voice is strong, but she doesn’t make eye contact with me. She pushes me into my room, wagging her finger.

“Ay, you stay up here until it’s dinner! No more exploring for you, *sha*!” Mama slams the door.

The dinner table is silent.

“Mama” my sister’s voice is elegant, but I can hear it quivering ever so slightly. “Is Anelechi okay?”

Mama is the rock in our family, so she smiles and nods. Her veneer is see-through, though, because her eyes shimmer in fright and she keeps glancing at the door. I stand up suddenly, pushing my chair back.

“If none of you will find Anelechi, I will,” I say with confidence. Pushing my feet into my rubber sandals, I grab my mobile phone. Mama glares hard at me, and, pushing back her chair too, starts after me. I’m faster than her, though, and I dash out before she can catch me.

Ten minutes past, running on the dirt road, I am wondering if I should call Baba to handle this. But I shake my head. I love Anelechi, and going back inside now will make me look like a coward. Suddenly, my phone is jumping, like the beans Mama makes for dinner, in my hand. I look down. It’s Anelechi.

“I’m fine, Mama!”

An hour later, Anelechi sits on the sofa while Mama runs her fingers through his hair. It turns out he had forgotten his licence for the drive home, and he had been stranded. All it took was a quick drive to get him.

“Mama,” I say, nestling in her lap, “Why is it that the world is so angry at us? Why does he scare us like that?”

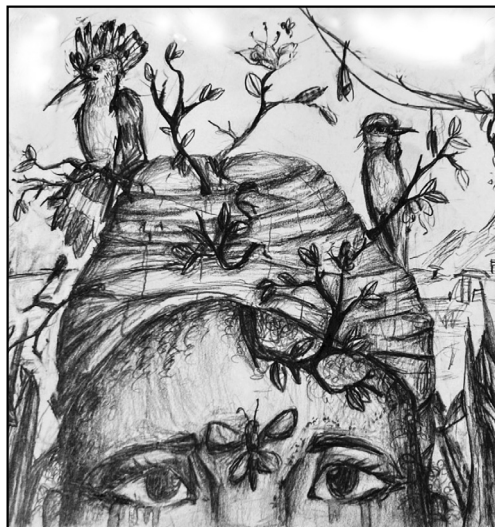
“Ay, *sha*, you remember this.”

Mama puts her hand on my cheek.

“The world is unpredictable. He likes to give us a good scare, o. But feeling his hands through the skin of a child, *sha*, then he is beautiful. We must all learn to be better children.” The whole family is crying now. We all hug Anelechi, and soon the whole apartment is filled with the sights, and the sounds, and the voices, of family.

—Eliza M. Rinkema, gr. 7, Singapore.

Eliza adds: “I enjoy creating artwork, mainly sculptural works, and charcoal illustrations. However, my main hobby is writing. Currently, I am in the editing stages of my novel (free verse poetry), which I plan to publish by the end of the 2019-2020 school year. I have published a book and food reviews with *Expat Living Magazine* (based here in Singapore) and have travelled around the world, journaling my experiences.”





### Ask – Why?

Faint smiles, deep soul cries,  
little faces looking around,  
hope is not lost in their minds,  
yet no food to be found.

Tears wet their lips,  
bodies fighting to live  
sucking water out of weeds.

No family deserves this!  
Then, I wonder – “Why?”

Ignored troubles, unheard pains,  
no one feels your heartbeat,  
through the streets, you walk in vain.

To live among the homeless  
is not what you had in mind.

Yet, you are among the invisible,  
people's eyes towards you are blind.

No individual deserves this!  
Then, I ask – “Why?”

Blood stained gemstones, injured hands,  
cuts, and bruises that aren't healing,  
as you work by day and night,  
for people who feel, but have no feelings.  
Hearts and dreams, and wishes shattered!

In your world, no time to play,  
no childhood rhymes, no infant's laughter.

No child deserves this!  
Then, I cry – “Why?”

Imprisoned hearts, shattered voices.  
By prejudice and bias, finger pointed.  
By artery of hatred, your blood spilled.  
By your color, avoided and exploited.  
With real chains and those invisible,  
your soul in a cage has been long guarded  
by those who thought to be invincible.

No human deserves this!  
Then, I denounce – “Why?”

Taken lives, unsafeness, fear!  
A child, in the morning, waved goodbye,  
as the school bus shifted gear.  
And what was to be a normal day,  
after the gun spoke loud and clear,

the day turned into a life of mourning,  
grief and outrage, anger, and tears.

No mother deserves this!  
Then, I yell – “Why?”

Persecuted beliefs, thought discrimination.

Some might give you wary eyes,  
cross the road, pull their child closer,  
because your God is not named as mine.

Chained by other's wrongful choices,  
you are seen as one of them.

No one asked you what your voice is.

No soul deserves this!  
Then, I pray – “Why?”

Forgotten actions, overlooked names.

We may be written out of history,  
denied of education, given less pay.

We are your sisters, mothers, and daughters!

Why are we the ones to obey?  
Our lives might be seen as mise,  
but we, like dust, we'll rise.

No woman deserves this!  
Then, I scream – “Why?”

Broken bottles, plastic pieces,  
old tanned papers tossed on grass,  
oceans filled with thick oil crude,  
sea-life not destined to last.

We know time is running out,  
yet time is still in hand,  
to defend this, our land.

No place on Earth deserves this!  
Then, I question – “Why?”

Why are we not like the sun that rises?

That corrects the wrongs of yesterday.

Hear the children sing their voices,  
let their souls be also heard!

I dare you to join me in this fight  
to better the world that we live in,  
so, we all can see the light.

We all deserve this!  
Then, please, ask – “Why?”

—Montserrat Llacuna, age 12, Massachusetts.



## If Only

If only ...

Questions were answered, and answers were questioned,  
if beauty was seen in more ways than one,  
if sadness was showered with love and affection,  
and silenced forever was the voice of the gun ...

If only ...

World's nations would join voices in song,  
if forgotten feelings would blossom anew,  
if thornless roses from our words were born,  
and hope was the heart of the world that we knew ...

If only...

Faith was people's path and assurance,  
if joy was a plague and peace a disease,  
if victory was the reward for one's life endurance,  
then love in one's heart would be endless as seas.

—Montserrat Llacuna, age 12, Massachusetts. She writes:



*"I attend Watertown Middle School. I describe myself as an engaged 7th grader who loves to create. Whether it may be in written form, art, or performance, my work represents who I am. I enjoy the process of creation as much as the final product. The challenges that bring me to change things along the way and*

*force me to rewrite, relearn, and redesign make me grow as a learner. Words can make you stop and think, can make you pause and listen, can make you respite and feel. Words have energy and the beautiful power to help, to heal, to humble. I guess this is why I love to write. Our words matter and the tone in which we speak them has a huge impact. Words are containers of power, and I have learned to use them to encourage, to motivate, to uplift, to show I care. I love words because they are dynamic. The power of words is available to each and every one of us, no matter our race, gender, or beliefs. So, let us make sure our words are always used for the right purpose and let our voices be heard."*

## White-washed

there is so much unspoken struggle  
in identity,  
teetering on the balance of  
embracing roots that stretch deeper  
than the grooves of my nana's face  
and fully immersing oneself into  
the persona of the Americanized model.  
the struggle lies  
in fully understanding  
the tongue of my motherland  
yet not being able to possess it  
besides for fragments of casual greeting,  
tight smiles replacing foreign jargon.  
for as the morals of my home  
are defined by ingrained culture,  
the address of my house relays  
the stringent upkeep of a western standard.  
navigating the paradox of conformity and comfort,  
my identity struggles to be  
heard, seen, and embraced—  
colored roots muddled to a fade,  
yet remaining unbleached.

—Saanvi Nayar, h.s. junior, New Jersey. Saanvi writes,

*"I would classify myself as an avid social justice activist, anxious incoming high school junior, but above all, a confused American Asian. I am second-generation, my history rich with Indian culture integrating through food, religion, love. And, yet, I feel a strong disconnect, now more than ever—coming of age in a country with specified standards, I often contemplate the verity of intersection between my two 'identities.' Beyond this contemplated intersection, I fearfully approach the concept of crafting my own persona, diverse enough to perhaps be wholly original.*



*Whether it be creating a community initiative aimed towards supporting families affected by COVID or holding the regional executive director of debate position for JSA (a student-led debate organization), I consider myself to be incredibly passionate about activism. However, I find that poetry is the solitary outlet for my personal activism, dissecting all that I am and strive to embody. To me, this poem encapsulates a personal struggle that expands to hold true for a very diverse audience, ranging in age, ethnicity, and passion."*



## The Woman With No Name: Earth



Before the destruction of a cold world,  
There was a woman with no name.  
She was more than a woman,  
She was an elegant dancer beyond her years,  
Who possessed an inexplicable smile,  
A heart made of gold,  
An unrelenting compassion for others,  
A hopeful wish for the future.

For years, she danced like no one was watching,  
She produced silent waves with the reach of her arms.  
Her legs bent easily together like a green seaweed.  
Her skin as brown as the bark of the evergreen trees,  
Her body as swift as the flowing wind.

Everyday, her once-cheering audience  
Ignores the woman's beauty and truthful desire,  
Fueled by their selfishness and greediness.  
Often, without thinking of the consequences,  
They deny her own integrity and her own values.

Slowly, the woman with no name stops dancing,  
Her body does not move entirely the same way.  
Her arms that once flowed, become rigid like rusty metal.  
She no longer dances the same way.  
She no longer has a name.

They used to call her "Mother Earth" or "Gaia" or "Terra."  
Although now, she is but a human consumption for the masses,  
An archaic fascination.

—Farah Lindsey-Almadani (photo: above), age 16, Washington.  
(We will publish her essay in the next issue as we ran out of space.)

## Nature's Wondrous Majesty

*Lauren Bartel's photography was inspired by the beauty of nature and landscapes that she witnessed on her numerous trips to national and state parks and preserves as well as to natural gardens in the continental U. S. See page 11 for her photographs as well as her portrait.*

"I have always been drawn to nature and natural habitats and settings, particularly those unaffected or uninterrupted by human footprints or interference. With my family and friends, I have traveled to many national and state parks and preserves and find the settings to provide the best opportunity to capture landscapes and wildlife. As much as I can, I try to use natural light and seek clean and unfiltered images. The intention is to capture the beauty of nature without affectation, adjustment, or manipulation."

## A World Without Racism

We were sorry to know that this poem was not an original work by the person who submitted it, and so it has been removed from the issue.

*Leanna Hsu, 12, New York, who submitted this poem, wrote to us on Dec. 12th, 2020:*

"I would like to apologize for plagiarizing on a poem I submitted... I am sincerely sorry and I realize now the severity of my actions. While I understand that there will be repercussions, I sincerely apologize and hope to move past these offenses. I also want to apologize to Noor Unnihar. I have a great fascination for some of her poems but it was wrong of me to use her work without permission or attribution."

We wish to extend our apologies to Ms. Noor Unnihar, the poet whose work was used by Leanna Hsu without her permission and acknowledgement. We ask for your forgiveness and appreciate your understanding. Thank you very much.

—editor

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*Lauren, age 16, is an emerging writer and photographer living in Florida. Her life passions include visual arts, literary criticism, and the natural sciences. A citizen naturalist, Lauren studies and conducts research in genetics, ornithology, marine biology and botanical sciences, donates her time to environmental and conservation causes and child literacy.*

*Please see p. 4 for another photograph by Lauren.*





*Sunset in Everglades*



*Zumwalt Meadow, King's Canyon*



*Jordan Pond, Acadia National Park*



*Coastal Maine Botanical Garden*



*The Peaks of King's Canyon*



*Sequoia National Park*





*“Stitches of Love” by Megan Fan, 17, Michigan.*

## “Overdreaming”

As one of limited means,  
I am poor in all but dreams.  
My body is light and lean,  
And in tatters hang my jeans.  
But that can’t stop me, it seems,  
From leapfrogging over sunbeams.

Sumptuous soporifics paint prismatic color schemes,  
And firework through my bloodstream.  
Reality and reverie have no seams,  
For my mind braves both extremes.  
At night sometimes I wake to screams  
And thieving fiends  
Who try to take my belongings.  
But they will never, ever steal my dreams.



—Amehja Williams, age 16, Pennsylvania. *“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.”*

## Stitches of Love

I have been studying the elements and techniques of art for more than ten years. I love painting with acrylics, gouache, and watercolor; coloring with pastels, pencils, and markers; and illustrating with my digital tablet. A prominent theme within my artworks is highlighting problems or situations in society, usually providing a sense of hope or empowerment. My submission is focused on the Covid-19 pandemic.

This piece called “Stitches of Love” was inspired by my grandparents, who have been hit the hardest by the pandemic. Despite having to completely reshape their lives to stay safe, they still smile and stay cheerful. I decided to create a digital portrait of them sewing a teddy bear and creating a poster that displays “Teddy Challenge.” This is because spotting teddy bears on the windowsills of neighborhood houses has become a fun scavenger hunt during social distancing. It has become an engaging activity that brings joy for kids and adults who may be feeling bored, stressed, or anxious. Because my grandparents keep our family feeling positive, the depiction of them making the teddy bear and poster represents how they have been spreading hope within their immediate community. The art reminds the audience how we should contribute and connect to those around us, spreading positivity to keep us going through this tough time.

While creating this portrait, I really focused on the colors. I chose to implement a bright, warm color scheme to really capture the liveliness and joy of the image while adding a relaxed ambiance with the cool tones. I definitely wanted to challenge myself in this piece by playing around with lights and shadows to create different melodramatic hues of color for the skin tones. I also experimented with different brush textures within this piece—the fluff on the teddy bear, my grandparent’s clothing, the green glass cups, etc. Although I used a digital application to paint, I gravitated towards the aesthetic of traditional oil paintings. I like how the brush strokes are clearly displayed and nothing is sharp and perfectly clean. I find this kind of textured aesthetic to be very comforting.

I hope this painting is able to find its way into the people’s hearts and create an emotional response.

—Megan Fan, age 17, Michigan.



# Piano Concerto by Christopher Joszczyk



Chopin by Chris Joszczyk

A single tall silhouette of a man enters the stage dressed in all black,  
A single lonely spotlight emits a beam of light onto the piano centered on the stage.  
The man's silhouette is illuminated by the light as he sits on the piano's bench,  
We can see the face of Chopin.  
The pianist positions himself on the bench with back obstinate and parallel to the wall.  
The pianist plays his mazurka with a sudden rush of sound,  
His fingers gliding over the white ivory keys,  
The ink notes engraved into his mind.

Each note coded with its own intended emotion rather than sound, unseen on paper.  
The steady cords serenading the people around as the man sways to the tones of the notes,  
The emotions of each note now visible,  
Each new cord resembles a new paired emotion,  
And the melancholy tones echo in the stage hall.

The pianist plays the songs inspired by infancy,  
Each cord portrays the folk music of his childhood,  
Each high note a representation nature,  
Each note shines on the oppression of Poles and the political situation of Poland.  
The notes of the mazurka inspired by his nationalist feelings and independence,  
His family torn apart and the notes mend them together,  
Sickness delays him, though only for a short time.

Slight intervals chirp between each sullen cord but live shortly.  
Between each steady cord is a sharp emotional jump, a retaliation of joy against evil.  
Fluttering of two keys rises through the sharp chords,  
Like the flapping of a bird, as the peak of the mazurka is reached.  
Nearing the final cords, morose and tainted notes fill the air,  
Becoming fainter and fainter as they continue,  
Until the final cord sounds, ending his strange eventful history.  
The spotlight fades,  
And the piano is deserted again.

—Christopher Joszczyk, age 13, Connecticut.



## Piano Concerto

Pojedyncza wysoka sylwetka mężczyzny wchodzi na scenę ubrana na czarno.  
Pojedyncze samotne światło punktowe emituje wiązkę na fortepian wyśrodkowany na scenie.  
Sylwetka mężczyzny jest oświetlona, gdy siedzi na ławce fortepianu,  
I możemy zobaczyć twarz Szopena.  
Ustawia się na ławce z opartymi plecami równolegle do ściany.  
Gra mazurka z nagłym przypływem dźwięku,  
Jego palce ślizgają się po białych klawiszach z kości słoniowej,  
Atramentowe nutki wyrte w jego umyśle.  
Każda nuta jest...

*We thought you might enjoy seeing how Polish language looks like.* —editor.

*"The portrait of Chopin was a grid drawing piece and was inspired by my love of music, piano, and my Polish heritage. After drawing the portrait, I decided to write about who Chopin was as a composer, and I was given the idea to write a poem by one of my friends. Throughout my research process, I learned much more about the life and compositions of Chopin. Since I was already familiar with speaking Polish, writing my poem in Polish as well as in English seemed like a unique way to highlight Chopin's background. I have played piano since the age of seven, so when I thought of who to draw, a Polish composer was someone I admired and was inspired by. The poem was another way for me to express my admiration for Chopin, as well as my love of writing."*

*He adds: "One of my most memorable trips to Poland occurred last year, where my family and I went to Oświęcim and visited the Auschwitz Concentration Camps while we stayed there. I was able to see and experience a piece from the history of Poland with my own eyes. I am currently in 7th grade and I plan to become an engineer in the future or take a career involving science or math."*

# Huang: Yellow

## I. “Look at the Stars”

*Ah-Ma* always said that when I was born, I came out laughing. It was a steaming hot day, and my face held the hugest smile she'd ever seen.

In that moment, she whispered to my mother. “Huang. That will be her name. Bright and happy, like sunshine.”

It was a strange name for a girl. *Huang*, meaning yellow; a surname in Taiwan. But it fit me. I was their new light in the world.

That night, *Ah-Ma* said, as the doctors prepared me for an unexpected surgery, my smile never faltered. She stroked my wispy hair, humming along to the English song on the radio as the doctor slipped on his gloves.

“Look at the stars.”

## II. “Look How They Shine for You”

I'd always been told I was special. The popsicle man would give me my red-bean popsicle with an extra “on the house.” The lady at the convenience store would smile her mismatched teeth at me, then tell Mama how brave she was; but I was too busy selecting *baozi* to care. As I waddled away, clutching the steaming bag to my chest, all I could think about was the mouthwatering aroma wafting through the humid air. Nothing else mattered.

At least, not until I went to school.

When Lin *Laoshi* led me to the front, in my yellow dress, the class fell silent. “Huang is a little different, so please give her an extra-special welcome.”

Their eyes bored into me. A boy snickered.

Lin *Laoshi* sat me next to a girl in pigtails. Immediately, she edged away. “What’s wrong with your arms?”

The boy who'd laughed glanced over. “She might not talk. Remember, she’s special.”

My smile wavered as I grappled for a crayon. “There’s nothing wrong. See?” Closing my fist, I scribbled onto the girl’s notebook.

She gaped at me, ripping the page away. “You ruined it!”

I’m not proud of it, but I started to cry. Loudly.

I sat through the car ride home in teary silence,

as my mother babbled on. “*Mei-mei*, don’t worry. When you’re special, all the stars shine down on you. Sometimes you’ll go through hard things because you’re strong enough to handle it.”

I said nothing, only replying as we pulled into our driveway.

“Mama, I don’t want to be special anymore.”

## III. “And Everything You Do”

As the years passed, I retreated into someone I wasn’t.

Instead of yellow, I began to wear greys and blues. Inconspicuous colors.

Despite the constant heat, I wore long sleeves to school, even gloves. That way no one would look at me and see something wrong, something “special.”

It got to a point where I stopped laughing.

*Ah-Ma* eventually tired of my moping. “Alright, up,” she said, tapping on the bed frame.

She guided me to an office that smelled of old cigars and incense, where a handful of journalists typed furiously into their documents.

As *Ah-Ma* bustled to the front with her manuscripts, I edged toward the computers, peering over a woman’s broad shoulders.

She turned, and I flinched.

But she hardly noticed my arms, eyes trained on my face. “Interested in writing?”

I hesitated. “I haven’t tried.”

“It’s a real treat.” She typed a few words, then paused. “I know things are hard. But when you write, you can let it all out; disguise it or leave it bare. People won’t care how you look. It’s either a good story or bad; no more, no less.”

*Ah-Ma* returned, dipping her head to the lady. “Wang Fang. Good to see you.”

“Someday this girl is going to take your spot in this newspaper.” She winked at me.

And soon enough, I took up writing with an energy that became a fervor. I willingly cooped myself up in my room, hunkered over my laptop.

It was hard-going, at first. My mind worked too fast for my hands. I’d lose my thoughts by the time my



limbs had found the letters, smashing my fist in frustration.

But writing took me away from all pity. I immersed myself in politics, in ethical questions, in hooks and rhetoric. My words were a haven, a golden sanctuary amidst the gloom.

When the letter came that I'd won my first essay competition, I screamed.

"Mei-mei?" Mama rushed to my side.

I shook my head. "There has to be a mistake—this can't be right."

"Huang! Oh, I have to show *Ah-Ma!*" She beamed, extricating the paper from my trembling hands.

*Ah-Ma* rushed into the room on wobbly legs, her entire face aglow.

"Huang, you are your name. You are our sunshine." Wiping a tear from the folds beneath her eyes, she pressed the letter into my hands. "You cherish this now, *mei-mei*. You're a real writer."

Slowly, I began to smile, then to laugh. The next day, I wore a yellow dress to school, waving as I passed people in the halls.

"Huang, you seem happy today," said my friend Li-wei. "Did anything happen?"

I paused, then shook my head.

"No, I'm just happy to be me."

#### IV. "They Were All Yellow"

Growing older, I grew happier. As I continued to write, I looked to music for inspiration.

My taste evolved as I explored forms of literature. I tried indie. Jazz. Even a little rap, though that didn't suit me quite as well.

While searching, I came across a Coldplay song I'd never heard: "Yellow." Laughing, I pressed 'play' and allowed the softly strummed guitar to bring me far away.

*"Look at the stars; look how they shine for you,*

*And everything you do—they were all yellow.*

*Your skin and bones turn into something beautiful."*

The thing is, the color *huang* doesn't just mean "happy" or "sunshine." *Huang* is the emperor's color. It

means beautiful. It means strong.

I think my messed-up limbs have become something beautiful. They aren't porcelain, but they're powerful. They're capable.

Maybe the stars do shine for me. They chose me for a reason.

They are yellow, and so am I.

I am *Huang*.



#### Mandarin Words:

*Ah-Ma*: paternal grandmother

*baozi*: Taiwanese steamed buns

*huang*: yellow

*laoshi*: teacher, professor

*mei-mei*: little girl, little sister; used to address young girls

—Anna Kiesewetter, 17, Washington.

*"I am half-Asian and half-Caucasian, with Welsh and German roots on my father's side and Taiwanese roots from my mother. English is my main language, though I know bits of Mandarin. Growing up, I have always longed for connection with my Asian culture. Being biracial, there is a strange duality of simultaneously having no community and multiple. Though I am intrinsically part of both Asian and Caucasian cultures, I still am unintentionally alienated around peers of both groups, causing me to feel a lack of cultural connection.*

*"'Yellow' was thus an attempt to revisit some of my roots; it is a realistic fiction story which references my Taiwanese heritage, with details derived from my three visits to Taiwan, as well as the experience of my three-year-old cousin, who has amniotic band syndrome, leaving her with malformed limbs. I wrote this piece hoping that she would read it when she is older, as a reminder that she is beautiful and capable. In my opinion, empowering young girls like her is so important and so necessary in today's society. We live in this world where imperfection is constantly ingrained within us, with insecurities and disabilities seen as flaws rather than embraced as integral parts of ourselves. Even despite all the negativity our 'flaws' can bring us, we have the power and might to succeed and make a difference in the world. Thus, 'Yellow' pinpoints this strength of character in hopes of someday achieving the future I envision, a world where we grow to appreciate our insecurities and build each other up; a world where true happiness and peace can thrive."*

## A Beautiful Culture that Shaped Me

Growing up, I've always been aware of one thing: I am Haitian. The traditions and culture of Haiti manifested in my life from my earliest memories. I would speak English in school and Haitian Creole at home. My Sundays were spent attending church service at a Haitian church, as most Haitians are Christians. Every New Year's Day I would wake up to the pleasantly aromatic Soup Joumou or Squash Soup. The Haitian culture and its traditions were mine. And I am proud to be able to have it.

However, the love I have for my culture and ethnic background, has not always been reciprocated from my peers. After the global condolences and sorrow from the 2010 earthquake settled, the media stopped showing the destruction. Then the media began to show the immense, expected poverty, and the jokes started. I remember being in middle school with a large Haitian and overall Caribbean population, and my peers would often degrade Haitians. My classmates would limit all Haitians to being dirty, poor, and uneducated. Calling someone Haitian subconsciously turned into an insult for my peers.

Though it was done in a joking manner, their perspective and the global opinion of my ethnic background left me feeling annoyed. I was annoyed at their ignorance. I was annoyed at the media. I was annoyed at the fake relief efforts from several major organizations. I was annoyed at the fact that people I identified with were being used as the butt of a joke for struggling after a catastrophic natural disaster. The one sided narrative of Haiti overlooked the Haitian culture I knew. It overlooked the rebuilding efforts on a local level. It overlooked the doctors and nurses from the Haitian diaspora returning to aid those in Haiti. It overlooked the persevering nature of Haitians.

Although my love for my heritage remained steadfast, I never fully understood why Haiti is only portrayed in a negative light, and why everyone willfully accepted this narrative.

Last summer family friends who lived in Haiti came to visit for a month. One afternoon the two teenagers from that family and I were discussing the media and global opinions of Haiti. I showed them the images that popped up when you searched Haiti on

Google and they immediately bursted out laughing. The dust covered roads and destroyed buildings, were not the sole version of Haiti they knew. They couldn't believe the array of photos of their home only showed earthquake destruction and poverty. They proceeded to show me their renovated school, which has a beautiful courtyard, basketball courts, and a field where students often play soccer. This Haiti is unknown.

Regardless of the global opinions on Haiti, as I grew up, I constantly reaffirmed to myself that Haiti's culture, traditions, and people are beautiful. I love hearing my grandmother describing her early life in Haiti. Though I could never imagine cutting off a chicken's head and removing the feathers, I'm completely enthralled by her stories. I love hearing my mom recount the glorious Christmas celebrations and parties filled with time honored traditions. I love hearing my grandfather sharing how he taught my mom and her siblings how to swim in the ocean. I love hearing how my uncle wrote and published a book in Haiti during his 20s. I love hearing stories about the culture and environment that produced the most important people in my life.



I'm filled with a sense of pride stemming from the fact that I'm Haitian. I'm filled with the honor of being from the first black Republic. I'm filled with a hardworking and persevering nature. I'm filled with a history of beautiful art and wood working. I'm filled with Soup Joumou on New Year's Day. I'm filled with church on Sundays. I'm filled with the ability to speak Haitian Creole. I'm filled with a rich culture and history that I wouldn't trade for anything.

—Christina Chaperon, 17, Massachusetts.

“We are all beads strung together  
on the same thread of love.”

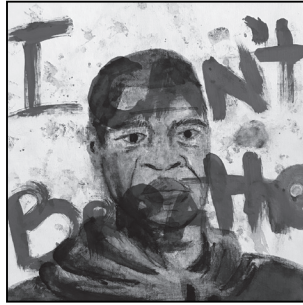
—Amma, the Hugging Saint



## If We Lose This Battle

If we lose this battle  
There will still be police officers  
Who will still see red like a bull  
When they see a person  
Who is of different descent.  
If we lose this battle  
There will be children, our children,  
Who feel as if we are on the verge  
Of slavery.  
If we lose this battle  
The fight will be suppressed  
But the issue will live on  
Into the next generations  
And they will be forced to fight again.  
If we lose this battle  
The people seeking justice  
For their late companions  
Will only be seen  
As uncontainable terrorists.  
If we lose this battle  
We lose the title  
Of the Land of the Free  
And all men will not be born equal.  
If we lose this battle  
We lose a force whose job is to protect.  
We lose the next generation's future.  
We lose our chance for change.  
We lose our right to justice.  
We lose America.

—Katharine Tena, 15, Pennsylvania. Photo by Linda James.



### #ifeeluseless

i'm scared and i'm lost,  
the world is raging outside as  
the people march for justice and change  
when all i can do is heart black squares and post links  
from the safety behind a screen  
and i want to break down the door and scream my anger  
from this murderous, intolerant earth  
to the unfeeling sky

—Claire Zhu, 15, California. "It is about the protests for Black Lives Matter, and how as people are taking actions, many children feel unable to contribute. We kids don't have money to donate, and can't join the protests, because parents find it unsafe, so all we can do is act on social media."

## Yellow Peril, Black Power

*My recent conversations with my mom about the Black Lives Matter movement inspired the poem below. Due to our language barriers, it can be challenging to clearly explain the racial inequities faced by Black Americans today. However, having conversations with family members about BLM is one step in the broader goal of addressing America's systemic racism. While we call out acts of racism from strangers, it's especially important to acknowledge the same views from some of our family members. Anti-Blackness within Asian communities is frequently overlooked; competition between minority groups only hinders progress for all.*

Mā mā: Stiff cardboard, shoulders scrape  
arms, fingers rub masks, hoarse  
voices hug thick June air and swallow again,  
blue shirts kneel, wait, breathe,  
see phones,  
shoot.

Mā mā: You read: Black people are  
lazy. You slide down greasy  
screens, again, you text sisters and  
brothers of windows cracked, businesses  
lost, Black people are lazy because, because, because.

Mā mā: Decades ago, you arrived,  
weary, giddy, latching onto a country  
called beautiful. You say:  
Asians made it, why can't they?  
Mā mā, love the country, love your grit, love  
the foundation you built. Model minority  
still has minority.

Mā mā: Because of Black people who  
fought histories ago and yesterday  
and today, you can see the beautiful.  
Because of Black people who  
paved the paths for more, for immigrants,  
for every color, in ink and legislation.

Mā mā: Because know this  
country nurtures white  
tales, stows away Black  
and brown and yellow, and  
feigns innocence.

—Tina Huang, 16, Virginia.



## Poems by Laurence School Students, California

### A Different Answer

What is freedom?  
People ask me.  
What does it mean?  
To truly  
be free.  
To fly above the clouds?  
Or to dive beneath the surface?  
To feel the loud chatter  
of laughter in a crowd,  
Or to sit in the quiet, in peace?  
I sit there for a long time,  
Contemplating,  
Silently thinking.  
And I then realize,  
And I then answer:  
It's different for everyone.  
One may wish  
to feel the salty breeze on their face,  
While the other  
Wishes to be in a quiet still garden,  
Dirty hands, muddy feet  
But a gleam of satisfaction for either person.  
Freedom can mean anything,  
But to answer your question thoroughly,  
Freedom means whatever makes you feel  
Carefree,  
Joyful,  
At peace with yourself  
And your surroundings.  
And yet,  
It's a different answer  
For everyone.

—Mae Mae Gad, Grade 6.

\* \* \* Dance \* \* \*

Every movement is a story

A picture

As you feel the movements everything seems like a surface

Breaking, twisting

Pulling you towards it

Music pounding in your ears

When you feel every movement zap your body

Dance helps you move forward from tragedy

Like light in the dark, it moves you

Pushes you for every step of the journey

The moves flourish a fresh start ->

### A Virus

A virus  
Hope  
We look  
Down the streets  
Where cars used to drive  
Only a few  
Cars left to ride  
You see  
Windows  
Doors  
Shut  
Schools  
Friends  
Lives  
Disappeared  
People saying  
Don't let me die  
A virus  
But hope is not gone  
Windows open  
Light shines through  
One day  
We will come  
Together  
Friends  
Schools  
The world  
When we grow up  
Our great grandchildren  
Will tell  
The story  
Of the virus  
We lived in  
We are living history  
And we will make it through  
—Brooke Derby, Grade 5.

### Black Lives Matter

Protesters on the streets  
Masks and signs  
Policemen  
Racism  
They stand up  
Because George  
Was killed  
A policeman  
Wrong hold, and too long  
Because George was killed  
That police officer  
didn't get arrested for days  
Protesters start stealing  
Looting  
Rioting  
Windows broken  
Shattered  
Businesses and employees' hearts  
Racism  
Trump sends armed military  
To shoot  
It isn't fair  
Why?  
Racism  
Black and White  
Don't deny the fact  
That we aren't treated all the same  
People are created as equal  
But they aren't treated like they are  
What?  
Racism  
Protesters on the streets  
Stand up  
Because George was killed  
Black lives matter  
—Lyla Hershkovitz, Grade 5.

-> From the past

Dance

A energizing, inviting, beautiful feeling

Vibrating from your heart

Inspiring ground-breaking actions

From you, even others

Your feelings activate bold, bright strokes

Like a canvas with delicate strokes of paint

A masterpiece

Dance

—Sloan Butler, Grade 5.



## Fifteen Years, Reworked

A haze of bubbly laughter echoing through monkey bars and swings,  
Crayon smudged outside the lines,  
shaky blanket-and-pillow forts...  
Memories unfold like a picture book

My mother, rolling on ballet tights,  
a new pair every week to replace the rips  
Me, sat down in front of a piano, instructed to play for an hour a day  
while my fingers ached for Legos instead of keys

A mess of adult voices reverberating  
over my head, shrinking me smaller and smaller,  
dropping phrases and words like “not trying hard enough,” and “disappointment,”  
I blocked them out as best as I could

As the years passed, more inches marked on a wall,  
Books became my passion,  
alluring in pages both fresh or yellowed,  
an escape of life into stories preserved with ink

The escape never lasted long  
Reality was inescapable, unavoidable,  
shoved at my face through barked commands  
to do something useful instead of wasting my time on imagination and pleasure

Now, the premonition of my future looms  
I sit fourteen hours a day, behind desks stuck with gum and carvings  
or at home in front of textbooks and packets of SAT prep  
Bleary eyes, dreamless sleep

Fifteen years culminated into a few things in my constant awareness:  
a yawning, bleak expanse in my chest,  
only ever filled by clawing fear or crippled with burning anxieties

Fifteen years of existence shutting everything I’ve cherished away in a box,  
Like old, worn childhood toys smiling cluelessly in ignorance of what was to come,  
Never to be used again.

—Claire Zhu, 15, California. “My poem, *Fifteen Years, Reworked*, is about the pressure and expectations placed on me growing up in a strict Chinese American family.”

## My Mama is Xiwangmu, Queen Mother of the West

My Mama watches over the Silk Road,  
peaches of immortality in her hair.  
She has the tail of a leopard and teeth  
of a tiger, standing nobly in her mountains,  
hidden by divine trees. My Mama rules the stars  
and everything in between, so I can play with the foxes  
and the moon-hare in the valleys, waltzing  
with the clouds that drum songs of jade.

Her long sleeves are paved with gold—  
one around my shoulders, the other  
opening the Milky Way for me. The people sing  
in her azure palace, their voices carrying  
into the garden, past pillars of bliss, past the resting ox,  
where the *pantao* tree stands. After three thousand years,  
when the peaches ripen, My Mama gifts them to me.

—Jolin Chan, 17, California. Photo, above.



Claire Zhu, 15, California.  
Also see her poem on p. 17.



Jolin Chan is a Chinese American writer and student living in California. She writes to pay homage to her heritage (see below), as well as address a variety of themes, including immigration, loss, unfamiliarity, history, and culture. See p. 31.

## An Interview with Julieta Martinez, 16, founder of *Tremendas* platform

**L**orena Sosa is a 17-year-old writer and speaker based in Orlando, Florida. She is the cofounder of the “Voices of Change” blog that uses art and storytelling to inspire climate action. Writing with a focus on the impacts of climate change, Lorena hopes to bring clarity to how climate change will socially stratify people of color and low-income communities and break down misconceptions surrounding climate change. Julieta Martinez is a resilient 16-year-old feminist and climate activist who has helped unite young Chilean women within her *Tremendas* platform.

Lorena had an opportunity to talk to Julieta about her personal inspirations, hopes for an intergenerational dialogue within the activist community, and her experience as a founder of *Tremendas*, with the goal of sharing how we can transform our concerns into motivations to create change. Some excerpts:

**LS:** I love that you value the voices of young people. What inspired you to found *Tremendas*? Was it the lack of youth representation?

**JM:** *Tremendas* has a focus on empowering women. It's a space for young women to share their ideas and initiate change because, for many centuries in history, women's stories have been tossed aside.

Young women, who have dreams and want to be empowered, can share their talents and stories, while connecting with other girls who are motivated to do the same. We want girls to have the opportunity to explore everything from music to technology in a socially supportive space. Recognizing this generation's motivation to mobilize others has motivated us to invite young women from all over the country.

*I was reading about your attendance at social conferences, and I came across the Fiis Innovation. What is it and how did it impact you as an activist?*

**JM:** It was where I was first exposed to the world of innovation. It's a Chilean festival that unites innovators from all over the world, bringing together two things that I find precious: the mind and music, allowing you to meet innovative entrepreneurs and musicians.



There I met Arturo Soto, one of the greatest influences in my life. He grew up in a very poor neighborhood in Antofagasta, where there was a lot of violence. In the midst of violence, he found peace in the sea (the water eased his worries). Years later, this peace inspired him to create a project where he would

take teenagers who face violence and other vulnerable obstacles, to the sea to play. And there he was, at the Fiis-sharing how he wanted to show these kids that even in the face of adversity, progress can be made.

Arturo left me in awe, only capable of thinking “wow.” We actually became family-friends and, through our friendship, he shared his stories and experiences with me, helping me understand that I wanted to create a community of young women fighting for a better world.

*How was your experience at COP25 as a youth activist?*

**JM:** On one hand, I was very frustrated, because the representatives of powerful companies would talk for two or three hours and then leave, achieving very little regarding the standards necessary for our environment. It was sad to not see people in power instigate change.

However, I was able to meet many young people from all over Latin America. We all realized how South-Americans are already being affected by the climate crisis and that we shared the same problems of inaction within our own countries. With so many of us there representing our countries, we had to do something.

Every day, we shared our concerns with each other, eventually writing them out into a list of demands for problems that we needed solved immediately. This included a demand for the ratification of the Escazu Agreement that requires civil society to be educated on the climate crisis and defends the defenders of the planet (because there are environmental activists who are being persecuted, monitored, or tortured). For it to function, a certain number of countries need to sign and ratify it.

We were able to have our own conference room where we voiced our concerns to people in power. We knew we were making a change.





## Julietta Martinez, *continued*

*How do you think the lack of youth voices can be resolved in decision-making processes?*

**JM:** It's a recurring problem and it's what I witnessed at COP25. If youth have a voice, we also have to have a vote.

Within team settings, I constantly see competition arising between people, when in reality, collaboration is key. What we most need to have is the power to gather, connect, and take actions to overcome the climate crisis.

Young people work very well together. But, we also need an intergenerational dialogue because there are people from other generations who have power to create change. With so many groups beginning to focus their attention on youth, we can create long-standing change and most importantly, learn from the experiences of previous generations.

*What do you recommend for youth who want to initiate action on an issue but don't know where to start?*

**JM:** I understand because I also started alone. Nobody teaches you how to take action so you're faced to think "where do I start?"

Start looking for role models within your community. Ask yourself- "who are the youth instilling a positive community impact?" When a person your age tells you they're organizing a community project, it encourages you to believe that "if they can do it, I can too."

Finding support among your peers helps and if that support doesn't exist yet, you have to be the first pillar that invites and encourages an active community. Strive to be an example of the change you hope to see by starting conversations about a cause that motivates you and working to mobilize your community to help resolve it.

*In an interview, you were referred as the "Chilean Greta Thunberg" and in response, you stated that we have to listen to the ideas of 'all the Gretas in the world.' Why is it so important to unite our generation?*

**JM:** It must be recognized that if Greta exists, there are more boys and girls all over the world mobilizing their communities for different causes. If space was given to recognize Greta's accomplishments, then it should be given to other changemakers too. The world has to recognize their talents and activism. Giving these young people a space gives us the opportunity to connect and catalyze a chain of action.

—Lorena Sosa, 17, Florida.

## Meanwhile

We are on a giant rock hurtling through space.  
The chances of life are almost zero,  
But here we are.

And you want to end it  
With fossil fuels,  
Animal agriculture,  
Single use plastics,  
Inefficient transportation,  
And deforestation.

You go on business as usual.

Meanwhile,  
The past three decades have been the warmest in  
recorded history.  
Meanwhile,  
Sea levels are rising.  
Meanwhile,  
Animals are going extinct.

We can no longer go on business as usual.  
The kids know *we can no longer go on business as usual*  
The kids are staging protests  
The kids are starting a revolution  
And you tell the kids,  
"You don't know what you're talking about"  
When the kids cite scientific studies you say,  
"They don't know what they're talking about"  
But when are you going to admit,  
You just don't want to hear what  
they have to say?

—Leah Johnson, 14, Virginia.



### Our 32nd Year Special Sale on Back Issues

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# Poems by Alison Karki



## 1. my mamu's eyes

those deep pools of honey  
that delicately  
and yet so irresistibly  
lure me into your unyielding gaze.  
those entrancing orbs of amber  
that remind me  
of the earth's soil after it rains—  
they bring me back to life.  
in the inky darkness and chasms  
of your irises,  
i get lost;  
but when the sunlight strikes your eyes,  
they are clear,  
liquefying into the sun's golden rays  
like burning flames.  
those eyes create sunsets of their own.  
and when those two small chestnut worlds  
known as your eyes  
dance around me—  
the way mars orbits around the sun—  
i know i am found.

—who says brown eyes aren't beautiful?

## 2. To celebrate womxn

wind plays with her hair  
she laughs, embracing the thrill;  
a brief moment, free.

—liberation

i stand up again,  
grit my teeth and take deep breaths—  
for i am woman.

—resilience

through my dark, brown eyes,  
lashes collecting my tears,  
i notice your strength.

—from one girl to another

painted "pink" for war?  
"delicate" hands clenched and raised—  
don't worry, we bite.  
—do not downplay our strength

## 3. My Mother's Tongue

My mother swallowed  
her mother's tongue.

Their tongues are  
razor-sharp  
deadly  
poisonous—

hissing at the generations of men that have disrespected them.

But their tongues are the damp soil  
needed for their delicate words to germinate and grow.

Their cracked tongues jab and sting like swarms of honey bees,  
but only the sharpest tongues  
can produce the sweetest words  
that ooze out and flow like warm honey.

I recite their precious words;  
my mouth being the furnace  
that transforms my tongue into piercing shards of broken pottery  
and my words being the glue that mends the pieces back together.

And every time I think I have lost my tongue  
given to me by my mother (and my mother's mother),  
the sharp stinging resurfaces—  
and their words pour out of me again.

## 4. taken seriously

maybe if i masked my melanin with whiteness--  
painted over the chocolate soil of my land and replaced it with pale  
sand—

maybe then i could be taken seriously.

maybe if i masked my femininity with manliness & "machismo"—  
concealed my so-called vulnerability with erupted aggression  
and

dissolved my womanly curves and bouncy breasts and  
drenched myself in toxic masculinity  
maybe then i could be taken seriously.

i just wish for once

i could be taken seriously.

i wish i wish i wish

—Alison Karki, age 17, New Jersey and Nepal. She is passionate about writing, politics, and the arts—with a focus on gender equality and reproductive health for women. She is interested in giving women access to feminine hygiene products and advocating for education for all women in developing countries. She has started the MegAli Foundation to achieve that goal.



# Reclamation

I lived my youth as a cold blooded creature  
 soft and precise, careful to tap on the doorknob four times  
 and to be quiet in public  
 lest I anger those near me  
 I grew up hearing those phrases far too many times  
*(Go back to your own country! Are you even legal here? Speak English, we're in America!)*  
 and though Chinese and Spanish rolled off my tongue so easily  
 I had nowhere to return to  
 For those countries run in my blood but not on my birth certificate  
 I became trapped between two states of being, split between one country and the next  
 and so I learned to be a cold blooded creature  
 I was quiet and observant, I felt as though I had to constantly guard my ethnicity  
 a mother guarding her nest of a thousand beating hearts  
 I stored it deep in my stomach, a small fiery ball of life  
 running and heating up my blood  
 Because in my veins runs tumbling mountains and thin air in a perpetual autumn, plantains  
 being fried underneath the hum of the city  
 and also the humidity of an island, the soft sweet smell of rain covering a rice field, resting my  
 hot cheek on cold tile floors  
 I write these moments down, I write a million words trying to capture the nostalgia I feel when a  
 particular scent washes over me and I am in Taiwan once more, I hear the sound of a million  
 locusts and it's summer or when  
 I hear someone speak in Spanish on the sidewalk, their words are warm and deep and I am in  
 Colombia once more, I am young and clinging on to my grandmother, I see her blond hair and  
 she puts blush on her cheeks with red lipstick  
 The writing warms me and chokes up my throat, I am a cold blooded creature no more,  
 my blood and life and past spills onto the page and ignites it with flames  
 my life flutters in front of me, writing has given my identity back to me  
 —Helena Muñoz, age 17, Pennsylvania. She has both Colombian and Taiwanese heritage.



## The American Dream

\* the land of eternal spring is almost a memory,  
 \* years running have clouded it  
 \* almost there.  
 the train tracks spared one leg,  
*la migra* was not so kind  
 worth it.  
 barbed wire ahead,  
 the American dream in sight  
 Deported.  
 crisis at home,  
 death everywhere  
 a virus slowed life to a trickle; the epicenter.  
 got out just in time  
 China isn't safe for family.  
 \* the land of opportunity approaches,

not welcome, blamed  
 Beaten.  
 it's all a blur  
 a jog through the neighborhood  
 memories of a lifetime  
 passing by the barbershop and preschool  
 family's at home  
 siren wails in the distance  
 approaching, hands up  
 everything turns black and white  
 Shot.  
 the American dream?  
 a nightmare.  
 wake up

—Viveka Chaudhry, age 14, Indian American, Maryland.

*Viv's inspiration was the current events—the Black Lives Matter movement and Covid-19 pandemic. She says she has learned about the struggles of racial discrimination of minorities. She depicts perspective of three different minorities as they experience the difficult realities of racial injustice.*

# The Shuttle Bus Towards Dawn

*Adapted from real-life experience; all names of characters are fictional.*

Sitting by the window, I watched as trees flashed back and blurred into dark-green shadows. Interspersed street lights streaked beautifully shimmering strings. Occasional bikers passed along the road. Vague outlines of windmills wavered far away. All reminded me that I was not in the bustling city of Beijing back home, but in a quiet town near The Hague in the Netherlands.

I sat with Mia, my homestay buddy, on the daily shuttle bus. Every day before dawn, it would first stop at Mia's house, then pick up my Beijing classmate Kai and her buddy Emma at the next stop, and then with more students along the route, head for the forum of the Model United Nations (MUN) conference.

That winter, I was on my school's study abroad program and participating in an international MUN in The Hague. It was not unusual that I travelled to other countries, but it was the first time ever I had stayed with a local family. Nervous but excited, I greeted Mia and her family after my Beijing classmates disbanded and met their respective host families. It turned out that the whole family was very friendly. I got on especially well with Mia. I really enjoyed cooking pancakes and chips with her at leisure. She was so kind and warm that I soon felt at home.

Every day, when I got on the shuttle bus to the forum with Mia, I couldn't wait to meet my Beijing classmate Kai and share my wonderful homestay experience with her. As I talked with Kai in Chinese on the way, Mia usually sat and chatted with her friend Emma, who was Kai's buddy.

One snowy evening, after we got home from the forum, I had a sort of feeling that something was wrong with Mia but didn't know what it was exactly. When I was upstairs in my room, I overheard a conversation between Mia and her father. At first, I could only tell Mia was upset from her voice. As her voice grew louder and louder, I noticed she was crying. Then I caught fragments like *"she's like a baby"* and *"I've done so much to make her happy but..."* She was talking about me. I froze.

Drowning in a flood of mixed feelings: confused, guilty, hurt... and even kind of frightened, I felt tears welling up but tried my best not to let them fall.

During dinner, Mia and I ate without a word for the first time. Finally, I broke the silence and asked her what happened. After a long pause, Mia said in a

low voice with repressed emotions, "I heard it from Emma...you told Kai that you didn't like the food here." I was absolutely shocked at that moment since I never said anything like that. I had no idea what was going on, but she went straight back to her room before I could explain more.

As snow fell quietly outside, I kept tossing and turning in bed, thinking hard to figure out what had happened. Finally, I recalled that one day on the bus, I told Kai something like, *"Although I've heard other classmates dislike the food here, I love it so much in my host family."* Emma is a Dutch-born-Chinese who can only understand a few basic Chinese phrases. It was probable that Emma caught fragmented phrases such as *"dislike...food...host family"* and drew the conclusion that I was complaining about food in Mia's family.

That's it! I was just about to jump up and rush into Mia's room to offer an explanation. But taking a step back, I reflected on myself: Mia had done so much for me, and I had always been grateful secretly, but I had never acknowledged to her my thanks for all her kindness and caring. I decided to apologize. But more importantly, to thank. I sat up and began to write a short letter to Mia—to clarify everything, the misunderstanding, and so much more.

The snow continued to fall the next morning. After reading the letter I slipped under her door, Mia came up and hugged me. The hug was quiet, but big and meltingly warm.

Things went back to the way they'd been before. Or perhaps, not exactly. After that day, I always spoke to Kai on the bus in English, our shared language, and tried to engage Mia and Emma more in our conversation. Murmurs between two duos gradually transformed into hearty laughter of four.

Sitting by the window, I looked up from my desk into the bustling darkness of a typical Beijing night. Cars flashed by at a distance. Passersby's noise rose and faded from time to time. All of a sudden, I caught sight of snowflakes falling outside. My thought couldn't help flashing back to a quiet town a year before...blurred shadows of trees, streams of street lights, the hug of a smiling girl, and the shuttle bus full of laughter travelling towards dawn.

A week later, a Dutch family received a *Happy New Year* card alongside a package of presents from Beijing.

—Jiayi Liao, 17, Beijing, People's Republic of China.



# 2020 Skipping Stones Honor Award Winners

★ Emily Yen, 10, Texas, & Aadhya Rakesh, 10, New Jersey, & Aily Wei, 10, New Jersey

★ Ms. Milman's Students at Laurence School, California

★ Montserrat Llacuna, 12, Massachusetts

★ Christopher Jozczyk, 13, Conn., & Sabrina Guo, 14, New York, & Leah Johnson, 14, Virginia

★ Claire Zhu, 15, California, & Katharine Tena, 15, Penn., & Siddhartha Chakilam, 15, India

★ Farah Lindsey-Almadani, 16, Washington, & Tina Huang, 16, Virginia

★ Xiaohong (Helen) Gui, 17, New York, & Jolin Chan, 17, California

★ Lauren Bartel, 16, Florida, & Srinjoyi Lahiri, 17, Texas, & Megan Fan, 17, Michigan

★ Anna Kiesewetter, 17, Washington, & Christina Chaperon, 17, Massachusetts

★ Alison Karki, 17, New Jersey, & Lorena Sosa, 17, Florida, & Jiayi Liao, 17, P.R. China



**Hearty Congratulations** to all our winners! We received so many outstanding entries this year that we ran out of space in this issue. So we have a dozen writings “waiting under the wings” for our next issue. —editors.

## Descendants of Survivors

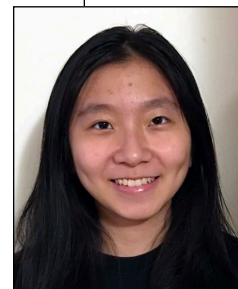
To leave skin-deep footprints, sealed into ambrosia, and bask in the clouded words of a teacher's lesson taught once, breathe away your dirtied air and charcoaled lungs, indulge in 24-carat gold, the shape of polyps, and lullaby me these promises one by one: Rid these coasts of their shackles, they do not frighten the coldness, sharpness of my thousand-year waves reflected off of your Floridian tanning beds and smoke screen swords bathed in complacency. If not lullabies, echo the anthem of your fathers and mothers of too-long-ago pasts. They bellowed from low ceilings and cramped corners, built in days with sore backs and unmoving ankles, bones rickety, brittle, in order to spare these rushing tides. Chant the tunes of your old self, mumble if not. You do not intimidate the clay in these crevices, the turquoise-deep lions of these tributaries. With or without Alexandria's bookshelves to share the dreams of your forefathers, my will does not heed orders. I stand with straightened shoulders and waterfalls, pursed purple lips and little-to-no rosy cheeks. The toes of an elder reach far greater lengths than any spectator, I assure you. Whisper, if nothing else, yearn for the blinding blue abyss of salt and plankton and days and days of yesteryears. Cherish the clock, my time and yours will compete around the horizon, twice back. Remember to bring refreshments as you count by the ticks until future arrives. You can stutter, you can cry, your voice can even crack into the hollowed out walls of a cherry blossom conch, specks of garbled syllables, but I will still hear.

—Tina Huang, 16, Virginia. Also see page 17.

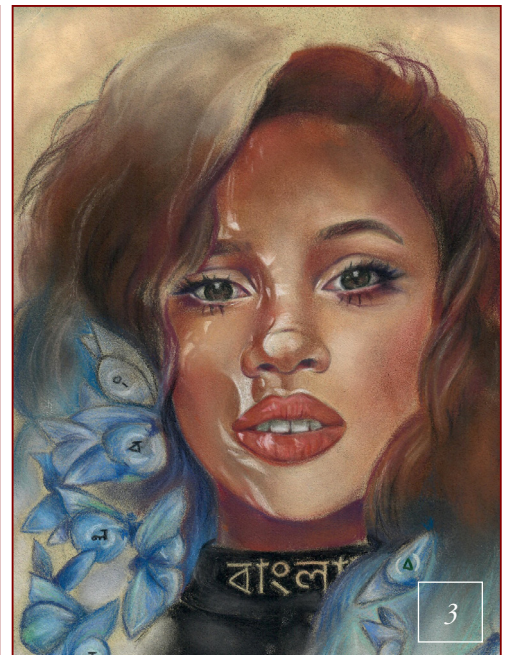
*“For me, poetry is a medium for reflection. Its flexibility and disregard of literary rules challenges me.*

*“I wrote **Descendants of Survivors** after reading an article about climate change. The article talked about how the indigenous people of present-day Florida were proactively aware of rising sea levels (they often dug up buried bodies near the coast and moved them further uphill). The sea doesn't rise in just a few days—it takes years, decades, to happen. These past inhabitants were looking out for future generations. In a sense, we are descendants of people who were aware of environmental challenges and did something about them before disaster struck. Growing up in a land-locked town, I wasn't too concerned about the state of our oceans; after reading the article, I realized my complacency.”*

—Tina Huang, 16.







1. Scrutiny 2. White Washed 3. Flight 4. Melody  
5. Loss of Language 6. Twin Sails 7. Lost in Translation  
*Art and photographs by Srinjoyi Lahiri, 17, Texas.*





## Art by Srinjoyi Lahiri

I am a 17-year-old Dallas-based visual artist creating art about the trials facing women of color in order to erase harmful stereotypes. To me, painting is about feeling alive. It's a lifeline, a pulse of energy, a reminder of all the positive energy in the world. More than an art form, it's an act in search of power, passion, and resilience in the face of fear. It's a way to cement my love for aesthetics with my passion for justice and make socially impactful creations. I believe that storytelling, through any art form, is a powerful tool when it comes to changing the world. In my art, I tackle identity, culture, and femininity, digging deep within myself to translate anger and frustration into beauty. When friends say they are able to relate to my work, I realize that art has the power to break down barriers and give diverse experiences visibility. Through painting, I want to not only honor my community, but also connect with others through shared narratives.

I founded *Young Artist Alliance* as I wanted to engage and empower young people to use art as a medium for social justice. The organization works to make the world a kinder place by empowering historically marginalized groups—women, people of color, youth—to speak our truths, spark conversations, and create change. Despite our massive voting power and complex identities, women of color are underrepresented in positions of political power: currently, only 4 senators are women of color. Although women of color are statistically more likely to be impacted by crises like climate change, gun violence, and others, we make up only 8.4 percent of congressional representatives.

Women of color lack sustainable political representation, which inhibits the possibilities for future generations of girls to become political leaders. Young people, and specifically artists, are often excluded from mainstream movements and underrepresented in political leadership. This cycle stops when girls of color are empowered to take on leadership roles in activism and civic engagement. I believe the empowerment of women, specifically through storytelling and art, com-

bats the erasure of our success, trauma, and narratives. Art encompasses so many different forms and provides so many different vessels for expressing personal experience. I see expressing your own narrative through art as a radical action that can enact change. Finding creative ways to communicate your activism is incredibly meaningful because it gets people's attention. Art makes you feel something, and also does not require a certain reading level, privilege, or view on the world to interpret it. Art has the potential to appeal to the emotional side of people and consequently provides them with the passion needed to create change. I also believe art fuels activism and activism fuels art. Art can initiate dialogues about certain issues and highlight problems that people may not have otherwise known about. Art also serves as a tool to connect others and make them feel less alone in their struggle. Building your community and connecting with other individuals who care about the issues you do is incredibly important when making change and art can serve as that bridge to connect people.

To date, we have interviewed and published 50+ inspiring artists and activists, gained a following of 600+ people, and raised \$3,000+ to provide 100+ disadvantaged Indian youth with fine arts training for an entire year. And we're just getting started.

—Srinjoyi Lahiri, 17, *Indian American, Texas.*

### The Stars Shine Bright

The stars shine bright	Who is scared of the night
All through the night	And the pretty moon's light
The crickets sing	And the stars that shine
As they flap their wings	To him are not fine
All through the night	So I show him the beauty
The moon gives light	For it is my duty
The night is long	He takes a look at the night
Don't get me wrong	And how the stars shine bright
As the night flies by	And how the crickets sing
In my bed I lie	And flap their wings
I have a beautiful dream	He rests on my arm
About Ice cream	He sees the night has no harm
I have another	We cuddle through the night
To be interrupted by my brother	As the stars shine bright.

—Aadhya Rakesh, 10, *New Jersey.*

# Sleepy Village

*My sketch is set in a South Indian village and deals with the advent of dusk.*

The water buffalo always remember their way home. They announce themselves with the soft sound of the bells around their neck. Warm earth cakes their leathery, hairless skin as they walk from the muddy pond in the middle of paddy fields. The hard, tar road clip-clops under their hooves, still warm from the wrath of the midday sun of the Indian south. The same sun is not angry anymore. He is mellow and drowsy, tucked in his blanket of pink, cottony clouds.

The water buffalo swing their heads dozily as they yawn out a few lazy moos. They see the little temple now, at the edge of the village. The temple means home. Just a few hundred meters up ahead is Rangayyah's farm, and in it are snug sheds which keep away the sharp chill of the night.

The temple is a charming little building, built upon the site of an older one. Statues of Garuda, the half-human half-eagle mount of the supreme God Vishnu, watch over the visitors. The tired gargoyles look down, and seeing that there are no devotees visiting at the time of sunset, seem to lay back and relax with their eyes, carved half closed, reflecting the sleepy serenity of their master. The aromatic camphor lamps are put out now, the last few temple bells echo in the village.

Old men start their way back to their homes, after an enjoyable evening of well-deserved idling under the shady, verdant leaves of the great old banyan tree. Lured by the smell of supper cooking, they toss their pungent half-burnt *beedis* (tobacco wrapped in a leaf) and grind them into the dry, dusty earth.

Farmers return from their toil, and soothe their sore legs with cool steel-bucket water. Rangayyah returns from his paddy fields too, and heaves himself onto the *charpoi* (cot) on the veranda of his house. Cleaning his hands in the tumbler of soapy water next to his bed, he watches his herd of buffalo trickle in. He eats the humble dinner brought to him by his wife: rice with a cup of curd and mango chutney. Content, he slips into a slumber as the last birds sing.

The old crickets hum in lethargy into the already drowsy villagers as the first signs of night arrive. The crickets are native to the land, as old as the hills, the

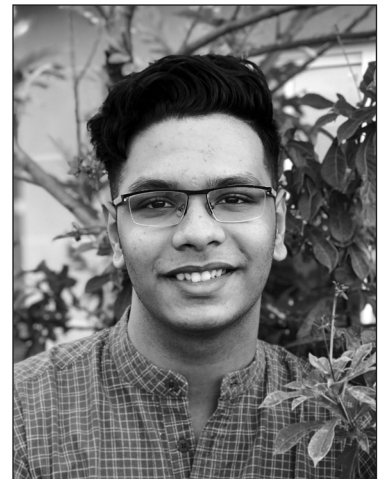
river and the night. They are of the few who are awake through the night. Some hop from the bushes and trees, and make their way to the houses of the weary sleepers. The oldest cricket takes a great leap off the banyan tree, and jumps his way towards the house of the *sarpanch*, the mayor of the village. It is an old house, and many parts of it are cold stone. The fading twilight casts azure and magenta hues over the terrace, which overlooks the fields, vast expanses of hay, crops and occasional trees.

Lonely feral dogs stroll across them, sniffing for prey, while their non-nocturnal, tame brethren lie near roots of mango trees and in the fronts of houses. They begin to snore away under the envelope of the chilly, emerging dark as rats scamper off over their legs to their warm holes on the sides of the roads.

As the moon ascends higher in the sky, night comes slowly out of her dormancy and stretches her arms out. She breathes her benevolent quiet and calm upon the little village. Children stop giggling as mothers start shushing them to sleep. Night gently strokes the villagers' eyelids, ushering in drowsy slumber. She swathes herself over the village, going from sleeper to sleeper, caressing them with her slim, tender fingers, singing to them sweet lovely lullabies and breathing into them dreams.

She has done the same for all her existence, from the beginning of time. The fields change and so do the people. From rich merchants to hardy farmers, from coconut groves to wet fields of paddy, from temples and houses of hard, gray stone to ones of metal sheets, mud and cement. She remembers all of that, the land being as old as her. Not that a sharp memory means much to her. Ever since her birth, she has had one task and one task alone: to put people to sleep. She knows nothing of great importance other than her ability to do so. But she does know that she will continue to do so...

—Siddhartha Chakilam,  
age 15, Kerala, INDIA.





## Italian Lifestyle

My trip to Italy opened my eyes to the prophetic power of cultural socialization. After a long tour of the Riccardi Medici Palace in Florence, my dad and I went on a search for our much-needed daily gelato. My dad was soon distracted from the search of gelato by an antique store ran by a middle-aged lady. Using me as a translator, my dad questioned the lady about the materials and pricing of these antiques. The lady was barely responsive. Instead, she focused on packing up the papers on her desk and searching for her keys. The message she sent was clear: she wanted us out so she could end her work day. My disgruntled dad left the store. I noticed that almost seconds after we left the store, the lady also locked up and left. When I checked my phone, everything made sense: it was lunch time. “That lady was so rude. Does she not know how to do business?,” my dad ranted. Being a frequent audience of my dad’s tedious rants, I tried to nip it in the bud by explaining the fact that it was lunchtime. This sent my dad into more fury. He argued, “That is not an excuse. Have you not seen the business people in China? Who cares about being late to lunch! Business is more important. People here don’t know how to serve customers. They are just so lazy!” This of course is a very condensed version of his rant.

This was a scenario that reoccurred over the course of our trip in Italy, and not only in small local stores. One night we walked into a Prada store, and after roaming around for 10 minutes, we were still not greeted by a salesperson. Of course, they did respond when we requested something, but the aura in the store was different. There was no constant reassuring and checkups. To be honest, being able to browse without the pressure of a salesperson following me around is a very refreshing feeling to me. However, my dad could never get used to the lack of service the sales people provided. We stayed in the store for quite a long time, and soon it reached 7 p.m., an unusually early closing time to me, someone who is from one of the largest consumerist countries in the world. The attention of the already distant salespeople seemed to drift. They tried to get us to the check out line as soon as possible, even if it meant that we would buy less stuff. This was a shock to me as the sales people in China who get off at 10 p.m. are willing and even eager to stay longer if they

feel like they have a customer who isn’t finished adding goods into their checkout bag. Every store we went to, we seemed to overstay our welcome.

While the breaks and early closing times in Italy were unusual to me, I understood the reasoning behind them. From what I have seen in Italy, most Italians strongly value their leisure time. They don’t feel like the promise of more money is worth the free time that they would be losing. That seems like a healthy, balanced life. However, I was raised in a completely different culture, and so was my dad. The emphasis was as much on money as hard work. From a young age, working into the AMs was normal to us. To outsiders, it might seem miserable, but to me this is what keeps me going. The satisfaction of knowing that I went above and beyond overweighs the lost free time. Sometimes I would think that a relaxed lifestyle would make my life happier, but too much free time actually generates anxiety inside me. I think this is the reason why it was so hard for my dad to understand the Italian lifestyle we saw. He doesn’t see extra work as a miserable thing. Instead, he loves it. Thus, I realized that the cultural background of hard work and self-destructing long hours clouded his senses and prevented him from accepting that the Italian lady doesn’t believe in longer work hours or cutting into personal time for business. The varying cultures makes people perceive the bigger frameworks of life differently. What my dad perceived as bad business was the Italian lady’s way of preventing her fulfillment from getting taken away. The culture that is heavily engraved into people’s minds prevents the existence of one objective truth.

—Xiaohong (Helen) Gui, 17, New York. “I am a high school junior who has experienced life in Shenzhen, Hong Kong, Toronto, Beijing, and New York. Everywhere I have lived, I have encountered situations that trigger cultural shock. I love looking deep into the environment around me, and writing about my experiences and discoveries.... I use writing and photography to ventilate my thoughts and emotions.”



# Empowering Virtual Conference with Congresswoman Grace Meng

With the recent outbreak of Coronavirus, maintaining a community of mentors and role models and learning as a student has been somewhat challenging. Thankfully, with some help from Syosset High School teacher Mrs. Sophia Bae, I recently had the privilege of participating in a virtual conference with US Representative Grace Meng as part of a classroom event, which provided an incredible opportunity for us to glean wisdom and grow.

As a young and driven Asian American girl myself, seeing Congresswoman Meng speak was incredibly inspiring and motivational. Being a youth in this generation, I still hear many stereotypes about how Asians are quiet and too timid to voice their opinions. Throughout the video conference, my admiration grew as I heard about Congresswoman Meng's dedication to serve her district by working in government, where there is a pressing need for diverse opinions. Meng, who is the daughter of Chinese immigrants who came to Queens in the 70s, initially felt out of place in that "America," but as she grew up, she realized her differences were actually her strengths. Now, as a legislator, she is grateful for who she is because that is what allows her to bring something new to the table. Being both Asian and a woman has brought obstacles, but her commitment to break the glass ceiling in an area where so few people like her exist is a testament to what America can be.

"Now I try to, as an American, take ownership of who I am," Meng said. "I feel like it's my responsibility to weigh in when people are not talking about issues broadly enough or not including enough people when we're talking about different issues."

Meng's journey in life, both personally and professionally, also led to her being an advocate and a voice for those who are underrepresented, and reinforced in her the importance of solidarity and unity amongst people who are often unheard. She provided insight on her experience growing up in America and what it's like to be a local elected official in Congress today, especially emphasizing the importance of being open and listening to others. For example, because of one

student's emphatic letter, Meng worked many years on the women's rights issue of Menstrual Equity, meeting many young people and advocates from all across the country. While she had never thought of the issue before, by listening and caring about her constituents, Meng helped collectively mobilize tangible change, and now women who go to New York City shelters are able to get these products for free. It was extremely encouraging to learn even student voices really can reach those in charge, especially as we aspire to help those around us.

Reflecting on how recent events like the Covid-19 pandemic have impacted her as a lawmaker, Meng again acknowledged the importance of thoughtful and gracious listening. Pivotal, the role of communal knowledge in listening enables us to come together and support each

other in ways that are impossible for one person alone.

"We realized that the government didn't have all the answers and that the government could not react fast enough to help people," Meng said. "And so, as someone who represented a local district, I learned to be a better listener, a better multi-tasker."

The current surge of outrage over systemic racial inequality has also highlighted the importance of solidarity, unity, and opening ourselves up to others' perspectives. Meng recalls how, during the beginning of the pandemic, a rise in anti-Asian racism came about.

"And I remember that some of the first people to stand up and to speak out against it were not just Asians, but were my black colleagues, were students from different college campuses, and national groups like the NAACP."

Divided, we are few, but together, in solidarity and unity, we have the power to change our communities. By demonstrating support and building and strengthening inter-communal trust, Congresswoman Meng encouraged us that change is possible. Finding commonality and living a life in active pursuit of justice, which includes contemplating our personal responsibilities and compassionately listening to others, not only increases her credibility as a public servant, but allows us all to navigate life in a healthy way.





## Descendant

I am a descendant of takeout boxes, cooking oil dripping from seams. Of a Chinese dialect and roasted ducks hanging on metal hooks.

Of walks to 7-11 and artificially flavored instant noodles and withering memories of fish ball soup. Of homemade Mooncakes and too-sweet taro boba, aqueous wisteria coating my tongue. Of a grandmother feeding her goldfish and a mother bringing back our third pet turtle. Of a smoke-filled father, prickly beard scratching my hands. Of eating too many churros and my mother's lemon-honey tea. Of Barbie dolls and naively-created worlds. I am a descendant of the moon and its rabbits, and all of the suns in between.

—Jolin Chan, 17, California.

## To Let a Man Breathe

...for George Floyd

How hard is it,  
to let a man breathe.  
Let this substance  
that surrounds us all  
give him life again.

How hard is it,  
to unchain hands,  
hands of a man, son, boyfriend,  
human being with a heart, a soul,  
a voice that calls for Mama.  
To let her spirit cup his face,  
whisper reassurance,  
wipe the blood off his lips.

How hard is it, we ask.  
Not so hard, watch the people  
in the streets fight for justice.  
Hear their cries covered in tears,  
hand-in-hand. His pleading  
is still raw in their mind,  
something you can feel  
against fingertips as it claws  
its way out. Let ire ring.  
They're living proof,  
it's not so hard  
to stand for a life.

—Jolin Chan, 17, California.

It was such a privilege to share virtual space with Congresswoman Grace Meng. In our brief time together, I felt empowered to never be afraid of expressing my own opinion, nor to falter if my voice isn't as powerful in the beginning. It is extremely pertinent for youth to be exposed to role models like Congresswoman Meng. She is the epitome of a mild-mannered yet determined leader, an ambitious Asian-American woman who works to push for compassion, equality, and justice. Meng's description of her younger self reminded me of my own experience, and knowing Congresswoman Meng's journey and respected position today pushes me to express and develop my own stance on current affairs, and to make sure I put my ideas and thoughts into action.

While it seems frustrating or overwhelming to engage in the political process, Congresswoman Meng is a wonderful role model, and enabled us to see the critical role youth have in hoping and acting for a better future. Change can be slow, and while we might not see immediate results, it's important to remember that even as children and students, it's also the future generations we ourselves are fighting for.

—Sabrina Guo, 14, is a Chinese American student journalist, poet, writer, violinist, social activist, and a young humanitarian, New York. "One of the many reasons I write is to amplify the experiences and voices of marginalized girls and young women, and to have a lasting positive impact on the trajectory of their lives and opportunities."



**Timber! By the Lion's Den** (p. 36): "My art piece is about lion's habitats being destroyed in parts of South and East Africa. Places in Serengeti are being destroyed too, so now Serengeti National Park and Kruger National Park are trying to protect the lions. It's important to save these animals because we aren't the only living things on Earth; animals live here with feelings, opinions, and choices to make too. Plus, we benefit from trees too because all living things on this planet are connected. We're all part of different environments and ecosystems that affect all of us.

"I used HB, 2B, 4B, and 6B graphite pencils. I also used soft, medium, and hard charcoal pencils, along with watercolor pencils and a few paint brushes to complete my artwork. I used different blending techniques for the eyes and other parts of the picture and shading techniques for the whole illustration."

—Madeline M. Harris, 11, Illinois.

## Nana Jean on Black Lives Matter

My solo journey on Kilimanjaro ended in 2006, and my solo journey in life began with the death of my husband in 2018. Now I come to the end of another chapter in my life. The new phase of *Skipping Stones* with electronic material is invigorating but a difficult transition for me to make. For fourteen years I shared my life, family, and perspectives across race, culture, and personal connections. Shortly after I began writing for *Skipping Stones*, I also began writing a memoir. After years of work I am now completing the epilogue. It also seems like a fitting end to the print publication of my **Nana Jean** columns.

When my guide turned around as we were climbing Kilimanjaro he told me to “Finish on your own” (see *March-April & May-June 2009*). Likewise, with my life partner passed on, I will have to finish life on my own.

I live Black in a White world and never get used to it. My first column in *Skipping Stones* in 2007 included my life and adventures in New York City (see *Jan.-Feb. 2007*). The friendliness and helpfulness of New Yorkers, as well as my feeling of acceptance there, seeped into me. The city and the conferences I attended ensured in me, a tall Black woman walking among so many others of different hues and views, a sense of belonging.

In my present home state of Oregon the growth of diversity is realized through a growing Latino community. Rarely do I see Black faces, even in Salem where the few Black folks find and see each other in a sea of whiteness, like castaways drawn to each other by their commonality of color. I feel vulnerable. I cannot enjoy walking down the streets or shopping in stores as I am often viewed as potentially criminal. The N-word is there, seldom uttered, but always within earshot.

I have a hard time being myself in my own skin. I have been taught that brown skin is not to be worn everywhere, and I have experienced multiple ways in which it is not the color of choice in some areas. I am disgusted with myself, when I occasionally react negatively to those who look like me, and I realize that oth-

ers may see me in the same way. Unconscious bias and unintentional internalized racism live both around me and in me.

I am exhausted, fatigued, worn-out and numb to the constant hopes for change and acceptability. Do I have to go through this pain again? I am so tired of fighting for my right to exist, freely and clearly, in this White world. A counselor once asked me why I felt guilt. Without thinking I said, “For being Black.”

Will I always bear the imprint of my upbringing in a racist nation? Are there some neural paths that become ingrained and unchangeable in us all? I am a bright, creative, strong Black woman. Dare Risk Dream says the sticker I lovingly carry in my notebook. I fly and write and take risks. I am an artist. A writer. A risk-taker. I made a tandem skydive to celebrate my fiftieth birthday. I skied down rugged slopes. I learned to fly a small plane. I summited Mt. Kilimanjaro. I am a university professor. I lived an interracial marriage until the loss of my spouse. Still in ways I am an unknown, even to myself.

There is a current wakeup call in our nation of the deep racial inequalities in health, education, wealth, and freedom. When will liberation and Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness descend upon those of African descent? Has the time come for Black lives to matter?

I have hope. I look at my warm brown skin with wonder.

It has been a pleasure writing this column for *Skipping Stones*. I have learned and shared, rejoiced and grieved. Thank you for following a part of my journey.

I take courage and meaning from these lyrics from the Beatles song *Blackbird*:

*“Blackbird singing in the dead of night, take these sunken eyes and learn to see.*

*All your life, you were only waiting for this moment to be free.*

*Blackbird singing in the dead of night, take these broken wings and learn to fly.*

*All your life, you were only waiting for this moment to arise.”*



Nana Jean & her Grandchildren, 2007



## The Way of Life

Every night before bed like clockwork, my sister and I would snuggle up to our mom—one under each shoulder, blankets to our noses—and beg her to sing to us before bed. After pretending to make a fuss about us sleeping early, she would sing in her soft, soprano voice:

“Âu ơ... Ví đâu cầu ván đóng đinh...

Cầu tre lắc lẻo gập ghình khó đi...

Âu ơ... Khó đi mẹ dắt con đi...

Con đi trường học, mẹ đi trường đời.”

Translated into English, this famous Vietnamese song sings, “For the bridge is precarious, the bamboo difficult to walk on. But mother will help you. As you go to school, the mother walks the way of life.”

Growing up, my culture has been ingrained in me; like a circle, there is no defining point of where it ends and where my personality begins. It is all I have ever known, learning Vietnamese simultaneously with English, celebrating Tết, eating traditional foods like *phở* and *bún*, and listening to my family members blast Vietnamese karaoke music during every gathering. With immigrant parents, both of whom have minimal command of the English language, I have adopted two different characters once I enter and exit my wooden-framed door. On the side facing the outside world, I present my “American persona,” where I strike up two-minute conversations with people I will never see again and made sure my grammar is correct by using “May I” instead of “Can I.” I enjoy my American high school experience with Friday night lights at the football stadium and going to prom.

Once I step foot back into the comfort of my own home, I greet my parents by bowing my head and crossing my arms in reverence, take off my shoes, and put on my “Vietnamese persona,” striving to be the epitome of filial piety. I eat my food with chopsticks, where every meal contains rice, and remember my place as the first-born daughter in my family. As night falls, I prepare myself for the next day on the other side of the door.

As human beings with complex emotions and higher-level thinking, we still have a deep, primal desire to belong. Being a Vietnamese American, I used to feel like an imposter within my clan; I was not fully Vietnamese because I was born in America, but I was

also not American because I did not fit in with the stereotypes of Caucasian culture. I looked the part but was not authentically Vietnamese to my international friends because I did not have the same mannerisms as them. I spoke English but did not feel like my American identity was legitimized because I was not White. I was in limbo, stuck with one foot on both sides of the door.

It used to hurt me, to feel inadequate about something I could not control: my heritage. It took time to be proud of both my cultures, the parts that raised me. If I could pinpoint one instance that changed my outlook on who I was, it would have to be reading “Fish Cheeks” by Amy Tan in eighth grade. Analyzing it with my English class, I could not believe I was not the only one who sometimes felt the urge to prioritize one culture over another. I learned that I did not have to choose a culture, and the door I was seemingly stuck between was one that would lead me to an enriched life.

When I look in the mirror, I do not see my culture, I see me. Is that not what we desire to acquire, the ability to see ourselves holistically? My cultures make up who I am from within and reflect how I present myself outwards to the world, no matter the realm I am in. I am proud of the parts that make me Vietnamese American; I am proud of myself.

—Chelsea Le, 18, California.

*“I am Vietnamese American. Born of immigrant parents with minimal command of the English language, I surprised them when I, their first-born daughter, decided that writing was my passion. My elementary school days consisted of reading my short stories at the dinner table and translating them into Vietnamese so my parents could understand. Finishing high school this year, I will be continuing my education as a first-generation college student at Villanova University to study Journalism. As a minority, I plan to utilize my voice, both on paper and vocally, to encourage open conversations about solidarity and pride in one’s identity beginning with this essay. I hope this piece will inspire others to fully embrace all facets of their identity, to be proud of their heritage. Our differences do not divide us, they make us stronger.”*





**Mommy, Am I American?**, by Aila Malik, illustr. Dawood Marion. *AilaMalik.com*. Children with mixed identities feel insecure about how “American” they appear because they don’t look like White Americans. This picture book helps define national identity and patriotism as being kind, just, and inclusive. Grades 1-5.

**Summer North Coming**, by Dorothy Bentley, illustr. Jessica Bartram. *Fitzhenry & Whiteside*. A beautiful picture book depicting nature and life in rural Northern Canada. Shows both summer and winter life. Ages 4-8.

**Water-Walking Sidewinding, and other Remarkable Reptile Adaptations** by Laura Perdew, illustr. Katie Mazeika. *Nomad Press*. How reptiles survive. Ages 5-8.

**The Imperfect Garden** by Melissa Assaly, illustr. April dela Noche Milne. *Fitzhenry & Whiteside*. Naturally homegrown food can look different and imperfect, but it’s perfectly good and tasty! Ages 5 to 8.

**Flying Paintings, The Zhou Brothers: A Story of Revolution and Art** by Amy Alznauer, illustr. ShanZuo Zhou & DaHuang Zhou. *Candlewick*. This story of two world-class Chinese artists who lived through the years of China’s Cultural Revolution will inspire young readers with the power of their paintings. Ages 7-11.

**Rise! From Caged Bird to Poet of the People: Maya Angelou** by Bethany Hegedus, illustr. Tonya Engel. *Lee & Low*. Released to honor the 50th Anniversary of Maya Angelou’s memoir, *I know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, this poetic picture book celebrates the luminous life and legacy of a truly American author, activist, poet, performer, and professor. Ages 8 and up.

**Todos Iguales/All Equal: A Ballad of Lemon Grove** by Christy Hale. *Children’s Book Press*. This beautiful, bilingual picture book tells the story of the successful 1931 school desegregation case in California involving Mexican immigrant children. Ages 8-12.

**Jo Dares to Be Different** by Maria Angeles Rodriguez Vazquez, illustr. Jovita Wallace. *The Flying Cows Series*. This uplifting story, with engaging characters, takes readers on a young girl’s journey to feel at home in her new country where she is teased and bullied. Will help you find self-empowerment. Ages 9-13.

**The Heart of a Boy: Celebrating the Strength and Spirit of Boyhood** by Kate T. Parker. *Workman Publishing*. With 200 photographs, this heart-warming book captures the richness and the spirit of boyhood. Ages 9 -19.

**The Story of All-Star Athlete: Jim Thorpe**, by Joseph Bruchac, illustr. S. D. Nelson. *Lee & Low*. This book is much more than a biography of an All American Olympic legend Jim Thorpe who excelled in every sport even though he had a very hard life. It also teaches Native American history. Ages 8-13.

**Mamie on the Mound: A Woman in Baseball’s Negro Leagues**, by Leah Henderson, illustr. George Doutsopoulos. *Capstone*. Mamie “Peanut” Johnson was a great baseball player, but she was rejected by the whites-only girls baseball league because she was black. She played on a men’s team for three years. Ages 8-12.

**We Want Equal Rights!: How Suffragists Were Influenced by Haudenosaunee Women** by Sally Roesch Wagner. *Seventh Generation*. The women’s rights movement was born in 1848 and was inspired by the equality enjoyed by women in the Six Nation Confederacy. Well-illustrated, historical non-fiction book. Ages 8-12.

**Gutsy Girls Go for Science: Engineers** by Diane C. Taylor, illustr. Shululu. *Nomad Press*. The book introduces five women engineers in different engineering fields. It also offers five hands-on projects. Ages 8-12.

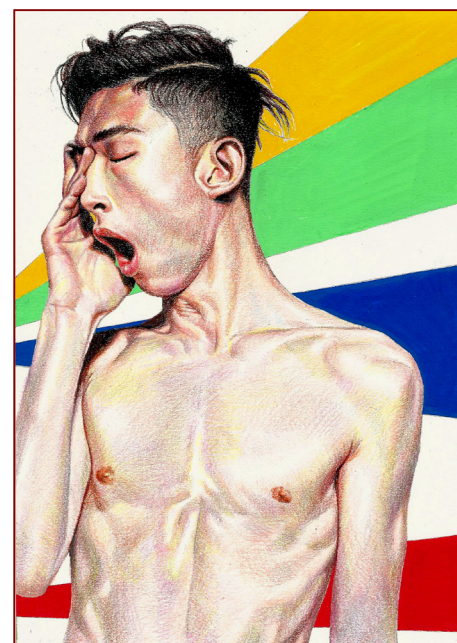
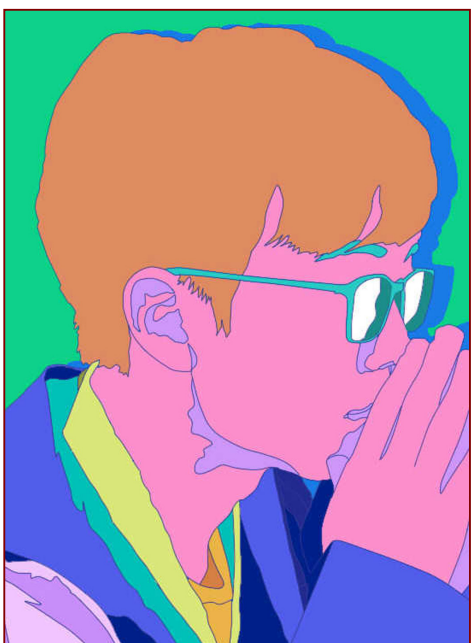
**Global Citizenship: Engage in the Politics of a Changing World** by Julie Knutson, illustr. Traci Van Wagoner. *Nomad Press*. This educational resource provides information youth need to become global citizen. It has a special focus on human rights. Ages 12-15.

**Body Talk: 37 Voices Explore our Radical Anatomy**, ed. Kelly Jensen. *Algonquin Young Readers*. This collection of contributions—from actors to writers—offers diverse perspectives on what it’s like to live in various bodies. The book touches topics from eating disorders to cancer, and from sexuality to gender identity. Ages 14-19.

**Planet Earth is Blue**, by Nicole Panteleakos. *Penguin Random House*. This beautifully crafted story features Nova, a 12-year-old autistic girl in a foster home. She has lost her older sister, Bridget. They both loved astronomy. The novel promotes empathy, kindness and hope in the face of challenges. Ages 12-16.

**Under Water**, a novel by J. L. Powers. *Cinco Puntos Press*. Khosi, 17, and Zi, 9, are sisters living in a township in South Africa, after their mom and grandma’s death. Khosi is determined. This engaging story examines the cultural complexities and relationships in their Zulu tribal life, and also global issues. Ages 15 and up.





## Noteworthy Visual Art Submissions from Korea

1. *My Local Street* by Wŏnjae Ko, 17.
2. *Mechanical Manuvers* by Sian Kim, 14.
3. *Monthly Taeyikim* by Taeyi Kim, 12.
4. *Pop Art* by Seungyeon Chang, 18.
5. *Next Generation* by Solbi Chung, 18.
6. *Nap* by Junhwan Kim, 18.
7. *Temple photo* by Nicholas Shin, 16.
8. *Flowers photo* by Katie Lee, 16, Korea.

We will also publish a few noteworthy writings from students in Korea in our next issue.



[www.SkippingStones.org](http://www.SkippingStones.org)

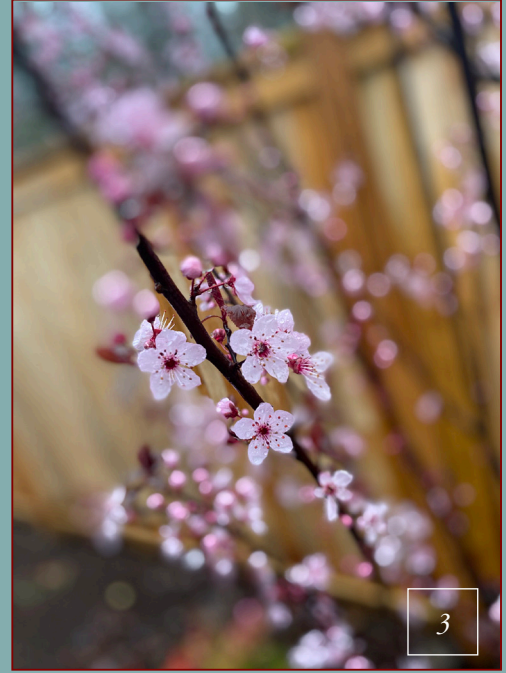
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### Youth Art Entries

1. Me & My Kitty & 8. What I do during the Quarantine by Jasmine Lynn-Skov, 10, Oregon. 2. Jellyfish by Reeya Chundury, gr. 5, Nebraska. 3. Spring Flowers & 7. Paradise Sunset by Mahathi Coimbatore, 13, Washington. 4. Colors of the Wind, & 5. Searching by Lucy Hirschman, 13, Vermont. 6. Timber! By the Lion's Den by Madeline M. Harris, 11, Illinois.

