

The cover features a vibrant, multi-colored background with a gradient from purple at the top to teal at the bottom. Two dark palm trees are silhouetted against the sky, with a large, glowing circular shape resembling a sun or moon in the upper right. The title is centered in a large, white, sans-serif font. At the bottom, there are stylized, layered waves in shades of teal and blue.

# Podium's Summer 2021 Zine

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**Back Once Again**

***You cannot be a writer unless you see yourself as one. Each summer 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 among several people.***

***Enjoy youth pieces from Podium partners at:***

- 1. MLK Middle School with NextUp RVA**
- 2. River City Middle School with NextUp RVA**
- 3. Partnership for the Future**
- 4. Southside Metro Richmond Boys & Girls Club**

## **Self-Acceptance**

**Jonathan B.**

**MLK MS**

Once, a leopard was born with spots he loved a lot,  
but his friends did not.

He was shunned and kicked out of his pack.

Left cold and searching for a snack.

When he found a spotted frog, it gave him some advice,

“Learn to love your spots. They make you look nice.”

So the leopard listened and flaunted his spots.

His friends begged him to come rejoin the pack,  
but the leopard did not and showed them his back.

# **Affirmations**

**\* Providing support and encouragement to oneself. \***

## **Self-Acceptance**

**Keily R.S.**

**River City MS**

I love myself because I accept myself unconditionally.

Today, I forgive myself because I'm still me.

Today, I feel happy I'm alive.

## **Self-Love**

**Lauryn B.**

**MLK MS**

I love myself today because I should. No bullies or anybody should get the best of me. At. All. Love yourself before you try to love anybody else. I forgive myself today because I didn't do as well on my test as I usually do.

Something good I've done for myself is that I've done tons of thinking about how to be a better person, and it's working. I'm working to be a better person because I've gotten to be rude and heartless because of bullies. They've worn me out. Stuff happens as a kid that you can't erase, and it makes you keep your feelings bottled up.

## **Self-Accomplishments**

**Zion L.  
MLK MS**

I am conversing more with classmates.

I wasn't as talkative on my first day.

I am happy because it's almost Thursday.

I started to eat more instead of sleeping off the hunger, and I am glad I did it.

## **Proud of Myself**

**Tyonna S.  
River City MS**

I love myself today because I'm about to drive soon. Today, I also forgive myself for being lazy. I am feeling good because I saw a lot of my friends. Some I didn't recognize, and some I did. Something good I did for myself recently was play soccer, and it was really fun!

**All Good  
LaRon T.  
River City MS**

I love myself because I'm nice.

I forgive myself if I say a bad word.

I feel calm because it's a calm day.

Something good I do for myself is to take care of myself and sleep.

**Confident  
Jas'Lyne R.  
MLK MS**

I love myself because I am being me in each and every way,  
From my outfit all the way to my attitude.  
Something I did for me was to buy myself some crocs.

**Myself  
Kemari M.  
River City MS**

I love myself because I was born.  
I forgive because I was trying too hard.  
I'm feeling good because, why not?  
Something good I did was to help others out.

**Self-Care  
Lynayah S.  
MLK MS**

Today, I forgive myself for kind-of being toxic towards my old friends, and for giving up on things I try hard on. I also forgive myself for being "sensitive" because of not finding a "joke" funny. I recently did something good for myself by getting rest.

**Progress  
La'Mya M.  
MLK MS**

I love myself today because of my hair, and I slept well.  
I forgive myself for missing the bus.  
I feel like I'm getting talked about.  
Something good I did for myself today was that I got up for school.

**Satisfied  
Aaminah J.  
MLK MS**

I love myself because I look cute.  
Today I forgive myself because I didn't try as hard.  
I am proud because I finished the day.  
Something good I did for myself today is got work done.

**Just Being Me  
Kahron H.  
MLK MS**

I love myself today because of who I am.  
People probably talked trash about me today,  
and I just walked it off.  
I am feeling great today.  
Something good I did for myself was that I stood up for myself and  
was brave.

# TRY IT: Write your own self affirmations

**Affirmations make you feel good about being you. Try writing a few of your own out below, and whenever you feel sad or blue, pull them out to remind you how awesome you truly are!**

I love myself because \_\_\_\_\_

I forgive myself because \_\_\_\_\_

Today, I am \_\_\_\_\_

Something good I did for myself is \_\_\_\_\_

My own affirmation: \_\_\_\_\_

# The Weekly Word

**Extra! Extra! Read all about it! Check out these articles, reviews, and interviews conducted by student reporters from the Southside Metro Richmond Boys & Girls Club!**

## **Interviews: Personality Spotlights**

### ***Business Section***

#### **Entrepreneurship By Devyn H.**

This article on business is about Aiden. This past week, he has been working on creating logos and marketing. His favorite part has been making the logos. In the future, he wants to make a gaming business. Making logos is important because it makes people want to shop at stores or buy the product. The Boys and Girls Club teaches marketing because it values teaching kids how to make their own businesses.

### ***Sports***

#### **Badges for Baseball By Maliyah A.**

Jarel has been doing Badges for Baseball. He has been playing baseball and learning from his coaches who are also police officers. He has learned from them how to be a good leader, about teamwork, and sportsmanship. In the future, Jarel plans to complete college. 10-years from now, he sees himself having finished school, getting a job, and buying his own house.



## ***Current Events***

### **GoLead**

**By Jada M.**

For current events, I interviewed Taylor. Taylor has been collecting water bottles and making a garden. She thinks that helping the homeless is an important current issue. Taylor has been working on three big projects and five smaller projects this summer. Taylor's favorite part of the club is serving brunch. In 10-years, Taylor sees herself being a doctor because she likes to help people.

## ***The Inside Scoop***

### **Interviewing Tiana**

**By Maliyah A.**

Tiana is so cool. She is a nine-year-old girl who lives in Richmond, Virginia. She has four sisters, and she lives with her mom. As a fifth grader, she likes to have fun and play! She is the best and is great about being a good person. I hung out with Tiana today, at 10:52 am on July 20th, 2021. Tiana wants to continue to be a good person and help others.

## **Review Articles**

### **My Favorite Things**

**Jada M.**

My favorite games are Minecraft and Fortnite. My favorite drink is water, orange juice, apple juice, and milk. I like to listen to Rewrite the Stars. I would rate all 5 out of 5 stars.

**SZA**  
**Devyn H.**

SZA - 5 stars out of 5. SZA is a Pop and R&B artist. I rate her 5 out of 5 stars because she makes good music. Also, she's one of the most unproblematic artists out there.

**Fortnite**  
**Tiana J.**

Fortnite is a video game that you can play on PlayStation 5, Xbox, and many other game consoles. It is a good game. I always play Fortnite on my Xbox with my white controller, and my sister plays it with our other sister. My other sister plays Fortnite on her PlayStation 4, and my brother plays with his friends on his PlayStation 4 too. With everyone playing it, I will rate this game 5 out 5 stars.

**Fortnite**  
**Maliyah A.**

Fortnite is my favorite game. It is so fun; I just love it! I rate it 5 out of 5 stars. I play it on the PlayStation 4 with my red controller, and my brother plays with me too. Everyday, I play Fortnite until I fall asleep. Sometimes I play with my friends, and we all have so much fun.

# Personal Memoirs & Earliest Memories

\* A significant moment in someone's life. \*

Enjoy reflections by teen writers at Partnership for the Future.

**Bittersweet**  
**Cindy M.A.**

I remember when I made a friend a long time ago. He was very kind, but then he left all of a sudden, and I didn't get to see him for years. He didn't tell me he was going to leave or anything. I did kind of feel alone at the time because he was my first friend at church. The important thing is that I got to see him again after years, and he's still very kind.

At the time, I wished he could've stayed longer and played, but I also wished I could've stayed in contact with him. He's one year older, but he was still my best friend back in that time. I feel like he forgot the fun we had. No, we can't have much fun anymore because we're a bit older and we have important things to think of. Even though we don't have much time, I enjoy the bit of time we have. Maybe he forgot how much fun we had back then, but I won't because when I was a kid, it was the most fun I ever had.

**My Earliest Memory**  
**Alijah N.**

My earliest memory involves my grandmother. I used to live in her basement with my mother, but we moved out after a few years. I remember watching non-cable tv shows on Nickelodeon and PBS Kids. I also remember an old radio in a corner that I tried to get working. After we moved out, I never went a day without visiting. I would spend days at a time over there because I was so attached to my grandmother. I don't remember what she was like, but I'm pretty sure I saw her as my mother-figure.

## **Polly**

### **Julian M.**

It started as just a normal day. The sun is shining, the earth spinning, and the sky is clear. A calm before the storm. I am sitting in bed, oblivious and using my laptop.

My mom is standing at the foot of my bed, and I can already sense that something is amiss. I can see it on her face, hear it in the quiet, “I love you.” My heart has already dropped with those three words. The kicker: “Polly is dead.”

Now I’m really paying attention. I set my device aside. I must have misheard, or maybe that was some sick sort of joke. “What?” I ask as the anxiety begins to rise.

“Polly got hit by a car. I’m sorry, I love you,” my mother repeats, adding condolences to control the damage.

In an instant, I’m on my feet, rushing down the stairs, and bursting out of the front door. The world is a blur around me, a sea of colors in which I fight not to drown. I’m losing.

On the vividly green grass of the front lawn lies my Polly. A tiny creature that somehow meant the world to me, so unique and special, unmoving on the ground. I blink, and I’m on my knees, hunched over her body as tears gush out of my eyes like rivers. I blubber nonsensically, like a man deranged, pleading for her to wake up like a scene you’d see in a movie.

Unfortunately, reality’s the most unforgiving movie. She does not move. Doesn’t make a sound. In my arms, she’s horribly, awfully limp. Her beautiful eyes now clouded with death. Blood trickles from her broken jaws, and I cry harder still. Her gorgeous, mismatched fur was like the coats of many cats stitched together in an amazing combination of patterns and colors.

I can’t weep forever though. Polly is placed in a shallow grave, coupled with a mouse caught by my other cat; a parting gift, even though they never got along. Polly is covered with earth, taking the gift with her. My last words to her, one of my closest companions, had been to “go away.” I got what I wanted at that moment. Now she is really, truly gone. I wish I’d never said those words.

## **Earning My Merit Badge**

### **Ethan C.**

I was at a summer camp with my Boy Scout troop. We were going around the stations learning and doing different things. I was at the Crime Prevention Merit badge station. The counselor there taught us about different police tools and general knowledge about crime prevention. I was fascinated with hearing about it and especially enjoyed finger printing.

Then the counselor went over what-to-do situations in case of emergencies. I never really liked talking about those types of situations. After that, we came up to the counselor to get signed off for the badge.

## **Spanish Class**

### **James B.**

It's the first day of freshman year and the bell rings loudly as I walk in. I find the nearest open desk to me, and the teacher says, "Gracias". My heart starts to beat faster and the hairs on my arm start to stand up as the A.C. blows onto me. I quickly realized that I stepped into my Spanish class. I remember thinking to myself, "Oh no! Last year I didn't learn anything!"

The class starts, and the teacher begins to introduce himself. "Hola. My name is Sr. Marshall." Everyone looked tired and unenthusiastic about what he was saying. A few minutes go by, and we start an activity. I get really nervous because I don't know any Spanish, so I continue to raise my hand and let him know, I don't know any Spanish. He tells me it's ok and that we'll get through it together. The rest of the year I did fine and got a B average in Spanish. From this experience, I learned that you shouldn't stress about a situation before you even go into it.

## **The Meet**

### **Kayla W.**

An important event for me was in the eighth grade when I got "Best All-Around Female Track Star" at my track meet. At first, nobody thought that I was going to get it, including myself. Everyone thought I wasn't going to do well because I didn't do the warm-ups. I did my races, and then at the end, I was announced to get the mini trophy. It was a very hard meet. My body was sore, and I felt tired, but it all paid off.

## **Earliest Memory**

**Sueza K.**

I don't know how I didn't get tired of it. I sat on the old forest green couch in the living room, waiting for the Elmo DVD to replay. I stared blankly at the old, boxy TV as the characters repeated words I had heard many times. The fuzzy screen flickered in the dim room as I lay next to my brother, who was getting sick of Elmo. He was only one, so my mom sensed this and took him to his crib. I was only two, but I probably should've shut off the TV because I didn't need to watch Elmo explain numbers for the tenth time. I passed that.

## **My Mom**

**Special S.**

When my mom passed away, that was a big impact on my life. It changed me for the better, but it also challenged me to be strong when I felt I couldn't. With this, I had to learn that I would never have certain experiences. I felt alone at times, and I even wanted to leave to be with my mom. I knew I had to be strong for my sister, and with this, I knew my mom would be so proud of every accomplishment I've ever achieved. With all I do, I make it my business to make my mother proud. I will forever let her live through me. Of course, some days are better or worse than others, but I am doing a lot better than before. Sometimes, I feel alone knowing she's never coming back, but I know she watches over me.

## **Earliest Memory**

**Elijah I.**

My earliest memory was short but one of my happiest. It began on one of the sunniest, brightest days I have ever witnessed. My mom was downstairs when I woke up, already preparing oatmeal for breakfast. I turned on the TV to watch my favorite show, Franklin. As the episode ended, my mom finished breakfast. I had canned pears along with my oatmeal, and it was extremely delicious.

After breakfast, my mom presented me with a surprise. She got me a kite! Being three years old, I was really excited. We tried the kite outside, and even though it was not windy, I still had a lot of fun with it. Afterwards, we had a picnic outside on a light green blanket. I can't remember what we ate, but I know it was a fun time.

## **The Scar**

### **Jayla H.**

In the fourth grade, I was playing with my friends outside. There were four of us including me and my sister, and it was hot too, so we were already outside for a while. All four of us were downhill, and we wanted to race each other to Alberto's house. I wanted to win, so I went through the backyards instead of the front yards.

While I was running, I tripped behind my friend's cousin's old house. I didn't notice the glass until after I fell, but I wasn't in any pain, so I thought I was alright. I walked over to my friends and sister. While we were talking, my friend Quinten noticed blood on my elbow, so I looked and saw a deep cut that was at least 6 inches long.

Then, I walked down the hill with my sister to tell my mom. The entire time, I was just feeling surprised instead of in pain. I was never actually in pain; I was just scared to get stitches. Long story short, I never got stitches. Now, I still have the scar, but it's got smaller over time.

## **Memoir**

### **Emerald R.**

It was very dark and rainy, and all you could hear was the constant tapping of raindrops on the glass. My brother and sister were next to me, and my mom was in front of me. This day was very unexpected considering she was perfectly fine two days before. Obviously, when you're truly sad your eyes get blurry and cloudy from tears; although, in that moment, I felt nothing. Blank. "Emerald, do you want to say bye," my mom asked. I didn't.

I sat in silence in front of a TV with no signal. In all honesty, I wanted to say something, but I couldn't. The person who raised me was dying, and I was watching it through a screen. I knew she was ready to go, and she knew how I felt. The impact of my grandma's death still hits hard because it happened this May. I love you.

## **My Voice**

### **Carina G.**

I was born, kicking and screaming, but no voice came out. I had no way of speaking, no communication due to abnormal air in my vocal cords. I had to learn to use sign language once I turned four, but struggled to learn, so I had to use a communication board instead. Once I turned six, I finally had a procedure done to fix my airway and vocal cords. The only thing was the sound. My voice was never going to change once I hit puberty, and I will continue to have procedures to make my voice stronger. I had to go to speech therapy and other classes to compensate for lost time.

## **Family Reunions**

### **Mariama S.**

It makes me happy that my family is close enough to have big family reunions once or twice a month. It shows me that family is important and should come first. Our family is big and close, and I love that we are happy and loving.

I have another one tomorrow. We have family coming from Chicago, Atlanta, and Vermont, all to show how close and loving we are. I'm glad we all can express our love for one another. We cherish each other more and more when we see each other. Our characteristics are shown in family games, dances, even speeches. I'm so glad to be a part of a big family!

## **The Day School was Over**

### **Christian B.**

“Two weeks out.” All my fellow students cheered instantly as we were let out for a supposed fortnight. School was becoming heavy as the world panicked and grew sick. I was surely relieved, as I needed a break, not only from my peers, but from the workload. My improvised time off was at first sweet. It was refreshing to have myself regenerate mentally as well as physically; however, it quickly turned bitter after a month of impromptu isolation. I should have prepared for an extension, but no one could have prepared for what the world faced in the next year.



## **New Experiences**

### **Madisyn W.**

When I got the news that my first year of high school (ninth grade) was virtual, I felt as if I wasn't ready. Coming from middle school, you would always imagine and dream of that first year: stepping into a new beginning with better outcomes when going to high school. So when reality came, I started stressing about what I was going to wear, how people and myself were going to act, and more.

The first day came, and I didn't know if I wanted my camera on with my "first day outfit on." I decided I was going to, and the first day went well. Everyone was cool and helpful, and things started to succeed on a day-to-day basis to a point where virtual school became so natural.

Months went by, and I got so comfortable that I didn't even try to get ready or get on the camera. I felt more comfortable that way, so that's what I did. I would say ninth grade was wonderful. I was able to meet new people and discover new things and ideas, which is something I love doing.

## **Growth**

### **Kimari S.B.**

The time I had a negative impact on my life was in the eighth grade. In eighth grade, I always used to be in trouble. I always got suspended, had to leave school early, and it got to the point where there was a big chance that I was going to get expelled. I was really upset with myself because I had become this person I thought I'd never become. Disappointing my mom made me feel like I lost every opportunity I had. It made me feel like I failed as a person.

Later during the school year, I told myself that I had to change the way that I'm acting because I'm not going anywhere in life. People in the main office at my school doubted me. They always thought that I'd stay in trouble. Quarantine gave me a huge break to get my thoughts together, and the truth is, it actually made me become a better person.

When I started high school, it was like a brand-new start. I've become a better person and have gotten into many programs. I have also met important people in Richmond which is good, so this had negative and positive impacts on my life.

## **The Graduation Speech**

### **Kiyah B.**

My most significant memory would have to be speaking at my 8th grade graduation. I knew that if I was picked to be president for my school, I had to speak at graduation. Not knowing that my last year of middle school was going to get cut short due to the Coronavirus. I was upset that I couldn't see my close friends graduate or take pictures with them before going to high school.

When working on my graduation speech, it took a lot of patience for me to note things down and then be able to put everything together. I felt like I wasn't going to get it done on time or that it wasn't going to be perfect like I wanted it to be. Also, making sure that my hair and everything looked good for my video.

It took me two attempts at creating the video, uploading it onto my computer, and sending it to my teacher. I was a little upset because she wanted me to do the video over. I was more so looking down instead of the camera. When it was time for graduation, being that it was virtual, most of my family came to my house to hear my speech and cry with one another.

## **My Memoir**

### **Tamia V.**

One of the most important events that happened to me was when I finally saw my grandmother. I had not seen her for almost two years, ever since COVID-19 came. I was so happy to see my grandmother because she is the one person I know that will always make me smile, be happy, or want to spend time with me, regardless if she was busy or not. She would still want to hang. The first time I saw her, I cried for a long time and gave her a hug for about 10 minutes because I didn't want to let go of her. I just wanted to keep her tight, catch up on the good old times, and see how she was doing.

## **My First Day of School**

### **Cherish B.**

My earliest memory is my first day of school. I don't quite remember if it was pre-k or kindergarten, but I do remember that it was a sunny morning, and I was riding with my mom in her black truck that smelled old, but in a good way. We pulled into my grandmother's house, and I remember walking to the door with a smile on my face. I could feel the stone sidewalk under my shoes as I slightly dragged my feet. I also remember how big my backpack was and the way it felt as it covered the expanse of my back. Also, my purple outfit was bright and made me feel happy. I remember opening the door and everybody from the house yelling "surprise!" Everyone at my grandmother's daycare had gotten together to throw me a surprise party before my first day of school. It made me happy to see all my friends and the people I cared about at the time come together and (now that I'm fully aware) support me.

My whole family even went as far as taking me to my school together on my first day. I remember walking through the hall and seeing my name on a shirt shaped name tag, and how white and less happy the building felt in comparison to the outside. All my family surrounding me probably helped me calm my nerves. This moment was important to me because it showed that they all cared. I would tell my family if I could that this is one of the moments that helped me love school as a kid. It was an opportunity for me to interact and socialize with other kids which was great, since I was an only child. I think it is a great first memory to have since it has been a foundation on the rest of my life.

## **The Car Accident**

### **Syasia A.**

The other day, I was walking downtown. This walk was for fun, just to get out. As I was walking, I heard and saw a car accident! A mail van ran into the side of someone's car. It shocked me. I was right there, so it was a surprise to me. I stood and watched to make sure no one was hurt, and they weren't. Next thing I hear is sirens. They got closer and louder. I see the police, ambulance, and firefighters. Crashes and things of the sort make me anxious, but I had to keep walking, so I did. I wish I would've been brave enough to help, but with all that help around, it was okay that I wasn't!

## **East End Lightning Jamari A.**

When I was 11, I started a new chapter in my life. The chapter was track and field. Sport talent runs in my family, so it was no surprise when I joined the team I started my track career with an AAU team, East End Lightning. This helped prepare me and ultimately led me to joining my middle school track team. I went to the middle school track team at the top and continued to run with both teams till the end of middle school. Then, it was time to move up. I was excited to start my freshman year of track. As the season arrived, covid began to rise and eventually led to the season being cancelled. I didn't even get to run one high school meet. AAU season was also cancelled. I was supposed to attend the 202 indoor nationals, and the AAU council cancelled it. This was a devastating, major setback.

Throughout the pandemic, I continued to train, and as it started to fade away, indoor season began. My school does not have an indoor team, but my AAU team does. I ran with them but did not attend nationals because there was still a pandemic going on. After the indoor season was over, the outdoor season began. I only ran with my school team at the beginning of the season. I was the fastest girl on the team. I made it to regionals and got top ten, but I did not qualify for states.

After that season concluded, I ran AAU and qualified for the Junior Olympics, but I did not go because it was all the way in Texas. I still run track and I am in the training season. Track has come with many ups and downs. I have competed nationally and won a national medal. I hold track and that medal close to my heart.

## **Nana Tamia M.**

An early memory from my childhood is the passing of my nana. I remember this moment vividly; it's like I relive it. I was at a summer program with my little brother. My dad came to pick us up early, so I knew something was wrong. Then, when I saw him, I could see from the look in his eyes that something wasn't okay.

My nana was battling cancer before she died. I knew the time would come, but I still wasn't prepared. When my dad told me, it was like the world stopped. My nana was my best friend. She was literally my favorite person in the world. I wished that I could have provided my dad with more comfort at the time, but I, myself, was devastated.

## **The Diamond**

### **Anonymous Submission**

I attended a Flying Squirrels game with my mother to perform the national anthem with my school's choir. The whole time I was performing, I was a nervous wreck, though I doubt anyone could hear me. It was a huge relief to walk off the baseball field and enjoy the game like the rest of the people who came. I sat in the crowd with my mom and brother. Just next to us were my two best friends and their mom. The two girls were fraternal twins, but they looked nothing alike. I recently developed a crush on one of them. She had bright hair and freckles. We were history classmates, and I told her about my crush a week earlier. The feeling wasn't mutual, but I wasn't upset and completely forgot. Like a normal best friend, I asked her mom if we could sleep over, and her mom said she would get back to me and never did. On the car ride home, it was oddly quiet.

Suddenly, my mom revealed that my crush's mother had informed her of my crush. I was then questioned uncomfortably in the car like I was only six, like I didn't know what it meant to "like" someone in that way. The questioning continued when we arrived home with my father present. My mom revealed to me that she was upset with me for having those feelings for a girl and how selfish I was being. It was that evening I realized my mother and father's love was conditional. Throughout that entire interaction my body felt numb, like I was hearing mostly white noise. I was angry that my mother would upset me and call me things I wasn't. I was frustrated because I know I couldn't change her mind, and I was sad knowing I had to hide a part of myself from my own mother.

# Loving Our Languages

\* Enjoy these cautionary tales in Spanish and English. At Podium, we celebrate storytelling in every language! \*

**Lá Niña Féa**

**Yaomí V.B.**

**River City MS**

Era una niña fea, y era muy inteligente, más que los demás. Lo hacían acosa y la habla cosas feas. Le quitaban la tarea porque sabían que era más inteligente. La obligan si no lo hacía y ha iban a molestar más. Le hicieron una broma los mas populares. Ella le gustaba el niño más popular, pero el tenía novia era la niña más popular en escuela. La broma era que la invitaron a una fiesta y el sueño de ella era bailar. La iba a besar, y en frente de todos le dijo que le apestaba la boca. Ella salió llorando y su mejor amiga la ayudó; ella prometió vengarse.

Ella cambió con su mejor amiga. Eran empresarias y famosas con bonito cuerpo, y se asombraron que ella cambió. Por eso no es bueno el acoso porque no saben lo que se esperan después, y pueden ser mejor el otros.

*She was an ugly girl, and she was very intelligent, more than the rest. They would bully her and they would tell her ugly things. They would take away her homework because they knew she was smarter. They would force her if she didn't do it, and they were going to bother her more. The most popular ones wanted to play a joke on her. She liked the most popular boy, but he had a girlfriend who was the most popular girl in school. The joke was that they invited her to a party and her dream was to dance. He was going to kiss her, and in front of everyone he told her that her mouth stank. She came out crying and her best friend helped her; she promised to take revenge.*

*She changed with her best friend. They were businesswomen and celebrities with beautiful bodies, and everyone was amazed that she changed. That is why bullying is not good because they do not know what to expect afterwards, and others can be better.*

**Ser Inteligente**  
**Yenebid G.R.**  
**River City MS**

Le hacen bulin por ser intelijente se burlaban y le pegaban y por que la amenasaban si no les ayuda a los demas, no sabian que hacer a la hora del examen. Como ella no aceptaba ayudar, los le quitaban sus cosas y ella ya no aguantaba mas asi que decidio hablar con las maestras, y la ayudaron. Como ella era intelijente siempre tenia buenas notas.

*They bullied her for being smart, they made fun of her and hit her, and because they threatened her if she didn't help others, they didn't know what to do at the time of the exam. Since she didn't agree to help, they took away her things, and she couldn't take that anymore. She decided to talk to the teachers, and they helped her. As she was smart, she always had good grades.*

**El Patito Feo**  
**Gloria S.**  
**River City MS**

Había una vez un patito que era más feo que los demás y sus hermanos lo intimidaban. A medida que siguió creciendo, entre mas ma acoso le hacian hasta que decidio irse de la granja vivia. Cuando volvio ala graja pero ya no hera feo porque se avia boluido un cisne y era super guapo. Todos los de la granja se preguntavan quien era él. Les preguntó si sabían el patito al que intimidaban. Todos en la granja pidieron perdón. Él los perdonó, y eso volvió a hacer felices a todos.

*There was once a duckling that was uglier than the others, and his brothers bullied him. As he continued to grow, the more bulling was done to him until he decided to leave the farm he lived. When he returned to the farm, he was no longer ugly because he had turned into a swan and was super handsome. Everyone on the farm wondered who he was. He asked them if they knew about the duckling that they bullied. Everyone on the farm asked for forgiveness. He forgave them, and that made everyone happy again.*

# Overcoming Hard Times

The Weekly Word News Team at the Southside Metro Richmond Boys & Girls Club started an Advice Column. Responses below address a student facing troubles. A teacher was being unreasonable to him, and he was not sure what to do because he was scared of failing the class.

*Dear Scared Student,*

**From Jada M.**

I would want my family and friends to help with a problem like this because you didn't do anything wrong.

**From Devyn H.**

If I were you, I would talk to my mom or talk to an adult, such as another teacher or the principal.

**From Tiana J.**

I'm sorry about your problem with the teacher. Here is my advice: I would tell your mom to go to the school with you, have the principal come to the classroom, and then talk it all out with the teacher, the principal, and your mom. Then, the teacher will not do it again.

**From Maliyah A.**

I heard what happened! If you are nervous, talk to someone your trust, and that will calm you down. Maybe then you should go to the school with someone you trust. Just don't try to fight because that will make it worse. Be confident in yourself, and maybe your teacher will calm down too! <3



**Overcoming  
Brandon W.  
MLK MS**

In a land far, far away, there was once a wrestling academy. At this academy, there was a boy named Bruce. All the other boys bullied Bruce because of how small and skinny he was. That, however, did not stop Bruce from becoming a wrestler.

One day, Bruce won against one of his bullies in a wrestling match, and it proved just how capable he was to all his bullies.

**The Power of a Hug  
Treasure G.  
River City MS**

There was a boy named Peter, and  
He was a little different from others.  
Peter had a different face than everyone else.  
He learned to expect it.  
Today was his first day of school, and he was extremely excited.  
When he got to class, people started to laugh.  
Peter got upset.  
But then, there was a kid named Jake.  
Jake went up to Peter and gave him a hug.  
Everyone else started to get confused.  
Jake said, "He is just like everyone else. He's special."  
Peter and Jake smiled.  
There is power in a hug.  
The End.

## **Seeing Myself in a New Light**

**Heaven R.**

### **Partnership for the Future**

On July 26, I rode to the DMV after weeks of studying and taking practice tests. I was anxious and nervous. I sat down and started reading the questions. I read them over time and time again. Finally, I get the courage to submit the sign identification part of the test. I submitted my test and I read that I failed. I got one sign wrong, and it was one of the easiest signs: school crossing. Prior to taking my test, my sister told me not to cry in the DMV because then people will know you failed. So I walked out the DMV with all the dignity I had left.

The ride home, I felt so sad and upset with myself. The next few days, I stayed in my room and slept a lot. But a few days after that, a wise man told me I'm not a failure. I didn't pass the first time, but I should keep trying and pass next time. I think that during the test, I started to overthink and doubt myself. I didn't think about the question thoroughly, and that's why I failed. I am not a failure.

## **The Evolution of the Dragon**

**Gabby S.**

### **River City MS**

One day, a beautiful bird had a family of five. One bird came out ugly, and he was bullied more and more the older he got. His siblings started bullying him and calling him names. One day, the momma had enough and kicked the ugly bird out. A year later, the ugly bird left on its own turned into a beautiful dragon and lived happily ever after.

**Adversity**  
**Christopher E.**  
**River City MS**

Once upon a time there was a soccer ball, basketball, a beach ball, and a football. All of the balls were at school. Basketball was the school bully, and Football was rolling to class when he got stopped by Basketball.

Basketball said, "You know nobody will like you because you're not round like us."

Football responded, "That's not true. People will like me for who I am."

"Did you get that from your mom?" Basketball asked.

"Yes, and what's wrong with that?" inquired Football.

Basketball laughed and said, "No wonder you're such a baby."

Football just replied with, "The only real friends you'll have will be the people who like you for who you are."

Then, Beach ball was the new student and bullied Basketball. Basketball finally knew how Football felt, so he apologized to Football. Now they're friends.

**The Dog**  
**Xavier P.**  
**River City MS**

There once was a little dog.

One day, he became different from his pack because he got bigger and bigger, and then even bigger.

He was so large that he became an outcast.

He only had one family and one home, but he never thought of himself as all alone.

# Self-Advocacy

**\* Standing up and speaking out for ourselves and our communities is a very important skill to have. Read what our teen writers are looking to change now. \***

## **Update School Curriculum**

**Julie H.P., Brock H., Isaiah A., and Heaven R.  
Partnership for the Future**

Dear Governor Northam,

We are high achieving students from various schools in the Commonwealth of Virginia. First, we would like to thank you for taking the time to read our letter. We are writing to you today in an effort to inspire education reforms. After careful consideration, we have come to find that certain aspects of our current education system are, to be frank, outdated. They no longer reflect the current thoughts, feelings, and reality of our state, and furthermore, our country.

One reform that we would like to see is the updating of textbooks. While we are not asking for the discontinuing of our current textbooks, we are asking that more current and relevant information be easily and readily available. Thank you for your time and we hope that you consider our reform.

## **See His Integrity**

**Jayden B.  
MLK MS**

This boy in a village  
had a beast inside him at birth.  
One day, he saved the entire village  
but they didn't know that,  
so they remained to look at him differently still.

**Respectfully Learning About and Appreciating Cultures**  
**Ramsey N., Sophia L., Kenneth B., and Carina G.**  
**Partnership for the Future**

Dear Superintendent Amy Cashwell,

We are representatives from Partnership for the Future who also happen to be residents of Henrico County. It has come to our attention that Juneteenth is now represented as a holiday and will be officially a part of the Virginia Public Schools curriculum. Just like Juneteenth, we would like to suggest that schools add to the curriculum a mandatory assembly that educates students on the meaning of cultural appropriation and the difference between it and respectfully learning and appreciating a culture. We would advise this due to the fact that most students do not know the difference. We would appreciate it if you considered putting this into action within the school policy. It would benefit not only the students, but the community around them and future generations as well.

Sincerely,

Representatives from Henrico County PFF

**Address Climate Change**  
**Christian B., Anthony H.T., Rodney G., Ashley M.M., and Emily S.**  
**Partnership for the Future**

We believe that climate change will lead to an inescapable fate for the planet and its inhabitants. We believe that not only humans, but environmental areas such as the Great Barrier Reef, animals such as turtles, and ultimately, the fate of the future is at stake. We believe, however, that great change is still possible. Countries like Denmark lead in an effort to usher in prosperity in the next number of decades. We believe that miniscule changes, like recycling and managing wastes, to large scale changes, like imposing higher taxes and even altering our power sources, are necessary. Therefore, we believe that it is not too late to slow, or even reverse, the effects of climate change for the greater good.

# The Impacts of Social Media

## *What Value Does It Have?*

**Jonathan S., MLK MS:** It's funny and helps us not be bored.

**Jalyn C., MLK MS:** It helps people be social.

**Terieq H., MLK MS:** It has a lot of value because of how much money it makes and brings us joy.

**Somer M., MLK MS:** It gives us communication confidence.

## *How Does it Connect us?*

**Jonathan S., MLK MS:** It shows our uniqueness by being able to call, text, and see each other's posts.

**Jalyn C., MLK MS:** It helps keep people close.

**Terieq H., MLK MS:** With messages, photos, and videos.

**Somer M., MLK MS:** Communicating by texting and stories.

## *What are its Top Benefits or Dangers?*

**Jonathan S., MLK MS:** You can investigate and see different things, but people could also try to hack into or get your personal information.

**Jalyn C., MLK MS:** It can help your get to know people better and promote good causes.

**Terieq H., MLK MS:** Catfishing and cyberbullying are two largely negative impacts.

**Somer M., MLK MS:** You can get in touch with people and explore, but there is also cyberbullying, spam, and scams.

## *What is Your Favorite Platform?*

**Jalyn C., MLK MS:** Discord

**Terieq H., MLK MS:** Tiktok

**Somer M., MLK MS:** Instagram

# Free Writes

## **Attempt #231**

**Sophia L.**

### **Partnership for the Future**

The clock was ticking louder than usual. Each increment of time seemed to stretch beyond infinity, and each eye in the room focused on the front. Clammy hands were holding onto a piece of paper. Those same hands were shaking as I stood rocking side to side. I clenched my teeth, only to pry my dry mouth open. My gaze, shaken and blurry, landed on two girls quietly but obviously giggling in the corner of the room. “Iraq r-requests an.. Au-di-dio....uh, audience...” My face felt heavy and wet as tears dripped down my face. My head spun, my body spun, my legs were out the door, and a sob escaped me. Attempt #231, almost successful.

## **Search for the “AB”**

**Kalia G.**

### **Partnership for the Future**

I found the “AB” when I was going to the laundromat. Behind the building, there was a 10-foot creature eating a whole deer. I was scared for my life and immediately ran into the building to take cover. But, I’m afraid my sudden movements caught its attention because it began charging for the door.

All the customers began screaming while the manager called the police. Nobody was able to lock the door, and it would’ve been useless anyways. The “AB” charged for the window. BOOM! BOOM! The glass shattered into one million pieces.

As it slowly entered the room, I felt a warm liquid running down my leg. I was mortified. When I looked up, we locked eyes, and it made the loudest, most chaotic sound I’ve ever heard. Without harming anyone, it left the laundromat and entered back into the woods. That was now 25-years-ago. Nobody believes me. Do you?

# The Abomination

Oliviyah M.  
Partnership for the Future

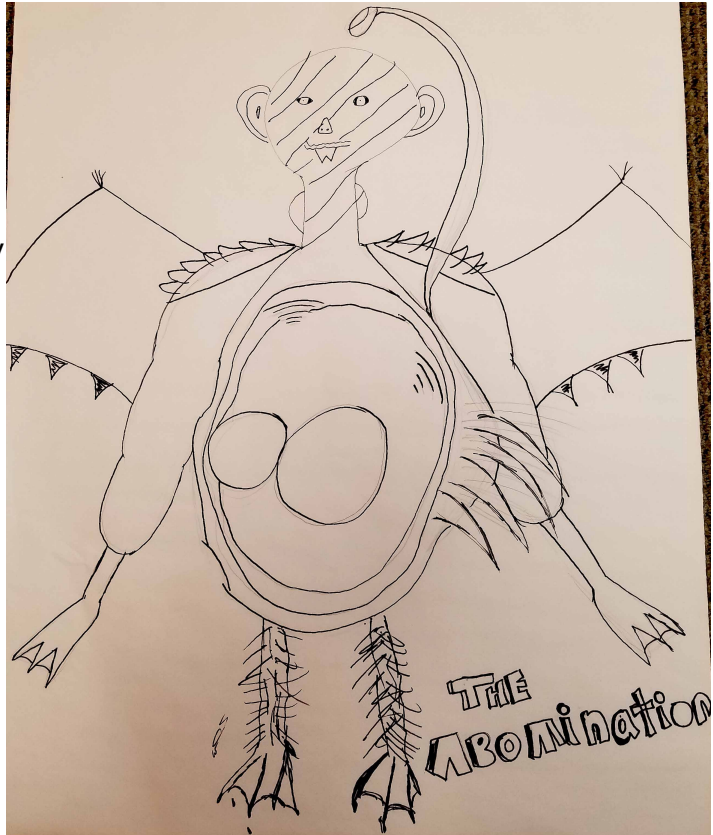
It was a Saturday afternoon around 5pm. That's when I usually take my daily walk. This walk was different though. Something was off; I felt it in my gut. The sky was gloomy, no birds were chirping, and my neighbors weren't watering their gardens or sitting on their front porches as usual. There wasn't a sound or a peep.

Five minutes into my walk, heading downtown, I heard dreadful screaming and running coming closer and closer to me. That's when I saw it: the most unusual, biggest, and strangest creature that I have ever seen. My first instinct was to turn around and run back home, but oddly enough, I didn't.

I didn't know what it was, but something drew me to this creature. Maybe it was my curious mind; maybe it was my spirit. With no fear, I approached the mysterious creature. For what reason? I don't know.

Once I was at an arm's length distance from the creature, we locked eyes, and suddenly, I felt my whole-body shift. I couldn't move, breathe, or feel anything until . . . I woke up and realized that it was all just a dream . . .

Or was it?





## **My Encounter with the Abomination**

**Rehjonae W.**

### **Partnership for the Future**

I encountered the Abomination on a hiking trip with my brother. We decided to follow the guide through a trail that led deep into the forest. A few minutes into the walk, I began to hear shuffling in the trees, but I didn't think much of it because I assumed it was a squirrel. Before I could understand what was happening, I saw the Abomination attack our guide before dragging him away. It was the ugliest creature I have ever seen!

## **The Abomination**

**Mariama S.**

### **Partnership for the Future**

When I see it, the first thing that comes to mind is that it's ugly and weird looking. Then, I run away because that's none of my business. I don't like things that look like that!

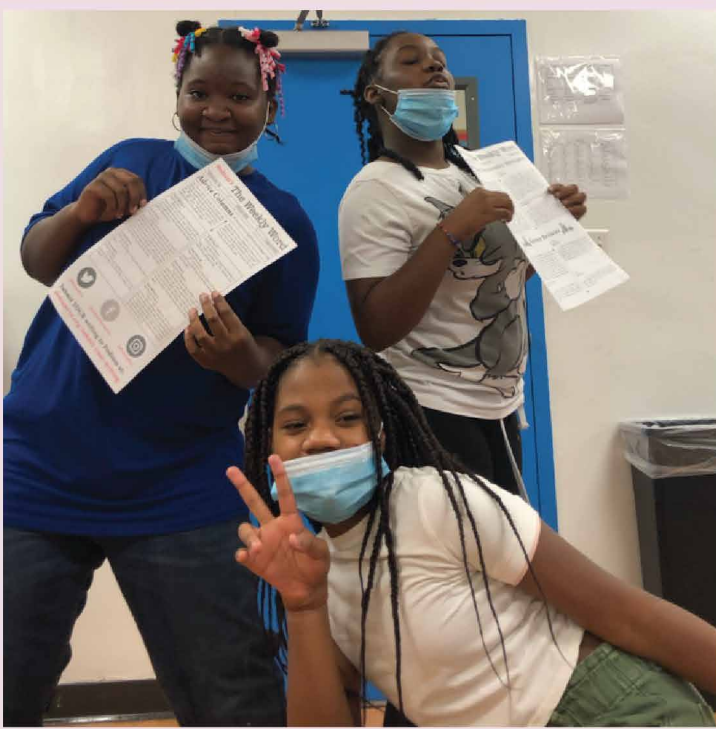
## **Fear the Flying Devil**

**Iceon H.**

### **Partnership for the Future**

I'm filled with fear as I run through the dark. All I can pick out is the sound of hissing and howling. I try to find a place to hide, but there's nowhere in sight. I turn around and see it, the Flying Abomination. Unpleasant to look at but graceful to see flying, it drops down and scratches my face. I fall down, and as I look up, it towers over me. In my final moments, I close my eyes and clasp my hands, asking the Lord for mercy as I enter his kingdom. I open my eyes after waiting for my end and see nothing but giant footprints in the sand.

The rest of my exploration team finds me by shining their flashlights. I respond to them, saying, "I've seen a devil."



**Southside Metro Richmond  
Boys & Girls Club**

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