

Journal 8

**VISIONS OF
MODERN
YOUTH**

Curated by Richmond students in 2016

PODIUM

Welcome to the Eighth Volume of the annual Podium Journal! For those of you who have read any of the previous seven volumes, you will not be disappointed. As you'll soon be reminded, Richmond teens have imagination, talent, and heart in abundance. For those of you reading this journal for the first time, you are in for a surprise. In the following pages, you will read stories, engage in poetry, and find inspiration.

Podium is a 501(c)(3), non-profit organization. Our mission is to provide youth ages 11-19 in the Greater Richmond Metro Area the skills to become confident and capable readers, writers, and communicators to succeed in school, career, and life. To learn more, visit us at www.podiumrva.org. Or connect with us on Twitter and Instagram @PodiumRVA.

Esteemed philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein said, "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world." Learning to become a great writer is about so much more than writing well. By fostering their writing skills, Podium teens learn essential critical thinking skills, deepen their ability to communicate and listen, and strengthen empathy and relationship-building skills. Most importantly, through Podium's programs, youth develop lasting friendships as writing peers.

We hope reading this journal inspires you to develop and continue your lasting relationship with the love of writing.

With Love,
All of us at Podium

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Six Word Story

Elizabeth Salinas - Armstrong High School

My songs,
My notes,
My voice.

Boys & Girls

Destiny Brown- Thomas Jefferson High School

My boys,
my girls,
so adorable,
so savvy.

The ones I look back to laugh with.

The ones I gossip profusely with
about weekend excursions.

I can make fun of them, and be made fun of.

The ones I share playful banter with.

The ones I trade snark with on exes and her.

I can't divide them.

My boys are the ones I can share inside
jokes with about the most obscure references.

My girls, I can mindlessly chatter with, share
moments and secrets alike.

Without one I am lost.

Without both I am alone.

That's why I keep them close.

Until June 15th:

They will be replaced, but not forgotten.

The divide between our lives will remain too
great.

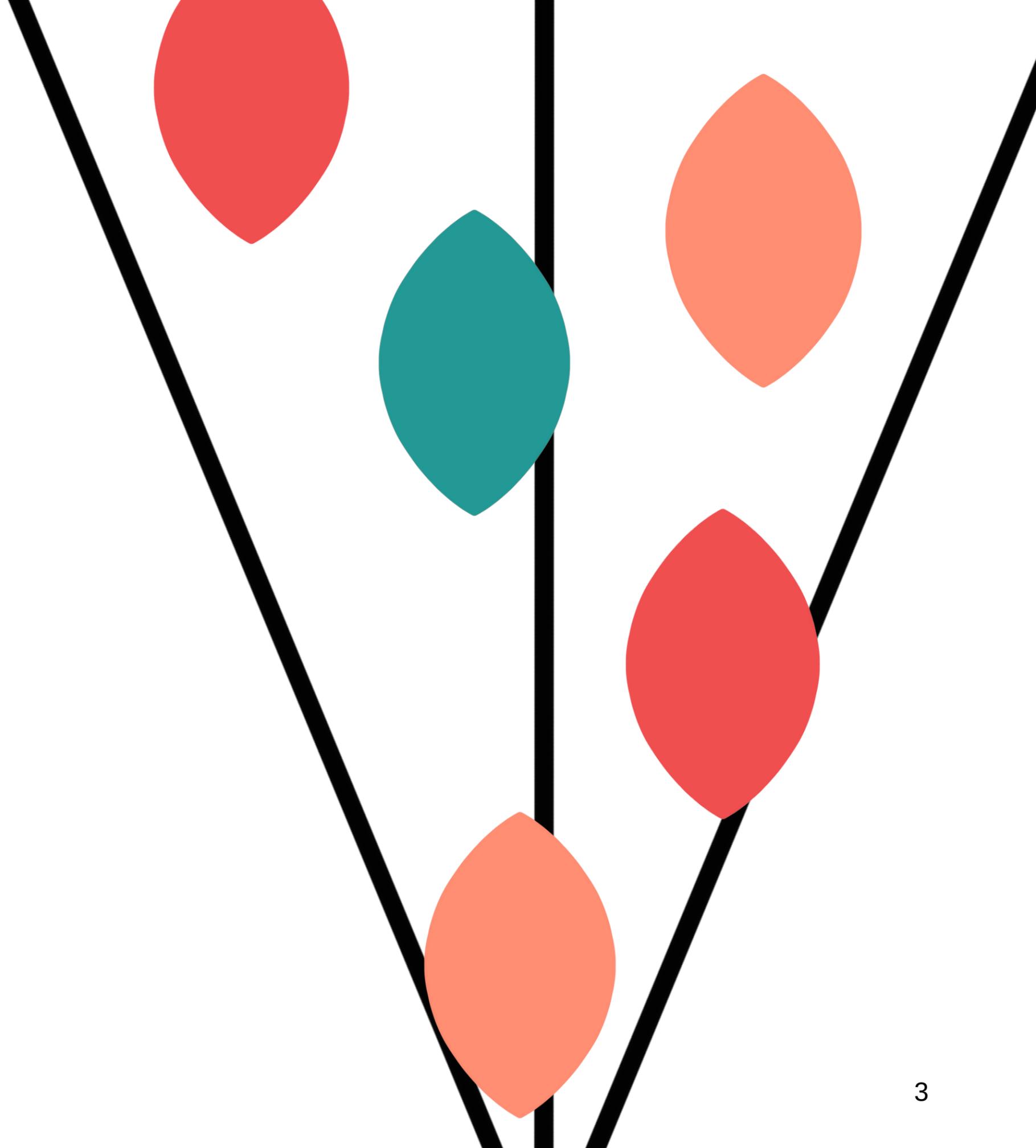
When we are no longer tethered together
by school,

by mutual friends,

by shared experiences,

by those inside jokes,

that have since grown old.



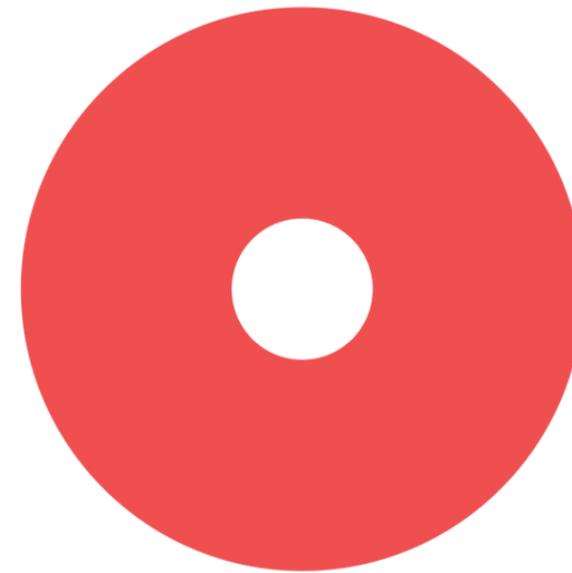
De'Onea Christian

Destini Valery - Armstrong High School

Her hands are hard,
bigger than mine.
Her nails are painted; a manicure
isn't really her thing.

With those hands she
writes the stories of her life.
My friend is an artist, and rap is her
genre. The streets are her logic.
She grew up in the projects.
The struggle is real.

Her words are the truth,
and I just want to see her make it out.
So then the world can hear people out
empathize, they gon' want to vibe
with our people.
I can see her now,
turning up and representing,
won't never forget where she
came from.



She asks for my advice. Sometimes
I turn her down.
She gets agitated.
It's funny because I know
she's been through a lot in her
life.
She's been turned down,
but I notice that's her motivation
to fight.
"Put your heart in it. I don't
know what else to tell you,"
I say.
So she continues
to do what she do:
Write.
'Cause she know one day she gon' be that
girl with the mic.



Makeup

Shayla Bennett - Huguenot High School

We've been friends since 10th grade.
At the beginning of our friendship,
she was kind of tricky to deal with.

As we became closer, she made
me forget my flaws, and what everyone
else thought.

She was a perfect example of a best friend.
When she couldn't be there,
I'd wish she were.

Feeling like the old me no one liked.
I began to be annoyed with her;
I pushed her away for a while.

Until, I realized how bored
I became; closed off like the old days.
And now, we have fun without the flaws.

Headphones

Mario Bullock - Huguenot High School

I remember way back when I had no one to vibe with or listen to. No one to help me block this world out. No one to chill with and help me block out the ignorance of society. But now that I have you, I'm scared to lose you, so I keep you close: the length from my pocket to my ear. When I want to change the beat of my life, I chill with you and listen to your stories, the wisdom you deal, and I know it's always real.

In the beginning I didn't know what to think of you. I thought you were cool, because everybody else did. But until I spent time with you, you could always boost my mood. Even when I'm feeling grouchy and rude, you pull me back to my normal self, a chill dude. You were always mainstream, yet at the same time underground; the treasure I'm still glad I found.

You always kept me entertained on long bus rides. And when I'm feeling down, you tell me to keep my head high. You tell me to let my wings carry me. We say you're lit, because you ignite life. On the surface, it might look Black and White, but look a little deeper and you might find something you weren't looking for. A new outlook on life.

A Million Words

Justin Daniels - Thomas Jefferson High School

My youth is a whisper
Within a world of screams.
It is a simple time
Of ignorance and naivety,
A time when I thought I was strong
When I thought I could never be brought
Down.
I understood everything, but knew nothing
I was blind to the feeling of real pain.
Now in my age I sit confused,
Confused as to what it is I'm feeling,
Wondering why this was brought upon me.
This never ending feeling,
A feeling worth a million words,
But can be said in one.
This word is unmentionable,
A sin to even utter.
Someday it might be harmless;
The day when it no longer hurts,
Or reminds someone of what it is and
How it felt.
Lingering as a constant reminder of their
Weakest time.
A feeling I wouldn't wish on my worst
Enemy.

AJ Goodwin - Armstrong High School

My heart stopped beating long ago.
Now it beats anew, but it beats slow.
Used somethin' shiny and saw my blood flow.
Now my scars heal, but they still show.

Blood in my pen, pain in my soul.
Had to bury people I ain't wanna let go.
My eyes hurt from cryin', tears bleedin'
Lookin' into those whose smiles misleading.

My chest burns when danger in my ear.
But it eases up when I know my love is near.
Headaches and heartaches; 17-years strong.
I would be right, but would think I'm wrong.

A black bird sits on my wall.
Has five colors around; none are good at all.
I'm that bird, on a daily basis.
And I'm tired. Can't wait to see
my loved ones faces.

The No-One

Dante Jbarah - Open High School

His hair is like straw,
dried and plain,
yet vibrant and complex.

His eyes, a dark and ugly green,
like the scales of an alligator.

His skin, not pure, not dark,
but an abnormal mixture in between.

Blemishes and scars scatter.

Truly a gruesome sight.

His nails are bitten to the core,
lined with whites and obviously worn.

His attire, as if obtained from the slums of a bustling city.

His humor, awkward and disquieting.

Yet somehow, one can stand him.

His messy hair, his dull eyes,
his weird skin, his bitten nails,
his lazy clothes.

Only one can accept all of this,
in all of his flaws and hardships.

A Need

Desiree Green - Richmond Community High School

Is this really a deadly sin?
It's so innocent and childlike.
Everyone has to do it.
In fact, it is a necessity of life.

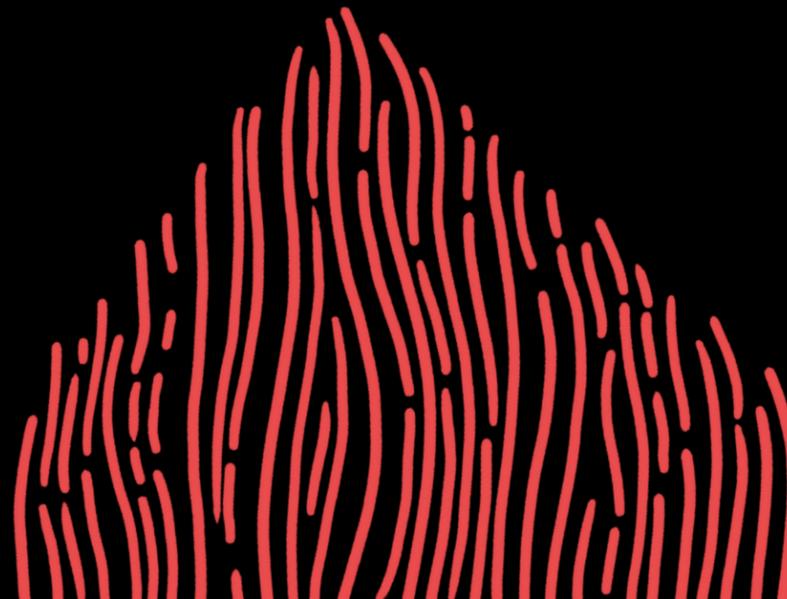
So why does it result in being criticized by being by everyone?

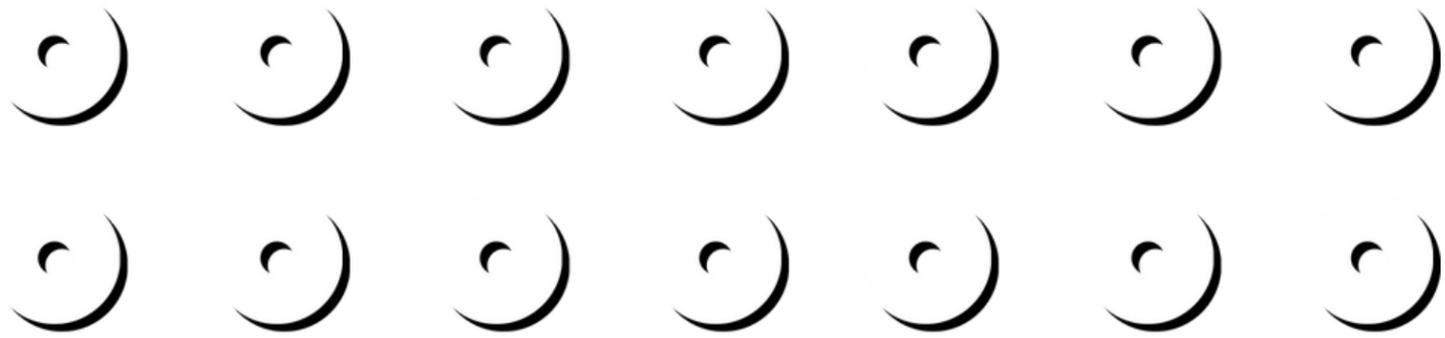
Maybe that's the reason you ended up like this:
You were just trying ignore to the harshness of society,
and take a pause from reality.

You put your head down,
and body to rest.

Your mind is on a vacation
No longer caring about things that bring you stress.

You took a break
from this hate-filled world,
and woke up in a fiery hell.





Time Fail

Karl Abrahamson - Open High School

I open my eyes groggily. My nose feels hollow, as if it's missing something, which means only one thing: I have a bloody nose. I rip my sheets off as best as I can without running into the bookshelf by the door, try to navigate into my bathroom for toilet paper. It doesn't make it any easier that I have to tilt my head up to the ceiling to prevent myself from leaving a bloody trail on the floor. On my way in I look over at my clock. It reads 4:25. I grab some toilet paper and stuff it up my nose. I walk back into my bedroom to wait for the bleeding to stop, pulling out the chair from under my desk to sit down. I look out the window for a couple minutes at the dark ocean below the cliffs, the water's surface dimly illuminated by the beach's nightlights down by the shore.

I feel the blood in my nose stop. I relax, pull the tissue out my nose, and place it into the small trash can under my desk. As soon as I start to look at the view, I get slammed forward into the desk. My spine cracks, the wind flies out of me as my stomach is crushed, my kneecaps fracture—all under a second. My knees hit the table as I fall backwards, shooting a massive spike of pain to my nerves from my injuries.

I've never been much for drama, but I'm not going to say I didn't curse. At that point, no one would have kept their cool. My vision blurs from the tears in my eyes. I swipe them away, and manage to lift my head up to find the clock; 4:05.

As soon as I register the thought, the pain fades, the chair rights itself, and as quickly as it all started, it ends. My pain is gone as I stand. I look out the window as the clock reads 3:50.

The hard part is to be able to comprehend what happened. I start writing it on a sheet of paper in an attempt to make it clearer.

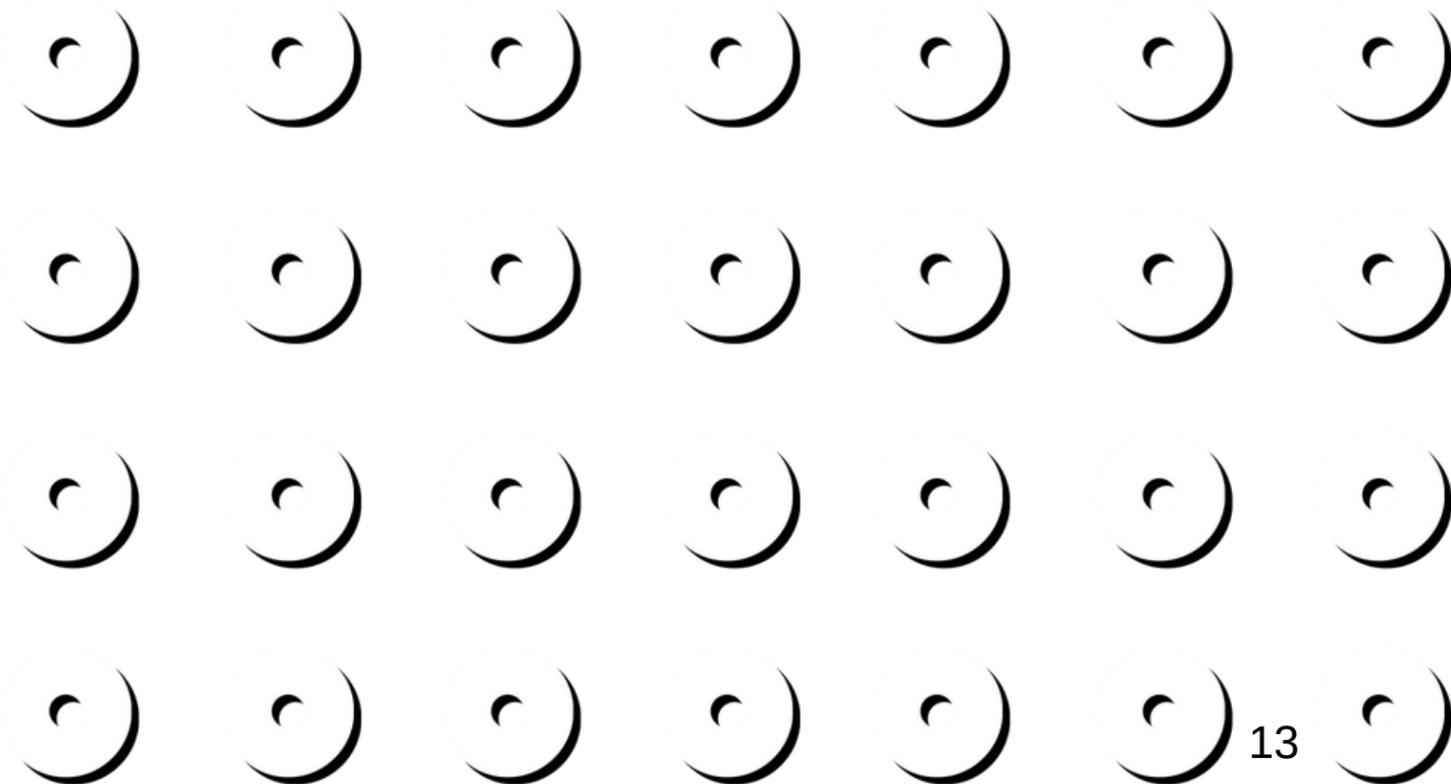
4:25- I sit down in chair.

4:25ish- Get crushed by chair.

4:05 - I fall out of chair, chair reverses itself, pain disappears.

3:50- Explaining.

An explanation comes to mind. Time messed up and made my life into a Sci-Fi novel.



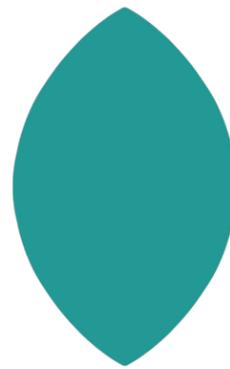


Social Confusion

Katlynn Sawyer - Thomas Jefferson High School

I don't understand
Why my timing is bad
Why does it matter
To tend to my duties
At my own time?
It seems that no matter what i do,
It's okay for me, but not for anyone else
Why do my actions get look down upon
When I feel like I do nothing wrong?
They are never satisfied with what I do
Making me feel like I' the bad guy
Maybe I am, but who knows?
All I know is that I don't like people expressing
Negative thoughts to me
And I think that they should keep to themselves
I don't get upset when they do stuff, so
Why is it different for me?

Maybe it's because I'm wired differently
Than other people
I lack empathy and compassion at times
I'm a little selfish, but at the end of the day,
Who isn't?
Sometimes I think that I don't deserve friends
Because if I don't know how to be a friend,
how can I be one to somebody else?
I feel so confused, I don't know if I'm wrong
or right
Maybe I should just cut everyone off
And be by myself from now on
But it's not good to be anti-social
Sorry, sorry, sorry
That's all I can say
Because I can't think of anything else
To explain my behavior
But I wonder if I'm really sorry
Because I keep saying it, yet I make the same mistakes over and over again
So is it sorry? Or sorry not sorry?



I Wish I Were White

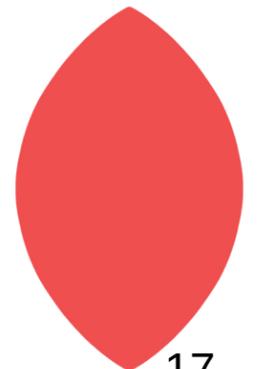
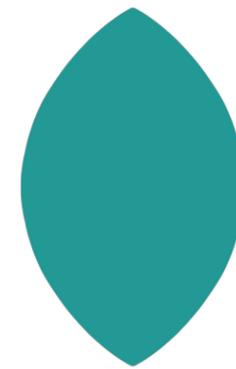
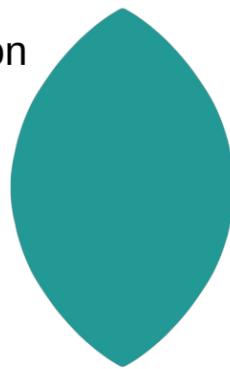
Mushanea Robinson - Open High School

Growing up during a time when African slavery in the U.S. and segregation are no longer, you may say, “Why? The world is more accepting of other races than ever.” If I were white, things would be easier. It would be easier for me to get and do the things I wanted. I could go through life the easy way.

If I were white, it would be easier to comb my hair. It bothers me when people say black girls and women straighten their hair to look white. I do not straighten my hair for this reason, but to have an easier time managing, and to switch it up. Curls can get boring after a while. It probably takes less time in the mornings for the white girls with straight hair, but for me it’s one of the main reasons I can be late.

If I were a white, maybe it would be easier for me to get the job of my dream: “African- American students need to complete two more levels of education to have the same probability of getting a job as their white peers,” a new study by Young Invincibles finds. If I were white, it would be easier for me to get a job without a college diploma, because I would look more harmless. If I were white, my mom would have given me one of those easy names like Lorah or Emily. Maybe when I apply for a job, they won’t toss my application out just based on my name.

If I were white, maybe it would be easier for me to have a happy family. I could have one of those white T.V. moms, like from the Brady Bunch, who stays at home by choice because her husband is wealthy enough to provide for them and their children. If I were white, it would be easier for my mom to cook breakfast and dinner every day without being as tired. If I were white, it would be easier to bring my father to school on Bring-Your-Dad-to-School Day, because I would know where he was. Then people wouldn’t say things like, “your dad never loved you.” If I were white, maybe it would be easier for him to stay around, and maybe my brothers and I wouldn’t take our anger out on our mom. Maybe then it would be easier for me to read this without wanting to shed a tear.



If I were white, maybe it would be easier to be happy with my appearance. Maybe my nose wouldn't be so big. Maybe I would have more celebs who looked like me, or icy blue eyes. If I were white, maybe I wouldn't have to date within my race to be accepted. A guy wouldn't say, "you're pretty for a black girl".

Because I'm not white, things will be much more difficult. I will have a harder time becoming successful. I will have to wait for things longer. I will have to face, or be subjected to, discrimination. I do have to hear speeches from old white women saying "Be proud that you're black," when it's easy for them to say. I will always be that one person who says "It's not that bad." Sure, it's not that bad now; it's not that good either. Many girls of color will experience this in life and have self-hatred. We see it on T.V.; wonder why all the characters are white. I will deal with it when I get rejected from jobs, without real opportunity to begin with. I don't feel this way every time I wake up, but I do think the meaning is the same. It's important to know that I don't think white means better, I think I means easier.

Are there people who want to be black? I don't think so. They might want to be the stereotypical black person. You might get an athletic scholarship, have some people fear you, have the ability to go without washing your hair every day, or you wouldn't have to tan. Black doesn't mean bad, it just means harder. I'm not saying you can't get nice things being black, it just means you'll have to take extra steps to get there. If you were black, you wouldn't start off with an A. If a white person told me "I wish I were black," I would say, "I wish I wanted to be black."



I Believe

Joelle-Marie Obi - Huguenot High School

I believe that there's magic in her voice.
I believe that she speaks with her eyes.
I believe that if you look closely,
Oh, if you just get close enough,
her tired eyes hold an image of the seven suns as they rise.
I believe her hips are as wide as the galaxy, so she occasionally excuses herself
if she happens to bump you into your side.
I believe she is a lion,
not a lioness;
she takes orders from no one.
Don't believe me?
Put her to the test,
she knows her worth,
and it doesn't need to be shown with a million dollar crown.
I believe that you'll never catch her with a frown.
Her lips perfect and round.
I believe she loves nature and the great outdoors,
La terre is where she is from,
And her skin is café au lait,
Fawn and bronzed.
I believe on her face you may see oppression,
But depress this in your skull:
Her braids are tight, and it's nothing but a mug.
I believe she's stronger than she looks,
And they underestimate her because of her good looks.
I believe she is a mystery.
I believe she's a black woman, far from mystery.

Sophie Hampton - Open High School

Have you ever noticed how terrible things happen to innocent people? I've been mulling that over for years. Here I am, seventeen, in my fourth foster home, with nothing too great going for me. Story is, my parents couldn't handle me financially, so they got rid of me. Don't get the wrong idea, I'm not bawling my eyes out or anything. I hardly knew them. I just have fragments of memories, because I was only, like, four when they gave me away.

So, in case you were wondering, my name is Chase. I think it suits me, because I feel like I'm constantly chasing after something I can't reach. I'm about six-two, thin, leanly muscular, with blue eyes and light brown hair I dye black. If I was asked about my race on a form, I'd put Caucasian, but I'm only telling you this so you can try to picture me. I've been told on that I've got pretty great teeth. I never had braces, so I suppose I'm lucky. I have kind of big hands and feet, but they're in proportion to the rest of my body. Overall, I'm pretty healthy, aside from the fact that I've had to go to a therapist for the past six years because of "traumatic experiences." I'm hoping I don't have to see another one now that I've moved to a home. I don't think I need any more therapy. The people are nice, and I feel fine.

My new foster home is in suburban Chicago. I got here about three months ago. I've got a foster brother and two foster sisters here. My foster brother's name is Jason, and he's a pretty okay kid. He's much younger than me. My foster sisters, Kelly and Bianca, don't talk to me much. They're not home too often. They basically come to sleep, then they leave. They both have "serious" boyfriends, whatever that means. As for the house, it's a nice place. This set of foster parents are good, Christian people who just couldn't have kids.

I'm not a really religious person. I feel like I should be, just in case there's some god out there, but I don't know. It doesn't really factor into the equation of my life. I've got enough to deal with—school for example. I just started senior year in a new school. It's some local public school. I barely know the name, because I haven't even tried committing it to memory. I can't say that it's been a hard transition. I don't want to say I care enough to feel that way, but it definitely has not been a walk in the park.

My foster parents make a fairly good income, but the only kid in private school is Jason, because he's the youngest and has the most time left in school. I guess they think there's more hope for him, which is probably true. It's cool that this family is nice and all. But in my mind it's always just been me. I've got everything I need.

So there you go. Now you know my situation. A lot of people don't really care to know about me though. They just care about what I've been through, like what my previous foster parents have done to me and the "traumatic experiences" I've had. For instance, nobody knows my favorite color is red, or that my favorite food is pizza (although they could probably guess that, since it's a common favorite), or that I love going to the park and watching people do people things for hours, or that I can play guitar and my favorite Nirvana song is *Polly*, or that I read *The Outsiders*, like, five times a year.

I'm a good student. It's usually the pity factor that leads to my success. Teachers hear about my situation and they go easy on me. My first memory of school was being shoved down the stairs in the first grade by this kid named Tim. Year after year, school after school, the whole bullying situation only gets worse.



I have to say, I'm not good at many things. I'm good with people though. Just not in the way you might think. I manage to make friends with people in need of friends. I haven't found any here yet, but I'm sure I will. I make a lot of bad choices. I've done drugs twice, gotten drunk more times than I care to admit, gone to "those" parties, and I've kind of developed a smoking habit. I'm going through withdrawal, because this new foster family has zero tolerance for smoking. I'm kind of irritable right now.

You know what makes me angry, besides not having cigarettes? The fact that what most people think matters, is so meaningless. Can you take your Mercedes with you to the grave? Will it in any way make you a better person? It makes me sad. It makes me happy that I'm nothing like that.

Something else that makes me happy is music. I just like it. It's simple, yet complex. I like those types of oxymoron's in life.

Going back to the whole smoking thing (because it's been driving me insane), you should know that the only reason I started was because people say it calms you. I don't know how true that is, but I am a very nervous person. The smallest things just make me feel uneasy. Like, seeing people walking across a street. It just makes me think of cars hitting people and I freak myself out to the point where I want to call to the people, "Run," as if there really is a car about to hit them. I'm weird that way. I also use a lot of hand gestures when I speak. They're hard to describe because they vary depending on my mood. When I'm angry though, I make no gestures. Even though I don't think I'm like most people, I don't believe I'm quirky. Although, I am kind of specific when it comes to things I want, but that's being picky not quirky. It annoys a lot of people because they think I'm a perfectionist. I'm just very organized about things and I like them the way I like them.



To tell you the truth, I've been kind of lonely lately. Back in Vermont, I had a few friends. Sure, they were terrible influences on me, but they were nice to me. I haven't met anybody in the three months I've been here that I would consider a friend. When I'm with the right people, making friends is easy, but when I don't feel like I belong, I just fly solo. See, everything in my life just "depends." Like, I'm outgoing when I feel comfortable to be outgoing, it just depends on the situation. My outlook on life changes every day from positive to negative to positive to negative. I'm really not a stable human being, and I'm sure you've realized that from what I've told you about myself. I do have some "for sure's" in my life though. I am for sure not going to college. I'm not really into the whole high school, college, job, path. High school is a "have to," college is a choice. I just want to get a lot of small jobs, because I don't want to become one of those people where work is their life. I want to work, and then I want a life and I want them to be as separate as the universe will allow. I'm just not your regular clean cut and conservative kid if you know what I mean. I don't get up every morning, stare outside the window, thank god for what he or she has given me, and then pour myself a bowl of cereal. Half the time I don't even eat breakfast.

I'm a guy who lives with no regrets. Well, sort of. I guess I regret going to all those parties and drinking and smoking, but hey, they've made great stories and I never got into any real trouble. I'm making an effort to make smarter decisions though. I'm not complacent or anything, but I wouldn't change a thing about me. I'm pretty proud of myself because of how well I've handled the things that I've been through so far. I only realized how well I'd been handling them when the therapist I had back in Vermont, raised my awareness of the matter.

She said in her annoyingly calm voice, that one of my greatest strengths was the way I dealt with all the things that have happened to me. And then she went on to say how none of it was my fault, which brings me back to my main point: terrible things happen to innocent people. On this lovely Saturday morning, however, I'm feeling pretty energetic. Which for me, means waking up around eleven thirty, opposed to one.

"Wow. You're awake early," Jason, my foster brother, says sarcastically from the kitchen table when I come downstairs, "Do you want some lunch? I made you a sandwich for when you got up."

"Why are you so nice to me?" I laugh.

"Because you're cool, and kind of intimidating."

I look at him confused.

"Just kidding," he laughs, "Jeez."

I get the grilled cheese he made me, sit down, and start eating it.

"Chase, I think they're sending you to a therapist today."

"Wait, what?" I ask, almost choking on the first bite of the sandwich.

"It's some lady named Dr. Houston. Hey, when you go can you ask her if she's actually from Houston? That'd be awesome. I wonder if..."

I stop listening to what he's saying as I feel my stomach sink down into places a stomach probably shouldn't sink into. My heart starts racing. There goes the anxiety. Sure enough, Jason is correct. About an hour later, I'm in the car headed to yet another session of therapy. My foster mom, Karen, signs the paperwork. Meanwhile, I am doing a little thinking while sitting in the cushioned seat in the waiting room. They call my name three times before I actually hear it. I go reluctantly, dragging my feet a little. This is it. The moment where my life cycles back like it always does, but this time feels different. Once inside, Dr. Houston says hello and attempts to start the session.

"Look," I say, gaining self-confidence and interrupting her, "I've done this too many times. We take a trip down memory lane, you tell me what's happened to me, I confirm it for you, you ask me how it makes me feel, as if it's not obvious that abuse makes people feel bad. Then you ask how I'm doing and how my heart is, and I say that I'm fine. You ask me why I'm here, and like always, I tell you it's because my foster parents or the state have made me come. I know every therapist wants a Good Will Hunting moment and all, but this is never going to be that way, because I'm tired of talking about things that I've already dealt with. I'm done with therapy, and I'm leaving now."

She's left speechless as I stand and exit the room. This is the first time in my life that closing a door has ever felt meaningful. I just finished a chapter in my life I thought would never be over, and now I feel like I'm ready to take on the world.



Worth It

Toby Weaver - Open High School

It starts with a dollar,
Then two,
Then three,
Suddenly you're a millionaire.

Sacrifice a stranger,
Sacrifice a life,
Sacrifice a love,
You're a billionaire now.

You're almost there,
CEO of your own business.
But why stop there?
Con the economy.

Four trillion dollars.
Sacrifice a nation
Be CEO of the world.

Doctor's Office

Chloe Murdaugh - Armstrong High School

See, Doc, it is the inside that's hurting:
When you are heartbroken and your emotions flow.
And I don't want to show it, but the bad just approaches
me and my relationships; going through phases: repeat, repeat.
Love is hard to have but easy to lose.

Can you still see something beating?
Do you see a bruise?
Am I able to love anymore?
Because I keep being pushed out the door,
and my heart has broken so many times
that I've

lost
count.

The Rise of Gun Violence

Desiree Green - Richmond Community High School

I don't like feeling scared,
scared to do everyday tasks.
Whenever I simply ask to go to the car at night to get something I left,
Or even to go for a job on the neighborhood trail.
Paranoid thoughts flood my mind. The Islamic State is everywhere.
And how I will be so helpless at their attacks,
that not even prayers will help.
I have yet to see Mockingjay Part II.
But, apart from schools and black churches,
movie theaters are the most at risk.
Instead of feeling safe in church,
I theorize how all churches and schools should keep guns,
so they won't be sitting-ducks when they're
inevitably attacked.
The media makes us live in fear.
Instead of feeling protected, we feel completely vulnerable.
Vulnerable to the point that we surrender our freedoms.
Parents begin telling their children not to go outside,
while politicians advise that the only way to stop crime
is to give up means of protection.
To sit helpless, unable to fight back.

If Only

Jada Keeve - Open High School

You talk about elections,
but they never seem to add up.
You rage with fire about these
terrorists, saying to kill their
families. Yet, you don't
seem to understand the hatred
you bring to yourselves. Do you
realize all the nasty things you've
said to the people? This issue
is huge, but all you care about
is starting another war with another
country. Take a look at yourself in
the mirror, and just think
for one second
about what you've said to others.
You say you're sorry, but
sorry doesn't add up. You say that you
don't mean it. If only.

History of War

Tristan Wynn - Thomas Jefferson High School

Gas chambers and suffocation
Waterboarding, interrogation:
These are America's Spoils of War.
Bloodshed, begging for more, More, More.

Give a man a fish and feed him for a day.
Give a boy a gun and throw some lives away.
Teach a man to fish and feed him for a lifetime.
Teach a man to kill and cut another supply line.

Why

Solomon Smith - John Marshall High School

Why?

Why did I do it?

I could've walked away.

But, no, I didn't.

So what then?

What made me do it?

Was it the fact that he threatened me,
or was it that I didn't like him?
It was my fault. I let it happen.

I shouldn't have done that.

Even if he was a lowlife, he deserved better.

People will start to wonder where he could be, how fun will that be?
Having to deal with the complaints and the pleas, the bribes and threats.

I can only take so much. Should I just dismiss them and forget about it?

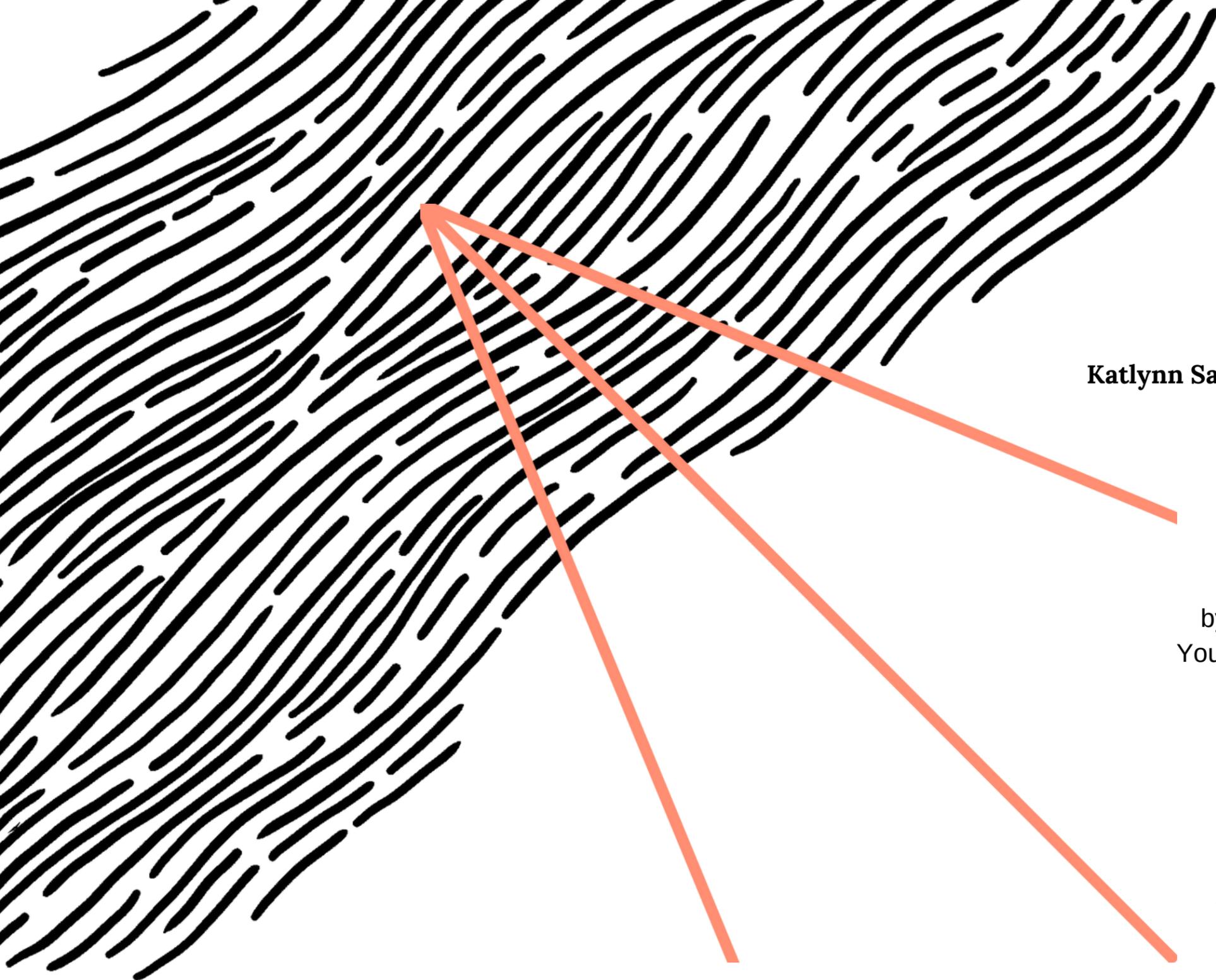
No. I can't. No way I could ever forget something like this. This'll be burned in my hollowed-out brain forever.

The ambulance is almost here. I can hear the sirens.

My radio on my shoulder is going off like it's on fire.

Great.

How am I going to explain to the chief that I killed another kid?



One Day

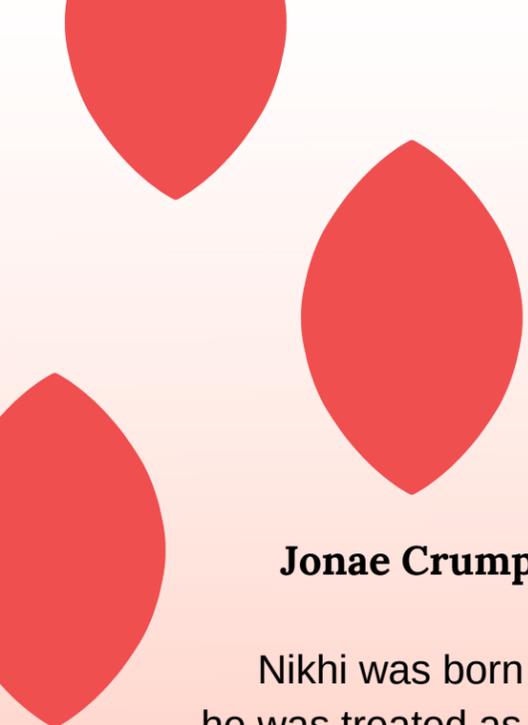
Katlynn Sawyer - Thomas Jefferson High School

One day in the future
I hope to see
Change in equalities
Between everyone.

I don't think that you should be judged
by your race, sexuality, gender, or religion.
You should be judged only by your character
And how you treat other people.

It would be wonderful to see
The changes in our nation,
Less killings and violence,
No turning people away
Or severe beatings and arguments,
Just everyone living together in harmony
And supporting each other,
Lifting each other up.

That's the way I want the world to be.



Scar

Jonae Crump - Richmond Community High School

Nikhi was born a minute behind Mufusi, but over the years he was treated as the lesser child. Mufusi was bigger and excelled at everything. Poor Nikhi would always fail in anything compared to Musufi, so Musufi got all the glory from their parents and never shared the light. When Nikhi was 9-years-old, he ran off into the great canyon. Little did he know that hyenas watched him. Zousha, his attendant, swooped down and tried to warn Nikhi, but the hyenas were already on his heels. He ran, but he was too slow.

The hyenas grabbed his legs. They left him for dead, barely breathing. Mufusi was supposed to walk with him, but he left to meet a girl instead. After that day, Nikhi vowed to himself that he would never again trust his traitor of a brother. When he returned to the Rock, he looked in the drinking hole at his reflection. A scar formed, a new namesake. A reminder for the rest of his days.

She Brought Me Flowers

Olivia Bell-Ferguson - Thomas Jefferson High School

She sat carefully on the grass in front of me. Her eyes burned, and her cheeks were stained with tears. She was totally quiet. Not a word fell from her lips, nor did a snuffle, a whimper, or sigh. She looked a lot better since the last time she came here. She had been dressed in a t-shirt and baggy sweat pants. Her hair was a mess, almost like a bird's nest, and her old flip-flops nearly fell off her feet.

Today she was wearing a pretty, yellow sundress; her nails were done to match. She wore white sandals, and her hair was curly and vibrant. Most days before she would bring lots of words and lay down her worries to me. Today she was silent. I could hear the birds chirping and the trees rustling for the first time. How I wish I could reach up and wipe her tears away. I wish I could stop her pain. But, every time I touch her, she just slips away.

You Know the Truth of Our Love, The Roots of All Love

Ny'rul Jones - Huguenot High School

Spoken words that I never imagined could be said,
a voice so sweet, it cleared all madness in my head.
As the pounding thump of a heartbeat grows,
it seems as though the whole world starts to slow.
But I don't want my feelings to show.
Because my emotions tend to hold me back from a world I wanna know.
At times we collide,
but the truth we still hide.
Whether in search, or right beside,
you still try to discover things
you already know.
If it reaches your mind, heart, or soul
you swear they'll never know.
But I can't help but think in mind
that feelings will show over time,
or wonder if you want me to be that way
with you to be by your side,
if I touch your heart, or if you keep me inside.

The One "L" I'll Never Do? Leave. A Shakespearean Sonnet

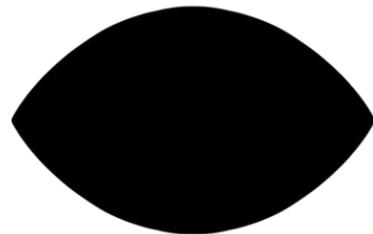
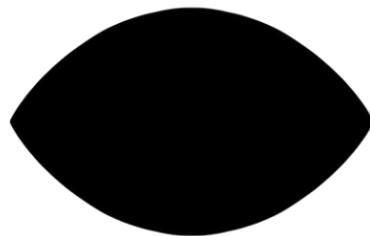
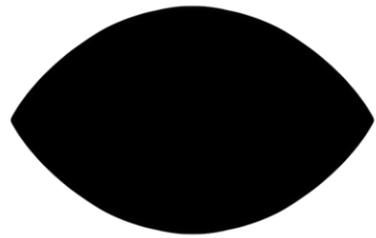
Da'Quon Stith - Huguenot High School

Deny me at the scene when things are bad,
but I'm not mad, just a little confused.
See, you like to treat the world like your dad;
don't be mad because I care if you are used.

When I was your handler, things mattered.
Brown betties taste better with somebody,
but now you just live life in the hazard.
Can you stop being plastered and just drive me?

I'm the car. Your favorite gear was insane.
Was that because you live like you're drunk?
You are becoming a lot like padre.
No matter the smell, I still love your funk.

The bond that was us is long gone away,
but this bee love. You're honey, so I'll stay.



She Was My Eyes

Georgia Leipold-Vitiello- Open High School

She told me she was beautiful, blonde hair, blue eyes. To be honest I knew from the beginning that it was all a lie. I adored her anyway. I loved her because of the way she could describe the world through colors, I knew more about the color blue than I knew about science. She was my eyes, because mine didn't work.

"Where were we, Linus?"

"You were telling me about yellow."

"Right, yellow. It's warm, it kisses your skin and heats you on the coldest days. It's vibrant and full of life. Yellow is the Sun's rays giving everything it touches a warm hue.." She trailed off.

"Jewel... I can tell when you're hiding something"

"Dr. Morgan called... He told me about an experimental treatment," she said.

"What?"

"There's a new surgery... It could make you see."

I don't respond to her at first. Seeing would change everything, I've never liked change.

"Is it safe?"

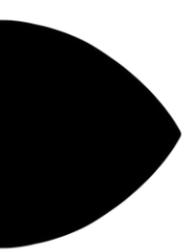
"I believe so."

I could hear the conflict in Jewel's voice. I'd been married to her for five years, known her for ten, in all those years she had loved being my eyes.

"Can I think about it?"

"Absolutely."

I've thought about what seeing would be like, but I never imagined it as a reality. I lost my vision when I was just a baby, due to a rare illness that the doctors didn't see coming until it was too late. I have no memories of sight. I know Jewel would miss being my eyes. However, if I could see that would change everything. I know Jewel would be happy for me if I had my vision.



I realize that there is only one decision to make.

"Jewel?" I say meandering into the kitchen to find her.

"Yes?" She says, grabbing my arm and guiding me to the table.

"I want to do the treatment."

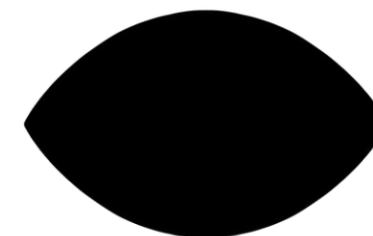
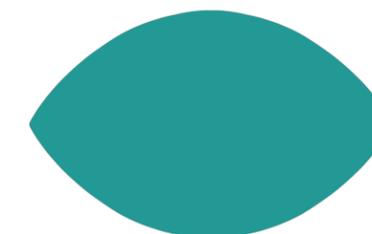
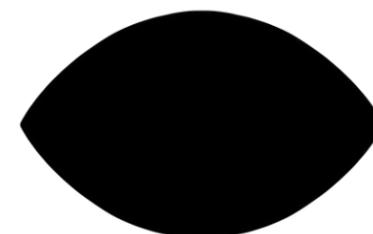
She sighs, "I knew you would... I'm happy for you... Really. It will be amazing for you to finally see, everything will change. I'm just in fear of us losing who we are together-- without me as your eyes"

"It will all be good change, I promise you. We will still be ourselves, I will just have sight. You have been my eyes for so long. But I'm ready to see on my own. We can travel and experience the world in a way that we never could before."

"I know," said Jewel.

Three weeks later the eye surgery was ready to commence. As the doctor counted back from ten, I fell into a deep sleep, the world would be completely changed when I awoke. The last thing I remember was Jewel squeezing my hand.

I blinked open my eyes and everything was bright. I began to focus on shapes and colors. I recognized every color immediately from Jewel's descriptions. Eventually my eyes focused on a face, I knew it belonged to Jewel. As it turned out, she had been lying about her appearance. She hadn't done herself justice.





All That Glitters

Vazya Herman - John Marshall High School

The fold and hiss of the flame, like the
open pages of a textbook in the wind when
I light my incense.

The crunching under my feet from
the cold grass.

Voices of 2 kids from the cracked window
of the house on the corner
by my bus stop.

The jail and court sitting directly
across the street from each other.

The gold-lined paper of the Bible
and Quran.

Winter Cicada

Keonna Beasley - Open High School

Your hair was as dark
as the night we met.
There was a thick haze of fog everywhere,
but I still saw your eyes and fear for me
as clear as day,
destroying the few options I had to escape.
The chance had arrived for you to cut me
down like the bamboo that had surrounded
us and suffered a similar fate.
Instead you let me flee, allowing us to live.
Even though I had escaped, in some
ways I truly hadn't.



Like Rain

Christopher Bennett - Armstrong High School

You were the first storm in the desert of my life.
You were the path that the moon lit throughout the night.
Funny, as I look over my time and reflect on the feelings I neglected.
Funny how I wish I had some people I thought I'd never miss.
Now I can only visualize your sweet wine dripping from my lips.

O.N.S.C. – One Night Standers Club

Destiny Hall-Harper - Richmond Community High School

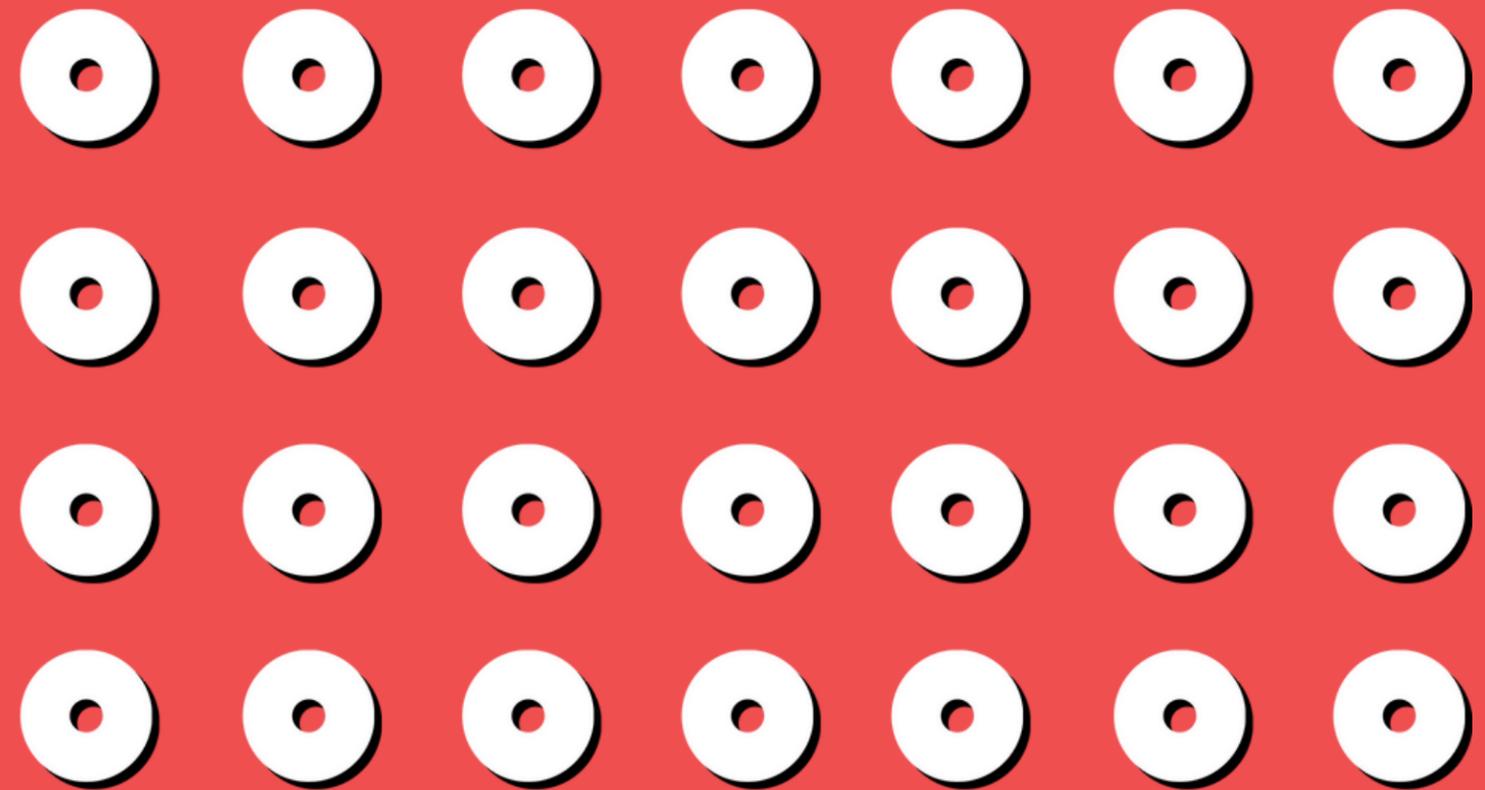
I remember waking up to the smell of hot bodies, burning in the intensity from the night previous. The way you held me, you made me feel safe. The following day, you had my clothes in a plastic bag labeled "girl # 5." When I asked you what it meant, all you did was send me out the door with my clothes, bed sheets, a PopTart®, and told me to get lost before your wife came home.

Wife? What wife? You never told me about a wife.

Shut up, you said. You were just easy pickings. Understand that I needed something to hold me over.

So you didn't love me?

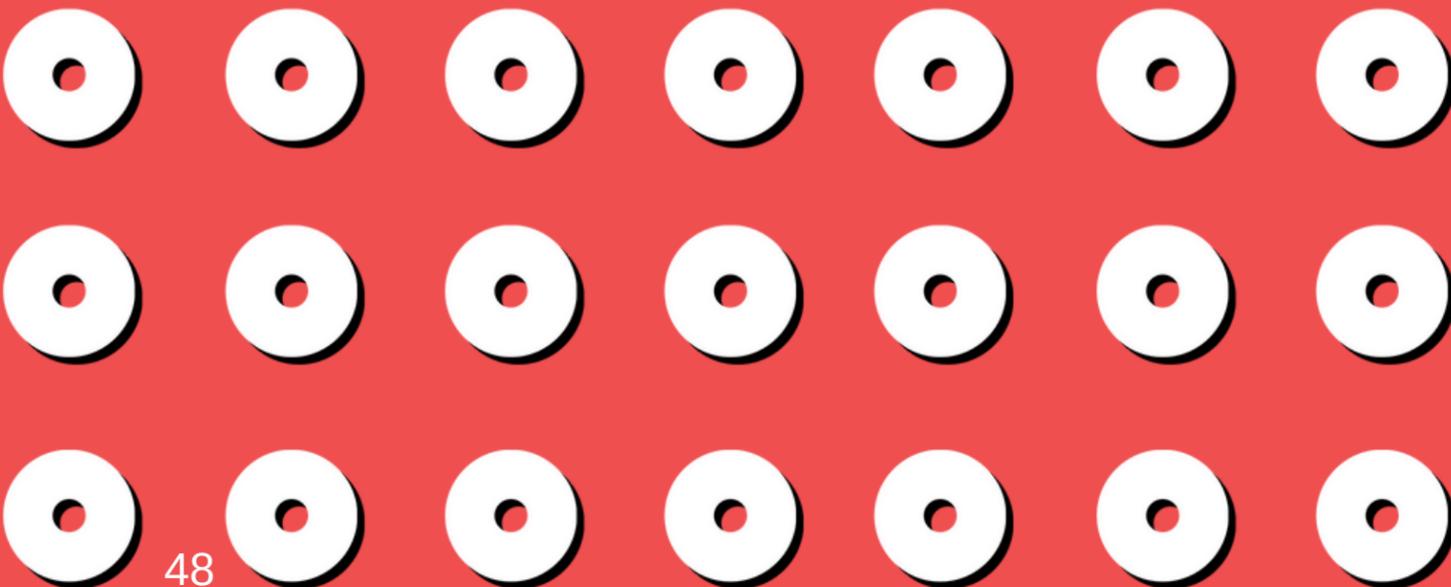
Of course not, you said. You're an insignificant creature that neither has luster, nor the capacity to please a man. So I will say it again, leave.



I left that day feeling worse about my existence; not only as a woman, but as a human too.

I warn you girls, all that glitters isn't gold. If he promises you the world, ask how hard he'd fall if he dropped it. If he says he loves you, make sure to check his contacts. His track record should be in his DM's. If he says he's single, reach into his back pocket for his wedding ring. Don't be fooled behind that smile—he thinks you are gullible. Men think we are just yesterday's newspaper. Drifting until we are stepped on by the shoe of a wanderer. They think we are weak, because of how trusting we are. Men take our love for weakness until we prove we are Amazons. We are the ones that made them. Man would not exist without women.

To every new member, this club is exclusive. Only the women scorned may enter. Proceed with caution, all our members are on edge. Who wouldn't be?



Your Mother is Strong

Joelle-Marie Obi - Huguenot High School

There once was a pair of shoes,
a pair of bright, shiny, red shoes.
13 inch heels on the bottom
that made a certain young woman
Look rather tall - so tall they made
the average woman think they would
fall if they dared try them on. She called
them her Favorite Red, Hot Stilettos.

And every night she'd stand at the corner of a dark alley,
offered her pearls in return for money.
You know what she found was funny? The policemen of the city,
the mayor, VIP's, lawyers, and married
men paid her great money for her pearls.

Every night she'd stand still occasionally changing her pose
looking as if she were hungry for a round of sexual activity
saying, "Sixty an hour but I'll take ten off for you, baby."
"Well, get in!" They'd reply. Every hour, men,
use her, force her to call them "Daddy."

And you might call this young woman a series of unmentionable names.
Have you ever asked
yourself why she needed that money? Drugs perhaps? Maybe.

Not really. Not quite.

At home she doesn't live alone; she has an angel. A beautiful
little girl of her own who resembled her greatly; she had tightly
curled hair, big mystical brown eyes, and her skin favored a chocolate
kiss with rose, gold dusted on her gracefully. Her name was Ana,
and her mother did so much.

So much that she dropped out of college
on a three year scholarship. She tried to get a job,
only to stumble upon hardships and end up
standing on a street corner.

All to supply one little girl. Positively:
If you asked the little girl who her hero
is, she wouldn't say Super Woman, Storm,
Wonder Woman, or Word Girl. She would say,
"My Mommy. I think she's strong."

Though she may or may not know about the need
for those bright, shiny, red stilettos, she knows
her mother is strong. That is the most
important lesson for her to know. And for you,
my dear, to ponder upon,
black mothers are truly strong.

Mother's Hands

Mike Allen - Armstrong High School

My mother's hands are smaller than mine, but stained
with hard work and stress. She's a mom, of course,
a single mom caring for me and my little sis.
I see sadness in her eyes as she paces
back and forth in her room, and I ask,
as only a worried son could, "Are you okay?"
She replies, as if yelling for help
from the depths of her soul.
"I'm alive."

Dear Mom

Demitrice Morgan - Armstrong High School

Mom, if only you were here,
if only your face were near.
Only so I could hear
you screaming in my ear,
"Wash the dishes, wash the dishes!"
Why can't I hear?
I know why: because you aren't near.
Your voice is hard to remember
'cause you've been gone since December.

Losing A Loved One

Astasha Miller - George Wythe High School

I lost a loved one, which brings sadness.
What happened to you later brought madness.
I know you have only slipped into the next room,
where I will see you again.

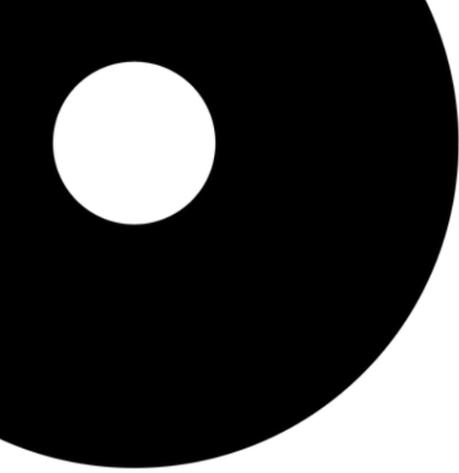
This past year has been hell without you.
I promise I won't fail in life, just for you.
I never felt so heartbroken.
Until we meet again, my heart has been taken.

There's not a day you don't cross my mind.
I cry, I pray, and I ask why.
I don't get an answer and I don't know why,
but I continue to tell myself I'm going to be fine.

When it came to the end of the road for you,
I was left miserable, confused, not knowing what to do.
You're one of my late fallen angels,
but I know you're my guardian too.

You will always have that special spot in my heart.
I'll keep my promise that I made from the start.
You've gone home, too far away.
Everyday goes by, and I just wish you could stay.
I got you down here on Earth,
and I know you got me from up above in Heaven.

June 23, 2013 at 12:20 am you were pronounced dead.
When I read the text that you were gone, I was in denial.
You were only 16, going to the 10th grade, changing your ways.
I'm going to make you proud by keeping my head up on these rough days.
I love you, Marquise.



To Me

Sydney Vick - Richmond Community High School

Sydney,
When I see your face,
My heart skips a beat.
Wah... Mmm, that's too cliché.

Sydney,
When I see your face,
I recognize who you are.
I see your beauty,
and I see your scars.
I know the problems you face,
but I love who you are.
But enough with this rhyming,
'cause I'm not rapping bars.



From your mocha skin,
to your nubby, chewed nails,
to your kinky, coiled hair,
down to your innocent caress.

I love all of you,
and my heart is filled with despair,
because I know that sometimes
you tend to forget.

But babe, I'm right here
for you.
And my love is all you need.
Doesn't matter what anyone else thinks.

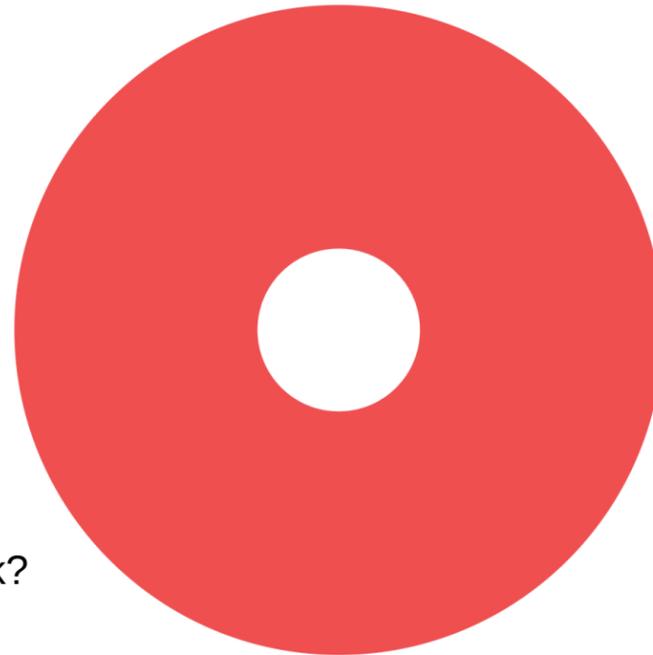
You are a queen.
So forget about the scars,
both mental and physical.
Remember what they mean—
that doesn't mean they
define who you are.

Let them build you up,
both in love and in strength.
take a look in the mirror.
You see that? Okay.
Why would it matter what they think?

You see, I'll always be here
for you.
And you'll always be there
For me.

It's us two against the world.

Except it's just me.



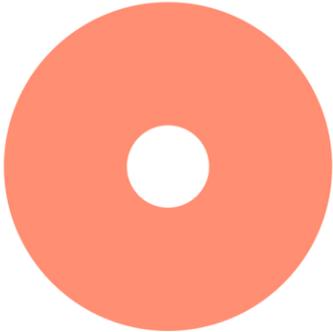
MIDDLE SCHOOL WRITING



Basketball

Meyonna Boyd - Henderson Middle School

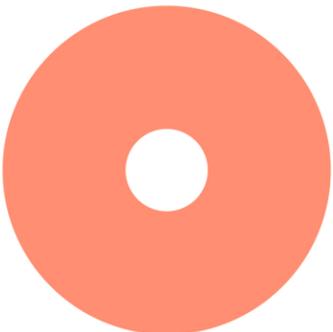
Basketball, basketball, o' I love basketball.
Basketball, basketball, o' I love basketball
I love the way I dribble down the court criss-
crossing and flossing, making them fall.
They sit and watch me shoot tall,
like MJ most of all I'm shorter/quicker
And can handle the ball, going down
the court moving and grooving
popping and rocking why, you
bumping why you dropping, basketball



On Art

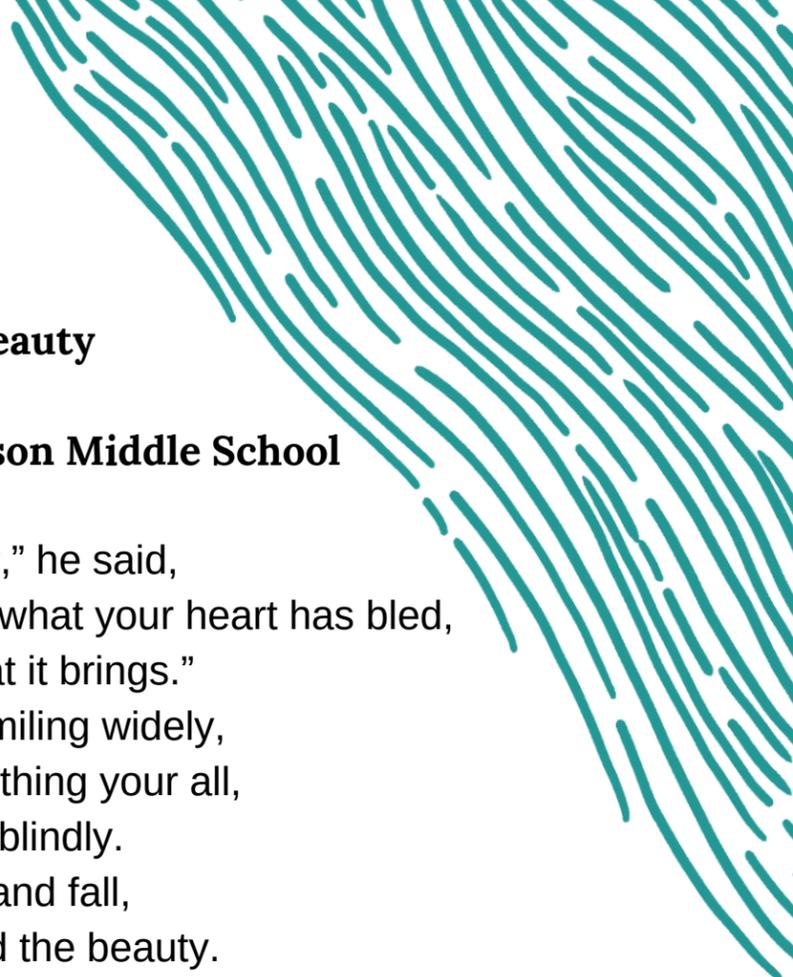
Zhavar Johnson- Henderson Middle School

Art is a necessity to life, because art is not just the things we make, but the ideas we have. Without art, we wouldn't have basketball, or recipes, or anything like that. I would use a tree as an example, because you have to give it time, but when it grows, it's beautiful. Art is pretty much like breathing. You have to do it. Even silence is an art, because even when you're not talking, you're still breathing and trying to create a personality that is quiet. It affects what happens to you, and it affects what happens in the world.



Passion and Beauty

Querriana Fulton- Henderson Middle School



"Passion and Beauty," he said,
"Is a most wonderful thing. It shows what your heart has bled,
Including the love that it brings."
"Passion," he started smiling widely,
"Passion is giving something your all,
even if you go in blindly.
You will stumble and fall,
but you will always find the beauty.
Especially if you love something."
He looked directly at me.
"Or someone. It gives you wings to spread and fly,
Soaring through the fluffy clouds
High in the sky.
It's screaming in your head, loud.
Beauty, on the other hand,
Can be so much quieter.
You could love the look of a land
Or how someone's a fighter.
It could be even deeper,
Like the way someone dog ears book pages,
And how they're such a deep sleeper,"
He laughed with mirth that was ageless.

Morning Senses

Alexus Drumgold - Anna Julia Cooper Episcopal School

The peppermint toothpaste
The plain water
The mini snack that was leftover
From the night before
My orange soda that hits my mouth
The “Thousands Wish” perfume that
I put on every morning
The Gain detergent from the covers
The leftover smell of last nights
Meal.
The “Oui Ringtone” that wakes me up
My mom waking up to start her day
The yawns and moans from me getting
Up and stretching my arms out
My friends calling my name or welcoming
The phone that’s lying beneath
Me or either beside me

The Things I Need

Essence Robinson - Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School

Cars, trucks, buildings, dogs, trash
Cars, bus, talking
Food, toothpaste, hot chips
Clothes, shoes, socks, water
Washrag, toothbrush
Sewer, flowers
Dark and foggy
Pulling my sleeves over my hands
It keeps me warm
Feels like I’m walking through
A cloud.

My mind is a fog.

Humanity

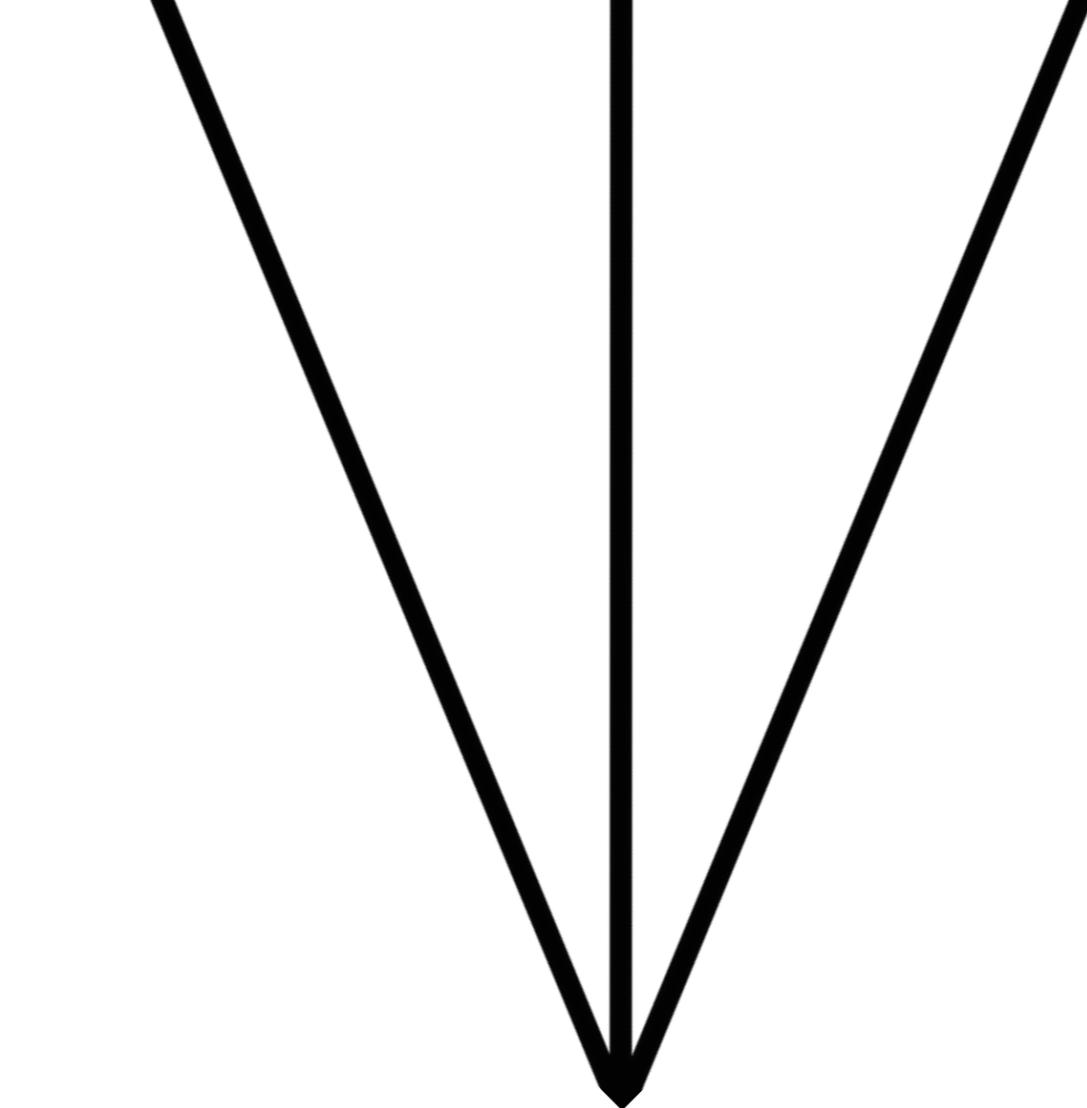
Querriana Fulton - Henderson Middle School

Humanity is full of darkness and destruction
Every country fights
But I've learned that they can function
And the future is bright.
People shine brighter than stars
I can give you a few examples,
Even in the sadness of wars
Love, in supply, is ample
A motorcyclist helped an old lady in a wheelchair stuck on cement
A customer paid for a family's trip to their home country and off they went.
I help people everyday. So smile a little, and give kindness away.

Day After Day

Jaymesha Richardson - Lucille Brown Middle School

Walking towards that bright light, I keep my head high.
The ground dissipates beneath my feet, but
I got my wings to carry me. I'll be okay.
As I think about my past I realize, I don't know freedom.
I've always wanted my dreams to rescue me.
I may not have gone to church every week,
But my faith is as strong as ever.
I've asked the Lord to follow me day-
after-day, even though I've been unfaithful.
As I walk through that golden gate, I
Wondered, "Why did you call on me?"



Not So

Eliza Wrenn - Lucille Brown Middle School

See it's okay,
because in the end
the ground will swallow us anyway
with all of our friends,
and I won't feel
so different anymore.
Not so different anymore.
Not so different anymore.

Perfect

Dannay McKinney - Lucille Brown Middle School

She would look in the mirror and think she wasn't good enough.
The only things perfect about her were the warm tears upon her cheeks.
Clear as glass.
Clear as her mind and heart,
revealing all of her secrets.
She was driving herself mad over the eyes of another that shined so bright,
yet were so dull when they looked into hers.
She'd stay up at night,
wishing for those eyes to become as infatuated with her soul as she was with theirs.
She never thought she'd be good enough for those eyes.
She never was,
but she found the eyes in her reflection shining brighter than theirs.
She found love in herself.
And somehow that became all she never knew she needed.

Encounter With A Death Bringer

Haley Miller - Henderson Middle School

"Come on Luna!" Kryan yelled, "You got this!" There was something I had to do. The last dragon I needed to get the gem for was right here-- Death Bringer. A Death Bringer is a demon dragon, they never stop growing-- I mean it. Two more things you need to know: Death Bringers hate humans; they will kill a human as soon as they see one. They also pick fights with every dragon they come across. Now do you get it?

"Luna!" yelled Kowici, "Just don't stand there, do something! Now!" "I used an attack!" I yelled, "It's not working!" "Use your strongest attack!" Nyla yelled. "Alright fine!!" I yelled. Suddenly, I had an idea. "Go for its weak spot." I thought. Its weak spot... Its tail!

"Luna?" Nyla yelled, "What are you-", her sentence got cut off; I had jumped and was now running down the dragon's back.

"Distract it!" I yelled. They started to distract the Death Bringer. Whatever they did worked, I was soon at the tail and had found its weak spot. I took my sword out and stabbed it in the weak spot.

"No!" Death Bringer yelled, "They told me that you would never be able to kill me!" "Sorry" I said, "but they lied." With that, he disintegrated. One small thing fell out the air-- a black gem. I picked it up and put it on the mark where I usually seal the gems. The gem was sucked in, and I felt dizzy. I fell on the floor and passed out.



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YHELI East District Family Resource Center: Alexis Drumgold, Shemonee Jackson, Zhy'Arin McHellon, Jalen Jefferies, Anthony Robertson, Destyn Williams, Deveney Burke, Kahla Lassiter, and Jerrin Norton.

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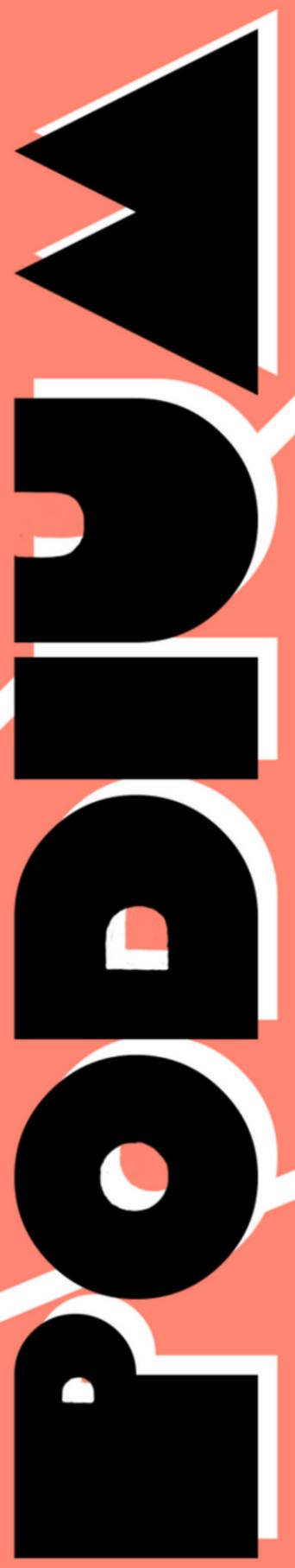
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