

The Pen & Pencil | Spring 2017

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Drawing by Neil Baidan



Drawing by Robert Nicolas

Time

He governs all with his sister space,
He exists in every nook and cranny.
Even though you cannot see him,
He thrives in all the lands.

He is the father who speaks in hands.
His face is covered by glass.
He stands tall in London, wearing a cloak of brass.
You can hear his booming voice every hour.

Sometimes his companion is a cuckoo bird.
He determines day and night.
When it comes to being late or early, he is always right.
Sometimes he is called the grandfather.

He ticks and tocks as he talks.

Kamal Norton
Grade 7

I'm a Volcano

I'm a volcano.
My mind is corrupt.
Please stay away,
Or I will erupt.

As I grow old,
I turn to coal.
I watch the world,
See the series unfold.

J'von Hurtado
Grade 7

**An excerpt from the biography:
My Family**

I interviewed my mother, Ana, who was born in Nicaragua on December 6, 1959. Life in Nicaragua was hard because houses there are shabby. For example, rain and wind can destroy or seriously damage the house and cold air can enter easily. In 1988, my mom and dad lived in my grandfather's house in Nicaragua, which had many bedrooms. My mom and dad were twenty-nine years old at the time, and my grandfather about sixty-six. My grandfather did not like my dad because he was poor, and my grandfather thought that my mom should have dated someone with more money and nicer clothing. My grandfather had money because he owned a farm that grew cotton and people worked for him. My grandmother did not work, so she took care of my mom and her other eleven children. My grandfather also disliked my dad because he was working with the military at the time.

During the time that my parents and grandparents were living together, there was a storm, and it was expected to bring hard rain, wind, and a lot of debris. That day, my grandfather tried to fill cracks in the ceiling and put buckets under the cracks so that water wouldn't pervade the room. However, it didn't work. Water covered the floor and my dad and grandfather each had to take a broom and work together to push the water out. This was a bonding experience for them, and my grandfather and grandmother then agreed that my mom and dad could be married.

*Aaron Parajon
Grade 7*

Someday

My girl and I are like birds in the sky.
We both had a dream to become king and queen.
When the day comes, I will not hesitate
To ask her if she will be my life mate.
But for now, we have just finished our first date,
And so I will wait.

Kalden Lama, Grade 7

Feelings for Her

Feelings on feelings
They just keep changing
Feelings on feelings
Like DNA, always rearranging
From sadness to love, and maybe to anger

That curious feeling when you meet a lit rapper
That offended feeling when you're told you're a loud napper
Don't forget that feeling when you get rejected
When you finish that workout, but feel unaffected

Then I met this girl and all my feelings stood corrected
For who I am, I hope she accepted
Still wanna know more about her, call me a detective
Imma keep on trying, cause winning her is my objective

She's the reason I wake up and pass that gym test
She's the reason I man up when someone try to roast me
She's the reason I try to strive for the best
And she's the reason I can feel more comfortable and toasty

Of these words I say, I'll never get tired
They say I got dubbed, but for my niceness I'm still admired
Please trust me on this, I won't be a liar
But for now I'm right here, Imma be her spare tire

Samuel Nwankpa, Grade 7



Drawing by Mohammad Moussaif

TiMER

My last day of ignorance ended with a trip to the hospital. My mother's hand rested on my shoulder as the man shuffled with his instruments. I could hear the ticking of her watch clash with her TiMER, and I bit even more at my fingernails. I removed my own wristwatch and placed it upwards on the plastic. He turned and his green eyes matched his face mask.

"Are you ready, Mia?"

"Yes, she is," my mom responded. But really, I wasn't. I took one last look up at her and she refused to meet my eyes. The clanking of the metal brought me back, and I held onto the leather of the armchair.

"Once again," the doctor began, noticing my fear and trying to distract me, "the TiMER works in a linear fashion. So—"

"Yes, yes, yes," my mom interrupted. "We understand the rules and benefits of the TiMER. Now can you track her so we can go celebrate?!" she said, shaking me vigorously.

"Nurse, on your count," the doctor said, and I began wincing. The sharp and consecutive clicks of the tracker entering and exiting my skin reminded me of a stapler, and the pain no more than a bee sting.

"All done!" he said, but it wasn't done. This wasn't the end, nowhere near. I looked down at the digital bar, and it protruded slightly from the sides of my wrist. The black outline drastically in contrast with my fair skin, and the beeping noise of it loading was monotone and banal. The digital numbers read "00y:03d:21h:17m."

The drive home was a quiet one. Mom sat driving, a cheeky smile tiring her face.

"Ugh. I still smell like the hospital." I tried to start a conversation and patted down my shirt. But there she sat, still frozen with her smile. I saw The Dented Boulder, the town's

local pizza store and hangout. It was a mental landmark for us to know that we were close to the house. The constant throbbing that came with the ticks of the TiMER reminded me of its existence, no matter how hard I tried to ignore it.

“We’re here!” Mom yelled, yanking the keys out of the ignition and prancing over to the passenger side. She opened my door and gestured with her hand. I got out and walked up the stairs of the paint-chipped porch. The creaks of the wood only brought me back to the many times I’d clumsily fallen down them when I was younger. My nostalgia was interrupted when I opened the door to a unison, “Surprise!”

My brother, Jackson, was the first to greet me. “Welcome to adulthood, Mia!” he said, shaking me. He messed up my hair and went to hug my mom. My dad, walking slowly and carefully, held a two-tiered cake. He balanced it on his right hand and covered the candles with his left.

“But it’s not my birthday yet, Dad,” I said, trying to hide under my brunette curls.

“And yet, you are born again!” he yelled, never taking his eyes off the cake. My sister, Kalluto, ran over and hugged my shin, and like a baby’s rattle, I was again vigorously shaken.

She had the most adorable slanted eyes, and her soft, silky hair differed from the rest of the family’s. Still, baby Kalluto was our own.

“So, tell us. How many years do you have?” Jackson asked, lifting his fork in the air. I purposely shoved more cake in my mouth to avoid the question, but eating with my left was a harder task than I thought.

“Mi-a?” Jackson asked in a sing-song voice, but I continued to ignore him and the other two sets of eyes at the table. Noticing that I was dodging the question, mom got up and grabbed my wrist.

“Three days!” she yelled. “Only three days!”

“Mom!” I yanked my hand down and immediately looked over at Jackson, who was picking the icing off his cake.

“Three days?!” Jackson whispered and stood slowly. “She gets three days while I’ve waited seven years?” He was angry, and this wasn’t his first burst. He also got his TiMER three days before his fourteenth birthday. And when my mom took him to get it implanted, he’d freaked about his nine-year countdown.

“Jackson, just calm down,” Mom started, but became silent after seeing cake suddenly soar through the air. Jackson removed the icing from his restless, college student eyes. I turned to my right to see Kalluto, her arm raised, icing between her fingers, and an innocent yet mischievous grin that only a toddler could make. The family waited for someone to say something, but honestly, we were all holding back laughter.

With Kalluto’s chuckles, Mom’s snorts, and Dad’s squeaks, the whole table began to suffocate in laughter, even Jackson.

“So,” Jackson began again, with cake still in his hair. “What do you think he will look like?” I knew the intentions behind the question were good, but I instantly clammed up. See, the TiMER is a biotechnical implant that counts down to the midnight before you and your soulmate make eye contact. The only thing is...mine won’t be a *he*. I looked down at my wrist and thought, *Three days, sixteen hours, and nine minutes until I meet her.*

The sun’s glare woke me before my alarm, and I rocketed upwards, hoping I wasn’t late for school. I could hear the commotion of my family members outside of my door but before I could open it, someone got there first.

“Mee-ah!” Kalluto cheered running into my room and embracing my leg. I grabbed underneath her arms and picked her up.

“Morning Baby Kallu.” I tickled her. I walked her out of my room, and in the congested hallway of my dad brushing, my brother grooming, and my mom pampering, I felt out of place. Kalluto’s laughter seized the attention of my mom first.

“Morning, my girls,” she said. “Let’s get you dressed. And you,” she pointed my way, “need to get ready for your party.”

“But what about school?” I shrugged my shoulders.

“What do you mean? Today is the run-around!” I’d forgotten about the annual “run-around.” The day before all of our birthdays when Mom takes us out to different places.

“But what if—” I began.

“Don’t worry, honey,” my dad interjected. “Everything is going to work itself out, like my beautiful beard here,” he said, looking back at the mirror.

I turned around and headed back to my room. I plopped on my bed with a sigh of relief at my newfound day off from school. I rolled over on my stomach and opened my phone. Jasmine, my best friend, was the only one at school who knew about my TiMER and its countdown. Her questions seemed to come just as fast as the ticks.

Jasmine <3

So is it, like a robot thing?

No, it’s just an implant.

Did you tell your parents yet?

They’ll find out soon.

Are you nervous? Like, if I found out my true love I would be ROTF.

Lol. Yeah, I guess. I GTG. See you tomorrow.

Wait, wait, wait! We have to talk outfits!

“00y:00d:04h:16m” my TiMER read, and the queasiness in my stomach had nothing to do with the winding downtown streets of the city. Mom had taken me all over. Shopping, to the spa, and our final stop, the nail salon.

Exhausted, I plopped on my bed, ending my day the same way it began. The TiMER illuminated my face and I stared back at it. “00y:00d:00h:12m.” Twelve minutes until my birthday...and my world ending.

We could smell The Dented Boulder before we arrived, and Kalluto already began fiddling with her seatbelt. The staff directed us to the party room where all the tables had been set up and the arcade games were ready to be played on the walls. At the far corner of the room I spotted a bay window, and I knew that was where I would be spending most of my night.

“How much more time?” Jackson asked, taking a break from the arcade games.

“So, you’re talking to me now?” I joked with him, punching his shoulder.

“Yeah, I’m serious. I wanna take a picture of you two when he walks in.”

“Well, okay. Sure.”

The butterflies in my stomach matched a number of people in the party room, seemingly growing as more and more walked in. My mom made sure everyone went over and greeted me so I wouldn’t miss “him.” All night I was greeted by aunts and cousins, but really I was only longing for one person. When I saw the pulled-back, brown ponytail with the casual yet sophisticated black and red dress, I sighed. As if I was finally able to let go of the breath I was holding for so long. Jasmine instantly spotted me at the bay window and shuffled over, her tight dress restricting her legs. She sat her present on the ever-growing tower of gifts and jumped next to me.

“So, is this a bay window or a bae window?” she joked, her voice lowering toward the end of the sentence.

“Shut up!” I laughed, shoving her.

“Ooo, this is so exciting! What do you think she’ll look like? What if she’s older than you? What if—”

“Jasmine,” I covered her mouth. “I love you, but you’re not helping.”

“Sorry. Sorry. I guess we’ll all find out before midnight.”
She looked at my wrist.

But the minutes felt like hours of waiting, and while Jasmine tried to distract me with conversation, it was futile. My mom gathered the attention of everyone in the room as the party winded down. All of the eyes made me clam up even more as we all stared at the door.

“Okay, guys. We’re gonna sing Happy Birthday now,” she said. My mom held Kalluto, Jackson, and Dad at my shoulders, and Jasmine was by my side, holding my arm. They began, but I closed my eyes.

“3! 2! 1! Happy Birthday to—” My mom waved for the cake to be brought in.

“Now?” the manager asked, opening the door. The girl at his side struggled to hold the sheet cake that read, “Happy Birthday Mia.”

“Doodle-Ding! Doodle-Ding!” the TiMER sang, but only seemed an echo in my head. When I locked eyes with her calm hazel ones, I felt scared. Scared of how much we already were connected. Still struggling with the cake, she broke our gaze first and tried to keep her balance. Without thinking, I ran over to her right as the cake started to fall. We both caught it, upside down. The icing splattered over both of our faces and the floor.

“I-I’m so sorry.”

“Don’t worry about it,” I said, never breaking eye contact.

“¿Una chica, Sofia?!” the baker said. She looked up, even more scared than I was.

She stood, and the baker, her father, wrapped his arms around her shoulders.

“We will bring in another cake. Happy birthday, Mia. We must go now.”

Still on my knees, cake in my hair, I slowly turned. Jasmine was the only face not frozen with surprise. We waited for someone to break the silence.

My eyes trailed around my own room, looking up at the posters, down at the school project, and across at the television. I tried to close my eyes, but still they remained, darting. A red glare caught my attention and the digital numbers on the clock released me. My held breath was let go and I rolled over to adore the clock. "11:38." The numbers progressed, and I realized that I wasted that minute. I'm not going to waste another minute of my life. My time is mine, and I won't let it be controlled. A dog growled, and with my eyebrow raised, I looked at my phone to see if it was a notification from an app I'd carelessly downloaded. It growled again and I realized it wasn't a dog, but my stomach. "Cereal. I need cereal."

"Mia, my baby girl. Why didn't you tell us?" my mom asked. I didn't know how they expected me to open up with them all circling around my chair. I grabbed a bowl of cereal, my mouth crunching the bran. Jackson stood behind me. After two shoves, I sat back down. I knew he wouldn't let me pass.

"You can't just ambush me like this, you know. Besides, it's almost twelve. Why are you guys still up?" I said, raising the reaching Kalluto on my lap.

"Nevermind that, Mia," Mom said. "We need to talk about your...problem."

"What problem?" Jackson asked, startling me.

"Well, honey," my dad began, ignoring Jackson, "I don't mean to sound all 1970s, but..."

"She's not sick," Jackson said, and the crossed armed stance I thought was caging me was actually protecting me from my parents. His eyes never met mine, but he knew how grateful I was.

"No, no, no. I wasn't going to say she was sick," he said, staring down Jackson, his expression stern and stagnate. "What I was going to say," he continued, his kind eyes returning, "was that it's okay."

I held my breath. I was hoping they didn't see my owl eyes, surprised at his acceptance.

“I-it is?” I asked, clenching my fists.

“Yes, honey, it is. Because by the time you’re eighteen, all these feelings will have gone away. It’s just a phase.” My brother’s head mimicked the motion of my heart. They both dropped with our hopes. The hopes that our once close-minded father had accepted his daughter for who she was.

“Mee-ah.” Kalluto smiled, but her chuckles didn’t lift the atmosphere as they usually did. I stood from my chair and lowered her. My body was on autopilot, acting without thinking. Before I knew it I was inside my room. Face first in my pillow, I began to snuffle in my own tears. My body was limp, and I felt like I would never truly be able to be myself around them. I heard footsteps enter the doorway.

“Mia?” It was Jackson.

“Look, I don’t really know what to say or what to do to comfort you, or how I can help you block out Dad’s words, but I want you to know that I love you. And all we need is each other, okay?”

I chuckled. He was right. He didn’t know how to comfort me, but he made me laugh. And while his plan was never going to work for me, I still knew that I loved him, too. I gathered the strength to sit up. We both leaned in for a hug.

“You’re so ugly when you cry,” he said to me, laughing. And I knew that whatever I was going to go through, I’d go through with Jackson.

Kalvin Singleton
Grade 8

An excerpt from the biography: Rehana Tadite

Rehana Tadite was born on September 27, 1973, in La Lorraine in France. She grew up in a small mining town called Farebersviller in the county of La Moselle. Rehana is from a family of ten, six girls and two boys. She is the oldest out of all of them.

One day in Morocco, she visited her grandfather. He was a shepherd in the high Atlas Mountains and had mostly goats. She was nine years old and thought of this as a big event because of all the goats coming down a reddish-brownish colored hill in coats of brown and white. One goat rushed up to her grandfather and put his head on his lap, waiting to be pet. Rehana's grandpa explained to her that this goat was an orphan, and no goat would take him in and nurse him so it was up to her grandpa.

Earlier, when Rehana was six years old, she went on picnics with her family. Her mother would wake up at sunrise and cook two whole chickens. The smell of the house was filled with fresh aromas that would wake up all eight children. As a surprise, they would all see the food all set up and then they would go on the picnic. Before ten in the morning, Rehana's dad, Ali, would take the family out to a peaceful and tranquil forest to rest, have fun, and eat. All eight of the children took their supplies and explored the forest all alone. They chased rabbits, badgers, and pigeons.

One day, Rehana's family stumbled upon a broken winged pigeon and took it home to nurse it and help it out until it was time to free him. Unfortunately, the bird did not survive long and died early. These experiences taught Rehana how to be independent, take risks, and be closer to nature. They also taught her to enjoy simple things, and to try to be close with her family. They were some of the best memories that shaped her, and it gave her comfort and joy when she thought of them.

Mohammad Moussaif, Grade 7

Good Times

The wind is blowing and the leaves are growing.
The rain satisfies the daffodils' thirst.
It is time to wake.
The weather is now warm.

The clouds are gone,
And the sun shines in full.
The days are bright and very hot.
It is time to have fun.

It is time for learning.
The sun is gone,
And the leaves have lost their bright colors.

Oh my, what a chill!
The leaves are no more.
The naked tree remains.
Snow everywhere.
How cold!

Gregory Senat
Grade 6

People Come, People Go

People come, people go.
Never forget the ones you know.
The zoo is always crowded and busy.
So loud and bizarre I sometimes get dizzy.
 And people come, people go.

People sometimes don't really care,
That sometimes separates come into pairs.
The streets are breaking with people in a rush,
And they forget about you and don't talk very much.
 And people come, people go.

It's 3 o'clock and the day is done.
People fade and so does the sun.
The ones you know don't say goodbye
And go like a cowardly butterfly,
 And people come, people go.

Stephan Snagg
Grade 7

Biography:

Fernando Santiago Huerta

Fernando Santiago Huerta, my father, was born on October 26, 1985, in Veracruz, Mexico. He lived with both his parents in a small white house near mountains and valleys. One day at the age of eight, Fernando and his nine brothers and five sisters went to the mountains to play hide and seek in the forest. Fernando and his brother climbed a tree to hide. He got up to the top of a twenty-foot tree but he couldn't keep his balance and fell. He yelled, "Ey, vengan estoy lastimado!" ("Hey, come—I am hurt!"). He was unconscious.

When he woke up he didn't know where he was until he saw the face of the doctor. He realized he was at the hospital. Fernando says his brothers and sisters had gone to tell his mom that he'd fallen, so his mother had the ambulance come to their house to take Fernando to the hospital. Fernando stayed in the hospital for three days because he had severely hurt his head. He says this was the most memorable moment in his life because his brothers, sisters, and mom had saved him from dying.

Eight years after this horrible incident, Fernando decided to immigrate to the United States of America. He wanted to leave because he thought that he could help earn more money and then send some of it to his family to buy food and clothes. To do this, he walked through the Sonoran Desert. Fernando says he paid a person \$1,800 in order to cross the border. He said, "the smuggler made us walk the whole time, and whenever we were hungry he gave us food." At one point, while crossing the border he needed to hide from the border patrol helicopter. He said he jumped and landed on a cactus. When he got up Fernando noticed he was covered full of spines. He had to take all the spines off of his body. He said he yelled every time he took a spine off himself. Fernando was

in pain for two days because of the incident. When they had reached Arizona after twenty days of walking, they waited for the vans to take them to New York. Fernando said, “I was very happy when I got to Arizona because we just needed to wait until the vans came.”

Now at the age of thirty-one, Fernando lives with his wife and three kids. But that doesn’t mean he still didn’t suffer. In the year of 2014, Fernando went to the hospital because of his health issues. He was suffering from migraines. He said, “This never happened to me before, and I was very scared.” He stayed in the hospital for two and a half days and the doctors and nurses tested him to figure out what happened. The doctors and nurses said this had happened to him because he had not eaten and rested enough and, perhaps, because he got sick when he crossed the border but it didn’t affect him until now. Fernando said, “I am very happy and I am living the dream of life. I am not married because I think that I don’t need to get married because my partner and I are always happy.”

Fernando works in a supermarket in Brooklyn and is always satisfied by how much they pay him. He always has enough money to buy anything he or his family wants. And he doesn’t care that Donald Trump is president because he isn’t scared of being deported.

Jeisofer Santiago
Grade 7

Biography: Mrs. Solano

Silvia Solano is a friend to me but she is like family. When she was a child she lived with her six siblings and her dad on an island in Guatemala. Her mother died and she didn't really know her. She was the second oldest out of her five sisters and one younger brother. With her dad always working as a police officer, she had to do all the shopping and cleaning. She was like the mother of the family. She did this since she was eight. She had to wake up at four in the morning to go on a boat to another town off her island to sell shrimp she bought the previous day. She'd take at the most two and a half hours to sell shrimp at the market because she had to be home by ten in the morning to make food for her siblings with no help from anyone. As for school, she only had half an hour to do homework and study out of the whole day. Her childhood was very hard.

In Silvia's teenage years, she had one of her worst experiences. To support her family, her aunt made her go to New York. She traveled for two weeks with twenty-eight other people she didn't know, all from Guatemala. They traveled on local buses in many different towns. Today, it is hard for her to remember what areas she went through. When they reached an area close to the border, they had to walk a few days, day and night, to cross into the U.S. All she said that they had to eat while making their way across the border was bread. Once they crossed, they got back on a bus and continued their journey. With her last bus ride, she finally got to New York in 1984. She was excited when she saw the city lights because she was almost done with all her traveling. She decided to immigrate to New York to make good money and send some of it home every month.

When Silvia arrived in New York she was already

married and her mother-in-law took her in. She lived with her mother-in-law until she and her husband got an apartment. One of the exciting parts of the process of settling in was when she got her green card. It was exciting because it sometimes takes people twenty years for them to get their papers. When it didn't take long for her, she rejoiced. She felt free at that moment.

She has lived her life feeling free in the U.S. When she was settled with her husband three weeks after she got there, she worked in a carpet-making factory for six months. She got paid \$4.50 an hour and only had a fifteen minute lunch break. She didn't sit unless it was her lunch break or when she got home. It was hard for her.

Now she has three loving children who adore her and two grandchildren. As an adult, she trusts her husband because he always provides the help she needs and has never left her side. "He gives me power," she said. She loves him with all her heart and trusts him fully no matter what.

Nathaniel Gonzalez
Grade 7

Kade & Dexter

Kade Francis recently transferred from Flower County Junior High to Hazeltucky Middle School. His new school's football team needed a new starting quarterback since their previous one, Lucas Grant, received a concussion. So, when Kade tried out for the team, he was named the starter. Everything was going well for Kade so far. Then, two days later, Ms. Johnson announced that they had a new student. *I hope this new student likes football, Kade thought.*

"I would like to introduce our new student," Ms. Johnson said, "Dexter Hill!"

Quietly to himself, Kade said "No, this can't be him. It just can't," but his fear became reality. Standing in the front of the class was Dexter. The only reason Kade changed schools was to make sure that he wasn't driven crazy by Dexter. The thing is, he was jealous of Dexter. He was so jealous that it got to the point where he wanted to punch him. Dexter was the starting quarterback for his old school and all the teachers loved him, and he got excellent grades. Kade was always in his shadow. He was Dexter's backup QB, he had better grades than Dexter, but was an on-and-off student.

At football practice that day, the coach told Kade, "Sorry kiddo, but Dexter is our new starting play-caller." When practice was over, he went into Coach Davis's office and asked, "What does Dexter have that I don't?"

"Well," Coach said, "you two both have tall, muscular physiques. And you do have the stronger arm, but Dexter is better at reading defenses and calling audibles. You are more physically gifted and he has a better QB mentality. I understand that you don't necessarily like him, but once you get to know him, you'll appreciate having him on our team. You may be surprised."

“So, who’s starting on Saturday’s game against the Panthers?” Kade asked.

“I’ll figure something out by game day,” Coach Davis said.

On Saturday morning, during the pregame locker room speech, Coach Davis announced that Dexter would start the first half and Kade would replace him in the second half.

The game went back and forth until the score was tied 28-28 in the fourth quarter, with fifty-two seconds left on the clock. It was first and ten at the Knights’ 37-yard line. The first play was a simple draw play to the halfback. Gain of three yards. That play took eleven seconds.

On second down, they tried a wide receiver screen. That gained seventeen yards and now the clock read 0:31.

Coach Davis called a timeout. He told Kade to run another draw play, but at the line of scrimmage, Kade saw that the Panthers had too many people in the box, so he audibled the play into a read option. As the ball was snapped, Kade faked the handoff as a free linebacker blitzed to the halfback. As the defender realized he had been baited, Kade ran to the LB’s blindside with a wide-open field in front of him. With the opposing safety was on the other side of the field, there was no one in sight. All he had to do was sprint into the end zone.

But, as he approached the 30-yard line, he slipped. He tried to get back up quickly, but the defense had caught up and touched him down. As a result, the Knights had a new set of downs at the 28-yard line with twenty-four seconds left. On first down, they ran a halfback toss. But it was a loss of seven yards due to the halfback trying to juke defenders. On second down, all the Knights receivers ran slant routes. Kade completed a pass to one of them for fourteen yards, and with five seconds left on the clock, he spiked the ball. Fourth and three yards to go. This was the play of the game. Kade recognized that the defense was running a blitz and “Cover 1” expecting a long pass and trying to bring pressure. He audibled the play from all the receivers running “out routes” to a Hail Mary.

The ball was snapped. All the receivers ran down the sidelines. All he had to do was throw it up not in the center where the safety was. But, as his arm was in motion to throw the ball, his arm felt lighter. The same linebacker he had baited before snatched the ball out of his hands!

“Thank you!” the linebacker exclaimed in a mocking tone. The defender then proceeded to accelerate the other way into the end zone for the game-winning play while Kade lay on the floor dumbfounded on how they just lost. The final score was 35-28, Panthers. The Knights had a record of 9-2 with three games left in the season.

Fast-forwarding to their last few games, they won in blowouts. With scores of 31-10 against the Pirates, 28-7 against the Wolves, and 21-6 against the Bears. All three of those games had one thing in common: most of the points in each game were scored in the first half, the half that Dexter played. And in the second halves, when Kade played, Kade would always lead the team to one scoring drive. Going into the playoffs, it was clear that Kade had lost any chance of being the starter. On Tuesday’s practice, Coach Davis announced that Dexter was their official starting QB. Then he said to the whole team, “I have a new idea that might get us far into the playoffs. Kade, come up here. How would you like to be a receiver?”

Kade replied, “But coach, I’m a quarterback.”

“I understand that, but have you ever heard of Terrelle Pryor?”

“Well, yeah, he used to be a quarterback, but his coaches made him play wide receiver. And he’s excelling at it,” Kade said.

“Exactly. And you have the physical build of a tight end, but you’re as fast as a receiver. You, my friend, are a match-up nightmare,” the coach replied. After every practice, Kade spent extra time working with Coach Davis and the receivers coach, Coach Shaun. He worked on his release, double moves, route running, and catching.

It was 1:00 p.m. on Saturday during game day. Their opponents were the John Harvard Hawks. The Knights won the coin toss and elected to receive the ball first. The kick went out for a touchback. Coach Davis wanted to try Kade's receiving skills and told him to run a curl-and-go. So, on the first play from scrimmage, Kade performed the route to perfection, and Dexter threw the ball to a wide open Kade who caught it and proceeded to plant his right foot and juke the safety. And then, he was gone. He ran up the field for six. His first play as a wide out resulted in an eighty-yard touchdown. Kade finished the game with eleven catches and 189 yards! The score was 42-27, Knights.

At Monday's practice, Coach Davis told the team that Saturday's win was a team win. And could not have been done without their new deep threat, Kade. "Just because we're on a roll doesn't mean we should take any days off. No breaks. Just hard work. I would also like to thank Dexter for the performance he has put up the last few weeks," he said. Kade listened to everything coach had to say, but only focused on his praises to Dexter. So, going into Saturday's game against the Panthers, ("The Revenge Game" as his teammates called) Kade went in with the mindset of making Dexter look bad whenever the ball was thrown.

But Kade wanted to make it believable. So, when the ball was coming his way, he would slightly slow down to make it look like Dexter overthrew it. The game went back and forth with the score being 33-31, Panthers. It felt like déjà vu for both teams, the same things were happening as in their last matchup. With six seconds left in the fourth quarter at the Panthers' 40-yard line, the Knights went to their last resort, a Hail Mary. The ball was snapped and all the receivers ran down field. The defense was in man coverage. None of the receivers were open, but Kade ran past his defender, and he was thrown the ball. He let his defender catch up to him and pretended to box him out to highpoint the ball. He let his

man get in front of him and jumped late to allow the defender to intercept the ball in the end zone! To make the act more believable, he frantically ran after his man and tackled him at the 5-yard line as time expired.

Back in the locker room, Coach Davis congratulated his players on a great season as the Panthers advanced to the Virginia State Championship. After his postgame speech, he told Kade and Dexter to meet him in his office.

“What happened to you out there, Kade?” Coach asked.

“I don’t know,” he responded.

“Good game Dexter,” Coach said.

“What!?! Why are you praising him! He threw the interception! If I had tried to catch it, maybe we would have....” Kade exclaimed, but was cut short by Coach Davis.

“What do you mean ‘if I tried’? By the sound of it, you threw the game away on purpose to make Dexter look bad!”

Dexter wanted to get in on the conversation, too. “Why do you hate me so much? I’ve done nothing negative to you, at least to my knowledge.” Kade seemed offended, thinking that Dexter was being sarcastic.

So, Kade responded, “Why do I hate you? Because everything comes naturally to you! You always get what you want! You’re a teacher’s pet and I’m always in your shadow. You get all the attention. If I do something, what do I get? Nothing! What I’m trying to say is, you have the easy life, and I’m jealous. You never have to work hard for anything!”

Dexter was normally a pretty calm person, but Kade’s claim of him never working hard made him snap. “You think my life is easy? I’ve worked day and night to get to where I am now! I only moved here because my dad got a job promotion, and his new job was in this town. You know what, I’m tired of this. My dad isn’t even my real father! He’s my step-dad. My biological father was in the army and got killed in battle!” He said this with so much passion and anger that he started to cry as he spoke. “He taught me that a good work ethic will get me

what I want and anywhere I want to be. My mother recently had breast cancer, and she had to undergo medical treatment, and surgery! You see my hair? I barely have any! You wanna know why?! Because I have alopecia! I'm even fortunate to have hair. Most people with my disease are bald!" Dexter said with rage.

"I always thought that you liked getting buzz cuts," Kade said in a joking manner. That little joke caused Dexter to lighten up and brought out a chuckle from him. All jokes aside, Dexter's mini speech humbled Kade to such an extent that Kade decided to apologize to him for all the things he had said to and about Dexter.

"See, Kade, this is why I said if you get to know Dexter, you'll appreciate having him around. You should feel inspired right now. You're both dismissed," Coach Davis told them. After that whole locker room talk episode, in that same offseason, Kade and Dexter started hanging out, and all the hatred for one another had faded away. During a street football game with their friends during summer vacation, Kade once again apologized to Dexter for all he had done to him.

"You ready for this upcoming season?" Kade asked Dexter.

"You know it! And we're getting further than the district championship game. Just don't choke, all right?" he said jokingly.

Andrew Botchway
Grade 7

The Art of Losing
(Inspired by "One Art" by Elizabeth Bishop)

My days feel over during this age
For I faced too much to continue this page
However, I continue this to let go of disaster

Yet, although hard to express
This message signs people like me not be depressed
My life is facing what I again call out disaster
The art of losing isn't hard to master

I have lost my father in vain
And yet many more I know die in pain
The art of losing isn't hard to master
For it is easier than ripping plaster

Next, my grandmother who failed to live on
But her music to my ears forever lived upon
From ages one to twelve I have felt much suffering
For only I can say the art of losing is hard to master

In my beloved dead one's legacy
I write such disaster
Only to keep in my comfort of losing others who matter

Gregory Senat
Grade 6

An excerpt from the story: **Foster Care**

Like almost every other month in Chicago, April got the best of us. It rained non-stop, but this was nothing new. In fact, everything had been the same for the past three years. I was used to being in this hell hole.

“Jay, clean up your room. Some idiot is coming here,” Dorothy hissed at me. She looked like Nanny McPhee. All she ever wanted was for me to leave and clean my room.

“Who is coming?”

“I don’t know.”

“What do you mean you don’t know?”

“How about you just shut up and clean the damn room. Stop questioning me, little boy,” she said as she took another sip of Hennessy—the second bottle of the day. Her drinking probably meant she was either late on her rent or Mark, her ex-husband, hadn’t brought her garbage to the dump.

“They are coming in a few hours, but I’m going to the store. Just in case they come and I’m not here, let them in and show them their rooms. Don’t forget to...”

“I know, I know. Clean my room. But wait, if you’re just going to the store, shouldn’t you be back in time to let them in?”

“I asked you to let them in, not to be all in my business. Just follow direction.”

“Whatever.” I knew she would say something like that. I didn’t really care about him or whatever and they probably didn’t care about me, so I didn’t bother cleaning my room.

The first person I saw was a tall, black guy who had a few cuts where his beard should have been. He had a du-rag and a gold tooth, but I wasn’t intimidated. The perks of not caring about anything at all.

“Ayo, lil man, I’m looking for D’Angelo,” he said. “This

is Houser Foster Care.”

“Sorry, he means he’s looking for Dorothy and this is Harold Foster Care,” said a beautiful, slim lady with caramel skin. She seemed like the outspoken type. She had long, tangled, curly hair.

“You lucky I don’t have to watch you no more. Same reason I’m bringing you here. Cut me off again and I’ll beat your a...” the guy said.

“Okay, Dorothy isn’t here right now, but she said to let you in. So, right this way,” I said. I opened the doors expecting both of them to walk in, but the guy just dropped her bags and left.

It was only me and her.

Jason Lavoe
Grade 8

— |

The Templars
(Inspired by “The Eagle” by
Alfred, Lord Tennyson)

He clutched the flag with his gnarled hands;
Standing alone on Holy land
To show his city’s high command.
I am one who can speak in tongues.
We breathe in the spirit through our lungs.
We are Templars. We are one.

Neil Baidan
Grade 7

Recurring Memory

Blood puddles across the floor.
I grit my teeth as I concoct another memory.
I could remember it clearly, his deep blue eyes.

He cried and begged for mercy.
The cracking, the tearing like a song in my mind.
His screams of agony only entertained me.

I couldn’t stop.
It was like a song on repeat.
Or a little divine treat.
But I couldn’t stop
Until I woke up,
Gasping for air.

Ever since that day,
That song is on repeat.

Ethan McLaren
Grade 7

Tech Ideas for Practicing Mindfulness

“Mindfulness involves easing into the present moment and choosing to respond to whatever arises with as much compassion as possible. It’s a process and takes practice, but it’s worth it. The more tuned in to the present we are, the richer our lives become. Students were asked to design a game that would introduce the invaluable skill of mindfulness to others. The results speak for themselves.”

—Nick Mosca, 6th grade teacher

A Mindful App

One day a character (a customizable character, such as boy or girl) learns about something called mindfulness. A mindfulness teacher comes to his school and teaches that mindfulness is a type of meditation in which you can reduce your anger and nervousness. During the video game, the character practices mindfulness. As each stage passes, he encounters difficulties in school or home such as losing a very important basketball game. He practices mindfulness to stop enemies or anger from overcoming him. Inside the

A Mindful Strategy Game

You are an army general and are trying to free your homeland of two tyrants. Each tyrant symbolizes the past and future—the two major culprits that take innocent people out of the present. This game will take place in a medieval fantasy setting. The objective of the game is to use your small army and grow it until you can topple the tyrants from their thrones.

The larger your army and prisoner count, the more food and resources you need

levels, he earns a letter of PEACE.

P stands for pause.

E stands for exhale.

A stands for accept.

C stands for choose.

E stands for engage.

To gain these letters, the character must look for them in secret areas inside the levels. If a character gains all of them, he gets a higher score in the level. This leads to higher rewards. The character fights anger monsters, which symbolize fighting emotions and returning to the present. The character must stay alive without losing all his mindfulness meter. A character can earn costumes and upgrades as he progresses. To upgrade characters, coins must be earned inside levels and special events. There is also food to regenerate health. A character can mindfully choose healthy foods, such as vegetables. These regenerate the mindfulness meter. Or the character can choose unhealthy foods, like McDonald's,

to feed them. Marching your army takes more food and running your army takes even more. After a battle, soldiers need more food or time to recuperate. To get food you can hunt it, farm it, buy it in a town or village, or take it as part of tax in towns you have captured. You can disband units or free prisoners to lower your army size and increase your movement speed and lower the amount of food you need.

The battles in this game will be very dynamic. They will use an interactive top-down view or a first person view. The views will allow you to command your troops on where to move, how fast to move, and who to attack. You can also play battles in the view of one of the soldiers or the general. This transforms the game into an action game. The units you start off with in the game are two light halberd units, one light spearman unit, one light crossbowman unit, and one heavy lance cavalry unit.

You also have your leader,

which decrease the mindfulness meter. A character can also increase experience points by finishing achievements such as gaining all five letters of PEACE in one level.

I hope you play this game when it comes out in 2018!

Edwin Kim
Grade 6

Mindfulness Balance

My game would be called “Mindfulness Balance.” It would be a game where you would have to time your clicks and bring your character back to the present. Before I describe the game, I want to emphasize why mindfulness is important. The reason that this can be very helpful is because everyone worries. Then, they fail because instead of focusing on what is in front of them they think about the future or the past. So, if they are taking a test, they might forget everything because they are too busy focusing

General Mindfulness, who can be put in any unit or be an independent unit. The light and heavy variations of the units relates to their armor and weapons. Light units cost less and move faster but do less damage and have less defense. Heavy units cost more money and are slower but do more damage and have more defense. You can choose one of these following abilities for your general:

- A) The ability to rally any routing units back to the fight.
- B) The power to strike fear into the enemy making them more likely to route or surrender for 60 seconds.
- C) The power to strengthen the defense and damage of nearby allies for 60 seconds.

The general will always have one major ability called mindfulness, which is an ability that slows down time for 60 seconds allowing you to plan your strategy in a battle.

on what is going to happen in the future. That is what mindfulness is for. It is supposed to help you stay focused on what is in front of you. What is done is done.

In the game, there are going to be flashbacks about the character's past. A part of the game involves a Subway Surfers platform. You are going to be running through space and time, dodging memories from the past. After you finish running, the timed clicks part will come up. You will need to tap certain parts of the screen. The reason you need to do this is to bring your character back from either the past or the future. In essence, each click brings you back to the present!

Michael Boanoh
Grade 6

The Mindful Timer

What app would I create to teach people about mindfulness? The app I would create would be called "The Mind-

Aside from the general, another powerful character is the mage. When mages are very strong, they unlock the mindfulness school of magic. This school of magic can allow unlimited use of the mindfulness ability, the ability to increase your soldiers' mindfulness in a battle which increases their speed, and the ability to decrease your opponent's mindfulness.

Jeremy Bywater
Grade 6

Mind Your Space!

There are many possibilities of making a game about mindfulness. So, I decided to share my idea. I call it "Mind Your Space!" The story would be that you are playing as a 6th grader who is trying to stay in the present but certain distractions or obstacles keep getting in your way. In this game, there would also be character customization. You would be able to choose the gender, clothing, etc. You would be able to design the clothing of your character,

ful Timer.” This app gives you advice and daily reminders to take a few moments and bring yourself back to the present and nothing else because “staying in the past or future only brings stress” (as quoted by Mr. Mosca). Also, the app plays customizable music to soothe your nerves. The app will always play different genres to keep you relaxed. “The Mindful Timer” also lets you know when you should go to sleep and when you should start working.

“The Mindful Timer” doesn’t just give advice like those fake fortune cookies. “The Mindful Timer” gives you advice from real live people who practice mindfulness! “The Mindful Timer” tells you when you should wake up (depending on what you do). You cannot practice mindfulness when you’re tired and you also can’t go to school or work tired and still try to practice mindfulness. That’s why you have the alternative option to put in some information about

too! An example of a distraction might be a cow who is on a ball and eating a taco. To get through these obstacles easily, there would be certain boosts that you can collect such as instruments. These boosts would help the character become calm for a certain period of time. During this calm period, getting through obstacles would be a breeze. Each boost would have different effects. For example, maybe the piano would be a focus boost so that you don’t get easily distracted. The trumpet might focus on speed so that you can get through the obstacle quickly! At the end of every mission completed, your character would peacefully meditate despite all the distractions you faced to show your success.

Honestly, I would play this game. It would be crazy, weird, adventurous, calm, fun, and would have wonderful graphics.

Jonathan Melchor
Grade 6

yourself that can help us help you get your energy to study mindfulness and get your salary higher or grades higher. Like I said, you don't have to put in personal information, but for the best results in mind, I suggest you do.

As a bonus, this app helps you with more than just mindfulness. This app also helps you strategize on how to help yourself preserve energy.

Braylon Ware
Grade 6

Tragic Dimension

Here I lay flat on the arid sand that relaxed my feet when suddenly giant creatures that looked like Vikings walked amongst us from the nearby sea flooding my way. Even though I felt a sudden urge to run burning inside of me, I continued to stay on the hot, dry sand, paralyzed.

“Marvy, Barckley, get away! Come to Mama. Come on...” As I continued to lay down frozen as a popsicle, my mom’s voice made me realize I wasn’t dreaming.

Immediately, I looked to the left to find only the worst of my imagination. Marvy, my four-year-old baby brother running toward the terrifying giants. Although I knew Marvy loved fairy tales and all other kinds of fiction, I couldn’t believe he would do such a risky thing. As I got off the sand, my legs were cold, so I could only run slowly while my mom ran like she was trying to be the fastest woman alive!

“Marvy, don’t go there sweetie. Come to Mama,” she yelled distinctly. “Barckley, use your powers to save Marvy.”

Suddenly, I stopped to give myself a moment. I thought my mom had gone nuts just because of how unbelievable the situation was. Why would she think that I was some sort of metahuman who could save humanity? The reality was that I was just a normal human trying to run after his little brother, just to save him from giant creatures I thought to be unbelievably terrifying.

“Mom...” I shouted while seeing a glimpse of Marvin’s face laughing while being sucked into a portal.

Standing here recalling the last image I saw made me cry. Seeing the impossible was the exact opposite of good. Oh! How good it should feel to be on the beach in Florida, but I could not bear the thought of my mom and brother dead. So, I took the first step and started to run!

*Gregory Senat
Grade 6*

What You Cannot See

What is crystal and clear
Is not all there is,
Because deep down in there
Lies all this hurt of his.

But some cannot see it
For they are blinded by the smile,
Their friendliness and helpfulness
Or why they reconcile.

Only a few can see that far,
Past the thick atmospheric layer,
To see all that he has been through.

But some will keep him in prayer,
And some will see past this layer.
They will ignore it and say, "Later."

If you possess these amazing goggles,
Put them to good use.
Knot this person back together
Tight; Make sure they're never loose.

Samuel Nwankpa
Grade 7

— |

**An excerpt from the biography:
Shizuka Matsuo**

My mom, Shizuka Matsuo, and dad have been living together for twenty-five years even though they have different backgrounds. My mom says that “we are a multiracial family, and you have the opportunity to learn the values of diversity and respect. As a biracial child, you don’t need to choose one race or heritage.” To her, interracial marriage means exchanging culture, background, opinions, and respect. She wants me to have lots of American values and Japanese values to remind me of who I am. She tells me, “Our family is like a cultural melting pot.”

Being Japanese to her means being nice, honest, hard-working, and having pride. She believes these adjectives because of how her parents made her be respectful to others, always try her best, tell the truth, and be proud of who you are and what you do. She doesn’t miss Japan at all (besides the good sushi) because she was never able to relax there. There is a lot of pressure of being a good child, citizen, mother, and wife. In New York, she feels less pressure. Even though she isn’t rich, which is something she wanted in her life, her dream came true by going to the place she wanted to live in and raising a family.

*Dejean Sypher
Grade 7*

An excerpt from the biography: Daniel Attuquaye

When Daniel finished high school in Ghana, he was almost on the verge of death. He had come down with malaria, and it was one of the worst experiences of his life. He remembered not being able to do anything. He felt anxious because he knew that all the time he spent in bed resting could have been spent doing other things, like playing sports.

Daniel was the only person in his neighborhood that he knew who had malaria, so he had a lot of time by himself and no one to interact with. He had so much time on his hands that he started hallucinating. When hallucinating, he often dreamt of encounters with made-up creatures and going on adventures. He didn't remember what he specifically hallucinated about, but he knew they fell into that category. While sick, he felt nauseous, weak, and had no appetite. His mother did the best she could to make him feel better. She went to the hospital almost every day to check up on and comfort him. He was in the hospital for a week and then spent three weeks in bed at home.

The hospitals in Ghana were inferior to those in the United States. In most Ghanaian hospitals, there was always a lack of medical equipment. He recalled taking a medicine called quinine. It helped him get better, but every time he took it he was itchy. He felt like he was on fire. As he got older, he realized that the cause of the itchiness was due to sulfur being in the medicine, which he was allergic to. Now, whenever he goes to the doctor, he tells them his allergies.

That experience with malaria changed his life. Whenever he goes back to Ghana to visit relatives, he takes all the necessary precautions to not get sick. He takes a medicine called mefloquine. Anyone who uses this medication must use it once, two weeks before they go to Ghana, and once a week whilst in Ghana.

Because of having malaria at such a young age, he has become very health cautious. He rarely eats out and likes to eat home-cooked meals because he knows what's going into his body and how it was made. The malaria experience was so bad that he takes drastic measures when it comes to not getting sick. He said that whenever the weather is fifty degrees or lower, he can be found wearing multiple layers: an undershirt, an inner shirt, two sweaters, and a coat to top it all off, much to the amusement of his wife and son.

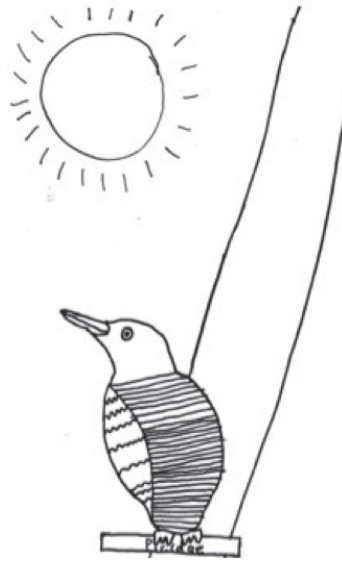
*Andrew Botchway
Grade 7*

The Forest

Koalas kick kind kangaroos
While cockatoos cook cats
Playing poker
And lizards licking lollipops
Possums pick prickly pineapples

Victor Yu, Grade 7

*Drawing by
Sion Facey*



The Woodpecker

The light slowly peeks through the door.
The numb feet gently touch the floor.
Newfound consciousness allows him to soar.

He eats his bread when on the fly,
And hears mother's chirp to say goodbye.
Perfectly punctual, Picidae starts work and sighs.

Sion Facey, Grade 7

**An excerpt from the biography:
Maria Rowena Flores**

After graduating from De La Salle University and teaching for about seven years in Manila, Philippines, the New York City Board of Education invited Maria to come to the United States to teach students in New York. During this time, the Department of Education was asking teachers from abroad to come and teach math and science. With her degree in biology, she was invited.

The adjustment was stressful for her as she had to leave her two children in the Philippines with her husband to go to a country she had never been to. However, she also felt that if she took this opportunity, she could give her kids a better life than she had. Her husband was a soldier like her father, and before leaving to go to the U.S., she asked him to resign from the Navy and take care of the kids. To her surprise, he said yes.

Teaching was a heartache for Maria because she faced discrimination by her middle school students. In her words, “I experienced students telling me to go back to my country and cursing me out, you know. So, I had to assert myself as their teacher, which was not easy. I was emotionally and physically exhausted every day for two years.” She informed the administrators of the school and the parents of the disrespectful behavior which helped slightly, but she had to constantly keep calling them out. She gave out detentions to rowdy students. She also set up strict rules, but not much changed. She never really understood why they disliked her so much. She wondered if maybe it was because she came from another country.

*Neil Baidan
Grade 7*

Formation

I was a tree who lived with a bee.
Then something touched me and I couldn't see.
So I thought about what I could be,
But soon got scratched by a crazy bear,
And thus was changed into a chair.
The rest of my life's been a nightmare.

Nate Gonzalez
Grade 7

Chair

Going to sleep, I had a dream
Of a chair from my childhood.
Over time, we've both become dull and old
Along the way.
Recalling many memories.
Away from my dream, in the real world
I am known as a wise legacy,
Knowing many things about life.
Both I and this chair are
Alike in many ways. I will never forget that dream I
had.

Torin Thomas
Grade 7

— |

Wisdom Tree
(Inspired by "Trees" by Joyce Kilmer)

From seed to stem and from trunk to tree
and roots to top.
From what I can see
This tree is much better than me.

She wanders around in my train of thought.
She lifts her rustling arms to pray.
Her apples descend down like rocks in water.
She stops those rays from invading our eyes,
and we watch her leaves dance in the air.

In the winter this tree is naked and totally brown.
But when they come and cut her down,
I sit on her stump and
think of the years she stayed alive.

Her time had come.
We are now known as monsters,
Cutting down this tree.
I hope I can have one more day with just her and me.

Mohammad Moussaif
Grade 7

A Month's Travels

Traffic was inevitable and so were accidents. The roads were drenched and cars were slipping and sliding about the city. As the white flakes engulfed the city, little eleven-year-old Jerry was making his way to school through a treacherous path of snow up to his waist. Speeding cars zoomed past him. It was rush hour in a blizzard. Not much was visible with the white onslaught blocking his view, and everyone else's too. Little did Jerry know, he would not make it to school that morning.

Chaos echoed through the city, and Jerry didn't see it coming. A 1995 Ford Mustang came drifting around the corner at the speed of light. The light was red, but it was coming closer to Jerry by the second. An engine revved nearby and what felt like a lightning bolt hit his chest head on. He flew into the air and landed into the never-ending white abyss. His eyelids dropped and shielded him from the outside world, and he disappeared into the black emptiness that is sleep.

He woke up to the sight of a vast and open area filled with what appeared to be browning grass, like the dying grass in his tiny, unkempt backyard. He looked up to the giant acacia tree above him and noticed an enormous white vulture gazing down at him. He saw crocodiles lying on river banks and a herd of zebras munching on grass close by. He heard a loud roar in the distance and saw a few lions feasting on a rotten carcass. The sky was the color of the ocean and the sun beamed down on him, even through the leaves of the tree. Jerry had no idea why or how he got here, or what happened before he woke up, but he thought he was in a savanna some place in Africa.

Jerry picked himself up off the ground and made his way through the tall grass into the seemingly endless plains ahead of him. He took his shirt off and dripped a trail of sweat on the ground. He needed water. The dehydration was too much. It

must have been a hundred degrees, and he felt like a sponge. As his body weakened, he felt each gasp for air get harder to grasp and each step longer than the last, but he kept going. And what kept him going was the thought that he was thousands of miles away from anyone he knew, or anyone at all for that matter. He was in total isolation in the middle of nowhere.

He felt like a survivalist on National Geographic, as if he needed to drink his own pee to survive, or build a shelter out of twigs and hunt for nearby food.

He heard the nearby cackles of what sounded like a cartoon character laughing at a corny joke. He turned around to the sight of a few spotted creatures that looked like dogs galloping toward him with blood dripping down from their jaws. The hyenas had just feasted on a zebra baby.

“So, this is it,” Jerry thought. “I’m going to die right here, right now, not knowing where I am.”

He put his hand to his heart and looked up to God for answers. He prayed and prayed, even though he’d never done it before. Magically, the sun vanished into the blankets of darkness and Jerry felt a raindrop hit his face. The animals around him stopped and cherished the moment as he did, and all looked to the sky and stuck out their tongues. The hyenas stopped the chase and went off in the opposite direction.

Jerry walked around an acacia tree and his eyes rolled into the back of his head like he was on a rollercoaster. He looked back at the tree and was surprised to see a pile of orange leaves on the ground. He walked back around the same corner and crunched them. It was a totally different place now.

The sky was bluer than the Pacific and the birds were singing a tune. It seemed like a princess fairy tale. The people had smiles up to their noses and walked as if they were late to work. Mountains surrounded the paradise, and Jerry didn’t mind the change at all. He decided to follow the flow of traffic and see where it would take them. The people seemed to be going to the same place anyway, and they stuck together like a school of fish.

Jerry didn't know what to expect at this point. Nothing was leading him to an answer.

"Excuse me miss," he said politely as a woman passed, but she kept walking on the seemingly mile-long gravel pathway.

Jerry missed his family. He missed the city. He missed his friends, too.

"Am I dead?" he thought. "Is this the pathway to Heaven?"

He looked at his hands and pinched himself. He didn't feel a thing. Not thinking much of it, he kept walking on.

He met a fork in the road. It was left or right. The people were taking the left pathway, but Jerry didn't see an end to that pathway. So, he let his impulse take him to the forest ahead. He took a step forward and the gravel crunched beneath his feet.

He walked into the forest as it became greener and greener and God's tears poured down upon him. The hundred-foot-tall redwood trees seemed to surround him as he heard the loud purring of a nearby "cat" somewhere in the trees.

"Meow," he responded, as if he were his cat, Otus, back in Brooklyn.

"Meow," the cat purred once more.

"Well, I got nothing better to do anyway."

So, he followed the sounds through the labyrinth that was the rainforest. He was stomping on leaves and breaking through vines, but for what? To find some wild cat? As he stepped where the purring was coming from, he looked up and noticed he just lured himself into a death trap. Saliva dropped onto his head, and the cat above him roared like a lion. He looked into the yellow abyss that was its eyes, and it looked back with its lips curled up revealing canines the size of Jerry's finger.

The panther leaped down twenty feet from the tree and Jerry was motionless, frozen in time. And it seemed so. As the enormous black panther leaped at him every millisecond felt like a year and Jerry could do nothing but stare into its eyes

deeply. As the beast was only an inch away from him, Jerry closed his eyes and let it happen. He waited for the inevitable pain to hit him, but nothing did. He slowly opened his eyes.

“What the hell is happening to me? Where am I?”

“Watch your mouth, boy. You’re in church, and people are trying to pray,” a black woman around fifty years old said to him.

He glanced at his surroundings and wondered where he’d end up next. When would he just die already so this cycle could end? He saw the bibles around him, the crosses, the tinted windows, and flowers. Jerry lost all hope. He questioned life and death, time, and reality.

He picked himself up and walked out of the front doors. He heard them slam behind and everything he believed in stayed in there.

“Athens Family Church,” the sign outside read.

But Jerry was tired, hungry, and mostly thirsty, and he wanted to end his journey already. He lay down in the green waves below him. Sprawled out on top of the grass, he wondered about his family. All the good times he had and the bad ones. A salty tear fell from his eye onto a sunflower below him. He peered into the sun and it blinded him momentarily. Unable to see, he started rubbing his eyes frantically. His vision was blurry but started to regain. He looked up again and instead of the sun, a large lamp was shining down on him. Instead of grass, his head was resting on a flat pillow, and his body on a mattress that felt like a brick. Instead of the wind blowing through his hair, it was only an air conditioner.

He tore off the tiny blanket and sat up to peek out of the window. The sun was gone and replaced by the never-ending wrath of snow falling from the clouds. Below was a velvety blanket of it as taxis picked up and dropped off people, and a 1995 Ford Mustang sped through a red light. He knew he was back in the city, in his borough. And for the first time in a while, a grin like the Grinch’s took over his face. He stepped

out of bed and immediately hit the ground. He tried to get up, but he couldn't feel his legs. The door handle opened and a woman wearing a blue mask on came in with a notepad in her hand. She dropped it and took off her mask.

“He's up!” Jerry heard faintly.

“Well, get him off the ground,” a different voice said.

He felt a few pairs of hands firmly grasp him and lift him back into the bed.

“Contact his parents. They'll want to hear the good news,” a woman to his left said under her mask. “He's been asleep for a whole month.”

He peered out of the open door only to read a sign that made him realize everything that had happened beforehand: New York Methodist Hospital.

Fernando Fernandez-Guzman
Grade 8

I Threw My Life Away

Hello, everyone. My name is Johnny.
The perfect life, oh, I had it all right.
Cars, yachts, planes, and even chandelier lights.
After my first wage, I went to party.
That made my coach as hot as wasabi.
“You set a standard for the rest of the team.
If I let you stay, people won’t like you, like a black jelly bean.”
Then he decided it was time to release me.
“I had to do this. I’m sorry, Johnny.”
His words were like getting hit with a belt.
The media’s critiques were like an army!
All I could hear from Browns fans was “Shame on you!
Boo! Boo! We should’ve never drafted you!”
Then I got in trouble at a hotel—
That almost got me in a metal cell.
You probably thinkin’, “Sucks to be you!”
I’m coming back, but only time will tell.
My jersey will again be able to sell,
Like Odell Beckham Jr’s.
OBJ said I could rock a New York Big Blue.
To kids, I could be like those turtles under the sewers.
I could get a ring in a year or two.
Ok, this is up to you:
Do I look better in green or in blue?

Andrew Botchway
Grade 7

Forgiveness

The wind blew many leaves violently across the road. The weather report said that there was going to be a major snowstorm over the weekend. It was very typical in the harsh winters that Chicago always had.

Edgar was sitting in his bed, on his phone scrolling through his social media account. He had grown his whole life seeing it snow like this. It always snowed around Christmas time when his father always failed to fly back home from New York. Edgar stood up, placed his phone on his lamp table, and went to the kitchen. As he was walking toward the kitchen, he blurted out, “Mom, what are we having for dinner?!”

Then his mom said, “Chicken, some rice, and mashed potatoes.”

Under his breath he said, “Lit!!!” Edgar then sat on the kitchen table waiting for his mom to serve him dinner.

“So, what have you been doing this afternoon?” his mom asked.

“Nothing much. Just sleeping, eating, and lying in bed wondering if my dad will actually make it this year for Christm ...”

“C’mon Edgar, don’t say that!” his mother interrupted. “You know that your father

works very hard to keep us healthy. He pays the bills and tries to make sure that we all have the right necessities. He is just,” she paused, “really busy sometimes. Besides, there is still one more week left until Christmas, and the snowstorm is predicted to only last for the weekend. So, he probably will make it this year.”

Edgar went to his room and shut the door. *For six years, my dad has not visited us. Every Christmas it’s the same thing, he thought. If only for once he could make it and show that he actually cares.*

The news came on. The snowstorm increased in power and now registered as a blizzard. Weather experts predicted that it might be one week before the storm finished. Edgar sighed. He lay down on his bed and started to tear up. But then he shook his head, put on a straight face, and relaxed. The last time he had spent it with him was six years ago. That was when he was nine years old. He had many old happy memories from the gift unwrapping on a late-night Christmas Eve, to his dad playing his Xbox 360 with him. He missed those old happy times. They were all memories that made Edgar smile.

Edgar was planning to go out with his friends the next day. He looked at his phone. The time said 11:11. He messaged his friend, Bryan, and asked him if he was going to come tomorrow. Bryan replied saying that he heard that the plans were canceled and that no one was going.

“Great!” Edgar said out loud.

For the past few weeks, his friends kept on canceling all the plans they made. He had no idea why. He secretly thought that they did not want to hang out with him anymore. Edgar started thinking that because one of his friends mysteriously stopped talking to him both in person and through text message. He then let go of his phone and went to go brush his teeth. He rarely fell asleep earlier than 12:00, but he went straight to bed, sleeping with his happy memories of the past.

The next day, he woke up with his body trembling and sweaty. He had dreamt that his father had died in a plane crash due to a malfunction. He was creeped out and scared at the same time because the day before, he had been talking to his mom about how his father never makes it home for Christmas.

He finally stood up and went to go take a shower. As he was taking a shower, he was still thinking about the nightmare he had. He was thinking about how his life would change if his dad actually died. He thought about how he would not have any more money because his mom did not work. He also thought about how devastating it would be for his mom and

for him. All the memories he had with his dad before he went off to New York to go search for a job that would pay enough to pay up for their debt.

Once he finished taking a shower, his mom called him.

“Yes mom,” he replied.

“Can you please go out and buy the groceries. It’s already 12:00 o’clock.”

“Alright,” Edgar said with a smirk on his face.

“Hey, weren’t you supposed to go out with your friends?”

“Yeah, but they canceled, and now everybody’s not going anymore.”

“Oh, well. Hurry up then and go buy!”

Edgar changed his clothes. He checked the weather to see if it was cold. It was thirteen degrees. He put on two sweaters and a coat. Then he left the house and made his way to the grocery store.

On his way to the grocery store he was walking at a very slow pace. He was still bummed about not going out with his friends that day. He had really been looking forward to it. As he made a left to enter the grocery store, something caught his eye. He turned back and saw his friends. He looked closely to make sure that he was seeing properly. And there they were. His friends had lied to him.

He noticed how they looked as if they were having so much fun. Bryan, Jim, Alexis, Noah, they were all there. Edgar’s eyes began to tear up. He moved toward them. As he was walking toward them, his friends were also walking away. Then Edgar was bold enough to shout at them.

“Hey!”

All of his friends turned around with surprised looks on their faces. Their heads turned around. They all recognized that voice. All of them tried to hide their faces under their hoods and faced their heads down.

Then Edgar said, “I thought we weren’t going out anymore. Bryan told me that all of you canceled because you

all had something to do.”

Bryan was also with the group. He was turning a different direction. His face was red and he was looking at everybody else that was with him.

“Bryan,” Jim said, “You should have told us.”

“Yeah man. We were all free for today and you told him that we weren’t going to hang out? That’s mad foul,” Noah said.

Bryan just stood there in silence, his face red. He then turned to Alexis and laughed. Alexis laughed, too.

“Oh, well. We got discovered,” Alexis said with some giggles. “Ed-in-the-Head actually figured us out.”

“Hey, chill. How you gonna call out homie like that? And what you mean ‘we got discovered?’” Noah said.

Bryan and Alexis exchanged looks. Edgar looked furious. He clenched his fist and was

about to punch Bryan in the face, but he dismissed the thought and just crossed his arms.

“So, you see,” Bryan said. “Ever since me and Alexis saw you, we just plain out didn’t like you. Your grades were bad and so was your attitude. We hated every single thing you did. From the way you walked to the way you spoke. We thought that you would’ve realized by now we didn’t like you, but somehow you still remained in our group!” He turned to Alexis and said, “Let’s go.”

As Alexis and Bryan left, Noah and Jim stayed with Edgar. They supported him. They knew about Edgar’s issues. They knew that he had practically grown up without a dad. They knew that it was very hard for him to have the motivation to actually do well in school. Noah just looked at him and said, “We gotchu, fam.”

Then Edgar told them how he was grateful for them standing up for him and that they were great friends. They then planned to go out later in the week.

He came back home with the groceries that his mom told him to buy. His mom smiled at him. Edgar smiled at her

back. He went to his room and relaxed for a little bit. Then he went on his Instagram account. Alexis and Bryan had unfollowed and blocked him. Edgar just had a grin on his face. He did the same thing to them back. Before he did, he messaged each one of them a text that read, "Lol, too chicken to say anything to my face. Have a nice life."

Of course, none of his friends were going to see this message since they had already blocked him. But at least he tried to warn them. After he had sent the message to Bryan and Alexis, he asked his mom, "Is the food ready?"

His mother replied, "Yes honey. Your food is ready."

"Mom, you are the only one that truly loves and cares for me."

"Of course, Edgar. You are my little boy."

Five days later, it was Christmas Eve. The blizzard was very strong. The snow was falling at an unstoppable rate. It had already snowed two feet. Edgar was chilling in his bed. He had made a new Instagram account. He made it completely different. He followed Bryan and Alexis. He wanted to see what they were up to. It was 8 p.m. and his mother told him that his father was not coming this Christmas but that he would come after the blizzard calmed down. Edgar did not even care. He saw a post made by Bryan that said that he was hanging out with his buds to just check out the snow. Edgar knew exactly where they were. They had always gone to that place when they would hang out with each other. Edgar just liked the post and then moved on. Then he told his mom that he was going out to see the snow and he left.

As he was outside, he reflected about the things that had happened. His friends had left him, his dad was not going to come for Christmas, yet again, and school was about to start again next week. Edgar took a deep breath and then exhaled. He sat down on the cold soft snow. He picked up some snow with his glove and then made a snowball. He threw it as hard as he could up the side of a building. The snowball reached

all the way to the top. He smiled. This small action prevented him from becoming any more angry and sad since he knew that just like his snowball, he could be successful and reach past any limits.

A few minutes later, he saw a car arrive right in front of the house. His mom did not tell him about anyone coming over. Edgar stared at the car then he saw a man come out. He was tall, muscular, and was wearing a hat and scarf. The man walked to the back of the car and he took out many boxes. Edgar went back into his house because he was confused. He asked his mom, "Who is that?" but his mom did not respond. Then there was a knock on the door. His mom opened the door, and there was his dad, his arms stuffed with presents. Edgar raised his eyebrows. He did not know what to say. He was both mad and happy at the same time.

Deep in his mind, he thought about how his dad had left him for six years alone, without a man, a father, to look up to. He thought about the many times that he needed a dad to be with him and coach him to do what was right, but there was never one there to support him. Another part of him was happy. He was happy to see his dad after many years, but he could not let go of the bad times he had spent without him. Yet, deep in his heart, Edgar still had room for forgiveness.

"So, how's it been going?" he said.

Christian Sanchez
Grade 8

An excerpt from the biography: Rosa Jiminez

Rosa Jiminez had a hard start to life. She was born to an abusive mother, and when she decided to leave to live with her father in Italy, her life was seriously changed again. She was held captive by a man for seven years. The following is an excerpt from Rosa's biography:

One day, Rosa finally escaped.

“The man left the door open when he left so I waited about ten minutes assuring he was gone, and then I left. Lost and confused, I started running. It was the first time in seven years that I was outside. Eventually, I found a public school in Florence. It was around the end of the school day so everyone was leaving. One girl in the crowd was leaving with my father. I ran up to my dad crying and only said, ‘Daddy?’ My father hugged me and I felt his tears running down my back. He wiped his face and said, ‘Rosa, this is your sister Yvette.’” My grandmother said that they hugged and talked about what happened the whole car ride home, instantly forming a bond.

One day Yvette and Rosa were in the park playing a game. “I stopped to tie my shoe and as I went down I saw a child named Giovanni.” They knew of him because they were neighbors, but they were not very close. “He looked as if a group of people had attacked him and he had most definitely been stabbed. We asked, ‘Are you okay? Can you hear me?’ No response. I said, ‘We’re going to get you some help, okay?’” They called the ambulance and when they arrived they said, “We are so sorry but he is not going to make it.” Rosa began to cry and Yvette hugged her.

“I thought to myself, what if it was my mom? Would I be sad, after what she did to me? I wanted to see her again because I loved her. No matter what she did to me, she was my mom.” Rosa saved up for a flight to New York, getting paid less than minimum wage, but eventually got enough to go.

Jvon Hurtado, Grade 7

An excerpt from the biography: Emeyou Teshineh

Emeyou Teshineh was born in Harlem of New York City in 1966. She went to Pre-K at the age of five at Public School Thirty-Six on 123rd Street and Amsterdam Avenue. Emeyou was shy and didn't say much, and this resulted in her not having many friends. "I just didn't know how to talk to people. I was afraid to say the wrong thing." In mid-September, about two weeks after the first day of school, a girl approached her, and they made small talk. This girl was Lysiane Ribeiro. Emeyou liked how Lysiane was simple in personality and was someone that she could trust with gossip or secrets. Their relationship continued to grow. They ended up going to the same middle school, The Ascension School, and talked on the phone and played games such as jacks as they lived on the same street. Emeyou said she wants her kids to play games together just like she had done with Lysiane. Today, Emeyou and Lysiane live on the same street and Lysiane is her children's godmother.

Emeyou grew up in a three-person household which included her mother Anna, her father Mamo, and sister Marghiee who is three years older than her. The relationship with her sister wasn't always loving and helpful like it is now. They sometimes fought over silly things, such as the possession of candy or whose bed someone was going to sleep on. However, after years of tormenting, they learned to protect each other because their fighting was taking a toll, and they got sick of it. From there, their relationship only got better because there was less fighting. "It took time. It was a healing process. So, to stop this, we started giving each other time to let our emotions out and hear each other if we were angry. Counting to ten helped," she said. "I remember we fought to a point where it was just too much to handle and it had to stop. We were starting to get in trouble with our parents too much

and they were telling us to stop. So, we took the time to look at each other as human beings with emotions instead of as annoying pests. When we took this new approach, we learned new things about each other, like what our favorite thing to do on the weekend was or what books we liked.” This started at the end of middle school and the beginning of high school.

Marghiee got liver cancer at the age of fifty in June of 2016. Emeyou was terrified when she heard this because their mother died from cancer at fifty-two. In fact, “the reason why I stressed so much about it was because I felt as if the same way my mother got sick, Marghiee was getting sick. And it scared me because it felt like the situation was playing out the same way.” Marghiee and Emeyou’s relationship has become so close that Emeyou now goes to help her older sister every day with cleaning her apartment, getting her medicine, or preparing food that she’s allowed to eat. In addition, on every other Saturday, Emeyou goes with her to Mount Sinai Hospital on 101st Street and Fifth Avenue to assist her. Marghiee is strong, fighting cancer now, and is surviving.

The way that the sisters bonded affects the way that Emeyou parents now. When she sees her children fighting, it reminds her of her relationship with her sister, and she knows that in the future they will need each other. She wants them to build a close relationship now. “I see it now. You and your brother were just like me and Marghiee growing up when we fought. You will need each other one day.”

Sion Facey
Grade 7

Walking the Tracks

The boy just jumped off a bridge.
Somehow he knew that he would live.
The man just walked over the train tracks.
Nobody could look, they all turned their backs.
But again, he was safe. The train missed him by a hair.
While the crowd was amazed,
The man walked away with no care.
The man took two steps into the street.
He got hit by a car in a heartbeat.

*Zidane Martinez
Grade 7*



Drawing by Neil Baidan

An excerpt from the story: **Grievances**

I did exactly what Pop told me to do. I got up, brushed my teeth in circles just like Dr. Helen had told me to do, and sat down to eat some Frosted Flakes. When I ate the first spoon of Tony the Tiger's brand cereal, it tasted bland. Frosted Flakes always tasted sorta bland to me, but this time, it was like cardboard or the bread you get at church. I hated putting on my black suit—it looked like I had rolled in dirt and then rolled in tar.

“Hey, cheer up. You look fresh, and I'm with you. Always remember that,” Pop said.

“That's just what Mama said,” I responded.

At seven years old, I didn't get it yet. I didn't get how you could take things for granted and not hold your family tight because you don't know the last time you'll be able to hold them again. The only thing I knew were the prices of the new Jordans or the catchy earworm tune of the new mattress commercial on FOX.

Even when I went out the door with Pop, making sure I had everything and was all ready for the day ahead of me, I still had that tune in my head.

“For the best night's sleep in the whole wide world call...”

“You're watching too much TV, Son,” Pop snickered.

Walking down to the station, we both reminisced and talked about the new Spiderman movie that was coming out and how we were going to save up to buy 3D movie tickets instead of the regular tickets. The one time I went to a 3D movie was with Pop and Mama. It was a mind-blowing experience and Mama promised she would take me again one day. But now, with her gone, it was Pop's duty to fulfill Mama's promise.

“Hey, Pop. You don't gotta answer at all or anything, but how did you and Mama meet?”

Pop smiled. He smiled as if he was about to cry.

“How long we got on this train?” Pop asked.

I looked at the stops. It was a long ride from Baltimore to Philly.

“About two hours,” I said.

“All right. I’m going to tell you everything about Mama. It seems only right, you being young and not having known her as deeply as I did. Just don’t fall asleep, kiddo. And pay attention because I’m only going to say this stuff once.”

Anonymous

Dust

How did this happen? How did it all turn to dust? The rations are low, everyone is angry, and “they” are waiting. This isn’t some “Walking Dead” fantasy. It’s a nightmare. Now those “things” aren’t your typical shambling brain-hungry undead. Sure, most of them are mindless, but in the midst of all those crushed skulls and guts are the Myriads. The Myriads are specialized creatures, built for intense combat, if you call wildly flailing your arms at a target intense combat. They are faster, stronger, and smarter than an average shambler. Some speculate that they were artificially made by the “people” that caused this mess. They say that the Myriads are made by using a forbidden acupuncture technique on already dead corpses or the living if you choose to do so. Stylostixis, pricking the skin with thin, sharp needles originally from China which moved to the West. We survivors have trouble fighting the Myriads, forcing us to make some of our own. It hurts to see those you once knew turned into mindless robots under your command by using what they held most dearly when they were living. Whether it be photos of family, toys, or pieces of cloth, they will obey you as long as you have their item.

Does it matter anymore when you are trying to live in this greed driven world? Trying to survive against an endless onslaught of anger and confusion? Just fighting over and

over, a never-ending cycle. Once said by a wise man, “Until whichever comes first: a bullet or my savior, I will keep clinging to the last glimpse of that terrible illusion...hope.” This was the motto I’ve always thought of when facing troubles since I was a young boy. This was quite often as I suffered great pain when I was young, but as I grew up, I became callous and almost emotionless. Losing myself to the lame numbness of repeated attacks. My dad an alcoholic, my mother neglectful, and my brothers... they did hate me so. Every day I pushed by these troubles only to be faced with the greatest challenge of my life. Maybe it’s bad luck; maybe it’s fate. Who knows... maybe I deserve this?

Those who created this turmoil had a purpose. I’m not trying to justify their actions, but they do prove a good point. Their entire movement is to show the avarice actions of the human race. To represent how mankind’s morals have been deteriorating ever since their creation. To describe neglect towards your brothers and sisters. To display an eat or be eaten world. This is their purpose.

As minutes pass by, I hear a faint crash near the entrance of my safe house. Great, they got through the fence. I listen to their mournful cries and their gentle moans sounding closer and closer. This is how it ends, a cliché and honorless death, unacknowledged (well, except for one thing). I don’t know why, but I just lie here waiting for the inevitable to happen. The Myriads and shamblers pushing at the door. One creek, two creeks, three creeks, one creek, two creeks...three? Nothing, just silence. Then an explosion sounds off causing a numb and buzzing sensation to course through my ear as a figure stands over me at the doorway. Well then, maybe it’s not the end. Maybe, just maybe, this world can go back to the way it was. Before we...caused...this. Before...I...caused...this.

Signed,
Dr. Jamie (covered in blood)

Neil Baidan, Grade 7

An excerpt from the biography: Saran

Do you know what it's like to move away from your parents as a teen because your life is in danger? My mother, Saran, does. She was born on January 30, 1972, in the Bronx. She lived in public housing with her parents and three older brothers. I am her son, and we have a close relationship, but I can annoy her easily since she acts as a perfectionist and wants everything to be a specific way. I feel comfortable sharing information with her that I might not with other people.

When she was only fifteen, Saran moved out of her mom's house to live with her older brother, Lest. Her response to a question about the difference between living with her mom and brother was, "when I was younger, my mom always took me out with her and we had a great relationship, but when I became a teenager things got a little sour." Saran's relationship with her mom worsened when she was a teen because she didn't like her mom's behavior. When Saran was asked why her mom wasn't doing well at parenting, she said that "She was working a lot, dating different guys." Her mom became homeless in 1989 when Saran was seventeen. She said she wasn't sure if her father leaving had influenced her mom's behavior. In addition, she stated that her mom quit working and started receiving public assistance. "She was not using the money she received to pay rent" and Saran was unaware of the reason. She was evicted from her apartment and would stay at her friends' homes.

Saran's relationship with her mom started to get better when they moved in together again when Saran was twenty-three. Her mom became her best friend, but sadly, she died just a few years later.

Luckily, Saran's best friend, Tanika, helped by staying at her house and checking up on her to make her feel better.

Saran had known Tanika since college and the two work together today. Saran thinks Tanika understands her thinking, and she feels like she is “the sister she never had.” When asked how Tanika helped Saran cope with her mom’s death, Saran said, “She ran errands like going to the supermarket, making sure my bills were paid. She assisted with taking care of my children.”

Amari Bryant
Grade 7



Drawing by Brian Young

We Real Cool

**Poems inspired by Gwendolyn Brooks,
1917–2000**

We Real Smart

We real smart. We
do art. We

go to school. We
follow the rules. We

get good grades. We
have financial aid. We

hide our hostility. We
gain A's.

Brian Yang, Grade 7

Tim: A Poem About a Strange Man

Tim's really weird. Tim
Fears beards. Tim

Adores floors. Tim
Robbed a candy store. Tim

Spat at cats. Tim
Chats with hats. Tim

Emulates emus. Tim
Wishes his life would start anew.

Brian Young, Grade 7

History

I learn lies. I
Dismiss, deny. I

Could care. I
Don't dare. I

Erase events. I
Support sense. I

Really realize. I
See signs.

Mack Hernandez, Grade 7

Persistence

I may pass. I
may fail. If
I do, I will not wail. When

I play a sport, I
may lose and get bruised. I
will always attempt to
be in a good mood.

Amari Bryant, Grade 7

Mad Rad

You mad rad. You
Got new fads. You
Hold a gun. You
Have some fun. You
Live in the hood. You
Not trying to be good. You
Ride the rails. You
Go to jail.

Shaun Alexander, Grade 7

You Not Me

You not me. You
barely athletic. You
fake fight. You
get tight. You
act dumb. You
not fun. You
not cool. You
look like a fool.

Armani Guzman, Grade 7

Dreams
Poems inspired by Langston Hughes,
1902–1967

Dreams

Believe in dreams
Cause when they die,
Life is like a hot desert.
It is so dry.

Hold fast to dreams
For if they go,
Life is a frozen field
With lots of snow.

Bruce Falloon, Grade 7

Never Ditch Your Goals

Never ditch your goals
Cause when they go,
Life is like a frozen tundra
Without any snow.

Never ditch your goals
Cause when they die,
Life is like burnt wood
Black and dry.

Jason Pepin, Grade 7

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