“Be yourself. Above all, let who you are, what you are, and what you believe shine through every sentence you write, every piece you finish.”

– John Jakes

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

Enjoy youth pieces from Podium partners at:

George Wythe High School
Highland Springs High School
John Marshall High School
Self-Care is Self-Preservation
Writings on caring for ourselves and others.

The Floor of My Home
Richard J.
George Wythe HS.

You are not weak.
You are not unloved.
You are not broken.

Don’t say you’re not strong to yourself. You are not weak; you are a leader.

Forgive he and she
Will forgive me too,
No matter how many times
You asked her to break.

I have forgotten I am the floor of my home.

I Love Myself
Shevontae J.
George Wythe HS

I love myself today because I ventured out of my box.
Something good I did was not spiral.
I forgive myself for losing motivation because it happens.
I am smart because I worked for it.
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Dreams
Kenneth E.
George Wythe HS

Always dream of what you want to do in life,
Keep a good mindset, and follow what you believe.
To the Top  
Kiara B.  
Highland Springs HS

I push myself day in and day out  
until I get to the top.  
Day in and day out I do my best  
To build progress and get better.  
Day in and day out, I keep going and don’t give up.

Erasure Poem  
Jaiden B.  
Highland Springs HS

I might be different and weird,  
Though, I’m not afraid to show it,  
People were laughing at me, but I didn’t care.  
Attention truly kills, and  
Bullies don’t help me heal.

Am I Real?  
Paige F.  
Highland Springs HS

I am a teen. Am I real?  
I can’t tell you, no.  
But I am rebellious and intelligent.  
Am I?  
I deal with the stereotype,  
I disregard an uncontrollable rage.  
I am hoping,  
I am spontaneous and creative.  
I am falsely accused and apologetic.  
I am.
Upset  
Ja'Chaun T.  
George Wythe HS

Three years ago, when I was in the 6th grade, my best friend was play fighting me. I was really upset about it, but I tried to not let it affect me. Yet, her action did affect me. All I can remember is after that, I tried to skip class just to avoid her and to forget about it. I am still learning how to properly cope with issues.

Change of Action  
Makayla F.  
George Wythe HS

One time when I was really little, I walked to the store by myself and bought some chips and candy, but I didn't have enough money to buy juice. So, I paid for the snacks, but then I stole the juice. I had never done something like that before. I went home, and a couple days later, it really started to mess with me. I told my mom. She was upset, so we went to the store to tell the store owners. I told them what I did. I was six years old and didn't know any better. Disappointing my mom was a really hard thing to cope with, but I learned from my mistake healed, and have never stolen again.
Myself  
Jada R.  
Highland Springs HS

I love myself.  
I love myself, mainly.  
Never pressed about a hater,  
Myself is very cute, funny, and nice.  
Has self-confidence and self-esteem.  
Myself only comes first, always.

Overcoming Love  
Amauri D.  
George Wythe HS

A time when I felt low about my appearance was when I was dating this one girl. She was very friendly with other girls and very touchy with them, which led me to be jealous. I felt like I was way out of her league as I met her friends and found out who she dated. I think the cause was from her showing more attention to her “prettier” friends than me. I never overcame it or coped with it. I just broke up with her because I later found out she was cheating.

Changing My Ways  
Devyn C.  
George Wythe HS

When I was younger, I used to fight people until they couldn’t move or fight anymore. I would always do this in secret, and I think it came from me feeling like my dad and my sister didn’t want me around or that they hated me. As time went on, I started working out, writing songs, dancing, singing more, and I joined a different martial arts club. Changing my outlook and changing my ways changed my life.
Let the Creative Juices Flow
Enjoy short stories and poems from our talented youth!

Sunshine
Antoine T.
Highland Springs HS

They may come and go
like the clouds in the sunny sky,
but she is like the sun.
Always there, shining away but as night falls,
I know it's time to say goodbye.
As time becomes still,
I wait, and I'm ready for my sunshine to appear.

Gone
Naailah V.
Highland Springs HS

I heard a fly buzz when I died.
The stillness 'round my form
Was like the stillness in the air
Between the heaves in storm.

Warm like the Sun
Imani D.
Highland Springs HS

Her face was warm like the sun
And her skin is soft as a bunny.
She smells sweet like honey.
She is as beautiful as art.
Love
Milan M.
Highland Springs HS

When I had nothing to say
You never encouraged me to see the light,
This thing we call love
Causes nothing but hate.
I pushed you out my way.
You’re constantly throwing shade
End this sorrow
End this pain
No longer your friend.

Erasure
Duane B.
Highland Springs HS

Here sitting, watching life
The pain is excruciating.

You swallow.
A box of Kleenex tissue.
Enduring the pain of your blood constantly boiling
In your veins.

Responsibility
Xavier T.
Highland Springs HS

Look at my fellow brothers and sisters
forced to think there’s nothing left.
See no regrets
captured in the webs of my hopes.
In what the public calls “the ghetto.”
Small house,
many siblings,
single mom,
minimum clothing.
Building a generation of hate and pain.
His pain hardens his heart.
Love is needed.
Summer
Xylah W.
Highland Springs HS

The sun is beaming down,
Temperature is rising.
Grills on,
Pools open,
Schools are closed,
Trips taken.
Fun times for everyone!

I'm a Genius
Jonathan L.
Highland Springs HS

He calls himself humble
Yet calls himself a genius,
You may not understand it,
But that mere fact
Shows the genius in it all.

Erasure
Gabrielle L.
Highland Springs HS

I am from an African woman sculpture.
I am from Grandmother in Midlothian
I'm from “Life is much more than things” and
“How you live is more than how you sing.”
From a song I can sing to myself every day.
I am from back rubs and music falling asleep.

Wonder
Jaiden B.
Highland Springs HS

She was sleeping next to him,
And she was thinking,
How many women
have been here before
Her.
Hi friend, or I guess whoever reads or listens to this. This is me, simply me, the genuine version of myself writing this. It's weird to think that I've just been putting a cover, like a tarp, on this self I'm talking about. Sometimes the tarp slips and I have that genuine part of me for a minute, until the tarp is centered back again. What I'm trying to say is that I'm not always myself, or I am, but the crucial parts of my personality are diluted, like watered down soda. I am in a club with some amazing people, but when I'm in the presence of that club, I'm wearing the tarp and the soda's not so fizzy. I don't know why, or even how to fix this.

Maybe it's because I was the weird girl in middle school, the theater kid student athlete, the one who liked their history, and science, and math classes who asked questions when no one else would. I never really stood in with all of the other girls and boys, unless they were as weird as me. I was ridiculed by the people who were jealous of me, what they call “bullies”. Maybe that's why I don't really dance in public, or feel awkward around my close friends, and even why I can't exactly say what I want to say because the words come out like a confused tornado.

Like tonight, I was just dancing to Hamilton and 'Dead Mom' from Beetlejuice in my kitchen eating french fries and chicken tenders, something that made me feel like I was truly my genuine self, what made me want to write this in the first place. Y’know the amount of happiness I would feel if I could do this with a friend who loves Hamilton as much as I do, or to express my genuine self in front of the people who I already know accept me for who I am.

Would it be weird to change? They have spent 3 years around my thoughtful, but awkward self. I'm not scared of ridicule anymore, but how hard will it be for me to take off the tarp I once kept close?
The Sun and The Moon
Sierra M.
Highland Springs HS

I rise from the sky
Brightening the world with my light that I shine.
And when the kids are playing in the day,
they are always beaming with energy.

After a day all done
the wolves howl in the night,
and all the animals who want for sleep shut their eyes.
When the kids fall asleep, I always tell them goodnight.

What is Love?
Sheyna E.
Highland Springs HS

What is love?
Is it real? Is it true?
I don’t understand
How others can love,
I want to be loved too.
To hold hands and kiss,
But it makes me feel weird
To feel like this.
I hear it has
This feeling of butterflies
But I can’t find it.
I don’t know that feeling.

What is love?
Is it real? Is it true?
I just can’t find it,
but I hope that you do.
LGBTQ+ Identity
Ashaney S., Jarla C., Taniya C., and Richard J.
George Wythe HS

Setting: Whole Foods

Characters: Karen (37 y/o), Keisha (17 y/o), Jacobe (16 y/o)

Scene: Karen and Jacobe are in the Whole Foods shopping when Keisha walks in with a pride shirt on.

Keisha: Wassup, Jacobe.

Jacobe: Yoo, Keisha.

Karen: Hey Jacobe... who is that and what is she wearing?

Keisha: This is from pride. It represents my sexuality, and my pronouns are they/them.

Karen: Pronouns aren’t a thing, so why do you call yourself that?

Keisha: Because that's what I feel comfortable with.

Keisha walks away feeling down and feeling unaccepted. Jacobe and Karen go home and to talk to their mom about the LGBT community. The day ends, and the next day, they all see each other at Starbucks while Keisha was at work. Karen quickly walks up to apologize.

Karen: Hey sweetie, I'm so sorry about yesterday. I was very unaware about what I was saying.

Keisha: It's okay. Next time, just ask before assuming.
Coming Out
Miyah M., Kenneth E., and Shevontae J.
George Wythe HS

Setting: Home

Characters: Mom (36 years old), Dad (35 years old), Daughter (17 years old)

Scene: The Evans family live at 300 Maple St. Mr. And Mrs. Evans are in the living room watching a Madea movie when their daughter comes into the living room.

Destiny: I have to talk to you. Mom, Dad, I'm gay.

They both are not understanding at first. Slowly, the dad starts to come around, but the mom is still having a hard time.

Mom: No you’re not, it's just a phase.

Dad: Are you serious?

Destiny: Yes.

Dad: How did you find out?

Destiny: I've always known.

Mom: I will get you into therapy, I'm going to call your aunt and we will go to church tomorrow. Everything will be okay.

Destiny: No, Mom. I'm gay, I like girls.

Dad: No you're not!

Mom: Okay, let's all just take a deep breath. To be honest, I've known for two years.
Setting: Ms. Parker's townhouse

Characters: Ms. Parker (41, Jasmine's mother), Jasmine (16, daughter of Ms. Parker)

Scene: Jasmine walks in to see her mother in her room, holding her diary nervously.

Jasmine (nervous): Mom…

Ms. Parker (disappointed): How long did you know?

Ms. Parker slowly walks up to her daughter.

Jasmine (scared): K-know what?

Ms. Parker: That you liked girls, Jasmine.

Jasmine assumed her mom would be angry at the fact that her daughter was a lesbian, so she never told her.

Ms. Parker: Why did you not tell me? Love is love, Jasmine. It does not matter what gender you like.

Ms. Parker hugs her daughter. Jasmine misunderstood her mom and realized that her mom would love her no matter what.
Sonic's Story
Christian H.
John Marshall HS

Christian, Trey Webz, Amore, and Sonic were all hanging out at Christian’s house, planning their real Fortnite building. Christian’s mom lets out a loud scream and calls the boys outside. “All of your supplies are gone. I am calling the police.”

Detective Nose arrives and asks, “Who was here when the supplies went missing?” All the boys said no one left the house. Detective Nose asked if someone came over, but no one said anything. Christian said Sonic was the only one who left the room. Sonic said he only went to the bathroom. Detective Nose said, “There are fingerprints on the door, so Sonic, are you sure?” The detective took the boys outside and noticed again there were no fingerprints. He then asks Sonic where he took the supplies.

How did the detectives know it was Sonic?

The Mystery of the Hikers
Iris R. and Jahquai C.
John Marshall HS

A group of hikers went up a hill to get some water before their big trip. They said to the rest of the hikers, “We will be back, Mom and Dad.” When they got started, they thought they were being watched, not by their mom and dad, but from someone else, somewhere else. But they paid it no mind. When they got halfway to the top of the hill, they both somehow stepped on a steppingstone. (Get the joke?) They tripped and rolled down the hill and died. People came and saw the heads of the two who had fell, and they’d been bashed in. So, how did they die?
Luther’s Story
Tyler H.
John Marshall HS

Luther went to a party on Saturday night in Tampa Bay, and he started drinking. Being too rowdy, he bumped into a security guard and was kicked out. The same guard that kicked Luther out was killed just minutes later. The body was found by Jennifer, and she called the police. The police pulled up and asked questions about what was going on. Jennifer explained, and the detective noticed she said, “The security guard was stabbed to death.” Detective Craig then told Jennifer to put her hands behind her back and arrested her. How did she know he was stabbed if she wasn’t the killer herself?

The Mystery
ShaNiyah C.
John Marshall HS

“This is crazy, I didn’t do it!” Clarance told the detective. “I went to the store to get some wine for the night.”

“How long were you gone?” the detective asked.

“I was gone for about an hour, looking for wine everywhere. I found two bottles, but then I dropped them.” So, the detective went to the crime scene and saw wine everywhere along with a lipstick in the color pink.

“Is this your wife’s, sir?” the detective asked.

“No.” said Clarance.

“So, whose is it? Because it’s also on your white shirt.” The detective arrested Clarance and later found a lady wearing pink lipstick, holding a gun, and covered in blood that matched Tasha’s. They took her in for questioning and found out that her name was Tammy. She was Clarance’s girlfriend.
The Murdered
Edward J.
John Marshall HS

I'm Jay's neighbor. I heard five gunshots, then saw a boy named Big James get in a red car with large rims and pull off fast. I was about to walk into the house when Big James pulled up with a handgun and told me to leave, that it was about to go down.

Big James' part of the story: I was in my red car, walked into Jay's house, and was shot at five times.

Sasha's Story
Al’Janae C.
John Marshall HS

For Brit's 20th birthday, she and her friends Sasha and Chris went to celebrate at the hotel. They were hanging out, partying, and such, but then Brit started getting a little upset. She was always jealous of Sasha and Chris' friendship. So when Sasha and Brit wanted to go to the pool, they asked Chris to come, but he said to go on without him.

On the way to the pool, Brit said something to Sasha about how she felt, and when they got on the elevator, they didn't say a word. Hours later, when a woman tried to get on the elevator, she saw Sasha's dead body. She screamed and called the police. When they arrived, everybody was at the crime scene, even Chris and Britt. Britt yelled over to the officers, “Why would someone stab my friend four times?” After that, the police arrested her.

How did they know Britt was the killer?
Skipping Out
Sparkle F.
John Marshall HS

My sister, my mother, and my cousin were at home all chilling until they realized I wasn't there. They tried to look for me, but I was nowhere to be found in the house. They thought about what they could do, then La’Fae said “Let's make a plan!” So of course, they made one by thinking of a location to start at until they found what they were looking for. They hopped into the car and followed the plan. They found me but didn’t expect to see Sincere and Desire. They got in trouble too. Sincere was punished and when La’Fae and Desire went back home, Desire got in trouble as well.

The Park
Jahquai W.
John Marshall HS

It took place at a park, and it went down at nighttime with three people. Myself, my sister, and a detective. This is where it all began. I was walking my dogs with my sister. We were going to the park. There were loud sirens going around. It had me shook. I let go of the leash, and our dog ran off and was just gone. We tried to find help for our dog, but no one came. There was one thing we hadn't done yet. We called 911 to find our dog.
Podium
@PodiumRVA