

A landscape painting featuring a hillside covered in vibrant red poppies. A white wooden fence runs diagonally across the scene. The background shows a bright blue sky with wispy white clouds.

Trust In Us



**Podium
HS Zine**

Fall 2018



You cannot be a writer unless you see yourself as one. Each high school program begins with an exploration of ourselves as writers, creators, and communicators. Some work is created by the individual, and some work is a collaborative effort.

Enjoy youth pieces from our partner locations:

**Armstrong HS – ACE
John Marshall HS – JCCE
Thomas Jefferson HS**

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IDENTITIES AND GENDERS

MJ P.L.

THOMAS JEFFERSON HS

Identities and genders are two different things. I think an identity is your mentality, and a gender is something similar, but not the same. An identity is what you have the mental capacity to be, and identifying with a gender can be male, female, or occasionally both. You can switch between genders, and identities change all the time. The concept of identity and gender being different has been a foreign ideology until now but has since become more widespread. A lot of people mock those who identify differently because they don't understand that gender and identity are different things, although they can sometimes intersect. It's all very fluid, changing, and sometimes hard to understand.

That's the problem. No one explains to those who don't understand that identities like gender neutral exist. People who identify as gender neutral aren't saying they're physically neither, but they just don't want to be judged and referred to on a binary. If someone just explained that and spread it around, there would be more understanding.



PISTANTHROPHOBIA

MA'REEsha R.

ARMSTRONG HS

Pistanthropobia.

Lies flowing like wind.

The more lies, the stronger the breeze.

Blowing in our face, blowing to no end.

Getting colder, getting fierce.

Lies can be seen from eyes.

The eyes of coldness, sadness, and fear.

Leaving us with no trust or with guilt.

It hurts to have no trust.

Can't get close to people without assuming,

Leaving us alone and lonely.

Can't believe anything anyone says,

Getting insecure and heartbroken.

Expect anything from anyone.

Closeness can turn into distance, and an

Angel can turn to the devil.

Don't be sad, it's just life.

Live life to the fullest.

Be independent, enjoy fun times,

Make memories, not tears,

Learn, and make life better.

Hardships can turn into masterpieces,

Like caterpillars turn into butterflies.

Be strong and healing will start.

Lies flow like the wind, but

Winds stop at some point.



ENVISION YOUR FUTURE

OLIVIA B.F.

THOMAS JEFFERSON HS

What do you envision in your future? That's not too hard to answer. In my dreams, I envision being a successful business woman. My chauffeur drives me to work every day, where I earn millions of dollars each year. He drives me back to my gorgeous mansion. No need for a white picket fence when I own a hundred acres. My personal chef has my dinner prepared for me as soon as I walk through the door. My kids attend the best private schools in the country. They both want to go to Harvard, but I tell them Yale is also a very suitable option. They never have to struggle for anything the way I did.

And then, I open my eyes. I understand that kind of future will probably be unrealistic for me. And although money is essential to life, life is not about money. Even if I could bring in millions of dollars every year, I wouldn't be able to sleep at night knowing that there are people in the world who don't have homes or food or clothes, while my small family of four is living in a twelve bedroom castle. I might not be able to change the world, but I can change the lives of those around me.

I hope to become a successful business woman who collaborates with several non-profit organizations that give back to communities. I want to help improve the lives of those who need it. So, when it comes to the question, "What do you envision for your future?" I have to stop right there. It isn't just my future that's hanging in the balance here. It's everyone's future. If we wish to move forward as a society, we have to think beyond ourselves. We have to invest in our fellow citizens and work together to create a world where no one has to worry about where their next meal will come from, or where they will be sleeping that night. The future of our world is up to us. We have the power to change the world.



INTO ANOTHER LIFE

CHARLES M.

DOMINION TEC

She's in a hospital room holding her child while her friends and family watch with love, crying tears of joy.

First, you're born. Then, you're taught to speak words and walk. Go to daycare and school to learn subjects and make friends, then puberty and graduation.

Go to college, fall in love, get married, have beautiful children, and take them on vacations, if you have time. As years go by your children leave, but in time, you realize they'll always be in your heart. You're complexion may fall apart, but you will be eternally youthful.

You become elderly and frail in a hospital room. You're at his funeral crying, and in your eyes is sorrow and pain. He says, "Don't be sad or scared, my darlings. I know the pain will go away when I'm in the blanket of heavens."

MENTORSHIP REFLECTION

KAVIN J.

2018 ALUMNI JOHN MARSHALL HS

I am so happy to be at VCU! The diverse atmosphere is very refreshing, especially coming from an area where there isn't a lot of diversity. The whole experience has been a joy. There are still issues I'm going through, and will be for a while, but I enjoy those moments as well. I have been working as a "helper" of sorts at John Marshall High School to help pay my tuition. It's been fun working with my old teachers again. I feel as though people see me as a mentor, but I'm still learning how to not burn everything I cook. I have the natural effect of teaching without knowing, and by working with the JCCE program, I feel like this is my way of giving back to my community.

GUEST

PIECES



HANDLEBARS REY F. OPEN HS

Perfect rows of perfect houses
Like your perfect rows of perfect teeth.
Stealing cigarettes from your father,
We smoke them behind the school.
This youth is golden;
We hold it precious in our hands as we ride
Your bike to the grocery store,
Wobbling as I sit on the handle bars.
Pressed flowers tucked into the lined pages
Of your math notebook,
We've collected them over the years,
Sending postcards from faraway lands.
I'll keep them in the drawer in my chest,
Next to my cellophane heart, and my old, tattered childhood.
One day I'll come back and bury them
With the bones of my first dog.
And one day,
I hope we can be kids again.

BLACK WOMEN DION C. THOMAS JEFFERSON HS

Being a Black woman in this world is hard. We are underestimated. I say this because some people still see us as "house wives," as if we are not capable of doing what the next White lady is doing. I feel like we have to work harder than others. Most Black women I know are discouraged because of where they come from. Encouragement to us is seeing other Black women make it.



POINT OF VIEW AIRHIEZ C. ARMSTRONG HS

I don't want to be someone's point of view. I know people have different perspectives, but sometimes people act like jerks because they are tired. Sometimes they're insecure or jealous of what you have that they don't have. Sometimes, they act like that because they want to show off and be cool. It can also be how their parents raised them, or they might get their power from school.

A lot of people have acted like jerks to me, but I don't put my anger on them because I don't know what they've been through. I've also been a jerk to people, and controlling anger on a very tiring day is hard. You might end up snapping on someone, and apologizing can be hard too. Sometimes, I'm mad and have a tiring day, so I end up not talking to people. I don't want to put my anger on a person who didn't cause it.

WHO I WAS, WHO I AM, AND WHO I WANT TO BE ZACKARY B., ARMSTRONG HS

Who I was: When I was a little one, I had very long hair, but then, I cut it off. I didn't like seeing myself at that point.

Who I am: Right now, I am a teen trying to pursue my dream. Other than that, I get everything I desire in life. I am a blessed person, but there are side effects.

Who I want to be: What I want to be three years from now is a Youtuber, Filmer, or Twitch Streamer. I will live that rich life one day. To do that, I need to get my priorities straight, stay focused, and consistent. It's all in the process.



WHAT MAKES ME WHO I AM NOAH H. ARMSTRONG HS

Nimble, noble,
Well-mannered, and respectful to all.
“Treat others the way you want to be
treated.”

Blood is thicker than water.
“I am who I am.”

You are who you choose to be.
Right and wrong,
knowing that they’re doing it wrong and
wanting to help.
Know the person needs help.
Know how to give and share
knowledge when needed.

HURT WINTAH G. ARMSTRONG HS

I was in a two-year relationship, but I did something wrong and hurt the love of my life. Now, I feel messed up inside because I know I hurt them and made them cry. I just want to make things right, but I can’t because I failed.

YOU MATTER INDIA W. ARMSTRONG HS

I love you!
You matter!
Money is replaceable,
but
Your life isn’t.



TRAPPED MA'REESHA R. ARMSTRONG HS

Trapped.

Stuck like birds in a cage,
Can't stop my feet from sinking.
Nowhere to run, nowhere to turn;
Stop these dark thoughts, stop the pain.

Pain lingers, breaking minds and souls,
Only leaving tears, depression, and death.

Here we are thinking we're alone.
Thinking no one understands us, but
There are a lot of people like us.
Don't feel lonely, we're around.

Some hide it well, and some don't hide it at all.
Some give the best advice, and some give
Great comfort.

No freedom, no light, just dark thoughts.
Devouring every positive thing around,
Eating hope until there is none.

Numbness overpowers the pain.
Feeling nothing but emptiness,
There is no real escape from us.

It keeps coming around each time,
Turning into an endless cycle,
Never getting better, never escaping.

As said, we're just stuck like
Birds in a cage.



BLUE EYES

REY F.

OPEN HS

Baby blue morning glories
Blooming in my chest
Under a bittersweet
Sapphire sky.
My blue hand rests in
yours in the silence.
We've never been here;
We were never so awkward.
If you love me say something
Because everything feels
As if we're chipping like
the light blue paint on my
Fingernails.
We're China dolls growing
Old.
I don't want to let go of
Your porcelain face,
But you hand me a
Bundle of forget-me-
Nots,
And I fall in love with
Your blue eyes all over
Again,
As you leave.



MENTORS FROM JOHN MARSHALL HS REFLECT ON THEIR EXPERIENCES

PEER

KAMREN L.K. JOHN MARSHALL HS

I loved the way that we talked with the kids. It was very cool to see differences in each of them. It was good to see all of the kids talking and playing games, like Vampire. I learned how to communicate with people.

DESHAWN H. JOHN MARSHALL HS

I had fun hanging out with the kids, like when we played games and talked with them. I learned how to be more respectful with others and to wait my turn. Sound Charades was a game we played, and it was really fun.

IYANA L. JOHN MARSHALL HS

I enjoyed mentoring the kids at Henderson Middle School. I liked working with them, and they were easy to interact with. When we played games with them, I felt like they were really enjoying it. In Podium, I learned communication is really important.

MENTORSHIP



WHY I BECAME A MENTOR

KAMERON L.K. AND MARQUISE B.

JOHN MARSHALL HS

PEER

Kameron became a mentor because he loves to help kids with their problems. Kids are the generation of tomorrow, and they are going to help the economy!

Marquise became a peer mentor because he doesn't mind mentoring kids.

TAYONNA B.

JOHN MARSHALL HS

I had a great experience helping with the younger kids. In the game Sound Charades, I let the little girl I was partnered with win because as a mentor, you should be positive with them. I enjoyed seeing the little kids laugh, and I liked communicating with others too. It was a skill I learned in Podium.

MARQUISE B.

JOHN MARSHALL HS

While in Podium, we had a great time at Henderson Middle School. I had fun playing games with the younger kids, and I appreciated their energy and enthusiasm with us older kids. Two Truths and a Lie was amazing, and the game we played called Questions is awesome to play with people of all ages. I advise everyone to interact with Podium after-school 100%.

MENTORSHIP



ME TOO XAVIER A. THOMAS JEFFERSON HS

In a world of foxes, is there really any room for sheep?

So out of place with their curious balls of fur,

In a world of wolves who poke and prod, but a sheep
can't make a peep.

Today is the day those sheep are saying enough.

Foxes aren't the only beasts with a roar.

Sheep are tired of being told they are mere prey.

Now is the time to make a sound and shake the foxes to
the core.

The sheep are roaring their roar, and the foxes better
pray

Because the sheep aren't just seeking justice,

They're reaching out to the docile foxes, and their goal is
just in range.

Now, it's not just the sheep roaring their powerful roar,
Foxes are coming out and screaming too.

The foxes can no longer look at this as a mere chore
Because a change is coming soon, and now they realize
their teachings were untrue.

A social change is more than just foxes, and there are
more of
us than them.

It's about awakening others from their sleep
Because now the future isn't looking as grim.



WRESTLING ARZON C. ARMSTRONG HS

My sister and I, Yazmane, were wrestling.

She punched me, so I punched her.

She told me to jump off, and so I did.

She jumped off, with her elbow first, and I broke my
arm.

I REMEMBER LOST STAR THOMAS JEFFERSON HS

I remember when I first heard those letters.

My father said it was sad they get a voice.

Mother said it was a sign of the end.

I agreed.

I was only a few years over ten and

Had never met an L,

Never spoken to a G, and

B was just impossible, as was T.

I didn't know there were more letters.

I didn't know we both breathed air.

I didn't know what feelings were there.

I heard the same announcement,

Bowed my head in prayer,

And still hurled insults in the same beautiful air.

I look back on my past self

And his opinions of me and you,

Just because he didn't know he was part

Of LGBTQ.



DAD MARIO T. ARMSTRONG HS

I was excited when I found out I could get one of my kids back! I walked into the school building with a smile on my face. When he walked in the guidance office, I knew I should say happy birthday. When I told him, he was speechless and filled with joy, so I took him with me to Norfolk.

TO LITTLE ME ANTHONY A. THOMAS JEFFERSON HS

To little me, thank you and screw you. I was right to dislike you, at least for the most part. I haven't been to the studio in weeks. Rich and still lazy, I carried it with me. 16-year-old writing became several albums. That's 100+ songs to thank you for. You hated yourself then, when you tried to be emotionless. That's my most valuable trait now.

I did a lot of things you wanted to. I got face tattoos and bleached my skin like M.J. I even cut my bones out, pressed and wired them into diamonds. The mental health issues got worse, but that's said with pride. My inspirations overflowing. I'm truly an icon.

THE STORE CAMONTE J. ARMSTRONG HS

One day when I was eight-years-old, I was with my brother. Our grandmother told us to get something from the store, so we walked to the store and searched for it. My brother told me to steal something, so I did. When I went home, I opened the stolen gum. My grandmother asked, "What is that?"

My brother told my grandmother I took it from the store. I got in trouble and was mad at him for a whole week.



FEAR

TAVION W. ARMSTRONG HS

My fear is basically my reality: never finding love, forever being alone, and wasting my life on temporary feelings. I know that I will eventually lose the person I love because they cheat too. This type of fear is bound to happen again and again. My solution is hope. I hope that I will find a wonderful woman with a heart that matches mine. I hope to love someone as much as I want to and can.

Other than that, I am not scared or have a fear to address. At the end of the day, I live my life and with the problems that come from it.

MY FEARS

SHACORIE J. ARMSTRONG HS

My fear is heights. Over the summer, I think I worked on losing this fear. We went on a field trip, and I was on a rope in mid-air. I think I cried three times up there and even thought about giving up, but my friend helped me make it to the end. I always think the worst about everything. It's the same reason why I have never been on a roller coaster. I think it's going to fall off or break in half.

I also have a fear of failing, because I am a lowkey over-achiever. Ever since elementary school, I have always been the smart student, the one who always finishes first. I think if I were to fail something, I would either get upset or start having a breakdown. I've always been like that, and I don't know why.

FEARS

ADDRESSED



TWO DREAMS AND ONE HORROR

TRACY F.

THOMAS JEFFERSON HS

In the future, I will probably have a partner and a Switch with Smash, of course. Imagine the sheer horror. I'm playing Smash and just slumping guys with Ridley, right? I hear the door knock, and low and behold, it's the aforementioned partner.

"Take a seat," I tell her as I smile at her beautiful face. She sits down on my Joy-Con and Pro controller. The sheer force of her behind crushes them into bits. KRKK!!

A single tear falls from my eye as I witness this accidental slaughter. This is my greatest fear.

"....You know you're buying me new ones, right?"

FEAR

DA'MON H., ARMSTRONG HS

To me, fear is something that affects you, nothing else. To be honest, I am not afraid of anything because in life, you just have to deal. To overcome fears are to face them. In my case, there is no point because I just live with it.

REJECTION

ASHANTAY C.

THOMAS JEFFERSON HS

My biggest fear is rejection. Rejection is failure in a way. Being rejected by my crush means that I fail at getting close to him. If I get rejected from a college I applied to, then I fail at getting an education.

I let the fear of rejection get in the way of me winning. I never get the chance to do the things that I want to do, like talk to new people or ask people for things. Rejection is a pretty irrational fear that I've had my entire life, and I'm not sure if it will ever go away.

FEARS

ADDRESSED



JONNA F. ARMSTRONG HS

Dear Family,

I know the war is going on right now, but stay strong and keep your head up. Slavery should be over soon. Then, you and the kids don't have to worry about somebody beating you, but if something bad does happen, take the kids and run. Run far away to the free land. I'm sorry that the master made me go to war, but I'm trying to stay alive and make it home to you.

From,

Your dear husband

**OCTAVIA M., ROESHAWN L.,
SHANESHA B., AND JAVONIA B.
ARMSTRONG HS**

Dear Son,

I had a show last night and the people loved us. It was so cool. I wish you could've seen us. The crowd loved the way we played. I had a solo, and I was so scared.

Anyway, how are you doing in school? And, how's Mom? She told me you're doing very well and holding it down. I have to go. I will talk to you soon.

Love,

Dad

LETTERS TO

LOVED ONES



JAQUAN W. AND JALEEL J. ARMSTRONG HS

Dear Cousin BoBo,

One day, I decided to explore the sea in Hawaii with my friend John. On the way to Hawaii, we ran into a bale tumbling across the road. When we finally arrived, we saw a large group of tourists flocking around the beach, taking pictures. We found a place to park and settled down on the beach to wait for the boat to arrive. After 20 minutes passed, the boat came to take us into the sea. When we arrived at our destination, we put our gear on and dived into the water. As we descended deeper, we saw a large colony of fish swimming around John and I. Then, I noticed spectacular scenery of an anemone bathing in the light of the sun. When we turned around, we saw a scuba diver with a camera.

Sincerely,

Rupert

P.S. We found Nemo!

DAYSHALIYHA G. ARMSTRONG HS

Dear Bae,

Hey. Today I got a job. I think you will like it, but I don't like my boss. He is really mean. He said I have to do all this paperwork, and it's just too much. But, I thank God for a job.

Love,

Bae

LETTERS TO
LOVED ONES



TENEE G., DAMON H., AND TAVION W. ARMSTRONG HS

LETTERS TO
LOVED ONES

Hey Mom,

I had my first performance. I was so, so scared. I wish you were there. You should've seen me! I was the loudest one out there and on point with the beats. Even though I was terrified, I pulled through like the boss I am.

Love,

**SHACORIE J.
ARMSTRONG HS**

Your Son

Dear So-So,

Wow! Down here in the ocean is so intriguing and beautiful. I swam to a lot of places that were super cool. In the images I'm attaching to this letter, I'm swimming in the Oh-So-Amazing ocean. Also, as you can see, I'm swimming past anemones which have a weird but soothing texture. I think I almost saw a million and one fish. Also in the picture, you can see colorful rocks in the background. I really wanted to take a little rock as a souvenir for you, but I didn't know If I could. Next time I go scuba diving, you have to go with me, and I am not taking no for an answer!

Peace,

Shacorie



BANANA MAN LOST STAR, DION C., AND CALVIN W. THOMAS JEFFERSON HS

ALPHABET

POETRY

- A - After a long day, I walked to the park.
- B - Before I left, I ate a banana.
- C - Coincidentally, there were a lot of banana trees.
- D - Down the bananas fell, all at once.
- E - Expediently, they fell onto a nearby sports car.
- F - Frazzled I was as they splat on its hood.
- G - “Great nonexistent God dang it!” I said.
- H - He spoke to me and said, “Shut up!”
- I - I was confused; I’m certain he isn’t real.
- J - Just as soon as I looked at him, he was gone.
- K - Knowing that I wasn’t prone to hallucinations, I strolled off unsettled.
- L - Later that night, I awoke to his voice again.
- M - “Man, why do you keep bothering me?” I said.
- N - Now, what he said next is critical, and not just banana critical.
- O - “On this day, I overslept,” he yawned.
- P - “Potassium is what he needs to stay awake!” I shouted.
- Q - Quickly he filled the room with bananas.
- R - Rapidly they fell; the room was hurriedly tilling.
- S - Suddenly they stopped, leaving the room like a Donkey Kong game.
- T - Thrashing through bananas, I crawled
- U - Under all of the peels.
- V - Very annoyed, I slipped on a peel.
- W - Waking up, I realized it was all a dream, and the sound of
- X - Xylophones filled the room.
- Y - Younger me really loved the xxylophone.
- Z - Zeke, my brother, then came to get me for breakfast.

IN THE POWER OF THE
PEN, EACH OF US HAS A
VOICE!

HAPPY READING!

ARTWORK BY REY F., OPEN HS

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