



Break the Chains

HS Zine Winter '19



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

For printed copies, please contact us at:  
[info@thepodiumfoundation.org](mailto:info@thepodiumfoundation.org)

**Top 5 Tips for New Peer Mentors**  
**Kamren L.K., Deshawn H., Carnashia W.,**  
**Tayonna B., Denaisja J., Khamariyah F., Deyah**  
**J., and Tyemeir G.**  
**John Marshall HS - JCCE**

1. Don't be scared to talk with the kids.
2. Talk with your chest, which means to be confident in what you say.
3. Be kind and always smile.
4. Keep the classroom neat and have enough materials for everyone.
5. Be respectful to all!

**Look in the Mirror**  
**Tracy F.**  
**Thomas Jefferson HS**

Normies and popular waves are dumb.  
You wake up and put on your J's  
Only to realize that hundreds of other people  
Are doing the same.  
Look in the mirror and be you.



## **Guns Have Been Lovely C.C. Huguenot HS**

Guns have been a problem since day one  
Because a gun will be bought before a car seat for a son,  
And the victims that fall are only remembered when their needed like  
the sun when winter has begun.

But what about the ones who have lost a love from a bullet?  
The ones who have been through it?  
Because my dad died before my family's eyes,  
and Eli was lucky enough to make it out alive,  
but he didn't survive,  
and now hundreds of victims are gone for the same crime.

Tell me, can you hear it?  
The sound of justice will prevail!  
Thanks to you our voices are more than sounds of the wind.  
You've moved the hearts of others and  
Your souls are forever justified with each other.  
Let me tell you something, and if you still don't understand,  
then you don't deserve to say you're making America great again.

Imagine a bullet ripping through your father's heart,  
Leaving you in pure shock and  
Forcing you to go into this silence of emotion,  
Wishing it was you who ran out of time on your clock.  
Imagine not seeing your father again, I can't even remember his voice.  
All I hear are the cries and the screams.



IMAGINE INVISIONING THAT EVERY NIGHT IN YOUR DREAMS!

Waking up too afraid to breathe

Because every time you turn around

There is a gun silencing someone's pleads!

Why can't you all see?

We're out here because we all fell victim to these scenes.

Or someone we've loved fell victim to the crimes that you all fund!

You have the power to make America great again,

But all you want to do is cage us all in.

Yes, and I'll say it again. Back in with the discrimination

Our administration is now showing favorites to criminals

Who are fascinated by the imagery of a blood scene.

But I won't rest until someone sees,

I swear America won't sleep until justice screams in victory. Because if  
shooters are the problem,

Why provide more guns to others

When we can eliminate the problem all in one?

Don't say you relate or that you understand

Because you won't until your standing at the casket

Holding the one you love's hand

As they lie dead from a bullet piercing what you thought

Was steel skin, because to you, they were the rock

You always confided in!



The human race is a disgrace  
Because this is the faith some of us chose to take.  
But, those who couldn't choose must suffer and wait  
For you to make matter worse with another speech  
About you targeting each race but your own!  
It's never, "The white kid who shoots the school was wrong."  
It's always, "The immigrants need to leave,  
and the black men needs to listen to the white men."

Let me tell you something, and I bet  
My words are so powerful they'll be put in a song.  
One thing I've learned, the real suspect is the white man  
In public office who never cared for America all along.  
Hate me for telling the truth  
Hate me because to you, I'm wrong.  
But you've told me giving guns to teachers is a better idea  
Than stricter gun laws or banning the weapon completely.

Oh, I see, because without it  
You won't make as much money.  
Fortune is more important than the lives  
And the voices of the ones who became voiceless.

Had enough? Never! My voice will open up a portal  
Revealing that my words are immortal.  
I will stand for those who have suffered.  
I will stand for the rights I have as an American.  
I will stand for the rights I have as a human.  
I stand for those who didn't have a chance at life because of a gun.  
I stand for my peers in agony remembering those who have died.



I shouldn't have to put my words in a rhyme  
For you to understand the significant amount of pain  
That has washed over this country, this world  
Because of a repeated crime.

I will stand for the safety of everyone  
Because if my ego was as big as yours,  
I wouldn't be here right now pleading.

I will not bow. I will not fall to my knees  
Because my peers need me to be  
Strong and stand up to the wrong  
That has fallen over us. Because we are united as one  
And divided by none.

I heard those words and knew justice has won.  
But that's a lie.

He was shot dead, and now everyone's hurting inside.  
Lost in a pain.  
Lost in the veins of our blood  
Was the cure of hatred.  
Because a bullet cannot cure what should have been within;  
Instead, it turns you into a sin.



## **Letter**

**Noah H.**

**Armstrong HS**

Back when I was young, you catered to my every need, regardless of what it was. I loved you. I did a lot to make you happy and sad. There is a lot for you to be praised for because I was getting into a lot of trouble. You were characterized as self-righteous and full of ignorance, which is probably part of the reason why I am who I am as a person. You taught me all you could, and all I can say is thanks until next time. XOXO.

## **You Got The Job**

**Eniyah M.**

**Armstrong High School**

**Sherry:** “Hi. I’m here for the job.”

**Boss:** “Do you have your application?”

**Sherry:** “Yes. Here you go.”

**Mike:** “Hi. I’m here for the job, and here’s my application.”

**Boss:** “Mike, congratulations! You got the job.”





**Concussion  
Deontae B.  
Armstrong HS**

One time last year, during a playoff game when I played for Mosby, we played our rival team. We had one minute left on the clock. It was a tie game, and we needed a stop. Their quarterback said, "Hut," and they scored. There were now 30 seconds left, and they missed the extra point. We ran the kickback and scored instead, but I came out with a concussion.

**Our Trip to Africa  
Ashaunna H., Chandler G., Kamren L.K., Deshawn H., Carnashia W.,  
Tayonna B., and Tashrieal K.  
John Marshall HS - JCCE**

Chandler and his dad were leaders of the most powerful drug cartel in the world. The FBI found out where he was hiding, and arrested Chandler's father. Before he was taken away, his father told Chandler to run away to Africa. His best friend, Kam, agreed to come with him until everything settled in America.

Kam and his moms went to Africa, and they got some supplies. Suddenly, Chandler and Kam were being chased by a dog. Little did they know that dog was also part of the  
FBI . . .

They left Africa the next day.



## How to Kill a God

Rey F.

Open HS

Maggots chewing through the sorrow skin of the dead god  
gnawing through bone and cartilage with white mouths  
burrowing into sweet marrow  
ever going the unholy cycle of love and loss.

They had given up the white light of Ether.  
They had given up their many hands,  
their many eyes,  
their many voices, and thoughts  
all for a tiny speck of a mind  
floating through everyday unconsciousness.  
The cloud, the pillar of fire  
fell to Earth in a kaleidoscope of light and heat.

The god tried to reach the speck,  
now bigger from this new, human perspective,  
but the chain grew wider and wider.  
Finding out how to love proved difficult for the god.  
They watched it grow,  
and they watched it die.  
The moon's gravitation pulls in the sea,  
overflowing, flooding  
onto thin cloth.



The god grew old,  
and here they lay  
in a wasteland of desert and machinery  
with only maggots to keep them company,  
wriggling  
through the dead memories of love.

Here's one.

**Glass Between Us**  
**Mario T.**  
**Armstrong HS**

There is only glass between us,  
And you still don't see my love for  
you.

I do everything for you,  
But you see nothing.

Every time you cry, I am here,  
And every time I cry, I'm alone.

I give you my whole heart,  
And you just throw it away.

Sometimes, I think I should leave,  
Or should I stay?

I wonder what is happy.  
Would you even know my love  
has gone away?



**A 16 Year Old's Rant**  
**Christopher O.**  
**Thomas Jefferson HS**

Modern humans don't really value anything.  
Everything, nowadays, has to have the most bling,  
Not just jewelry or materials that shine  
The phones, clothes, or even those who look breathtakingly fine.  
When a serious conversation is brought up or thought about,  
We change that conversation's route  
Because not everyone's mind is on a thinking level  
They've been hypnotized by the physical  
So they can cast aside with doubt.

They don't think we can change  
That this world is deranged,  
Cold, and heartless, and it will forever be the same.  
Your or me; this or that.  
Friend or foe; White or Black.  
It's diversity, but the percussion of this  
Is what brings us down. I wish I was speaking of bias  
Opinion, but that's the fact, diversity in power causes wars  
That destroys families from shore to shore.  
Diversity in personalities  
Ends up bullying for these formalities,  
Which kills people, personally, from the inside.



In all reality, we were born with eyes, yet very few can see.  
Love is a game, and people who trick other's hearts are so cold.  
Everyone should walk around with a shudder,  
Have the audacity to lie and put it on your mother.  
What makes it worse is that people are this way  
Because once they were the victims, and it's sad to say  
Then, they adapt to this mentality  
And treat someone else this way,  
And the cycle spins another day.

If we banded together, we wouldn't have to worry  
about watching our backs. Bonds aren't severed  
When everyone is on the same page.  
There would be no neck pains from looking up  
Or talking down to someone  
Because the field has been leveled.

Kids, nowadays, we don't see all that parents do,  
The hard decisions, hard work, but we notice  
When they didn't get those shoes, or a phone that's new.  
We get mad when we get punished for wrong,  
Like we are going to ignore what we did all along,  
And have the audacity to try and sing the innocent song.



But, parents are on the idiocy too,  
They don't respect us and all we go through.  
We get stressed, overwhelmed,  
Try to keep a social life and school in check,  
Sometime at both we fail,  
But they won't see that or ask why.

Sit down and care about what's going on inside,  
And notice some of us can be a little wise.  
People need to see with another's eyes.  
Let some heat out and vent;  
I hope my message was well sent.  
Minds understood is what I meant  
But for some, even if I didn't title this,  
It would've been titled from society,  
A 16 year old's rant.



# ***Mentorship Reflections***

***Alumni reflect on their experiences. Both AJ and Kavin have come back to Podium after graduation to serve as Program Mentors***

## **Mentorship Reflection**

**AJ G.**

**2017 Alum of Armstrong HS**

Podium RVA has been a part of my life since I was a freshman at Armstrong High School. I graduated in 2017. What started as just an after-school program turned into a space where I could express myself comfortably. And if I had never joined, I'd still be a timid version of myself.

Now that I am older, I believe other youth need the same opportunities I did, to have an outlet where they aren't judged. While I was in Podium, I'd tell short stories, read my journal entries, or just say whatever was on my mind. Now, I come back to Armstrong and help high schoolers find the voice they didn't know they had. I feel like I really connect with whoever I'm mentoring and vice versa, that they connect with me. The situations they're going through I've experienced, most of the time, and I can help them out. Podium has had an impact on my professional career goals because I've always wanted to mentor those younger than me. I love being someone they can really relate to.



# ***Mentorship Reflections***

## **Mentorship Reflection**

**Kavin J.**

**2018 Alum of John Marshall HS**

My name is Kavin, and I have been a part of Podium since my freshman year at John Marshall High School. Podium is a program that I'm so happy to have found and grown to be a part of during that period of my life. What this program does is truly amazing and has made me both a better person and storyteller. Podium mentors encourage outward thinking and to embrace all parts of ourselves through our writing. Whether you write poetry or short stories, they help you improve upon it in some way that feels natural and welcoming.

Podium and the mentors that work there are some of the most creative and encouraging people I've ever met. They provide constructive criticism and can always prove to you that you have the skills to do anything you didn't think you could do. I really feel at home when I'm here because I can be as creative as I want while having fun writing the stories that flow from my streams of consciousness. Podium helped me reach my authentic self, and that's something I will always appreciate about what they do.

I am currently a freshman at Virginia Commonwealth University. I study Mass Communications while interning and mentoring for Podium. What makes a good mentor for any program is the feeling that you've impacted someone's life, and I feel like I get that every time I mentor with Podium. There's something very open about writing that makes it easy to connect with a person on their level and share experiences with. That way, you can help guide youth in the right direction in life, one that's best suited for them.





**Prism**  
**Rey F.**  
**Open HS**

You stabbed me in the heart with a glass sword.  
I tried to pull it out, but the quick-silver blade broke off in my blue hands.  
The sharp synth of it braking, blood pooling  
I fell into myself, crumbling like paper.

Ectoplasmic phantom of hazy, yellow tones  
You ruled my world with your pretty hands.  
Cold to the touch but still beautiful,  
You were made of every kind of light.  
Burning my skin, turning my bones to crystal  
Purifying me.  
I hold the afterthought of you,  
Cradling it like a responsibility.

In a sense, the sword was a stain  
A memory for me to try to drown at 3 a.m.  
When all I can think about is you  
Only to come up gagging,  
Gasping for you, over and over.  
I lost things in that.

I hold the handle in my hand now  
While you stand there staring, waiting.  
How could a creature so beautiful be so dangerous?  
I wrap my hands around the glass still embedded in my chest and begin to  
turn.  
A click,  
And water comes pouring out.



## **Letter to a Friend**

**Eniyah M.**

**Armstrong HS**

Dear Kayla,

You are a good friend and help me through a lot of my problems. I thank you for always being there for me when I need you the most. Even when I don't want to talk about things, I always feel comfortable talking to you, and I love you for that. I love you for everything you do for me. I want you to know that you mean the world to me. I know good friends are hard to find, and when they come around, you keep them. You are the definition of a good friend.

Love,

Eniyah

## **Letter to a Friend**

**Kayla J.**

**Armstrong HS**

Dear Bagel,

Thank you so much for being there for me when I was at my worst. Thank you for sticking with me through it all. Thank you for helping me while I was going through rough times. You have been there for me ever since the first day we met, and I really appreciate you for everything that you've done and for being an amazing friend. You're my sister, like family. That's what I consider you, considering all that we have been through. I love you Bagel!

Sincerely,

Kayla



## A Short Story

Capri R.

Armstrong HS

“Shhhhh...” a distant voice said. “I think she’s walking up.”

Alex cracked her eyes open, allowing them to adjust to her blurred vision. Once adjusted, she tried sitting up. “Woah there!”

Alex looked over to the person speaking. “W-Where am I? What happened?” Alex spoke in a startled yet defensive tone.

“Don’t worry. You’re perfectly fine.” The stranger smiled warmly.

“That didn’t answer my question.” Alex scowled. The young woman sighed quietly. She reached over and picked up a bowl with a sweet smelling paste. “What is that?”

“It’s porridge. My special recipe of honey and peach porridge.” She placed the bowl on Alex’s lap. Alex hesitantly took the bowl and sipped on the spoon. “So, what’s your name?” The lady grinned.

“Alexandrea. Most just call me Alex.”

“That’s a really pretty name.”

She spoke back in a soft tone. “My name is Catherine.”

Catherine was a petite, young woman with bleach blonde hair and skin as pale as snow. But, her most noticeable feature, her grass green eyes with golden flakes.

“So, uh, Catherine? Where am I?”



Catherine fiddled with her flowery dress. “Well, I was going for my usual supply run. I walked by a tree, looked up, and saw you bloody, and that child shaking like a leaf in fall.”

“Benny?” Alex questioned. “Where’s Benny?”

Catherine giggled under her breathe, “Don’t worry about your son. Poor thing wouldn’t stop shaking and calling for you. I had to ask my daughters to take of him while I’m here with you.”

Alex sighed in relief as she feel on the bed. “He’s such a sweetheart. When I tried to give him food, he wouldn’t eat unless he was sure you would. He seemed pretty young to worry about that.”

“He’s only three,” Alex chuckled. “He can’t really walk or talk yet, so I just carry him around.”

## **Tolerance**

**Da’mon H. and Essence M.  
Armstrong HS**

Tolerance is what we often forget that we have. It is something we are told to deal with, then push to the back of our heads. Tolerance is a 9-letter word that we can just throw away. How can you have a word with such power that seems very small? T-O-L-E-R-A-N-C-E has so much power. You have the right to put up with anything. We don’t always have to just deal with it. Instead, we can take a stand.



## **A Discussion with My Past and Future Selves**

### **Lost Star**

#### **Thomas Jefferson HS**

Okay Go! Say all your feelings! Use your words!

. . . Or, not.

Come on, you need to say them.

You'll lose her. You can't.

That's what you're afraid of, isn't it?

That's the opposite of what you used to say.

You used to say confessing would get you nowhere,  
that you couldn't get in the way of them.

Now, nothing is in your way,  
and sure, those feelings are stronger,  
but that isn't a problem. Just find your  
words and go for it!

Even if you have to fall into a pitfall, go for it.

Stumble over your every thought and clarify later.

We both know you can do this. Now, what  
do you have to say?

"I love you, more than anything, more than  
ever before. I don't know what will happen,  
but with you, I can overcome it."

### **Acceptance**

**Shaquita E., Eliza M., Remar Y., and Tykia D.**

#### **Armstrong HS**

**All people are valued!**

**Christians aren't higher than other religions.**

**Charity is an option, and**

**Equality is the first priority!**

**Perspectives of different opinions create**

**Thoughtfulness.**



## True Family

Maryjane P.L.

Thomas Jefferson HS

There's family, and then, there are people you're related to.

There's a very important difference.

Family are they people you die for, the people you would lie for.

The people you're related to, they're just there.

You share blood, but not much more.

Family is bound in ways where the knots tying them seems random,

But it all makes sense in certain moments.

In times of greatness, like great joy or grief,

Or in those random in-between times.

Like basking in a summer haze,

Or brawling against a stinging winter breeze, but together.

At some point you just know who these people are.

The lines just appear, almost solid enough to see.

I found stronger knots and ties at school

Than I ever found at home, other than in my sisters.

Family isn't just people you would die for,

It's also people you would live for.

In those hard moments where everything fades away,

And you feel so alone that you're physically cold,

True family can pull you out of those moments.



# ***Headline News***

**“Anime Haven No longer a Safe Haven”**

**Anthony A.**

**Thomas Jefferson HS**

Anime Haven has shut down! This awful calamity has shaken millions. And right after, there was a massive yarn shortage. The shortage was caused by none other than the infamous con-artist himself, Soulja Boy. The Soulja Watch founder has been credited with the break of war. The unnamed war is said to include The Battle of the Big and the Bigger. Our source Soulja Boy claims, “The battle has lasted for eons, you feel me? It’s had a huge comeback, bigger than Tyga. No one’s was bigger than Big Soulja, though.” But, why did Anime Haven shut down? Sources say it was caused by the Illuminati, run by Adolf Hitler, which retaliated against the beloved website. This gained the attention of Abraham Lincoln, the 16th US President. He believes this to be a tragedy with recent tweet, “Darn.” We do believe all conflict could have been avoided with the aid of Spider-Man.



## **“Possible 9/11 Con Artist Challenges Grilled Cheese Duel”**

**Ashantay C.**

**Thomas Jefferson HS**

The man that is conspired to be behind 9-11, who was also the 43rd US President, George W. Bush, challenged the world’s most beloved twinkie icon, The Minion, into a grilled cheese fight in front of The World Trade Center. “He ain’t want no smoke, I’ll fold him,” says Bush. This fuel between Bush and Minion have blown up online for the past few days, but no response has yet to come from Minion. Online trolls have posted memes of two minions in the shape of The Twin Towers with grilled cheese flying towards them. According to sources, Minion has posted fire, bomb, and gun emojis under Bush’s Instagram posts, but there is yet to be a concluding response.

## **"President Barack Obama Knife Fights Roid Mickey"**

**Xavier A.**

**Thomas Jefferson HS**

Yesterday evening, footage was leaked of everyone’s favorite President engaging in deadly combat with Roid Mickey. At exactly 4:56pm yesterday, footage was leaked onto Twitter depicting a fierce battle between President Barack Obama and Roid Mickey. This fight took the internet by storm! The hashtags #Baracked and #PepperJackMickey have been trending since the initial upload of the battle. Our leading knifeologists have a few opinions. “I love our man Barack, but as we see it, his knife and form are vastly inferior. He’s dead meat,” says Rupert Chadwin. In opposition to this statement, Hillary Clinton exclaimed, “Barack is a good man who won’t give in. Even in a hopeless situation, he will prevail.” We believe she’s lost her marbles because our professionals are the best in the business. Though we don’t currently have all the details of their epic battle, it is our duty as journalists to keep you updated. Stay tuned!





# ***Advice Columns***

## **Speaking Your True Feelings**

**Daniel F. and Traquan J.**

**Armstrong HS**

*Dear Logan,*

I'm having trouble in school. There's this girl I like, and we have been talking for a while. We have a lot in common, but just as I was about to tell her how I feel, she ended up getting a boyfriend. I still want to be her friend since she's good company, but I can't get rid of these feelings. What do I do? -- *Dana*

*Dear Dana,*

Life is too short. Live it to the fullest. Tell that girl how you feel. You may be rejected, or you may not, but holding it in will make it harder. Start off, however, by giving yourself space from her. – *Logan*

## **To Teens Wanting to Commit Suicide**

**LaQuan C., Tykia D., Jameshia R., and Eliza M.**

**Armstrong HS**

To whom it may concern,

I have advice to the young teens who try to commit suicide. Suicide is not the answer. People love you, and it's okay to talk with someone. It'll get better soon because it is all in God's plan, or the one you look up to.



**Life Advice for Everything**  
**DaMariana Y. and Larry G.**  
**Armstrong HS**

Dear Lost One,

I'm here to give you advice on everything. We're going to start with having friends and/or associates. If anyone has enough power to change you in a negative way, you shouldn't be friends with them. Personally, I feel like if you can let someone change you, then you might be too vulnerable. Nobody should ever have that much power over you, and it's the same with relationships. If you start changing because of someone, you shouldn't be with them.

Deeper into relationships, my motto is, *Communication is Key*. If you're in a relationship with no communication, that's not a relationship. That's like having a friend who you don't talk to. That's not a friend.

Off of relationships, your personal life is next. Anything you go through, you shouldn't keep it bottled in. You need to find one person you can trust and talk with. Me personally, I have Nahdia. I tell her everything. She's like my diary in human form. One day, you'll find a Nahdia. And when you do, keep her, and she'll help you succeed in life. That should always be your life goal. To succeed in life, or to at least strive for success. Of course, you'll hit rock bottom and have some rough patches, but your goal should be success.



**On Body Image**  
**Miranda R. and Ashantay C.**  
**Thomas Jefferson HS**

*Dear Dr. Rishanda,*

I feel like my body image is getting worse. I try to lose weight, but I don't have access to healthier foods or space to exercise. My clothes are getting smaller, and kids laugh at me in school and gym. When I'm in dressing rooms, I feel insecure because it's almost like these clothes aren't made for me. Everyone around me is getting into relationships, but no one finds me attractive. Valentine's Day is coming up, and I am feeling a lot of pressure. I like someone who is way thinner than me, so they probably have higher standards. When I go on social media, I see all of these "perfect" people, and when they post, they get comments about how beautiful they are. But, when I post, I'm bullied and made fun of. I'd appreciate any advice.

*Sincerely,*  
*Anonymous HS Student*

*Dear Anonymous HS Student,*

I'm sure that you are a wonderful person. You don't need all of this negative stigma in your life. I suggest that you unfollow the people that make you feel insecure. That should help in some ways. Follow more body positivity blogs and people who look more like you. Don't worry about a relationship right now. You're only in high school. Your entire life is ahead of you, and there is someone out there who will love for who you are and not what you look like. Try to talk with a counselor or trusted adult about the bullying. For the dressing rooms, find out which stores have clothes that are for you and clothes that you feel comfortable in. I really hope this helps. Stay strong and remember that you are beautiful.

*Sincerely,*  
*Dr. Rishanda*





# **IN THE POWER OF THE PEN . . .**

**Each of us has a creative voice!**

## **HAPPY READING!**

**Artwork by: Sting, TJHS**



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