

SPRING - SUMMER 2020



Podium

All pieces collected are from weekly virtual programming in Podium's own hosted programs!



Alumni Section

Contracted
Kavin J.

Chapter 1

The last time I saw her, she was lying face down in a ditch off the side of the road, three years ago, cold and lifeless, and now, she's sitting across from me, sipping on a cherry coke in the New Hop Dinner like it never happened. I just stared at her in disbelief, someone who I watched die is in this old run-down dinner.

"I loved this place as a kid! Brings back so many fond memories. The strawberry cheesecake here is to die for, and the chocolate cake is not too shabby either..."

"Why... h-how are you here?" I cut her off, shocked to see a dead person walking again. "You died... I saw you die!" My mind was racing but my training only let my voice stumble for that moment. She let out a slight chuckle and smirked at me.

"Wow, it's so great to see you, Carmen. It's been nearly three years since I last saw you."

"That would have been nice to hear before you started with all the questioning, you know. But then, you were never a person who wasted time. Straight to the point and always have been. That's one of the reasons I like you." She sighed and adjusted herself in the booth "Well, to make a long story short, I have some unfinished business that needs attending to." As she said those words, her left eye flashed with a dull, red glow.

"What happened to you? Why did you come to me, Carmen, after all these years? How are you even alive? I don't even know where to start." My mind ran faster than I could keep up with. She's alive and here, how? Why?

"You really thought a bullet could kill me?" she said with an air of confidence as she leaned back in her seat and took a sip of her drink.

"Considering it was a shot to the head... Yes, I would think a bullet would kill anybody in front of it."

"Oh please, Jason's little friends wish they could kill me that easily, and they are already on my list." She laughed

"I hope I'm not on that list. I was forced there and couldn't do anything."

"Oh, I'm well aware of your involvement in all of this. You are not an easy person to find, you know? I had to see a lot of people before I could even figure out where you were hiding; otherwise, you would have been the first person I paid a visit to, Sawyer."

"Yeah, I made it that way on purpose. So, what do you want with me? Are you going to kill me? Go ahead, do it! I have nothing to live for anymore anyway." I swirled the black coffee I barely touched.

"I'm not going to kill you, that would be counterproductive. No, no, no, I need you for a far more important task." She lifted up my head and stared me directly in my eyes "You're going to help me kill the person who tried to kill me."

I was stunned, did she really just say that? "You...want to kill Jason?!" Her playful demeanor changed to that of a dictator who wasn't taking no for an answer. She held my gaze for a few seconds, then she leaned back, ran her fingers through her hair, and said, "Come on, lighten up a bit. We have so much to discuss."

Untitled Progression

Kavin J.

My feelings were locked away in a chest, chained by the fear of being hurt again. But you wouldn't know that just by looking at me. I walked with confidence, my chest held high, looking like I knew I was a bad chick, but on the inside, I was hollow like the tree in my backyard. I felt like giving up all the time, with my heart too heavy for my chest. I couldn't carry it anymore. But you helped with the rest of the weight, and I thank you.

Reflection

Kavin J.

I heard an urban legend from a friend that if you look at your reflection at midnight on the 13th of the month with the moon in view, you'll see a vision of your future self and what your life will turn out like. Of course, I didn't believe this dumb rumor. It was spread over the web to trick people into believing in a lie, but I guess that's all rumors. Even though I didn't believe in this fairytale at first, something did happen. I woke up from my sleep just a few minutes before midnight to a mostly clear sky. At midnight it would be the 13th and my birthday. I walked into the bathroom, used it, and washed my hands. I briefly looked up in the mirror, and I'm not sure what I saw. It was like a dark shadow looming over me, so I jumped back.

The light dimmed a bit, and when I looked back at the mirror, I saw something that definitely wasn't me. It looked like me and moved as I did, but whatever that was, it wasn't me. I stupidly moved my face closer; it just felt like I was being drawn towards it. A chill ran down my spine as it shoved its hand through the mirror, shattering it, and it grabbed me by the throat, trying to pull me in. I woke up out of breath and nervous about what I had just seen. The time was 11:52 p.m.

My curiosity got the best of me, so I recreated what happened in my dream. But when I looked up at the mirror, it was like time stopped and everything turned gray. The walls were cracked. I felt cramped and could barely move. My reflection stared at me. It felt like hours had gone by with it just staring at me. Whatever was in the mirror wasn't me. It couldn't be. Not anymore. It cocked his head, sneered at me and said, "This will be fun. We are going to do so many things together." The lights flashed, and I could finally breathe, but I was terrified. "I haven't slept in days, Doc." Those words just circled around my head. "What... What do I do?"

"I think it's important to start with what we know. Tell me do you believe ghost stories? Because you might be in one."

Slam Poetry

Kavin J.

Hi. My name is Kavin Jackson, K.A.V.I.N. Jackson, and I don't do slam poetry.

Reason Number One:

I don't write poetry; I write short stories. Poetry weaves the beautiful words of song that dance around the inside of my ears and change my heart from one emotion to the next. Twist and pull my mind, creep on my old dreams of nothingness, and make me lose again to a part of me. I've thought I had the upper hand but I guess not. Well, screw that. I'm not dealing with that emotional wreck; that's a problem for me to handle in style.

Reason Number Two:

I write stories from my imagination, the combination of both sides of my brain working in harmony to tell my stories. Tales of tangible yet unbelievable sights. But to me, when I tell them they seem to be heard by those who can't see the images, or they can't follow the storyline. Should I read them slower? Should I read with more enthusiasm? Word. Wait. No. The more words might confuse you and me. Should I tell a simple tale? Why should I? I write my stories for an audience to read and hear, but if you can't understand, then you're not my audience.

Reason Number Three:

My stories aren't painful. They don't make you cry. They can make you laugh. They are not from my past. Of parents who cheated on each other, lost custody of their kids, got divorced, manipulated family members to have each other, and of poverty, while I was caught in the crossfire of both ends, taking on the bullet wounds from people trying to win me over, like I'm the last place they need to get



this monopoly. I'm an entertainer, a jester for your amusement. I have to put on a show. The people in my heart who are gone but would be proud of me. To hear my stories of love and wonder, magic and creativity. To see them smile from a story that warmed their hearts with anticipation as I leave them wanting more with a cliffhanger that make them the same. Darn, not again! So I'll take my scores of 4, 5, 6.3, and 7. Oh, and thank you for your time.

Crit
Destiny H.H.

If you are going to art school
and your skin is darker than the canvas you paint on,
there are five rules you should know before you go.
First rule of being brown skinned in art school is to close your mouth.
Utter a peep,
utter a stutter,
and those white, woke kids will be all down your throat.

Rule two: A critique will be your lynching.
Make sure you don't tie the noose for them.
Stay quiet.
You will hang like your piece on the wall, and they are all taking snapshots.
You are a trophy.
Your hands are too aggressive, calm your strokes.
Make it seem like references to water doesn't trigger you.
They don't tolerate a slave narrative.

Rule three: don't mention slavery in any piece you do.
You make everyone uncomfortable.
Tell them you felt it was right.
Tell them you read it in a book;
you'll seem more educated that way.

Rule four: you'll always have a resting bitch face.
A professor will ask at least five times in three hours if you are okay.
Are you upset?

Rule five: restrain yourself from beating the crap out of your professor.
Especially when they seem to know your story better than you do.
You'll hear the white kids talk about cultural appropriation like it's a new iPhone update.



You'll get tired.

Your mouth will start to curl, and the wooden paint brush you grip so tight between your fingers will crack, and you'll stand straighter.

To be a black artist is to draw a dart board on your back.

Students will hurl words like darts

upon impact. You might bend,

but remember, this is what you signed up for.

Our hands are made to do only a few things, and art ain't it.

My grandmother tried to warn me.

Told me to have a backup,

take up journalism.

I didn't realize any job I get will seem like I'm the only one in the room.

Art school wasn't made for us pieces of art.

I have tried to fit in.

I have stretched a white canvas so far over a brown frame until it tore, exposing the wood underneath.

I have been meaning to get back to my roots, to paint with the blood of artists before me, but for some reason, I can't shake this noose.

There's always white around.

No color.

It's a quiet abstraction.

Each brush stroke adds more white.

It bleeds onto the gold,

covers the red, and

silences the black.

It was never good at keeping still.

I put this piece up for critique

My piece was torn apart, but they dared not come closer when I told them I made it for them.

It's ironic how much you get away with when you are the artistic black.

The weird black.

The quiet black..

And for the first time in my life, I felt like the creator of my painting.

Only this time,

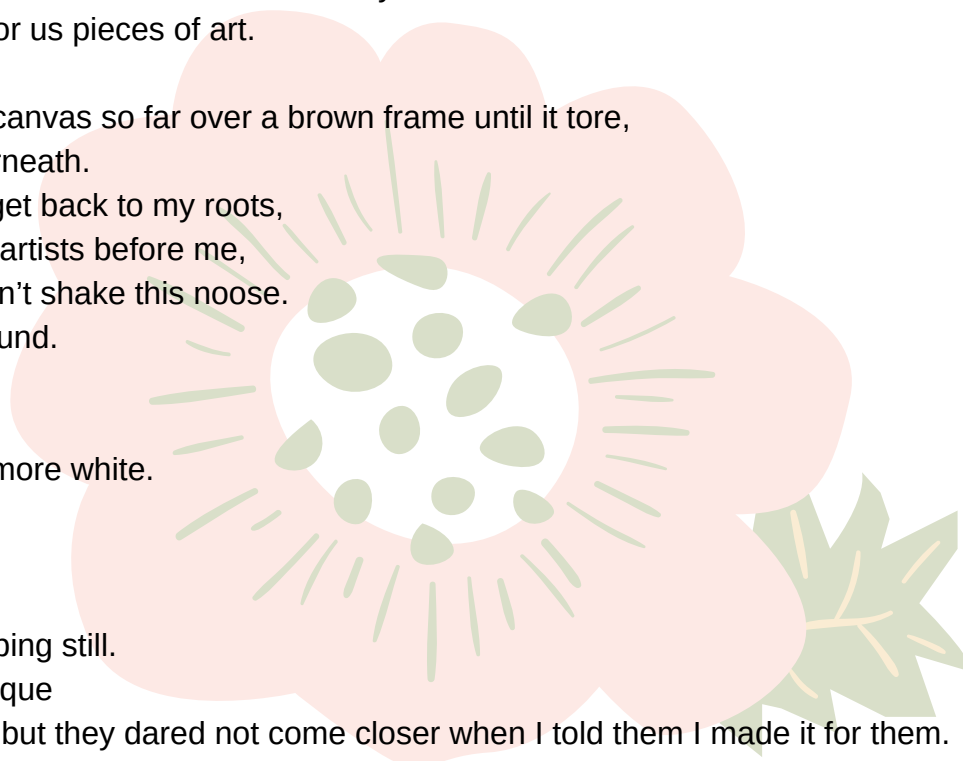
the white of my canvas was forced to watch as it was now the one being critiqued.

I could see the black seeping out from under the white.

It reached out to me.

After the critique I had it framed.

It's untitled.



White Wakanda

Destiny H.H.

I had a dream of a white wakanda.
I woke up in a timeline where Martin and Malcolm were silent.
One where black progress took a back seat to the colonizer.
In this white wakanda,
black people thank the colonizers.
They apologize for the 401 years of strife we caused them.
We whip ourselves.
Chains hold us to our desks as we listen to white professors outside of classrooms.
In this white wakanda, slavery was an inconvenience
A misunderstanding,
A Christopher Columbus misstep into a new world that was never supposed to be discovered.
In this white wakanda, Harriet Tubman gave herself up and
Apologized for the underground revolution that resulted in freedom.
Freedom can only be a construct by black unruly rebels.
In this white wakanda, I bleach my skin,
I make sure to let my classmates know I'm not a threat,
I point a gun at myself to show my humanity,
My hands bound behind my back.
I'll let you beat me
If it helps to show you I mean you no trouble.
In white wakanda,
the black panther isn't here to help us.
In this timeline, the confederacy won the civil war,
And we've been slaves to the system ever since.
We've never had rights;
We don't need them.
Don't speak up,
Massa might whip you.
Don't make eye contact,
Massa might whip you.
Don't acknowledge emotions,
Massa said emotions lead to uprising,
And uprisings get you whipped.
Be a good slave.
Be tolerant.
Watch as they drag your children,
Your mother,
Your father,
the love of your life away.

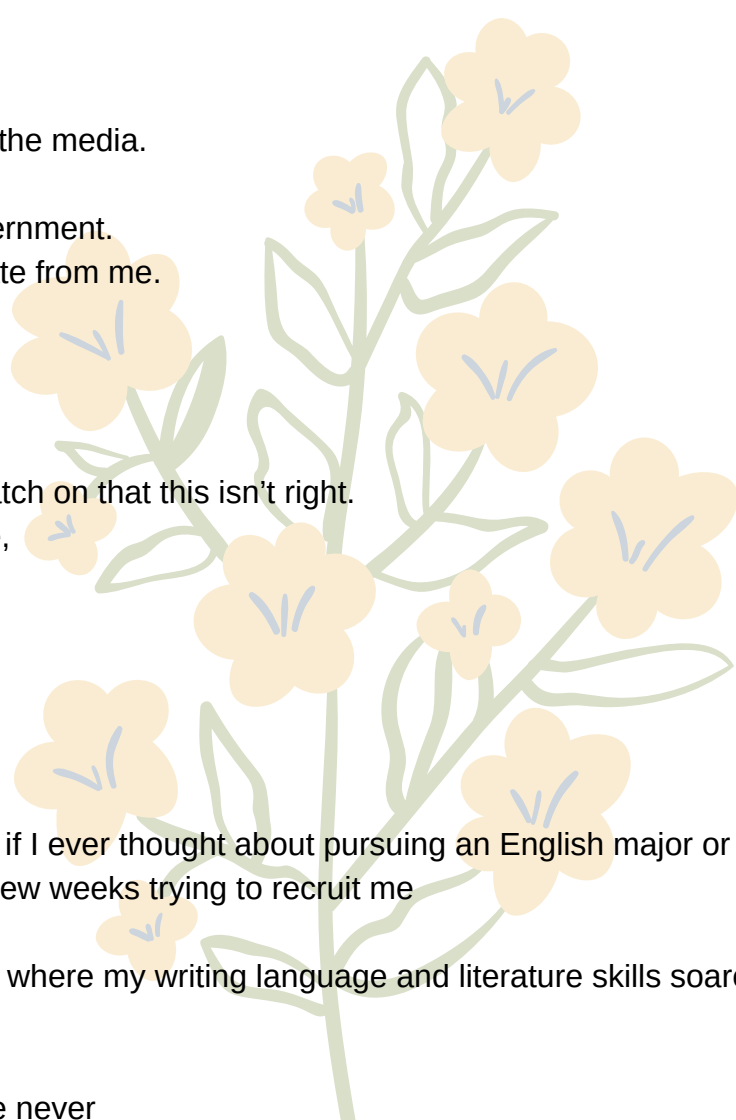
....



This dream...
I've had for days..
I wake up in the middle of the night
with cold sweats,
crying .
The sound of protests and unrests as my people are being beat in the streets like some damn
disobedient slaves.
And to the white man,
Have we ever stopped being slaves?
Have we stopped being the white man's footstool in the eyes of the colonizer?
In class, I raise my hand.
The black students in my class feel uncomfortable talking about race relations.
"Can we divert from talking about race?"
they say.
I tell my professor, the second deadliest disease to a black person in America is 2020 is their white next
door neighbor who wants to stay "neutral"
On topics about race.
I don't think the white wakanda is a dream.
They shoot us with their poison dart guns
and feast on our flesh for the world to watch in the media.
In white wakanda, we are a third world country.
The rich aren't really rich but slaves to the government.
My mother, she's tried her best to shield the hate from me.
But I've caught on. I've been enslaved as well.
And everytime I wake up,
I feel like I broke the timeline.
Because the more I wake up,
the more the black people of white wakanda catch on that this isn't right.
And they are intrigued at the fact that in this life,
Black America has built its own wakanda,
And it's ever growing.

English
Destiny H.H.

My university recently sent me an email asking if I ever thought about pursuing an English major or minor.
This is the third email I've received in the past few weeks trying to recruit me
into the English department.
Coming from a college preparatory high school where my writing language and literature skills soared, I
couldn't say I felt humbled.
The resident caucasians took notice
that the one black girl out of many talks like she never
used Ebonics in her life.
Talks like a whip was taken to her tongue.
Articulates like she has never uttered an ain't in her life.
I'm quite familiar with many classic works of literature.



For instance, Holden Caulfield in *Catcher in the Rye* considered the majority of human kind to be phonies.

He stated that he was the realest in any room.

I think the word he was looking for was silent.

I think the word he was looking for was silenced.

Notice the verb tense.

I am well educated on my verb tenses.

I am going to die, present tense.

I cannot breathe, present tense.

He could not breathe, past tense.

Will we be able to breathe, future tense.

George was here, past tense.

Breonna was here, past tense.

Eric was here, past tense.

Sandra was here, past tense.

Black people used to be left alone...

Never a tense.

This melanin shows that black bodies have been left in the past tense for way too long.

And I ain't gotta open a Merriam-Webster dictionary to know that black and survival ain't on the same page.

Black,
characterized by the absence of light.

Black,
reflecting or transmitting little or no light.

Black,
served without milk or cream.

Black,
thoroughly sinister or evil.

Black,
connected with or invoking the supernatural and especially the devil.

Black,
not associated with any context relating to survival or peace.

Peace,
An illusion.

Illusion,
white educators shielding the heavy blow of racism from African American students so as to not cause uproar or unnecessary violence.

Violence; associated with Police, see brutality on page May 25, 2020.

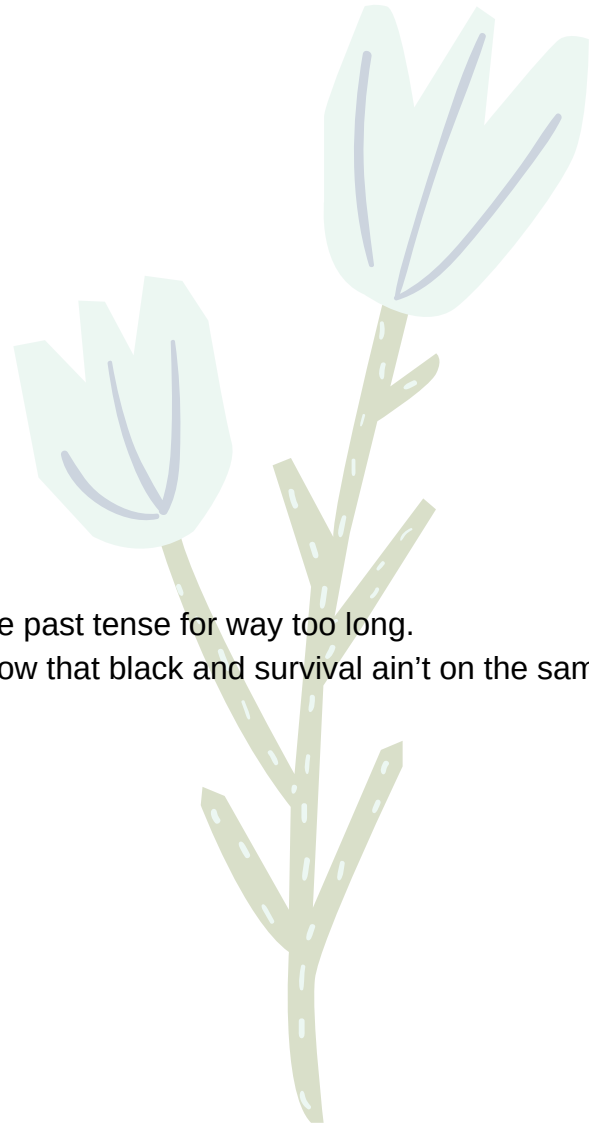
Tell me again how an educated black woman has her melanin erased
Solely because she knows the proper usage of their, there, and they're.

Examples:

White woman calling the police announces "they're attacking me."

Proper Usage: they are.

White woman caught in the car with black men with pounds of marijuana,
Says "that's theirs"



Proper usage: T H E I R.

Police indicate a residence of interest, “unknowingly” targets a POC household,

Proclaims: “they live there.”

Proper usage: T H E R E.

There denotes place.

A space.

A belonging to somewhere.

Blacks Belonging.

An Oxymoron.

Because black and belong can't happen at the same time.

So to the blonde haired, white woman at my university who told me to consider an English major or minor,

Nah fam, I don't know the first thing about English.

To the Moon

Tristan W.

I was so ready to go to the moon if NASA told me. I had to gain their respect.

I was always so ready to tell them the secrets they told me, while she cried late at night.

As if that would even have a chance to hold me.

I was so ready to blast off to the Moon and never return to the ground below my feet, no matter how devoid of life it was.

I was always so ready to sacrifice everything. Friendships, family, everything I had, for just one chance to go to the Moon.

Since I was young, I had always been fascinated by the wonders of outer space, and it was a damn shame that my first mission was to land on the moon.

Its core is nothing but a little dust and iron.

So barren and empty, yet everyone is so fascinated with its face all covered in craters.

I used to love the Moon, but the more I learned, the sourer it grew for me.

I wish the Moon was made of cheese, just so that I didn't have to look up at it every once in a while.

Even now, it calls to me, and I want to answer because I've stared at it since I was 11 years old.

I used to play games and have so much fun with it because the moon was my best friend.

But like most friendships when we are young, we just had to grow apart because nothing can ever be simple.

It couldn't just be simple.

I didn't think the Moon could hurt the Sun so badly, but it did some damage.

I always loved the Sun too.

I had been captivated by it since I was eleven, just like when I found the Moon.

We knew each other.

We helped each other...

I just couldn't pick one to love.

The Moon had major sway on the tides of my opinions, and I grew to despise the Sun, even if she was the only thing keeping me alive, while he was siphoning my energy.

AND GOD DO I HATE THE MOON.

Everyone always thinks it's so cool but no, not the Moon I know.

Il it ever did was pull my tides in ways they shouldn't move naturally and cause the Sun to flare up and damage me.

After all this time I can finally say I've gone to the Moon and back, and honestly...
It ain't all it's cracked up to be.

Jewels and Roses

Tristan W.

Oh boy! You've done it now, you stupid boy.

You know why you did it, but that doesn't mean it was okay.

Be honest with yourself. You used her as a rebound and in the process, convinced her you really loved her.

I can't tell if you're a manipulative bastard, or if you were just heartbroken and wanted an escape from your mind.

Did you just want to replace the value of the roses with brand new glittering jewels?

You've never liked jewels; they've always been secondary in value to you.

That's the REAL reason why you called her Sprite.

Not just because she reminds you of a forest fairy, but because she was your second choice.

Just like the soda, you only noticed her feelings when the roses were gone and you missed them.

Stop lying to yourself and saying that you didn't do anything wrong

You chased the shine of "diamonds" when all you wanted was a bouquet of roses, and you knew, the whole damn time you knew,

but you still stole the diamonds from her and made her chase a ghost she could never catch,

All because you wanted some roses to be there in your arms.

So what if they have thorns? At least they feel alive,

Even if they may look fragile, they're strong.

Stronger than the "diamond" you stole just to make yourself feel better.

Once you were done with the "diamond," what did you do with it?

Sinking and dissolving like the spoonfuls of sugar in the tea I've made

Just to keep my head above the water at night.

Water, oh yes, water, is the bane of my existence

But something that has fascinated me since I was a child.

And we, water and fire, just don't mix, but without the two, the fine goods we dine on

Every day would not even be possible.

And oh boy, oh boy, do I love steamed crab-legs and pasta!

I'm tired, oh so tired, of trying to fight the crashing waves, but if I don't,

My fire will go out. And the wave machine will be upset with me.

So I say, "Woe is me," as I open another can and add to the endless sea of red beside my bed.

This truly is a twisted cycle I'm in, and yet I absolutely love it.

Mmm, oh how sweet your kisses are, Doctor.

Take me away from my thoughts with the sweet love you give to me.

I'm Not Enough

RaJahné H.

Why can I never be enough? It feels like nothing I do is enough. I just want to be useful, to be seen as important, good enough. When I try my hardest, it seems like I mess up more. No matter what, something or someone is neglected. I have given all I have, and I don't have any idea what I'm doing wrong. I feel like a foreigner in my own body, and I'm letting myself down.

Will I ever be what I want, what everyone else needs me to be? It feels like I'm stuck in the darkness, like there is no light, and no way out of this misery I feel. The hatred I feel inside boils, and for some reason, my prayers aren't working. I'm losing faith, or did I ever have faith?

Then, the Sun comes out. The cold feeling slowly melts away. I can hear the sun telling me everything is going to be okay, and for some reason, I believe her. She looks like nothing I've seen before. She shines in ways I didn't know I needed. Her rays find their way into every inch of darkness. "You are enough," she tells me.

If someone this powerful, this amazing can see it, it has to be true. Maybe, just maybe I am missing something about myself. She sees something I can't see. With her energy, I have the strength to get up and try again. I may not be perfect, but I'm going to try. Wrapped in my blue armor, I will fight, and I know I won't lose.

Dystopia

RaJahné H.

It's dark.

We are stuck inside, away from the light, and packed in like sardines waiting for the okay to resume life.

People are breaking rules,

fighting the power,

screaming to be let out of this prison.

Slowly the can is opening.

People are running out and

the world is opening.

I'm crumbling.

I'm spiraling.

People are asking for me to get back to life.

Is it safe?

Can we live, will we live?

Is money worth the risk?

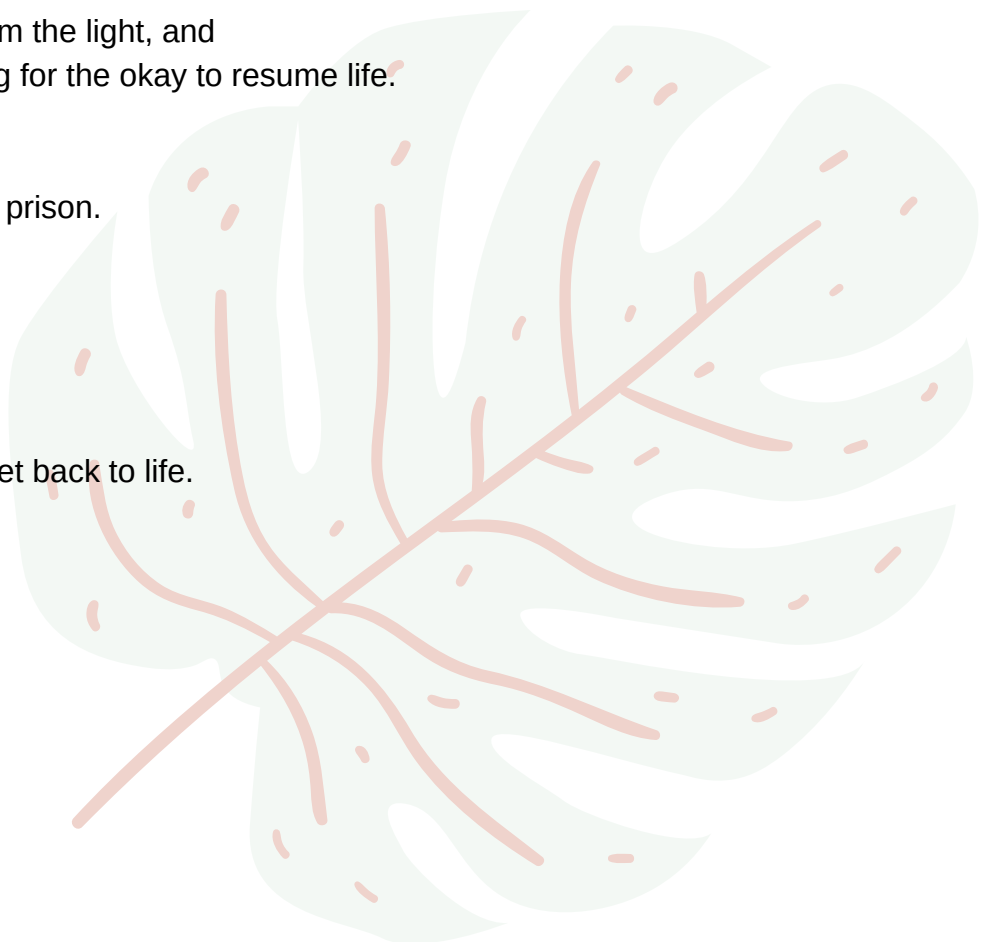
Anxiety is rising.

I can't breathe.

Sugar

RaJahné H.

The taste of sugar
is on my mind; need candy
to stay alive, ugh.



A Space Scene

RaJahne H.

"RaJ, what the hell are you doing?" Gavin shouts.

"Hey don't yell at my girlfriend," Tristan retorts. *"But, uh babe, what are you doing?"*

"I'm fixing the space ship, idiots," RaJ yells back, flipping her afro. *"Do y'all want to die?"*

"Uuuuh, not really," they both reply in unison.

"Then stop talking and let me save us. You men are so stupid, especially when it comes to money," RaJ says, getting back to work.

"What does money have to do with it?" Gavin asks, looking confused.

"Money has everything to do with everything." RaJ replies snarkily.

"And that, my friends, is what we call unchecked capitalism," Tristan chimes in.

"Okay Tristan, instead of starting this conversation again, make yourself useful and get me some ice cream," RaJ replies.

"Is that going to help you fix the problem?" Tristan asks.

"No, it's going to help my stomach and my taste buds," RaJ replies with a head snap.

"Well, shouldn't you fix the problem first?" Tristan asks. RaJ simply turns her head to Tristan, and he responds *"Okay, okay fine I'll get you ice cream,"* He knew there was no way to win the fight so he obeyed.

"Whipped," Gavin responds and Tristan flails around like a duck because Tristan is weird and does weird things when embarrassed.

"He better be, if he knows what's best for him," RaJ says, flipping her hair again even though it does not move. *"Guys!"*

"What, what's wrong," Tristan says, running towards RaJ.

"I beat the expert level in Sudoku!" RaJ replies, holding up her phone with amusement.

"Really?" Gavin responds, *"You ju-,"*

"I'm so proud of you babe!" Tristan interjects, cutting Gavin off.

"It only took me 35 minutes this time! Sudoku is really the best medicine for the brain!" RaJ says excitedly.

"You are so right my love," Tristan replies.

"Sooooo, what have you been fixing this whole time then?" Gavin responds.

"The problem. I was fixing the problem," RaJ says, feeling attacked.

"But for the past 35 minutes, you've been playing Sudoku, so you haven't been doing anything other than that," Gavin says.

"Kavin, you should..."

"SO YOU DON'T THINK I'VE BEEN WORKING?" RaJ yells, cutting Tristan off.

"I tried to tell you, Kavin," Tristan whispers.

"IT SOUNDS LIKE I'M NOT BEING APPRECIATED," RaJ screams at the boys.

"Sweetheart, everything is okay. We both know you run this whole operation," Tristan says, reaching for a hug from RaJ, *"Right Kavin?"*

"Yes, I am so sorry I didn't see it before," Kavin says.

"Let's talk about something else," Tristan says desperately. *"Climate change?"*

"NO," RaJ replies.

Nightlight

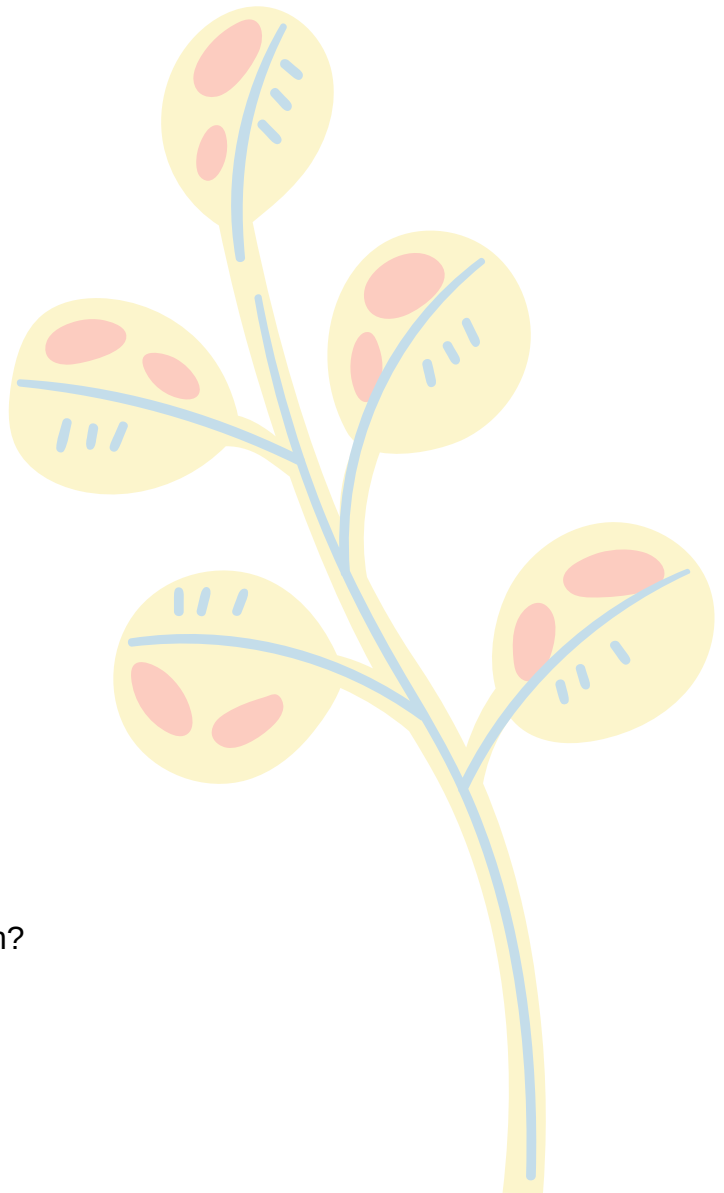
Kavin J.

The dark was always too scary to be in because that's where all the bad things happen. So, I try to stay close to the light on the candle. He is my friend, and he makes me feel safe. He says his name is Pyo, and that there's something in the dark he needs to find, but I'm scared. There are things that move in the dark, and noises that shake the ground. You can only see their eyes. Big, bright, yellow, and scary. Pyo said, "It's okay. He can keep me safe, but can't stay here. We can keep each other safe." I was scared. Everywhere is darkness, and I can't breathe. It's so cold, I can't stand it. But, his light is warm, and it's nice to see.

I'm a Black Woman

RaJahne H.

I am a black woman.
I'm strong,
Powerful.
My tongue can cut you with ease.
I won't break a sweat,
And I won't regret
Tearing you to shreds with my words.
I am a black woman.
I have to be strong.
I have to be powerful.
If I don't cut you with my tongue
You'll walk over me.
My words have to kill for them to matter.
I am a black woman,
And I feel like I don't matter.
If there is a strong woman behind every man,
Then who is behind me?
Who will be there for me when my shield is broken?
I am a black woman,
And I'm tired.



Hollowed Symphony

Kavin J.

This empty place used to hold the most wondrous performances, filled with sounds that moved hearts and became cinema reels in the memories of the audience. These broken walls built by old songs and voices. The lights now faded, dim, and the wood floors cracked. The stage set for the show that would have wowed the crowd, leaving them stunned with raving reviews. Their voices ranged through, where instruments could be heard dancing their melody and props stood tall, providing a life outside of this one.

But now, they're just echoes of lost souls, scattered scenes, and empty sounds. This place, these sounds, and the memories shared are woven into the curtains. The life breathed into this place has finally reached its climax, and now, the show has ended. The curtains have been called and have now fallen. They've taken their final bows, the lights turned off, and clapping fades out. My performance is over. My symphony, hollow and empty, and my curtain called.

A New Form of Therapy

Kavin J.

No, the pills haven't been working.

No, the breathing exercise hasn't been helping.

And no, I still haven't caught a shiny Eevee,

Wait...no... wrong conversation, sorry.

I'm always angry, and my life feels like it's falling apart.

Aside from you, it just sounds like I'm complaining

About everything when I should be happy.

I should be happy right?

I've been losing motivation for a while,

And we can't

I can't

Keep going on like this.

I feel like I took the best drugs but only got the side effects and withdrawal symptoms.

Was life always this hard?

Why is it so hard to remember the fields of rosemary and lilac I used to play in?

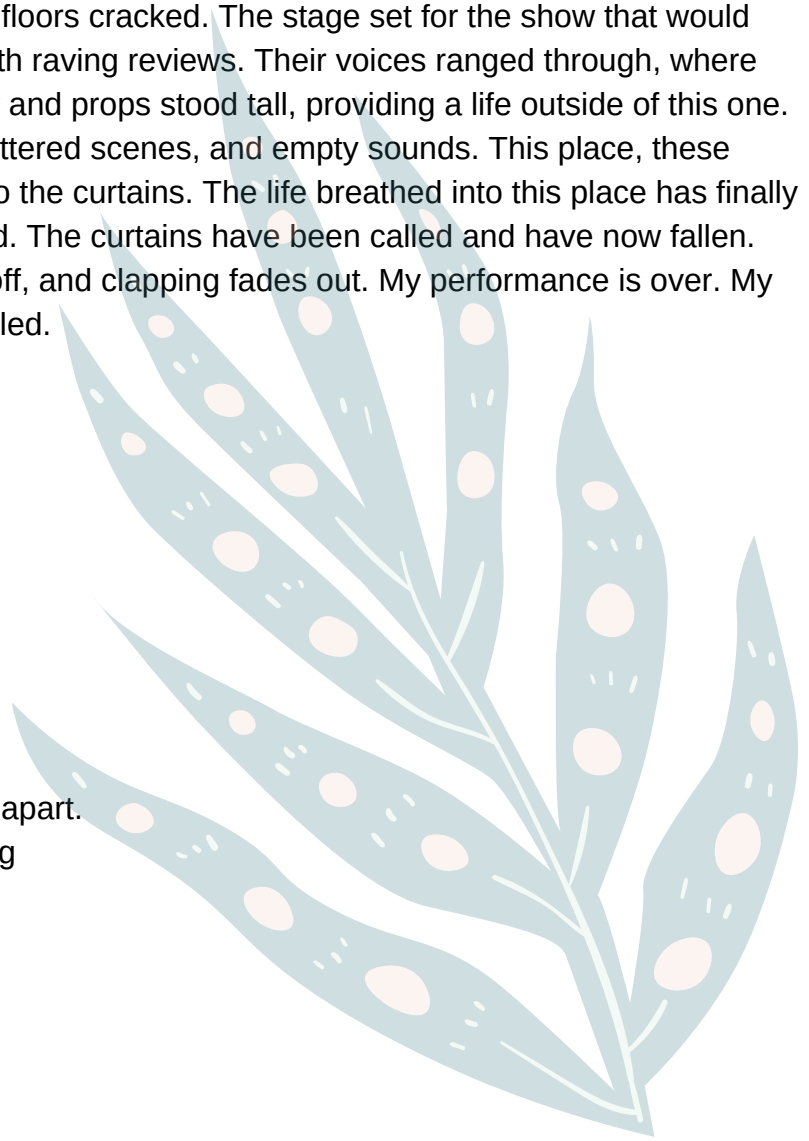
My memories are shot with no hope of recovery. Is it time already?

No wait, please, just a little longer. I need to talk more.

My friends feel like strangers.

I feel so dragged down I don't want to say bye. Please tell me why I feel like this, please. Please, new exercises, ne-new medicine, new anything, please...

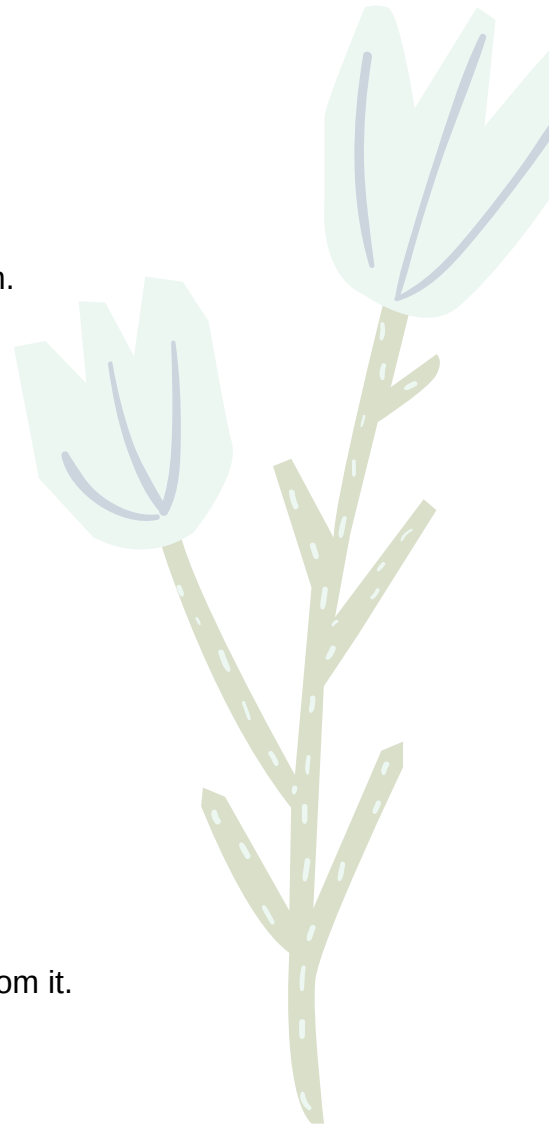
I don't want to feel this again.



I Know You Can Hear Me

Tristan W.

I know you can hear me.
You may be trying your best not to listen, but I know that you're in there.
I know your thoughts better than you do sometimes,
so I know you can't resist looking at me.
I know you hear the words I'm saying.
The emotions flowing off my tongue.
And for whatever reason it may be, for me, responses you have none.
I'm sorry you don't want to talk about emotions right now.
But that's just the mood I'm in.
So, I promise to bring them up later, my love, as they're part of who I am.
And you want to know me better than anyone ever can.
I beg of you to please talk to me,
So that I might hear your voice one last time.
As this night draws on, I can feel myself fading.
I need to let you know one thing.
I love you more than anything, and I want you to be able to love me.
I want to make you feel safe and warm, and to worry about nothing.
I want to be our protector, though, I'm not very strong.
I will love you in my dreams
and continue when I wake at dawn.
I am sorry my love,
if I have upset you in some way.
And I'm sorry I'm like this all the time.
I just want to talk to you tonight before we have to go to sleep.
I miss you.
The past couple days have been full of drama, and I don't want to run from it.
I want to fight it as hard as we can.
Because I want to be yours and only yours.
I want you to be happy in my arms.
I want you to be happy and safe for as many of your days as I can make them.
Because you are mine.
I know you can hear me asking if you're okay.
And I know you might not care,
but all I want is for you to know I'm just right here.
I know you can hear me say, "I am right here."

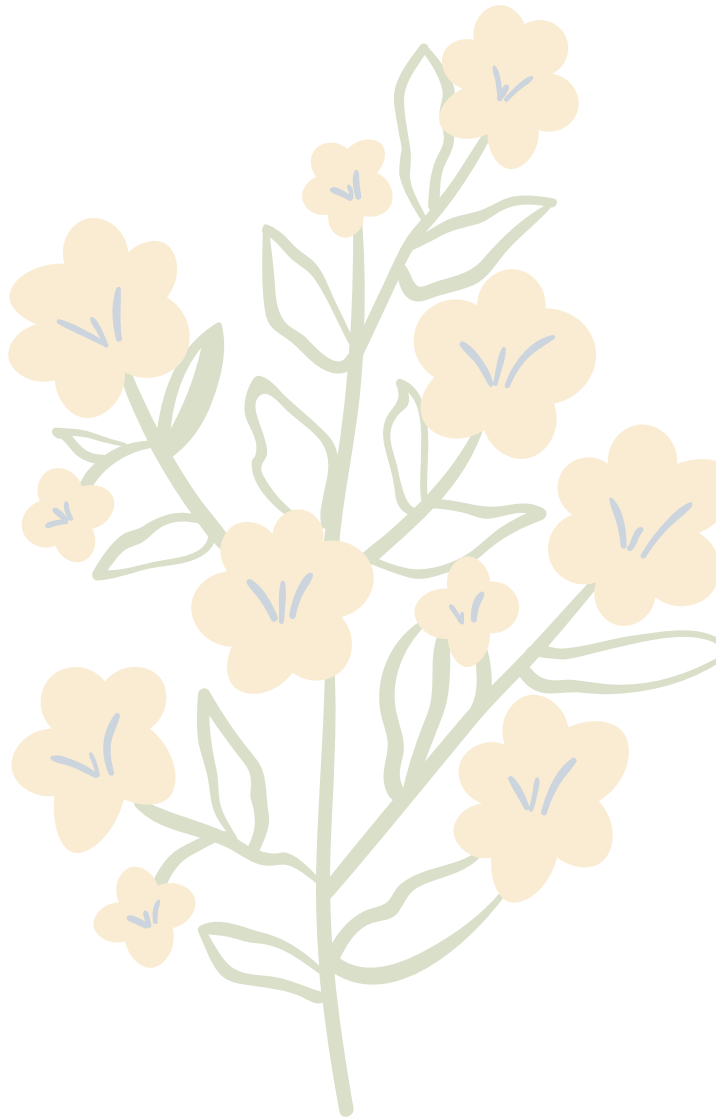


Nye
Tristan W.

Every day goes by the same.
I'm scared. He's so far away.
What if it doesn't work?
What if I can't look at... him.
What if he can't fix it?
She won't let him out.
The world is dark.
I can't breathe.
I miss my life outside.
It's getting harder to feel.
My mind is foggy.
I'm shaking.
I miss... him.
Eight miles is too far.
Can we do this?
I'm angry that he can't be here.
I'm so stressed. And angry. And tired.
I'm. So. Tired.
I'm tired of being this way.
I'm tired of being me.
Another night of melatonin,
And I'll wake up alone.

***Inspired by M.
Destiny H.H***

My sculptor placed my shapeless body on a pedestal.
He kissed my curves with a chisel and hammered out my imperfections.
He carefully carved out my breasts
making sure they were how the creator intended.
Imperfect but beautiful.
A bounty that provides more than it takes.
My sculptor knew me before I even knew myself.
He carved ears to make sure I hung onto every word.
He whispered the universe into my body,
traced the systems into my skin and blew butterflies into my stomach.
He left my heart for last,
placed a piece of his soul in the marble and he wished love into the small of my spine.
When he was done, he put his chisel down and stood back and admired his work.
He cried.
Turned me around on the pedestal and looked me up and down from every angle.
He smiled.
He held my hand and lifted me off of my feet.
I was his creation,
a mold of what he was to become.
I was his future.



The Beginning: Hidden Treasure
Kavin J.

“Bishop, where are we going?”

“Hush Knight, you’re going to ruin the surprise, and it’s just a bit further now.”

“I’m now very concerned for my well being; are you sure about this?”

“Yes, now will you... Ah we’re here, and I can see rook at the other end.”

“You brought me to a ball pit? Really? And why is the floor so yellow. I feel like I’m walking on a dry sponge.”

“Hey guys, come on and help me look. It should be over here somewhere. Oh, sweet. This one has a mouse on it!”

“Dibs! Nice.” She sighs, “Will you hurry up? We don’t have all night.” Knight sighs,

“Fine, what are we even looking for? Pink eye and the flu?” Rook speaks up,

“No We’re looking for treasure. Pawn told me there was some at the bottom of the ball pit here, so start digging, Sir!”

“This is very childish and immature behavior. We’re too old to be doing this, and...” He sighs, “Alright, move over.”

Both Rook and Bishop scream, “Yay!” Knight hushes them.

“We have to be quiet or will get caught,” he barks.

“Sorry,” they say with their heads down.

Bishop perks up, “What have you found so far?” Rook shrugs,

“Just an empty bag of Chex Mix and this bicycle.”

The ground shakes. “What was thAAAAAAAAAATTTTTTTT!!!!!!!”

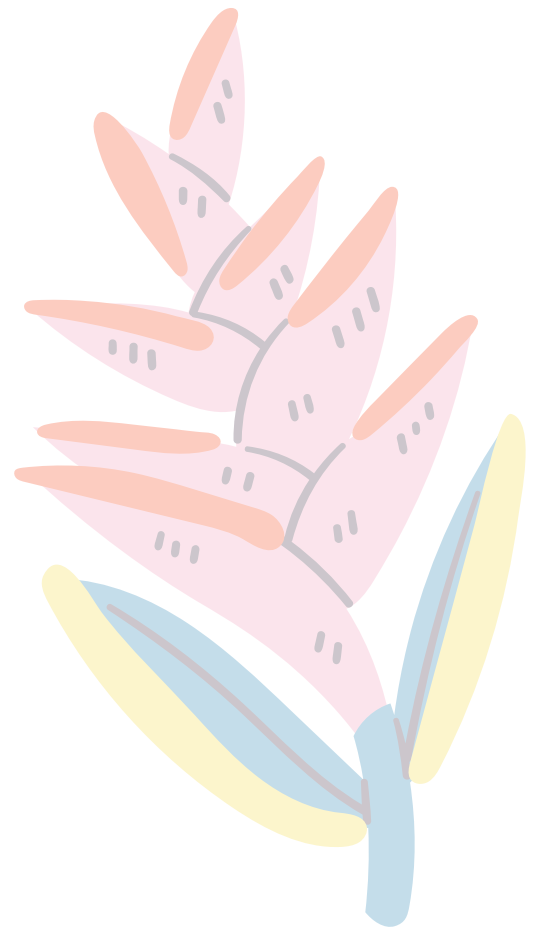
They fell through the bottom into somewhere unknown



The ABC's of 2020

***Savon T., M.J. P., Tristan W., Kavin J., RaJahne H., and Destiny B.
Teen Professional Conference***

Almost a world war. Avatar. Australia wildfires are over.
Bubble baths, please.
COVID-19 and RIP Chuck E. Cheese.
Donald Trump, DoomsDay is near, but Dean's smile is here.
Elevated anxiety, evictions,
Friends, friction, and fiction.
Ghosts and Geopolitics everywhere.
Hazard pay? The new Hitler? Healthcare?
Impeachment and ICE raids.
Justice?
Killing of unarmed black people. Kim Jung Un. Karens, Kanye, and Kavin's beard.
Lines at Walmart.
Murder hornets and Mask wisdom.
No justice, no peace, no income.
Optimism? Old people fear.
Podium here with virtual programs, a form of positivity.
Quarantine silence and stirs.
RaJahne quit Shoneys, and
Savon and Tristan turn 19.
Tik Tok takedown of Tulsa.
Unity? Unchecked politics.
Virtual world explosion. Vaccination?
What, Winter? When did that happen?
Xanthan gum makes smoothies thicker, and X box Series X is released.
Yoga is dope, so are yoga pants, and
Zoom is now how we meet.





High School Section

Philophobia.

Niles W.

Why am I so scared to fall in love?
Why do I get scared to go into a relationship after so many failed ones?
Why do I feel moonstruck after talking to a guy who might date me? We're just friends.
Why am I so scared to get hurt again?
Why do I have these urges to find the **one**, and then never speak again?
Why am I so scared to experience a "normal" emotion?
Why can't I think right when I'm in love?
Why can't I be happy?
Why can't I live in the moment?
Why must I be so scared to open my heart to new people?
Why do I fear getting hurt?
Why do I fear love?
Why do I fear falling in love?
Why do I fear everyone who claims that they "love me"?
Why am I scared of everything that has to do with love?
Why can't I be normal?
Why can't I stop being scared?
Why must I live in jealousy and pain over those who have found the one,
when there's no one for me?
Help me.
Someone. Somewhere.
Help me break this curse, and let me experience happiness again.

We Need Positive Student Stories on the News

Ka'mariya T.

The news should have more positive things on it instead of just the bad things. They should show how some places in the U.S have money raised, but that may not be everywhere. They should show the teens who are graduating at 15-years-old because of their GPA. Some students should be recognized for the good things they do. Mostly, the good is not being recognized enough around the world.

A way to put these stories on the internet is have a social media page for some of the positive things that happen. For example, if some students have good things going on in school, their school page should put something up for them and their achievements.

The world can have a page called the U.S economy about the money decreasing and increasing, but why? Students don't get seen for the good things in life. Sometimes life is hard, but people don't realize students are criticized by the way we act, and that's a problem.

Students Should be Allowed to Vote
Shacorie J.

Students should vote because we have opinions too. We need to share them because our opinions matter. All U.S. citizens should vote about the decisions in the U.S. Even though the U.S. thinks students should not vote, we suggest an age limit to only allow mature students to vote instead of all little children. There should be a maturity test included in the voting process to determine if teens should be a part of the process. Voting impacts teenager life just as much as it does adults. For example, teenagers should have some options when it comes to school issues because they are actually the people in school experiencing it.

Kids are impacted by the election, so their opinions should be heard. Some students actually pay attention and are well informed because they actually worry how our government impacts us. Many pay attention to the news and try to act in alliance to the issues. In conclusion, we are trying to make America better by trying to involve more people in the political process.

Address Australian Forest Fires
Ashantay C.

One billion is the number of animals we've lost, and 1,400 is the number of homes that were destroyed in the devastating fires that continue to rip through Australia. If we wait any longer, numbers will be too high to count, and what we once knew as a sovereign country will be no more. What are we waiting for? We made it so far, but it still feels like we're going backwards. What can we do to emerge from what seems like the end of days?

Any small thing helps. Every cent that we donate, every post that we share, and every word that we speak, helps. You don't have to be a multi-millionaire or an A-list celebrity to speak out. No matter where you're from, what you look like or who you are, every single voice matters. If we all work together and use our voices, Australia's orange skies can turn back to blue.

Climate Change
Maryjane P.

Climate change is a real thing.
Why does the school bell ring
to tell us we're being excused for severe storming?
Our top worry should be passing class, not getting warnings
to help us live through the morning.
It's so hot when I walk home in May
that I have to change my clothes after the school day.

Dystopia

Elijah W.

Dystopia.

No concrete laws.

Run by criminals.

Pollution is rapidly rising, smog.

Children have no schooling and often become homeless.

No medical care due to lack of resources.

Dear Past Self

Shavon B.

In our future, we will achieve great things, but we will also lose things like our dad, our mom, and our best friend. As we lose things that mean a lot to us, we also gain things that we learn to love, like our new school, and we are happy now. We've also made a lot of new friends and met our old school friends. At times, we have also made a few enemies. I don't like them and they don't like me. When I tried to be nice, they were ungrateful and stuck up the more I tried.

Global Warming

Kameron B.

She's crying

Out and you ignore

The calls.

Mother Earth, she's going to fall.

O' Mother Earth

God help us all.

Our forests are burning,

The ice caps are melting,

And there's nothing saving

Us from ourselves.

We're destroying our home,

The only one we've got.

Even if we go to Mars, what

About our animals?

Will we leave them here, or will

They come with us?

Will they be extinct before we, or the

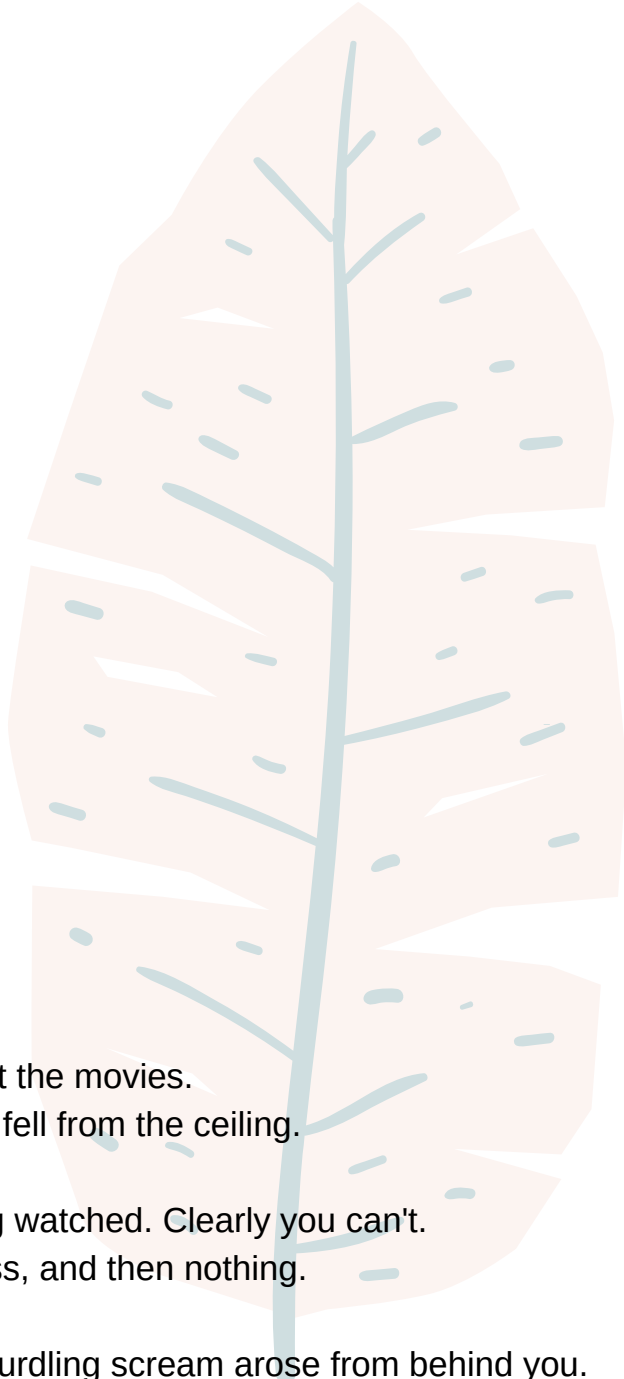
Other way around?

Love BB
Bianca G.

Dear my middle school self,
Thanks for helping me get
To high school even though
It was hard for you.
You could have stayed single
Because some boys just
Want to play with your
Feelings.
You're very good at
History and math but,
You should have passed.
This is okay now because
You can retake it.
You could have controlled
Your temper, been
Quieter, and also had
Less friends.
But always be yourself.

2 Sentence Horror Stories
ACE Graduation Celebration

- A - Alex and her friends went to go chill at the movies.
B- Boom! The lights went out, and bones fell from the ceiling.
C- Certain people can feel if they're being watched. Clearly you can't.
D- Didn't turn around, and at first darkness, and then nothing.
E- Everything went silent. Then a blood curdling scream arose from behind you.
F- Far in the distance, you see blood spurt in the air.
G- Get help now.
H- Harrietta tripped and fell, but we don't see her anymore.
I- It's coming for us right now.
J- Just keep running, and it won't catch us.
K- Killing sprees happen every year around this time.
L- Lives lost, but bodies found.





Middle School Section

Less Tests Please

Jada F.

I am advocating for less tests in school. I think there should be less tests especially when they are back-to-back. Tests stress people out because they have multiple things going on outside of school. Teachers and other adults always say that it prepares you for the real world, but at this age, kids shouldn't be this stressed just because of school.

People, like some of my teachers, think the education system is broken, and there are multiple reasons why. I really think that we should have less tests, especially with the stuff we are learning now. Some things we learn, we may forget because we will never need to use it, but there are also a lot of things that are useful in life that we learn in school. What I'm trying to say is that we need to fix our education system in many ways.

Advice to Elementary School Graduates

Sydnei J.

Dear rising 6th graders,

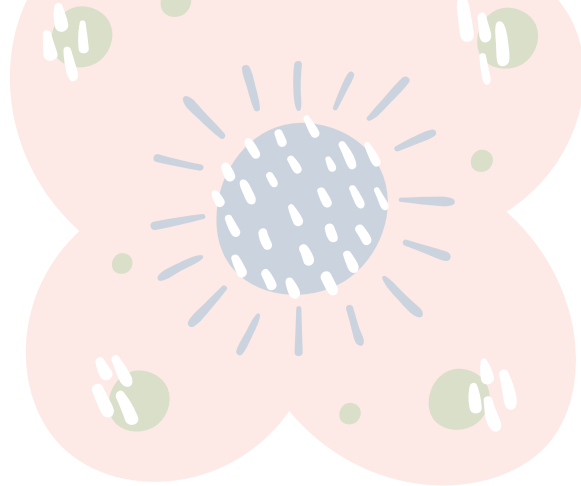
The transfer from elementary school to middle school is tough. You might want to listen when they have Back to School Night, and you can visit some of your classes. You might also want to have a friend group.

Sincerely,
Sydnei

Getting Lost on the Way to Class

Sahara W.

You should make a route that isn't too crowded and that you will take every day. Then, you will get muscle memory and won't be lost anymore. You should also try to remember what end of the hallway has what room numbers, in case you have to go to some other room. When you're planning your route, try to make it as quick as possible. You should try a few different ways in the beginning to find the best way. Once you've decided your route, stick to it, and you'll never be lost again!
(Repeat with each grade level.)



The Scientist

Brianna G.

Nextup RVA: The Steam Machine

Once, there was a scientist who wanted to be scared in real life and not just by movies. He created a disease to make people turn into man-eating zombies but soon regretted it because it went too far. People turned into zombies at night, and only adults turned into zombies. All of the kids lived in a giant mansion with everything they needed. Some of the adults lived in the mansion to stay human.

My Superself

Journey W.

Podium Virtual Program

In a small town, I came upon a hurt superhero. She heard of me in the news because a reporter recently came to my school to interview children about what super power they wanted to have. The hurt superhero was named HR, short for human remote. HR said to me, "Take this necklace, this is my time remote. I heard of you from the news." I put the necklace on; then, my clothes changed to a superhero suit with a clock on it.

Pets Can Talk

Destiny D.

Nextup RVA: Teen Scene

Pets can talk but only when humans are not around. I know they do because dogs are really smart. They understand when you are about to leave the house, getting ready to grab something to eat, using the bathroom, etc. My dog seems like she can talk because she makes a lot of weird faces. Also, when they bark, it feels like they are telling us something.

Murder Mystery

Sahara W.

Podium Virtual Program

“Oh officer, thank goodness you're here! My wife has been murdered! I had just gotten home from work, and from the moment I walked in, I knew something had happened. The furniture was smashed and all of our valuable decor was gone. I thought it was just a robbery, so I waited to call the police until I had inspected all of the damage. I went upstairs, only to find my wife lying on the ground dead with a knife in her back! I called the police immediately. The cameras outside don't show anyone breaking in, so I know the only people who could have done it are the cook or the maid.”

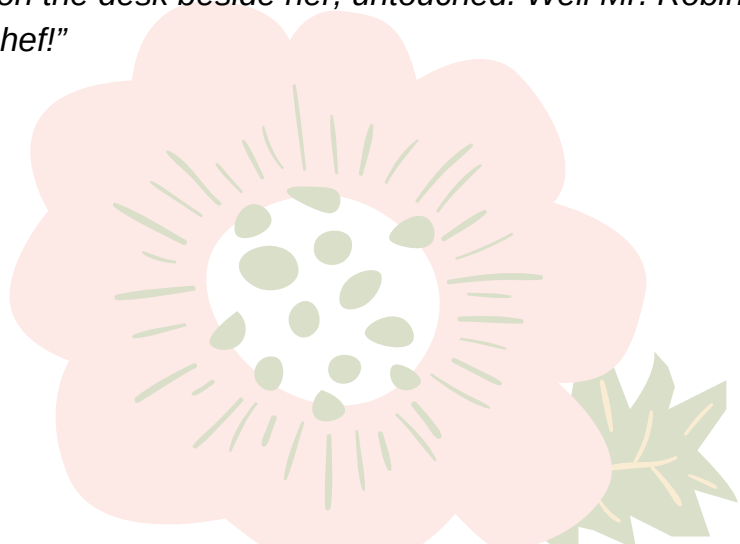
“Thank you Mr. Robinson. I will now question these two suspects.” The officer turns, “Chef, where were you when the murder took place?”

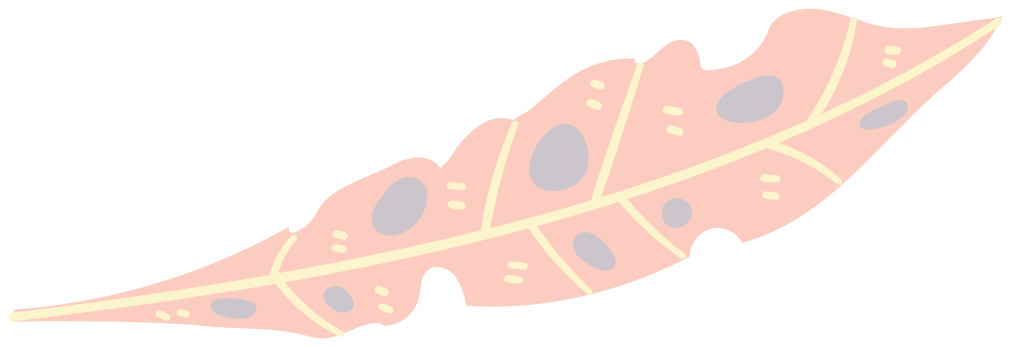
“I was downstairs cooking dinner, just after I brought Mrs. Robinson her tea. I heard someone making a lot of noise in the living room, so I ran outside. I couldn't call 911 because the phone is inside. Once I thought it was safe, I ran inside to check on Mrs. Robinson and the maid, only to find the maid in the room with the dead Mrs. Robinson!”

“Thank you, Chef. Maid, where were you?”

“I was cleaning the spare bedroom when I heard the chef go into Mrs. Robinson's room with tea. Not even 10 minutes later, I heard a ruckus in the living room. I was about to run downstairs, but I thought better of it. I ran into Mrs. Robinson's room instead, and there she was lying on the floor dead! I bolted the lock, so I wouldn't be murdered too. That's why you found me in there when you got here.”

“Thank you, Maid. Now, I'm going to go examine the body. It appears that the knife is the same as the ones stored in the kitchen. The tea is on the desk beside her, untouched. Well Mr. Robinson, I who the murderer is. Officers, arrest the chef!”





A Walk in the Jungle

Raniya K.

Nextup RVA: STEAM Machine

When I was in the jungle walking through every bush, I did not notice a cobra in one of the trees. It tried to bite me, and I tried to fight, but it was too late. It bit me before I could stab it. I had to call for an emergency, but I forgot there was no signal and couldn't. Then, I remembered I had this cream in my backpack. I put it on my arm and stayed alive.

Hiding Spot Diary

Sahara W.

Podium Virtual Program

Day 54: I've been hiding in this old janitor's closet for two-weeks now. This morning, another human came in here with us. Her name is Cassie, and she's only 14-years-old. Lincoln, Bex, and I got quite a fright because she didn't knock or anything; instead, she just burst in. We thought the school shelter had been overwhelmed by the robot army.

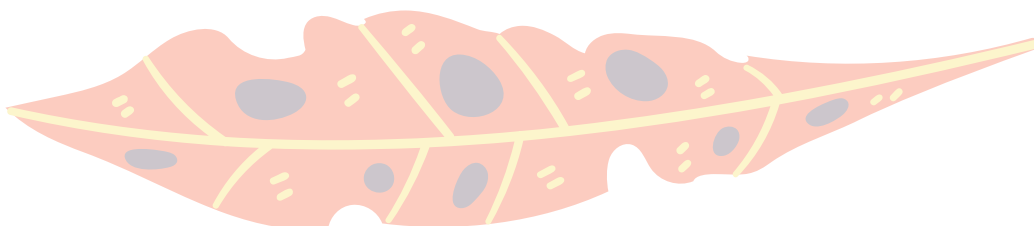
I'm glad I'm in a safe spot, but if the human army doesn't win soon, I think I'm going to go insane. The rations today were 6 saltines, 3 sticks of jerky, and a can of sardines. I wish I could go home. We found a deck of cards on the highest shelf in the closet. They're pretty beat up, but anything helps.

Should Middle Schoolers Get Recess?

Khamani M.

Nextup RVA: Teen Scene

I think middle schoolers should not have recess at all. At Henderson Middle School, where I graduated from, they don't deserve it. Students have gym throughout the day too, so that's their recess.



The Bunny Story

Journey W.

Podium Virtual Program

Once upon a time, there was a little bunny. She had a big bunny family, and one day, she went bunny shopping with her mom. They went to Bed, Bath, and Bunny. She got lost in the store and could not find her mom. The little bunny was scared, so she went to self-checkout, and to her surprise, her mom was right there! When the little bunny caught up with her mom, she was so happy. She said, "I need you to stay with me in stores, okay?" Then, they went to Red Robin for burgers and shakes.

Letter to my Generation

Sahara W.

Podium Virtual Program

Dear Generation Z,

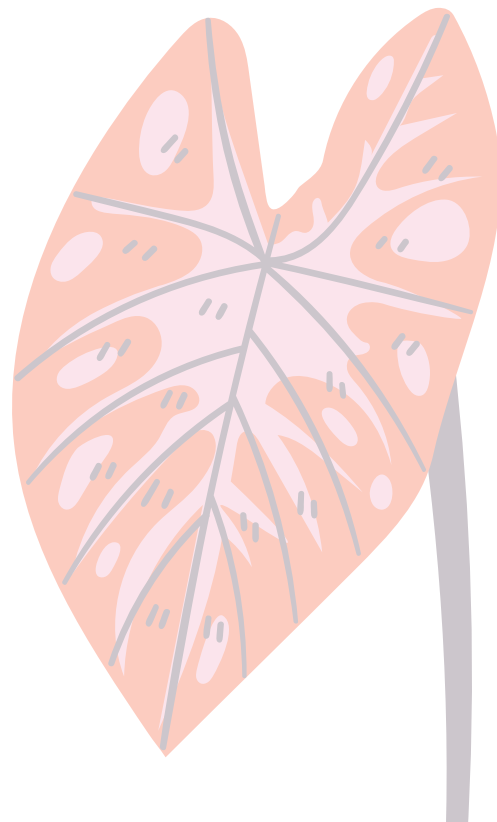
We need to work together so we are not remembered as the last generation who had a chance to fix the environment. Climate change is going to reach an irreversible point in 10-years, and we have a chance to make sure it doesn't reach that point. We NEED to be the change. Do you want to be the one who kills off all of the adorable baby penguins and polar bears?

A Spider on the Sidewalk

Leslie S.

Nextup RVA: STEAM Machine

I was walking down the sidewalk
when I saw a spider.
It kept walking towards me,
and I didn't want to kill it,
but it kept walking towards me.
So I just kicked it, and it ran away.
Spiders are like that.





How to Survive a Hurricane

Dauida S.

Nextup RVA: STEAM Machine

To survive a hurricane, we would stay in the house and turn the lights off, in case the power turns off. After, we would go downstairs into the bathroom or the guest room to hide. We would also get snacks and other important stuff that we need, just in case it's still going to be going on. My dog would be there too. I would bring something to do because we might get bored and want to play a board game. We need to bring food and water, just in case we get dehydrated, and an extra pair of clothes, in case we stay there for a long time and need to change. It will just be me and my mom because my brother will be going off to college. I hope my other family will be safe. That's what I would do to survive.

Weather Alert - Thunderstorms

Sahara W.

Podium Virtual Program

When a severe thunderstorm warning is issued, if outside, go to a car or the nearest accessible building. If on a walk and very near home, go back to the house. If at home, go to the basement where there are flashlights and food inside the emergency box. If the power does go out, stay calm and use the flashlights and wind up radio. Neighbors are expected to be able to protect themselves especially since thunderstorms are usually predicted ahead of time. If you see a severe thunderstorm watch or warning, or see storm clouds, DO NOT GO ON A WALK.


Weather Alert - Landslides

Journey W.

Podium Virtual Program

In a case that you get caught in a landslide, here are some tips to use.

- Go to another level in your house, so the flooding won't rise to that level.
- If you have something to seal your door with, use that, so there won't be a lot of flood water in your house.
- If you are not at your house, get to the nearest restaurant, so you are safe.



Robot Owners Manual
Sahara W.
Podium Virtual Program

Delitterer 5000 Owner's Manual: The Delitterer 5000 is the best Delitterer in the line yet, with many new features and improvements on older ones! With your new Delitterer 5000, you'll never have to pick up trash again! The Delitterer was designed to always pick up litter you see in public, making following this rule so much easier!

Small enough to fit in your bag, it's easy to take on the go! The high power vacuum pulls trash towards it and holds on tight, making sure it won't drop to the ground again until you find a trash can and flip the vacuum switch off.

Don't want the garbage anywhere near you? The new Delitterer 5000 has an expandable arm that reaches up to 9 feet away!

To use the Delitterer, leave it by a sunny window or spot outside with the mini solar panels facing the direction of the sun. When it is fully charged, the LED light will turn green.

To use the expandable arm, push down on the blue button. To bring it back in, push down on the orange button. To activate the vacuum, flip the purple switch.

If your LED light is red and the vacuum isn't working, you need to charge it. If it starts to heat up, quickly get it into a cool area for it to cool down. If it doesn't cool down or repeatedly overheats, bring it to your nearest litter picker-upper repair store.

Robot Owners Manual
Journey W.
Podium Virtual Program

Your robot is used for chores, and here are the instructions. 1. Look on the back. There is a plug, so you can charge your robot. 2. The robot will need to be charged at night, starting at 6:00 pm. 3. This robot has a built in Siri. Here are some things you should not do to the robot. 1. Do not make the robot stressed. 2. Do not get anything wet on the robot. Please handle it with care.

A Family Meal
Journey W.

One day, a family had their first family dinner in a month. The daughter was busy with catching up on homework, the mother was busy working on an office presentation, the father was working two jobs to pay for the wants of their children, and the son was busy with after school sports. They came together for dinner, and they had shrimp and buttered noodles. The food was so good that it became a family recipe.

Halloween
Sahara W.

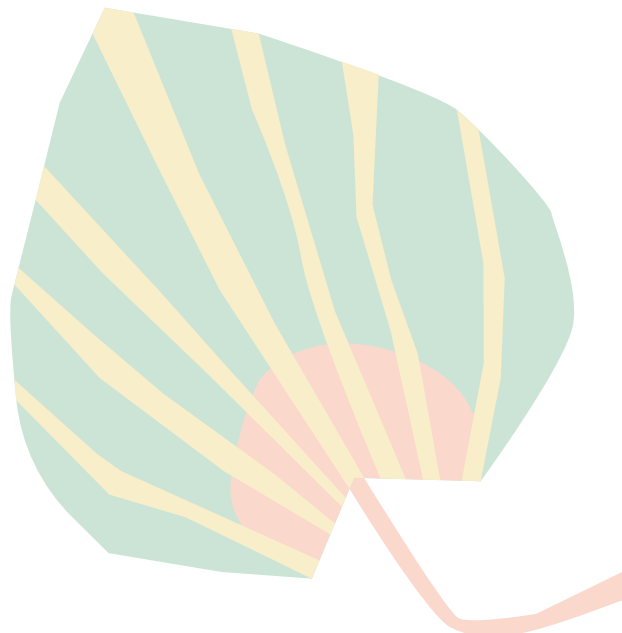
A shadow creeping,
A jack-o-lantern grinning,
People running from door to door,
Their bags collecting more candy with every "Trick or treat!"
Halloween is a holiday that delights many
Yet still causes fright.

Advice to New Students
Journey W.

Dear student,

There are some things you need to know about going to middle school. Most importantly, you should make a list of room numbers, so you can remember what class you are going to next.

Sincerely,
Journey



**In Podium, each of us
has a creative voice!**

Happy reading!

Connect with us:

**@PodiumRVA
podiumrva.org**