

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 2006

RON FORTUNE AND JANICE NEULEIB

This issue of the *Illinois English Bulletin*, the Best of Illinois Student Poetry and Prose of 2006, offers amazing reading for teachers, students, and parents. Both Robin Murray and Kimberly Radek comment on the quality of the writing that they received this year. The judges had their work cut out for them since the quality clearly must have presented some challenges in making final decisions. The students have written about the issues of their lives and the lives of people they know, but the writing has captured something of the wider truth about all our lives. Poems such as Jessica Johal's "Punjabi American" and stories like Miranda Pettengil's "One Ring to Bind Them" demonstrate the wider cultural issues and influences that this generation of students bring to their writing and to our attention. We are grateful to them.

IATE also thanks Kevin Stein, Poet Laureate of Illinois, for his contribution to this issue and for his great contribution of the state poetry award. As he says, “poetry is an affirmation,” and the involvement of the state’s Poet Laureate in this work shows teachers that their work with poetry matters not only to their students but to those of us who enjoy their students’ work.

Most of all we want to thank all the teachers who have worked with these students, who have worked with IATE over the years, and who continue to show their commitment to writing of all types and varieties. We as editors salute each of you. As always, our thanks also go to Tara Reeser and Sarah Haberstick whose work puts the *Bulletin* into production promptly and properly each issue.

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

James Barnabee	Cyn Koukos
Giovanni Benincasa	Jennifer LaPapa
Amy Birtman	Karen LeMaistre
Glen Brown	John Lodle
Cathleen Case	Amy Lucas
Diane L. Clark	Jennifer Lucchese
Anne Cocks	Paul Lusson
Maria Cropper	Elizabeth Maxwell-Carlson
Joanne Curtis	Rebecca Mullen
Tarrie Dullum	Simone Neal
Judi Elman	Joyce Norman
Sheila Fitzsimmons	Sandy Parato
Margaret Forst	Elizabeth Perlman
Ann Garrett	Angie Reeves
Kate Glass	Lee Roll
Stephen B. Heller	Michelle Scales
Kim Herron-Titus	Sara Sher
Christine Hicks	Stephanie Solis
Rebecca Hodgkin	Lauren Stenzel
Debby Hudson	Kate Sullivan
Kimberly Hunt	Paul Swanson
Paul Kemp	Terry Tavine
Cyndi Knodle	Nell Wiseman
Karen Kopriva	

IATE POETRY RUNNERS-UP

Sarah Cason, "Kodak Camera," Grade 12, Lyons Township High School, La Grange, Glen Brown—teacher

Laura Dobroth, "Unrequited," Grade 12, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Diane L. Clark—teacher

Allison Gutmann, "Ashley Barkan," Grade 11, Adlai E. Stevenson High School, Lincolnshire, Elizabeth Maxwell-Carlson—teacher

Kelly Jarvis, "Distraction," Grade 12, Buffalo Grove High School, Buffalo Grove, Kate Glass—teacher

Sruti Kalva, "Glass," Grade 12, Buffalo Grove High School, Buffalo Grove, Lauren Stenzel—teacher

Sylvia Kaminski, "My Sister Veronica," Grade 11, Adlai E. Stevenson High School, Lincolnshire, Elizabeth Maxwell-Carlson—teacher

Becky Keeshin, "In the Deep of Nature," Grade 6, Edgewood Middle School, Highland Park, Sheila Fitzsimmons—teacher

Cassandra Kuhn, "Leaves," Grade 3, Wiesbrook Elementary School, Wheaton, Terry Tavine—teacher

Amanda Mahoney, "Six-Year-Old Politics," Grade 12, Libertyville High School, Libertyville, Karen LeMaistre—teacher

Jonathan Naskrent, "Pages of Memories," Grade 8, Macomb Junior High School, Macomb, Joanne Curtis—teacher

Hannah Smith, "Whispers," Grade 11, Midland High School, Varna, Amy Lucas—teacher

Leigh Terhaar, "Dripping with Words," Grade 11, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Karen Kopriva—teacher

Trisha Warner, "Fresh Cherries," Grade 12, Oakland High School, Oakland, Lee Roll—teacher

Morgan Willows, "Lisa Cason," Grade 11, Adlai E. Stevenson High School, Lincolnshire, Elizabeth Maxwell-Carlson—teacher

Julia Win, “Design,” Grade 12, Lyons Township High School,
La Grange, Glen Brown—teacher

Xinxin Zhang, “Upon Finding a New World,” Grade 10,
Carbondale Community High School, Carbondale, Kim
Herron-Titus—teacher

IATE POETRY HONORABLE MENTIONS

Josh Brickman, "Chess Is War: War Is the World," Grade 11, Vernon Hills High School, Vernon Hills, Paul Kemp—teacher

Sheena Cooper, "Personality," Grade 10, Thornton Township High School, Harvey, Jennifer LaPapa—teacher

Elizabeth Daley, "We Talked About Novels, or Standing on the Steps Watching Ideas Fly Away," Grade 12, Lyons Township High School, La Grange, Kate Sullivan—teacher

Maranda Jean Finley, "Mommy," Grade 10, Oakland High School, Oakland, Lee Roll—teacher

Natasha Galperin, "If the War Keeps Going," Grade 6, Edgewood Middle School, Highland Park, Sheila Fitzsimmons—teacher

Ralle Karadjov, "On the Cold Concrete," Grade 12, Adlai E. Stevenson High School, Lincolnshire, James Barnabee—teacher

Emily Elizabeth Kulas, "Fate," Grade 8, Northbrook Junior High School, Northbrook, Rebecca Hodgkin—teacher

Andrew McGregor, "Life Colors," Grade 11, Oakland High School, Oakland, Lee Roll—teacher

Kelsey Pagorek, "No Love This Day," Grade 5, Wiesbrook Elementary School, Wheaton, Terry Tavine—teacher

Mara Shirar, "The Ex," Grade 11, Oakland High School, Oakland, Lee Roll—teacher

Adam Swiatlowski, "The Empire Hotel," Grade 10, Northside College Preparatory High School, Chicago, Giovanni Benincasa—teacher

Kerstin Walker, "Pink, No Razzle-Dazzle Rose," Grade 11, Hinsdale Central High School, Hinsdale, Cyndi Knodle—teacher

Joshua George Winchester, "Shoelike Train," Grade 11, Mount Vernon Township High School, Mount Vernon, Ann Garrett—teacher

IATE PROSE RUNNERS-UP

Lukas Achenbach, "Nicotine," Grade 12, Lyons Township High School, La Grange, Kate Sullivan–teacher

Avi Baranes, "The First Time I Fell in Love," Grade 12, Highland Park High School, Highland Park, Paul Swanson–teacher

Honor Beeler, "Battle of the Bats," Grade 9, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Amy Birtman–teacher

Kendall Bell, "Metathesophobia," Grade 9, Carbondale Community High School, Carbondale, Angie Reeves–teacher

Sarah Bronson, "Fighting Your Demons," Grade 7, Edgewood Middle School, Highland Park, Sara Sher–teacher

Brittany Ann Carrell, Untitled, Grade 10, Oakland High School, Oakland, Lee Roll–teacher

Jackie Fish, "What's Next?" Highland Park High School, Highland Park, Anne Cocks–teacher

Austin Frej, "Scrooge: A Character Analysis," Grade 8, Lycée Français de Chicago, Cyn Koukos–teacher

Lindsey Henrikson, "Smoke," Grade 12, Buffalo Grove High School, Buffalo Grove, Kate Glass–teacher

Mehreen Sabah Iqbal, "Deadly Tumors and Ketchup," Grade 12, Belleville Township High School West, Belleville, John Lodle–teacher

Julia Irons, "Becoming," Grade 8, Northbrook Junior High School, Rebecca Hodgin–teacher

Ben Leddy, "Man on the Moon," Grade 12, Charleston High School, Charleston, Nell Wiseman–teacher

Kristen Maddox, "The Man," Grade 11, Warren Township High School, Gurnee, Michelle Scales–teacher

Emily Moore, "Ping-Pong in Schools: Why Not?" Grade 10, Carbondale Community High School, Carbondale, Tarrie Dullum–teacher

Tatiana Moore, "Shifting Gears," Grade 11, Highland Park High School, Highland Park, Cathleen Case–teacher

Elizabeth Yerchanig Ohanian, "A Moment Captured in Time," Grade 11, Warren Township High School, Gurnee, Michelle Scales–teacher

Joshua Pascal, "Brazilian Float Trip," Grade 6, Edgewood Middle School, Highland Park, Sheila Fitzsimmons–teacher

Autumn Perry, "Tommy Girl," Grade 9, St. Scholastica Academy, Chicago, Kimberley Hunt–teacher

Miranda Pettengill, "The Second Coming," Grade 11, Highland Park High School, Highland Park, Jennifer Lucchese–teacher

Eric Scott, "Pound It," Grade 12, Highland Park High School, Highland Park, Anne Cocks–teacher

Grant Simon, "The Giant Panda," Grade 7, Lycée Français de Chicago, Chicago, Cyn Koukos–teacher

Katie Sims, "Two for the Show," Grade 10, Hinsdale Central High School, Hinsdale, Cyndi Knodle–teacher

Grace Sullivan, "Camping 'Neath the Stars," Grade 6, Edgewood Middle School, Highland Park, Sheila Fitzsimmons–teacher

Alexandra Tejan, "One Little Light," Grade 11, Adlai E. Stevenson High School, Lincolnshire, Stephen B. Heller–teacher

Mike Wallace, "Persistency," Grade 12, Buffalo Grove High School, Buffalo Grove, Lauren Stenzel–teacher

Joshua George Winchester, "Yr an Angel," Grade 11, Mount Vernon Township High School, Mount Vernon, Ann Garrett–teacher

IATE PROSE HONORABLE MENTIONS

Alicia Barker, "The Dangers of a Book," Grade 12, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Amy Birtman—teacher

Elissa Barsky, "TSI: Thanksgiving Stuffing Investigation," Grade 10, Highland Park High School, Highland Park, Stephanie Solis—teacher

Jourdin Batchelor, "Conformity Essay," Grade 10, Carbondale Community High School, Carbondale, Tarrie Dulum—teacher

Honor Beeler, "The Accident," Grade 9, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Amy Birtman—teacher

Elinore Beitler, "Mother Nature Gone Wild," Grade 7, Edgewood Middle School, Highland Park, Sara Sher—teacher

Cara Elizabeth Boren, "Momma's Man," Grade 7, Ransom Grade School, Ransom, Rebecca Mullen—teacher

Elizabeth Daley, "Funerals," Grade 12, Lyons Township High School, La Grange, Kate Sullivan—teacher

Ben Davis, "Food Paper," Grade 10, Highland Park High School, Highland Park, Judi Elman—teacher

Annie Flaherty, "The Giving of Flowers," Grade 11, Adlai E. Stevenson High School, Lincolnshire, Stephen B. Heller—teacher

Jimmy Harper, "A Jaguar's Life," Grade 7, Lycée Français de Chicago, Chicago, Cyn Koukos—teacher

Andy Johnson, "The Cell," Grade 12, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Margaret Forst—teacher

Allie Kleifield, "Clouds," Grade 12, Buffalo Grove High School, Buffalo Grove, Kate Glass—teacher

Franki Levenson-Campanale, "One Step at a Time," Grade 8, Northbrook Junior High School, Northbrook, Rebecca Hodgin—teacher

Mariel McAleer, "Down the Hill," Grade 6, Edgewood Middle School, Highland Park, Sheila Fitzsimmons–teacher

Benjamin R. McBurney, "My Cure," Grade 11, Oakland High School, Oakland, Lee Roll–teacher

Emily Miner, "The Days of Our Lives," Grade 11, Naperville North High School, Naperville, Sandy Parato–teacher

Linden Moot, "From Self to Home," Grade 11, Highland Park High School, Highland Park, Paul Lusson–teacher

Lena Munzer, "The Battle of Wind and Sun," Grade 6, Edgewood Middle School, Highland Park, Sheila Fitzsimmons–teacher

Shazia Siddiqi, "Independence Day," Grade 8, Macomb Junior High School, Macomb, Joanne Curtis–teacher

Michael Stoliar, "In the Blink of an Eye," Grade 12, Highland Park High School, Highland Park, Judi Elman–teacher

Marisella Tapia, "Down the Road," Grade 10, Highland Park High School, Highland Park, Elizabeth Perlman–teacher

John Van Duyn, "The Tree Climber," Grade 4, Wiesbrook Elementary School, Wheaton, Terry Tavine–teacher

Stacie Wolf, "Robbers," Grade 12, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Karen Kopriva–teacher

Paige Zelinsky, "Sylvia the Great," Grade 11, Highland Park High School, Highland Park, Paul Swanson–teacher

**MAPPING RELATIONSHIPS:
THE POEM AS HUMAN COMMERCE**

KEVIN STEIN
ILLINOIS POET LAUREATE

A poem defines the poet's relationship with a world of others, both human and natural. It is a portal with complementary views. One view is focused outward upon the world from the poet's own eyes; the other is focused inward, enabling the reader to look into the poet's being. In sum, poems map poets' relationships with the universe they inhabit or the one they wish to inhabit, setting down the boundaries as well as the topography of their attention.

The mere act of writing a poem is an act of affirmation. It affirms both the poet's place in the world and the value of what attracts the poet's attention.

A poem is thus a form of human commerce, one whose exchanges abjure cash but nonetheless intimately and necessarily involve value. Ineluctably, what the poet values makes its

way into a poem, consciously or not. The poet's commerce with nature and humanity involves much importing and exporting to be sure, a curious kind of one-person international trade with the larger world. Its images and ideas are transported across the border of the poet's self and exported back out again into the world, transformed as a poem. The poet's currency, of course, is language. Not surprisingly, his/her profits are intellectual and emotional. For the poet, language is coin of the realm. For the poet, experience is both raw material and end product, the poem itself an experience not mere story about experience.

Congratulations to the poets whose splendid poems earned this year's IATE poetry contest first place honors. Among them, I am drawn to those valuing relationships, for those poems sparked my above musings on the poem as act of human commerce. These poems have garnered my citation as Poems of Special Merit. Whether it is a granddaughter's loving recounting of her grandma's quirky sayings or a daughter's arriving home to her parents' exotically spiced dinner, these poems reveal the depth of human relationships through exquisitely chosen detail. Their subjects are animate, bristling with an idiosyncratic but embracing humanity. These poems implicitly understand essential human loneliness even as they celebrate human togetherness. Sometimes that togetherness offers the "missing piece" that makes one whole; other times the larger culture brings not so salutary pressures, forcing one to grow from kids' funky Keds innocence to "skin tight jeans / high heels and a / low cut shirt." Even a fourth grader's ekphrastic poem—her response to a Georgia O'Keeffe painting—delivers its own surprising commentary, finding in a lone tree enveloped by fog an image to express human loneliness and resiliency.

This is the poet's essential task and obligation: To pay attention, thus allowing the world to enter one's door and

the world to exit again, transformed by self and experience,
remade as poem.

Poems of Special Merit
2006–2007 IATE Poetry Competition
Cosponsored by Kevin Stein
and Patti Blagojevich, First Lady of Illinois

These submissions have garnered recognition as Poems of
Special Merit:

“Punjabi American,” Jessica Johal, Grade 12, Buffalo Grove
High School

“The Missing Piece,” Mariel McAleer, Grade 6, Edgewood
Middle School

“My Grandma,” Jodie Lynn Good, Grade 10, Oakland
High School

“*Grey Tree, Lake George*, Georgia O’Keeffe,” Emily Taetzsch,
Grade 4, Wiesbrook Elementary School

“Marissa Ristich,” Nick Neri, Grade 11, Adlai E. Stevenson
High School

CONCRETE VISIONS IN VERSE

ROBIN L. MURRAY

When a fourth grader rewrites a Georgia O’Keeffe painting, *Grey Tree, Lake George* in verse and a senior provides a rich portrait of “Punjabi American,” they have grasped the grounding for good poetry—concrete detail reconstructed into a real, sometimes emotional, experience. In the poems collected here, images ring true, without resorting to empty or inflated style sometimes (wrongly) associated with children’s and young adult poetry. People and places highlighted in each piece—to cling to the cliché here—came to life for me as I read, bringing back memories of my own grandma or best friend or grove of grey trees.

These poems seemed like gifts, delivered especially for me, like flowers put into words, like sunflowers on birthdays:

In Takeshi Kitano’s *Fireworks*
sunflower lions smile
bright yellow and green

with infinite centers of
seeds like grains of sand through a microscope.
Grained gold, speckled with green,
sunflowers beam, stretching upward
in summer heat.

They lined our garden
once, shading lettuce, shooting fire above the
leaves.

I don't remember if we seeded the flowers
roasting kernels, but I can taste the sun
when memories say we did. Salty crackle
sweet crumble, like a coffee cake topping
I sometimes smell when walking across
sandy soil, sunflowers roar.

Or orchids placed on flowery Easter dresses:

On the blackboard: corsage
underlined with "French root" below
a reference to "The Necklace" and—for me—
orchids,
worn for dances, Easter, ballrooms
and my niece's baptism
but also with mutable irony—
rootless yet thriving, fragile yet defiant
in clear plastic boxes, on pink dresses
a perfect flower floating on air
less than even Guy de Maupassant expected
—an orchid without pins.

I think you'll enjoy these gifts as much as I.

MAGIC KINGDOM

I walk into this familiar place; seen it all before
In fairy tales, my own journeys, and storybooks galore.
I turn around and what I see amazes me much more—
A captain fighting alligators and even fish that soar.

I decide to travel far away to stars in outer space,
So I ask a friend to sprinkle fairy dust across my face.
I float into the atmosphere, leaving without a trace;
I get so scared I come back down at an enormously quick
pace.

I decide to see what else beckons me in the land of joy and
shores;
I look around and what I find is a graceful, bronze-trimmed
door.
Turning the handle, I peek inside; what I see is not a bore—
Princesses dressed so beautifully, the center of me is torn.

They invite me to a tea party in their royal home,
An elegant, grand castle, in the center of a “fantasmic”
show,
With fireworks, and music cues, and lights that go and go.
I watch as my eyes, bulging bright, glint in the summer’s
glow.

I suddenly yawn as sleep envelops—cannot easily resist—
And I dream of all the magnificent things that I could have
missed.
So soon I awake with many thoughts but mostly a big list
Of what I should do today as I give my dad a big, thankful
kiss.

I prepare in a hurry and am ready to go;
We exit the hotel lobby, and my pulse won't stay slow!
I want to soar on a roller coaster although my mind says
no,
But hey! When you're in Disney World, might as well go
with the flow.

Kimberly Bradford

Grade 8

Northbrook Junior High School

Northbrook

Rebecca Hodgkin, teacher

OLE MAN ON THE STREET CORNER

Walkin' down the street
In Harlem
I see an ole man
Sad, drownin' in the blues.
I ask him what the probl'm
The reason he so sad
He tell me that his woman
Gone to a younger lad.
Well I sits m'self down beside him
Tell him my woman gone too
So we sits there together
Drownin' in the blues.

Andrew Bulla

Grade 12

Charleston High School

Charleston

Nell Wiseman, teacher

MY GRANDMA

Grandma tells me stories about three little pigs
Dreams of a big farm house atop a hill
Loves to eat hot-fudge sundaes at DQ
And still goes to the Coles County Fair for a lemon
shake-up

She takes me shopping every birthday
Laughs at the dumbest things
Like her cat playing with a rubber squeaky mouse
Grandma gossips like a 16-year-old girl
"The neighbor kid is goin' to jail."
And tells dirty jokes like a 16-year-old boy
"You hear about Cinderella and the Pumpkin Eater?"

My grandma sits in her chair
Sits in her chair all day
Full of secrets
Watching the neighbors like a hawk
She says the silliest things
"Jodie, you're my main squeeze!"

This year, she can barely make it out for Christmas
But she'll find a way to make my day
She'll slip me a five dollar bill
But make me promise not to tell
My grandma is hiding her sickness
Not knowing what tomorrow will bring

But she does her crossword everyday
And watches *Jeopardy* religiously
And my grandma tells me she loves me...
Like a fat kid loves cake.

Jodie Lynn Good
Grade 10
Oakland High School
Oakland
Lee Roll, teacher

DESTINY

Life is an immense step into
making difficult decisions.
Just like a deer in Miami,
you're lost.

You don't know which way to turn,
afraid of what's going to happen next.

"Boom" you are hit,
it feels like a bulldozer ran into you.
You wait and nothing happens.

All of a sudden you feel like a hawk
soaring in the sky.
You're going up looking down on what happened.

You feel no more pain,
you feel recovered,
and lighter than ever without all the pressure on you.

As you go up you remember your loved ones.
You look around, but they are nowhere to be found.
Now you wonder if they know
what happened.

Right below you see the ambulance rush toward you.
All of a sudden you feel guilt
weigh you down.

You think about how your mom
feels—you—sneaking out
to view the outside world.

You realize how sorry you are
and you want to tell her how you feel,
but you can't.
Your voice is paralyzed.

Then you say no I don't want to die.
God hears you and tells you
to obey your parents,
for they are always right.

Jynniah Harris
Grade 9
Lake Forest High School
Lake Forest
Amy Birtman, teacher

PUNJABI AMERICAN

I walk through the front door,
the scent of Mati's
tandoori chicken curry
sticks to the air.

In the kitchen
she stands before the stove
adding masala spices
in a beige and white *saltwar kameez*,
the baggy pants I know,
tied with white string, but covered
by the short-sleeved *kurta*
that reaches just above her knees.

Papa sits at the kitchen table
reading the *Punjab Times* newspaper.
Bill Clinton is in India,
he flips the page, Aishwarya Rai
starred in the new movie,
Bride and Prejudice.

For just a split second,
the steel *kara* on his wrist
reflects the sun shining
through the window behind him
and causes a glare in my eyes.

Naniji sits beside him
sipping a cup of strong Punjabi *cha*
the familiar tea spices
mix with the masala,
and make my tongue go dry.

I sit at the table,
Mati places in front of me
a bowl of tandoori curry,
steam from the chicken hits my face,
her lips brief to my forehead,
she says, "Morning, Beta,
careful, it's hot."

Jessica Johal

Grade 12

Buffalo Grove High School

Buffalo Grove

Joyce Norman, teacher

JAPAN AND WWII

Hail fell from the sky,
The little bird could not fly.
He will rebuild again.

Julia Katlin

Grade 7

Sunset Ridge School

Northfield

Debby Hudson, teacher

THE MISSING PIECE

the cherry on top
the dot on the "i"
the icing on the cake
the toppings on the pie

the one who brightens up
the gloomy weather
the glue that sticks
my life together

a friend, a thing,
a brick in the wall
the tiny detail is cherished
to me, and to all

the spot on the pup
the whisker on the kitten
the complicated stitch
on that warm woolen mitten

the one who reminds me
I'm as strong as a lion
the one that tells me
I'm a bird that's always flyin'

the petal on the flower
the branch on the tree
the green in the grass
the wave in the sea

the one who is there
when my eyes are weepin'
the one who is happy
when my smiles are seepin'

the people I love
through every heartbeat
the missing piece
that makes me complete

Marisol McAleer

Grade 6

Edgewood Middle School

Highland Park

Sheila Fitzsimmons, teacher

MARISSA RISTICH

Marissa Ristich is a girl of wonders.

She masters
building blocks and
would soon devour
Algebra 2 problems.
A straight-A student.
Her glowing laugh took
me far into space
where
no one
could find me.

Plus
she could smear shaving cream
over a table
better than any other tot in the class.

She left her hair
uncombed and frizzy
until
she was forced to make it wavy and highlighted.
Her short faded jeans
always
matched her Keds shoes but
never complemented her shirt
until
she was forced to dress in
skin tight jeans
high heels and a
low cut shirt.

The Cheerios
she ate

always
found their way to the floor and
not her mouth.
Until
she was taught to have manners and
not to make messes.
She drank lemonade as if it were
the water in a
camel's humps.

Marissa Ristich
would
love
to turn back time.

Nick Neri
Grade 11
Adlai E. Stevenson High School
Lincolnshire
Elizabeth Maxwell-Carlson, teacher

GREY TREE, LAKE GEORGE

GEORGIA O'KEEFFE

Free Verse Interpretation

A tree
Standing there,
Like a stone
Gloomy, so gloomy
In the sad
Dark
Gloom
A tree
Its branches twisted
Gnarled, yet, they wave
In the mist, the fog
Sad, though so picturesque
Drooping evergreens behind it
All so detailed
So thorough
Makes me feel lonely
Though comforted
Safe
And in the midst of it all
A tree.

Emily Taetzsch

Grade 4

Wiesbrook Elementary School

Wheaton

Terry Tavine, teacher

FINE WRITING

KIMBERLY M. RADEK

In *Living by Fiction* Annie Dillard writes, "Fine writing is not a mirror, not a window, not a document, not a surgical tool. It is an artifact and an achievement; it is at once an exploratory craft and the planet it attains; it is a testimony to the possibility of the beauty and penetration of written language." From the beautiful expression of emotion in Emily Hines's "One with the Music" to the penetrating social commentary of Elizabeth Dana's "Blessed are the Poor in Spirit," we invite you to read the best of this year's prose writers, all of whom may be proud of their achievement in this art of writing. We once again thank you for sharing with us these artifacts of your students' labors.

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

Lori Cinotte

Yelena Kajevic

Kirk D. Lockwood

Ryen Nagle

Randy Rambo

Delores Robinson

ADDICT

Today was the day. I glanced furtively. Everything was in order. It sat there, mocking me with its elusive beauty, the light caressing its every curve. I needed it. It would fulfill the deepest part of me. *I was an addict. It was my vice.*

No one else appreciated it. I deserved it. *In my mind, I already owned it.* It was always there, but never paid attention to. No one would notice, I reasoned, if it disappeared for a little while. *I needed it for myself.* It was like other objects I had pilfered before. They stayed in the bottom drawer of my dresser. They cowered there until my need for them arose.

My plan formed. Almost impossible. Mr. Gibson never left his desk, his fortress. It was only for a couple minutes a day it was unguarded. The door was left open for the janitor before lunch. *This was the thrill which I lived for.*

The day passed. The tension built. *I needed to release it.* The tick of the clock echoed in my mind, endlessly. My eyes never left it. I yearned to hurl my pen at it, break its cruel face. No. *That would destroy my facade.* I was the boy who sat in the corner. No friends. No threat. No suspect.

Mr. Gibson's droning voice shattered my fantasy of the clock falling to the ground, *my pen piercing its heart.* The jarring bell cut through everything. I watched as the other boys got up. They laughed. They were idiots. Every last one. They made fun of me. No matter. *The objects were my friends.*

I walked out the door. I lingered at my locker. Mr. Gibson left the room. He didn't notice me. *I was part of the landscape.* I returned to the classroom. I could hear my heart pounding through my shirt. Sweat leaked from my every pore. I was there. I picked it up reverently, enjoying its presence in my hand. I walked to the dormitory, wandering through the empty halls, sheer ecstasy echoing in my mind. I tossed it

into its home, its prison, *its dull clang intertwining with my silent laughter.*

Kyle Albert

Grade 8

Northbrook Junior High School

Northbrook

Rebecca Hodgin, teacher

SIPCOF

Sipcof. I am a person who is quite sipcofing. The type of person who walks ever so sipcofly down the hallway into the classroom. A true sipcofer.

That would be me. Jessica Baker. The creator and almighty inventor of the word *sipcof*. Why create a word, you ask? When I open the dictionary, I see all kinds of verbs, adjectives, nouns, but none are for me. Coquette? Yes, but not just that. Fiery? Yes, but there's so much more! Gossipmonger? I say more like stating the facts. Sipcof.

"Ah, I see! The *sip* from gossipmonger, the *co* from coquette and the *f* from fiery! The combination of coquette, fiery, and gossipmonger! Genius!" No. Not at all. A sipcofer is not just a flirty, determined chatterbox...it's me!

I am the type of girl who will watch a football game with my face painted blue and orange, guzzle a soda, and out-burp every guy in the room. I am the type of girl who can show up to the high school prom in a 400-dollar gown, nails done, hair in place, eyelashes painted, four-inch heels, ready to dazzle my classmates. I am the type of girl who will pig out on pizza and pop one day, and eat nothing but whole grain rice and herbal green tea the next. I will buy you a present for Halloween and St. Patrick's Day, but totally forget about your birthday and Christmas.

Sound like a sipcof? Do you understand who a sipcof is? A sipcof is hard to understand. She would give anything to be married, but turns everyone away. Spend hours doing her hair and makeup, only to end up wearing sweatpants. Speed like crazy, but yet turn-signal exactly 100 feet from the stop sign before pausing the vehicle for exactly 3.5 seconds. Drive with her knee, but turn with the hand-over-hand technique. The type who would order a triple Whopper, biggie fries, and

a large, chocolate-dip cone, with a **diet** Coke. A sipcof is not indecisive, she's just hard to process. What is she thinking? What is she going to wear to school today? What will she say next? Why is she doing the chicken dance in the middle of Wal-Mart?

Sipcofs are crazy. They do things on a whim, but things always turn out just right. I think today I will try out for cheerleading. And tomorrow I will join the Future Farmers of America. I think today seems like a good day to sleep outside on the cold, soft dirt. And tomorrow I think I will stay in a fancy Hilton Hotel suite. Why not carry my Louis Vuitton purse to my after-school job at McDonald's? And maybe today I will dye my hair platinum blonde, and pass the ACT with a 36. A sipcof is all about breaking stereotypes.

So you want to be a sipcof? You can try and try, but sipcofs are born, not made. If you think you would like to become a sipcof, I'd advise not trying. Make up your own word. Be your own person. Live your life how you want to, not how you think you should live it. Keep on sipcofin' on!

Jessica Baker

Grade 11

Oakland High School

Oakland

Lee Roll, teacher

BIG BOYS DON'T CRY

Once upon a time I was a girl. A girl who loved a boy. A boy who lit up like no candle, match, or cheap gas station lighter ever could, for me. A boy who caught a good deal more than his fair share of sun in his hair. A boy who the whole world held its breath and waited for. And watched. And he never noticed.

He was one of those boys with a father. A father who taught him how not to cry. How to take hold of the emotion and suffocate it before it got the chance to hurt him. Or love him. The boy was good at hiding. Very good. But, even with all his expert hiding, he succumbed to the feeling, in the end, as all boys do. And he took it twice as hard.

I remember once, before I ever even met the boy, I saw him open a door for an older lady, at a Kroger, near my house. I don't know why I remember it. It wasn't a real terrific turning point in my life or anything. And after the lady walked through, the people just kept filing in. Like he was a doorman or something. And I remember thinking how annoying it would be to stand there, without anyone even offering to take the door. Without anyone even saying "thank you." But he just smiled. I don't know why I remember it. Why I remember everything he ever did. But I do.

I loved the boy. Not because he was beautiful and brilliant. Or because he had money. Though he was. And he did. I loved him for his laugh. For the way he said my name. For the song he wrote and sang me once, on my birthday, underneath the stars, on the rooftop of my old school. I loved him. I did. More than I can write. More than I can even put together in my mind, really. There isn't one word out there, in any language or poem, near strong enough to say how much. But I loved him. I did.

But the boy didn't love me. He loved his needle and his poison. He loved his pistol that he learned to shoot with, quite well, towards the end. He loved his brother and his father and the society that told him "big boys don't cry."

He loved his hands, like I did. I loved them because of what those hands could do. I loved them because they could draw these amazing sketches and play the piano and write incredible stories and songs. He also loved them for what they could do. Because they could steal. Because they could hold knives and guns and pull triggers. Because they could kill so he didn't have to.

But in the end, those hands let us both down. Turns out they weren't the only ones that could kill. And another boy shot *my* boy four times before he died. And as he lay there, on the ground, I sat with him.

"He wasn't a very good shot," said my boy, with his last good breath. "I could have had him in one."

Once upon a time I was a girl. Not yet nineteen years old. And I loved a boy. I loved a boy with all of me that I could give away. I would have given him everything. Anything. I would have. I'm not exaggerating, here. I don't *need* to exaggerate. I loved him. I loved him.

My boy was dead but he wasn't gone. He woke me up in the middle of the night, crying. He crept into my dreams and into my thoughts and into my everyday chores.

It wasn't long after my boy was killed that a man named Robert Fredericks—or maybe it was Frederick Roberts—asked me to testify in court against the boy who killed *my* boy. Some lawyer or something, I guess. I told him I was busy.

I know. Lame excuse, right? Was I ever once too busy for him? For the boy with the light green eyes and the penny colored hair. For the boy with the longing to learn and read and write. Always writing. He was such a great writer, though

he rarely let anyone—even me—read his work. He was one of those few exceptional writers who could just capture you and actually bring you into the story. His stories were like poems. Clean and sweet and sad and wonderful. And I was “too busy.” How could I be too busy? Too busy for the boy who I’d built my calendar around for the last four years. The boy I’d loved since the first time I saw him smile.

I went to the boy who shot *my* boy, at a place for boys like himself. He sat in a chair, at a table, looking more human, somehow, than I’d expected him to. I sat opposite him and looked at him, really looked at him, for the first time. He was young. So young. Only thirteen years old, they’d told me. My little sister was twelve, almost thirteen. She was too young to kill, wasn’t she? Her eyes so big and wondering. Trying to take in everything all at once so she wouldn’t miss anything. I thought of her. Her hair, a golden tumbleweed. In the summer, she’d sit out on the porch, with our mother, and have watermelon seed-spitting contests. She was too young to kill. Wasn’t he? He had dark skin and dark hair but his eyes were honey brown and wide. Eyes that knew how to smile, once, I could tell. But he wasn’t smiling now.

“I loved him,” I told him.

“I know,” he said, looking down.

“Why’d you do it?” I asked.

“I’m sorry,” he said. He looked at me, then. I could tell he was trying. Trying to fix things. Trying to bring my boy back. Probably trying to bring his *own* someone back too. But, of course, he couldn’t. Neither of us could. And I thought I saw something in his eye. A tear. A hope. And I knew that he probably had a father, somewhere, with strong arms and a big voice, who taught him how not to cry, like *my* boy was taught. Who taught him it was okay to hurt someone when you’re hurting, yourself. He was born with a chance. We all

are. Some of us don't have much of one but we still all have a chance, right? He did this to himself. He did it with his bullets and his hate. He did it to *my boy*. He did it to *me*.

And I pushed back my chair and I stood up. To get a closer look. To intimidate him. To scare him. I got up so I could shout at him a little bit louder. I got up to tell him that he'd taken away the only thing I'd ever needed. The only thing that ever made *me* feel like *I* was needed. And I walked over to the boy who killed *my boy*. And I pulled him close to me and I held him. Tight. I held *him* like my boy used to hold on to *me*. And the tears were coming from both our tired eyes, now. Pouring out of us like from a faucet. And, for the first time, I knew that it was all going to be okay.

Kendall Bell

Grade 9

Carbondale Community High School

Carbondale

Angie Reeves, teacher

DADDY'S LITTLE GIRL

Can I sit on your lap when we watch the scary movie? Can I hide in the crook of your elbow when I don't want to watch? Would that be all right? Friday night rides in your Dodge Durango. I turn the heater on your seat while you run in to pick up the pizza and listen to you complain about your butt being on fire. Then I might just realize you put mine on too; I didn't see you push the button.

I was lucky to get the front seat because Morgan and Ryan wanted to play their Game Boys in the back. Their light magnifiers illuminate the coffee stain on the dark leather next to Morgan's outstretched leg. I watch the strip malls pass by and I can't tell one apart from the other. Tomorrow we'll drop by one of them and pick up a mouse to feed Ryan's snake, J.P. I don't know how you can distinguish one strip mall from the next. You always know which one is the right one.

Inside the house, the cool tile greets my bare feet and I run upstairs to put on my slippers before scurrying back down to make sure Ryan didn't steal all the end pieces of the cheese half of the pizza. Morgan and I fight over the little table that sticks out of the middle. You just told me last weekend what it's for; it keeps the box from smashing down on the pizza. I told Allison yesterday and I felt really smart because she hadn't known what it was for. But I had. Because you taught me.

We rented *Alien 3* for us all to watch tonight and *The Three Ninjas* for when we wake up tomorrow and you're at work. When your feet are up on the recliner and you finally nestle into that one spot, worn in to the shape of yours and Abu's loosened muscles, I hurdle over the armrest and lean my head against your shoulder. Ryan turns the lights off and

your hands squeeze my waist as you whisper “mwahaha” in my ear just to watch me jump.

I wriggle away from your tickling fingers and nuzzling stubble, but my fist, although big for a six-year-old, only results with a chuckle when it connects with your forearm. Morgan, acting the mother, just like last week when she made me do the dishes, brings down the bowl of popcorn and I pop my hand in and take out a scoop while my eyes transfix on Sigourney Weaver.

The ending credits roll across the screen while Ryan snores on the couch. “Go bring your brother up a blanket, willya kiddo?” you ask me as your eyes flicker open. I turn the light on to the basement, quickly descend, and pull out a blanket before scurrying up the stairs, never looking at the deer head on the wall to the right. I hand you the blanket before I run to the pantry and hide a Ho-Ho in your green sweatshirt that I took from your closet, while you go to clean up in the kitchen. Your summer Cuban tan highlighted from the water running down onto the bowl. Darkness downstairs sends us up the two flights of stairs to the bedroom.

A few weekends ago, I couldn’t sleep and I had crept down the stairs, losing sight with each step. I had woken you when I was crawling out of bed and you followed me down and invited my breath to come short and quick when you made the stair creak behind me. You wiped the white line from your lips and said, “Drink your milk, it makes your bones stronger.” I didn’t understand how this liquid from a cow could make any difference in my body. But I believed it. Because you had told me. It must be true.

You roll out the trundle bed with the Lion King pillows and Morgan and I argue over who gets to sleep next to you. You put the sleep timer on the television before your breathing gets louder and slower. I lean on my elbow to watch Nick-

at-Nite over the top of Morgan's head. The sleep timer goes off and the picture in the television closes into a dot before going as black as your mustache.

Last weekend you helped me with my math problems. $2 + 3 = _$ is written on a piece of paper on the TV tray in front of me. I put my hands up and you place them back in my lap. "You don't need your fingers, you have your brain." I stumble through the problem and you place another one before me. $4 + 2 = _$. Six. You sat next to me and went over numbers for a half hour. I was excited to get your help instead of Mom's or Ryan's. You knew everything. I still make sure to drink all of my milk because my dad says it'll make my bones stronger. It must be true.

Lorin Biosca

Grade 12

Buffalo Grove High School

Buffalo Grove

Joyce Norman, teacher

**PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH SPEAKS
ON HOW TO TIE AMERICA'S SHOES**

"It is my job, as the President of the United States, to tie shoes. I'm the Shoe Tie-er. That's *my* job, as President.

"It's important...for the President to have *both hands*...on the laces when he's tyin' his shoes. The President can't tie both his shoes at the same time. He's gotta tie'em one at a time.

"Now, I plan to keep these instructions short and to the point, because verbosity leads to unclear, inarticulate things. First, you gotta make sure that the shoes aren't hidin' weapons of mass destruction. You have'ta be careful, because they outnumber us...two to one. Then, it's important that we have the right shoes...on the right feet. The left shoe...has'ta be on the left foot, because it's the left shoe. My point is...the socks have'ta be on first. You can't have socks...without shoes, or else you're gettin' nowhere. Republicans understand the importance of bondage between shoes and socks. We need to take care of our socks while they're underfoot. That's why I'm establishin' the No Socks Left Behind Act.

"My left shoe—it's brown, see?—it's been doin' a good job holdin' together despite that little tear, there. See it? And it's holdin' up. You're doin' a good job, Brownie. A damn good job. That is what I believe, and I believe what I believe is right.

"One thing is clear...is relations between American and its feet are good...and they're important that they be good. Those who don't tie their shoes properly...can end up with their shoes untied.

"I tell people: let's don't fear the knots. Let's shape'em. I'm the Shoe Tie-er, not an Untie-er. As I always say to my laces, 'Fool me once, you...shame...you fool me once, shame on...shame if you fool me...you can't get fooled again!'

“This war on terror involves shoelaces because of the nature of the shoelaces, the history of the shoelaces, and their willingness to terrorize themselves. They’re innovative...and resourceful...but so are we! They never stop thinking about ways to harm our socks and our shoes, and neither do we!

“No matter where we’re at in this shoe-tyin’ process, we gotta stay the course. Just stay the course, America! It’s also important...that we look after the environment. I’m not an environment-hater. Some people like to point fingers! But I like plants. I would guess—I would *surmise*—that some of the best shoelaces are made of cotton. Cotton, which is derived from plants.

“Shoes...are just like people. They have toes. They have heels. And they have souls. People, like shoes, look to their President for answers. So when you ask me, how do you tie your shoes, that’s my job to answer that question for you, like I’ve done.”

Laura Briskman
Grade 12
Lake Forest High School
Lake Forest
Karen Kopriva, teacher

TRAIN OF MEMORIES

My grandparents are good the way rice is good: common, yet necessary. I did not realize that while living with them, nor did I see that even as I left them. They gave me bowls of love and I ate them up without a thought. Before that fateful day when a train took me away, my world was perfect, plenty, and full.

Until I was seven and a half, I would lisp “*Ah Po*” and “*Ah Gong*,” Grandma and Grandpa, when people asked about my family. *Mama* and *Baba* lived elsewhere, in a land that did not include me, thus, of no importance. My grandparents, along with my aunt, took me everywhere and gave me everything. On a daily basis, they would buy me five dollars worth of candy when it cost fifty cents each. At noon each weekday, without fail, my grandpa rode his bike to my school and picked me up for lunch. He would hoist me onto the bike seat and we’d sail away. The same routine would repeat at dinnertime, rain or shine or snow. He also helped me fly by sweeping me up into his arms and running around, pretending I was an airplane. Even when this became a burden to his biceps, I flew. Perhaps, deep down, he knew that one day I would truly fly—away from him.

My grandfather was a true scholar. Students voted him “Best Teacher” in the county. I was vaguely proud of him, but not enough. “*Chou Ah Gong*,” stinky Grandpa, I would say as a giggly joke. However, the joke became implanted in my brain and barred me from appreciating his many skills. He was one of my first teachers. Mathematics became a delightful pastime under his tutelage. Later, I discovered that I was far ahead of the other children because of his teachings. I unconsciously thought of him as safety. The man could run miles without stopping at age fifty-five. He

was so strong, so confident, I thought years later. With him I would go anywhere.

Grandma served a completely different purpose in my life. Whereas Grandpa was teacher and protector, *Ah Po* was mainly mother and cook. Even as a child, I realized what set them apart. Grandpa was handsome, steady. Grandma looked aged and unstable. Every morning, before school, she would braid my hair. "*Aiya, Ah Po,*" I would scold if a measly strand of hair fell out of place. Then Grandma would take out the braid and, with the concentration of a surgeon, redo my hair. She made sure I had everything a little Chinese girl could want: dolls, chocolate, dresses, and an endless pile of hair ties. She was my genii and my cook. At dinner, pots of rice, vegetables, meat, and soup sat on my table, but I would not eat any of it. "*Bu xi huan,*" I don't like it, I'd say with my lips in an upside-down V. And Grandma would rush to find something to tempt my little mouth.

Being a fussy mother and cook was not Grandma's only job. She also tutored me. On weekends, we would sit next to dried fish in our musty attic, reading picture books. Knowledge interested me naturally and, with the help of Grandma, I learned a great many things. By age five, I could recite hundreds of poems. I could sing folk songs and children's songs. Both of these I lost after emigrating to the U.S. They were precious emeralds of culture and memories, and they faded in my life like my *Ah Po's* hair.

She knew all along, my grandma, that I would leave her. Yet she ignored it the way a person ignores death. Chinese culture taught one to ignore the emotions. Feelings should be kept away from life. They upset one's balance. Duty was the path in which one could never go wrong. My grandparents buried emotions like grain seeds, as did other Chinese. Seeds sprouted weeds of torment. There was no relief from it. Never

in my life had I witnessed my grandparents communicating tenderly or thanking each other genuinely. It was just not the norm. Instead, their conversations revolved around me. "*Diandian e le,*" Diana is hungry, or "*zanmen chi shenme,*" what are we eating? I, too, followed the ways of the culture. I became a logical, stable, and too-sensible child. Never in my early years did I say "I love you" or "thank you so much" to my grandparents. Expressing emotions was simply not a necessity.

That was why, on the day of my departure, my eyes were dry. My parents had come a couple of months earlier. They brought a sister, mother, and father for me. Those terms were meaningless. *Ah Po* and *Ah Gong* were my world. Mother and Father did not do anything. However, I considered them pleasant visitors. After a while, they decided that I should go with them to *Mei Guo*, the beautiful country, or America. That held my attention span for about five minutes and then I forgot about it.

The day came with surprising suddenness. I was about to board the train to the airport. The train was alive, and it was soon to leave. It did not occur to me that I would leave seven years of memories behind. Grandma seemed normal. She hurried me along like she did when shopping at the sky vendors. Grandpa, alongside, strode powerful steps and had his scholarly face on. This was typical behavior, so I did not make much of the situation. A train whistle sounded. "*Kuai zou, kuai zou,*" go quickly, go quickly, my grandmother said, shooing away my last moments with her.

I hopped onto the train and the door closed. As the train began to move, I noticed through the transparent glass that Grandma's eyes were bloodshot. They were fine only a minute ago. Why? I thought. Grandpa waved. I turned to my mother to see if she was crying. Years later, I would not remember

if she cried. I would only remember my grandparents' eyes,
dripping red.

Diana Chen

Grade 11

Vernon Hills High School

Vernon Hills

Paul Kemp, teacher

IMPOSSIBLE PERFECTION

"What?" My heart stopped. Everything else in the world seemed to freeze, and all I heard were her words.

"I just don't understand how this could have happened, how it could have gotten so bad..." *Lub-dup, lub-dup*. I could hear my heartbeat in my ears, its pounding growing gradually until I wanted to scream. *No, no, this can't be happening, this CAN'T be happening*. I could no longer feel my fingertips or my toes, or any of my limbs, for that matter. I felt paralyzed; it was like a nightmare come true.

Ever since I was a little girl, I have always been obsessed with the idea of perfection. I would accept nothing short of myself but flawlessness, and I would torture myself over it constantly. Everything had to be in exactly the right place, everything had to be done in exactly the right way. I never thought anything of it; this was always how my life had been. But all the structures of that dreaded "p" word came crashing down around me on one fateful day.

I was twelve years old when I was first diagnosed with scoliosis. The faultless glass of my life that I had so meticulously and fervently constructed for the past eleven years was shattered, smashed into jagged, imperfect shards. The diagnosis chilled me to the very marrow of my bones. Scoliosis is a deformity of the spine; for unknown reasons, some people's spines develop in a curved shape instead of in a straight line, and, if allowed to progress unchecked, it can crush vital organs. I had become a victim of a debilitating condition.

I can still remember my initial protests to the diagnosis, demonstrating all too well my underlying dream of perfection....

No, this is not happening, I can't have scoliosis. My family's genetic history is impeccable. Plus, isn't scoliosis just a tall tale that parents use to make their children sit straight? I couldn't believe it, and so I didn't. If I didn't allow myself to believe that I was...deformed...then it just wouldn't be true. I mean, how could I, this young, flexible girl have a...deformity? It's just not possible. This has to be a mistake.

But my protests were all in vain. It took me nearly three months and two X-rays to finally accept my condition and admit defeat: I had finally lost in the battle for perfection. I had scoliosis, and that was that.

If allowing myself to accept the notion was difficult at first, the next year was even more so. I was ashamed of myself and what was wrong with me. I had a colossal flaw, which glared at me like a giant red F at the top of a test. And that was what it was to me. I was a failure, and there was nothing I could do about it. Every night for the next three months I would loiter in front of the full-length mirror, looking at my back and trying to convince myself that there was really nothing wrong with me, that all those X-rays showing a curved spine were a hoax. Every night for the next three months I went to bed in tears.

Show time, I thought to myself and took a deep breath. I had only done this once before, and I wanted to do it right.

"Ok now, don't move and please hold your breath," said the lady pleasantly.

It was now my moment of truth. I stood up as tall as I could, straightening my spine to its full extent and trying hard not to breathe.

And it was done.

X-rays are only mere seconds to take, but what they show can haunt someone for a lifetime.

"Great, now just wait back in your room, and the doctor will be there shortly."

Shortly...yeah right. I waited for what seemed like an eternity. And then I waited some more. Finally, he came in. Each of my nerves tingled expectantly as he put up the X-ray and flicked on the light.

"Now, what we have here is very interesting," said the doctor in his nasal, droning voice. He sounded bored; yet this was one of the most important days of my life. "As you know, we continue to observe the patient if the curve is within twenty degrees..." *Just get to the point!* I was never one for waiting. "...And high thirties, low forty degrees is the gray zone. Surgery starts at forty-five degrees."

The doctor breathed in deeply. "Well, we do have quite a case on our hands here." A beat. "You see, she has a curve of..."

My heart quickened, and I felt like I had just sprinted the mile.

"...Fifty-one degrees."

It seemed as if someone had just punched me in the stomach, hard. A burning sensation filled my eyes, and my vision became blurred. I was beginning to have trouble breathing, and my limbs were numb. Everything seemed to spin around me. The only thought running through my mind was the word *surgery*. For a girl who had never been inside a hospital before, surgery was unthinkable. I could vaguely hear snippets of "a surgery date needs to be set up a half a year in advance" and "she will not be able to move for a month afterwards" in the conversation. We left as quickly as possible.

Two months later, as the reality of the situation begins to set in, I still do not know whether or not I should undergo

surgery. The advantages of doing so are manifest, but so are the disadvantages. Regardless, I will never be able to eradicate scoliosis completely from my life. And, as much as I may strive against it, as many stars as I will wish on, as many times as I will say to myself that it is not true, I will always have scoliosis. And everyday when I look into the mirror, I know that some things are just not meant to be perfect.

Faye Cheng

Grade 9

Hinsdale Central High School

Hinsdale

Cyndi Knodle, teacher

IN THE CAR

The first time I heard, I mean, really heard, the song "Hurt" was when Christine broke up with me in the back of my rusting pick up at a drive-in movie. I've never really liked Johnny Cash, but I guess that's not really even his song. Just a cover he did. But it made the perfect slow, agonizing background for Christine's own song, titled "I think we need to talk."

When she first said those words, I was slow to drag my eyes away from the flickering blue previews on the movie screen. When I did look at her, it was like listening, really listening, to Johnny Cash. The gelatin glow of the movie made her ash-blond hair look silver. Her eyes wouldn't meet mine; they looked from the popcorn to the fraying car seat and her fingers counted the worn patches on my letterman jacket, which had been her second skin for the last four years. I knew what she was doing, of course, and I picked up the popcorn from its warm cocoon between us so I would have something to do while she dumped me.

It took longer than I thought it would. She was good at it, I guess. There were no unfounded accusations screamed, no false tears. She let me down slow and easy as a new mother puts her first born to sleep. I missed most of what she said. Sometimes it's easy to get lost in the meaning behind words. The honey-slow rise and fall of her voice knitted gently with the hoarse one from the radio, but it wasn't hard to find the genuine regret and sadness behind those words. By the time she was done, I was so caught up in the sound of her consoling that I missed the ending. She must have taken this for anger because she slipped out of my letterman jacket, the car seat, the car, before I could compose an answer to whatever she had asked.

“I just want you to know that we’ll always be friends, okay?”

With this apologetic farewell she was pulled by arms as tan as her own into the car that had driven up beside mine. I caught the mocking hint of a sentence (“So how’d he take it?”) before the car leapt forward, coming to rest about 50 feet away. I had time to wonder if this space was a peace offering to me, or some kind of ironic, physical manifestation of the newly forged emotional distance between us, before the movie started. Not that the film distracted me. Because if Christine’s friends had been ready, lurking beastlike in the shadowy jungle of a drive-in lot, to pick her up as soon as the break up was over, then a lot of people had seen this coming. It explained some things, I thought, watching the meaningless movements and distractions of the screen. Like why the entire team had thrown more than a football my way on Friday. There had been miserable, pitying looks too, the same species as those you get when your dog runs out into the street for the last time. They had known. I felt my eyebrows crease with mild embarrassment, and I held onto that emotion with a firm desperation that was a little alarming. It was the first thing I’d felt since I’d seen Christine’s hair silver in the light.

Johnny Cash had long since passed, replaced with the low murmur of the weather report. I hadn’t turned off the radio when the movie had started and I didn’t move to do so now. I shifted in my seat slightly and watched the blonde heads in a car almost 50 feet away, waiting for a song to define their actions as smoothly as it had Christine’s.

How many people had known? The question was beginning to lose its power, the humiliation fading with each repetition. I fingered the edges of my jacket, which was still breathing her perfume into the stale car air and tried not to inhale. Then I stopped. It really didn’t matter. Her scent had

already lost its meaning. It occurred to me that maybe I should leave, that the space between was a hint that it was time for honorable departure. My fingers twitched towards the gear shift and then stopped. I waited for anything. Anger, the re-emergence of a specific blonde head, sadness, the beginning of a mockingly mournful song, frustration, a couple kissing on screen. Anything. I sat in the truck feeling the growth of rust and I waited for whatever Christine had taken with her to come back.

Elizabeth Daley

Grade 12

Lyons Township High School

La Grange

Kate Sullivan, teacher

BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT

It's always far away. It's in the pictures of big-eyed children with dark skin staring up at you from the pages of *National Geographic*, but you can easily turn the page before you feel anything. It's in the bony frames of the mothers, holding their screaming babies during those late-night commercials that try to guilt you into giving, but you can easily change the channel before you do anything. Poverty is never close to home, never knocking on your quaintly suburban back door. It's always neatly tucked away, put where you cannot see it, like dust bunnies swept under the rug. When poverty does stretch out its arms, trying to touch you, entreating you for help, you quickly recoil and continue your comfortably suburban lifestyle like nothing happened at all.

You fly out to Washington, D.C., maybe for a vacation, maybe for a business trip. You stay at a nice, moderately priced hotel. You visit the Smithsonian, the Lincoln Memorial, and the Capitol Building. You walk the streets, take the Metro, and feel that sense of importance, knowing that momentous decisions are made in this very city every day. However, if you do not change trains at Metro Center, but rather take the Red Line to Judiciary Square, and walk a few blocks, sidestepping the garbage and the homeless people that clutter the sidewalk, you would come to the Center for Creative Nonviolence, America's largest homeless shelter. If you walk down the cracked concrete stairs into the basement of the multistory building, you would enter a brightly painted room. A mural of rainbows and Bible verses covers the small foyer, and on a couch pushed up against the farthest wall sits Isaiah. Isaiah is a black man, about sixty years old, who does not have any legs. His wild gray hair radiating out from his head is reminiscent of Albert Einstein, though Isaiah's hair

is wild not out of eccentricity, but simply because he has not had a haircut. His clothes are worn and dirty, and when you lean in to try to understand his mumbled speech you realize that he probably has not showered recently. However, if you take the time to listen to what Isaiah has to say, you would realize that he has the majority of the Bible memorized. He sits on the couch, greeting all who enter and sharing Bible verses by heart. He says he is a minister, a man of the cloth, and repeats to you the Beatitudes, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for they shall inherit the earth." If you exit the foyer into the main building, you would meet many people like Isaiah. There are people recovering from addiction or fighting mental illness and people who have just fallen on hard times, each of them with their unique story. But, as you exit the building, saying good-bye to Isaiah, you remember that D.C. is known to have a lot of poverty, and that when you arrive home, you'll be sure to send the Center for Creative Nonviolence a check.

Later, maybe weeks, maybe months, maybe years, you are in downtown Chicago. You are there to see a play, or an opera. As you walk down the street, the smell from the sewer wafts up to you, and a dirty, ragged man plays the saxophone, rudely interrupting the aria you were humming from the opera you might be about to see. You realize that this is why you live in the safe, clean suburbs. The city is nice every once in a while, but there is no way you could ever live there. If you stop to listen to the man with the saxophone, you realize that he is moderately talented and toss a few singles into his open case. A few blocks later you see another man leaning against the wall of a building holding up a cardboard sign. "HUNGRY AND SICK. NEED MONEY FOR FOOD." You think that it is more likely that he needs money for drugs. You pause a moment, consider offering to buy him a sandwich,

but the curtain rises at eight and it is already seven thirty. Anyway, if he were really hungry, he would go to a shelter. You are almost to the theater when you see those kids who drum on the ten-gallon tubs. It just would not seem like the city without their upbeat rhythms in the background. If you stop and ask them where they go to school, you would find out that they attend one of those urban public schools, where you are very glad your children do not have to go. They go to school with outdated textbooks and metal detectors, where gangs and drugs and violence are very real threats. After school, they go home to their houses in the projects where gangs and drugs and violence are even more real and more threatening. Then they come here, and play their drums for you, a skill they probably had to teach themselves considering it is highly unlikely that they have any form of music education at their school. However, you probably do not ask them where they go to school, so you just stand, listen, applaud, and make your way into the warm, bright theater, glad you came to the city for a visit.

The following Sunday, you are sitting in your suburban, middle-class, Christian church. You are listening to a sermon about Jesus, Jesus performing miracles, Jesus telling parables, Jesus angering the Pharisees. As you sit in your pew, volunteers in the basement of your church roll up mats and wash dishes. Last night, dozens of homeless men, women, and children slept there, trying to escape the cold. Your church is a PADS site, which ministers to the homeless and destitute right in your community. Maybe not in your specific neighborhood, but a neighborhood close enough to make you uncomfortable. These people are not from the city, where urban poverty is a fact of life, but from your area, your community. Last night, small children ran around the basement, comfortable in a strange place out of necessity and habit. Tired old men laid

their aching bones on mats on the floor. Women asked the volunteers to put the few dollars or possessions they carried with them in the refrigerator, so there was no risk of them being stolen. However, you know nothing of this as you listen to the verses about Jesus eating with the lepers, sinners, and tax collectors. As you open the door of your shiny car after the sermon, you forget how Jesus walked around the ancient world, sharing his teachings. You forget that blessed are the poor in spirit, for they shall inherit the earth.

You forget these things because you are very rarely reminded. As you go about your everyday life, you are blind to the poverty around you, blind to those who suffer. When asked what the biggest problem in our nation is, you cannot quite put your finger on it. You know there is something bigger than obesity and heart disease and cancer, something that causes crime and drugs and prostitution, but you are too busy being afraid of all these smaller things that you do not realize what the problem is that you have to solve. It is a problem people have been trying to solve since the beginning of the Common Era, but in our society of "family values" is astoundingly often overlooked. But then again, you have already forgotten Isaiah's reminder: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for they shall inherit the earth."

Elizabeth Dana

Grade 11

Warren Township High School

Gurnee

Michelle Scales, teacher

MADE IN MÉXICO

With precision, Mama chops bananas. She articulates with each dice, the sound of the knife hitting the cutting board like a machete. Outside, the Florida rain taps gently on our red tile roof—background noise to her favorite Telemundo show.

“I’m so bored,” I mutter as I sit at the kitchen table, staring out of the grubby window.

“Call tus amigas, Teresa,” she says. “Help me cut plátanos.”

“No, Mama. I don’t want to.”

She merely waves her hand in my direction, ushering me out of the kitchen. La cocina is her domain. I leave, rolling my eyes at her outfit; Mama is known for her crazy clothing. She’s told me many times that every outfit she wears contains all the colors of the rainbow. I smart-mouth her usually, responding that her outfit’s so loud, people can hear her coming a mile away.

“Better too loud than too soft, Niña.”

She always directs these types of comments to me. Teresa, you need a little meat on your bones. Why don’t you find yourself a boy? A nice one from church. Wear a little bit of lip liner. Don’t you have something better to do than spend every Friday night with me?

We’ve been here four years, since I was twelve.

I remember the day before we came to America, I went to the market and said good-bye. I’d grown up there; every day after school, I’d skip down the dirt road, escaping all the dusty books and stiff posture of my cramped desk, where I had to sit still and recite my prayers. Here, I was free. The sun set as I rode my brown Schwinn out of the mercado for the last time, feeling so light and hollow inside, already missing the smell of cactus and clay and dry air stinging my tan skin.

That night, mi familia sat out on the screened porch, drinking limonada, reminiscing and catching green lizards. Mama made her famous salsa, and neighbors gathered to wish us luck with our new life. Maria and I danced to la música of a local mariachi band. Since we were babies, we'd been inseparable. Maria was the loud one, with the crazy ideas and longest eyelashes you've ever seen. Me, I was the sidekick, the one who needed to be coerced. As we sat eating tortilla chips on the steps of mi casa, I tried to imagine life without her.

"Hey, hey, don't be triste already," she teased. "Let's go dance!"

"No, I'm okay. You go, I'll just sit here for a while."

"Teresa, you always were the sappy one." With that, she bounded off, and I knew she had tears in her eyes.

Later in the kitchen, I sat at the table, watching everyone. Mi abuelo had taken out his guitar and began to play with shaky hands. Papi sat outside on the antique motorcycle he had forever tried to repair, staring off into the velvet sky. Maria's mother was holding Mama's hand, still gossiping about the new pastor. My brother and his cute friends pestered Maria, tugging on her braids. My eyes were more watery than when Mama made me cut onions.

As the night grew later, people began saying their good-byes. Punches from my brothers' friends, pinched cheeks from my aunts, un beso from my abuelo. Maria gave me her favorite doll, the one that looked just like her.

"Gracias."

We held each other really tight, afraid of what would happen when we loosened our grip. As she pulled away, the smell of salsa and cheap perfume lingered in the chilly night air.

Sometimes, on Friday nights with Mama, I call her. When we're on the phone, I pretend that we're both in the

same city, two houses away, and if I wanted to, I could just walk over, sit cross-legged on her quilted bed, and chat. We speak in rapid Spanish, giggling school girls. Mama rolls her eyes, and tells me to send Maria's mother her love.

Tonight, after I get off the phone, I am quiet. Maria has un novio, a boyfriend. They're going out tonight; she had to get off the phone to shave her legs. "I'm so nerviosa, Teresa. Should I let him kiss me?"

"What would Jesús do?" I ask her sourly, but she doesn't catch my sarcasm, and if she does, she brushes it off.

"Mama, Maria has un novio," I say, twirling the phone cord.

"Really?"

"Sí."

"Good for her," Mama replies, knowing that it irks me.

I stay quiet.

"Help me cut plátanos."

Wordless, I tie the black-and-white checkered apron that's been hanging on the kitchen door around my waist and peel a banana. I've never been as skilled in the kitchen as Mama would like, with my clumsy hands and my tendency to daydream. When I was younger, I believed that it was a gift. Now I know slicing a banana is all in the state of mind.

As I finish my first, she has diced three. She leans against the counter, downing an Advil to soothe her aching joints, and then resumes chopping. "I know you miss México. We all do. I feared when we came here that you wouldn't remember. That you would become this all-American girl."

"Never, Mama," I assure her.

"Teresa, I hope you're adjusting."

I say nothing and continue cutting. The boy who asked Maria out is probably walking up the steps now. He has a flower. Shakes hands with her father.

"Teresa, you hear me?"

"Sí. Mama, I'm going to go outside, okay?"

She nods and turns on the skillet.

I sit down on the front steps and consider what she's said. The rain is lessening, but raindrops still bounce off the pavement, resisting their fate. Salty beads cling to my eyelashes. Sticking my tongue out, I catch a rain drop.

I wonder if it's raining in México.

Laura Dobroth

Grade 12

Lake Forest High School

Lake Forest

Diane L. Clark, teacher

MY GRANDPARENTS, MY INSPIRATION

When I was five years old, my grandparents told me their medical tales. Shifra, my grandmother, was a field surgeon during World War II. Standing less than five feet tall, she marched with the Soviet army over thousands of kilometers from Russia into Bulgaria. She operated on wounded soldiers pulled from the field, often standing day and night over the operating table, ignoring the whistling bombs, disregarding the hunger, feeling neither heat nor cold. Her heroism has not been forgotten. Today, my family dearly preserves the letters she received from the men whose lives she saved.

My grandfather, Mikhail, was an otologist specializing in hearing restoration surgery. He showed me the miniscule prosthetics that he hand sculpted to replace afflicted bones within the ear. He recounted how his deaf patients would respond to his voice even before he finished the last stitch. He lived through the horrors of the Holocaust, but instead of harboring hate toward those responsible for the tragedy, he taught me to believe in human wisdom, love, and compassion. To this day, he receives phone calls from his grateful former patients.

My dear grandparents, my inspiring teachers: you cannot imagine the depth of the desire you have awakened in me through your stories—my desire to become a doctor, to share your lessons of giving and forgiving. When I was allowed to hold your retired instruments, I could feel the power of your strong and gentle hands. And the dream of medical instruments doing their magic in my own hands was engrained in my heart and mind.

Upon entering high school, I was afforded the opportunity to observe doctors in action. I began volunteering at the local hospital and quickly acquainted myself with some of the

surgeons. When I asked to watch a surgery, I was invited, to my astonishment, to see a dozen. I witnessed a laparoscopic gallbladder removal, the microvascular clipping of a cerebral aneurism, orthopaedic surgeries, cesarean sections, and a natural childbirth. I do not know yet what type of medicine I want to practice, but from the lofty shoulders of my ancestral giants and with my limited, but personal, experience, I can better see the endless possibilities in the field of medicine.

As I work my way through college, medical school, residency, and finally my own practice, I aspire to carry with pride the flame that my grandparents have passed on to me. It is the flame of medicine and education, the flame of lives well lived. In the future, I imagine the tongues of this flame, the tongues of wisdom, love, and compassion, blazing brighter and hotter, kindling the torches of life in my own children, my grandchildren, and others whom I will meet along the way.

Andrey Dolinko

Grade 12

Vernon Hills High School

Vernon Hills

Paul Kemp, teacher

GIANTS OF THE SEA

In my spare time I have been studying whales for about two years. They are the most interesting animals I have discovered. At first I thought they were just another kind of big, dangerous animal. However, after reading through many books and creating a website about whales, I discovered that only toothed whales, such as the sperm whale, attack animals like squid, but only for food. Other whales such as the humpback, which is my favorite species of whale, have baleen plates that they use as filters to eat very small animals like krill and plankton. It turns out that bigger whales are actually harmless to people. These facts and many others sparked my interest in the fascinating whale species.

Most people think whales are just another kind of fish, but this could not be farther from the truth. In fact, whales are mammals and have many characteristics that differentiate them from fish. For instance, whales have blowholes and must surface to breathe, while fish can breathe underwater through their gills. *Whales and Dolphins* by Caroline Bingham states that the muscular blowhole leads right to the animal's lungs and is located on the top of its head. One blow can "reach up to thirteen feet high" (Bingham 6–7). Even though they cannot breathe underwater, Vassili Papastavrou in *Eyewitness: Whale* believes some species of whales can stay submerged for "up to 90 minutes" (39).

Whales have many distinct physical characteristics. First, they can weigh anywhere from twenty-five to forty tons when full grown, but at birth they weigh three tons! They also measure as much as forty-five to fifty feet in length when full grown. According to the American Cetacean Society's website on the humpback whale, some of their tails can reach eighteen feet in width. The largest species of whale is the

blue whale. Not surprisingly, they are known as the giants of the sea. Also, the tail of the whale is called the fluke, and no two whales have the same fluke pattern. Researchers use the fluke to recognize specific whales. Furthermore, some whales have a fin on their back called a dorsal fin. It may be situated at different parts of their back, and the shape also helps to identify the type of whale. Lastly, the coloring of whales varies depending on the type.

Mark Carwardine in *Whales, Dolphins, and Porpoises*, shares that since there are “forty-four different species of whales” there is no specific location for them, so whales live in many different places around the world (31–37). They can be found from “the tropics to the polar waters” (Papastavrou 39). Whales also have many different migration routes. Every year they leave the cold waters in winter to migrate to warm waters to breed. A very popular migration route is from Alaska, down through the Pacific Ocean, to the Sea of Cortez off Baja California. According to *The Whale* by Valerie Tracqui, this journey takes three months. When migrating, whales cover about “seven miles per hour” (Tracqui 12).

Commonly observed behavior patterns show how playful whales actually are. For instance, they enjoy breaching, which is when a whale jumps out of the water, lands on its back, and creates a huge splash. The splash can be heard for several kilometers. They also lobtail, which involves a whale forcefully slapping his fluke on the surface of the water. Other forms of behavior are flipper slapping, spyhopping, wake riding, bow riding, and beach rubbing according to David Kidd. Whales use these behaviors as forms of communication and just for fun.

As previously mentioned, my favorite whale is the humpback whale, whose eating habits are quite interesting. They use little bubble nets to trap fish and then eat them

through their baleen plates. They are easy to identify because of their unusually long flippers and a single bushy blow. Their name comes from the way they hump their back before they take a deep dive.

While vacationing in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico, my family and I experienced whale watching. Having chartered a fishing boat and spent the day on the Pacific whale watching, I saw a pod of gray whales from a very close range. On another day, we ventured up a cliff and spotted the whales making their migration south along the coast. This spectacular view made me envious of the researchers who observe whales everyday.

From having studied whales, I have developed a sense of protection for them, and I have grown to love this mammal even more. They are unique and interesting, and as a result I am considering pursuing a career in marine biology in order to acquire more knowledge about whales and to help keep them from becoming extinct.

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Jake Fansler

Grade 7

Lycée Français de Chicago

Chicago

Cyn Koukos, teacher

THE RUSHING WATERS OF THE NAMEKAGAN RIVER

It was the summer of 2005, my first year at North Star Overnight Camp. Every cabin went on a camping trip sometime in the four weeks of camp. Little did I know that when I went on mine, I would be seconds away from death.

I was leaving on my camping trip for the Namekagan River one afternoon during the second week of camp. Half-way through breakfast, our camp director announced that, since my cabin was leaving on our trip, we were dismissed from the lodge to finish packing our bags and to fill our water bottles. While we were packing up the van, I was very eager to get our trip started and get out into the wilderness. After everything was done, we said good-bye to camp and embarked on our journey up the Namekagan River.

At the landing, we put our canoes in the water, partnered up, and started paddling up the river. We canoed for eight hours until we got to our campsite. At the campsite we unloaded the canoes, set up our tents, and started cooking dinner. While the pizzas were cooking over the fire, a few of my friends and I decided to go swimming. I was so excited to be able to go swimming on rapids that I did not even think about the dangers of it. We slipped on our life jackets and jumped into the water. When we came up with the idea to swim, we did not know how strong the current was. As soon as we started our swim races, the current started to tug us away from the campsite. All of my friends caught onto a rock and were able to swim to the part of the river where the current was not as strong. I got very unlucky and was pulled away to a part of the river where there was nothing safe to grab; the only object was a log covered in slimy green moss that had two gray, poisonous wolf spiders bigger than my fist crawling on it. I was so frightened when I saw the spiders that

I ducked my head under the water, so that I would not have to look at them. At that time I thought that I was going to die. It was unquestionably the most frightening time of my life. Luckily, my counselor Byron was in the water and had seen me being dragged away by the current, and getting thrashed by the rocks underwater. I was screaming as loudly as I could for his help. As he got out of the river to get the throw rope, I finally found a rock to hold onto and pulled myself ashore. I sprawled out on the pine needle-covered hill. After about a minute, I got up and tried to walk back to the campsite. The hill was very steep, so I had a tough time getting up it. When I finally reached the top I had to hold onto the trees around me to avoid falling. After I had taken a few more steps, I tripped on a root and rolled down the sharp pine needle-covered hill. When I hit the water, Byron threw me the throw rope and tried to pull me in against the current. Then disaster struck; I dropped the rope, and the current took me away again. As Byron pulled the rope back in, I used the very last bit of my strength to get myself in his range, so that he could throw the rope back out to me. He threw it to me, and this time when I caught it, I knotted it to my ankle to avoid dropping it again. I was very relieved that I had not dropped it again. After a long while, he pulled me in to the shore. I was safe.

When I spit all of the filthy water out of my throat, I felt much better. Being a little cut up and wet did not bother me; I was just happy to be alive. I also realized that, had my counselors not forced me to wear a life jacket, I never would have survived. I am very glad that I wore one. I knew that after what I had been through, I had gotten very lucky. Since that day, I have looked at life from a different perspective. I now realize that life is a gift given to each of us to be cherished.

Sam Fishman

Grade 7

Edgewood Middle School

Highland Park

Sara Sher, teacher

PATHÉTIQUE

I sit down at the piano and stare at them, those keys, awaiting someone to release them from their silence. They seem to be staring back, mocking me, as the perfect autumn day outside reflects in their ivory and black surfaces. I take a look for myself and turn my head towards the window. The wind rustles through the trees, changing color in all their glory set against a light blue sky. I try to remember, why don't I do this more often? But then it all floods back—homework, tests, finals, SATs, college applications, graduate school, career—the never ending road of pressure I'm trying my best to forget about right now. I guess that's what it all comes down to, whether you're ready or not, and I'm thinking it's better to be ready.

With a sigh I turn my attention back to the tiny black markings on the stand in front of me. Do I have time for this? Oh, well, I tell myself, I'll make time. I guess I can always just cut back on sleep. I've done it before.

A deep breath—the C# minor chord. Grave, heavy...but just right...it's Beethoven, not Mozart. A two-count rest, and then softer chords that follow...another rest, and another chord, a little harder this time. The tune picks up again, and just when it gets brighter, it falls back into the rhythm that it just can't escape, the rhythm that makes it what it is—Pathétique.

Is it sad or angry, nervous or excited, or none of the above? The sound can be felt, not spoken; heard, not described. But it is powerful, and it will make sure that it is heard.

The music continues, releasing a sonorous sound that fills the room. I don't think about the counting anymore, or the accuracy of the timing. My fingers already know the

crescendos and diminuendos; the fortes and pianos are natural. I play, and worry only about the playing. But yet, the *other* world creeps into the once perfect scene, as I still hear myself annoyingly recall that upcoming debate tournament...

Minor chord.

...math test...

Chord, arpeggios up and down, C# minor variation.

...research assignment, English essay, newspaper article, service project...

All of it, the scales, the fortes, the worrying, the impatience, the frustration...it all comes down to that final line. C# minor...and a rest. Another chord, and a rest...and then, totally out of place yet so perfectly positioned, is a descending scale, sending my hands to all ends of the keyboard before the last measure: five more sharp, short chords, and silence. I don't take a breath yet, I just stare at the music, and listen to the silence.

But then my mom rounds the corner, saying how she has never heard me play so well. I respond only with a "thanks." I hadn't noticed.

I look back to the music. It seems difficult when you look at it, but it's really not. If you know life, you know Pathétique.

Ellie Graham

Grade 10

Lake Forest High School

Lake Forest

Karen Kopriva, teacher

THE GLASS EGG

I am frozen. My head—stuck halfway through the open doorway. My eyes—unblinking, still, in wonderment and awe of what lies before them. From this angle, I can only see about half of the room—the stately grand piano standing proudly in a corner, complemented by the beautiful paintings on the wall. I swear I can see the prints of my breath on the air, and it seems that, if I make one motion too rough, the entire space in front of me, holding itself up so nicely at present, will shatter like glass. Still, it draws me in.

I step through the doorway slowly, awaiting the crash of splintering air—nothing. My feet land on the plush white carpet, and the room reveals itself to me in full. Before me stands the most delicately beautiful room I have ever beheld. It is a wonderland of exquisite beauty and timeless fragility. Endowed with art, china, sculptures, clocks, and fascinating artifacts of all variety, it is the precise embodiment of all that I have never been allowed near. It is all so magnificent I don't know what to admire first, but I find myself drawn to one particularly fascinating piece. It is a glass egg perched atop the mantelpiece on the far wall. It looks so serene and perfect in its spot; I can't restrain myself from approaching it to get a better look. I reach up ever so slowly to feel its texture, but the instant the tips of my fingers encroach upon its outer shell, it shatters into a thousand tiny pieces under my touch. Once again, I am frozen.

As you can surely imagine, I bolted. In such a situation, what else could a seven-year-old child do? The inconvenience of the circumstances was further augmented by my uneasy

relationship with the egg's owner. It belonged (that tragic egg), along with its surrounding art collection and the room (and house) of its residing, to the father of my aunt, or, "Papa Reece," as we call him. On the wrong side of the family to be my grandfather, he has always been somewhat detached from my immediate family. He possesses an eccentric personality, along with sophisticated and extravagant tastes in fine art, as evidenced by the famed room with the white carpet. As mentioned before, he is rather distant in many ways, and relations with him are neither fun nor comfortable.

Understandably, I was seized with terror at the breaking of the egg, and after recovering from my unusual fit of paralysis, I made myself scarce. I retired coolly to the basement to join my cousins in their much more childish endeavor: video games. Naturally, I played it cool throughout the evening, not mentioning a word about the incident to anyone. However, when I heard the terrible shriek ("Reece, your egg!") emitted from above, my heart sank.

I need not go into too much detail of the ensuing events, except to say that Papa Reece conducted a thorough investigation of the area for the next half hour. I, being a fool of only seven years, did not own up to my crime, and stood ashamed in the corner. He blamed me, of course, claiming that I, being the tallest boy, was the only one who could reach the egg. This was probably true, but the other adults made him stop before he enforced a reenactment of the scenario (which I assure you, he was more than ready to do), with each cousin attempting to reach the top of the mantelpiece. Thank God this did not take place, not only because I would have undoubtedly been proven guilty, but also because, with my clumsiness, I would have likely broken another sacred work of art.

Over the years, Papa Reece has reminded me time and time again of that day, and not at all in a joking, conciliatory fashion. It would give him more satisfaction than I can say to hear me admit my offense, and perhaps replace the egg. Well, I have neither the funds to do the latter, nor the guts to do the former, so I deny it every time, shrugging my shoulders. If I broke the egg at this age, I believe that, as a mature young adult, I would admit my mistake and accept the consequences. But, because I lacked the good sense and responsibility at that age to admit that I was wrong, I forever condemned myself. Though today I do have the responsibility that I lacked in my youth, the ability and willingness to admit that I am mistaken, I still can't bear to denounce the child I once was. By my will, my youthful stubbornness and immaturity will stand unchallenged, and as long as I never concede to Papa Reece, the glass egg will be forever held safely in the hands of a child.

Jimmy Green

Grade 12

Highland Park High School

Highland Park

Maria Cropper, teacher

ONE WITH THE MUSIC

My fingers were cold, and my heart was beating fast. My hand gripped my violin hard as I walked to the stage, which loomed in front of me as large as a swimming pool is to an ant. I walked to the center of the stage, pointed my scroll at the pianist, and gave the signal.

Vivaldi's Concerto in A Minor filled the room. Long, mellow notes like a continuous sunset on a summer evening, and then short, lively notes like a pebble being dropped into crystal clear water. I was one with the music, floating, soaring, wherever the notes would take me. I could feel everyone's eyes on me, and I wasn't nervous anymore. It was as if the notes had a life of their own. They were whispering to me, just like a tranquil breeze makes a sound as if the trees know my name. My solo was coming up, and I was ready.

I looked at the pianist and signaled for the ritardando. The piano's notes got slower, seeming farther away, until they stopped altogether. My solo was upon me. The notes filled the air, echoing back to me. The syncopated notes gave me a light-hearted feeling. There was nothing that could bring me down. My solo ended, and the piano came back in. My performance was coming to a close, and I knew my months of hard work had paid off. I had played a flawless performance. I ended the piece with a harmonic on the A string. I slowly lifted my bow off the string and let the note ring out, crystal clear. It was the only noise in the room. Just as the note died out, there was a thunderous applause. I looked down at the audience and saw my parents looking up at me, and then at my violin teacher, also filled with happiness. I took a bow and then motioned to the pianist. My spirits were above the clouds. It truly had been an amazing performance.

Emily Hines

Grade 6

Edgewood Middle School

Highland Park

Sheila Fitzsimmons, teacher

CONFINED

Snowed-out holiday traffic, accompanied by the usual barrage of unbearably merry radio melodies, remains our only obstacle as my family and I embark upon our annual holiday trek. Visited scarcely throughout the rest of the year, my relatives' Wisconsin residence has always seemed to me like a separate world...an abode in which men and women may be boys and girls if they so desire. I call to mind the presents lying strewn about the living room floor beneath a tree of evergreen branchlets adorned by the picture frame ornaments and pipe-cleaner reindeer of my now elder cousins and hold dear my familiar, boyish sense of excitement awaiting the exchange of gifts, although thoughts of Santa Claus no longer occupy my mind.

Each Christmas, Easter, wedding, or reunion accompanies a particular element of surprise among my family upon our scarce, quarterly visits to Port Washington, Wisconsin; humorously, I look forward to escaping the usual overabundance of information meant to bring us up to date. I look forward to the company of my cousins and to the playful overseeing of my second cousins, among whom my inner-child eagerly awaits making his Christmas Day appearance. I look forward to reacquaintance with the *one* cousin my age who is always reliably present to call me back to that age upon my probable dissent.

Yet the expectations of this year's gathering seem unclear...whited-out like every forty yards ahead amidst the thick, dusty snow that plagues our progress as we creep along this winding rural highway. We reach the popping crackle of a cragged gravel road, the final pathway of our descent; it has been nearly four months since I first heard the news.

We enter through the garage, between banks of alcoholic

and carbonated beverages reserved for the occasion, kept cold solely by the breath of winter upon the concrete floor. Enduring a bombardment of hugs and handshakes, I narrowly escape what would be an endless update from my uncle and slip out of the kitchen. Upon entering the living room, I gaze with particularly heartfelt dismay upon my cousin...the only one my age and, thus, my usual companion at family gatherings of the sort.

My heart sinks at the image of her, fragile as ever, aloof upon the leather couch, as though by protective measures, inevitably expecting maternity garments or tiny shoes and socks in place of the beauty-supply novelties she would otherwise anticipate receiving. Learning the lessons of motherhood even as the child resides in her womb, she accepts these gifts graciously as her own, for she no longer exists as a single entity. She eats, drinks, sleeps...maintains herself for two. She remains selflessly dedicated to the well-being of her unborn child on this day, an anniversary of maternal sacrifice, and is, thus, granted a sound state of mind. Yet, the torment of such sacrifice has left her face aged in its expression, permanently creased with each pain of pregnancy. Tainted by the consequences of indulgence and bearing the marks of experience, she has never looked so beautiful.

I pause for a moment to reminisce. Hide-and-seek...I remember her favorite hiding spot and my own. After counting carefully to fifty, I would find her always among the vacant boxes of the storage room, myself partial to the camouflage of the toy closet; neither of us ever won. I now guide my little cousins' counting and monitor them as they do the same. I long for a one-on-one round of *Taboo*, while aunts, uncles, and elder cousins enjoy slightly alcohol-driven holiday bliss shortly after consuming the honey-baked ham, but such hopes are thoroughly let down. My youthful counterpart,

now an expecting mother, remains upon the leather couch, confined, acting as though life is pleasant despite the burden of responsibility that has cast her into premature adulthood before my eyes. And, setting an unprecedented low, I remain aloof as does she; we exchange no words other than my own pitiful holiday greeting, "Merry Christmas,"...original. Our usual exchange of playful banter and humorous sarcasm seems now a mere impossibility, prone to imitation but never to genuinely occur again.

The joy, the burden that this child represents seems to me an abrupt foreboding of the decline of my own juvenility. In what seems now to be limited years, I, too, will become confined to the responsibilities, the burdens of adulthood. I, too, will become confined, not to the presents still strewn about beneath the tree, nor to dropping hints to my little cousins' as they count and hide, but rather to a characteristic decay of liveliness.

Yet, at the same time, the profound beauty of my cousin's captivity opens my eyes. She is embracing a role that was formerly her object of rebellion. She is outgrowing the shallow nature of commonplace adolescent concern far ahead of her generation. She is abandoning the selfishness that has often seemed her defining characteristic. A maternity gown replaces her camo-cargo pants, and the immaculate soul that dwells within her has washed away her impurities. Although by unconventional and perhaps undesirable means, she is in pursuit of something better.

As night falls, shielding the blanket of snow with a quilt of darkness, it comes time for my family and me to depart. I exit through the garage between familiar yet greatly reduced banks of alcoholic and carbonated beverages, this time *embracing* my own confinement...my own pursuit of something better.

Pat Howard

Grade 11

Adlai E. Stevenson High School

Lincolnshire

Stephen B. Heller, teacher

HERE OR THERE?

It's the first day of school for an American fifth grader now living in a foreign country. She stands completely alone on the playground; no one looks remotely familiar even though these students speak a familiar language. America was her home with all her elementary friends. Now she stands with clenched fists, furious at her parents who uprooted her and dumped her down in this strange land...

Slamming her door behind her, she yells, "I'm home!"

Her mother responds with, "How was your day, sweetie?"

"Fantastic," she replies sarcastically while plopping her grammar quiz with a big red F down on the table. She proceeds to stomp upstairs, alone in her thoughts and facing the challenge of rebuilding her life and reputation in a foreign country.

Isolated in her new room, surrounded with pictures of her former American elementary friends on her night table, her face lights up. She picks up the phone, dials the number she knows by heart, and listens. The phone rings once, twice: *Oh please pick up*. Her prayers are answered; she hears a click, followed by an uncertain, "Hello?" She knew if there was anyone in the world who could help, it would be her best friend back in America...

When a child relocates, he/she never knows if the other students will accept him/her. The older the child is, the harder it is to accept the role of "the new kid." In Laura's case, she just needed to take the first step, which is always the hardest. She has to rebuild her courage and look for friends. Calling on her best friend helps validate her ability. She has to hear the harsh reality from her friend. This reality includes the

following: First, she realizes that she has to give her new home a chance and to have hope, but more importantly, not to give up. Secondly, her friend Stacey reminds Laura that she will always be there for Laura, and, thanks to the benefits of mass communication, Laura can call or email Stacey whenever she needs her support. Finally, Laura has to be strong and realize that things will eventually get better. Stacey tells her that it won't be easy, that Laura will probably experience various stages including denial, depression, and isolation before feeling at home in her new environment. But Laura needs to open up to her new experiences, to realize that Laura has a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. In her new country, Laura represents the United States; she is an American, student ambassador.

Two months later, Laura enters the same door followed now by four young girls the same age. They laughingly converse. "Oh my god, I don't know what to wear to the party! What are you guys wearing?"

"Why should you have such a problem, Laura; you have the best closet ever; but luckily I brought my black skirt that looks amazing on you!"

As Laura passes by her night table, she accidentally knocks over Stacey's picture. Laura reaches for it and smiles a "Thank you..."

Sometimes it takes a while to adjust and find acceptance; in other cases, it does not. Laura just needed the right guidance; she needed someone to push her in the right direction. When Laura finally accepted the move and all the changes in her life, she managed to move forward and enjoy the experience of emigration. She no longer hated her parents for the move; instead, she loved them for allowing her the

opportunity to see more of the world and for establishing international friendships.

Every move has its difficulties, especially if one is a student; but he/she has to find that special someone who cares enough to push him/her in the right direction. Over time the individual will come to accept and enjoy the strange, new land. It may take a while, but he/she will grow to appreciate the diversity that makes life worthwhile.

Erika Jung

Grade 9

Lycée Français de Chicago

Chicago

Cyn Koukos, teacher

DISAPPOINTMENT

If it seems too good to be true, it usually is. Yeah, that's a pessimistic view, but what can you expect from someone who's had disappointment after disappointment presented to her? Heck, *I am* a disappointment! It started with my birth. My mom was only eighteen when she had me, which isn't unusual in these parts. It was unusual that she wasn't married and was having me with someone from outside of Pine Grove, someone who high-tailed it when it became apparent that a baby, me, was on the way. So the first time I heard "Waiting for a Girl Like You," by Foreigner, it didn't exactly put me in a good mood. I was over at the post office, getting sprayed with slush from the same car that was blasting the song. I didn't really mind *that* since my mittens were already soaked and my flare jeans were caked with snow. What I did mind was that the song was a sham. I loved the lyrics, but they hadn't been true for my mother and they probably wouldn't be true for me. I was irritated, upset that this person thought he could just zoom into town playing that song, getting girls to fall in love with him, girls who would have their hearts broken.

I glanced over at his car and observed fumes billowing out of the tailpipe, rust on the bumper, and a license plate from out of state. Wisconsin. That explained the song. All anyone listened to around here was classical music.

I squinted my eyes, trying to get a good look at this person through the steamed-up car window. Sure enough, he was "quite a looker" as my mom would say. He was probably thinking he was a hotshot from Madison, probably looking for a one-night stand, probably just as focused on himself as my dad had been.

The guy was singing along to, "*When you love someone, it feels so right, so warm and true, I need to know if you feel it too....*"

I've been waiting for a girl like you to come into my life."

I couldn't help liking the sappy words, liking the way this guy was oblivious, rocking out to a song, one hand on the steering wheel, the other playing an air guitar, as if five pairs of eyes weren't focused on him. I was not the only one to have noticed the newcomer.

His car careened around the corner and parked in one of the empty spots next to the post office. They all would have been taken if not for the nasty snowstorm we'd had the night before. Downtown Pine Grove, such as it is, usually attracts plenty of customers this time of year. Of course, *plenty* in our town just means a few families out to buy wreaths for the holidays. My town doesn't attract large numbers. That's why I was so taken aback that someone from *out of state* was here in Pine Grove. Despite my slight resentment, I couldn't help feeling curious about this newcomer.

I walked a few steps past his now parked car and heard footsteps crunching snow behind me. I turned and noticed that the guy still had his keys in hand. They were glinting with sweat.

I heard him say that he wanted directions to get out of Pine Grove; I was dying to know what his expression was. Was he exasperated that he was stuck here, glad for the break from the road, or just bored? Instead of satisfying my curiosity, I continued staring at his keys. I couldn't make eye contact; all of a sudden my nerves were kicking in, so much for anger.

"Oh, um, it's pretty straightforward actually," I said, my voice barely audible. "You just keep taking this road until you hit, um, shoot, I can't think of the name, uhh, *Umberly Drive* which should take you all the way to Trent Road if you take a left on it."

I couldn't figure out how I'd forgotten the name of that road even for a second; after all, there are only about two

big roads near Pine Grove. The guy interrupted this train of thought, saying, "Well, thanks a lot. You really helped me out um...I'm sorry, what's your name?"

I couldn't believe I was getting flustered! He was just asking for my name. I was surprised he had even heard me with the conversations going on right around us. Other people were crowding around, soaking up this new image in town more thirstily than the free hot cider Mr. Harvester was handing out. I had just been fuming, thinking to myself that the guy in the car was some pompous foreigner to my little town, and all of a sudden it was like I was head over heels in love with him! His hazel eyes couldn't have worked *that* much magic on me in such little time. I mean, I hadn't even made direct eye contact yet. "Colette, I'm Colette," I said.

At the same time, I heard, "Bob."

Turning, I saw one of those other Christmas shoppers shaking hands with the guy from the blue Probe. It was too late to pretend I hadn't thought he'd been talking to me, and I turned red, redder than the cold could have made me. To hide my scarlet face, I whirled about, pretending to act very interested in Nan Tinkin's baby, who she was cradling in her arms while craning her neck over my shoulder to get a look at the new man in town. Her little boy had one of those wide, innocent smiles that only babies can have. Just wait, I felt like telling him. That smile won't last long. It's frozen into place now, but when you get older it'll melt right off your face, along with that innocent hope shining in your eyes. Life is nothing but a disappointment.

Mary McCormack

Grade 11

Lyons Township High School

La Grange

Kate Sullivan, teacher

CHRISTMAS SNAPSHOTS

Girl, 14, looks at pictures of her memories. They are of her family's lake house in Michigan City, which is really in Indiana. In each picture, she is surrounded by family members. Aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins all dash madly around the candid. They sit still and smile brilliantly in the posed group photos. As the girl flips through each one, her eyes reflect stories. To fully understand the contents of the photos, we would have to have access to her mind. Memories are not in photos. Photos can only capture a single moment. In our minds is where we see things as they were, or as we had perceived them to be. There is a photo the girl has cast aside.

The whole family is gathered in front of the mantel place. Grandma and Grandpa are in the center with all their children around them. The grandchildren are in the front of the picture, smiling as big as they can. Some of the littler kids are hidden behind the shoulders of the oldest. Aunts and uncles lean on each other with big, cheesy smiles on their faces. One uncle has his large hands on the shoulder of a grandson who is smiling sheepishly. Two cousins have their arms linked and their fingers extending in "bunny ears" behind each of their heads. The girl isn't smiling for she is just staring at the camera. Each person's eyes are focused on the camera, some squinting at the light. Their faces all have the same shape, and each has a similar nose—small and ever so slightly turned up at the end. Their arms were all intertwined forming a net of loving hands.

"Everybody, get in here RIGHT NOW! We are taking this picture for the Christmas card!!!" Grandma screamed. *My uncles and aunts, aware of her tone, tried to usher us into the living room. We older kids went willingly; we knew Grandma hadn't had a smoke*

in a while, and she was getting nasty. But the littler ones didn't get the hint. They scrambled from the room shrieking. They thought that it was a game of chase. The uncles finally herded them to the living room. The adolescents waited for a while, completely oblivious to the chaos around us. We were immune to the anarchy. As the little ones were dragged in, the camera equipment was being set up.

*"What the *bleep* is this?" Grandpa asked. He kept toying with the camera until he gave up. "I don't know what the *bleep* I'm doing!" The uncles took over from there. We sat sullenly on the uncomfortable wooden rocking chairs, making faces at each other and betting when dinner would be ready. The smart money was on 9:30; we were notoriously late eaters. The little kids whined and fussed: they were deeply upset that their game had been interrupted. It was an arduous task to get everyone together, but we finally managed it. We all took our place with smiles on our faces. Jack was fidgeting, squirming around and trying to make us laugh. Suddenly, with everyone around me, the bright light made me feel like I was in a dream. Everything was going in slow motion and I felt like someone was pressing on my eyeballs. I had my arm around Kelly's waist, and I moved it to wipe my forehead. I turned around to look at my family. Grandma was sulking because Jeanne had thrown away her cigarettes. Grandpa was talking, loudly, about how he hadn't had cameras when he was growing up—they were too poor. Aunt Kathy and Mike were faced away from each other, their hands on their hips. Jackyboy, Jack-John, Marty, and Tommy were teasing Maggie about bugs; Maggie got a beetle stuck in her ear during the last family camping trip. The rest of the family was talking animatedly, using wild exaggerations and rapid-fire speech. But in the moment before the flash, the mood shifted. Everyone fell silent, and the tensions melted away. A big, fake smile appeared on everyone's lips, the kind you use for yearbook photos or to greet someone you despise. I turned to look at the camera as the flash brightened the room, illuminating us all in its light. When the light disappeared, we broke apart and*

resumed our previous activities. I felt like someone had taken the muted volume and turned it on full blast. The flash had offered a brief reprieve from our normal volume, and now the loud noises felt unnatural. Fights continued, and cousins ran from the room shouting. Melodious Christmas music filled my ears, providing a sharp contrast to the harsh tones of my family.

To fully understand the contents of photos, we would have to have access to her mind. You will not find true memories in photos. Pictures are inanimate objects. They hoodwink us into thinking things seem to be as they appear. But photos can only capture a single fleeting moment. In our minds is where we see things as they actually were, or as we had perceived them to be. No photo can see the emotions or context of that moment in time.

Molly Kathrine McGreal

Grade 8

Northbrook Junior High School

Northbrook

Rebecca Hodgkin, teacher

TIMELESS THREADS

A few hours from now, when the sky is reddened by the sun that falls and rises every day, a forlorn wailing sound from the *tofu* man's bicycle horn will permeate the air. But now, while the shadows of the three *matsu* pines in the garden are still short, only occasionally is the quiet broken, and then just barely, by the murmuring sound of a woman passing on her way to the corner grocery. Though the smell of burnt asphalt from the street outside still lingers in my mind, as I step across the wooden threshold and into the dim house, I shiver slightly.

My family has come to visit my Japanese relatives, as we do every summer, and everyone rushes down the narrow hall to meet family in the kitchen. I linger behind. The hustle and bustle of overstuffed bags fades, and, just for a minute, it is silent and I am alone in front of my grandfather's room. Sliding open the door reverently, I step inside. Though it has been empty for many months now, I feel as if I am sharing the tranquil space.

Within, delicate paper *shoji* screens filter the bright light from outside and emit a soft, soothing glow. They are hung with incongruously new paper, too clean and crisp. All around me, a familiar musty smell of old hardwood blends with dust, covering everything as if it were the physical manifestation of time. The *fusuma* sliding doors dividing the room once contained a graceful swan painted with deep black brushstrokes, yet it is now enshrouded in mists of memory.

Old papers and thin books lie on the low wooden table in a dark corner of the room. I walk over quietly and gently blow off a layer of dust. The family name appears, majestically written by a bold brush on the cover of a particularly frail book. I open the cover and gently turn some pages,

releasing the flow of time. These yellowed and fragile pages lie loosely, joined for hundreds of years by faint threads holding the binding, and us. Each page is filled with the names of my ancestors, and each name is written with a different hand. Fluid brushstrokes come together in the *kanji* to create images of a strong great-grandfather, his beautiful mother, her wise brother, his dedicated father. The thick yet precise strokes forming *Hideshi*, the earliest ancestor of the family, conveys to me the respect this man once possessed. Awe still remains in this silent room of remembrance.

To the right hangs an old scroll. The worn paper holds a brush painting of a small thatched hut nestled between three *matsu* trees at the base of a tall, ancient mountain. A waterfall, pouring threads of water, flows down into a pond next to the house. Looking carefully, I see this room—my grandfather's room—in the hut. I bend closer and there he is, *ojichan*, writing a letter in his room beside the waterfall. It is a waterfall of time, with its many threads, cascading into the pond. The pond and the house beside it collect the memories for a moment, before they flow on again: *ojichan*, his father, and all those before him, keepers of the memories, writing them down in thin books so they are not forgotten.

Turning toward the little shrine in an alcove in the wall, I trace its intricate wooden carvings with my fingertips—branching, crossing, and then joining all as one. With a thin wooden mallet, I ring the small old bell lying on a miniature satin pillow. A clear sound hangs in the timeless air, refreshing my mind as if from a long sleep. I lie down on the woven grass ripples of the *tatami*, and as I stare at the wooden slats of the ceiling, I feel myself blending into the room and all of its memories.

Kevin Mori

Grade 10

Hinsdale Central High School

Hinsdale

Christine Hicks, teacher

THE SMELL OF TUSCANY

As you walked in from the garden, the kitchen would smell like the warm sun beating down on your back while you picked olives. Sweet and loving, it would sweep under your nose. Flour sprawled along the floor like a trail for ants would lead you up the counter to her delicate, yet large hands. Her eyes would dart up, she would smile, and you knew...today was going to be a day of work.

She would roll out the dough, but never too much. Knowing how her kids love thick crusts, she would always get it just right. Then, she would set the dough aside on a wooden board. "Hotta!" she would scream when the cat jumped up on the counter in search of sausage and salmon that had been sliced and placed at the corner of the sink. He was always in search of treats, but my mother always knew where the broom was.

Then Maurizio would knock on the door, she would let him in and they would smile. Though they didn't understand each other's languages, they did have one language in common, the language of food. My mother would then reach from his basket of cheeses he brought from his farm, pick them up one by one and smell them. You could tell whether she wanted the cheese or not by her distinct expressions. Her eyebrows would rise when the smell of the cheese crept into her lungs, staining them with scum, but smile when the stench flowed like the wind. She was always using her nose and still says today, "If it doesn't smell right, don't eat it."

Then Maurizio would smile, mumble a good-bye in Italian, and my mother would give him some money. I can't remember how much, but she always kept these coins in the pocket of her apron. She would then return to the counter, humming with a soft smile as she melted and stirred the

ingredients. The kitchen would fuse with sharp and soft smells, some red while others black, the combination heavenly intoxicating. She always had the windows open because the cooking would heat the kitchen so much, but the heat outside usually made the opening no help.

“Go help Maria now,” she would tell my cousins, brother, and me as she wiped her brow, and then we knew exactly what to do. We would run out into the sun, under the apple trees and the one plum tree, toward the garden. Maria would be there, carefully and selectively picking tomatoes, onions, chives, and basil. She was old and half blind so she would hold the produce up to the hot sun to get a better look. When satisfied, she would place them into her large basket, but when not, she would throw them to the ground mumbling like Maritzio in Italian. We would run up to her and get in line, she would assign us our jobs, simply grabbing our dirty hands and pointing them toward a corner of the garden. And then we would get to work.

Hunched over, the aroma of thick soil would fill your nostrils going deep down, thickening your blood. Removing vegetables one by one, we would brush the dirt off the coarse skin with our tiny hands. Sometimes, Joe would have brought salt out in his pocket and we would sprinkle it onto some tomatoes when Maria wasn't looking. Huge bites sent acids running to our hearts and heads. A stinging want, like love, that was too good to resist. She would always catch us though when we returned back to her with our baskets because the dried, red juice would still be dripping down our sneaky smiles and chin. She would scold us, but we never knew what she was saying.

Then everyone would bring his or her baskets inside, and my mother would still be stirring. The sun would slowly set across the goats at the bottom of the hill, and they would

close their eyes and rest. We too were tired, but resting was not an option. My mom would set us all up at the kitchen table with knives and veggies, and we would chop, slice, dice, and mush until our eyes could not take anymore. We would then bring our work to her in little handfuls while she tossed them in the sauce. The kitchen would smell of sweet tomatoes and roasting onions. It was the smell of warm rooms when coming in from the cold snow.

Finally, she would pour the sauce onto the dough, wooden spoon in hand, and then add the cheeses. The sweet odor ran up the stairs all the way into our rooms and attic. Squeezing a fresh lemon from the courtyard onto it finally, and finishing with the various toppings, she would place it in the huge stone oven. Within five minutes, the entire cottage would reek of sweet basil and spicy peppers, a stench that lingered around the corners for days after.

It was one of the only rituals my mother acquired for the family, because making pizza was not easy. When finally our stomachs were filled and our bellies overflowing with laughter, my mother would give us a smile so big, no matter how many times you cut your finger dicing, it did not matter anymore. It would be as if the warm kitchen had filled your heart with sweet heat. The approval of a mother is a strong power, like garlic, and that smile was enough to let us know that our extra help made our mother, aunt, and even all the sunflowers in Tuscany look toward the sun the next day.

Rae Nickerson

Grade 10

Highland Park High School

Highland Park

Elizabeth Perlman, teacher

ONE RING TO BIND THEM

"So, where do you want to sit for lunch?" I call to Katie, swinging my lunch sack.

"Well...I thought I'd sit with Isabelle today." She fidgets and twists her long black hair into a knot.

"Oh. Again. Okay." I look down at my grimy sneakers. "How about after school?"

"Isabelle and I are going to paint our nails," she says, "but I will totally call you later, okay?"

She walks away before I really have time to respond, so I sit at an empty table and quickly take a big bite of sandwich, then wince as the half-chewed glob sticks in my throat. The fluorescent lights are so bright my eyes start to water. Maybe if I stare hard enough at the big yellow stain on the cafeteria wall the tears won't escape.

When I get home I go straight to my bedside table where my music box teeters precariously on its three legs. I lift the pink lid and the ballerina inside springs up and twirls to *Für Elise*. It reminds me of when I used to twirl in my own pink tutu. Katie and I used to take ballet.

I reach into the box and close my hand around a hard, round object. My fingers haven't forgotten the shape and the feel. I uncurl my fingers and the ring rests in my palm, the metal cold against my skin. The gold shimmers and shines in the lamplight. For a moment I am twelve again and Katie and I are at a yard sale on 57th, and I buy the ring for 30 cents. We laugh and braid our hair and wear flowers behind our ears like the elves of Middle-earth. Then I'm back again in my room, and I close my fingers around the ring and squeeze my eyes shut. When I go downstairs for dinner I have a red, aching indent on my palm.

Katie doesn't call me, but when I see her the next morning

in math she skips over and apologizes. "Isabelle and I decided to go to the mall and we lost track of the time." When she walks away I stare at the fantastic shapes formed by the wood grain on my desk and think about how Frodo's ring turned him invisible.

In history I reach into my pocket to make sure the ring's still there, and when my fingertips lightly trace the engraved elvish characters I think about the time Katie and I went to see the Lord of the Rings concert in the city. We laughed and laughed with excitement. When Max with the too-large glasses whispers, "Could I borrow a pencil?" I have to blink and shake my head to resurface from an ocean of memories.

I try to talk to Katie after school, but she and Isabelle are already walking away and I can't bring myself to call after them.

The next day in homeroom Katie only waves at me and continues talking to Isabelle, so I sit at a desk in the opposite corner of the room. She's wearing shimmery pink lip gloss and suddenly the wood grain on my desk isn't so interesting anymore. She never used to wear makeup.

I spend most of that day doodling hobbit holes, and when I take the ring out of my pocket again in history to trace its shape, Max and his glasses ask me "Hey, do you like Lord of the Rings?" I kind of nod but don't take my eyes away from the silver streaks of graphite in the margins of my paper. But then he asks me if I'd rather live in Rohan or Gondor, and I look up and grin in spite of myself. "Rohan," I say. "Gondor," he says, and we spend the rest of class in whispered discussion.

After school I see Katie, and she's alone. So I take a deep breath and say, "You know the old ring from the yard sale on 57th we used to take turns wearing? I brought it because I thought maybe you might want to see it again."

And then her eyes light up like they used to and she says, “No way! Good times.” So I reach into my pocket to grasp the shining circle, but Isabelle honks from her car and Katie says “I’m sorry, we’re late...” and she bites her lip. “Can I see it tomorrow?”

“Yeah, okay, sure,” I say, and she sprints off towards Isabelle’s car and I turn away so that I don’t see them drive away together.

The next morning I get dressed and head downstairs, ring safely in my pocket. But I sprint back up when I realize I’ve forgotten a book on Tolkien I promised to lend to Max. Book in hand, I stop suddenly in my doorway. I reach my hand into my pocket and bring the ring up to the light. I notice for the first time how worn and chipped the gold paint has become, and how it has lost its luster. I walk slowly over to my bedside table and lift the pink lid of my music box. The ballerina twists on her tilted axis, and I hear the plunked notes of a muted melody. I slowly lay the ring in its original place and stand and watch the still-remaining patches of lackluster gold. I turn and walk downstairs.

When Katie sees me, she comes bounding up and asks to see the ring. I kind of stutter that I can’t find it and her smile turns down a little at the corners and she says “Well, let me know if you do.” She sighs and walks back to Isabelle.

In history, Max and I decide that I am Merry and he is Pippin, and old Mr. Carmichael, our teacher, is Treebeard and the history classroom is Isengard. We laugh and imagine all the maps on the walls flooded by the waters of the Isen. After class we eat lunch together under the bright fluorescent lights of the cafeteria and joke about the big yellow stain on the wall.

Miranda Pettengill
Grade 11
Highland Park High School
Highland Park
Jennifer Lucchese, teacher

LEGACY

The teapot buzzes. Steam leaves the nozzle at a loud, steady pace. The coffee meets the cup. The mug is chipped, but I see it as more than adequate. We sit around the table. The table has feet. Clawed feet.

"Tiny made the best breakfast in all of Illinois" escapes my mother's mouth. The woman she describes is small in stature. Big in spirit. The picture of her flashes in my mind. *Politically incorrect*, I think. Before the thought escapes my mind, she begins again.

"Tri Sigma. Oh, sorority life. The girls and I went on tons of skip outs. Arkansas. Florida. You name it, we've been there and invaded their frat houses."

"Why?" I ask. The thought of rushing, of associating with frat boys, all makes me wonder how my mother and I get along. She mulls it over. The room is half-lit. Her glazed-over blonde hair stands out. Her face. Her face is too youthful. Her face represents how she sunk into sorority life.

"You know that you're a legacy," is her only response.

She always says this to me. It never makes me feel better. Legacy. So reminiscent of nepotism and every other -ism. The wallpaper in the kitchen is beginning to peel in the right hand corner. My mom looks up and rolls her eyes at her imperfect kitchen.

"Clawed feet on a table. What family has clawed feet on their kitchen table?" she mutters between sips of her black coffee.

I sit and wonder how my mom ended up here. Party girl to middle-class conservative. City girl to suburban wife. She's never cared for antiques. Her likes have always included chocolate. Running. Coffee. Always coffee. I hear that black teapot screech at least twice a day. The noise seems to be at

a higher pitch each time it is set off. The smell is strong and overpowers my competing senses. Lack of cream, sugar. It's so strong I see the Starbucks label, even when that white and green bag is nowhere to be seen.

Coffee. Bounces into the white mug. The face of a dog graces the side of the cup. Its ears are unrealistically large. Dogs and coffee. The two constants in my mother's life. I say the mug is half empty. She tells me that it is half full.

"You'll love college. Much better than high school," she says.

Her best years are figured around a life that is far different than mine. She had spring break in Florida with the girls. A boyfriend for each year of school. I tell myself I'd rather be at home during break. The thought of skin cancer is just not that enticing. Independence. That's what I'd like. Who gains independence by being dependent on a boy?

The times have changed. Her dependence has changed. She has changed. She needs the coffee flowing through her veins. She picks up the mug yet again. Only a quarter of the liquid is left. The remaining sips flow from the beat-up bottom of the mug to her mouth.

"I never drank coffee when I was your age. Never. I thought it was disgusting," says the coffee addict I call Mom.

"Well, something changed," is the only remark I can think of. It's so obvious. Of course something changed. I just can't grasp the concept of change.

My mom slides over to the stove. Warm. The shiny, black burners are still warm. She rattles the teapot. All the water is gone.

"Do you want something hot? I'm going to put up some more water," says my mom.

I shake my head yes. Up and down, up and down.

The teapot screams. Steam floods the blue and white kitchen and I can finally see my mom through the steam.

Molly Rottman

Grade 12

Buffalo Grove High School

Buffalo Grove

Joyce Norman, teacher

AA & MG

I memorized that summer breeze in Michigan that carried away the paper that shed broken words, "You're mine forever," while the cardinal hides it in the ground. Whenever the wind would knock at my arm summer '04 came to the door. The daisies in the field threw the football back and forth and dragged it back to me, but never could find its place again. It hit the squared-off grass and disappeared with the wind to tell the forest we were coming. It made paths between the weeds and homes of creatures for our feet so we wouldn't trip. Mark sat with his John Deere hat tilted to cover the freckle against the sugar maple tree and took the knife to make a promise. "AA," Ashley Adams, and "MG," Mark Gooby, always and forever. The carving was deep into the root of the tree blocking the rain from spying. I thought it could be the definition of perfect. He and I. Perfect.

At night we gathered around the fire. Wrapped like a s'more in the checkered wool blanket he always had in the back of his Chevy pick-up truck roasting away the chocolate in our lives and leaving the graham cracker. The smell of his blanket spoke in the holes of the checkers to show how safe his arms guarded those monster trucks in the competitions that chow down the others. The truck would skid through the dirt from the back junkyard and the stench of cabbage hypnotized me to sleep on the sheets that painted silk erasing away my yawn. Looking at the wood and the hemp on our necks, the knot at the end told me the sparks couldn't ignite and take away "us." We walked up the hill to the cabin that would make me long for those sheets. Before I walked in, the squeak of the door kissed me goodnight.

Summer camp sophomore year made me feel like a star NBA basketball player running through the line-up of teams.

I wish I could go back to that year it was the definition of perfect. He and I. Perfect. Our lives were planned. The country house with crown molding of our anniversary in the middle of Tennessee with one black horse with a white spot in the middle of his eyes. A front porch painted with a little boy swinging on the hammock that told the story of Ma and Pa, another promise he told me. My seven little ones running the fields with their arms open wide trying to grab the cotton off dandelions. Nothing could take away those promises.

When the week came to an end, I headed back home carrying my sleeping bag with the rip of my hemp hanging down from the memory of the campfire I knew I wouldn't get back. He dropped me off and this time the squeak talked to me and I kissed him.

He picked me up over the grass that measures the weight of wood the cracks whispered, "Ashley, I am so thankful for you, I love you."

I believed him and I said I love you too and jumped into his football player arms. I thought it was the definition of perfect. He and I. Perfect.

Junior year made the stars fall to the cornrows from ancient fields that farmer Joe forgot to plow. They hid under the roots and never knew how things got so bad. I remember being online when the snow covered the pavement and the roof made room for Santa's sleigh.

"Ash, I don't like how your hair speaks curls and when you wear fur all the time."

I pounded the keyboard and couldn't get my fingers to stop freaking out. His words became silver secrets he used to carve our initials. Nothing made sense anymore. The hill straightened and love rode to the top so it couldn't see down. I searched for it when I walked to his house in my high heels through the snow with the light in his room pushing the words

that needed to be said. The talk consisted of him mumbling about my problems and me staring into his emerald green eyes that took me to the yellow brick road. I couldn't find it in the box with the picture of his polo stripes gripping around my sweater he left at my mailbox that vanished between the flames and left the glass from the frame screaming for the past. How could someone just throw away all that we had?

Next summer came the cabins at summer camp grew in front of the tree with "AA" and "MG." It told the story of lies. I hated going back to Michigan. I stepped off the Greyhound I walked down the hill that we used to climb but now watching it tumble us to the bottom. The river daydreamed away the vases that held the memory of our first date. The daisies said good-bye to the wind and carried "us" to the hidden door in the back cabin never to be found. I knew now that he and I were not perfect. Perfect does not exist in a world of broken words that can never be replaced. The daisies gave the hope to the sparks and they ignited away our dreams. The summer breeze never came to me again and if it did I would be sure to push it far away.

Brittany Schuyler

Grade 12

Buffalo Grove High School

Buffalo Grove

Joyce Norman, teacher

UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

Children, from the moment they are born, develop an unconditional love for their parents. I found that out the night I should have stopped loving my mom.

In high school, she was an honor student, even participated in band. When she met my dad, her life went down hill. It was like Eve and the serpent all over again. He gave her something stronger than love; he gave her something she would later yearn, cry, and beg for. He also gave her me and my sister, Brianna.

I was two when Brianna was born and I was two when she died. She didn't die literally, but she died in the sense that she lives only in my memories.

The accident took place at night; I remember this because it was dark outside when we later rushed to the hospital. I can't recall the weather though, because at the time I had lost any feeling in my body.

She was only going to the store. I had eaten all my food like she'd asked and was up for a reward. "Eat all your food and mommy will get you some gummy bears," she said. I will never forget that lie. Gummy bears are sold in stores, not on street corners.

She had been gone for a long time. I was too young to actually count the minutes, but I knew it was a while. At first, everything was fine; Brianna was sleeping and I was watching Cartoon Network. Eventually, Brianna started crying. She cried off and on for a few minutes; her cries then turned into screams.

I knew the only way she would stop crying was if I picked her up. I could always calm Brianna by letting her suck on my fingers. I crawled across the bed, which was so cold it felt damp. I reached to grab hold of her, but something

burned my hand. I reached for Brianna, again and again, but each time the heat grew.

I jumped off the bed and raced to the window. I tore at the blinds and pressed my face against the glass to see if my mom was anywhere in sight. Then suddenly I became scared and exhausted. Tears fell from my eyes. They became sobs that deepened as I gasped for air.

“Mommy, Mommy,” I repeated as I choked on my tears. I was alone, and all I wanted was my mom. I got back on the bed and pulled on Brianna’s arm. She had been crying the whole time, but I just noticed that she was hurt. The flesh on her leg looked like it was rotting away, and her face was purple. I kept pulling, but my arms were only those of a toddler.

Sometime later, mom came home. We left the apartment. My mom was holding on to Brianna with care, tight enough so she could run. My grandma had her hand over my mouth, because my screams were so loud.

“I tried. Mommy, I tried.” I repeated this over and over on the drive to the emergency room. I felt like I had done something wrong; I was the reason my sister was hurt.

Brianna had third degree burns and had to be rushed to St. Louis University Hospital. I couldn’t go with her because I had to answer a lot of questions for the “nice lady.”

“Where was your mommy?”

“How long were you all by yourself?”

“How many times have you watched your baby sister?”

I answered all their questions, but nobody ever answered mine. Why was the “nice lady” taking me away from my mom?

Ironically, she would be the woman who made sure I was safe, had a home, and eventually place me with a lifelong family; I didn’t understand then. I just kept crying for my

sister and my mom, the source of the situation, the woman for whom I still have unconditional love.

Chelsey Thompson

Grade 11

Marion High School

Marion

Simone Neal, teacher

THE ROCKETS' RED GLARE

At a quarter to eight on a warm summer evening, it is quite clear that the Fourth of July is one of my family's favorite holidays. As we drive along in our trusty Japanese minivan, my father plays Sousa's "Stars and Stripes Forever" for all the world to hear. And I mean *all* the world. It really should come as no surprise that my dad's been wearing hearing aids for nearly four years now; ever since 9/11, he's been so patriotic that certain tracks on his George M. Cohan CD have developed skipping, among them "Yankee Doodle Dandy" and "You're a Grand Old Flag."

Meanwhile, my sister Julia shouts over the cymbals in the back seat, boasting to my friend Amanda and me about her new hula hoop, which apparently works just like a glow stick. She instructs: once it's dark out, you snap the fluid inside, and the hoop will glow for about an hour before the fluorescent color is extinguished. "You have to be careful, because although you can use the hoop as many times as you want, once you snap it, it won't *ever* glow again." Her eyes have grown large, and she is leaning towards us in utmost solemnity. We play along, sarcasm dripping from every word like the gravy on the juicy Italian beef sandwiches we would soon devour. She fails to catch on until Amanda exclaims, "Wow, Julia! I am so incredibly jealous of your glow-in-the-dark hula hoop that I'd give up my left pinky and an eyebrow just to have one. Golly Ned!"

Oblivious to the teasing, Dad pulls into the familiar driveway of our close church friends, the Howards. We have arrived fashionably late, it seems, because the entire street of their Vernon Hills subdivision is packed bumper to bumper with all sorts of other Asian cars, their owners gathered to celebrate American independence. My dad lets the patriotic

melodies roll as we unload the van of what little we offer: a tray of vegetables planted, picked, and washed by Mexicans; a few folding chairs made in China, and a quilt assembled in Jordan. We set up our seats facing the artificial but placid lake over which the fireworks will be shot. I remember how beautiful the reflection of the explosions was the previous year, especially to my father's selection of a powerful a cappella rendition of "The Star-Spangled Banner." But now we're listening to "God Bless America," sung by the French-Canadian Celine Dion. Before even bothering to say hello to the Howards, Julia dashes for the food, her favorite part of any celebration. I, the older, wiser, more-polite sister, introduce my friend Amanda to the hosts.

I have known the Howards probably since I was born. I was two months old when their daughter Rachel first babysat me and my brother. Mr. and Mrs. Howard are involved in all sorts of activities with my parents. The women take Bible study and help lead social ministries; the men are on the church finance committee and play poker; all four often attend the theatre together, and *all* brag about their well-behaved, moral, wonderfully Christian children. "So tell me about your brother's Eagle Scout Court of Honor," Mr. Howard prompts. "What an accomplishment."

My response is cut off by the first firecracker. Dad, never missing a beat, selects "America the Beautiful"—his favorite version by Ray Charles. Each head is turned up at a precise angle by which each particle can best be seen, and each mouth is shaped as an "ooh" or "ahh" or "ohh," in that exact sequence. After about ten minutes, two tykes wearing glow necklaces toddle by, reminding me of Julia's hula hoop. I glance at my friend, and she's thinking what I'm thinking. So being the good, honest, ethical young people we are, our actions come naturally. We go fetch the hula hoop, snap it so it

glows, and, of course, keep it to ourselves. Which we do successfully until the finale of the fireworks begins and my sister suddenly remembers her beloved ring of plastic splendor.

She runs toward the driveway, where we are so merrily swiveling our hips, and She. Flips. Out. "I PAID FOR THAT WITH MY OWN MONEY, YOU CREEP!" Pop. Pop. P-p-pp-p-pop-opopop. Op. BOOM! "I HATE YOU!" Shee-oWOP! "The Caissons Go Rolling Along" plays at full volume: "Then it's Hi! Hi! Hee! In the field artillery..." whirr...POP! Whirr-whirr-shee-OP! POP! POP! "I NEVER WANT TO SEE YOU AGAIN! I HOPE YOU GET SOLD TO THE GYPSIES!" Pshe-OW! And without warning, I find myself on the ground with my sister sitting on my stomach screaming at me. She pulls my hair, JHOO! kicks my sides, WRAP! WRAP! slaps me, FEYOO! POP! and throws the hula hoop towards the crowd, inviting more unwanted attention. "I HATE YOU I HATE YOU I HATE YOU!" BOOM! BOOM B-B-BOOM BOOM BOOM! CRASH! Fizz...shee...pop. Ha ha. hahaha.

She's furious, I'm in pain. And all I can do is laugh.

In the distance, I can sense that the fireworks have ended, Don McLean is quietly crooning the first verse of "American Pie." People, *church* people, *everybody's* looking. And the Howards! The Howards I've known *forever* and who respect(ed) me and my sister are staring at us, shock and disbelief written all over their faces. Julia's face is flaming red, her teeth clenched, as are her fists, and she glares at me, gives me a final kick, and screams "IT'S NOT FUNNY!" And I know it isn't. But my coping mechanism goes off and I roll over and laugh until my sides hurt. Except they already hurt from the hitting. *Ow*.

Everyone's staring at me. It's my favorite holiday, and I feel like I need to curl up and die. Jesus, what was I thinking?

Emma Trevor

Grade 11

Adlai E. Stevenson High School

Lincolnshire

Stephen B. Heller, teacher

CALL FOR STUDENT WRITING FROM
ALL LEVELS FOR IATE'S BEST ILLINOIS
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DEADLINE: Postmarked no later than January 31, 2008.

FORMAT: Typed copy is preferred. 8^{1/2} 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
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When submitting manuscripts, include a signed statement to read:

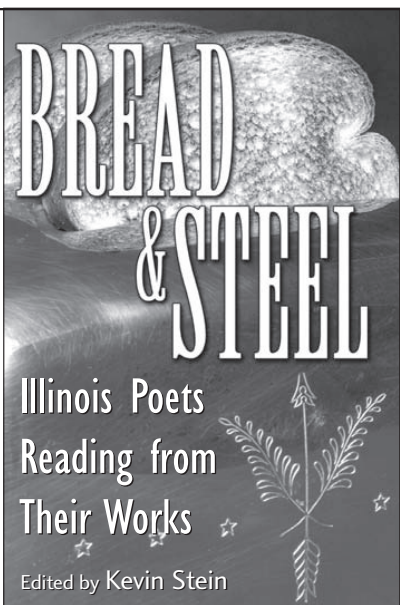
To the best of my knowledge, the enclosed manuscripts were written by the students whose names they bear. I have submitted work by the following students (give complete list of students represented):

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

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