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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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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction to the Best Illinois Student Poetry and Prose of 2005 Ron Fortune and Janice Neuleib	7
Teachers with Students Placing in Any Contest Category	9
IATE Poetry Runners-Up	11
IATE Poetry Honorable Mentions	12
IATE Prose Runners-Up	14
IATE Prose Honorable Mentions	16
Poems of Exceptional Merit Kevin Stein	19
From Beaches to Candy Wrappers: With Poetry, It's All in the Details Robin L. Murray	21
A Day at the Beach Marissa Annis	25
Candy Wrappers and Deodorant Victoria Ertl	26
Careless Anna Friel	27
Lela Lohr Amanda Godek	28
Been Through... Ashley Johnson	30
Wandering Wolf Sarah LeVaughn	32

A Response to: <i>Road Past View</i> by Georgia O’Keeffe Emma Li	33
Self-Destruction Eva Martone	34
U-505 Jennifer Morton	36
The Tear and the Sunset Benjamin Raymond Ostick	37
Beaten Kelsi E. Robb	38
News Travels Caitlyn C. Strader	40
Wall of Darkness Diana Whitney	42
On a Hymnsong of Holden Caulfield Josh Winchester	43
Next Year Rosalie Zaccone	45
Best of Illinois Prose Kimberly M. Radek	47
The Long Dinner Marissa Annis	49
Dancing in the Rain Amanda Axley	52
Public or Private? Alexander Ryan Bennett	55
Gray Michelle Calderon	59
Like Ma Always Tried Zoe Curzi	63

Ruby Pouches of Pomegranate Esther Divovich	67
Today Will Fade into Tomorrow Whitney Dunkel	71
The Waiting Room Alecsandru Florea	74
A True Transformation Will Frej	78
The King of Nature Brett A. Glasner	81
The Flag Holder's Tale Sarah Hartman	83
Toy Soldiers Tess Margaret Hellgren	90
A Twist in Time Emily Jastromb	94
Live FAT, Die Young Michelle Maskeri	98
Morning Routine Nicole Mitchell	99
<i>Kavik, the Wolf Dog</i> Enya O'Riordan	102
White Noise Bryce Parsons-Twesten	105
Third Time's a Charm Daniel Alan Pisani	109
Good Days and Bad Nicole Reindl	113
Aromatic Embrace Kelly Schur	116
Safe Ellyn Sidell	119

The Wise Man Solomon Ben Suslick	122
Blood Ties Crystal Tan	125
Life of the Kitchen Megan Wark	128
Survivor: Quincy Mall Jesse Glen Whitaker	131
Am I Right? Chrissy Zicarelli	134
Canyon Swinging Elena Zifkin	136
Call for Student Writing from All Levels for IATE's Best Illinois Poetry and Prose Contest	139
Required Enclosure for Student Poetry and Prose Entries	140

INTRODUCTION TO THE BEST ILLINOIS STUDENT POETRY AND PROSE OF 2005

RON FORTUNE AND JANICE NEULEIB

The writers of this year's collection have struck many vital chords as they play out their many skilled pieces. The poetry displays a wide range of age groups and writing styles. Short poems, such as "Wandering Wolf," create an image quickly and powerfully. Others, like "A Response to: *Road Past View* by Georgia O'Keeffe," create a powerful set of feelings as the poet reacts to an important work of art. Still others, like "Beaten," tackle emotional territory that stretches both the writer and the reader. The prose provides exciting reading experiences that rival published adult writing. "Gray" will make any person who has been the victim of crime think a bit differently about the possible criminal. "The Waiting Room" serves as a cautionary tale to those who make big decisions about other people's lives. Finally work like "Canyon Swing-ing" recreates a powerful personal experience for the reader.

All these student pieces remind Illinois readers that we live in a place where promising young artists of many ages are developing and growing in our midst. We thank them for their work and for letting us be a part of their writing worlds.

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

Jennifer Arias	Rosemary Laughlin
Jane Austin	Julie Lee
Amy B. Birtman	John Lodle
Barbara Blanton	Paul Lusson
Glen Brown	Elizabeth Maxwell
Mari Brown	Faisal Mohyuddin
Diane Clark	Martha Mosley
Matthew R. Clark	Rebecca Mueller
Richard Clark	Simone Neal
Joanne Curtis	Cheri Nordstrom
Carol Davies	Joyce Norman
Justin M. Dennis	Nicole Pierce
Elaine Dion	Lee Roll
Sheila Fitzsimmons	Paula Rossi
Margaret Forst	Judith Ruhana
Carol J. Gallagher	Michelle Scales
Ann Garrett	Janel Schlickman
Kathleen P. Haurberg	Sara Sher
Stephen Heller	Kathy Slater
Pam Hodges	Lauren Stenzel
Elizabeth Holding	Suzanne Stohschein
Debby Hudson	Kate Sullivan
Laura Klepzig	Terry Tavine
Carolyn Konz	Tracy Townsend
Karen Kopriva	Patricia Valko
Cyn Koukos	Nell Wiseman
Osen Kuehnle	Tera Woody
Myles Laffey	

IATE POETRY RUNNERS-UP

Elizabeth Awick, "Pushing the Limits," Grade 10, Hinsdale Central High School, Hinsdale, Suzanne Stohscheim—teacher.

Jay G. Baker, "Elegant Explosion," Grade 8, Oakland High School/Lake Crest Elementary School, Oakland, Lee Roll—teacher.

Elizabeth Bell, "The Mountain's Way," Grade 8, Anna Junior High School, Anna, Pam Hodges—teacher.

Paula Bielnicka, "Forget the Heart," Grade 9, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Amy B. Birtman—teacher.

Alice Finidori, "Orangutan," Grade 7, Lycée Français de Chicago, Chicago, Cyn Koukos—teacher.

Breanne Gardner, "The Melody of Life," Grade 6, Glenwood Middle School, Chatham, Kathy Slater—teacher.

Philip Hossu, "In the Magical Forest," Grade 3, Pleasant Hill Elementary School, Winfield, Carol J. Gallagher—teacher.

Kristina Ilic, "Stallion," Grade 7, Park Junior High School, La Grange Park, Julie Lee—teacher.

Angela Martinez, "STATIC," Grade 12, Buffalo Grove High School, Buffalo Grove, Richard Clark—teacher.

Andrew Martz, "Their Voices," Grade 4, Wiesbrook Elementary School, Wheaton, Terry Tavine—teacher.

Michelle Maskeri, "Backwards and Upside Down," Grade 5, Pleasant Hill Elementary School, Winfield, Carol J. Gallagher—teacher.

IATE POETRY HONORABLE MENTIONS

Jessica Corbett, “Want,” Grade 7, Kaneland Middle School, Maple Park, Nicole Pierce—teacher.

Katie deLoys, “Ode to Shoes,” Grade 7, Sunset Ridge Elementary School, Northfield, Debby Hudson—teacher.

Ariel Euhus, “Chocolate Music,” Grade 4, Pleasant Hill Elementary School, Winfield, Carol J. Gallagher—teacher.

Jessica Gay, “Loving Memories,” Grade 8, home-schooled.

Kyle Leonetti, “Eruption,” Grade 11, Oakland High School, Oakland, Lee Roll—teacher.

Aaron Lidawer, “The Stillness of Space,” Grade 6, Edgewood Middle School, Highland Park, Sheila Fitzsimmons—teacher.

Kevin McCarty, “Collins Sailing,” Grade 12, Lyons Township High School, LaGrange, Glen Brown—teacher.

Lindsay Millichap, “Public Displays of Affection,” Grade 12, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Margaret Forst—teacher.

Kaitlin Marie Mohon, “And I Am the Dancer,” Grade 12, Charleston High School, Charleston, Nell Wiseman—teacher.

Kasey Pham, “Blown in the Wind,” Grade 4, Wiesbrook Elementary School, Wheaton, Terry Tavine—teacher.

Eugene Raskin, “The Secret Kingdom,” Grade 11, Adlai E. Stevenson High School, Lincolnshire, Elizabeth Maxwell—teacher.

Danny Russell, “Morning Squall,” Grade 12, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Diane Clark—teacher.

Francesca Russo, “Bad Things, Good People,” Grade 11, Maine South High School, Park Ridge, Patricia Valko—teacher.

Erin Saal, “The Orchestra Is a Stormy Sea,” Grade 7, Blessed Sacrament School, Morton, Martha Mosley—teacher.

Elin Sandberg, “Internal Entertainment,” Grade 12, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Karen Kopriva—teacher.

Ashley Nicole Schrock, "Fingers," Grade 8, Oakland High School/Lake Crest Elementary School, Oakland, Lee Roll-teacher.

Becca Schulz, "Coffee-holics Anonymous," Grade 12, Boylan Catholic High School, Rockford, Carol Davies-teacher.

Marnie Shure, "Walking into Mass on a Cold, Unparticular Sunday (or Catholicism Rarely Caters to Children)," Grade 11, Lyons Township High School, LaGrange, Kate Sullivan-teacher.

Kevin Stoffel, "A Summer Afternoon," Grade 3, Pleasant Hill Elementary School, Winfield, Carol J. Gallagher-teacher.

Jeremy Webb, "A Walk Remembered," Grade 10, Marion High School, Marion, Simone Neal-teacher.

You Yang, "A Sunny Summer Day," Grade 11, Hinsdale Central High School, Hinsdale, Myles Laffey-teacher.

Rosalie Zaccone, "Dichotomy," Grade 9, Bureau Valley High School, Manlius, Kathleen P. Haurberg-teacher.

IATE PROSE RUNNERS-UP

Laura Briskman, "Service Department," Grade 11, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Rebecca Mueller–teacher.

Julia Grace Carusillo, "Roxenboxen," Grade 11, Hinsdale Central High School, Hinsdale, Myles Laffey–teacher.

Cara Fahey, "Dream House," Grade 11, Hinsdale Central High School, Hinsdale, Myles Laffey–teacher.

Maria Gao, "Once Upon a Park," Grade 8, University Laboratory High School, Urbana, Rosemary Laughlin–teacher.

Michelle Giardina, "Loss," Grade 12, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Amy B. Birtman–teacher.

Emma Grisanzio, "Pages from Eleanor's Journal," Grade 5, Pleasant Hill Elementary School, Winfield, Carol J. Gallagher–teacher.

Joey Gross, "The Orange River and Black Desert," Grade 7, Park Junior High School, LaGrange, Osen Kuehnle–teacher.

Sarah Hartman, "The Flag Holder's Prologue," Grade 10, Highland Park High School, Highland Park, Mari Brown–teacher.

Jessica Hunter, "The Red Couch," Grade 8, Macomb Junior High School, Macomb, Joanne Curtis–teacher.

Emily Jastromb, "Awakening," Grade 11, Highland Park High School, Highland Park, Faisal Mohyuddin–teacher.

Lainey Kahn, "Yankee Candle Company," Grade 12, Buffalo Grove High School, Buffalo Grove, Joyce Norman–teacher.

Jasper Maniates-Selvin, "How Lucky Can You Get?," Grade 8, University Laboratory High School, Urbana, Rosemary Laughlin–teacher.

Connor McCormack, "Down to the Last Man," Grade 7, Park Junior High School, LaGrange, Osen Kuehnle–teacher.

Kristin Mikrut, "I Don't," Grade 12, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Margaret Forst–teacher.

Tatiana Moore, "The Foster Child's Prologue," Grade 10, Highland Park High School, Highland Park, Mari Brown-teacher.

Lillian Prueher, "The Bus Driver's Prologue," Grade 10, Highland Park High School, Highland Park, Mari Brown-teacher.

Michael Schoof, "Human Frailty," Grade 6, Edgewood Middle School, Highland Park, Sheila Fitzsimmons-teacher.

Caroline Tell, Untitled, Grade 12, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Carolyn Konz-teacher.

Vivek Upadhyay, "Show and Noel," Grade 12, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Margaret Forst-teacher.

Allison K. Weigel, "High Flying," Grade 12, Belleville Township High School West, Belleville, John Lodle-teacher.

Alana Weinstein, "A Blessing in Disguise," Grade 7, Edgewood Middle School, Highland Park, Sara Sher-teacher.

LATE PROSE HONORABLE MENTIONS

Sindha Agha, "My Shout on Vegetarianism," Grade 8, University Laboratory High School, Urbana, Rosemary Laughlin–teacher.

Jolie Cherie Bayer, "Being Pleased Is Contentment," Grade 9, home-schooled, Bellevue, Cheri Nordstrom–teacher.

Chloe Besson, "A Friend like 'B.' (abridged)," Grade 8, Lycée Français de Chicago, Chicago, Cyn Koukos–teacher.

Lisa Boyce, "Rock-a-Bye Baby," Grade 8, University Laboratory High School, Urbana, Rosemary Laughlin–teacher.

Deanna Ciaccia, Untitled, Grade 7, Park Junior High School, LaGrange, Osen Kuehnle–teacher.

Max Dougherty, "Parchment, Quill, and Ink," Grade 6, Edgewood Middle School, Highland Park, Sheila Fitzsimmons–teacher.

Michelle Giardina, "Admissions Office," Grade 12, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Amy B. Birtman–teacher.

Julia Goldsmith-Pinkham, "Before and After," Grade 8, Lycée Français de Chicago, Chicago, Cyn Koukos–teacher.

Jon Goreham, "Red Plaid Flannel," Grade 12, Buffalo Grove High School, Buffalo Grove, Joyce Norman–teacher.

Andy Guo, "China," Grade 6, Edgewood Middle School, Highland Park, Sheila Fitzsimmons–teacher.

Martin Hempfling, "Physical Education: How Much Is Enough?," Grade 9, Evanston Township High School, Evanston, Elizabeth Holding–teacher.

Danny Hickey, "Excerpt from *The Gingerbread Man IV: The Mass Break Out*," Grade 7, Park Junior High School, LaGrange, Osen Kuehnle–teacher.

Michael Levine, "On the Other Side of America," Grade 11, Adlai E. Stevenson High School, Lincolnshire, Stephen Heller–teacher.

Melissa Maiste, "Just Special," Grade 4, Pleasant Hill Elementary School, Winfield, Carol J. Gallagher–teacher.

Bryce Edward Mitchell, "Public Nudity," Grade 12, Belleville Township High School West, Belleville, John Lodle–teacher.

Evelyn Pulkowski, "Sunli Sky," Grade 9, Rockford Lutheran High School, Rockford, Jane Austin–teacher.

Alex James Reese, "As Thin as Air," Grade 11, Warren Township High School, Gurnee, Michelle Scales–teacher.

Karthik Shastri, "Indian Ennui," Grade 11, Adlai E. Stevenson High School, Lincolnshire, Stephen Heller–teacher.

Grant Simon, "A Tale of a Tail: How the Peacock Got Its Feathers," Grade 6, Lycée Français de Chicago, Chicago, Cyn Koukos–teacher.

Brian Slattery, "To Teach, Or Not to Teach?," Grade 11, Highland Park High School, Highland Park, Paul Lusson–teacher.

Caroline Tell, "Growing Up at a Distance," Grade 12, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Carolyn Konz–teacher.

Richard Thiemann, Untitled, Grade 12, Woodruff High School, Peoria, Matthew R. Clark–teacher.

Tara Tsaparis, "I Wonder Why I Had a Stroke," Grade 5, Pleasant Hill Elementary School, Winfield, Carol J. Gallagher–teacher.

Drew Weitman, "A Blessing in Disguise," Grade 7, Edgewood Middle School, Highland Park, Sara Sher–teacher.

Josh Winchester, "Humiliation," Grade 10, Mount Vernon Township High School, Mount Vernon, Ann Garrett–teacher.

Hannah Woodford, "White Flowers," Grade 7, Park Junior High School, LaGrange, Osenia Kuehnle–teacher.

Tammy Xu, "Fishing Boys," Grade 10, Naperville North High School, Naperville, Paula Rossi–teacher.

POEMS OF EXCEPTIONAL MERIT

KEVIN STEIN

ILLINOIS POET LAUREATE

We come to love poems by means of various seductions and allures. This seduction comes to us, of course, via the medium of language, but its modes are many and subtle.

Of these, my favorite, at least for today, is a poem's ability to surprise. That element of surprise may arrive by a sudden recognition, some epiphany that brings poet and reader to revelation that is both lasting and memorable. Sometimes surprise inheres in the very subject the poet chooses, a topic so unique or an angle of seeing so fresh it brings readers the rush of the new. Other times surprise resides in the smallest of choices, in the very words a poet speaks, in their sounds and meanings—in their ability to astonish and give pleasure. To astonish and give pleasure—is this not what good poems do?

While all of the winning poems exhibit this quality to varying degrees, the poems listed below best embody this

measure of surprise and its rewards. These poems have earned my designation as Poems of Exceptional Merit.

“Candy Wrappers and Deodorant,” Victoria Ertl,
Buffalo Grove High School, grade 12

“Careless,” Anna Friel, Lyons Township High
School, grade 12

“Lela Lohr,” Amanda Godek, Adlai E. Stevenson
High School, grade 11

“On a Hymnsong of Holden Caulfield,” Josh
Winchester, Mount Vernon Township High School,
grade 10

“Next Year,” Rosalie Zaccone, Bureau Valley High
School, grade 9

“Beaten,” Kelsi E. Robb, Dunlap Middle School,
grade 7

“A Response to: *Road Past View* by Georgia
O’Keeffe,” Emma Li, Wiesbrook Elementary
School, grade 4

Congratulations to all of the winners. May both your
lives and your culture be blessed by your rich appreciation
of the art of poetry.

**FROM BEACHES TO CANDY WRAPPERS:
WITH POETRY, IT'S ALL IN THE DETAILS**

ROBIN L. MURRAY

Reading poetry from students ranging from third to twelfth grade is such a pleasure. It's a chance to see great writing—and the results of great teaching—from across the state. When a third grader describes a “sky as clear as a sapphire gem,” and a senior provides a potent image of “candy apple spokes on a circle of peppermint,” I fall back in love with teaching and writing poetry and am reminded that some of our best poets come from Illinois.

My first taste of Illinois poetry came from Carl Sandburg. I read his work in elementary school before moving to Galesburg, Illinois (his birthplace) and visiting his boyhood home. I read about fog and cat feet, and about Chicago and butchering. But then I taught “Splinter” and heard the prairie crickets harkening in the fall. Gwendolyn Brooks, Li-Young Lee, and Lucia Perillo join Sandburg and Archibald MacLeish as poets

who not only come from Illinois but also embody it.

G. E. Murray and Kevin Stein's *Illinois Voices: An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Poetry* foregrounds the great work of such poets and sets their work apart from stereotypes regarding the state. According to Murray, "The state was enormously influential in the development of American poetry in the 20th century, including the literary rebellion that resulted in the modern poetry movement between 1910 and 1925." Murray reminds us that a Chicago Renaissance gave birth to some of our greatest poets and that Chicago provided us with *Poetry* magazine, founded by Harriet Monroe in 1912.

Illinois poets provide a voice for a Midwest seen as resting on conservative rural values. These student writers continue a legacy of progress begun nearly two hundred years ago. Gwendolyn Brooks's "a song in the front yard" merges urban Chicago with small town, downstate Illinois and Carl Sandburg's "Theme in Yellow" highlights prairie grasses. I'll insert the two representative poems below:

a song in the front yard (Gwendolyn Brooks)

I've stayed in the front yard all my life.
I want a peek at the back
Where it's rough and untended and hungry weed grows.
A girl gets sick of a rose.

I want to go in the back yard now
And maybe down the alley,
To where the charity children play.
I want a good time today.

They do some wonderful things.
They have some wonderful fun.
My mother sneers, but I say it's fine

How they don't have to go in at quarter to nine.
My mother, she tells me that Johnnie Mae
Will grow up to be a bad woman.
That George'll be taken to Jail soon or late
(On account of last winter he sold our back gate).

But I say it's fine. Honest, I do.
And I'd like to be a bad woman, too,
And wear the brave stockings of night-black lace
And strut down the streets with paint on my face.

Theme in Yellow (Carl Sandburg)

I spot the hills
With yellow balls in autumn.
I light the prairie cornfields
Orange and tawny gold clusters
And I am called pumpkins.
On the last of October
When dusk is fallen
Children join hands
And circle round me
Singing ghost songs
And love to the harvest moon;
I am a jack-o'-lantern
With terrible teeth
And the children know
I am fooling.

A DAY AT THE BEACH

Come play with me
in my azure blue ocean.
Jump off of the dock
into the sparkly clear water.
Swim with my fish
that nip at your heels.
Glide through the corals
at the bottom of my reef.
Splash through the rolling waves
that tumble summersaults to shore.
Watch the sea foam
that washes up on my golden beach.
Play in my sand
as creamy as the moon at night.
Make sand castles
out of my warm, soft sand.
Glance at my sky
as clear as a sapphire gem.
Find the hidden houses
that play hide and seek with the trees.
Look at my peaks
like tall hills covered with moss.
Hike through my valleys
covered with emerald trees.
Seek out my creatures
that find shelter in my leafy forest.
Come play with me.

Marissa Annis

Grade 3

Pleasant Hill Elementary School

Winfield

Carol J. Gallagher, teacher

CANDY WRAPPERS AND DEODORANT

There are moments that can exist in my Pandora's box
that hang sweet,
pressed tight against my tongue,
like pieces of hard candy,
stolen out of overpriced restaurants.
There are less fragile slices of the day,
where eyelashes are just as comfortable
resting against faded dress shirts,
then on nostalgic pillows slept thin.
And where hands are willowy in tangled hair,
fingertips brushing against a strained scalp.
Scents of spring-tapped fabric softener,
deodorant sharp with spice
and an underlying smell,
male without the locker room,
can hang in nostril caverns
like the tendrils of smoke that can form clouds
between bathroom walls.
And never adds to violin string tension,
fabled to be made out of cat intestines.
Or to be trapped in a box,
meant to never be opened.

This wisp stands bright against
the variant shades of gray.
Like candy apple spokes
on a circle of peppermint.

Victoria Ertl

Grade 12

Buffalo Grove High School

Buffalo Grove

Lauren Stenzel, teacher

CARELESS

(after Billy Collins)

One evening while I sat on a park bench
I fell in love with a tree
and then with the acorns
the squirrels left scattered behind.

This is the safest kind of love:
without competition, without tears,
or distrusting glances, without risks,
or the packing of bags.

Unlike the love for the young man
wiping his brow and sighing
as he mows the lawn across the street.

No shame, no guilty desires—
the love of the tiny sparrow,
the calm midnight shower,
the country road numbing the mind.

No resentment, no jealousy, or revenge—
just the ache, every so often

for that large tree that found her purpose
protecting me with her shadow.

Anna Friel

Grade 12

Lyons Township High School

La Grange

Glen Brown, teacher

LELA LOHR

Lela Lohr gazes through
Green iris contacts
A snakelike lime green
And grape violet
Friendship bracelet dangles at her slender wrist
Outdated '80s sky-blue jelly sandals
A bleach white button-down shirt
And Old Navy boot cut
Jeans torn at the bottoms.

She sleeps beneath a glowing
Plastic-starred
Sky
Under her
Sun-kissed yellow sheets
Sparkling lights twinkle around her
Smooth wooden door, always unlocked
In case of emergency thunderstorms.

She eats only the blushing red
Gummy bears
Starting with their heads
Then their soft, chewy bodies
And the creamy white center of
Oreos
Accidentally dropping the midnight black
Outer cookies on the cool
Tile floor.
Her German Shepherd thanks her.

She shares homework and colds
And never fails

To sing her dolls to sleep
Watching them doze off comfortably
On her denim beanbag chair.
She is not afraid to dance
In the rain
Or kiss her mother goodnight.

Lela Lohr anticipates a
Role in *Titanic 2*, alongside Leonardo DiCaprio.

Amanda Godek

Grade 11

Adlai E. Stevenson High School

Lincolnshire

Elizabeth Maxwell, teacher

BEEN THROUGH...

I've been through many things in life,
For only being thirteen,
Let me go into detail,
And tell you what I mean.

I've been through depression,
Cold tears would fall every night,
But I knew I couldn't give up,
I had to put up a fair fight.

I went through the worst heartbreak,
It tore my life apart,
He ripped it out and stopped the beat,
Broken pieces were my heart.

I watch lies spread,
And fly through the school's hall,
Wishing I had the power,
To block and stop them all.

Things don't get any easier,
As you grow up to face the truth,
You just keep your head high,
And never forget to be you.

I've been through crazy things,
And yet so many to come,
But here I am tough and fierce,
Standing as one.

It's like I am on the highway,
Going at a perfect speed,

Not too fast or not too slow,
Trying to find what I need.

But even at the right pace,
Something can hit you from the side,
What you used to enjoy,
Is no longer a fun ride.

No matter what you do,
Remember one thing,
Everyone is an angel,
You just have to find your wings.

Ashley Johnson
Grade 7
Kennedy Middle School
Rockford
Tera Woody, teacher

WANDERING WOLF

The lone wolf trots through the crisp air
He stops,
cocks his head to stare.
Furry body dusted with snow
Cunning eyes, now all aglow.

Stillness...

Spots his prey
But it sees the wolf and runs—

Away.

Sarah LeVaughn

Grade 7

Lycée Français de Chicago

Chicago

Cyn Koukos, teacher

A RESPONSE TO: *ROAD PAST VIEW* BY GEORGIA O'KEEFFE

The little lonely road,
In the midst of nowhere,
Where does it lead?
The little road leads nowhere,
Going unto nowhere,
Leading on forever,
Or somewhere past view.
Just looking in the sky,
Or the dancing dark of shadows,
Every day through night,
Sandstorms here and there
That cover the little road,
Then the lonely wind comes,
Which blows the sand away,
Then back to the start,
As lonely as ever,
Going unto nowhere,
Leading on forever,
With sand dunes humped over,
And mountains that touch the sky,
All past view.
Not a soul nor plant,
Ever seen by
The little lonely road.

Emma Li

Grade 4

Wiesbrook Elementary School

Wheaton

Terry Tavine, teacher

SELF-DESTRUCTION

I
silently
 ask
 myself what this
world
 will
 become
 because no one
seems
 to
 care
 for anything other than money and her
own fame.
and all her lost hours o' mornings...
 and the vials of perfume
 thru her veins
 ...*fame*—She sobs
 on the table,
 soft skin
 morphed by knives
 *
 *
 *
 *
for her
 lost identity
 has changed
 *
 *
 *
 *

No one cares
Cats laugh

Flies drive
Lizards dance
Grass sings
Last flight
In sight
Sun's bright
She's right
Sleep tight
Goodnight

Eva Martone
Grade 12
Charleston High School
Charleston
Nell Wiseman, teacher

U-505

As I walked onto the large boat
And heard the tour guide's booming voice,
I wondered why so many men
Would live here as a choice.

First stop was the bunk beds, ratty and old
Wool sheets, wooden mattresses, beginning to grow mold
The soldiers slept in shifts, a few dozen at a time
Not knowing when or how they were to die.

Next was the kitchen
Just an oven, a stove, and a sink
The cook had to cook hundreds of meals
Unable to stop and think.

Then there was the navigating room
With millions of tiny buttons and wheels.
We heard the sounds, loud and scary
And learned the way ship life feels.

Down a narrow walkway, open a door
We found another room
Another sleeping quarter for the soldiers
And a place where they awaited their doom.
As I walked off the old, rusty ship,
I stopped and I thought.
It was the soldiers' assignment to live on these boats,
And it wasn't for themselves that they fought.

Jennifer Morton

Grade 6

Edgewood Middle School

Highland Park

Sheila Fitzsimmons, teacher

THE TEAR AND THE SUNSET

You, take the sunset and paint me a picture,
Take my peaceful rest and deliver me a dream.
I will take this tear that has fallen from her,
And write the story you have never seen.
You, show me the light of a dying man's eyes,
Show me the sun through the hill's lone tree.
I will show the beauty that can never die,
And remember that which is lost to memory.

You, give me one hand that has a voice,
Give me another with which to guide me.
I have decided upon the path of my choice,
And walk the way for everyone to see.
You, give me a tongue to savor heaven,
Give me a mouth for me to speak of bliss.
I will bring hope to those who choose to listen,
And praise you who have offered us this.

You, grant me the patience to reach the end,
Grant me a purpose to feed with this hour.
I will tell of these wounds that will not mend,
And cry for the loss of that one white flower.
You, grant me the words to lie upon the paper,
Grant me the recollection of all times past.
I will leave you my story of how I left her,
And perhaps one day there will be peace at last.

Benjamin Raymond Ostick

Grade 10

Neuqua Valley High School

Naperville

Laura Klepzig, teacher

BEATEN

Silence silence,
And silence more,
As he waits to run through the door.
Nobody knows,
But anger turns his face red,
As he hits with many blows,
She watches in horror,
Not knowing what to do,
As he beats P again,
Harder through and through.
But P is strong,
She lets out a scream,
And pushes him back,
As the tears start to stream,
The bat is flung aside,
Lost among junk,
And down to the floor,
P slowly goes, sunk.
The man runs outside,
The cops are all there,
He puts his arms up,
To show that he's bare,
The little girl runs to P,
Holds her, afraid.
She cries and cries and cries,
Terrified at what had just been displayed,
She holds her mom tight,
Until the ambulance comes,
Then they take P away,

But still
On the floor the young girl stays.

Kelsi E. Robb
Grade 7
Dunlap Middle School
Dunlap
Barbara Blanton, teacher

NEWS TRAVELS

1

Ready or not, here I come!

Running all over the farm, Zach looks for his sister.

In the chicken coop, under the combines, behind the
haystacks.

"AHHHHHHHHH!!!!!!!" he hears a scream.

He sprints to see what's wrong.

He looks all over.

By the cattle, in the house, by the sandbox.

He sees something by the fallen tractor tire,

He races to find his Nana.

"Nana, Nana!!" "What's wrong?!"

"It's Danielle. Her arm is under a tractor tire!!!"

She dashes outside to see her granddaughter, dead.

2

Scents of apple pie in the oven, relish in the canner, lemonade
sweet and refreshing.

My gram's hands full, with chores and grandchildren.

"Ring, ring." "I got it!"

Gram grabs the phone. Small talk becomes sobs and tears.

Suddenly, grandpa walks in as gram hangs up.

He comforts her while she tells the story, a game ended in
death.

Their great-niece is the victim.

They will never know her as a woman, as a mother, their
great-niece is gone.

3

Playing on our old blue couch, mom and dad beneath me.

"Ring, ring." Mom answers the phone,

Dad grabs me and starts to tickle.

I look over at my mom and see her crying.
She says between sobs, "Oh, my God, no, no."
Dad stops playing, begins talking to mom, he too starts crying.
I beg to know what is wrong. No answer. I scream to know.
I'm told there has been an accident.
My favorite cousin has died.

4

All I hear is her saying my name over and over,
"Caitlyn, Caitlyn, come play."

Caitlyn C. Strader

Grade 8

Oakland High School/Lake Crest Elementary

Oakland

Lee Roll, teacher

WALL OF DARKNESS

The lights go off,
It is black like the bottom
Of the deepest hole,
Space closes in and the
Air gets thin,
A wall of darkness,
I hear breathing,
Is it mine, or a
Lost soul searching
Through darkness,
I hear a noise
A whisper
In the wind,
Darkness everywhere and
Nothing to see,
Light breaks through
The wall
Of darkness
A wall to be broken
And to come back
At night.

Diana Whitney

Grade 4

Wiesbrook Elementary

Wheaton

Terry Tavine, teacher

ON A HYMN SONG OF HOLDEN CAULFIELD

27 January 2006

So, both of us met at some church of God,
where that blessed Mary let me see him.
I swam upstream through blood of some virgin,
and I met him and shook his hand, some hand—
paw of God's fetus! I was allowed to
meet Jesus; we were able to converse,
about life and death and why,
"You are my sunshine, my only sunshine!
Yes, yes—you make me happy, when skies are."
I took him by The hand; we touched our eyes,
together eyes—eyes together. I spoke,
"Friend, the world should know this kind of love."
On a Hymnsong of Holden Caulfield, I
spread my cheeks, and he kissed them. I'm sorry,
ladies; God is gay and happy.

So, both of us met at some church of God,
where Jesus showed me how to play Rugby.
I was wide receiver when the moon came and pulled
you and me to one, where our faces
came closely; the force almost smashed us in-
to two! However, God saved our souls; he
blinded ignorance and sang with angels,
"We are traveling in footsteps of those
who've gone before. We'll all be reunite-
ed on a sunlit shore." Well, you, Holden
Caulfield, save, the catcher in the rye.
"Friend, the world should show this kind of love."
On a Hymnsong of Jesus Christ, I

led my life, and he kissed me. I'm sorry.
Ladies, God is gay and happy.

Josh Winchester

Grade 10

Mount Vernon Township High School

Mount Vernon

Ann Garrett, teacher

NEXT YEAR

Wasting away taking notes to my doom
While my science teacher orbits around the room
Twirling pencils, dropping pens
Igneous rocks, telescope lens
Mathematics, number, grade
Typing letters, delete or save
Mercutio and Romeo
Juliet and Benvolio
Capulet and Montague
Shakespeare fails
So do you
Español, burrito, fries
Rolling R's
Sleeping eyes
P.E., movement, flicker ball
Pushing, running, touch the wall
Geo, mountains, forests, land
Head on desk
You get to stand
Art with painting
Pastels, chalk
Eyes on color, no time to talk
Clothing, sewing, stitching, pin
Every stitch, I die within
Passing, failing, detention, gone
Lessons boring, day too long
Vice and principal still in rule
That's what it's like at my high school
Friends and laughing, having fun
Learning nothing
Till the day is done

Like it, love it, need it, fine
College comes, just in time

Rosalie Zaccone

Grade 9

Bureau Valley High School

Manlius

Kathleen P. Haurberg, teacher

BEST OF ILLINOIS PROSE

KIMBERLY M. RADEK

In recent years the area of prose writing has become more interesting—and more the subject of media moments. We've seen people vociferously condemning works of fiction, like the Harry Potter books, which some feel contain "truths" too tempting for some religious believers, and Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*, which manipulates "true" historical documents and artworks to make its conspiracy-theory drama more thrilling. Likewise, we've seen readers publicly castigating James Frey for manipulating the "truth" in his memoir, effectively fracturing his credibility into *A Million Little Pieces*. What these sometimes violent and vicariously painful reader reactions illustrate, however, is that the written word is still important, and that even in these increasingly modern, complex, visually hyped times, people still look to writers to help them formulate their beliefs or live through difficult times. Writing, like living, is not only a craft but

a process, and by practicing it, we and our students can clarify and share our deepest beliefs and experiences with each other, whether we write fiction, nonfiction, fact-based fiction, or creative nonfiction. In their writing, our students share with us what they learn from their reading, as Enya O’Riordan does in her “*Kavik, the Wolf Dog*,” and from their experiences, whether positive, negative, or somewhere in between, as we see in Elena Zifkin’s “Canyon Swinging,” Jesse Glen Whitaker’s “Survivor: Quincy Mall,” and Kelly Schur’s “Aromatic Embrace.” Most of all, in teaching writing, we teach our students that they, too, have a “Safe” place in which to develop and reflect upon their own truths, as Ellyn Sidell’s piece both acknowledges and reminds us.

As always, we at Illinois Valley Community College thank you for sharing with us the truths of your students’ experiences, and we hope you appreciate the truths they have shared in all the works that appear in these pages, whether the works are fiction, non-fiction, or something in between.

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

Lori Cinotte
Tara Coburn
Kaushalya Jagasia
Yelena Kajevic
Kirk Lockwood
Randy Rambo
Delores Robinson

THE LONG DINNER

Families celebrate holidays in many different ways. Mine is no exception. On the Friday after Christmas, my aunt and uncle took our entire family out for a six-hour dinner. We drove for two hours in the Chicago rush-hour traffic to get there. When we finally arrived at the restaurant, we were escorted to a table by the wall. Then Olivia, the waitress, told us that we were going to have a twenty-seven course dinner. During that time, I drank five glasses of cider and then had to go to the bathroom three times. The bathroom was really interesting (at least that's what I thought). It had a wall that didn't go all the way from one side of the room (sort of like this | ---|) separating the toilet and the toilet paper away from the sink, small cotton towels for drying your hands, a hamper to put the towels in once you were done with them, and the door. It was an adventure.

There were about eight meat courses, but I will only tell you about my two favorite dishes. One of them was bison rolled up and filled with fruit and laid on a hot river rock, which was set on top of a juniper branch. It was yummy and cool! The second really good dish that left my lips smacking was a piece of lamb with potato on top. But, the potato was cut very, very thin, thinner than shoelaces! Underneath the lamb were some pistachios. It was the best food I have ever had in my life.

Three of the weirdest dishes you would have to experience to believe. They are hard to describe too. The first weird dish was cheese. The cheese looked like a white chip and was coated with some sort of sticky sauce, placed on a "wheel." For the second weird dish, the waitress brought pillows to put in front of us. Each person had their own pillow. By that time, I was really tired (this was about 11:32 p.m.). I just wanted to

put my head on the pillow and fall asleep. But, the waitress set a plate of duck and other things I can't remember on the pillow. We soon found out the pillow was to bring out the smell of the mace in the duck. That was not one of my favorite things to eat or smell. The third weird dish consisted of a bunch of unknown things on a metal stick mounted precariously on top of a small bowl filled with liquid. You pulled the stick out of the bowl and the things on it would fall into the liquid and you had to drink it up quickly. None of the weird dishes were enjoyable to me. They were just too different.

The desserts all had an evil twist to them. For instance, I'll describe four different desserts. The first one was a dried powder caramel that turned into sticky caramel when you put it into your mouth. It would have been really good, except the cook put sea salt in it. Yuk! The second one was a chocolate strand twisted up with different sauces all around it. Yum! But, the real twist was that the chocolate was baking chocolate. Not so yummy! If you have ever had baking chocolate, then I'm sure you will agree with me that baking chocolate is very bitter. The third one could be included with the desserts or put straight into the weird category. It was a marshmallow filled with ice cream. Yum, yum, yum! But, the ice cream was celery ice cream (no kidding!), and I hate celery. The last one was a peanut butter ball. I guess that would have been good, but the chef filled the balls with liquor and coated them with sea salt. It just wasn't what I would consider a great dessert. The desserts were one big letdown. They looked great, but just didn't deliver.

Overall, it was a wonderful evening and most of the twenty-seven courses at the restaurant were very good, but some of them, to put it mildly, I just couldn't recommend!

Marissa Annis
Grade 3

Pleasant Hill Elementary School
Winfield
Carol J. Gallagher, teacher

DANCING IN THE RAIN

Sunday is my favorite day of the week. Most people my age think that Sundays are terrible because school starts the next day, but to me, there's something so amazing about this day. A perfect Sunday—in my eyes—is spent curled up on the sofa with my big, fuzzy, warm cat while watching TV.

There's only one other day that could possibly rival a Sunday—a rainy day.

Rainy days are my little secret. While the rest of the world is trapped inside, feeling even more bored than usual, I am outside. I am in the downpour with Mother Nature and all of her creatures.

I am dancing.

Nobody ever sees me, because I go far out into our yard, into the grove of birch trees; it is my sanctuary. The trees do not protect me from the rain, and I prefer it that way. I love the trees, the rain, the sky.

It's pure magic, the rain. When I am out on my own dancing I feel so free, as if everything I've ever worried about and everything that ever bothered me had simply vanished.

Most people hate the rain, unless they are farmers. I can't see why, except with the cold rains; the cold is rather unpleasant. But have they ever gone outside during a light rain? It is truly beautiful. Everything sparkles; everything is alive. Afterwards, there is a certain scent; a scent that soap manufacturers try to capture but cannot. It is wonderful. No human can make the smell you find after a rainstorm.

And I know better than anyone the magic of rain.

I was out in the middle of a gentle spring rain on a warm Sunday afternoon. I twirled and my hair spun out around me.

The sound of a snapping twig came to my ears and I froze, bringing my arms back down to my sides. My long, auburn hair clung to my body, which felt almost like being embraced by an unseen figure.

"Isn't it rather damp for you to be out? Most girls don't like getting their hair wet unnecessarily," a male voice asked from behind me. I spun quickly on my feet and stared at him, ignoring the sound of splashing rain. He had dark blue hair and it was plastered against his pale face. There was a small silver ring pierced through his black eyebrow. I had never seen anyone like him in this small town. He was very handsome; surprisingly, he seemed almost familiar.

"Excuse me," he said, not unkindly and with a touch of amusement, "I believe I asked you something."

"Oh," I mumbled. "Sorry. Um, I like to come out in the rain and dance. I—I know it's strange..."

"Not at all," he murmured. A mischievous grin lit up his face. "I have to admit that I do the same sometimes. I can't dance at all, but it's still...it's unlike anything else on earth."

I nodded. That was exactly it. I didn't even bother to ask what he was doing in my yard. Instead, I held my hands out to him, inviting him to join in my dancing. Hesitantly, the boy took my hands and spun around with me.

I twirled out and then back towards him. He caught me in his arms and held me softly. It was strange, being held by a complete stranger. We'd hardly spoken at all, but it didn't feel like we had just met. He was so familiar that I knew that this wasn't the first time we had seen each other.

"I know you," I whispered, "but I've never met you." He raised his hand and stroked my damp hair.

"I feel the same," he murmured into my ear. "Do you believe in being born again? Because...maybe in a past life we were...well, I don't know."

“Hush,” I whispered, putting a finger to his lips. “You don’t need to say anything. Just dance.”

He nodded. Moments passed as we moved slowly to the gentle patter of raindrops. Then he briefly kissed my cheek and started to walk away. “I will see you again. I promise,” he called over his shoulder.

“I never caught your name,” I cried. “What am I supposed to call you?”

“My name,” he said, “is Rain. You love the rain, don’t you?”

Amanda Axley

Grade 8

Macomb Junior High School

Macomb

Joanne Curtis, teacher

PUBLIC OR PRIVATE?

A major decision facing parents about their children's education is: public school or private school? This essay will hopefully clear up some of the various myths and facts that cloud this issue because I have had the opportunity to experience each type of school and know the differences between the two. After reading this, you will be better prepared to make a decision that could make or absolutely flatten the rest of your children's lives, therefore condemning you and your spouse to a guilt-ridden future as total failures...so please pay attention.

First, we shall start with public school. Public school is often a more popular choice for parents. This is because it is easier to sign up for and probably closer to home. One thing to remember in public school, however, is that it is run by the state. All state education regulations apply to public schools, and are almost impossible to change.

If you do manage to have anything changed, it takes a very long time and is extremely arduous. Let's say that your child's school can easily reach temperatures akin to those attained in Death Valley, California. The thought of your child spontaneously combusting naturally upsets you and you complain about the lack of air conditioning to the principal. The principal explains to you that he is *very* concerned about this issue, but he cannot possibly do anything about it without help from the school board and that you will have to go to them with your complaints. The school board, in turn, refers you to the assistant superintendent, who refers you to the superintendent, who refers you to the Illinois education council, who refers you to an educational consultant, who jokingly refers you to the Pope, who asks you what the heck you are doing in his office. This cycle continues until something is

finally done about your concern. Unfortunately, by this time your great-great-grandchildren would be demolishing the school to make a shuttle landing pad or some other futuristic structure. So why bother?

A second point about public schools is that they have been rumored for reeling out many more underachievers than private schools. I am sorry to say that this is almost always true. Yes, public schools certainly raise the odds of stupidity in your child, but don't fear! The next paragraph illustrates a very important point about public schools that you can take to your advantage.

One thing that is definitely a plus about public schools is that they leave you the flexibility to tend to your children's learning. When your child comes home from his school day, you get the exciting responsibility of making sure his grades are *above* average (because there is no way in the world that your child could be merely average). However, this is not easy since your child does not want to share his grades with you and each parent has to find their own way of discovering these secrets (I know several who have been reduced to digging around in the backyard, trying to find where their intelligent offspring buried them). Public schools consider it your responsibility to make sure that your child is on track with his or her school work.

Private schools are an entirely different matter. They seem to handle things much more quickly and effectively because of the fact that they are run by one person. This person is the principal, although he is never referred to as a "principal." Heads of private schools *always* have a title (i.e. "Major," "Chancellor," "Ultimate Emperor of All Time," etc).

This single monarch is in charge of *everything* that goes on in his private school. He can make sure that your worries are attended to without consulting anyone. However, you

must understand that conveying any concerns to a school head must be done properly. The first thing to consider is if you or any of your relatives have gone to the private school in question because this is essential. If members of your family have previously occupied the private school then you can rest assured that you and your child will be treated with the degree of visiting monarchs.

If previous members of your family had not been enrolled in the school before, then you have what I like to call "a problem." It will not help to think of alternatives because I guarantee that your only remaining alternatives are: A) Donate a large sum of money to the school or B) Donate something that is worth a large sum of money to the school. As you can see you have been cleverly snared in an impossible puzzle where the only way out is through your checkbook, a pen, and at least three zeros.

The only disadvantage of total academic devotion is the risk that your child might become a complete adult, devoid of any childlike emotion whatsoever. Gone would be the days that he or she would come home on the weekends ready to hang out with friends. Instead, your child will start reading the newspaper (except for the sports section) and develop the annoying habit of quizzing you on various current event details. His or her favorite channel will be CNN and they will much rather engage in a mild discussion of Socrates philosophy than relive the latest SNL.

Reading this essay furnishes you with the essential knowledge you need to know about the two different types of education. This means that when your child accuses you of picking the wrong choice later in life, "I didn't know" will not be an option for you. You are thus required to take the utmost care in choosing your child's method of schooling, because you sure as heck cannot blame me for your failure.

Alexander Ryan Bennett

Grade 11

Hinsdale Central High School

Hinsdale

Myles Laffey, teacher

GRAY

I remember the times when things were simple, even if it was only for a short while. Simplicity, to me, was bliss, and I longed to go back to that. Back when I was a kid, and everything was right and wrong, black and white, nice and mean. When my biggest problem was figuring out how to get back at my brother for putting butter on my doorknob while I was sleeping so I couldn't leave the room. Those were the days.

It's funny, to be so young as sixteen and be able to say things like "those were the days" and "back in those days." It made me sound old, but that's how I felt. Like those days were a lifetime away. Its funny, how quickly things change.

In one instant the simplicity is gone, and you are left with decisions. Everything is no longer black and white, right and wrong. This mysterious gray choice appears, somewhere between right and wrong. That's when the real confusion begins. The confusion that almost took me over every time I pulled something like this. The fear and the adrenaline pumping through my body would push the confusion to the back of my mind. It would stay there for the night, forgotten. Forgotten until I lay my head down to sleep, and then it would come back again.

I looked over at my accomplice, a boy named Eddy, about my age. "You ready?" I asked. Eddy gave a quick nod, and we made our way over to the apartment building. We knew we wouldn't find much there. There were no rich places around where we lived, but these people were way better off than we were. They could live without the things we would take and we couldn't live without them.

There was that mysterious gray area again. We were about to break into an apartment and steal money, clothes, shoes, food. If we hit the real jackpot, we could get laptops

and mp3 players. If I were still five, I would think that what we were about to do was wrong, plain and simple. Now I saw the gray area, between right and wrong. My family was homeless and hungry. My father was dead, my brother was close to joining him with the gang activity he had gotten himself involved in. My mother couldn't find a job, and I was the only one who could do something. My family wouldn't live if I didn't do the things I did. But this family, the family I was about to steal from, would live and live well. They would bounce back from a petty robbery like this.

"Are you paying attention?" Eddy asked, breaking through my thoughts. "Come on, let's go."

I brought my thoughts back to the task at hand. We had to time this right. We had to approach the building just as someone was leaving and act as if we lived there. They would hold the door open for us, being polite, and we would go in. If that plan failed, we would climb up the fire escape. We already knew that the family we had targeted had gone on vacation, so no one would be home to call the police or set off an alarm.

We waited by the sidewalk and eventually saw someone coming to the door. We began walking up the front steps, as if we were just coming home from a night stroll. As predicted, the man who was leaving the building held the door open for us, and we walked in.

"People are a lot more trusting than you'd think," said Eddy once the door was closed behind eyes.

"Let's get this over with," I said. Apartment 2B, that was where we were headed. We climbed up the stairs and reached the second floor. When we arrived at apartment B, I waited for Eddy to try to open the door with an old credit card.

"I got it," said Eddy, when we heard the click of the door unlocking. He opened it, and we entered the apartment.

“Okay, let’s make this quick,” I said. “I don’t want to be here any longer than I have to be.”

I turned on the first switch that I could find and light flooded the room. I turned to see the living room and began searching for money. I didn’t find any there, but in the kitchen there was a cookie jar with over a hundred dollars in it. It was our lucky night. Eddy came back from the bedroom with a pile of clothes in his hands.

“All right, let’s go,” I said. “There’s nothing else here we need to take.”

We left the house, closed the door behind us, and rushed down the stairs. This was always the scariest part, the getaway. You were so close to being home free, but not quite there yet. There was still the chance that you could get caught.

I knew we were in trouble as soon as we reached the ground floor and headed towards the door. I could see blue and red lights coming in through the window in the door.

“I think we’re busted,” said Eddy.

“Fire escape?” I suggested. Eddy dropped the clothes; he couldn’t run with them in his hands. We went back up the stairs and into Apartment 2B where we climbed out of the back window onto the fire escape. We raced down the steps, praying to not get caught.

But our prayers were not answered. We reached the end of the fire escape, where there was a policeman waiting for us. Eddy and I knew we were done. There was no way out now.

A million thoughts raced through my head as the cop cuffed us and led us to his car. Most of all, though, I thought about right and wrong, and the gray area. The gray area that said since this was my first offense, I might get off easy.

Michelle Calderon

Grade 12

Illinois Math & Science Academy

Aurora

Tracy Townsend, teacher

LIKE MA ALWAYS TRIED

I don't cry. I don't break down sobbin' like they do in the movies. I just stare because I know he's gotta be lyin'. I don't know why Daddy would lie to me about somethin' like that, 'cause it's not right to scare a person when you're just lyin', but I know Daddy's lyin'. Ma isn't dead.

Ma isn't dead 'cause I saw her this mornin'. She isn't dead 'cause I love her so much. People with love aren't supposed to die. Daddy says she's dead, even when I tell him he's lyin', and I know it. I still can't figure out why he's cryin' so hard 'cause my Ma is out at the market where she set off to this mornin'. Still, Daddy keeps sayin' she was hit by a car.

My Ma isn't even able to die is the thing. She is too great to be able to die. She's got the voice of an angel, like I always tell her. She loves every kind of art and poetry and music. But mostly she loves me and Daddy. And we love her right back. We love her like crazy. She is the greatest woman on the planet, and I tell Daddy that. He smiles at me in a sad sort of way, and then it really hits me. Ma is dead.

I don't get it. I don't get why she would leave me and Daddy all on our own. I don't get why that driver would hit her. I don't get why she had to die.

Daddy starts talkin' and he can't stop. He tells me she loved us, and he says she's in heaven. He tells me we're gonna pull through this, but somehow it seems like he's talkin' more to himself than to me. I've never seen Daddy like this before. He leans against the edge of the sink in our bathroom where he found me and starts sobbin'. And pretty soon, I do too.

I guess love can't save people. I guess bad things do happen to good people. I guess Ma is dead, and I can't even do a thing about it. Except cry. I can cry, and Daddy and I do just that. We both sort of sink to the ground and cry our

hearts out. I never understood that expression 'til now. Cry our hearts out. That's what we did. I don't have any idea how I can live without Ma, but Daddy says we got to try. He says we gotta try like Ma always tried.

After the funeral, people start showin' up with gifts and cookies and pies and offerin' condolences. But I don't want condolences. I want Ma.

I wish they'd just go away. I need them to go away so I can remember Ma without all these people fussin' over me and callin' me a "poor thing." And I don't even really know what they're talkin' about 'cause we're no poorer than we were before Ma died, and I'm a person, not a thing. That's what I want to shout at them. Because they don't understand. Only I understand. And Daddy. He understands too. I can see in his eyes that he does.

Everybody at school is gonna find out. They're gonna pity me and watch me and say they're sorry, like they did to Johnny Wilson when his brother died. But they don't understand either. They all got their Mas, and they will for a whole lot longer'n I had mine for.

We say goodbye to the last person at the door and then Daddy shuts off the phone line and we cry again. I feel a little better afterwards, even though there is this pit in my stomach where my Ma used to be. It's the biggest, most empty thing I've ever felt. I feel like everything in me just got dumped out and buried in her coffin. All that's left is me and my thoughts. And my thoughts keep leadin' me back to the empty space. I feel like the hole has made me wobbly all over, like I'm gonna collapse into myself at any moment. It's like the middle of me is gone, so the rest of me just can't hold me up anymore. Maybe the only way to fill in the hole is to shrink. Shrink into the hole so the rest of you fills it up and you don't feel so alone. Shrink away from everything, and not let anything else

make a spot for itself inside you. 'Cause if you let someone else find a spot inside you, then they will go away. The good things, like Ma, always go away.

Sometimes, the pain is unbearable. Like a heavy weight that is trying to crush me. When it happens durin' school, I run to the front of the classroom so no one will see my tears, and I ask my teacher if I can take a break. They always say, "Yes" with a look of pity for the girl who lost her Ma. And then I go to the bathroom and cry, except right then there is no Daddy to be there to hug me, so I cry with just me. The sadness and the emptiness come because the waves of pain have just splashed on shore once again. That's how it works. In waves. Some days I feel like I can get through, and other days I feel so empty, so lonely. Like a dark space is just waitin' out there to swallow me up. Those days, I can't even go to school. I just stay at home and try to stop cryin' 'cause I'm always givin' myself a headache.

I told Daddy about the pit in my stomach and how it seems like the only way to get rid of it is to never let anyone else make a space there. And I told him about the weight that always wants to crush me. Daddy told me that you gotta keep lovin'. He says you gotta keep tryin'. You can't give up because that is when the weight had finally squashed you. That's when the fear of loss wins. He said I need to try to understand what he was sayin'. He said I had to try for Ma.

I was thinkin' about what Daddy told me for a real long time, and then suddenly I got it. I got that you can't stop fightin' for love, because when you do you have lost to your grief. You have to keep lovin' and fightin' to stay above the waves of pain and hurt. And I want to try. I want to try like Ma always tried.

Zoe Curzi
Grade 7

Edgewood Middle School
Highland Park
Sara Sher, teacher

RUBY POUCHES OF POMEGRANATE

Out of the delicate champagne glass, bubbles wrestled their way to the top of the sparkling beverage. Scurrying. Fighting for air. I glanced at my grandfather across the table. His usual unbuttoned shirt, which revealed his helium-inflated balloon of a stomach with gray chest hair gnarling through the buttons, was closed. Black, fuzzy sweatpants to ease the shooting cramps up his left leg were replaced with Hugo Boss black jeans, obviously ones given to him by my father. Yet everything else was constant. His splintered, mahogany cane rested against the right side of the table. Stubbly patches of white fuzz on his head contrasted with the bald patches, which reminded me of the checkered view of land from an airplane. Mountain-sized ears surprised the smoothness of his skull, as did his nose and lips. His outline was strong, thick, rugged, but his slumping shoulders and vulnerable eyes reminded me why I was here on New Year's Eve instead of at a party with my friends.

I reached my pale hand to the metal spoon lying next to my empty plate. My hand traced the pattern of the authentic Russian grooves in its base. Delicate flowers intricately laced through the silver. His condition was similar, but not quite so pretty. Cancerous cells were intricately laced through his lungs, spreading to his spine, where the affected nerve endings caused searing pains through his left leg. My father's reflection in the spoon spun me back to the rest of my family. His shiny, bald head and electric, emerald eyes scanned my grandmother, who was struggling to deliver all the food onto the table as rapidly as possible. Her arms were filled with colorful Russian appetizers as she waddled from the kitchen to the dining room table. Miles away from my grandparents' Chicago apartment, I imagined my friends snacking on pizza,

pretzels, and popcorn. My grandmother looked as if she would stumble on the mounds of clutter surrounding the elegant feast she created, but many years of practice helped her avoid the old radios and Russian newspapers and cheap action figures. The shine and gloss of the beautiful silverware and festive plates contrasted the dim clutter of the living room. I removed my hand from the spoon and placed it back on my lap. I remembered what I gave up to be with my grandfather and our little family: my friends taking pictures and laughing with their mouths open, showing their teeth.

The fork next to the spoon was perfectly straight, but the glossy finish had rubbed off from years of use. My grandfather's weathered eyes lovingly observed me. I looked deeper into them and recognized our family two weeks ago, when my grandfather had just been diagnosed with lung cancer. Complacency became an old photograph that could never quite be relived. And with nostalgia for complacency came fear. I feared how my grandparents' house would be without my grandfather; so many things would be missing: card games, he would always wink and let me win; pomegranates, he would painstakingly squeeze out every little kernel for me to enjoy; crossword puzzles, he would invent the most helpful hint, but never give me the answer. The answer for *us* was obvious: spend as much time as possible with each other. And so, my grandfather hurried to tell me about his life in Russia, in fear he might not get to tell me if he waited much longer. I sat on the side of his bed as he sat up in bed with the patched quilt covering his torso. Weak and fragile, he began telling me of his first significant memories at age six when the war began.

His stories sounded like adventures from a book. So foreign, it was hard for me to imagine living such a life. During World War II, his father left to fight in the war while his

mother and her five children were evacuated to Siberia, a place where hunger was imminent. On the journey to Siberia, their family took a train. It was difficult for them to sleep in the train cabins from the explosions of bombs being dropped by the Germans, aiming at the train stations. Several trains next to them were bombed. The second part of the journey involved traveling by sled down a frozen river, with horses pulling them. I imagined a serene wonderland of firs and crystal snow. All frozen and so silent that it hurt your ears. He then told me how the ice cracked and they almost drowned.

My grandfather didn't complicate things, or try to make his life look difficult like so many of my peers did. He used simple and clear words. They were facts.

Then, he looked out the window gazing far away back into the worn leather shoes of his childhood. He remembered walking through the empty cobblestone streets of the little town *Greasnuha* in Siberia at the age of eight. He stepped into his neighbor's sturdy log cabin. His friend was in the kitchen, standing by the window where white snow illuminated the mahogany wood cabin. In his hands was a dark piece of fresh, rye bread. The neighbor slowly took a bite into the bread as bread crumbs clung to the corners of his lips. He chewed and swallowed. Shame filled my grandfather, who yearned to taste that bread with every part of his eight-year-old body. My grandfather's eyes filled with tears and looked down to the patched, worn quilt. These were not facts, but raw emotions. He confessed that even now, at the age of 70, he still coveted that dark piece of bread.

I glanced at the knife on the right side of my plate. How could I not feel guilt slicing down my spine? I recollected the time my father told me the only time he sees my grandfather happy is when he's with me. The burden flattened me into the chair. To know someone's happiness lies in your hands. But

giving up a New Year's Eve party with my friends, to be with him, was not enough. I had to do more. I would do more.

My grandmother finally sat down after geometrically arranging all the components of our meal onto the table. My dad reminded us all to raise our glasses and think of a New Year's resolution...FIVE...brown-edged weathered playing cards slipping from my grandfather's battered, yet delicate fingertips as he lets me win a simple card game...FOUR...ruby pouches of pomegranate painstakingly separated by those same fingertips, only for me to gulp a huge tablespoon in my mouth...THREE...mounds of finished crossword puzzles piling up, and up, and up...TWO...my friends sporting shiny neon party hats, enjoying themselves just as much without me as if I was there with them, preparing to blow the party whistle when the clock struck...ONE...

As we clinked champagne glasses, the bubbles scurried more than ever to the top. I thought of the future. I thought of the New Year's resolution I had made just seconds before. Burden? It was a gift. I couldn't help but feel that way as I saw my grandfather reaching for dark rye bread, with the rest of the colorful feast ignored.

Esther Divovich

Grade 11

Adlai E. Stevenson High School

Lincolnshire

Stephen Heller, teacher

TODAY WILL FADE INTO TOMORROW

Today, it was *why?* Why was she making this phone call? He sweetly answered her for the second time. Yesterday, it had been *why this pill?* and *what's that for?* But, she could remember names. She knows Elise is excellent at the piano, while Marie has fifty-seven seals and enjoys singing opera in the stairwells. It was the reasons and the questions that were forgotten the most. She dialed the number set out before her on a sheet of paper, listened to the receptionist, and found the pacemaker battery was good for another month. With a polite thank you, she restored the phone to its cradle.

Today would be the last day she would sit behind the steering wheel of a car. Her warm breath mingled with the iced air in the van. *Where does this go?* Her mind was searching to find the answer as her son sat patiently in the passenger seat, crying out in silent anguish. How could a woman so extraordinary become so conquered? One month ago, she had sat under the lamp in her revered blue rocking chair. Just rocking, thinking, meditating on the answer to fifty-seven down; thirty-four across was hieroglyph and sixty-one down was effervescent. But now, something as simple as putting the car key in the ignition was more difficult than fifty-seven down. He turned his head away. *Why can't my eyes be blind to the erosion?* His head ponders while his heart is caught in a vice as a mocking laughter rings in his ears. *How fair life is now that the tables have turned.* A small tear skirts from the corner of his eye to trace the strong jawbone, quivering only slightly. Today would be the last day.

Names and faces, today she can remember names and faces. Today, she has forgotten what we talked about five minutes ago. Our lunch has ended, but the conversation is like a ring. No matter how wide or what it encompasses, we are

whirled back to the beginning, lost to an eternal dance—an infinite journey of a path already trodden upon. As I stand to clear the dishes, she asks another question of whose answer I've already told. This isn't the first time nor will it be the last, but she can remember names and faces.

Her grey hairs tell the stories of her times and wisdom. Her mind was a fountain of knowledge, perpetually absorbing new facts, vocabulary, and trivia. My role model has accumulated eighty-five years of intelligence, maintained her intellectual mind, and nurtured her soul. My role model, by no act of her own, had eighty-five years of her keen, quick-witted mind robbed in one month by Old Father Time, the great jester. He took a sharp-minded woman and stripped her of her memory. But my role model is a fighter; she still remembers names and faces, at least for today.

Down this month's long path, the erosion of her mind has become increasingly apparent. The winds of change have begun their undoing of life. Crossword puzzles are left abandoned underneath the bedside table, most likely never to see the patient woman's eyes. Their riddles will never again marinate in her brain or expand her knowledge. Discarded, they too experience the effects of time; they gather dust. However, they have nothing to lose, not like their challenger. No matter what time does, it can't take away anything from them. It can permit layers of dust to settle gracefully upon the white and black pages, but never can time remove any of its information.

Tomorrow, she will wake up and find that the reasons and questions aren't the only things that bother her. Names and faces will begin to fade away. A haze will grow day by day until she is lost to a thick fog. Every now and again, her memory will fight the fog down to a mere sprinkling of dew. But, once again, Old Father Time will win out; he always

does. The fog will return, encompassing what she used to know and changing it to what she will never know again. She will feel abandoned in a month's time because she can't remember names and faces.

Whitney Dunkel

Grade 12

Charleston High School

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Nell Wiseman, teacher

THE WAITING ROOM

Have you ever been in a situation where, quite literally, the rest of your life would be in the hands of a stranger? Have you ever been in a situation where all your hopes, dreams, and ambitions can be quashed by the arbitrary decision of someone unfamiliar and vaguely menacing?

I have.

While I now live here in the U.S., I wasn't born here and I actually lived the first seven years of my life in Romania. At the age of seven my mom met my stepdad, an American there on business, and they fell in love, married, and thus we came to America. The year was 1995 and six years had passed since we had fought and sacrificed to free ourselves from the yoke of Communist oppression. The Western world still didn't trust us and therefore all emigrant hopefuls would have to be screened at the U.S. Embassy in Bucharest to see if they were worthy. Tragically, although the people won their freedom in the revolution, conditions didn't improve much and there were many desperate to flee the chaos and poverty to seek a better life; unfortunately, there was only one Embassy so overcrowded that long waits were a constant factor. This overcrowding had two most unfortunate results: the Embassy could only give out a limited number of visas so they had to thoroughly interview all candidates, and the inhumane, five-to-six-hour wait for said interview. It was in that waiting room that perhaps the most influential events of my life occurred.

The room was very large with many rows of wood benches, a set of tremendous wood double doors, with metal detectors on both sides, and a large American flag in one corner. This was the final room of the "reception area" where only applicants were allowed and family or friends

were considered “unnecessary.” Some of the most haunting scenes imaginable could be seen at the entrance to this room: crying grandparents praying one last time for children and grandchildren they’d never see again, mothers telling their children to be brave, friends saying their last goodbyes. The room itself was deathly quiet, there was no conversation, no last-minute prayer, only quiet reflection and the knowledge that soon the merits of your life would be weighed and your fate would be decided. It was well known that one incorrectly phrased comment or one error in word choice could permanently disqualify you, as could any disturbance in the waiting area.

For an adult this was maddening, but bearable; for a scared and awed seven year old it was overwhelming, and I can remember that after about five hours of waiting I was so scared and so hungry I started to cry. All eyes in the room suddenly focused on me as my mother desperately, but resolutely, pleaded with me to be quiet. I couldn’t understand what was happening, but I saw from my mother’s face that it was serious and I tried as hard as I could to quiet myself. The doors finally opened, and our names were called. We stepped through the metal detectors and walked down the hall; however, something happened then that will forever be ingrained in my memory—one of the Marines had seen me crying and when we passed by him, he smiled at me and gave me the thumbs up.

The office we entered for the interview contained a large wood desk along the back wall where the interviewer sat and two hardwood chairs a few feet away from the desk. Little did I know what was yet to come.

I can’t say whether he was a good man or not, but he was terrifying in his stiffness and automatism. His voice never showed emotion, he never flinched, and he’d simply

cut people off when he heard what he was looking for. For him it was procedure; he asked the questions, we answered, and if the answers were what he wanted, we passed. It was a simple matter of what could we offer to the U.S.—circumstances didn't matter, need didn't matter, all that was relevant was whether or not we were of use.

As time has passed my perspective has changed: then I was frightened by his seeming lack of humanity; now I am terrified by the concept of his existence. When reflecting on the events of that day the what-ifs are inescapable: what if we wouldn't have been judged worthy, what if my crying had cost us our future? The irony of the situation is that his decisions were based on a meaningless and indistinguishable past in a suffocating existence. His decision was what determined the value of your life and the fate of your existence; your past was an irrelevant epoch of darkness and hopelessness. In Romania one's future was bleak regardless of the path one chose in life, but in the United States there was hope, there was deliverance from despair, there was the possibility of your life truly mattering. How many of those who would have faced a bleak existence there found hope here? But then again how many were deprived of that hope because they were "undesirable" from a financial or intellectual point of view? How many hopefuls, from all over the world, were denied because of this? How many great Americans could have been but weren't? When did "Give us your tired, your poor, your huddling masses yearning to breathe free" stop being the rallying cry of the oppressed? When did the worth of a human soul become its economic worth?

I was fortunate. I was found worthy. My life was given meaning and purpose. But every time my thoughts drift, they return to all my friends and family who were forsaken to their bleak existence just because they didn't fit some stock

definition of worth. I can't help but ask, why?

Alecsandru Florea

Grade 10

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Jennifer Arias, teacher

A TRUE TRANSFORMATION

“Our consciousness rarely registers the beginning of a growth within us any more than without us: there have been many circulations of the sap before we detect the smallest sign of the bud” (Eliot 55). Such words sum up the initial change of Silas Marner in the novel by George Eliot. Silas has been an outsider with nobody to love and nobody to love him, with disappointment after disappointment piling up into a heap of sadness. His only treasure is his gold, which he cherishes as if it were a child. When the gold is stolen from him, Silas enters pure despair, but eventually is able to find something that compensates for its loss. Young Eppie is brought to him as if a gift from God, and the reader witnesses a true transformation. He is rescued from emptiness and experiences immense contentment.

Growing up in the puritanical town of Lantern Yard, Silas Marner remains a very restrained person. Though Silas planned to marry, his religious community ostracizes him after being betrayed by his only “true” friend and his fiancé.

Forced to relocate, Silas settles in Raveloe, a superstitious town with less severe religious practices. As an outsider, he is immediately cast out by the townspeople, who are intimidated by his bizarre mannerisms that include cataleptic fits. So, Silas remains isolated within his cottage and with his occupation as the town weaver.

For fifteen years Silas lives in seclusion with his lone companion, his gold treasure. “But now, when all purpose was gone, that habit of looking towards the money and grasping it with a sense of fulfilled effort made a loam that was deep enough for the seed of desire” (Eliot 14). Strangely enough, this gold symbolizes all of the good things in life that Silas no longer has since God “abandoned” him in Lantern Yard.

It now becomes his pride and joy, what he comes home to every night as his reward for hard work and suffering. As a substitute for his need for love and companionship, gold also represents the most precious gift God gives man: a child. Alas, Silas suffers again when his gold is stolen from its hidden place. By depriving Silas of his treasure, Eliot attempts to reunite him with his faith and with mankind.

A ray of hope appears on Silas's hearth in the form of a blonde, curly-haired toddler. Coming out of a cataleptic fit, he returns inside his cottage and thinks he has found "gold—his own gold—brought back to him as mysteriously as it had been taken away" (Eliot 111). He soon realizes that "instead of the hard coin with the familiar resisting outline, his fingers encountered soft warm curls" (Eliot 112).

Now his transformation begins. Silas rediscovers undying love when he decides to raise and to name the child Eppie, after his mother and sister. Eppie finally fills the void in Silas's soul and at long last, fulfills his need to be loved. Silas experiences "a certain awe in the presence of a little child, such as we feel before some quiet majesty or beauty in the earth or sky—before a steady glowing planet, or a full-flowered eglantine, or the bending trees over a silent pathway" (Eliot 119).

With Eppie, Silas lives life with a renewed smile on his face. Eppie "created fresh links between his life and the lives from which he had hitherto shrunk continually into narrower isolation" (Eliot 127). Opening up to the Raveloe community, he "appeared for the first time within the church, and shared the observances held sacred by his neighbors" (Eliot 127). Friendly and more importantly, finally feeling he belongs with the company of others, Silas's tightly bound heart unwinds; and, with that, Silas finally shares love with Eppie, with his community, and with God. As Eliot says, "the gold

had kept [Silas's] thoughts in an ever-repeated circle, leading to nothing beyond itself; but Eppie was an object compacted of changes and hopes that forced his thoughts onward and carried them...away to the new things that would come with the coming years" (Eliot 127).

As the novel concludes, Eppie's wedding to a young, working-class lad, Aaron, is about to take place. Eppie is shown standing in the newly acquired garden near Stone-pits. Eliot explains that "Eppie has a larger garden [built] than she had ever expected...the garden was fenced with stones on two sides, but in front there was an open fence, through which the flowers shown with answering gladness..."(Eliot 183). Given Eliot's religious sentiment, the reader wonders if this final scene perhaps symbolizes a return to the Garden of Eden. In the ultimate act of redemption, Eliot bestows on Silas the chance to recover fully from his fall from grace by returning to a state of innocence for man, the garden.

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Will Frej

Grade 9

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THE KING OF NATURE

Darkness enveloped the inside of the warm cave. The cave was almost completely silent. All that could be heard was the gentle breathing of the cave's only occupant—a young lion.

The lion had just returned from a successful feast and was slumbering contentedly. His golden-brown fur slightly illuminated the cave, giving it an almost mysterious glow.

The lion's sharp claws loosely clutched the dirt of the den; his mane hung gently around his neck to a fluffy effect, and his peaceful snores echoed throughout the smooth, glazed walls of the cave. The den was quiet and peaceful, tranquil and serene. Happily and soundly, did the lion sleep. He had no worries surrounding him; he was a free spirit, escaping into tranquility.

Feeling deliciously fresh, the lion managed a small yawn, and slowly began to open his eyelids, revealing his hazel-brown eyes that were glistening in the dim sunlight that was beginning to stream into the den. The lion stretched and gracefully trotted outside of the cave into the daylight with an air of significance. Birds chirruped perpetually to each other in the blue skies of the open savannah. Other lions could be heard in the distance. Green grasslands stretched for miles in every direction, being cut off only by small ponds and creeks with water so clear it seemed nearly translucent. As the lion walked he observed many of the other lions in his pride arisen from their slumber. Many young cubs played a game of tag in the open fields. He noticed that their mother had wandered off in search of a meal. An older lion with wisps of silvery gray hair in his mane lay nearby, keeping a watchful eye on the cubs as he rested in the warm green grasses.

The lion stopped at a nearby oasis for a drink after a

short trek through the tall grasslands. He thirstily began to slurp water into his mouth enjoying each drop of this treasure nature gave him. Satisfied with his drink the lion began to lie down for a nap. He slowly closed one of his enormous eyes. As he was about to close the other he noticed the glint of something silver through the small clearing.

A few meters away stood a poacher pointing a rifle at the lion. The lion curiously stepped towards the silver object unconscious of the danger he was in. Grass crunched to the ground as he stepped. The lion heard a click and halted, finally knowledgeable of his danger, but it was too late. The poacher pulled the trigger on his gun and a bang echoed throughout the savannah.

“Pathetic beast,” the poacher cackled as he sliced out the lion’s tongue for proof of his achievement. “They’re no match for the human being; the stupid animals can’t even think.” With that remark, he picked up his gun and began his journey back to civilization.

Brett A. Glasner

Grade 6

Edgewood Middle School

Highland Park

Sheila Fitzsimmons, teacher

THE FLAG HOLDER'S TALE

My sign flashed on when I woke up. In neon yellow letters, it marched across my chest and back screaming, "CAN'T HANDLE CRITICISM...SCARED OF SPIDERS...HATES HIS JOB...UNABLE TO TAKE REJECTION...THINKS HE'S FAT..." It continued on, listing my faults, as everyone's sign does. We all have them. They appear around six months, when your brain truly starts to develop. When you're a baby, your sign is simple, maybe something like, "HATES CARROTS," or "DEPENDS ON HIS THUMB." They grow more complex as you grow more complex. Your mind develops, and your sign reflects the negative aspects of your character and personality. I can't handle criticism, I'm scared of spiders, I hate my job, I'm unable to take rejection, and I certainly think I'm fat. It's basically a stock ticker in your body. It starts displaying when you're awake, and blanks out when you're asleep. Perfectly visible through clothes, it is your college application, your job application, your ticket to the ladies.

I was still groggy when I moved into my small kitchen. The blinking yellow words reflected harshly off of my stainless steel sink, causing me to squint. My eyes finally adjusted, and I grabbed a syringe from a drawer. The words on my sign flashed, "USES HEROIN," as I prepared and injected it into my arm. I hadn't been lucky about that so far. My boss at work had walked in on me when that phrase became visible through my suit. A few of my coworkers knew why I was fired, but I had seen what their signs said about them as well, so I scratched their backs while I fell on my ass.

It had gone downhill after the novel I had written was shot down by a publishing company. The publishing company I worked for, actually. That's when two of my aforementioned faults of character became visible. I really took it hard. I didn't

do shit for about six months, and then my girlfriend, whom I had been seeing for two years, decided to drop me. She told me that she had seen what was marching across me when I was shaving in the mornings, or whenever I was watching TV at night. She wanted to split, so we split. I wasn't even aware that I was using heroin until I saw myself in the mirror one night, with the message proudly displaying itself on my chest. I didn't think too much of it at the time. Plenty of people were doing heroin and other drugs. It was just a matter of time before I started. But as days wore on at work, I worried. Using heroin was grounds to get me fired and if my sign was seen, that's certainly what would happen. I could protect my chest, of course, by crossing my arms over my sign when I ventured from my workspace, and I resorted to praying about my back. My coworkers saw my sign around the water cooler, and a few of them admitted to using heroin as well. It's okay, nothing's wrong with that, they assured me. So I told them what I had seen on their backs as well, and we arranged ourselves a little agreement of silence. My boss, however, watched my sign fully circle itself around me while I was bending over the fax machine. I was fired the next day.

In the next six months, I went through at least a dozen jobs. Like I said earlier, your sign is your job application. Not many people want heroin addicts as employees, and those who do usually only keep you for a couple of weeks or so. I was fighting vagrancy, but not all was bad. I had met another girl, Jane. She was a heroin addict, too. In an instant, our veins fell in love with each other. We exchanged everything with each other. Love notes, food, small gifts, telephone numbers, pager numbers—needles, too. You meet all sorts of people in needles.

Jane was beautiful. Just before I had met her, I was in a frenzy of sexual acts. Fucking everything in sight, really.

Man, woman, trans, vacuum cleaners, two at once, three at once, blow up dolls, fake pussies, fake tits, exhaust pipes, pool cleaners, Jacuzzi jets, everything. I suppose it was a hormonal reaction to losing my job. I don't know. It seems strange that that's what would happen. Maybe I just hit second puberty. Regardless, when I met Jane, I stopped all that. She just had an energy that made me say no. Not to her, but to the vacuum cleaners and exhaust pipes. "ENJOYS PROMISCUOUS SEX WITH INANIMATE OBJECTS" vanished. I was happy about that. We were both having the same problem. Neither one of us could hold jobs because of our faults. I had to move in with my mother because of my financial situation.

My mother was bedridden, so Jane moved in as well. I don't think my mom ever knew about it. She never mentioned it when I visited her room, at least. I tried to visit once a day. My mother would lie there, ensconced in pillows, her eyes closed. Always closed. There were enough sedatives in her to satisfy me. She never saw what was wrong.

"Come here," she would whisper, and I would. She'd move her hands over my face, kiss my forehead, and send me on my way. My way usually ended up with Jane on a couch.

My mother had been a tight ass all her life, so Jane and I quietly lived off of what we could skim away. She finally died, but with both Jane and I spending the money to buy our needs, it didn't last long. Between fucking and shooting up, we were always discussing our signs. There had to be a way to use them to our advantage. It finally came to us, her, really. Mugging. We had all the fucked up qualities necessary to deal what we lived off of. We were users, we now had the definite negative character traits, and we were willing to do it now. We were desperate. We needed money, and a quick, easy job to do. I was going insane trying to get my sign to work for me instead of against me.

We spent all next week strategizing. We needed an easy mark, someone who wouldn't try to fight back or call for help. We had to scrap up enough money to buy a gun as well. We wouldn't bother with bullets. We wouldn't need them. We hit the couch first and found a few dollars in change. We hit every drawer in the house, every nook, every cranny. We even went through my mother's old purse.

The man who sold us the gun was reluctant to do it. Again, our signs were working against us. But he eventually did, and Jane and I were now ready. We picked an upscale neighborhood to start off with. Easy, namby-pamby, Ivy League prats waltzing down the street alone during the night filled the place up. Jane and I spent a lot of time in that neighborhood, trying to spot the perfect place to accost our young academic.

I was still groggy when I moved into my small kitchen the morning of the meeting. The blinking yellow words reflected harshly off of my stainless steel sink, causing me to squint. My eyes finally adjusted, and I grabbed a syringe from a drawer. The words on my sign flashed, "USES HEROIN" as I prepared and injected it into my arm. I smiled. This was good. "DESPERATE ENOUGH TO KILL" This was even better. It kept getting better. Jane had decided that we would buy some ammunition for the gun after all. You know, to use for warning shots or something like that.

Our plan was to split up on our first attempt. Jane took one of my mother's kitchen knives to use on her victim. I kept our now loaded gun. We wished each other luck and went our separate ways.

My mark came along soon enough. He was whistling some stupid little song and had his hands in his pockets. I waited until he had passed me and got into step with him. I walked quietly behind him for about a block, and decided

it was time. I pulled the gun from my jacket pocket and nudged him in the back. He turned around, a confused look on his face.

“Excuse me?”

I nodded at him and jerked the gun in his direction.

“Are you mugging me?”

I nodded again.

A strange look came over his face. It started in his eyes, almost a twinkle, and moved down to his mouth in a full blown smile. He laughed.

“You’ve got to be joking,” he said between breaths.

“Hey, fuck you.”

“Yeah, yeah,” he laughed again and turned around, walking away from me. He started whistling again.

That was it. I was fed up with this. I raised the gun and fired. The sound was enormous. The guy acted like he didn’t even hear it. He just kept walking and walking. Walking and whistling.

I stood there, dumbfounded. What the hell had just happened? I had a gun, didn’t I? A loaded gun, at that. It just didn’t make sense. Any normal person should be scared of a gun. I fired it, didn’t I? That’d have me shaking in my pants.

Jane came running up, a smile lit across her face, her hands clutching to two leather wallets.

“I got it, I got it!” She yelled as she came towards me. Her mouth dropped suddenly, and she stopped before she got to me.

“What?”

It was like she had gone dumb.

“What?”

She was staring at my chest.

“COMES FROM A CIVIL UPBRINGING” “IS SCARED OF BEING ALONE” “HAS NEVER FIRED A GUN IN HIS LIFE” “POURS OUT HIS SOUL TO HIS MOTHER’S PICTURE EACH NIGHT”

And it kept going.

Remember how your sign reflects the negative aspects of your character? As a mugger, or thief even, I certainly couldn’t be scared of being alone, coming from a civil upbringing (which I was), or pouring my soul out to my mother’s old photograph each night (which I also was). Not if I wanted to intimidate my victims. Not if I wanted to succeed. It changed. My sign reflected the positive character aspects I somehow still had, and turned them negative. But I didn’t hold anything against Jane for long. We still fucked, and that was good.

But it was driving me insane.

Why couldn’t I catch a break? Why did people have to see my sign? It wasn’t fair it wasn’t fair it wasn’t fair. I would get rid of it, one way or another. No one should have the right to see what’s wrong with me. No one. Not even my mother. Not even my lover. Not even my employer, my friends, the strangers on the subway, the strangers on the street, the whatever’s. I would get rid of it.

It started with Jane. It was her idea. Shut my sign off, she told me. Shut it off, keep it off. I didn’t take note of what she said at the time. It was a rather awkward situation. But it came to me later that morning. Turn it off. It’s a part of our body, so take it out.

Okay.

That night I took a knife and cut into Jane’s breast. She woke up, her sign lit up. She screamed. I cut deeper. I’ll take it out, I told her. No one will ever see what’s wrong with you.

I dug and moved and carved out her sign. I got it, too. It will never been seen by another person. Not even I can see it now. Her faults are her secrets. I smiled and lay down next to her body. It was lukewarm. She must not have been feeling too well. Maybe she had a bad trip. It happens to us all, every now and then. The thought went through my mind as I turned the knife down into my sign.

Sarah Hartman

Grade 10

Highland Park High School

Highland Park

Mari Brown, teacher

TOY SOLDIERS

Tommy awoke to blinding yellow sunlight. It spilled through his window, over his potted plants, and across his floorboards, forming there a whitish glare. The little boy stretched and rolled over in bed, taking his covers with him. He blinked his eyes slowly, adjusting to the brightness of the hot summer morning. The day seemed ready for him; he was content to be drowsy a little longer.

The smell of Mama's sizzling bacon roused him. Tommy loved Mama's breakfasts with big, fluffy pancakes and syrup, piles of grits, fried sausages, and huge biscuits smothered in gravy. He eagerly pushed back the covers and dashed out of the room in his underwear (June nights were stifling in Mississippi).

The pretty woman at the kitchen stove turned around when she heard the bare feet pattering against the floor. "Hey hon, you sleep well?" Tommy nodded as she smoothed his rumpled hair. "Alrighty then, you go get dressed and play in your room for a bit and I'll call you when breakfast is ready." Tommy started galloping out of the kitchen when she pulled him back. "Don't wake your Daddy, OK?" she said.

Tommy tiptoed back to his room, leaving the door slightly ajar. He knew that sometimes Daddy slept in very late, all day even. Mama said it was because he didn't get much sleep when he was in Vietnam, so he was still catching up on it. She always looked kind of sad when Daddy slept in. Tommy knew that Daddy was different after he came home from Vietnam three months ago, but that was just because he was a big hero now. He never really laughed, and once when Tommy broke his model airplane, Daddy got really mad. He said Tommy was careless and that he should take better care of his things because real airplanes couldn't be fixed with

tape. He kept yelling at Tommy until Mama came and took Daddy outside.

The model airplane was one of the things Daddy brought back from the army. He also brought Tommy a set of green army men. There were snipers and captains and tanks... Tommy took them out now and started lining them up on his floor. He liked playing war where there were good guy and bad guys. Daddy said once that sometimes it's hard to tell who the good guys and bad guys are in a war, but in Tommy's game the bad guys were definitely bad and they always lost. He set up the troops carefully, arranging them opposite each other and ready to attack.

He heard Mama and Daddy's door open and Daddy's footsteps down the hall. Daddy had a loud voice, so Tommy could hear when he asked Mama what was for breakfast.

The metal spatula hit the frying pan with a whack, and Mama said something back to Daddy in her mad voice. Daddy said, "What's so wrong with me havin' some fun? God know I deserve some after the hell I lived in and besides, you ain't been too playful lately."

Tommy's troops started firing at each other, and a soldier on the front line fell.

Mama was talking back to Daddy, saying something about how she knew it had been hard but maybe she'd be a little more understanding if he didn't "vi-o-late" her trust. She said he was different than how he used to be.

"What's a couple of beers with some friends?" Daddy said back.

Tommy's bad guys were falling like flies; the ranks of the good remained untouched. Mama was being mean to Daddy, he thought. He said he was just having fun, so why would she be angry with him?

Mama started talking louder. "You think it's just the

couple of beers that I'm worried about? Jim, I'm worried about the *several* beers and those lovely ladies who always seem to know you a little too well. You hardly see Tommy anymore—"

"I see him more than enough!" Daddy said. "He's always wanting my attention—come see this, come do that. I'm not a babysitter!"

A bad soldier shot a good one, and the other side felt their first casualty. Tommy thought Daddy liked hearing his stories and playing games with him.

Mama got quieter. "He's probably listening right now, so maybe we should—"

"This isn't about him, it's about me. My problems," Daddy yelled. "Well, maybe I wouldn't have so many problems if I hadn't gone to a goddamn war to support you and Tommy!"

Tommy neatly lay a whole line of soldiers on their sides; they'd been caught by the last round of artillery.

"I'm sorry for what you went through," Mama said. "I'll never understand the horror. But you're home now, and the least you can do is try to be a father to your son and a husband to your wife."

Daddy laughed. "What do you think I'm trying to do?"

Mama muttered something and then he heard a slap.

"Don't accuse me of sleeping around, woman!" Daddy thundered. "I haven't been with any whore but you!"

A couple of Tommy's soldiers tried to run away but they got shot. Tommy didn't know what Daddy meant, but it sounded mean.

"You liar! I saw you last week with that woman at the bar!" Mama screamed.

"Nothing happened and you know it. The only reason I was with her in the first place was because you wouldn't

talk to me after I lost that job at the car wash!"

"You lost that job because you were drunk," Mama said, crying now.

"Well if you had memories like mine, you'd want to forget them too!" yelled Daddy.

Tommy's army men stopped fighting. He got up and closed the door very, very slowly. Mama and Daddy stopped talking when the latch clicked. They must have remembered me, Tommy thought as he heard them go outside. He could still hear their raised voices coming from the yard, but he pretended not to notice. He scooted his bare back against the bed and pulled his knees to his chest; he was feeling cold all of a sudden.

The army men scattered on the floor didn't look so heroic anymore. Tommy picked up one still-standing man and studied him in the light. The glare on his body made him appear gray and featureless, no longer a living member of the green ranks, but something else entirely. A ghost maybe.

The smell of burning bacon filtered into the room.

Tess Margaret Hellgren

Grade 11

Carbondale Community High School

Carbondale

Justin M. Dennis, teacher

A TWIST IN TIME

My past life lurks in the corner of my closet like a crumpled bedsheet after a nightmare. Slipping my hand off the closet doorknob and gliding backward toward my bed, I etch-a-sketch the back brace in my mind. My brain erratically turns the dials, searching for the visual, until the tinted grains map out the image of a pile of twisted cloth limbs and hard plastic pieces that once militantly adhered to my body, but now hide within the sheet folds. Sealed in a dust coffin, the brace collects cobwebs and memories of its short-lived legacy. The twisting of its materials is forever cemented in my body; each vertebra magnetically repels another away from the center of my spine. The inconsistently stacked bones carve an S into my back, branding the curvature as a product of my Scoliosis.

Having heard the word for the first time, a 10-year-old girl shivered in a stiff paper robe. Her ears sealed themselves off from the predicted prognosis, the hypothesized causes, the statistics of recovery—but the name scraped its permanence in her brain. Only hearing the biting tones within Scoliosis, the diagnosis for curvature in the spine, she felt the semantics permeate. The hard 'sc' sound pulsated fear, the 'olio' meant pain, and the 'sis' sounded unfamiliarity. When every last word of the doctor's explanation had dripped from the tongue, he promptly fastened a plastic brace with an eerie skeletal overtone to her back, hoping to force his hardware against the natural movement of her bone and muscle. He twisted her shoulders into feigned alignment and leveled her hips by applying pressure with snaps and buckles anchoring her body more and more towards the ground. Inches above the brace, the little girl's face mimicked her new plastered, mechanical skin. The corners of her mouth crept down to meet

her chin and her eyelids tilted to the side and sank into her dull skin as her features twisted from a carefree little girl to an afraid and lonely girl plastered in a body mask.

Over the next two years, she twisted her thoughts to match her spine. Being confined to a machine for 20 hours drastically limited her physical activity. She invested her time in dance, her expressive outlet from the conformity of her brace and rationalized that basic body movements were intended to be difficult, her gears were caught in neutral no more than any other person's. However far she twisted her thoughts, the girl relapsed more and more into a state of resistance. Her mechanical body obeyed only the control of her brace as her mental limitations silenced her movement. The puppeteering brace branded her as a mark of distinction—she was different. Reflecting on this new revelation, she spiraled herself into a comfortable corner of the world, coiled in her fading faith in medicine. It is here, at the bottom depths of our own lies so elegantly twisted to suit our needs, that optimists say our truths emerge from inside us.

Anat Baniel's hand is not one to wait for an emerging change. The longstanding guru of the Feldenkrais method, she gently reached in and guided a change from the root of its nest. By some twist of fate, the little girl found Anat. Anat proved physical freedom could be achieved through cognitive awareness. She advocated for the power of the brain to restructure the body to best suit its needs and argued that the brain can be trained to align the body more comfortably. The concept of Feldenkrais rang completely foreign to the girl's family and equally left the doctors with shoulders shrugged in puzzled confusion and lips smirked in doubt. The medical judgments trickled down the winding path and settled like dust on the tip of the girl's nose. Still bound both in hardware and blankets of manufactured beliefs, the girl

contemplated the frightening risks of both situations. To the now 12 year old, Anat's method threatened her understanding of herself, the challenge all preteens struggle to define. Feldenkrais gave back the mobility, comfort, and vivacity to many children's lives with cerebral palsy and other disabilities beginning in the brain, yet never before had Anat worked with Scoliosis. Could the little girl retwist her bandages to unravel her freedom and risk losing the statistics, data, and experiments that endorsed clinical treatment? For two years, she had surrendered her body to a clinical study on the effectiveness of the brace, and awaited hopeful results. X-ray after X-ray, the brace began to prove ineffective as her curve dominantly pushed its course away from the center of her back. So desperately seeking a chance to move free of plastic, she swerved from her scientifically verified method of treatment towards a revolutionary gentle treatment that presented an opportunity.

After deciding to abandon her crutch, the 12-year-old body froze in time and progressed into an infant relearning how to walk, breathe, and move with each Feldenkrais session. Anat uncoiled the stiffness her body presented as protection against painful movement and molded her now malleable body from the beginning. Thirsty for freedom, her body soaked up the movement it never imagined possible. She twisted, bent, and stretched as if air of her bones were disconnected. Her brain learned how to better align her bones to support her body, something the brace never learned to do. With each session, she shed a new coat and pigments of truth began to emerge. Soon the little girl's bones became mine. The twisting catalyzed a renaissance in my body, shifting vertebrae and snapping tension in my bones. Reborn into my own body, I could finally feel my breath stream throughout my limbs as an invigorating fresh wind.

Anat approached my Scoliosis the exact same way that I did. She continues to say that the only way to untwist is to twist even more. The twisting transformation in my body empowered my mind to follow suit. I now twist my thoughts above inhibition, fear, doubt, and most importantly, limitation. Now, with my feet firmly planted in the carpet in my room facing my closet, I reposition my hand on the slippery silver knob that shuts my brace away from the light bouncing off my mirror. The mechanism crunches in the doorknob and my body weight bows the door open enough to see everything but my brace hiding in the corner. I smile. Somehow she always does that to me, hiding no longer in my closet but in a crevice of my heart.

Emily Jastromb

Grade 11

Highland Park High School

Highland Park

Faisal Mohyuddin, teacher

LIVE FAT, DIE YOUNG

Obesity is ruining our lives. Life expectancy in this country is plummeting because so many people are overweight! Our nation's lifespan has never gone down before; it had only gone up in the past because of better nutrition, health care, and medicine available to all of us in this country.

Most people don't exercise or eat right because they spend all of their time lying around in front of the TV (or computer) and eating the wrong foods. We are a nation of couch potatoes. Obesity has started to destroy the gains Americans have made in extending their life spans, and it will make our nation's effort to increase our life spans more difficult in the future. A recent internet study that was reported on March 19, 2005, declared that obesity currently reduces life expectancy by a full five years. That is half of my age!

Fast and fried foods, sugar-sweetened drinks, and low-quality junk food have been major contributors to obesity in our country and they have caused our life expectancy to drop for the first time in 1,000 years. Some people call obesity a threatening storm that can kill people early. Scientists say that the life expectancy for obese people is only 60–65 years.

As you can see, if you are obese and not eating healthy foods or exercising, you are putting your life at risk. Make sure you EXERCISE (get off of the couch) and EAT HEALTHY (avoid junky or sugary foods)! Obesity may be quickly ending your chance at a long life. Don't live fat. Start being healthy today and help your body to live a long and happy life.

Michelle Maskeri

Grade 4

Pleasant Hill Elementary School

Winfield

Carol J. Gallagher, teacher

MORNING ROUTINE

I am sound asleep in my velvet pink and black bed, dreaming about cheese puffs and a tower of juicy steaks, until I am rudely awakened by Dad. He turns on the bright kitchen lights, and I bury my head into my warm, cozy bed. What is the point of getting up this early if it is still so dark that you can't even see your tail? Thinking I have been awake for hours, he ruffles my fur causing my whole bed to slide around on the wood floor. No chance of returning to my luscious dreams anymore! Soon, Dad will leave, and Mom will come down to take his spot. Yep, just as I suspected. Here comes Mom now. Trudging over to the pot that makes the obnoxious whistling sound, she steps on my tail! Squealing, I run and jump into my bed.

"Oh, I'm so sorry, Princess!" she exclaims.

If she would have opened her eyes, maybe she would have seen me. And she ruined my new groom! I would have liked to keep it neat for at least a couple of days. I'm tempted to call the SPCA (Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals).

Now fully awake, I desperately have to go to the bathroom. I wait patiently by the door, but I am ignored as usual. I deserve some respect! Am I not a member of this family?

Mom begins to cook something on the stove. Mmmmm. The tantalizing smell of the bacon sizzling on the saucepan makes my taste buds water. Oops. A wad of drool slobbers from my mouth to the floor. I leave my spill behind and sit obediently right underneath the pan hoping a piece might accidentally fall. No luck.

My sisters, Nicole and Brittany, come rushing down in a panic to get out of the house. I make sure that I stay out of their way to avoid another painful incident. Stuffing their mouths

with food, they pack more food in a paper bag. Hello? Don't you realize that I need to eat too? I scratch at my bowl. No one hears. I scratch more determinedly, spilling some water from my water bowl in the process. Thankfully, Mom hears me. But does she feed me? No. She calls for Nicole, who has already rushed back upstairs. By the time she comes back down, the sky has already turned light.

"Please don't forget all of my supplements," I want to remind her. "I need my salmon and fish oil. And make sure to mix the salmon well into the dry food so it is spread around evenly." However, Nicole is in such a flurry to leave that she forgets the fish oil and is too lazy to thoroughly mix in the salmon. Practically throwing my bowl at my face, she dashes out the door without even a pet goodbye.

After the girls leave, I am waiting by the door again when Mom finally notices me. I do my private business outside and scamper toward the door, excited to get my treat for returning so quickly. Dashing through the door toward the treat tub, I lose my grip on the waxy wood floor and crash my already flat face into the cabinet. Hoping for an extra-tasty treat, Mom throws me a chunk of something I don't even want to know what. I look on the bright side: any minute now I will be basking in my own peace and quiet.

Oh no. No! She's heading back into the house. Oh, wait, never mind. I almost wet the floor there. She was just grabbing her jacket on the couch. Hearing the clanging outside, I know I am alone now.

Ahhhhh...this is the life. The salmon in my bowl is moist and fresh, and I have the quiet house all to myself. I crawl back into my bed, take a few circles, and within seconds I am chasing squirrels around in the backyard...

Nicole Mitchell
Grade 12

Lake Forest High School
Lake Forest
Diane Clark, teacher

KAVIK, THE WOLF DOG

In *Kavik, the Wolf Dog* by Walt Morey, the author introduces the most important thing in life: love. Love between animals and humans is vital and special because it can provide deep friendships, respect, and trust. In the exposition, Kavik is trained to become an amazing sled dog that wins the "North American Dog Sled Derby" (Morey 455). However, a self-centered man named Mr. Hunter purchased Kavik to show him off to everyone in Seattle. While being shipped to Seattle, Kavik experiences a horrible plane crash, but he is found by a young boy, Andy Evans, who nurses Kavik back to life with love. Aside from Andy's love, Kavik also values love from a female wolf and Tom McCarty, gardener and handyman to George Hunter.

When Hunter arrives at the Evans' home to retrieve Kavik after he has been nursed back to health, Hunter transports Kavik safely to Seattle. Rather than being in a nice, comfortable home, Kavik is locked up in a small pen with concrete floors. Tom McCarty approaches to pet Kavik and say, "You don't belong in this cage or in this country anymore 'n I do'" (Morey 453). Like Kavik, Tom is from the wide-open spaces of Alaska and knows that Kavik needs to return north, to be free, and to be loved. Also when Kavik accompanies Hunter to be shown off at the private club, Tom offers Kavik the choice to escape from Seattle because he can relate to Kavik's needs. To show appreciation for McCarty's kindness, "[Kavik] placed a paw on McCarty's knee, where the man patted it" (Morey 495).

After Tom's aid, Kavik heads north toward Alaska to find Andy. During the journey, Kavik hears a dog singing, and he approaches the sound to find a beautiful female wolf waiting for him. "They were sniffing noses, [with] tails

waving happily" (Morey 507). Suddenly Kavik sees another wolf, which also answered the female's call. During their fight to the death for the honor of the female, Kavik wins. Then together Kavik and his mate head east rather than the intended north. "With the female at his side, Kavik ran through the vastness of the land and the magic of the night" (Morey 509). Temporarily Kavik forgets his objective: to return to the Evans. When the female wolf is shot and killed, Kavik makes his grueling trek back to the Evans.

Out of all the relationships in this novel, the one between Kavik and Andy is by far the most special bond. From the first time Andy saw Kavik at the crash site of the plane, he knew they had a special bond when Andy "was about to pull the trigger [and] the dog's eyes opened and he looked at the boy" (Morey 465). Andy and his parents become attached to Kavik, and Kavik grows more secure with their love. "Kavik would stretch full length, close his eyes, and listen to their low voices and bask in the wonderful feeling of belonging" (Morey 479). As soon as Kavik recovered from the accident, he would wait at the end of the trail for Andy to return from school. In the resolution he waits for Andy, limps eagerly towards him, and together they return home.

Luckily, Kavik demonstrates an ability to receive and return love thanks to three special people. Without Andy Evans, who nursed Kavik back to life, Kavik never would have met the female wolf that assisted Kavik in regaining his courage and instinct. Furthermore, without Tom McCarty who helped Kavik gain his freedom, he would not have returned to the Evans family. Thus, love is something neither animal nor human can live without.

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Enya O’Riordan

Grade 7

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Cyn Koukos, teacher

WHITE NOISE

A hum. A hardly audible vibration of sound. It permeated my mind. Slowly, so very slowly it came that at first, I did not realize its existence. Such a slow creeping, slithering noise, it wove about my mind.

I practiced to ignore it, but its volume increased. My irritation, I admit, soon became tainted with fear. This slowly mounting hum, echoing inside my skull.

I do not know how many days, weeks, passed before I noticed a change. I had been trying for so long to focus on the sound that I could not tell when the noise had changed, nor when I became aware of it.

It became clearer, more honed. The hum separated and its tone changed. My senses tensed and my eyes widened when I realized what it was. Unmistakable was the fluctuating noise inside my head. Voices.

It was then that I panicked. I started from my bed, but then held still. In the silence that followed, the voices hummed inside my head.

A silent hope sprouted in my gut. The noise will end. I became convinced that the voices would cease to mumble inside my head.

But the voices did not fade. Just as the hum before them, they became sharper and louder. Once I could hear the voices clearly, I began to listen to them.

There were voices of both men and women, young and aged. Their numbers changed, as people drifting through a room. They did not speak to me. It was as if they spoke to themselves and I was able to listen. You may ask how I did not go mad hearing a crowd of people constantly, and how I could stand to be the only one to know of this. Perhaps I have not adequately explained my ailment.

One day, when sitting in a small coffee shop, my mind was focused on the voices. At this time, there was only one. A woman. It said something about pouring a cup of coffee and I thought this ironic, as I was in a cafe. Just then, the woman behind the counter poured a cup of coffee. I continued to listen and the voice predicted the woman's actions repeatedly. A man walked in, and as he did, a man's voice came into existence in my mind. The voice spoke of what sandwich to order and, once it came to a decision, predicted the man's order.

So I came to the conclusion that these were not mere voices, these were people's thoughts. I began to identify people by their voices and could tell who was near me at any given time.

It was after this that my most harrowing experience came. I was sitting near my fireplace, reading, when a woman's voice began speaking. I could not tell to whom the voice belonged, but it continued to speak. It complained of being unhappy constantly and of a man she despised. Just as I was beginning to wonder whose mind this might be that I could hear, my wife walked through the door. She smiled warmly at me as the voice rambled in my head.

It was then that my mind first suggested the voice was that of my wife. I ignored it, however. My wife loved me, I knew.

But as time lagged, I could not determine whose voice spoke to me. And how often it spoke. Ceaselessly it berated a man in her life. Ceaselessly it lamented her existence. Again and again my mind insisted the voice was that of my wife. And I began to believe it. Who else could it be?

My wife never changed in this time. Always she smiled the same smile and kissed me in the same way, yet all the while, the voice spoke of despising her life and the man. Me! She thought of hating me while she feigned happiness. This

infuriated me. Constant was her drawl inside my head, just as her mocking smile. Closer and closer to the edge of madness she drove me.

It was on one night that this madness reached its climax. Sitting in our study, we enjoyed a warm fire. I should say she enjoyed. I had known no joy for quite a time. She was reading as I sat still and stared at the fire, listening to the voice in my head. Her voice in my head.

I rose from my chair and walked towards her. Her thoughts changed from her book to me as she glanced up. Hatred flowed from her mind. I stood beside her and placed my hand upon hers. Her thoughts, her voice, grew shrill. She looked at me, looked into my eyes, and smiled. Smiled. I moved my hand to her face and the voice grew still shriller.

I said to her, "I love you."

The voice became a scream.

My wife's lips mouthed, "I love you too." I could not hear her voice over her thoughts inside my head. Her screaming inside my head.

I removed my hand and walked calmly to the fireplace. The screaming continued. I slowly moved my hand and wrapped it around the fire poker. I moved it among the logs in the fireplace. I turned and looked at the woman who had lied to me since the moment she knew me. She smiled.

I smiled back and walked towards her. I looked down at her and brought the metal rod down on her head.

She screamed out loud now.

After two strikes, she stopped screaming. Her body lay still and my mind was silent. Silence! I had not known silence for ages! Finally, I was free of her berating. Her lies and mocking smiles.

I do not know how long I stood in the quiet room shaking and smiling. And then the silence was broken. I paled at

the noise that seemed to echo throughout the house.

It was the woman's voice, again.

"Look at what you've done now," it said, "you've gone and killed your wife."

Bryce Parsons-Twesten

Grade 12

Belleville Township High School West

Belleville

John Lodle, teacher

THIRD TIME'S A CHARM

The air was musty and the smell of dry blood filled my helmet. I ignored the stench and tried to remember how many times I had chased Leoric, and how many times he had gotten away. Three times now? I couldn't recall. I stepped over skeletons knocked from their niches in the catacomb walls. The elves that had hired me weren't going to be happy. Not only had I chased Leoric deep into their sacred crypts, but Leoric and his rabble were vandalizing the place.

My thoughts vanished as I came to a great silver door. An elven priest had warned me, "Don't enter the room with the silver door. The door seals off the rest of the catacombs from the holiest part of this holy place. Only the holiest may enter the holy place, and you are not holy." Holy seemed to be the only word in his vocabulary. If I had to listen to him for another moment, I would have spilled his blood in this "holy" place, to shut him up. Through his entire speech, he forgot to mention what was beyond the door. Luckily I knew. It was the resting place of the very first ruler of the elves, Leindral. I'd be executed on the spot if I disturbed just one thing.

"Sorry, old priest."

I put my shoulder against the bulky door and nudged it. As it shook open, an arrow zipped past my head. The door clicked fully open, and I dove into the dark room. I lay on the floor in the pitch-black room, listening to arrow after arrow fly past me, snapping into pieces against the wall behind me. Leoric and his group were in this room, ready for me. To top it off, they were all elves and even though they didn't have perfect vision in the dark, it was better than mine. They had the advantage, and I had to think of a way to quickly turn the tables. Magic was the only way.

"*Lor al,*" I whispered into the darkness.

A small glob of light slowly materialized in the darkness in front of me. I reached out and grabbed it, then hurled it into the darkness. It splattered against a wall across the room, lighting up a small portion of the area. I repeated the process, this time throwing it into the wall behind me.

With a snap of my finger, the two splattered remains of the luminescent goo began to grow and devour the walls, lighting the entire room in a soft blue. As the room lit up, I could see my enemies.

The ceiling seemed to reach up forever, supported by large stone pillars that circled the room. Several of Leoric's men stood, bows in hand, on a walkway that extended around the room. In the very center of the massive room stood a tomb. I presumed it was Leindral's.

I jumped up and ran behind a pillar. I looked out from behind it and quickly scanned the walkway above. Tucking my head back in, I pulled out my bow.

"Warlord Decreamos, grant me an endless supply of arrows until my enemies have fallen before me. *Politheros eindal*," I chanted.

My bow felt heavy as a bright light engulfed it. I pulled back on the bowstring then stepped out from behind the pillar. Letting go of the bowstring, I watched as an arrow of light took form in my bow and tore through the air until it found the chest of its target. Before his corpse could slump to the floor, I pulled back again and released. A second arrow burrowed into his skull. Immediately my eyes focused on another elf to my left. He aimed his bow and fired. For a moment, I felt the arrow bite into my left shoulder, but I pushed the pain aside and took aim. My arrow found his heart before he could ready his bow.

"You!" I heard a familiar voice shout from above.

I looked to the walkways above and caught sight of Leoric, but for only a second.

“Kill him! Don’t let him follow me!” I heard his command, then his echoing footsteps.

A line of elves sprung up from the walkway above and took aim. I sprinted to a pillar just in time, dodging an arrow.

“You aren’t getting away from me!” I growled.

I heard a nagging voice in the back of my mind reminding me where I was, but I ignored it and clipped my bow onto my belt.

“*Umas slun corod,*” I shouted the chant. “You hear me?”

I could hear the elves in panic. Everyone, no matter what race, no matter what language, recognized those words. It was one of the strongest and most feared magics, known by only a few.

My right hand felt on fire as a small orb of light materialized on my palm. It slowly spun in my palm, emitting an ear-piercing screech. I peeked from behind the pillar, then stepped out and lunged my hand forward, sending the screeching ball of light towards the walkway. Kicking up dust, I spun on my heels, sprinted towards the silver door and slammed it shut behind me. The door gave a weak shudder, then trembled with terrible force. I pushed my back against the door and bit my lip, waiting for the shock to end, then finally it did. I took a step away from the door, then noticed the door was all that was left. The entire crypt of Leindral was gone, eaten away by the terrible force of the explosion. I blinked for a moment, expecting the illusion to disappear, but the great silver door merely crashed down. The tomb of Leindral himself was gone, along with his corpse.

“The priest isn’t going to be happy about this...” I sighed, then yanked an arrow out of my shoulder.

Daniel Alan Pisani
Grade 12
Oakland High School

Oakland

Lee Roll, teacher

GOOD DAYS AND BAD

The lake is calm, but ripples form around the banks here and there. John sits, staring, not taking in much of the day around him. He is lost in his own world. His world is his history. And his history is his wife. Cancer had made him a widower five years ago, and he has never recovered.

All that matters these days are the “good” days and the “bad” days. The good days are days when he only thinks of his wife a few hundred times; the bad days are the days where he only thinks of his wife a few thousand times. Sometimes he fights it, and other days he just gives in, sick of the struggle. Days like today, he just sits and reflects quietly. He cries occasionally, and sometimes someone will stop and ask if he is okay. He just nods his head. How do you explain to someone in a few short sentences how miserable you have felt for the last five years?

John’s friends tell him he needs a dog. It would keep him company on days like today. It would not be able to speak, but at least someone would be with him while he is fighting such a fierce internal battle. When they tell him this, the lines in his face grow deeper as he frowns a little harder and says, “I don’t need no damn dog! It’ll just follow me around and sniff everything and get hair all over everything! AND it will have to go to the bathroom so much I will never be able to walk anywhere because I will always be recovering from the last walk and preparing for the next time nature calls upon the stupid animal!” His friends will smile and change the subject. They understand his bitterness, but they do not understand why he will not at least pretend to accept their help.

One day a close friend named Amy decides to quit giving John advice and just act. On her way out of work, Amy stops at the pet store. Afraid John will kill her if she gets him

an animal he has to take care of, like a dog, she heads to the back of the store where the fish are kept.

An employee proposes she purchase some goldfish and necessary equipment. He will not have to clean the tank, but he will still have to feed them. Surely that task will not be too hard for him.

When she takes the fish to his house, he has just gotten home from the beach. It has been one of those bad days, but something tells her she should give him the fish anyway.

He sits watching her put the tank together; he says nothing, which she figures in this situation at least is better than something negative about her trying to help him.

When she finishes, she hands him the food and tells him how to feed them and that they are otherwise self sufficient.

A few days go by before Amy sees John, and when she does, the fish are still alive, and there is fresh food floating on the surface of the water. She never mentions the fish that day. He is grateful for it because if she did, he would have to admit that it is not so bad to have a pet after all.

She notices a porcelain bowl by the front door. She is suddenly curious, but in fear of becoming Pandora, she keeps it in check. He offers her coffee, and she gladly accepts; it is a cold winter day for they are nearing Christmas. She notices gifts scattered about the floor and wrapping paper strewn across the carpet. She realizes he has not learned to wrap his children's gifts properly. She offers to help, and he surprisingly accepts. During a short break to refill her coffee cup, she sees a golden retriever come up and start drinking water out of the bowl. Returning with the coffee John sees the dog through the window and goes back into the kitchen. He returns a few seconds later with a package of hot dogs. Amy looks at him questioningly, and he simply puts one finger to

his lips and opens the front door. The dog runs away at first, but John sits jacketless for thirty minutes in the cold, patiently holding that hot dog where the dog can see it.

Amy is surprised at John's sudden change in attitude. Eventually, the dog slinks up, takes the hot dog gently out of John's hand, and quickly retreats. It glances back once, almost as if to thank John for his kindness.

Amy has the next two weeks off work and spends at least an hour a day at John's house keeping him company, since Christmas is such a lonely time for him. Each day the dog returns, stays a little longer and eats one more hot dog than he did the day before. She figures John has spent at least fifty dollars on hot dogs to keep that dog coming back.

On Christmas day, Amy heads to John's house to give him his present. When she gets there, John excitedly lets her in and introduces her to his new best friends, Sue, Mac, Tink, and Maggie. The dog that he had befriended was sharing her own puppies in return for the help he had given her. John now realizes life can go on, and he can cherish the memories of his wife while creating new relationships.

Nicole Reindl

Grade 11

Central Catholic High School

Bloomington

Janel Schlickman, teacher

AROMATIC EMBRACE

Kitchen bustling, the women of the family concentrate on preparing dinner as the men play cards in the living room. For once, no one is colliding with trays, bowls, and pots full of food. The kitchen is unusually large this year with its long marble counters, two sinks, and an island. My hands are covered with flour as I roll the dough into balls for my favorite Hanukkah dish. To my knowledge, this was the first time that the broth was from a pouch, but I was rolling the matzo balls myself. Homemade is always better, but I suppose half homemade is better than completely store-bought.

I roll the last of my dough into little spheres and toss them into the lightly bubbling broth. After washing my flour-dusted hands, I grab plates and utensils, clanking as I dodge people and food to get what I need. I head into the dining room where our menorahs burn brightly; one serving its actual purpose, only a few candles flickering in celebration of the Jewish holiday, and the other, fully ablaze, a candle race to see which grandchild will take the extra chocolate coins home. Crackles and pops from the dancing flames mingle with giggles and boisterous laughter from the chopping block and poker game as I make my way around the table, setting a gold-patterned plate at each seat, a napkin on top with the utensils carefully folded inside. As I arrange the last of the place settings, a gleam from a picture frame across the room catches my eye. It accents an image from years ago of us grandchildren surrounding Grandma in a cramped, little kitchen, peering over the counter to get a glimpse of what she's cooking. It's almost like something on a greeting card, one gray-haired lady's back turned to the camera with eight little heads crowding around and curiously turned, backs to the camera as well.

"Alright, alright," she calmed our anxious inquiries. "Who wants to learn how to do this?" Her eyes, set in soft wrinkled skin, twinkled as we paid close interest to such a meaningful family tradition. I was the first to speak up. I floured my hands and grabbed a hunk of dough. "Roll it like a snowball," she said through delicately painted lips. "You *do* know how to roll a snowball, don't you?"

"Of course Grandma! You are so silly!" She always had this way of making us laugh, even with something as serious as rolling matzo balls at hand.

Taking my tiny fingers into her perfectly manicured hands, she gently rolled the dough with me until I got the feel of it for myself. My first couple came out noticeably lopsided as they sat among her uniformly round ones. Witnessing the disappointment on my face, she gently touched my back, leaving a dainty flour handprint, reassuring me that my creations were simply special and unique, and in no way were they something I should be ashamed of.

One by one to the rest of my cousins and my brother, she passed on the well-ingrained methods of cooking that our family had used for centuries. As each of her grandchildren stepped forward to learn, her bright smile grew, her white teeth gleaming, even in the dim kitchen light. As the matriarch, it was her right and her responsibility to pass on the history of the family so that it may be carried on, whether it was in stories or in cooking techniques, and she shone with pride for the interest her grandchildren displayed.

Within time, everyone had finished their rendition of a matzo ball. Grandma gathered us around the stove and counted down. When she hit zero, in unison, we threw our creations together into the pot and gathered around to watch them boil in the broth. Patiently, we watched as our little dough balls plumped and moistened until they were ready to be served.

Family begins to assemble around the spacious table as the pot is brought forth from the kitchen, and is set at the vacant place at the head of the table. The aromatic steam drifts across the room and surrounds me in its warm embrace as I stare at the empty chair. For the first time in my existence, the holiday lacked the perfection that was my grandmother. Perhaps next year I will make the broth too.

Kelly Schur

Grade 12

Lake Forest High School

Lake Forest

Margaret Forst, teacher

SAFE

My safe place isn't really a physical one. It's not like a room or a garden or a favorite spot at the lake. Technically it's an object, so I suppose that it is physical, but it isn't a *place*. I couldn't point to it on a map and say, "There it is! My safe place!" No, it is not a place, but it is a thing. My safe place is my journal.

I began journaling when I was five. This new fancy of mine lasted for approximately a minute. I immediately encountered some problems such as writing more than two words upon a page. This turned out to become a colossal problem due to the fact that my handwriting was gigantic at the time. I stopped. It became one of those things that "the other girls" did until one day in fifth grade I attempted to start yet another journal. This time it lasted five months. Five excruciating months in which I wrote entry upon entry of something like the following: *Dear Diary, Today I went to school. It was fun. I hate Ali. She's so mean sometimes. Patrick put gum in my hair. I kicked him. Laura, Ali, and I laughed. I wore my pink leggings. I hate pink. Love, Ellyn.* Five months later, my writing ground to a sudden halt when my best friend Ali read my diary and retold it's contents to all of my friends. Horrified by the chain of events which mirrored the shunning of Harriet the Spy, I stopped. Then, in seventh grade I began again. I had long since been forgiven for my words by then, it was all a distant memory.

Somehow I kept being drawn back again and again to empty spiral notebooks, their clean white pages beckoning to me like candy. I never could keep my hands off an empty page. I craved to fill them. Yet, somehow my attempts never quite followed through. My notebooks would last for chunks of time. I would forget about them and eventually they would

join the growing stack in the corner of my closet collecting dust and moth balls. My forgotten memories in a forlorn pile that grew each year with less and less pages filled. Then, a miracle. I found out I could write.

I found out I could write consistently and completely every single day if I wanted to. In sophomore year, I found that I could write because suddenly I had emotions and feelings that just couldn't be kept inside. All those years I'd spent yearning to express myself had been wasted because I was trying to achieve the wrong goal. I couldn't write simply to remember. It couldn't be a chronological description of every single little impersonal detail. Who cared if I walked home with that person or suddenly had a dislike for carrots? I had to write my emotions. The page had to overflow with my pain or my ecstatic happiness or my ranting temper. I simply couldn't express before because I was going about it all the wrong way. Instead of writing the day's events, I went straight for what mattered to me. I had wanted to remember everything, but it turns out all the little things really didn't matter. It turned out I wanted to remember the pain or the happiness in its pure form. In the truest form that I could, the way it escaped from my pens onto the pages of the notebooks that I began to fill.

My safe place comes in the form of a tiny little journal. I have several filled journals now. They sit on a bookcase in my room like trophies for the world to see. I suppose most people just see them as notebooks. Different kinds of notebooks because I like to have a little variety in my writing supplies. However, the aesthetics of them don't really matter. It's what's inside them. It's the events that they represent, the people who have passed through my life, the emotions that have been bottled up and preserved upon the pages. Every time I get upset or scared or anxious and suddenly begin to

doubt myself, I have found that my journals are the place I run to. If it's something small, I will write it down. Most times I just need to let my doubt out onto the page, so that a little less of it is bouncing about in my head making me nervous. However, sometimes and only once in a very long while, something terrible will shake me. Something will really hurt me and make me think that nothing is ever going to be bearable again. In these times, I pull out my journals to read. I do this to remember. To remember everything that I've been through. Everything that I have gone through and survived. It gives me strength to believe in myself because I know that I can get through my rough times because I've done it before. My journal is my best friend, my biggest confidant, and my savior. It keeps me from the brink of insanity, it helps me through the worst times, it helps me to recall the best times. There it is between two covers with blank pages just waiting for me; my safe place waiting to hold me tight and remind me that everything will be all right.

Ellyn Sidell

Grade 12

Evanston Township High School

Evanston

Judith Ruhana, teacher

THE WISE MAN SOLOMON

A poor farmer, Solomon Lorkovski, lived near the town of Kishinev. Every week he would take his grain to the market. He had only one old horse to pull his wagon, but it was reliable. It pleased Solomon that he made enough money to keep his family fed.

It was the end of the week, and Solomon put the four bags of grain in the buggy and rode off to the market. In the market square, there was a marble fountain whose centerpiece was a statue of Nicholas Romanov, Russia's current czar. There were many poor peasants walking around looking through the large selection of goods. When Solomon pulled into the market, he walked to one of the merchants to sell his grain. This merchant was mean; he was yelling at a hungry boy who had tried to steal an apple because he had no money.

"Ah Solomon, you bring me more grain. Usually, I would give you 40 rubles for your four bags of grain, but the demand for grain is low so I'll give you four rubles," said the merchant.

"That is not fair. How am I supposed to feed and clothe my family?" Solomon asked.

"Solomon, this is not my concern," said the merchant.

Solomon took the money and left unsatisfied. As he walked back to his buggy he saw the boy who had tried to steal the apple. He took out four rubles and put them into the boy's hand.

"You poor boy. I may be poor, but I always thought that no one could be worse. I feel bad for you, my poor boy. Take these rubles that I made from my grain. Take them to feed yourself," Solomon said.

"Thanks, sir," said the boy and he squealed with delight as he ran off to buy food.

As Solomon was leaving, he saw a fight brewing in the market. One man was rich and the other was poor. Solomon could hear what the fight was about, and so he waited to see what would happen.

"This man stole my Akhal-Teke horse!" the rich man, Vladamir Kulski, yelled as he pulled a knife.

"I did not. Your Akhal-Teke ran away, and I saw it!" yelled Shlomah Suski, the other man.

Solomon knew that this would end in a bloody fight, and he intervened. He unhitched his own horse and walked it over to the two men. His horse was an Akhal-Teke. It was old but still had value as a stud.

"My friends, argue no more. I have the horse in question. I saw it wandering loose and borrowed it to follow a man that looked like Nicholas Romanov." He pointed to the statue in the fountain. "But he turned out to be my mother-in-law," Solomon concluded.

Vladamir Kulski started to laugh; he forgot his anger. Solomon laughed too. Then Shlomah Suski joined in. After the laughter was over, Shlomah walked off leaving the rich man and Solomon to talk.

"You are funny. You borrowed my Akhal-Teke to follow your mother-in-law who looks like a man! *Bozhe moy!* You are to be admired for your humor, and you are a man of peace and honor. Here, take some rubles to make up for the ones you lost," said Vladamir Kulski. He handed Solomon 400 rubles.

Vladamir Kulski took Solomon's horse with him, and Solomon stood grinning. Whistling, he went off to buy food, more clothes, a new horse, and a razor for his mother-in-law's beard.

Ben Suslick

Grade 8

University Laboratory High School

Urbana

Rosemary Laughlin, teacher

BLOOD TIES

It's that time of the year again. Red begins to permeate the streets and shops, swamping my vision left and right. Red banners, red lanterns, red firecrackers, all decorated with gold. They defiantly dare me to deny their existence as harbingers of one of the most celebrated—and to me, dreaded—holidays in Singapore. Chinese New Year. The time for fresh starts. The time for family reunions—the once-a-year opportunity to visit people you care about so much that you don't see them for the rest of the year. Oh yes. But it is tradition. Recalling the good old days when I lived in America and didn't have to deal with this before moving back, I stare at the festive decorations that hide the shabby facades of old shops in a thin veneer of novelty, lost in thought. I try to read the sparse Chinese characters for a few seconds, but admit defeat after all I get is "*Xin* something something..." I shrug and walk away, a dot in a black t-shirt and khakis drowning in a sea of crimson.

At dinner, my mother looks up from her plate of spaghetti—a change from the normal dish of rice—and announces shopping plans for New Year's clothes. They will be red, of course. My siblings and I clamor a chorus of complaints. No. Don't want to. Why. We detest the rigmarole that tradition dictates. We detest squandering cash on clothes when there are books or video games to buy. How curious. Most children would ask, plead, beg for new apparel. But my mother quashes our querulous outbursts. She says it's what everyone else at the reunion will do and we should follow. We subside. That's the way it is, has been, and will be. She continues with a brief schedule for visits, but I'm only listening absently; no matter who, no matter when, no matter where, it's always the same. I pick at my food, twirling the whitish-yellow noodles

through the red sauce, mixing, blending, but somehow the sauce keeps slipping off.

At the store, the monochromatic clothes overwhelm my senses. I struggle against the suffocating red; look for something, quick, and get out of here. I grab the outfit I am most comfortable in: a t-shirt and shorts, from amidst the flood of *qipaos*, Chinese traditional dresses. My mother takes one look and—*no*, she cries, exasperated. Do you think anyone there is going to be wearing something like this? Get a skirt. I declare adamantly that I don't care; it's my style, what I've grown up with. She knows that. And my choice of clothes would not be approved of. I know that. At any other time, she wouldn't mind if I bought those clothes. But now is Chinese New Year. At least she does not ask for a *qipao*. Finally we compromise on a skirt, and all that's left are the visits themselves. I wonder if it's possible to find a way out, but the ringing of the cash register only seems to finalize my fate.

The day dawns and we get dressed, with no small amount of dread on my part. My family makes its way to some aunt's apartment, and I fidget all the way there. Just before my father rings the doorbell, I take a deep breath. It's showtime. Make sure clothes are spotless...check. Turn up corners of mouth...check. Greet everyone in sight properly...well, points for effort. My siblings and I fumble through the standard wishes of prosperity in Chinese, tongues unused to this language. *Xin nian kuai le* (Happy New Year). *Gong xi fa cai* (may you be prosperous). The crisp, clear syllables turn into a mashed jumble of consonants in our mouths. My relatives smile condescendingly as they hear their language being butchered though, and shoot back responses rapid-fire. We press on like tired soldiers, fighting our way through the horde that has descended upon us. At last we break through enemy lines, duty done, and take refuge at a nearby white couch. We

have duly received our *hongbaos*, or red, decorated envelopes with money inside. Spoils of war. And that is the extent of our interaction, both sides retreating. I let out a breath I didn't know I had been holding and let my face return to normal, rather than the plastic grimace of a few seconds ago.

Left alone, I listen, bored, half to the excited, loud jabbering of my relatives with my parents in some incomprehensible dialect (probably about the price of fish) and half to the quiet conversation in familiar English between my siblings about the best way to beat the hardest boss on the last level with his 1000 HP and elixirs in the latest video game. Having anticipated this, I brought a book along—a thick anthology of Sherlock Holmes mysteries. Our cousins are all together somewhere playing *mahjong* in their traditional outfits. I, in my skort, remain seated, *The Complete Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* lying beside me, lonely. For now I am not interested in it, and turn my attention to one of my *hongbao* with its shiny, gilded surface. I trace the textured side with a finger, and idly start to scratch at it with a fingernail. The fake gold embellishment quickly disintegrates, revealing a dull red patch. I gaze at the hole and feel a strange sense of hollowness within me.

I can't wait to get home, can't wait to change out of this ridiculous outfit and back into my jeans, can't wait to go back to friends I can actually communicate with. But I remain steadfast, keeping my desires internal as I sit in my sphere of isolation. Because people have always told me that blood was thicker.

Crystal Tan

Grade 11

Adlai E. Stevenson High School

Lincolnshire

Stephen Heller, teacher

LIFE OF THE KITCHEN

The refrigerator swallows the used ingredients and regurgitates the needed ones, opening and shutting with flashes of bright white light. Its heavy aluminum door inhales and exhales a low-pitched sigh of satisfaction. The stove ignites with an impatient clicking sound and a flash of illumination, the blue-orange flame engulfing the metal of the pans. My mom's dainty footsteps scurry back and forth from stove to counter to oven to refrigerator and back to stove. She doesn't say much, yet the kitchen is far from silent.

The garage door rattles the entire house as it opens wide and devours my dad's charcoal gray suburban. "Big Daddy Joe's home!" The thud of his black leather shoes rattles the floorboards, letting out a deep moan. He has on the usual pair of khakis and an unusual pale purple polo. I'm surprised he's wearing the purple polo; he was so opposed to the color in the beginning. My mom, sisters, and I spent close to ten minutes in the Polo outlet convincing him that he was a "purple-type guy," even though it seemed obvious enough. This particular shirt stood out amongst all the rest and seemed to beckon him with desperate cries of "Pick me! Pick me!" He tried to maintain his argument, but in the end, the polo won the battle, and as it turns out, he wears it more than we'd expected. As he prances through the kitchen, his shirt seems to smile with satisfaction.

The green stems of broccoli thud as they fall to the bottom of the pot, delicately balanced on top of the blue-orange flame. Next, my mom grabs the chicken: fleshy, pink pieces to be seared on the stove. They sizzle and screech as they hit the hot pan, the sound filling me with an unexplainable warmth and security. As she cooks the chicken, the pan clanks against the burners, singing a duet with the spatula. The browned

chicken finds its way into a pile in a pearl-white baking dish, is bathed in a sauce of lemon juice, butter, mustard, herbs, and who knows what else, then topped with parmesan cheese and whisked away into the oven. As my mom pries open the oven door, it squeaks, emptying a surge of heat into the kitchen.

Aromas of lemon and butter begin to flood the kitchen while the chicken basks in the oven. It's the aroma of Christmas. Last year, my grandparents came over to our house in Florida for dinner and while we munched on plates of sweet grapes and stale crackers, the same fresh smell of lemon sprinted from the kitchen into the rest of the house. That Christmas was by far the best that I can remember. At first I thought it would be weird, Christmas in Florida. It eliminates the possibility of a white Christmas, and instead, we spend the day consumed by the swimming pool or lying in the stillness of the sun. In Florida, the entire family shares a small, six-room house which leaves plenty of time to be spent with one another, while providing the perfect atmosphere for tempers to breed. One afternoon, after I refused to go swimming with my sister, she and her ally, the faucet, blanketed me with a frigid sheet of water while I was unsuspectingly lying by the pool.

Water trickles out of the mouth of the faucet where my mom is rinsing a handful of strawberries. She dries them off, scatters them on the counter, and waltzes towards the knives. Her long, pointed fingers slice the strawberries into thin rounds, which, following the bite of the knife, are catapulted into a serving bowl, their landings echoing throughout the room. The oven timer bellows and my mom grabs the dirty, stained, gray-blue oven mitt, yanking the chicken out of the oven. A hiss escapes as it is switched off and my mom's shuffling fills the space as she staggers through the kitchen, filling the table with platters of food. Once she sits down, the kitchen

is filled with nothing more than the mechanical, monotonous
rumble of the icemaker.

Megan Wark

Grade 12

Lake Forest High School

Lake Forest

Karen Kopriva, teacher

SURVIVOR: QUINCY MALL

Sometimes one has to sacrifice the body and mind for the good of the family. Every once in a while my mom and grandma get this great idea to go for a ride to a little place called Quincy. The major problem with this situation is that men are usually quick shoppers. We know what we want, so we can get in and get out. Most women, on the other hand, love to shop. They feel the need to make it an all-day event. My mother and grandmother are no different, so I take a few planned steps to survive these trips with them to the Quincy Mall.

The ride there is a very crucial part of the whole trip. Although the ride may only take 35 to 45 minutes to get to Quincy, it can seem like a lifetime. There are some key materials though to making the trip a success. The first and foremost item is the mp3 player. Although most parents think kids buy these devices because we want to listen to music, the truth is that teenagers buy these devices to keep from having weird conversations with their parents. These conversations are about things like dating, gossiping, and bowel movements. Usually, I have my earphones on before I even get in the car. Item number two is the Nintendo DS. The Nintendo DS is a handheld device that has provided me with countless hours of entertainment. So not only do I fail to hear my mother and grandmother, but I can also be entertained. One DS cartridge usually suffices for a trip to Quincy. For longer trips I bring at least two cartridges. If I forget these two items, I might try jumping out of the car or try falling asleep. I usually fall asleep.

I already know before we get there that we are going to park next to a horrible place known as Bergner's. Bergner's is a department store in which women can find whatever

they want and more. Now for some reason unknown to men, department stores usually put their lingerie by one of the entrances. When we go into Bergner's, my mother and grandmother automatically head toward that section. I try to escape, but I am pulled right back to my mom's and grandma's sides by the leash of shame. As we head through aisles of the lingerie section, I try to keep my head low and my collar up. Keeping a low profile is very important. I usually bump into other young men in the same situation. Although slightly embarrassed, we nod at each other as a way of saying, "Man, I feel your pain." I love my mom and grandma, but I do not want to be around when they are picking out the latest fashion in granny panties.

After they are finished in that section of the store, Mom and Grandma usually head for either the shoes or the clothes. They often spend hours in these two different departments. Since stores have chairs right next to the dressing rooms, I typically start out by finding a nice place to sit. Mom does not let me bring my Nintendo DS in with me so I normally grab a magazine that is located by the chairs. One can only imagine the number of feminine magazines such as *Vogue* and *Marie Claire* that I have read. After I have read the magazines front to back, I usually go up to grandma with the cutest face I can make and ask, "Grandma, can we go somewhere else?" More often than not I am answered with a yes.

The next nightmare occurs in the men's department. Most people like it when others buy clothes for them, and I am no different. I like getting clothes, but the process I have to go through to get them is horrible. I have perfected a system though that has cut my time in men's departments tremendously. When I get there, I look around for a few items that I like. Once I find a few items that I know will fit, I take them to my mom and grandma and tell about my decisions.

Jeans are one item I try to stay away from. All jeans fit differently and women know this; consequently, I will end up trying them on. Sometimes it seems as though I spend hours in a dressing room trying on jeans. This process can lead to dehydration, starvation, and lack of sleep, so stay clear of the pants section.

Finally the time has come to leave Bergner's. As we leave Bergner's and go out into the mall, my mother always asks me where I want to go. I answer. And then I wait for the question, "Do you have a watch?" If I am going to have any fun, a watch is required. If I don't have a watch, I have to stay with the group.

Although it is a fairly safe place, if you do not keep your wits about you, a mall will eat you up and spit you out. If you follow these steps to surviving the Quincy Mall, you will have a much better time. The keys to survival are to bring certain items for the trip, keep a low profile, avoid the pants section, and, finally, bring a watch.

Jesse Glen Whitaker
Grade 12
Hamilton High School
Hamilton
Elaine Dion, teacher

AM I RIGHT?

Growing up in a town with very little economic, ethnic, or cultural diversity has made it very difficult to live as a minority. Since elementary school I have had to sit in designated areas of the classroom, separated from other students. At sports practices coaches gave me alternate instructions and devised new plays that catered to my special abilities. Peers have always been quick to notice and comment on this *glaring* physical difference between us. But overcoming these obstacles my left-handedness has presented has helped shape the person I am today.

Accounting for only 10% of the population, lefties are technically a minority. Over time, we have had our share of discrimination. During the Salem Witch Trials, a left-handed woman was assumed to be a witch. Many modern day expressions give left-handedness a negative connotation, such as "giving a left-handed compliment," "an idea coming out of left field," or "a dancer with two left feet." Until recently, lefties were forced to become righties. My left-handed mother bowls right-handed, uses scissors right-handed, and plays golf right-handed because specialized left-handed equipment was not available to her when she learned these skills.

Growing up, my parents never discouraged me from predominantly using my left hand, but they were unable to prepare me for life in the right-handed world. In first grade, after an entire spelling test of bumping elbows with my right-handed neighbor, she finally exploded in frustration "Why can't you just use your right hand, are you stupid or something?" I also experienced discrimination in the most important aspect of my life: dance. As a child, I was forced to use my weaker right side in ballet class, making it difficult for me to learn the movements. I watched the other girls tendu

and plié gracefully with their right legs, while I clung to the barre in a desperate attempt to not fall. I was discouraged by my inability to coordinate the movements of my right leg and wished that I *did* have two left feet. However, I did not let this stop me. Through hard work and dedication, I was able to master the techniques—on *both* sides—and to develop my passion into the talent I possess today.

However, for all of the challenges my left-handedness has presented, I would never choose to be right-handed. Being left-handed has shaped my identity in many ways; I am a creative thinker, a visual learner, and a versatile artist. My spatial reasoning skills, controlled by the right side of the brain, have helped me pursue my interests in drawing, painting, and architecture, and have aided me in seeing the application of math in everyday situations. My left-handedness has provided me with many skills, as well as a sense of individuality. So, for all the times I have had to sit in a special desk, teeter awkwardly on my right leg in ballet class, or listen to taunts of being “wrong-handed,” being left out has proven to be the right thing for me.

Chrissy Zicarelli

Grade 12

Lake Forest High School

Lake Forest

Karen Kopriva, teacher

CANYON SWINGING

It was happening. It was really happening! I knew that in a few anxious moments I would be standing on the edge of a platform, away from my parents, harnessed and strapped in, realizing that I wouldn't be able to change my mind. My head was racing and my heart was beating loudly, almost coming out of my chest. Then I heard a man who was about thirty or younger with an Australian accent say my name. He was standing with a harness looking expectantly at me. I walked over to him shakily. Even though I was nervous, I plastered a fake smile on my face. He smiled at me, flashing his white teeth that looked even whiter in contrast to his perfectly tanned skin. He held his hand out, and introduced himself. I cannot recall his name, for I was too caught up in my own nervous thoughts.

He held a harness out to me, suggesting that I should take it and put it on. I took the harness from the man and tried to look more confident than I felt. As I was putting my harness on, I looked around the little platform. There were pictures of people who had jumped, even one of Jack Black. Everybody who had jumped seemed to look happy, or at least had a look on his face telling me that it was worthwhile. Regarding that, I decided to make the best of my experience and think of the unique excitement that was yet to come.

Once my harness was on and tightened, the man asked me which way I would like to jump. I told him that I would like to jump forward. The man said that that was fine with him but informed me that jumping backwards would be less scary. I told him that I would prefer to go forward, because the thought of not being able to see where I was jumping scared me out of my mind.

Finally, I was strapped into all of the cables and everything else that would reassure my safety. There were so many

things that could go wrong, but I pushed those thoughts out of my mind with great effort.

Before I knew it, I was standing on the edge of a platform that was about 400 feet high and stationed on a cliff emerging from a great canyon in Queenstown, New Zealand.

I looked down, more nervous than ever, and I gave myself too much time to think about jumping. I protested to the people manning the device that I was just too scared. Somehow, though, they persuaded me to jump. I looked down, closed my eyes, and jumped!

It took me a few short moments to react. The fresh air was gently whipping my face as I fell. My mouth opened to scream, but no sound came. My voice was sucked right out of me, like a vacuum sucking dust bunnies from the floor. As I was regaining my senses, I looked around. The sky was perfectly blue, deep and pure, with a few cumulus clouds floating peacefully, as if they'd been there forever. The canyon surrounding me was beautiful and natural. Below me I could see the dark blue-green water flowing gently downstream.

Even though my surroundings were peaceful, and I could hear the occasional chirping of a nearby bird, my body was full of exhilaration and energy. My stomach had replaced itself, for it was too stubborn to fall with me, and my face glowed with excitement.

Finally, the drop didn't seem so severe, and I was gracefully swinging through the enormous canyons. Everything was still for a moment; I was the only being in existence. Slowly, my graceful swings came to a stop, and I was pulled up gently, but quickly back to the platform on a large cable.

Once all my gear was taken off and I regained my footing, I was speechless, for what I had just encountered was a feeling of pure joy that I would like to preserve forever.

Elena Zifkin
Grade 6

Edgewood Middle School
Highland Park
Sheila Fitzsimmons, teacher

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

DEADLINE: Postmarked no later than January 31, 2007

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
POETRY AND PROSE ENTRIES

When submitting manuscripts, include a signed statement to read:

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

(Name)	(Title)	(Grade)
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(School)	(Teacher's Signature)
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MAILING: Send prose to: IATE Prose Contest
Kimberly M. Radek
Division of English, Mathematics,
and Education
Illinois Valley Community College
2578 East 350th Road
Oglesby, IL 61348-1099

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