

Illinois English Bulletin

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Illinois Association of Teachers of English

IATE is a professional organization for teachers of English/language arts. IATE publishes the *Illinois English Bulletin* and the *IATE Newsletter* and hosts an annual fall conference. IATE is organized by districts throughout the state, each district having a district leader and providing local activities to members throughout the year.

IATE also maintains standing committees that address a number of professional interests and works with other professional organizations to further the interests of teachers. Composed of nearly 1,500 teachers throughout the state, IATE provides a working network for the exchange of teaching tips, current research, and professional development as well as enduring friendships.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE BEST ILLINOIS STUDENT POETRY AND PROSE OF 2008

JANICE NEULEIB

Once again the students of Illinois and their teachers have provided us with a bounty of impressive writing. The poems speak in many voices, including the unvoiced feelings of an elephant. The prose pieces range from fiction about life in Illinois and elsewhere, sometimes far away and long ago, to literary commentary and personal essays. As always, the *Illinois English Bulletin* editor wishes to thank the teachers who have worked with these students and who have submitted their work for judging. Ongoing thanks also go to Robin Murray and Kimberly Radek for their commitment to all the students and teachers who write and read so diligently. Their work with the judging is an important and much appreciated contribution to IATE and to the students of Illinois.

In addition, thanks go to Kevin Stein, Illinois Poet Laureate, for his ongoing work with the judging of the poems

receiving special mention for the year. Stein, an amazingly talented and generous poet, initiated this practice of selecting and noting poems each year. IATE expresses gratitude to Stein for his work and appreciation for his contributions to the state of Illinois and its writing community.

As always, the *Illinois English Bulletin* could not exist without the work of Sarah Haberstick, production director, for this journal. IATE appreciates the commitment of the Illinois State University English department and the university for providing such an outstanding and efficient director to implement the production of each issue. Thanks also to Michael Bunce, Julia Drauden, and Haley Drucker, student assistants, for their tireless work with the close reading of the text of this issue.

**TEACHERS WITH STUDENTS PLACING IN
ANY CONTEST CATEGORY**

Mary Bender	Cyn Koukos
Amy Birtman	John Lodle
Glen Brown	Paul Lusson
Mari Brown	Elizabeth Maxwell-Carlson
Heather Corral	Tisha Ortega
Elaine Dion	Carolyn Reinglass
Mara Dukats	Diane Riley
Tarrie Dullum	Lee Roll
Judi Elman	Ginger Shelato
Margaret Forst	Sara Sher
Ann Garrett	Kate Sullivan
Stephen B. Heller	Karen Topham
Kim Herron-Titus	Jan Wiezorek
Ashley Hobbs	Nell Wiseman
Michele Honecker-Ummel	Debra Zeman
Paul Kemp	Amy Zimmermann

IATE POETRY RUNNERS-UP

Mackenzie Boltz, “Dancing the Night Away,” Grade 6, Rochester Middle School, Rochester, Ginger Shelato–teacher

Melanie Clapp, “December Sunset,” Grade 12, Oakland High School, Oakland, Lee Roll–teacher

Grant Dethlefsen, “Last Chance,” Grade 9, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Amy Birtman–teacher

Portia Goodin, “Highwire,” Grade 10, Carbondale Community High School, Carbondale, Kim Herron-Titus–teacher

Emma Michalak, “October,” Grade 8, Lycée Français de Chicago, Chicago, Cyn Koukos–teacher

Christine Robinson, “Loose Screws,” Grade 11, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Karen Topham–teacher

Sophie Staton, “My Uggs,” Grade 7, Lycée Français de Chicago, Chicago, Cyn Koukos–teacher

IATE POETRY HONORABLE MENTIONS

Samuel Aber, "Mostly Nothing at All," Grade 8, Northbrook Junior High School, Northbrook, Heather Corral–teacher

Savannah Beard, "Ode to Uneven Bars!" Grade 6, Rochester Middle School, Rochester, Ginger Shelato–teacher

Veronica Bernabe, "The Music that Comes from Within," Grade 7, St. Matthias Transfiguration Catholic School, Chicago, Jan Wiezorek–teacher

Todd Bollinger, "The Cow," Grade 12, Charleston High School, Charleston, Nell Wiseman–teacher

Cordelia Brand, "Chaos for Sanity," Grade 8, Northbrook Junior High School, Northbrook, Heather Corral–teacher

Amanda Bullock, "In My Own Words," Grade 9, Earlville High School, Earlville, Ashley Hobbs–teacher

Emily Burke-Franz, "Who I Am," Grade 11, Earlville High School, Earlville, Ashley Hobbs–teacher

Mary Kate Cahill, "A Mountain and Beauty," Grade 8, St. Matthias Transfiguration Catholic School, Chicago, Jan Wiezorek–teacher

Aleva Carver, "Overactive Imagination of Life in Five Midnights," Grade 10, Carbondale Community High School, Carbondale, Kim Herron-Titus–teacher

Tina Chen, "Weeds of Hope," Grade 11, Vernon Hills High School, Vernon Hills, Paul Kemp–teacher

Johanna Coleman, "Poetry & Me: The Awkward Affair," Grade 12, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Karen Topham–teacher

Julie Dorbes, “White City,” Grade 6, Lycée Français de Chicago, Chicago, Cyn Koukos–teacher

Mason Fulling, “We Love It, We Hate It,” Grade 8, Northbrook Junior High School, Northbrook, Heather Corral–teacher

Blase Heusner, “Falling Star,” Grade 9, Earlville High School, Earlville, Ashley Hobbs–teacher

Melissa Kaplan, “Steven Kaplan,” Grade 11, Adlai E. Stevenson High School, Lincolnshire, Elizabeth Maxwell-Carlson–teacher

Willow Krumwiede, “Chaniqua,” Grade 7, Hartsburg-Emden CUSD 21, Hartsburg, Tisha Ortega–teacher

Christian La Luz, “The Birds in the Sky,” Grade 7, St. Matthias Transfiguration Catholic School, Chicago, Jan Wiezorek–teacher

Liz Mardiks, “The First Time I Painted My Nails,” Grade 12, Lyons Township High School, La Grange, Glen Brown–teacher

Carrie Mulderink, “On Turning Eighteen (after Billy Collins),” Grade 12, Lyons Township High School, La Grange, Glen Brown–teacher

Jordan Murphy, “Halloween,” Grade 12, Oakland High School, Oakland, Lee Roll–teacher

Connor Olsen, “What Would I Do?” Grade 6, Lycée Français de Chicago, Chicago, Cyn Koukos–teacher

Margaret Mary Orbon, “The Cherry Blossom Tree,” Grade 8, Northbrook Junior High School, Northbrook, Heather Corral–teacher

Elaine Palutsis, “Solitaire,” Grade 12, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Amy Zimmermann–teacher

Sophie Peterson, “Look Out the Window,” Grade 6, Lycée Français de Chicago, Chicago, Cyn Koukos–teacher

Katie Schoder, “Design,” Grade 12, Lyons Township High School, La Grange, Glen Brown–teacher

Kyle Dewayne Smith, “Beathings,” Grade 11, Oakland High School, Oakland, Lee Roll–teacher

Abryl Williams, “A Blackening Heart,” Grade 10, Earlville High School, Earlville, Mary Bender–teacher

Hailey Williams, “The End of the World,” Grade 12, LaSalle-Peru High School, LaSalle, Michele Honecker-Ummel–teacher

Libby Zoller, “Why Nobody Hates the Sound of Birds Chirping,” Grade 9, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Amy Birtman–teacher

IATE PROSE RUNNERS-UP

Rhea Abel, "Making Decisions: From Avoiding Ugly Sweaters to Changing the World," Grade 12, Belleville West High School, Belleville, John Lodle–teacher

Nora Burch, "Reflective Essay," Grade 11, LaSalle-Peru High School, LaSalle, Debra Zeman–teacher

Angela Cao, "Misdeeds of Thought," Grade 11, Vernon Hills High School, Vernon Hills, Paul Kemp–teacher

Lacey Clifton, "A Tale of an Exgraordinary Snowflake," Grade 9, Oakland High School, Oakland, Lee Roll–teacher

Johanna Coleman, "yo-HANH-nah," Grade 12, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Karen Topham–teacher

Amy Gardiner, "Learning to Speak Vulcan," Grade 12, Belleville West High School, Belleville, John Lodle–teacher

Jonah Hanig, "One for the Records," Grade 8, Edgewood Middle School, Highland Park, Sara Sher–teacher

Luke Hanson, "A Gospel of Love," Grade 11, Vernon Hills High School, Vernon Hills, Paul Kemp–teacher

Julianne Ishler, "Time of the Season [for Loving]," Grade 11, Lyons Township High School, La Grange, Kate Sullivan–teacher

Jordyne Lowry, "Inside the Gates of Hell: Let Us Not Forget," Grade 12, Earlville High School, Earlville, Mary Bender–teacher

Maggie Lundstrom, "Visualization," Grade 11, Adlai E. Stevenson High School, Lincolnshire, Stephen B. Heller–teacher

Dina Malagic, “Losing Pieces on the Way,” Grade 12, Lyons Township High School, La Grange, Kate Sullivan–teacher

Juliana McLain, “Cake for Dr. King,” Grade 11, Vernon Hills High School, Vernon Hills, Paul Kemp–teacher

Maddie Schubert, “No Regrets,” Grade 8, Edgewood Middle School, Highland Park, Sara Sher–teacher

Natalie Shay, “The Self-Proclaimed Rabbi’s Prologue,” Grade 10, Highland Park High School, Highland Park, Mari Brown–teacher

Caitlin Steen, “Escaping a Nightmare,” Grade 12, Earlville High School, Earlville, Mary Bender–teacher

Kristin Tanabe, “Breaking the Bonds,” Grade 11, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Karen Topham–teacher

Lina Trucco, “Second Half,” Grade 9, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Amy Birtman–teacher

IATE PROSE HONORABLE MENTIONS

Samuel Aber, "Leave Jesus Outta This," Grade 8, Northbrook Junior High School, Northbrook, Heather Corral—teacher

Scott Andersen, "Regret," Grade 12, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Amy Zimmermann—teacher

Anna Begley, "Anchorage," Grade 11, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Carolyn Reinglass—teacher

Joseph Capps, "The Different Levels of Hugs," Grade 12, Mt. Vernon Township High School, Mt. Vernon, Ann Garrett—teacher

Johanna Coleman, "Broccoli Forest," Grade 12, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Karen Topham—teacher

Claire Curran, "They All Have Something," Grade 12, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Margaret Forst—teacher

Jennifer Dent, "The Cost of Innocence," Grade 12, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Margaret Forst—teacher

Brett Ford, "Chairlift to the Top," Grade 12, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Margaret Forst—teacher

Bianca Kapoor, "Boxes," Grade 11, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Karen Topham—teacher

Matt Leal, "Sword for Hire," Grade 11, Earlville High School, Earlville, Mary Bender—teacher

Matt Leske, "The Basketball Court," Grade 12, Highland Park High School, Highland Park, Paul Lusson—teacher

Elanor Nesbit, "Bear," Grade 11, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Carolyn Reinglass—teacher

Kelsey Poelker, "The Playground," Grade 11, O'Fallon Township High School, O'Fallon, Diane Riley—teacher

**OF POETRY, THIS WORLD,
AND THOSE OTHERS**

KEVIN STEIN
ILLINOIS POET LAUREATE

Poetry gives us the world whole. The poem may do so by means of big ideas or by virtue of minute particulars, but the result is the same. Readers see this world's complexities and beauties and tragedies in full relief, as if the poet carved away its muddled surface and left only the revelation.

This quality Robert Graves referred to as poetry's "stored magic," the poetic act of prestidigitation and the readerly act of participation as both audience and able assistant. Readers accept that the poet is up to something, and they become willing accomplices. They understand the poet will not lift her candle to light upon the particulars of what *is* but will instead drop a curtain over the familiar to show us what *might be*. In the imagined realm of what *could be*, poet and readers meet in the shared pleasure of surprise.

This otherworldly magic often inheres in the very making of the poem. It's not so much a matter of tricking as of conjuring—a fresh world imagined to show us our tired world anew.

In various and manifest ways that is just what happens in this year's Poems of Special Merit. Megan Creighton's subtle "What the Elephant Perhaps Feels" limns the line between our limited human perceptions and the "hyperrealm beyond / our sense of touch." The poem's underpinning is the conjectural "if"—and everything we readers know for certain is called into question by what we don't know. The poem's roots and tendrils are epistemological, testing the limits of what we humans are capable of knowing and of how we come to know it.

This same conjectural impulse powers Tommy Hebson's whimsical "If You Give a Penguin a Popsicle: Numeroff Imitation," where the poem's launching point is revealed in its title. A wacky universe spills delightfully from this imagined first cause as if issuing from the mind of a creator who foresees how one act leads ineluctably to another. The satisfying of one "want" occasions another need that must be answered, no matter how bizarre or problematic. This discomfiting state is all too familiar to any home remodeler who buys a new couch and finds now she must also have new carpet, paint, and lighting—world without end, amen.

In the hands of the painter at work in Jessica Hoffen's "A World Beyond," the new realm's initiating first cause is simply the flush of color and the "flick of the paint brush." Here, through motion and color, the artist creates and thus discovers simultaneously. Various, a "koi" pond, exotic "dragons," and mother with child "emerge" through the artist's interaction with the canvas. As with Hebson's poem, this creative whirlwind circles back upon itself in perpetual play, ending as it began and thus beginning again.

Caitlyn Christine Strader's "A Night of Fun" reminds us that although the imagined world may be enthralling it need not always be benevolent. As if in dream-become-"horrifying nightmare," the speaker experiences an ironic "night of fun / At the circus" harassed by a bevy of clowns. These manic Bozos prey upon the teenaged speaker by employing the typical flower-petal squirt gun or oversized floppy red shoes in less-than-welcoming manner. The result blends humor and terror so characteristic of clownish behavior—whether it occurs in dream or in the school yard—and reminds one not to trust appearances in friend or foe.

When the world is too much with us, as the poet suggests, we weary of it and of ourselves. We turn to the otherworld and often paradoxically discover there what we labored to escape, now revealed in full measure we once were blind to.

Poems of Special Merit
2008–2009 IATE Poetry Competition

These submissions have garnered recognition as Poems of Special Merit:

“What the Elephant Perhaps Feels,” Megan Creighton,
Grade 12, Lyons Township High School

“If You Give a Penguin a Popsicle: Numeroff Imitation,”
Tommy Hebson, Grade 9, Lake Forest High School

“A World Beyond,” Jessica Hoffen, Grade 8, Northbrook
Junior High School

“A Night of Fun,” Caitlyn Christine Strader, Grade 11,
Oakland High School

FROM SEA SALT TO BROADWAY: STUDENT POETRY IN MOTION

ROBIN L. MURRAY

Living in rural Illinois seems to encourage interconnections with the natural world here or elsewhere and interactions within and between relationships. Sixth grader John Freveletti takes us on a walk down Broadway, and Ryan Brown highlights something as miniscule as sea salt. Megan Creighton moves us with a reflection on “What the Elephant Perhaps Feels,” and Caitlyn Christine Strader takes us through “A Night of Fun.” All these budding student poets explore and reflect on their worlds with honesty and emotion, showing us the power of the little beauties that surround them.

This focus on little beauties seems essentially Midwestern. With a vast landscape away from coastlines and mountain ranges, and sometimes broken only by grasses, soybeans, and corn, Illinois seems void of natural wonders until we look closer at little beauties like birds or a falling star. Illinois artists

like John Siblik embrace these little beauties, connecting their art to the natural world in similar ways. As Siblik explains of his focus on interconnections and interactions,

My work references relationships; starting with the individual and moving out in concentric rings effectively creating a community. As a whole the work addresses the ideas and processes of community, environment, chance, emergence, pluralism, and historical narrative. Through various images, words, and expressions, a variety of “acts” surface and are conveyed as blue prints, plans if you like.

Emerging student Illinois poets embrace these “acts,” literal slices of life that provide community and a sense of place. And that sense of place and community, in a sense, tells us a little more about who we are. Their poetry augments works of Illinois poets like Michael Anania, who in “On the Conditions of Place” makes transparent the purpose behind these connections:

As indistinct as water is in water,
places dissolve into places, words
among words, what is carried along,
names whose sense shapes our memory,
all that is said or might be said,
Palatine or Platte, a leaf, a stem,
a proper noun, a spit-curl of scum
that draws along a moving stream
the probable line of what is seen. (1534)

Student poets represented here, from sixth to twelfth grade, all capture a piece of Illinois and teach us something about who we are as humans connected to place. Congratulations to them all!

Works Cited

- Anania, Michael. "On the Conditions of Place." *Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry*. Ed. Richard Ellman and Robert O'Clair. New York: Norton, 1988. 1534.
- Siblik, John. "Artist Portfolios: John Siblik." *Moberg Gallery*. Moberg Gallery, n.d. Web. 26 Aug. 2009.

SEA SALT

I hear waves crash against the shore.
I can taste the salt in the air.
I stare into the distance, evermore.
The breeze blows and musses my hair.
With the occasional call of a seagull or bird,
The beach is smooth with the soft sand.

I hear not a single word.
I just let time slip through my hand.
Sitting and just thinking,
Ideas come to mind.
My only movements are breathing and blinking.
I never experience relaxation of this kind.

The problems of the world seem to halt,
As I sit and feel the cool sea salt.

Ryan Brown

Grade 7

St. Matthias Transfiguration Catholic School
Chicago

Jan Wiezorek, teacher

WHAT THE ELEPHANT PERHAPS FEELS

If a rainstorm
rumbling miles away
can send him to the next grassland,
then stillness is perhaps
the feeling of gnats flitting their wings
and the veins of leaves exhaling;
it may be a silver birch panting,
heavily, towards the surging sea
and the abrasive thumping of
shells shattering, when it happens.
We could ask the elephant
if pressure suffuses his ears
with the air of hubris, if hair
really grows full length
without a perpetual tug, and if war
erupts across deserts without
a tremor of evidence.
If in spring there isn't a tickle
too subtle for us to feel when the flowers
unfold their soft petals,
then what is it like in the
hyperrealm beyond
our sense of touch?

For us, there was no earthquake;
the cracks in the ground suddenly appeared;
the landscape shattered, the buildings fallen,
and we sensed nothing as the earth crumbled.

Megan Creighton

Grade 12

Lyons Township High School
La Grange
Glen Brown, teacher

WALKIN' DOWN BROADWAY

It is night in New York.
Walkin' down Broadway
Nothing ever sleeps.
There is music
Coming out of every window and door.
I walk
Into one theater.
There is an old-fashioned band
Playing in the center of the room.
Everybody is dancing
To the catchy tune.
I join in.
The band suddenly
Goes and plays softer.
I walk out
Humming the tune.
To the next theater
I go.
They are showing
A black-and-white movie
With good music.
I pay my two dollars
And sit down.
The trumpets and saxophones
Play their best.
I walk outside
Music flyer in hand.
Now I go
Where I wanted to be before.
I walk in.
My favorite band

Is playing my favorite song
 "In the Mood"
 I leave after.
 I am tired.
 What a night,
Walkin' down Broadway.

John Freveletti

Grade 6

Rochester Middle School

Rochester

Ginger Shelato, teacher

IF YOU GIVE A PENGUIN A POPSICLE: NUMEROFF IMITATION

If you give a penguin a Popsicle,
He'll want a red one,
He'll then want a different color,

So you'll bring out the whole box that your mother bought
at the store,
He'll then throw a tantrum because there were none left,

He'll want to make his own!
So you'll give him the molds to make them,
He'll pull out the molds before they are ready,

And they'll spill all over your new kitchen,
Once that mess is up,
He'll discover the brisk cool breeze of the freezer that
reminds him of his home in Antarctica,

He'll want to build an igloo in your backyard,
But it's summer time and it's steaming outside,
Chances are he'll want to go back inside,

He'll discover how the ice machine works and stack the
cubes together until,
He has a tiny igloo that reminds him of his family and
friends,

So he'll want to make a documentary to send to his closest
pals,
He'll ask for a camcorder,
He'll film the footage and discovers he wants to share it
with the world,

He'll ask to use your computer to upload his video to
 YouTube,
When he applies the video you clean up the puddle of
 water that used to be an igloo,
Yet again you'll hear him hollering your name,

He'll now have given your computer a case of spyware,
He'll then use antivirus software to restore it back to
 normal,

Next he'll ask for some eyedrops because he got red eye
 from watching the computer screen for too long,
He'll run to the bathroom to put the drops in,
Just then he'll trip and fly into the bathtub,

He'll decide to take a bath seeing that he's already in the
 tub,
But the water isn't cold enough,
So he'll go to the kitchen for some ice cubes,

When he sees the ice cubes it will remind him of the cool
 fruit punch his aunt used to make,
And with his nice, cool, refreshing, fruit punch,
Chances are he'll want a red Popsicle to go with.

Tommy Hebson

Grade 9

Lake Forest High School

Lake Forest

Amy Birtman, teacher

A WORLD BEYOND

Colors, colors, on the wall

Swirling, moving, telling all

A flick of the paint brush

A twist of the hand

A tweak of the nose and on the canvas lies a man.

And on from these motions

Stories emerge of worlds not seen.

Where princesses and dragons rule

And handsome men on horseback valiantly save the day.

All is full of life

A vibrant blue, a shocking orange

Koi swimming in a pond emerge.

A soft baby pink

Quick wisps of hair

Sprightly joyful

Tiny toes, a peachy tan

A warm smile

A mother's embrace.

Blending

Graceful

Mixing slightly

Soft glows

Nature sings its lovely song

Perfection is not perfect.

A ruby
To light up the face
That's not where a nose goes
Blueberry is not the color of a head
It's a masterpiece.

A tomato here
Some garlic there
A little more tomato
And the label is complete.

A tweak of the nose and on the canvas lies a man.
A twist of the hand
A flick of the paint brush

Telling all, moving, swirling

Colors, colors, on the wall

Colors, colors

You know all.

Jessica Hoffen

Grade 8

Northbrook Junior High School

Northbrook

Heather Corral, teacher

NOCTURNAL

I look again into the black,
I see naught but my face stare back,
But in blindness I hear at least,
For in that darkness roams a beast.

I look away from his haunting glare,
The sight of which I can not bear.
His toothy grin of ivory fang,
Before the end of men have rang.

Out of the heavens he comes to be,
And out of fear I turn to flee.
His dancing form consumes my life,
Brandishing his formless knife.

For my life I turn to fight,
A final prayer to the fading light:
"It is over, your search is done,
Let fate show now the righteous one!"

He seeks to make me his again,
To drag me to his shad'wy den.
His strikes are filled with burning rage,
To batter down my steeled cage.

I fight against this evil wraith,
Simply to prove my unyielding faith.
I strike his heart with shaking hand,
In triumph over dark I stand.

A shriek, a howl, a final cry,
Into the dark it goes to die.
But as I look into his lair,
I hang my head in despair.

The better has still not been shown
Our balance is as yet unknown
Yet he is forever gone,
His darkness fades before the dawn.

James Morrow

Grade 10

Lake Forest High School

Lake Forest

Mara Dukats, teacher

A NIGHT OF FUN

Paint, thick and red, drawn in a smile, fake, upward.
The sneering lips open,
Revealing gleaming teeth, sharp, pointed,
Ready to attack when you least expect it.
Hair, striped green, yellow, blue,
Colored to make you laugh.
The patterned outfit, to appear silly.
Polka dots, striped patches, flower buttons
Hypnotize you,
Distracting you while he pounces,
All the while, pulling you deeper
Into the most horrifying nightmare.
A shrill cackle escapes his smile.
Using jokes to make a fool,
Squeezing the white flower button,
Spraying cool water up your nose,
He grabs you with clammy hands.
You try to escape, but
He throws you down.
Giant, red shoes
Stomp you to the ground.
His laugh, earsplitting, rings again,
Piercing.
Prying giant paws away,
Using fingernails and teeth,
You free from his grasp,
Only to look around,
Seeing more, many more.
Seven crawl from a tiny car,
A green one, short and fat,
Another dressed in yellow,

Towering over the others.
An older one, dragging along,
Slinking behind the others.
Three juggle flaming torches for children,
The one behind the tent, smoking, sees you,
All start closing in,
Coming towards you, creeping, stalking.
A night of fun
At the circus.

Caitlyn Christine Strader

Grade 11

Oakland High School

Oakland

Lee Roll, teacher

ILLINOIS PROSE 2008

KIMBERLY M. RADEK

Lorrie Moore writes in her short story “How to Become a Writer” that one might be a writer if “The only happiness you have is writing something new, in the middle of the night, armpits damp, heart pounding, something no one has yet seen. You have only those brief, fragile, untested moments of exhilaration when you know: you are a genius” (122). Once again, we at Illinois Valley Community College have been privileged to read the works of prose that our colleagues across the state have encouraged from their geniuses. We invite you to read this year’s winners and appreciate what Moore calls the “music of language” in these students’ writings—their ability to express themselves both through and with “the atoms of poetry, the cells of the mind, the breath of the soul”—which we certainly hope leads them to happiness long after they have left our classes behind.

Kimberly M. Radek,
for the judges at Illinois Valley Community College:

Mark Brown

Lori Cinotte

Tara Coburn

Kaushalya Jagasia

Ryen Nagle

Randy Rambo

Delores Robinson

Work Cited

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THIS GAME SUCKS

Alex sat with his best friend, Will, playing their favorite video game. They sat, no one speaking, their eyes glued to the screen. The large, very expensive flat-screen television was mounted on the obnoxiously clean, painted-white wall that made up part of a nauseatingly large, painted-white house that made up part of a shamelessly excessive, painted-white neighborhood. The screen was split into two parts, one of which displayed Alex's character and the other, Will's. The two were working cooperatively to put a delightfully bloody end to a terrorist uprising in an unnamed Middle Eastern country. This was in the game, of course. In reality, the two were sitting on black leather couches, drooling.

Halfway around the world, Lt. Gregory Rivera led a small group of men, draped in tan military-issue camouflage, on their daily rounds through the urban wasteland of the capital city of a Middle Eastern country whose name we know all too well. As the group of U.S. soldiers rounded a street corner, a woman began to scream, bullets were fired, a car exploded, and the devil reared its ugly horns. Lt. Rivera raised his assault rifle to his shoulder.

The roar of an explosion bellowed through the high-class surround sound system in Alex's home.

"Will you turn that down?" he mumbled to his friend, his eyes still glued to the bloody mess on the screen.

"Buh?" replied Will, rather pointedly. He gunned down a virtual militant, and reached toward the glass of diet soda resting on the coffee table in front of him, without even looking at it. He grasped blindly at the air twice before making contact with the glass and knocking it onto the floor, creating a large brown spot on the carpet. He finally looked away from the television. "Whoops," he whispered.

"Ah, whatever. Let the cleaning lady take care of it."

"You sure?"

"Yeah. It's her job, isn't it? Now shut up and play the game. We're getting shot at. "

Lt. Rivera fired 16 rounds into the second story of small building and ducked behind a mailbox. From atop the false sense of security the mailbox provided him with, he could see two of his soldiers, one a man and one a woman, lying on their backs in the street. He fired two more shots into the window before the second car bomb went off. He was much closer to it this time.

Tension was building in the basement of the suburban home, as the two boys were preparing to make their final assault on the militant headquarters.

Lt. Rivera lay face down on the ground, dazed and confused, his mouth full of dirt and asphalt. He felt light-headed and looked back to find that he was bleeding profusely from his left leg. Judging by the amount of blood on the ground, he didn't have much left.

As the boys were about to enter the terrorist headquarters and thus begin their final mission, Will was shot from behind and, in a stunning display of computer graphics technology, exploded into ten blood-stained pieces of flesh. The boys were taken aback.

"Are you kidding me? How could let yourself get killed? We were *so* close!"

"Sorry, man. He snuck up behind me."

"This game sucks. Now we have to start all over from the beginning!"

Lt. Rivera saw dark spots blocking his vision before his world completely faded to black.

Samuel Aber

Grade 8

Northbrook Junior High

Northbrook

Heather Corral, teacher

A SHIMMERING RADIANCE

Igor Kusnurylov
December 16, 1943
Oświęcim, Poland

Dear Petrushka,

It's been seven days now since the storm has started. The morale in the rest of the resistance has been reduced to nil, and the food is running low. Whenever I look outside, the snow covers the land like a delicate blanket. In the distance, fires still burn from the battle the day before. About 20 miles from here, at the Auschwitz camp, smoke pours from the stacks like the fires of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Last month, when we were fighting a group of SS in the fields of Paczków Forest, a friend of mine, Yetsil, was talking to me about his homeland of Czechoslovakia. He remarked that "...in the town square we all used to gather and celebrate the Harvest Moon, the stars looked like they were dripping down onto the earth, and the smell of the wheat fields was as sweet as wine..." As he said that he smiled, tears welling up around his eyes. And then he said something I will never forget, "Igor, if you make it out of this alive, find my wife and tell her that I love her and that I would have liked to see my son." I looked at him as if he had told me some incriminating secret, but I knew what he meant. Later that night, his prophetic fear came true. As we ran from the field back to the base under the guise of the storm, I saw his ring hand sticking out of the snow, clutched in defeat. The red gleam of the diamond stuck out like a star.

As I lay in bed that night, I stared at the dull gray ceiling and wondered if all this was really worth it. I had lost one of my dearest friends, and I knew I was going to lose even more.

But most of all, I was worried I was going to lose you. I knew that the war was getting hard on you, and I couldn't bear to think of you leaving me. If I make out of this alive, I will take you back to Cairo to visit your mother and father. The smile on their faces when they see you will be the only assurance I'll need to know that everything is back to normal.

In the morning when we all get up for the day, I look out the window at the frost-covered wheat fields, the sun shining off the grain coloring the field a golden honey. The coffee here tastes putrid and the bread is as stale as Igor Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*. As we line up for the roll call, we all sneak in a casual smirk or so as our lieutenant, Captain Yaskov Grenerich, explains the day's mission, for the reason that his teeth look like rusty nails. Each time we walk out into nearby Alkonost Forest, it's just as eerie as the first time we were there. The trees are as tall and old as time itself, and the paths between them are sunken down so far your head comes up to the bottom of the trunk. It is said that in the beginning of time, the bird Gamayun built a nest on the tallest tree and is there to this day.

As we were leaving the forest, we heard a tree branch shatter in the distance. Startled, we dropped down to the ground like flies and signaled each other like deaf mutes. The smell of smoldering damp grass filled our lungs as snow began to fall, cloaking the woods like an iron curtain. Then everything slowed down to a trickle. My ears rang like a dulcimer bell, and blood was all over the snow like pinpricks on Snow White's skin. I could hear my comrades yelling in their native tongues, speaking of iron demons and flaming guns. As quick as a bullet, it sped up on me like a gale force wind. Fire burned my skin, boils falling off and finger nails dripping away. It was as if my arm were burnt by the sun, burnt far beyond recognition.

All round me soldiers lay dead, bullet holes protruding from their skin like invisible thorns. German soldiers lay twitching from shrapnel, the ones who could still walk locating their dead, and helping the weak. I could hear cries just as we would make as children yelling out for our mothers and our gods in hopeless desperation. Slowly, I began to regain my senses, and I could feel a hand grasping my shoulder, pulling me up with tremendous might. Dazing off, I looked up at the sky, and the snow had stopped. And for just a minute, a single radiant minute, I thought I saw the face of God.

In the evening, as I stood looking out at graves being dug, clutching my arm, I thought of everything I had told you. That I would be back, that I would be there for our child, and now, with this wound, I doubt if I were right. And it has been seven days now since the storm has started. The morale in the rest of the resistance has been reduced to nil, and the food is running low. Whenever I look outside, the snow covers the land like a delicate blanket. Smoke clouds the horizon, from the battle not too long ago. And in the sky, I can see the snow falling again, dotting the graves like the dead bodies yet to come.

Sincerely,
Igor Kusnurylov

Tom Carino

Grade 12

Earlville High School

Earlville

Ashley Hobbs, teacher

THE OTHER

"I hate her. I hate her with all the bile in my stomach—she is driving me out of my head."

My father just stared as I began to spill.

"I can't stand living next to her. She's always slamming the doors and she won't get that damn grin off her face every time she says, 'Oh, sorry.'"

He opens his mouth to speak, but no way was I stopping now.

"This is our home, not theirs, Dad. It seems like you just met this woman and they are already moving in."

I couldn't stop; my words were shooting from me like bullets. My thoughts were racing as my fury became further heated with each word. But my dad just stood there, stuck in between the narrow cabinets, silently listening to me with no sincere expression across his face. No sympathy back at me, just the look of listening as my mouth and movements continued. It never used to be like this. His eyes were different now, his jaw stiff. His eyes kept wandering around the enclosed kitchen as I was searching for his response or understanding words. I turned towards the hallway to walk out and there stood the reason for his unsettling silence—the other object of my hatred. There stood the mother of the "other" I loathe so much. My stepmother's face was tight, except for her bottom lip that was fighting the tremble.

Ellie Douglass

Grade 12

Lake Forest High School

Lake Forest

Margaret J. Forst, teacher

DON'T YOU DARE

If you like something that everybody else shuns, you should hide it. If you express your feelings for someone and they reject you, you should stay home and sulk for at least a week. If someone says they don't like your sweater, burn it. Makeup is vital for conflict with the outside world. If you think you look fat in that shirt, change. In case you're wondering if they are talking about you, they are. And trust me, it's bad. By the way, your feet are way bigger than the average teenage girl. Even though your OCD is nudging you to wash your hands at least four more times, don't. They *will* notice. The average weight for a 16-year-old girl is 115 pounds. You're over. You wore that shirt last week. Don't ever reveal to anyone that you still suck your thumb on occasion. If you're ever caught attending church, make it known that you were forced. Singing in church is embarrassing. If they look uninterested, it's because you're boring. If they walk away, it's because you're annoying. If they don't laugh, it's because you're not funny. When he tells you he loves you, he doesn't mean it. If you're wondering if he talks about you to his friends, he doesn't. He flirts with her when you're not around, and yes, that was a line. Don't ever consider opening up; she'll betray you. Are you sure you want to risk having a sleepover? Sometimes you wet the bed. Unpainted toes are repulsive. Unstraightened hair is disgusting, and yes, you have something in your teeth. Why even bother trying out? No amount of makeup is capable of covering *that* zit. Regardless of the health risks, yellow teeth are attractive and everybody loves the pungent smell of cigarettes. Are you sure you want to eat that? Don't you dare raise your hand in class. You *will* sound stupid, and yes, they notice when you stutter. You might think they're being sarcastic, but they're telling you

the truth. Are you really going to leave the house like that? Everyone knows how you got that bruise. It's not okay to tell people that your uncle is gay. Your potato chip consumption level should never exceed six chips. Unless they're low fat, then you can have seven. If he doesn't answer the phone, he's definitely leaving. If she doesn't wait for you after class, she definitely hates you. I can't believe you watched *Barney* until you were in the fourth grade. Don't ever surrender to your quirky whims or they'll think you're naïve. Don't bring it up, it's taboo. If you won't have sex with him, it means you don't care. That relationship will never last. That's a bad idea. Your voice is way too manly for a girl. No matter how hard you study, there's no way you're getting an A. Don't tell anyone you watch *Hannah Montana* every Sunday night at 7:30 p.m. central. Think community college; it's more realistic. Make that a diet. Gel pens are so middle school. Don't go anywhere without your lint roller. Don't be caught dead reading or doing Sudoku for fun. Don't blow your nose in front of the whole class. That's disgusting. You actually pee at school? Don't ever be satisfied with yourself; there's always room for improvement. Don't ever dare to be different. Go with the flow. Girls do *not* perspire. Yes, you're paranoid. Don't write that paper, it's far too cliché. Oh, and you've got to stop worrying about what people think.

Alexandria Dunnells

Grade 11

O'Fallon Township High School

O'Fallon

Diane Riley, teacher

ALWAYS

The silence is painfully long. A large candle in the shape of a 76 has given up containing itself and is now dripping green wax on the cake while illuminating my father's pensive and sagging face. A man who believes that fortune cookies are futile, superstitions are juvenile, and only hard work can make you successful, my father uncharacteristically allows himself a thoughtful silence before blowing out his candle with a soft stream of breath. After a brief pause, I add to the usual family chatter, but my mind is elsewhere, prowling the birthday wish that my father so thoughtfully constructed. *Does he wish to have his memory back?* I question him, but he plays by his superstitious rules and does not tell me. Instead, he smiles mischievously and says, "I forgot."

My father was present at the 1933 World's Fair in Chicago. He was excited to get new tires for his red bicycle when World War II and the rationing of rubber ended. He danced a waltz in a grand ballroom while watching Frank Sinatra perform. I remember this, but he cannot.

In my reverie, I am seven. I enter my dad's office. From the first waft of mustiness I am mesmerized. My eyes are attracted to a spinning record in the corner and my pulse is seduced by the cadence of the music. Billie Holiday fills the office with her sweet low tones while she bemoans the loss of a lover and contemplates life: "*Why was I born? Why am I livin'?*" The dark wood that surrounds me revels in the deep colors of the notes. Neatly clipped *Chicago Tribune* articles sit in a stack, pruning with age. Each dusty book stands with an air of defiance and wisdom. A small statue of a Spartan guards stock market charts and family photos; all are hung very precisely on the walls.

My father does not remember the story of the red bicycle. He does not remember the feeling of twirling in an

ornate ballroom with Frank singing in his casual tone only a few steps away.

On his 76th birthday, my father strolls into his office and straightens the photos on the walls. He then makes neat, flat piles of the many papers on his desk. Yet, even while he makes this effort, his memories and thoughts lie disheveled, strewn over the office floor. He can't remember why he saved this *Chicago Tribune* article in the first place, and Billie Holiday sings unnoticed in the corner as his mind turns hazy.

A disease has robbed my father of his mind but mockingly left his body perfect, so that only those closest to him can see a drastic change. Like a limping lion, he who used to be so strong has been diminished to a state of helplessness. He who defiantly used natural remedies his entire life must now acquiesce to taking medications from a plastic container labeled with each day of the week.

When I blow out the candles on my own 76th birthday cake, I may not remember my name. I may not remember my street address. I may not remember how much money I have or if I have been successful in life. I can only hope that I will have been good to the loved ones around me, and that they will adore me as much as I adore my father.

Venetia Ginakakis

Grade 11

Vernon Hills High School

Vernon Hills

Paul Kemp, teacher

OCEANS APART

“Can you say that again please?” Over the years I have become accustomed to answering this question when pronouncing my last name to others. I don’t blame them because it is not every day that you hear the name Giritharan. As a matter of fact, it is not often that you hear a Sri Lankan name in general, which is exactly why I take pride in it. During the summer of 2004, I finally got to learn about my dad’s home country when my family and I went to Sri Lanka for the first time. It was an amazing experience that I will never forget.

We stepped off the hot, crowded bus that had taken us from the airplane to the airport in Colombo, the capital city of Sri Lanka. The runway was farther than a walking distance from the airport, so the uncomfortable shuttle was required. As we stood in line to get our passports checked, I looked around at the airport which seemed to be no bigger than a Wal-Mart. We walked out to where one of our relatives waved us down, and the first words that came from his mouth were “Welcome to Sri Lanka!” After spending 26 hours in the air, I was definitely ready to be there! As we drove through the city, I couldn’t believe what I was seeing. Both sides of the road were lined with shacks that sold all sorts of foods and items. Surrounding them were palm trees, coconut trees, mango trees, and an abundance of other gorgeous, tropical plants that I had never seen before. Everyone drove on the left side of the road, and most of the vehicles were old vans, little three-wheeled buggies, and motorcycles. The roads were like a free-for-all, and horns were used as commonly as gas pedals. Wherever there was a gap in traffic, a car would squeeze through it, and I held my breath as we came within inches of the vehicles around us. Stray dogs, goats, and people on bicycles were everywhere. It certainly was not the picture

I had in mind prior to our arrival. After experiencing all of this, I realized I was entering a whole new lifestyle filled with many things to discover.

After staying in the outskirts of Colombo by the beautiful oceanside for a week, we went to Jaffna, which is where my dad grew up and where his sisters live. Due to the civil war that has been going on there for years, we had to go through several army checkpoints which were quite scary, but the feeling of meeting my family for the first time made it all worth it. On the way there I was extremely excited, but nervous at the same time. I replayed different scenarios of the introduction over and over again in my head, hoping that the real one would go as wonderfully as I imagined. After a very long and bumpy van ride, we were finally there. As soon as we stepped out of the van we were met by the bright smiles and twinkling eyes of my aunts, uncles, and cousins. I didn't know what to think. They invited us in very kindly, and we all visited and talked. They only spoke Tamil, which I understand and speak well enough to communicate.

The first couple of days I didn't socialize much because I felt kind of awkward and shy. Soon, however, I started talking and spending more time with my cousins until I was practically glued to their sides. My brother and I took a football there and taught them how to throw it, and they taught us how to play Sri Lanka's favorite sport, cricket. I watched my youngest cousin make a kite out of sticks, string, and paper, and then we went to the beach on a breezy day to fly it. My oldest cousin, knowing that I love basketball, attempted to make a hoop for me out of some hose and a wooden pole. It didn't work very well, but was definitely worth the try. At the house I watched my aunts prepare delicious meals with kitchen utensils that were much different than anything I had seen in America. A couple nights we all went out to get

ice cream, and it was wonderful to sit and enjoy each others' company as if we were old friends. Unfortunately, like many other trips, our visit in Jaffna had to come to an end. I remember the van ride to the airport. It was absolutely silent. We sadly said our goodbyes and got on the plane. I heard later that my youngest cousin started crying when they got home saying that he hoped our flight would get cancelled and that we would come back. It was amazing to me how one minute we were strangers with completely different backgrounds, and the next we were family.

The rest of the trip was sightseeing and going to places Sri Lanka is known for. We wound around the sides of massive mountains in the hill country, and the scenery was unforgettable. Enormous crystal-clear waterfalls cascaded down the sides of the mountains and were surrounded by green rolling hills, rivers, and fog. I felt like I was in a painting, and I was left speechless as I gazed in awe at its beauty. While I enjoyed this very much, there was one thing that I could not swallow. The poverty in Sri Lanka was overwhelming. Almost every time we stopped our van to look at the scenery, crowds of people surrounded us holding out their helpless hands. One time, a little girl, who couldn't have been older than five years old, tapped my mom's leg, held out a flower, and said "candy." It was probably the only English word she knew to describe food, but all we could do was give some money to her grandfather. My interest in the medical field was sparked then and there. We did what we could, but we couldn't possibly give all of them money. I just wish we could have helped them all.

I haven't even begun to delve into the experiences that I had in Sri Lanka, but in many ways it changed my life. It gave me a stronger sense of family that had been separated from me by oceans for 14 years. I finally felt an appreciation

for being half Sri Lankan, instead of just merely knowing I was. It guided me to have a greater interest in the medical field because after seeing all that poverty, I knew I wanted to make a difference. While I was born in America and have lived here all my life, a part of me will always belong to Sri Lanka.

Ashley Giritharan

Grade 12

Carbondale Community High School

Carbondale

Tarrie Dullum, teacher

THE FUTURE LEADERS OF ILLINOIS

The notion of Boys State is quite simple: put a bunch of rambunctious (and let's face it, girl-crazy) teenage guys from all across the state into one college campus for a week (with no female contact) and let them have a stab at a small-scale republic. Give them elections. Give them parties. Give them a wake-up call at 6:30 (those fascists). Give them gruel. Then wait and see who comes out on top. Only the strong survive.

You always have to watch the sell. They tell you it's a "learning experience," it will "open your mind," you'll "meet new people," and best of all: you'll "never forget it." They couldn't have been more right.

When I set foot on the campus of Eastern Illinois University with nothing but my sleeping bag, luggage, didgeridoo, and a pocket full of dreams, I could hardly imagine the twisted tribal anarchy and *Lord of the Flies* atmosphere that awaited me. I was quickly assigned to my building, floor, "county," and "city": Anderson Hall, fourth floor, Kennedy County, the city of Brennan. For a week I would be a citizen of the most deranged and maddening summer camp ever conceived by mankind.

I'm a fairly liberal guy. Most people who know me know this, and no big fuss is really made about it. However, the good ol' boys in the city of Brennan didn't know me. You'd think I was making a tie-dyed shirt while reading *Das Kapital* and singing old labor hymns by the way Mayor Boone reacted when I told him that I was totally in favor of same-sex marriage. The didgeridoo didn't help. When I first walked in with an oblong satchel slung across my body, I was met with excited questions such as "Is that a fishin' pole?" No facial expression is as masterfully contorted as the look of disappointed shock with a touch of innocent confusion. I

was able to see this expression many times over as I explained myself and my didgeridoo-holding satchel to the population of greater Kennedy County.

The ceremonies were the best. We marched to and from. Being in marching band, I had a bit of an edge in this department, but when it came to shouting obscenities at the other rival counties, our apparent mortal enemies, I was novice at best (note to self: improve trash-talking abilities). I knew Boys State was run by the American Legion, but as the counselors handed out pamphlets about opportunities in the military, I was surprised at the whole boot camp atmosphere. After each of these ceremonies (let's call them Patriotism Pow-Wows), we returned to the dorms for an exciting evening of city meetings, in which we passed reform legislation such as the regulation of which stalls were to be used for which bathroom purpose.

When these scheduled activities ended each night, the panic set in. That simple phrase "free time" can mean a lot of things. In some groups, it means time to relax, time to read, or time to talk quietly. At Boys State, it means time to take two mattresses and have two guys run at each other until the weak one falls down in a springy heap of broken defeat outside of my door as I try to keep my sanity. Only the strong survive. I thought I would have to make a run for it. Skip town, head for the railroads, and hitch a ride.

On a healthy diet of cheap cafeteria food, punk music, calls to my socialist brother, and didgeridoo-playing in a great oak tree, I was able to nurse myself back to a relative sanity. It's strange, but through a haze of meditation and soul-searching during this long strange week, I think I found myself at Boys State. It's strange, but at this camp I learned who and what I am. It may be strange, but I'm always going to be that hippie-like guy playing didgeridoo in the oak tree.

Kevin Johnson

Grade 12

Belleville West High School

Belleville

John Lodle, teacher

HIGH JUMP HIGH JINKS

When I was in eighth grade, I set a list of goals to accomplish during the next four years of high school. They included going to the state basketball tournament, running a year of cross-country, and maintaining a good grade point average. But the one goal I had worked the hardest for was to place in the state track meet. After three years of hard work, I realized that my goals were starting to come within reach and one of them had come so close I could almost feel it. I had managed to get to the state track finals and was relieved to be finished with the hours of training. Only one last meet was left, and I couldn't wait! Most athletes have a trip to the state track meet filled with joy, tears, and lifelong memories, but mine was soon to be filled with disappointment, Pepto-Bismol, and animosity towards the King.

After two years of performing well, I became overconfident and expected to complete my goal of medaling my junior year; however, instead of clearing the high jump bar, I was stuck in a port-a-potty at the state track meet watching my dream go down the toilet—literally. Two months earlier, I had a specific regimen to complete every day. I felt that nothing could stop me and that I could clear any height. The three weeks prior to the sectional meet I trained harder than ever and finally felt I was ready for the day to come. During the sectional meet, I was nervous but in control of my emotions. After a few competitive rounds, I qualified for the state finals, jumping six feet three inches.

The week before the state meet I practiced hard, I ate healthy foods, I received plenty of rest, and I felt strong. Finally the day came when we left for the big meet. The ride was very long and uncomfortable. To break up the monotony we stopped to eat at a Burger King along the way. Little did I

know that the King and I would be butting heads all weekend. We left Burger King for the track to get a feel for the environment. After my workout the real fun began.

I had gotten back to the hotel room fairly early to make sure I had a good night's sleep for the big day. I was taking every possible precaution. I shut off the light and attempted to close my eyes. This sequence ignited the longest 48 hours of my life. As soon as I closed my eyes, my stomach decided to turn on me and everything I put into it. I won't go into vivid detail, but I will say that I did not sleep one minute that night. When I wasn't vomiting, I lay on the floor wondering why the disaster had to happen to me. I felt that Burger King was the root of all evil, and I hated the establishment for making me sick. I now realize it could have been a number of things that made me sick, but at the time I was simply angry with the world.

When morning arrived, I was in horrible shape. My stomach was empty, my muscles ached, and my energy was gone. I tried to eat as much as I could in hopes of gaining energy. I managed to get half of a banana and a bagel down for a little while, but they came right back up as I left the hotel. I could do nothing. I was no longer in control, and I just wanted my sickness to stop. But it didn't. It continued all the way to the track meet. After a half hour of resting on the bus, I tried to take some Pepto-Bismol and hoped it would work. It helped all right; it helped my vomit taste worse than ever.

The time had come. The speaker announced the second flight of the boys high jump was about to begin. Most of the athletes were focused on their form and steps. I, however, was focused on how far away the bathroom was. I watched helplessly as the athletes in front of me participated in warm-up jumps. I tried to save all of my energy for the critical jump. Then I heard the words I had always loved: "Starting height."

But this time the words gave me chills. I tried as hard as I could to focus and be strong, yet I could barely stand without wobbling. The other jumpers jumped; some made it, many missed. Now it was my turn. The judge called my name, and I stepped up to the mark I had clumsily put down. I heard my feet pounding the ground beneath me and was amazed that I could even run. I gathered all of the strength that I had and gave one huge jump towards the bar. Then I heard the loud clanging of the bar hitting the ground below the mat. I missed. My next attempt came. I stepped up, ran, jumped, and missed again. By my third attempt I could barely see the bar as I was faint and frustrated. I knew I had to keep trying. I ran and jumped harder than before only to hear the dreaded clang, clang, clang.

My season was over, and I couldn't make any excuses. People asked me what happened, but rarely did I tell them. I was embarrassed for a long time. Now I realize that I had the opportunity to go to the state track meet, which was a great accomplishment in itself. I also realize many athletes would have loved to qualify for the state track meet but didn't, and I was blessed enough to have made it. But every now and then I say to myself, "I should have gone to McDonald's."

Dylan Morris

Grade 12

Hamilton High School

Hamilton

Elaine Dion, teacher

STACEY LOGAN (A CHARACTER ANALYSIS)

“Stacey glowered at T.J. a moment longer, then walked swiftly to Little Man and put his long arm around his shoulders, saying softly, ‘Come on, Man. It ain’t gonna happen no more, least not for a long while. I promise you that’” (49). This promise made by resolute Stacey Logan to his youngest brother in the novel *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* by Mildred D. Taylor, begins a chain of events that ultimately results in stealing a pearl-handled pistol, a broken trust, and the burning of a cotton crop. Through it all, Stacey is portrayed as not only a natural-born leader, but also a reliable friend even to those who are undeserving.

One of this African American boy’s greatest weaknesses is that he is too naïve and merciful. This trait comes constantly into play especially when T.J. Avery, a manipulating boy from Stacey’s class, is around. In chapter 6, Stacey receives a brand-new wool coat from his prosperous Uncle Hammer. When the Logans arrive at church, however, T.J. immediately criticizes the coat by saying that Stacey looks like a “fat preacher” in it (136). A few days later when Mrs. Logan asks for the famous coat so that she can take up the sleeves, Stacey confesses that he loaned the coat to T.J., since “the coat was too big for [him] and...T.J. said...since it fit him just right, he’d take it off [his] hands till [he can] grow into it, then thataway all the guys would stop laughing at [him] and calling [him] preacher” (141).

Angered by the act of stupidity on Stacey’s part, Uncle Hammer gives the boy a severe tongue-lashing, telling him that if he is not smart enough to hold onto a good coat, he does not deserve it. Even though T.J. gets to keep the coat, he becomes even more obnoxious than before, praising the coat every time he gets a chance. Still, Stacey continues to be T.J.’s friend, proving that he is indeed too kind.

Other than being too tolerant, Stacey tends to blame himself for the family's misfortune. For instance, near the resolution of the novel, Stacey's father, David Logan; a man known as Mr. Morrison who helps the Logans with their farm work; and Stacey head out to Vicksburg for some supplies. On the night after they leave, Mrs. Logan starts to fret. Then tragedy happens: "Stacey, a flashlight in his hand, came into sight, followed by Mr. Morrison carrying Papa"(211).

Mr. Logan's leg has been run over by their wagon, but the bandage on his head remains unaccounted for until Stacey reveals to his siblings that their father was shot. Stacey had been in charge of keeping the donkey that pulled the wagon still while Mr. Logan and Mr. Morrison attempted to fix a back wheel. During this time a truck approached and someone from inside the truck shot Mr. Logan, making the donkey rear up, causing the wagon to run over Mr. Logan's leg. Stacey explodes, saying that it is his fault that his father's leg is broken. His guilty conscience is something that he never really lets go of throughout the entire story, no matter how many times the family informs Stacey that it is not his fault.

Last but not least, Stacey is courageous. His dream of protecting his family and his awkward friendship with T.J. seem to assist him in holding onto hope for the future. Caught somewhere between a boy and a man, it must be really hard to continue to persevere in the way Stacey does, especially after his father is now handicapped. Somehow Stacey manages to continue being the best person he can be. It takes a lot of courage to escort a wounded T.J. back to his home knowing not only that T.J. might get caught at any time for an attempted robbery, but that Stacey can become an accessory to the crime because he is helping T.J. to the Avery family home. This action requires courage and forgiveness because T.J. has betrayed the Logan family upon many an occasion.

All in all, Stacey is found to be one of the most dynamic characters in this novel. He is proven to be forgiving and self-critical, which adds to his aura of being so very real. Also, he commands an awesome amount of courage that inflicts respect upon the reader. Taylor successfully brings into being a character who gives the reader an immediate sense of affection that is very hard to do when reading any book.

Work Cited

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Morgan Rawlinson

Grade 7

Lycée Français de Chicago

Chicago

Cyn Koukos, teacher

FLOATING ASHES, BURNT MEMORIES

I started my day to a cacophony of shouting pedestrians, bargaining shoppers, and whistling trains. Half asleep, I dragged myself to the kitchen, where noxious fumes of burning wood greeted me.

“Good morning, *Da Qiao*,” Grandfather said.

Everybody called me *Da Qiao*. No one ever used my real name because nicknames gave us a sense of affection and brotherhood. In China, everybody had a nickname. So, in a way, all Chinese people were part of a single, giant family.

“Happy Chinese New Year, *Da Qiao*,” Grandmother said.

Of course, it had to be Chinese New Year. Why else would Grandfather have been cooking breakfast over an actual wood-made fire? Chinese New Year was the only day he ever took a break from the stove. He always felt the need to do household chores the traditional ways on this traditional holiday.

I heard a knock on our front door.

“That must be Uncle,” Grandmother said. “Go and let him in.”

Enthusiastically, I swung the door open. Uncle wasn’t the typical “Chinese man.” He was rather soft, and he always had a welcoming smile on his face. But like most Chinese men he loved beer and cigarettes. In the absence of my parents, he acted as a father to me.

“Hey there, *Da Qiao*! Look at you! Look at how much taller you’ve become!”

Truth was, at the time I was growing out more than up. But Uncle constantly spoke words of encouragement.

After greeting Grandmother and Grandfather with the usual hugging and bowing, Uncle and I took our seats by the fire. To let the smoke out, Grandfather opened a window. The

chilling February wind rushed in and picked up specks of ash. Some of them danced in the air, and breathing became an arduous task. Some of them landed in my food. But not even the blackest ashes could've dampened our spirits that day. We ate, drank, sang songs, and toasted one another in loud and obnoxious voices. The entire family was together, a new year beckoned, and an entire day of shooting fireworks lay ahead of us. We were happy.

Eight years passed. I no longer resided on a third floor apartment in a busy Chinese city, but in a spacious house in the middle of an American suburb. I no longer lived with Grandfather, Grandmother, and Uncle. I no longer had opportunities to enjoy Chinese New Year breakfasts in a homey kitchen. Father always traveled for months at a time. Mother worked at the airport. True, I had friends and family in my new life, but their presence was minimal. I embraced loneliness, simply because that was all there was.

A new year brought a promising opportunity. Mother had a month's worth of summer holidays and wanted to go back to China. I decided to go with her. For nine years, I had not seen my birthplace. Restlessness filled me. I refused to eat or sleep during the 14-hour plane ride, too keyed up at the prospect of seeing my grandparents and uncle.

Finally, Mother and I stood in the terminal. There they were, all three of them. I ran into Grandfather's arms while Mother and Grandmother hugged. Looking around, I expected to see Uncle beside me, but he hovered in the back, standing awkwardly in a way that I did not understand.

"Why isn't Uncle here with us?" I asked.

Before Grandfather could open his mouth, the question answered itself. Horrified, I saw a man wildly different from my childhood memories. Uncle's head was bald, and his body looked unstable and shaky. He leaned on a cane he carried

in his right hand. Years of heavy smoking and drinking had finally showed their effects. These nine years had taken their toll on my grandparents as well. The wrinkles on their faces had deepened. Grandmother had to squint harder than usual when she looked at me. Grandfather's teeth, which used to be full and healthy, were now mostly gold and fake. I grieved to see them so transformed.

More disheartening changes greeted my arrival at my old home. Having lived in a spacious house in America for so long, I found the apartment to be small, unsanitary, filled with a putrid odor of mothballs. It didn't look bright and welcoming as it had before. It had changed before my eyes into something resembling a prison cell.

Grandfather started another wood fire for this special occasion. Instead of bringing back pleasant memories, the smoke only drove me away from the kitchen. I shut myself in my old room and came out only when the meal was ready. Uncle opened the window to a hot summer breeze. I looked at the ashes—this time not with indifference, but disgust. As they saw me nibble at small bits of food, my grandparents and uncle sensed the change within me.

We tried hard to eat, drink, sing songs, and toast each other in loud and obnoxious voices. But what was meant to be a joyful family reunion turned into a meal of blank stares and clinking chopsticks. We ate in great haste and unbearable silence. No one talked. We mourned a loss of family unity that might never return again.

Each day I exerted myself, hoping to create conversation with my family, to no avail. My efforts brought no more than "good morning," "how are you," "let's eat," and "good night." I once again embraced loneliness. The only difference was that this time I turned away from those who had shown me nothing but uncritical love for my entire childhood.

The day came for my departure. As I packed my belongings, I heard Uncle come up behind me. He was smiling, but not in the way I remembered.

“Did you enjoy your trip?” he asked.

“Yes,” I lied.

“Have a safe journey back home, then,” he said. “Good-bye, *Rong Jian Qiao*.” It was the first time he had ever called me by my real name.

As I turned to face him, his smile changed into a heart-breaking frown. He turned away and let out a deep sigh. I wanted to yell out to him, to make him understand that I loved him. Choking back tears, I could not find the words.

On the plane ride back, I again refused food or sleep, preferring to dwell within my own thoughts. From my first day in this world, my uncle and grandparents had given me the gift of happiness. No matter my complaints, no matter my whining and crying, they had stayed by my side. Even after nine years of separation, they took me in not as a guest, but as family. And I saw them as strangers. I refused to acknowledge their open arms. I turned them away. I thought I had seen changes in my family and home in China. But I had been wrong. They had not changed. I had.

And now, I wish to speak directly to my uncle, grandfather, and grandmother.

Dui bu qi.

I’m sorry.

Qing ni men yuan liang wo.

Forgive me.

Sam Rong

Grade 11

Vernon Hills High School

Vernon Hills

Paul Kemp, teacher

LOGAN

I stare at my little black suitcase. The cold metal of the car trunk sends life surging through my fingers as I stand in the stale Carolina heat. A gust of that new car smell, preserved in the trunk, makes its final escape as I slam it shut. I walk back up the driveway, toward the house. I watch Logan busy herself unnecessarily, arranging the little flower pots on the windowsill. With a lethargic hand she places each pot about three inches to the right of the previous one. I see her put the last pot in its place, and I wonder if we're thinking the same thing. I wonder if our eyes will lock, the way they often do, and if we'll smile, confirming the identicalness of what's going on inside our heads. It's taking merely an instant to convey something that would take us ten minutes to verbalize and communicate to someone else.

The rubber soles of my Converse All Star sneakers whine as they make contact with the slick blacktop beneath me. I think about what lies directly ahead of me: saying good-bye to my sister. At this point, the practice of saying good-bye entertains me for a moment. I consider the phrase, "I'm not good at good-byes," and find it foolish. Saying good-bye isn't something that you can be good or bad at. And it isn't an exercise which someone can improve upon. The sun stares down at me now, the way a disapproving parent would, daring me to look up. To me, saying good-bye is a way of socially acknowledging a parting between two people. So I think about how someone who is "bad at good-byes" is simply fearing the parting between them and the other person. If you claim not to be good at good-byes, you merely don't want to see them come. Similarly, one who is good at good-byes in reality just doesn't mind leaving. As Logan stays here to start school in a week, I'm shocked to

being leaving without her. And now, as I prepare to leave her behind, a never-before-experienced good-bye between the two of us is inevitable.

I reach the front door of the house where she's waiting. We stand there for a moment, the gentle breeze struggling to lift even a strand of our thick brown hair. Logan takes a step closer to me and we pretend to ignore the awkward combination of nearness and silence that rests, so foreign, between us. Finally, the warm amber of her eyes meets the hazel of my own, and I know we've been thinking the same thing again. As if upon natural impulse, we suddenly embrace each other tightly. My chin rests upon her soft shoulder, and I savor her familiarity, my sister. I squeeze tighter in hopes of soaking in as much of this memory as I can, desperately wanting to sustain it. An earnest whisper reaches my ear: "You know me," she says. "I'm not good at good-byes."

Faith Steckel

Grade 9

Lake Forest High School

Lake Forest

Amy Zimmermann, teacher

UNTITLED

Screw introductions. I was listening to the Beatles while trying earnestly to come up with something to write about. Maybe, I thought to myself, I'm just too hung up on conventional ideas. Perhaps a host of brilliant writing ideas was within my reach, I just wasn't pushing my thinking hard enough to reach it. This realization sparked excitement, but was frustrating as well. I know I can do this, I reassured myself, trying to hang on to my speeding train of thought and not get distracted, not fall off, like I usually do. In fact, I thought, everyone is capable of reaching these ideas, so what's stopping us? Why do we voluntarily hop off our trains? What's holding all of us at this conventional level of thinking? Why, generally speaking, are so many of our writing pieces laid out the same way? Why do so few of them actually *dazzle*?! And then it hit me. We all *are* restricted in terms of our thinking. But maybe it's not our fault. Maybe (when you put aside the political reference) John Lennon said it best, "You tell me it's the institution, well, you know, you better free your mind instead."

My generation, I realized, is in constant need of direction and guidance. If you sat a bunch of modern-day high schoolers down in an art room equipped with supplies, they'd sit there blankly wondering what they should do. Someone might take a sheet of white paper and draw a simple picture. It seems like society has so consistently given us a list of do's and don'ts that we've developed a fear of doing the wrong thing. This fear has handicapped us, paralyzing our minds, so that we are incapable of thinking outside of the box. Society has established so many restrictions and limitations that it's created a generation severely lacking initiative. We do fine as long as we have something put in front of us and are told what

to do with it. In fact, we've perfected the art of accomplishing assigned tasks because ever since the first day of preschool, that's all we've ever had to do. In other words, we can run far, but only as long as we're given shoes, a map, a speed at which to run, etc. As a five-year-old I remember being told to sit on this carpet and listen to this book and then go to this table and eat this snack and afterward we all squeezed and shaped pieces of tinfoil, exactly as our teacher showed us. The result? Twenty-four identical tinfoil dinosaurs. Even at a high school level, we sit and wait until the teacher arrives and distributes a worksheet to complete and, once finished, we sit and wait for further instructions. And what happens if we don't follow those instructions? We're punished, of course. But who would ever devise their own instructions anyway, when we've been relying on the ones in front of us since childhood? So then I ask myself, what happens when there's no longer someone to tell us what to do and how to do it? What happens when our task-bearing generation, so sculpted, grows up and the task-giving generation before us is gone?

Someone once told me that some housewives in the 1950s would pull their hair back so tight that it actually restricted blood flow, killing brain cells. I find it analogous to the situation in that we're being pulled so tightly by ever-present guidelines that unconventional thoughts and approaches are being suppressed, restricted, by society. Maybe this is why the term "random" has recently boomed amongst the adolescent population—we associate so much with conventionality and conforming that anything new is viewed as mildly inappropriate and branded "random."

I realize that this essay is lacking in organization. But its form, which I can see many jumping to label unacceptable, is really just proving my point. It conveys a message of stepping outside of the box, trying something new. So maybe

I'm crazy. Maybe this has been just another failure dressed up in a stunning combination of overconfidence and over-analysis. But this acceptance of a possible dud, again, is just conveying my point. Because if taking risks like this is what it takes to defy conventionality, then we should take them. Much of it may be the institution, but what I'm trying to say is that I think we all just need to open our eyes, just free our minds instead.

Faith Steckel

Grade 9

Lake Forest High School

Lake Forest

Amy Zimmermann, teacher

WHEN WRONG IS RIGHT

What is the difference between humans and animals? At first thought, one might find the answer easy to explain. However, during the first half of the 19th century when slavery flourished throughout the South, at least as it related to blacks, identifying the differences was not as easy as it would seem. In the novel *Beloved*, many of the characters behave in ways that are contrary to the reader's moral code. Due to the extreme emotional and physical pain that these characters endure, their actions do make sense within the context of their own lives. In the text *Beloved*, Toni Morrison argues that actions done out of fear require the reader to be open minded when interpreting the morality of those actions.

Morrison's novel is filled with the tragedies and immorality of slavery. One can hardly imagine the horror of accepting the pain and the torture and indignity of not being able to fight back. This is very apparent on the plantation, Sweet Home, where the main character, Sethe, once lived as a slave. One night, Halle, Sethe's husband, is faced with watching his wife being beaten by their owner's nephews: "All I knew was that something broke him. Not a one of them years of Saturdays, Sundays and nighttime extra never touched him. But whatever he saw go on in that barn that day broke him like a twig" (Morrison 81). In this situation, Halle is paralyzed with fear and thus powerless. As a slave, he had no control over the actions of these white men. If he tried to prevent the beating, his life, in addition to Sethe's, would have been in danger. As a result, he could only watch as his wife was tortured. Morrison uses the historical reality of a slave owner's power and control to make the reader understand that Halle's fear and related inaction were appropriate. Morrison also plays on the emotions of the reader by having Sethe angered and

saddened when she learns that Halle witnessed her beating but did nothing. "He saw them boys do that to me and let them keep on breathing air? He saw? He saw? He saw?" (81). Although Sethe feels betrayed by Halle's behavior and the reader is sympathetic to that betrayal, Morrison tempers the reader's outrage at Halle's behavior by conveying that a person under the influence of fear acts in a manner inconsistent with social norms.

Many are quick to judge the actions of others based on their own moral code; however, actions caused by fear can be misinterpreted. This is the case when Sethe kills her daughter. It was only 28 days after Sethe and her children had successfully escaped from Sweet Home to Cincinnati in the free state of Ohio, when Schoolteacher; his nephew; a slave catcher; and a sheriff came to her home in an effort to take them back. When Sethe caught sight of the four white men, she gathered her children and took them into a shed. There, she attempted to kill all of her children and herself, but only succeeded in killing her oldest girl. "Inside, two boys bled in the sawdust and dirt at the feet of a nigger woman holding a blood-soaked child to her chest with one hand and an infant by the heels in the other" (175). Morrison includes this horrific scene to demonstrate how the reader can misinterpret certain actions. Sethe believed that it would be better to be dead and in heaven than alive and in slavery. She had finally tasted freedom and wasn't about to let her family be forced back into the hardships and torture of slavery that she had experienced on Sweet Home. Although the reader should be shocked by Sethe's actions in the shed, Morrison uses Sethe's fear of returning to slavery to rationalize it. In making her argument here, Morrison also draws upon the reader's knowledge of the laws in effect during this time period. Specifically, the Fugitive Slave Law, which provided

that any runaway slaves, even those found in free states, must be returned to their rightful owner. Morrison uses this law to explain why Schoolteacher comes to Sethe's home. Slaves were valuable property, and Schoolteacher didn't want to lose any without a fight. But when Schoolteacher enters the shed, he realizes that the purpose for his trip is gone since his slaves are injured or dead and no longer of value. Sethe's story is also grounded in the true story of Margaret Garner, a runaway slave who also killed her child believing that death was better than going back to slavery.

No other American author communicates the issues and stories of slavery better than Morrison. She is able to do this, in part, because her background enables the reader to accept her as an expert on this subject matter. Morrison graduated from Howard University, an all-black school, where she received her degree in English and where she later returned as an English teacher and began her writing. After leaving Howard, Morrison became associate editor at Random House and a few years later was promoted to senior editor where she edited novels by many well-known black Americans such as Muhammad Ali and Andrew Young. To date, Morrison has had six books published and has been recognized for her writing with the Nobel Prize for Literature and the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for the novel *Beloved*. Each of these experiences provides Morrison with credibility.

Throughout *Beloved*, Morrison's goal is to cause the reader to understand that certain actions that appear immoral by today's standards may not have been so during the time of slavery. To accomplish this, she targets an audience of mature, educated, and experienced readers who have the ability to accept this proposition. Through the use of ethos, pathos, and logos as discussed above, Morrison is successful in persuading the reader that actions influenced by fear

must be examined without preconceived notions of what is right and wrong.

Shana Sternberg

Grade 12

Highland Park High School

Highland Park

Judi Elman, teacher

A CHILD'S REQUIEM

It was an international building used for housing immigrants. Shabby red bricks with determined vines crept along the outer walls. I can still feel the dank hallways, the barely lit stairs that were too steep for comfort. My parents rented the largest apartment of the whole complex—two rooms, a kitchen, and a bathroom. The balcony we had was only big enough for one person. It connected to one of those metal staircases zigzagging down the outside of buildings you see in the city, probably a fire escape. A thief wouldn't have been able to jump high enough to reach the bottom rung. Otherwise everyone would get robbed.

My mom awoke first, hearing a noise in the kitchen. The entrance lock to the apartment was old, so she complained to the landlord about it. It was too late to get it fixed now. I don't know what was going through her mind at that time, but she woke me up. The creaks and croaks of the decrepit floorboards passed through my mind under the dark, soothing blanket of the night. I told her it was nothing—sound advice from a five-year-old. It was hard for her. My dad worked out of town most of the year, but unlike him, we couldn't run; each new place always felt unsafe.

If you stepped into 108 (that's what people called the complex), the smell of stir-fry would hit you head-on like a wave. It wasn't the typical aromatic eastern cooking. Pressured inside the building, the oily smell grew heavy, leaving a ponderous ambience upon occupants and visitors. My parents didn't mention it to me since I never overstepped my watchful grandparents' periphery, but classmates whispered it. The grease that hung above my head at home turned into bewilderment and terror at the idea of such a place. They said that's where the gunshots came from, police sirens that cracked the darkness of night. It was called Hooker's

Street.¹ Between this nefarious land, my house, and school patrolled Richmond's finest—protectors, a shield. The kids spoke of lost family members. Those who went in did not come out.

My dad jokes about it today. "*Kai wan xiou*,"² he says. It's easier to laugh. Laughter is an anesthetic for the mind. He tells me that there were always rules. Stuff like *How to Respond to Wallet-Muggers for Dummies* should have been written. It would have been a best-seller. If someone points a gun to your head and demands for money, you give it without hesitation. It was between losing that hard-earned pay check and lying in a pool of your own blood. But no matter what, don't look back.

The Richmond VC community center held English classes for "fresh-off-the-boaters."³ The building had just been constructed a year ago, still bearing that fresh snow-white paint. It didn't matter who we were, what our families had done, or why we were running, in the classroom we focused on one thing: English. I found comfort in the similarity between the kids around me. We were all at the same level, trying to pick up a foreign tongue. A close bond formed, and we depended on each other.

A boy in our class is missing. Lessons are rarely missed since they were so important. We trusted the teacher when she said she didn't know anything. She tells us everything. So when she found out what happened she didn't hide the news. Even the older kids cried. The boy who missed class was killed in his home by a stray bullet.

1. Area of high crime density and illegal activities in Richmond.

2. He says "I'm just joking," but I know it's more than that.

3. That's what they called us. Whether derogatory or not, it didn't matter. No one thought twice about it.

"You see it's hopeless. The killer won't be found. It's what we deal with so get over it." Just abandon that hope. That sputtering flame will never grow into the fire you want. It struggles desperately, clawing its way forward only to be unceremoniously smothered out. I didn't want that to happen do me. I didn't want to die.

Even in an area where homicide was common, I never thought about it. I imagined that kids didn't die because that was what a childhood was for. Safety. You're always safe when you're a kid. It was an unbreakable net that would always catch you. If you're kidnapped, you'll be returned. If you're hurt, you'll always get better. The crime-laden neighborhood next door was sealed off like Pandora's Box. When it was opened we understood; we searched for the beacon of hope that was left behind. The things inside took another one from us. This time it was a little boy. They say, "No women, no children," but nothing is guaranteed.

The candles flickered, lighting the darkened playground. The lament of a solemn preacher drowned out the cries of mourning families. I didn't know it was a vigil, but I remained, motionless, afraid that any noise I made would shatter the delicate balance between us and the still night. I remember asking my teacher a question. She responded slowly, "We can't stop these things."

The innocence we have is fleeting. We came to this country like children, not knowing what to expect, looking at each other with blank faces and unanswered questions. But what we were taught echoed in our ears. I saw that opened hole and hesitated before jumping in, hitting the sides as I fell. Learning the movement of the pitch-black tunnel, jagged edges would mix with smoother turns. A child asks why we cannot live forever, because then we have nothing to treasure. A gun that spits out a bullet leaves an empty hole in the barrel. A blue line of police drag the bullet down; the black cartridge moves slower and slower but the inevitable cannot be stopped. The

resonating shock wave of the firing will linger, but don't let
the bullets hit what you still have.

Gary Yin

Grade 11

Adlai E. Stevenson High School

Lincolnshire

Stephen B. Heller, teacher

CALL FOR STUDENT WRITING FROM
ALL LEVELS FOR IATE'S BEST ILLINOIS
POETRY AND PROSE CONTEST

DEADLINE: Postmarked no later than January 31, 2010.

FORMAT: Typed copy is preferred. 8.5 x 11 paper is mandatory (one side only). Copy must be clear, legible, and carefully proofread, and must not include drawings or illustrations.

LABELING: Each entry must be accompanied by its own cover sheet stapled to the entry, which states:

- Full name of student
- Student's grade level at time piece was written
- Full name of school
- School's complete mailing address
- Full name of teacher (indicate if IATE member)

IMPORTANT: The student's name, the school's name, and the teacher's name must not appear anywhere else.

LIMITS:

- 1) Five prose and ten poetry entries per teacher.
- 2) One thousand words of prose per entry; forty lines of poetry per entry.

SOME SUGGESTIONS FROM THE JUDGES:

- 1) Please see that students abide by the line and word limits. Have them revise and shorten pieces that exceed these limits.
- 2) Please emphasize to students that prose and fiction are not synonymous. Encourage them to explore the possibilities of expository essays, arguments, and personal narratives.

REQUIRED ENCLOSURE FOR STUDENT
POETRY AND PROSE ENTRIES

When submitting manuscripts, include a signed statement to read:

To the best of my knowledge, the enclosed manuscripts were written by the students whose names they bear. I have submitted work by the following students (give complete list of students represented):

(Name)	(Title)	(Grade)
--------	---------	---------

(School)	(Teacher's Signature)
----------	-----------------------

MAILING: Send prose to: IATE Prose Contest
Kimberly M. Radek
Division of English, Mathematics,
and Education
Illinois Valley Community College
2578 East 350th Road
Oglesby, IL 61348-1099

Send poetry to: IATE Poetry Contest
Robin L. Murray
Department of English
Eastern Illinois University
600 Lincoln Avenue
Charleston, IL 61920