



If Only You Knew

SUMMER 2023 ZINE
YOUTH AGES 14-19



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Summer 2023 Youth Ages 14 - 19 Zine

“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
Armstrong High School
Huguenot High School
Highland Springs High School
Varina High School
Petersburg National Park*



Poetry & Prose

Time

Anonymous

George Wythe HS

Take time to enjoy every moment!

"Time is priceless."

You can't get it back.

Graduation Day

Dymeir C.

Varina HS

It was my graduation day.

I was excited to move on

to the new grade

which was high school.

To have my family there

and friends,

it made me feel good

to see the people I care about

watch me make it.

When my name was called,

I felt like all my hard work

was not for waste.

It was worth it

Best Friend

Anonymous

Highland Springs HS

"Mooooommmmm!!!" Gabby yelled as she raced down the stairs. She didn't expect to see whoever was at the table. It was her best friend who she hadn't seen in 10 years. They had a brief conversation and got in contact. Gabby couldn't believe it. She hadn't seen Cheyanne in a while. Could it really be her? Gabby and Cheyanne had a long talk about how life had been going.



“See Yourself One Way, Someone Else in Another”

Cindy M.A.

Writing Mentorship Project

As the title says, you see yourself one way and someone else another. People will always see you differently: different people will see you differently, some can see you as the prettiest person ever, and someone else can see you as a hideous monster. A girl wears makeup to feel pretty and does her hair to look pretty. A boy tries to be fit to look good, so he has to choose the right haircut to look good. Even with all the girl and guy do, someone will always judge. No matter how hard you try, something will always make you feel bad. People may make fun of the way you look, the way you dress, the way you have your hair, and no matter how hard you try, you will get made fun of for it.

My name is Cindy. I'm in high school, and I personally struggle with body image and my self-image in general. When entering my teenage years, I disliked myself the most, and while it was hard to hide, I did manage to hide it. People would always tell me, “Cindy you're so pretty,” and other people would say the complete opposite. Then there's the way I see myself. Sometimes I would love myself and other times I would just dislike myself. At the end of the day, we can't change how anyone sees us. We must live life and not pay much attention to other people. It's okay to feel how you feel because not everyone knows how pretty you can be inside. My advice to myself and to everyone is don't pay attention and just be who you are because not everyone in life will like you. Live your life how you want to and ignore everything. Just don't get in trouble while living your life how you want to live it.

Molly's Dog

Jade D.

Varina HS

Molly loved her dog.
They would play together,
Eat together,
Sleep together.
When her dog died,
Molly was in denial
And did not know what to do.
Overtime,
Molly finally realized that
her beloved dog would not come back.
“Oh,” she sighed as she realized.
“It's okay,” her mom said.
“It's alright,” her dad said.
She hated that her dog was gone;
however, she finally accepted it
After being in denial for so long.



Mystical Mysteries

Enjoy imaginative pieces on compelling crimes, mysteries, and spooky stories.

Monster in the Mask

Curron W.

Armstrong HS

Setting: A shut down store in Richmond, VA, on Halloween

Characters: Curron, Collin, Jaquan, Cevon, Tee Tee, & Miyana

Plot: Five friends are locked in the abandoned store for an overnight challenge.

Five friends go to the abandoned store on Halloween. They locked themselves in the store as a challenge to stay until morning. Once they get in, they decide to play hide and go seek. They hear Jaquan scream for help in the distance. Miyana, Curron, Cevon, Collin, & Tee Tee run to the scene. Someone chopped his arm off and then disappeared. They tried to call the police, but no one had service. Everyone rushed to the exit where they saw a big figure with red eyes and a teddy bear mask. They ran farther into the store and split up. Miyana found a flare gun and shot it at the teddy bear monster, but it escaped.

The friends exit the building to get help for Jaquan. After they tell the police what happened, Jaquan is taken to the hospital in critical condition. Everyone except for Collin goes to the hospital to visit; the lights are dim and there is no one at the front desk when they arrive. Curron walks out of the entrance to get water when he sees a tall figure with red eyes. He calls for the rest of the group, and as they enter the hallway, the figure starts running towards them. Miyana trips, and Tee Tee rushes back to help her. Miyana, Tee Tee, Cevon, and Curron all run towards the stairs. Miyana asks, "Where is Collin?" Curron grabs her, and they keep going down the stairs. They call the police, but the police said nothing was there and that Jaquan was fine. Later, they see Collin, and he says he was outside the whole time.

The rest of the group soon starts to notice that they are being targeted. Miyana is a scary movie fanatic, so everyone goes to Miyana's house for a meeting to discuss the teddy bear monster. Everyone is in the living room, and a neighbor walking by sees them through the window, recognizing them from the news. Collin then says that he needs to go home. Ten minutes later, the teddy bear monster breaks into the apartment. The neighbor sees the monster hiding behind the door and bangs on the window until he gets the attention of the group.

House Trap
Miyana W.
Armstrong HS

One long day on Friday the 13th, 1948, everything just went wrong. Collin, Jaquan, Ariyana, Tee Tee, Curron, Candy, Cevon, and Miyana wanted to hang out, so they all met up. They bought ice cream but got bored quickly and wanted to play a game. Looking for places to play hide-and-seek, they saw an open house walking down 49th street. Cevon made a dare for someone to try to spend the night in the open house. Jaquan replied that it didn't seem like a safe thing to do. Everyone else wanted to see if someone could do the dare, so they went inside to play hide and seek anyways. It was Candy's turn to seek people, so the others went upstairs to hide. Collin went into the bathroom and hid in the shower. Tete hid in the kitchen, and Curron hid under the stairs. Jaquan was in the closet. Cevon hid close to Candy to scare her once she's done counting. Ariyana followed Miyana, and they both hid in the bedroom. Done counting, Cevon comes out to scare Candy, and she screams! Everyone hears it.

Laughing, Cevon started looking for others. She went upstairs and looked in the bathroom. She looked behind the door thinking somebody was there, then looked behind the curtain. Collin was deep under the water. She screamed. Cevon ran upstairs thinking somebody had scared her too, but then she saw Collin there not breathing or moving. Everyone came out from the hiding spots. No one really knew what happened, so they all made Miyana check his pulse to see if he was dead. He was dead, but what they didn't know was how the water got turned on. They all ran downstairs, and while running downstairs, Jaquan slipped and fell down the stairs.

Caesar's Palace
Ashaney S.
George Wythe HS

The most famous hotel in Vegas
booms with the sickest and most famous
people in the world.
My crew and I took their money.
I got my crew together
and figured out what people are going to be
in each hotel.
We mapped out each hotel to see
who was going to be where.
The crew wired out everyone's money.
We're rich, and everyone else is gone.



Bob the Man
Gabby W.
Highland Springs HS

A man named Bob was run over by a random person. He woke up the next morning and tried to talk to people, but everyone ignored him. When he went home, he saw his family crying while watching the news. Bob looked at the TV and saw that he's dead. Starting to panic, Bob goes on a mission to find who did it. In the process, he fights bad guys. After a year of not finding the person who ran him over, he decided to forgive and forget.

For the Million Dollar Chips
Ariyana C.
Armstrong HS

On Wednesday August 5th, 2024, in Room 252 at Armstrong High School, CoCo died. Earlier, CoCo was playing outside. She came inside and took a bag of chips from Anna that had \$5,000,000 in it. Anna had robbed the bank that morning and put the money in the bag, then Coco took the bag with the money without knowing. After Anna found out, she chased CoCo around.

Quan went to room 252 and found Coco on the floor. Quan came out of the room and said, "I know who did it."

How Someone Died
JoyDaisa B.
Armstrong HS

Kyrel and Joy snuck into a school to change their test grades. They didn't know that the school was haunted. Joy heard voices behind them, so she said, "Oh heck naw, screw the test grades! My life matters!" Kyrel and Joy started running. Then Kyrel yells, "I need to go to the bathroom right quick." She leaves. A few minutes later, when Kyrel had not returned, Joy was worried and went to the bathroom. She saw a dead body and called the cops.



Ba da da da da, It's World War 3

Jacob S.

Armstrong HS

Setting: Room 252, Richmond, VA,, in the year 2028 during World War III

Major Characters: Thomas, Joe Biden

Plot: What happened to win the war? Who won? There are no satellites.

Event 1: U.S.A. – Biden left office, tried to be President again, and failed until 2028. All branches said no to shutting down McDonalds.

Event 2: All McDonald's blown up by: UNKNOWN. Grandfather Thomas in McDonald's getting tea.

Event 3: Ireland went to war against U.S. American citizen who stole missiles to give to Ireland in an Irish plane.

The year is 2028, and Joe Biden has been elected again after losing in 2024. Joe Biden's campaign message was focused on health and healthcare access. In a tense meeting, the members of U.S. Congress did not agree to the Healthy Meals and Fast-Food Elimination Act of 2028.

Two weeks later, Thomas, a man of 98 who had previously fought for his country, U.S.A., in World War II, was killed in what would become known as The McDonald's Bombings.

Thomas, who was killed in The McDonald's Bombings, was Irish. There was mystery surrounding who set off the bombs. When Ireland found out it was an order from none other than Joe Biden, the country began an attack on the U.S.A. that would ultimately lead to World War III!

Meat Factory Case

Christopher E.

George Wythe HS

There was a reported dead body in the freezer in a local meat factory. John and Kam were arguing with Shavon, and it got heated. They ended up pushing and shoving each other. Then, there was a hook thrown behind Shavon. Kam pushed Shavon, and the hook went through his neck, causing him to bleed to death. John was speechless, and TayShawn walked in and saw blood on Kam's hands. Kam was arrested for first degree murder and charged with 25 years to life in prison without parole.



Villian Origin
Marcel S.
Highland Springs HS

Ever since he was born, he only wanted to make people feel pain. He was born with a very strong power, and that power made him pure evil. The crystals stuck in his neck were the source of his power, and by now, the malice is stuck within him forever.

Nameless
Imani D.
Highland Springs HS

On an evil day, an evil thing was born.
She was crying, but her tears were frozen.

Nameless had been bullied ever since she was born.
She allowed people to pick on her.
One day, she got so upset at all the people picking on her that she started a huge fire.
Nameless couldn't control the fire because she was so angry.
She felt like it made things better.

After everyone was destroyed,
Nameless finally felt peace, no longer being bullied.

Robbery
Kevaughn B.
George Wythe HS

Bob was planning to rob a grocery store with Dave. Dave would be there to watch out for Bob. They got their masks and gear ready. After they arrived, Bob ran, busted through the glass door, and yelled, "Get on the ground! This is a robbery!"



Pay Attention
Tiana C.
Armstrong HS

Two girls were in class with headphones on, sleeping. Little did they know that the fire alarm had just gone off, and it was smoky. By the time they woke up, everybody else was gone. With so much smoke in their lungs, they were close to death. The lesson is to pay attention in school.

The Nightwalker
Kemonté G.
Highland Springs HS

One day at a science lab, around 11:30pm at night, a man by the name of Karl was testing out a new lab experiment. With Karl being tired and trying to work late, he mixed the wrong chemicals. It bubbled up and exploded all over his body. Karl dropped to the ground, screaming in pain. Then, all the lightbulbs burst in the room.

Stranger Danger
N'Shai G.
Armstrong HS

One day, a 17-year-old told her mother she was going out with a friend. The girl's mom asked who they were. The girl lied and said, "I'm going out with my best friend." The girl's mom believed her and let her go. The next day, her mom went to her room, only to be struck with horror as her daughter was slashed to death. Stranger Danger was carved onto her daughter's headrest.

The Park
Andre I.
Highland Springs HS

Jordan went to the park and saw her friend, Marcus. He said to her, "Did you see that thing over there?"

She replied, "What thing?" Just then, a shadow covers the whole park.

Marcus said, "You don't see that spooky... shadow?!" Jordan turned around and saw the spooky shadow.

They didn't realize that it was only a giant bird.



If Only You Knew

George Wythe HS students shared what they wish the adults in their lives understood about teenagers during their end of the year celebration.

Mutual Respect

Debbie G.R.

George Wythe HS

What I feel is misunderstood about teenagers is that we are immediately seen as rude or rebellious when we speak up for ourselves. There's nothing wrong with not wanting to have kids, not wanting to become a housewife, not wanting to get married, not becoming whatever our parents want, and not going to college. Just like there's nothing wrong with getting married, having kids, becoming a housewife, doing whatever your parents want, and going to college. We have to learn to respect each other's decisions and goals in life because we are all different people with different desires and aspirations.

Listen to Understand

Jessica R.

George Wythe HS

I wish people understood some of our mindsets and took the time to listen and understand us. I believe communication and comprehension are key. I also believe respect goes both ways. There is no point in asking a child about their feelings if you aren't going to listen to understand. Mental health is real. I have seen parents hear a child speak but not listen. They do it just to say that they allowed them to speak.

Wish for a Break

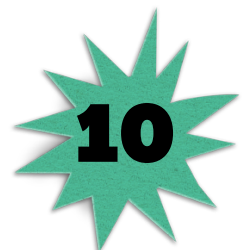
Dekailah B.

George Wythe HS

Sometimes we need a break from everything, including life sometimes.

We need time to space out

and just be with ourselves for a moment.



Listen

Kely A.

George Wythe HS

Adults never listen to us.
They think we shouldn't have a voice
or that we're not worth listening to.
If they do listen to us,
it's as if what we say goes
in one ear and out the other.

Look Beyond

Jachaun T.

George Wythe HS

I wish adults understood more about when kids are tired and need to sleep in class. The first thing they should be worried about is why those kids are asleep and what's going on at home.

What Adults Should Understand

Catherine C.

George Wythe HS

Mental health matters.
We don't need an answer or a lecture,
We just need someone to listen.

One Thing

Shevontae J.

George Wythe HS

Respect is earned, not given blindly.
If adults expect me to respect them,
I expect to be respected as well.



Misunderstood
Anonymous
George Wythe HS

One thing that is misunderstood about youth today is what we wear. Adults always say someone is too young to be wearing certain things because they're not age appropriate, even though they don't know our ages. They think we're trying to be "grown."

Phases
Ayron D.
George Wythe HS

Sometimes teenagers go through phases, and parents don't understand because teenagers are scared of changing and of conflicts in the world that could affect them.

School
Anonymous
George Wythe HS

School causes stress and anxiety.
Teachers pile up work on top of work.
We're trying to study for these SOLs and exams
While dealing with the world.

Teenage Feelings
Aniyah H.C.
George Wythe HS

Life as a teenager is very fun but hard.
You learn as you go, and you learn your place with people.
I want adults to understand that we have feelings too.



Agency & Advocacy

Student reflections on the changes they would like to see in their world and society at large.

Dear Representative McClellan
Rihanna P.
Varina HS

Dear Representative McClellan,

My name is Rihanna P., and I am a citizen in your district. I am deeply concerned by the most recent crime in the last year. I worry that if we don't take action now then it'll be too late. Many families are hurting over the passing of their loved ones. People that deserve justice still haven't gotten it. Most of the crimes are teens dying. 98% of the time they don't walk the stage they have worked hard for. I urge you to please consider changing and looking into gun control laws. Congressional inaction is not only a national shame, but it is a threat to our safety, the safety of our children, and the wellbeing of our communities. Gun violence is a public health issue, and it is taking an unacceptable toll on our society. You must act now. No more time must be wasted.

We need to take action to ensure that:

- Everyone who wants to own a gun must pass a background check. We need to require universal background checks on every purchased gun.
- We need an effective ban on assault weapons now.
- Gun trafficking should be a federal offense.

Sincerely,

Rihanna

Child Neglect
Kamille D.
Varina HS

I feel like child neglect needs to be addressed because all children deserve to be loved. Children are new to the world and need a loving adult in their life. If a family doesn't seem to have enough money, they should have food and clothes provided to them every month. Sometimes being poor or unfortunate can lead to neglect.

Letter to the School Board
Erin L.
Petersburg National Park

July 5th, 2023
Ryan M. Harter
School Board Member

Dear Mr. Harter,

I am writing to you today to express my concern about how Chesterfield County Public School decides on how teachers are approved to work in this county. I am a graduate of Matoaca High School, class of 2022. Recently there was a teacher who was exposed for grooming multiple young students. This is not the first time in recent years, so I am curious as to what Matoaca, and Chesterfield County as a whole, is doing to help our students stay safe. Every couple of years it comes out that a teacher has groomed or had inappropriate relationships with their students.

As a former student, I know that there are no resources to teach students when they are being manipulated by a person with a position of power. Matoaca claims that there are resources provided to the students to help when they are put in dangerous situations. There was a young man in my graduating class who was humiliated publicly because the school and the police department did nothing to help him. He was manipulated and denied by people who claimed to be there to help children. How will this be fixed?

From,

Erin L.

Gun Violence
Laila R.
Varina HS

I believe that gun violence is an important thing to talk about. Now that many school shootings have happened over the United States, they affect people everywhere. Not just kids, but adults, also. Many tragic deaths have occurred. Parents lose their kids, who are never able to come back home.



**Letter to Representative
Rory D.
Petersburg National Park**

7/5/23

The Honorable Jennifer McClellan
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative McClellan,

I am writing to you as your constituent to express my strong concern for a crisis facing many in the US and the world over. This being the exorbitant and ever-rising cost of housing in our cities. I am a lifelong resident of Petersburg, and as much as it pleases me to see economic progress and increased investment, many will be left behind. We can already see this in Richmond, and it will soon be spreading south.

In this city, many plots are full of empty and unused buildings and lots which could be used as housing. Why are they not being used for anything? These, in many cases, are historic buildings with solid foundations that deserve to be preserved and used. It is imperative that these buildings be preserved and renovated. I know you care about Petersburg, too.

From,

Rory D.

**Dear U.S. Supreme Court
Nyomi W.
Varina HS**

Dear US Supreme Court Justices,

It deeply unsettles and terrifies me how quickly you all made a life-changing decision. Not for yourself, but for a huge demographic of America. The overturning of Roe V. Wade is a historically tragic day. Not just for women but for anyone with a uterus. It deeply disturbs me that you don't understand the depth and gravity of what you did. The overturning not only puts millions in danger, but it also empowers child predators to get away with doing virtually anything they want. Teens, children, women, and LGBTQ+ people who have uteruses have now become even bigger targets.

Sincerely,

Nyomi



Dear Representative
Aminah C.
Varina HS

Dear Representative,

My conversation about social justice issues would be on child neglect and abuse. You'll walk out of your house to run errands, and you may see a mother yell, threaten, hit, or pull on a child from the ages of one to eleven years old. People may look and think it's not that serious or the kid might be acting up; however, pay attention to detail. Does the child look sick or scared? Do you come across a bruise on the child? Maybe ask yourself a question or two before leaving it be.

I feel that single mothers need support, especially if they have more than one kid. I've seen for myself how youngest and oldest children are treated differently. The oldest turns into a caregiver, and the youngest gets ignored. For example, I've seen a hungry child ask for food and get yelled at to go to sleep, or parents keeping children occupied with their phones and TV. While they do their own thing, parents depend on the oldest child to watch their siblings. Looking after everyone has turned them independent, yes, but that can cause rebellion, disrespect, and disobedience.

From,

Aminah

LGBTQ Rights
Kori C.
Varina HS

I think LGBTQ+ rights are important because they are human rights. Everyone should have rights because we are all the same. Why should one person be outcasted because of how they identify or who they want to be with? We could try to fight laws that go against LGBTQ+ rights.



My Hero

Students imagine their own heroes and reflect on the ones they have in their lives now.

Shadowman

Dereon G.

Highland Springs HS

Rod was a 16-year-old teen from Richmond, VA. He lived in a mix between the hood and the suburbs. One night, he was walking home from the basketball court with his childhood friend, Jay. They were in the wrong place at the wrong time. Mistaken for other people, they got robbed, and Jay ended up being shot. People looked around everywhere for Rod, but he was nowhere to be seen, to them.

In reality, Rod was watching the whole thing, but he had disappeared into the shadows. From there on out, anytime he felt sad, mad, or got in his feelings at all, he had the power to turn into a shadow.

Captain-Save-A-Friend

Threvia S.

Huguenot HS

Captain-Save-A-Friend is a hero to kids all around the world. Her main goal is to save kids who suffer from being bullied at school, but she also teaches bullies about the deeper effects bullying has on the people around them. She talks about how words can affect and hurt others, which may cause them to think less of themselves or even hurt themselves.

What Makes Superheroes

Kiara B.

Highland Springs HS

What makes superheroes heroes
are superpowers,
saving lives,
fighting crime, and
doing what they love.



Hero
Trinity M.
Huguenot HS

A hero shows us that
even though people can see your scars,
it does not mean that they define who we are.
It also shows that even with scars,
you can still be a respectful and loving person.

Ms. T.
Keyionna C.
Highland Springs HS

I think Ms. T is a hero. Each day, she wakes up early and is ready to get her day started. She packs her bags, so they are ready for the drive to work. While in the car, she decides to stop and get breakfast at Wendy's. As she waits in line for food, her favorite song comes on the radio. She sings and dances her heart out. She finally makes her way to her job, gets all her things, and walks to her office. Before she can even close her door, she has five students in there with her. As Ms. T sees what her day brings, she smiles as she looks at the mayhem that has already started. It's what she's used to.

Spidergirl
Christine H.
Huguenot HS

She's like Spiderman, but instead, Spidergirl has the powers of invisibility and to get money from her looks. She is nice, confident, and basically better than Spiderman!



The Chosen Ones
Andre I.
Highland Springs HS

“Son! How dare you let Electragirl and Fireboy go?!” the father says.

“I think we should stop committing crime and learn how to be superheroes!” the sister responds.

“Lil sis, I’m running away from home. I’m coming with you because I don’t want to commit crimes either,” the son tells his sister.

They see someone in danger in New York and save them. Later, the superhero leader comes and asks them if they’re going to become superheroes. At the exact same time, their parents realize their children are gone and start to look for them. Their parents find them and gather all the villains. Everyone starts to fight.

Secret
Anonymous
Highland Springs HS

I just found out that my best friend has a huge secret! She told me that she found a robot in her backyard. I replied to her, “Woah... a robot?! What kind of robot?”

She said, “A kind robot who is here to help. His name is, well, his name is Billy!” He needed information, so he went to school with her.

Superhero
Oscar V.
Huguenot HS

His superpower is that he can control technology with his mind. He also protects people from cyberattacks, including protecting everyone’s privacy and saving them from hackers and techno viruses.

Thugalicious
Jesse H.
Highland Springs HS

What makes a hero a hero?
The person I’m thinking about is Thugalicious.
He is a tall mind-reader who saves people.



I Podium

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