

# HEROS OF THE MIND

WINTER 2025  
ZINE  
YOUTH AGES  
11-13



# WINTER 2025 MIDDLE SCHOOL 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:**

- Dogwood Middle School
- Petersburg Boys & Girls Club
- Brookland Middle School
- The WELL
- Henderson Middle School
- Boushall Middle School



# ACROSTIC POEMS



## **P.E.A.C.E**

**J. Marcelo Washington**

**Petersburg Boys & Girls Club**

**P**erfect and harmonious  
**E**qual rights and fight  
**A**ccepting  
**C**hill, calm, and tranquil  
**E**nvironment

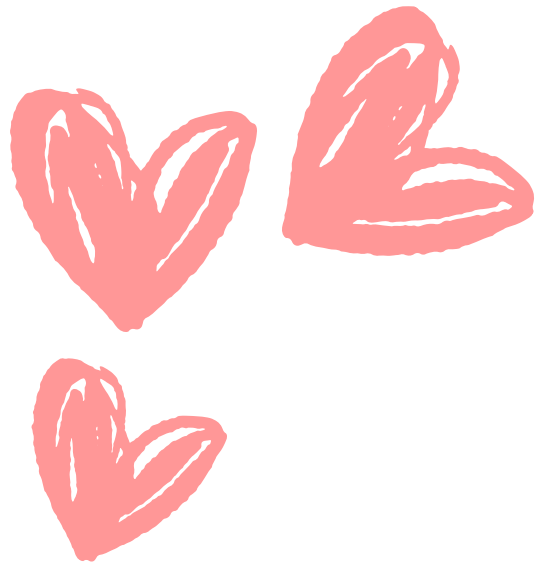
## **A Girl from New York**

**Janae Neverson**

**Petersburg Boys & Girls Club**

**F**rom New York,  
**A** girl  
**M**oves to Petersburg.  
**I**t's so fun out here.  
**L**ately, I've been going to the Boys and Girls Club and I like it  
**Y**ou might think I want to go back, but I don't.





## **Overcoming Every Problem**

**K'miyah Walker**

**Petersburg Boys & Girls Club**

Life is hard, so try and strive

Overcoming every problem so I can thrive

Various things try to get in my way.

Every time they do, despite the dismay, I try & try every day.

## **Love is so Powerful**

**Ava Jones**

**The WELL**

Familiar faces all around

Aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents

My family loves me

I love my family

Love is so powerful. You feel it for many; you may feel it for none.

You're ok to love whoever you love, no matter race or gender.

***Love who you love!***







### **Pineapple on Pizza**

**Zynia Syria**

**Henderson Middle School**

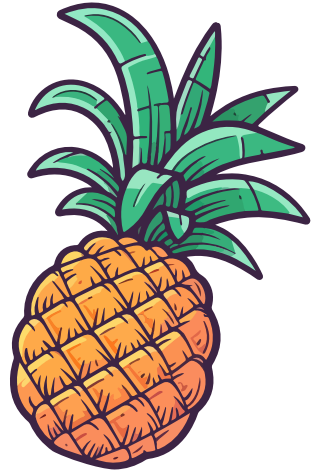
**P**ineapple belongs on pizza!  
**E**verybody says, "no it doesn't"  
**A**ll the time.  
**C**an I  
**E**ver meet someone who agrees?

### **Away I Go**

**Jada Mickens**

**Dogwood Middle School**

**P**arking along a crowded road.  
**E**veryone was staring at me.  
**A**way I go.  
**C**an't go because I was scared.  
**E**ffects because everyone else saw



## **Everything Will Be Okay**

**Eli Andrew**

**Brookland Middle School**

Everything will be okay.

Love will pick you up and drag you around, but despite everything...

I love myself.

## **Obstacles May Come**

**Sofia Blanco**

**Brookland Middle School**

Soft & soothing.

Obstacles may come.

Feelings may pile up.

Interesting life

Amazing life

## **Although We Fight, We Still Love**

**Kamila Lawson**

**The WELL**

Funny happy family.

Although we fight, we still love.

My family is caring.

Intelligent, the never give up type of family.

Love can come and go, but their love

You would love them.

### **Always Positive Vibes**

**Jonathan Tamacas**

**Brookland Middle School**

**J**ourney will never end.

**O**nce upon a time...

**N**ice weather, nice rhyme.

**A**lways positive vibes.

**T**ry until the end.

**H**ard worker, yes, I am!

**A**t a stop but not at the end.

**N**ever ever negative vibes.



### **The Attributes of Me**

**Lauryn Taylor**

**Brookland Middle School**

**L**oving and loveable,

**A**nd amazing at everything.

**U**nique,

**R**eally cute,

**Y**oung & beautiful.

**N**ever give up!

**Live Life Everyday**

**Camille Gordon**

**Brookland Middle School**

**C**aring

**A**nd

**M**indful.

In school, I make it a point to

**L**ive

**L**ife

**E**veryday

**Resemble Who You Are**

**Breanna Green**

**Brookland Middle School**

**B**e yourself

**R**esemble who you are

**E**veryone is different

**A**nd it can be confusing

**N**ow you will understand

**N**ot to be scared

**A**ngels will help

# HAIKU POEMS

## **The Monster**

**Eli Fuentes**

**Dogwood Middle School**

The monster chased me,  
Fear engulfed me as I ran,  
Fearless, I saw light.

## **Not Afraid**

**Jasira McCaskill**

**Dogwood Middle School**

Stand tall, Oh so high,  
I was once afraid of heights,  
I'm strong, not afraid.

## **School Just Ain't the Same**

**Noah Manning**

**Dogwood Middle School**

School was fun and games,  
But Middle School made it change,  
School just ain't the same.



**Black All Over**  
**Skylar Butter**  
**Dogwood Middle School**

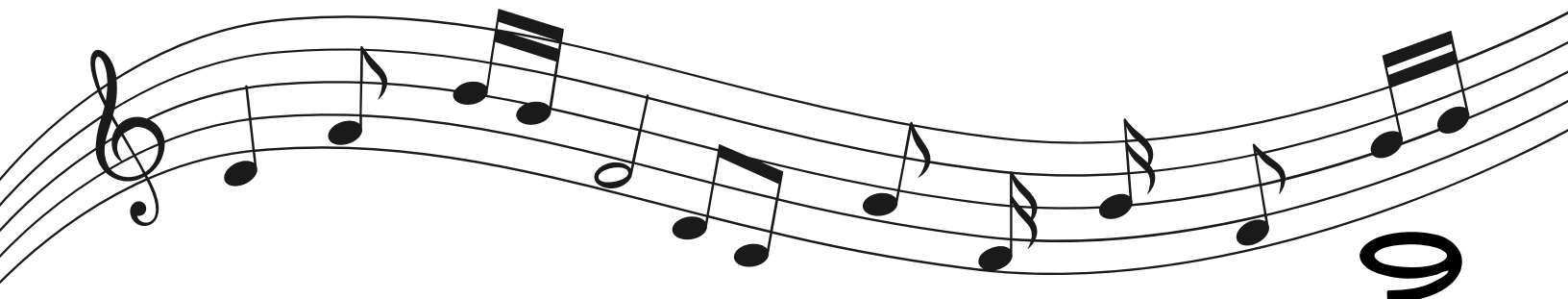
Black all over right now,  
I can't think or feel anything anymore,  
Black all over right now.

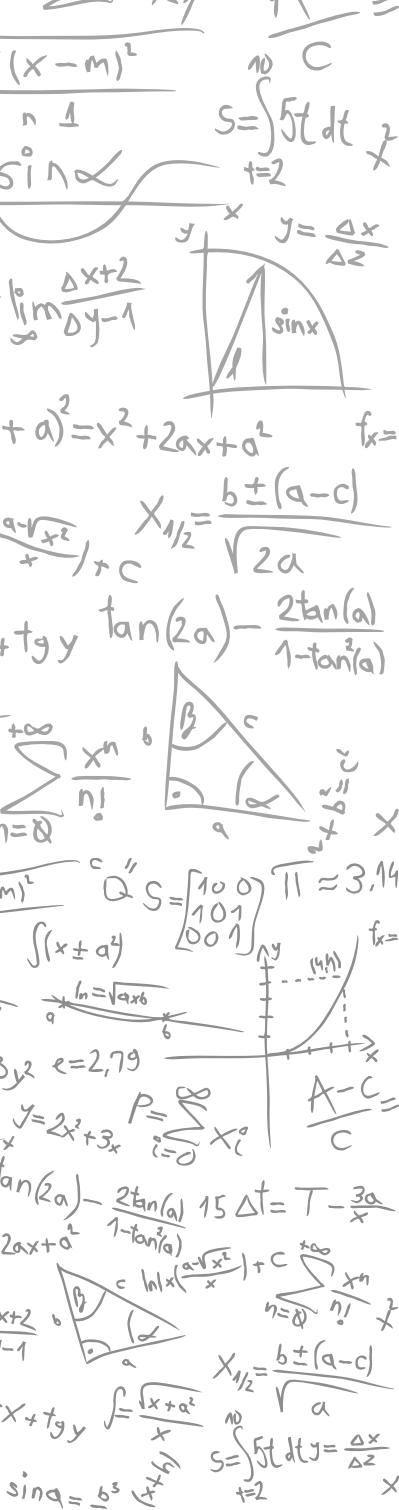
**I Stand with No Fear**  
**Breanna Green**  
**Brookland Middle School**

As the snake draws near,  
It's fangs dripping with venom  
I stand with no fear

**Music, I Love You**  
**Eli Andrew**  
**Brookland Middle School**

This a poem  
A poem about music  
Music, I love you





## My Love for Food

Jasirah Tyree

Brookland Middle School

I like to eat food,  
Food has a lot of flavors.  
Also, it tastes very good.

## Math? Not so Fun

London Robinson

Brookland Middle School

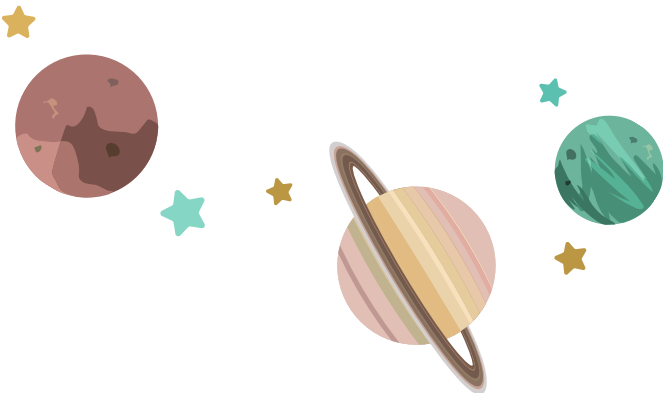
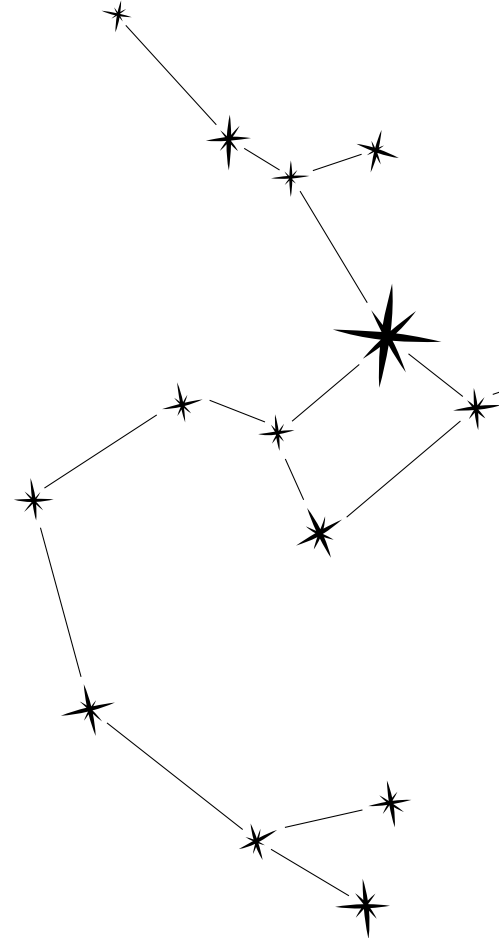
I do not like math.  
Math makes me go so insane.  
Math is so boring.

## Skies, Stars and Planets

Sky Gaines

Brookland Middle School

Skies, stars, and planets,  
I like to look at planets.  
Planets are my fav.





### Change Can Be Scary

**Nasir Taylor**

**Boushall Middle School**

I have to move homes  
Not sure about my next school  
Scared, a bit confused.



### Bravery is Key

**Indaysia Jones**

**Boushall Middle School**

Brave with every step.  
Being brave will set you free.  
Bravery is key.



### Style How You Wear It

**Madison Williams**

**Boushall Middle School**

Style how you wear it.  
Makes you feel good 'bout yourself.  
Dressing up is fun.



### **The Void**

**Kennedy Greene**

**Henderson Middle School**

We are on a rock.  
Floating around in the void.  
Are we all alone?



### **Life is Good**

**Madison Ramsey**

**Henderson Middle School**

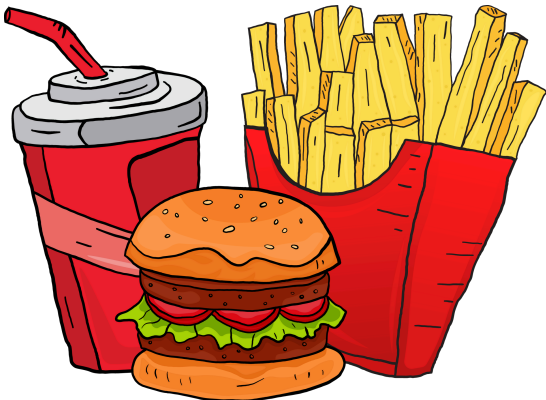
Life is good today.  
And my flaws are amazing.  
Life is beautiful.

### **My Order at Mickey D's**

**Zynia Syria**

**Henderson Middle School**

Can I order please?  
A big mac and a large fry,  
Large Dr. Pepper.





### **My Loyalty to Wingstop**

**Grace Elliot**

**Henderson Middle School**

I'm hungry for food.  
Line was long, cashier was rude.  
I'll wait for Wingstop.

### **Life is Good**

**Katarina Armstead**

**Henderson Middle School**

Life is good today.  
The sky is happy today.  
I am so Jolly.



# SOLVING COMMUNITY ISSUES

## Social Media & Teens

**K'Liyah Lee, Camille Burford, Sariah Capyra, Serenity  
Thompson, Zion Terry  
Boushall Middle School**

Social media can impact teens positively or negatively, it really depends on how you look at life. If you have a positive mindset, mean or sad stuff would not affect you as much. You learn from your mistakes. But if you have a negative outlook, things on social media will seem negative.

Social media can be bad because it can influence kids to be rude. A lot of teens just scroll all day — basically watching "brain rot." But going outside more and getting off your phone can really help.

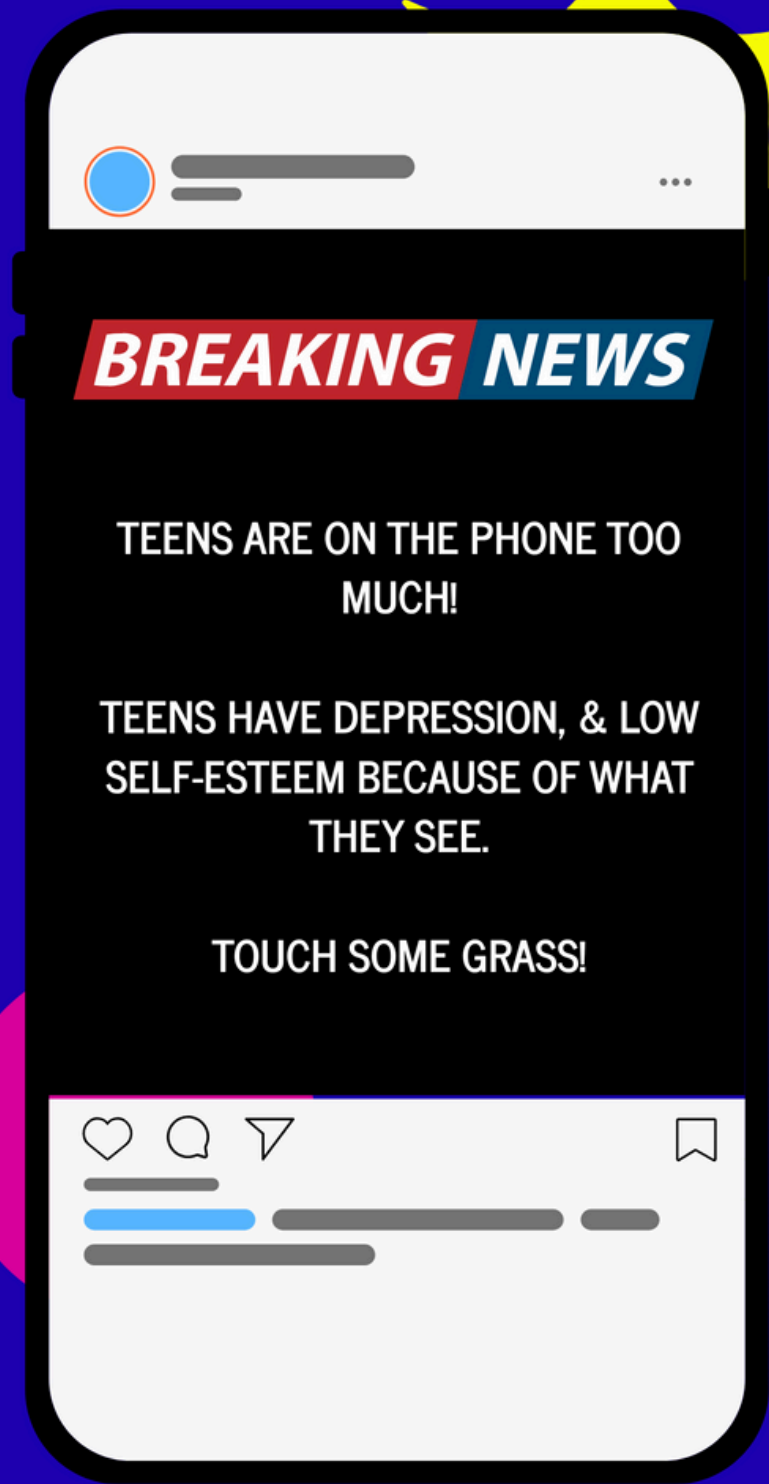
### **Here's some advice:**

"Just because it's on the internet doesn't mean it's true."

"Don't pay too much attention to other people's posts. Don't feel bad about what you don't have or can't *do*. Think about what you do have and *where you did go*."

"Be yourself on social media. Be positive. Go outside more. Put the phone down."

↑ NO PHONES ↓



## **STOP Cyber Bullying**

**Janae Neverson, Laura Livingston, Serenity Bates,  
Kiarrah Bumbrey, Kayla Wesson  
Petersburg Boys & Girls Club**

If you are being bullied, tell a good friend or an adult you trust— you don't have to deal with it alone. If someone tries to bully you on social media, block them and move on. If people say bad things about you, don't give them your energy or attention.

Don't worry about what other people say or do, just focus on doing what *you* know is right. If something or someone makes you uncomfortable, speak up and let someone know.

Cyberbullying can really hurt people, so don't do it. What bullies say about you isn't true — don't believe it. Think before you post or respond. Stay positive and remind yourself of your worth.



## **Social Media & Cyber-Bullying**



### **Negative Effects of Cyber Bullying:**

- **Negatively affects mental health**
- **Impacts Self-Esteem**



### **Advice for handling Cyber-Bullying:**

- **Lean on someone you trust**
- **Block people from your page**
- **Remember people on the internet lie for attention**



## **Accessible Parks for Teens**

**Jasira McCaskill, Alicia Richardson, Eli Fuentes,  
Shaniah Williamson  
Dogwood Middle School**

If there were more parks that everyone could use and get to easily, I would be able to hang out with my friends more. Being outside helps us stay active and connected with our friends. When there aren't enough parks or they're hard to get to, it limits what we can do after school or on the weekends.

A big problem is the lack of accessibility. Not everyone can enjoy the parks if they aren't close by or if there's no safe way to get there. Teens without reliable transportation or teens with disabilities can be left out. It's not fair that some teens can't experience the fun and benefits of being in a park just because they can't get there.

Reliable transportation is important because teens should have a safe way to get to and from parks. If we had better ways to get to parks, it could prevent a lot of the violence we see in the community. It will also give everyone a chance to be active and enjoy nature. Accessibility and transportation matter because all teens deserve safe places to have fun and be themselves.



# PARK ACCESS FOR ALL TEENS!

## Why Our Neighborhood Needs More Accessible Parks



### WHAT TEENS ARE SAYING:

"I would be able to hang out with my friends more."



Parks have a lack of accessibility."

"We need reliable transportation so teens stay safe."



### THE PROBLEM:

Many parks aren't easy for teens to get to. Without reliable transportation or access, some teens miss out on the chance to be active, connect with friends, and enjoy the outdoors



### THE SOLUTION:

- ✓ Create more parks in walking distance
- ✓ Offer safe transportation options
- ✓ Make parks accessible for ALL teens –including those with disabilities



### TAKE ACTION:

Let your voice be heard. Advocate for more accessible parks and safe transportation for teens in our neighborhood!



Start a conversation



Reach out to community



Share this flyer with others!

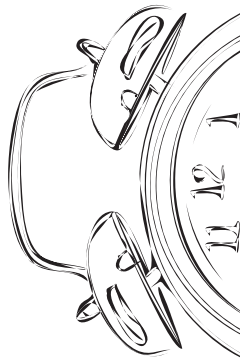
Share this flyer with others!





# WORD ROULETTE

In this section, students were tasked with composing a narrative utilizing a set of randomly generated words to encourage creativity, linguistic flexibility, and spontaneous storytelling



## LIST A

Lantern  
Whisper  
Mirror  
Thunder  
Journey  
Puzzle  
Shadow  
Treasure

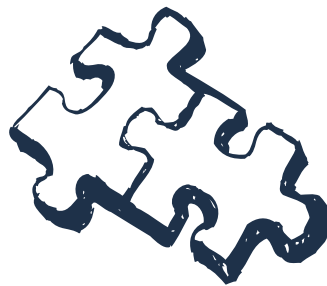
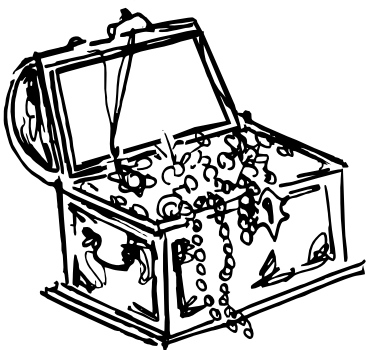


## LIST B

Moonlight  
Secret  
Clock  
Storm  
Escape  
Whisper  
Guardian  
Map



Check out some of our students & original narratives and see how skillfully they integrated these randomized words into their stories!



## The Haunted House

Arielle Williams

Boushall Middle School

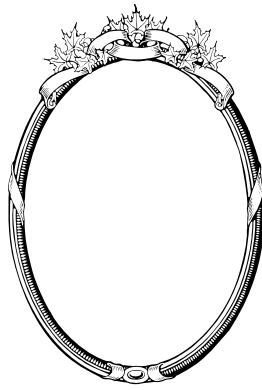
One night, my cousin and I decided to have a sleepover at a haunted house. It was dark and cold, so I grabbed a **lantern** from my backpack. As we were settling in, Skye, my cousin, heard a loud **whisper** from a room across the hall. Although the whisper caught us off guard, we didn't think too much of it.

We decided to tour the haunted house and checked out the bathroom first. When we walked in, we saw a HUGE **mirror** — but the mirror was strange. We saw two girls looking at us, but they weren't me or Skye! Scary, right?

We finished exploring the house when, unexpectedly, we heard a loud **thunderclap**. At this point, we were really scared, so we left and began our **journey** home. As we were walking, I looked down and noticed a **puzzle** buried in the dirt. I also noticed that our **shadows** began to take a weird shape.

Although Skye and I were scared, I will remember and **treasure** this adventure always.





## Mirror, Mirror on the Wall

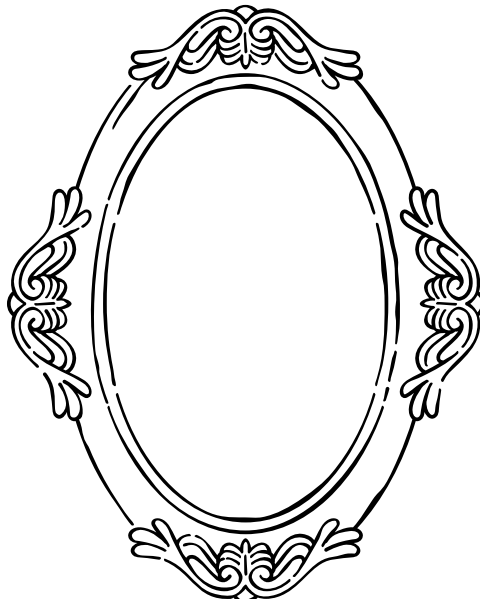
Madison Williams

Boushall Middle School

One day, my friends and I were hanging out and playing games like we usually do. We thought it would be fun to play a game called “**Mirror, Mirror** on the Wall,” so we did. Nothing happened at first, but then we heard a **whisper**. We were all freaked out!

Then it started to **thunderstorm**. The lights were flickering, and a **shadow** appeared, but it wasn’t any of ours. ‘BOOM!’ The thunderstorm was so strong that the power went out. Good thing I brought a **lantern**!

We decided to take a **journey** to turn the power back on, but we were **puzzled** and didn’t know where to go. That’s when one of my friends saw a scary man carrying a big **treasure** chest. We screamed and ran away. The end.



## Baby Blue

Kamila Lawson

### The WELL

It was a dark and stormy, **thundering** night when Baby Blue was born. Her parents left her on someone's porch. As Baby Blue got older, she noticed that she could **whisper** and talk to butterflies. She later discovered that she and her parents were superheroes, so she went on a secret **journey** to find her biological parents for an explanation of her unique ability.

She left her home and, as she walked through the woods, she found a strange light. She saw a **lantern** with a butterfly on it, along with a **puzzle**. "This has to be a sign from my parents," Baby Blue thought to herself.

After solving the puzzle, it revealed a map leading to a **treasure** box. She decided to follow the map in search of the mysterious treasure, but by the time she finished solving the puzzle, it was already dark. Tired and exhausted, she used her magic butterflies to create a floating butterfly bed.

Later that night, she heard something that startled her. She saw a strange **shadow** and realized it was an evil spirit. She got up as quickly as she could to escape. As she was running, she tripped on a rock and realized that this was not an ordinary rock, but a small, broken **mirror**. She picked up the mirror, thinking it might be useful, and continued running.

After running for a few miles, she came across a house, and as she got closer, she saw people through the window and felt something familiar. "Could these be my parents?" She knocked on the door, and when they opened it, she was surprised to find that it was her parents! Then it dawned on her... her parents were the treasure on the map. And with that, she got her happy ending.

## Scarlet & The Robbers

India Graham

The WELL

One night, a **storm** suddenly struck the city, and the doors to the bank flew open. Then appeared Scarlet — the most courageous and dangerous woman in the city.

There were five masked men running around the bank, but one of them was hiding a **secret**. As he **whispered** something to the other four men, Scarlet snuck behind them. Before any of the men could retreat, she put them in handcuffs — but one got away. He quickly ran out the front door and even faster down the street.

As soon as Scarlet finished putting the other four men in handcuffs, she ran after the robber who had **escaped**. She burst through the front door, her nice, soft, short black hair shining in the **moonlight**. Her heels clacked along the pavement as she searched quickly for the robber — but he was out of sight.

Just as Scarlet was about to lose hope, she spotted a **map** on the ground. It showed where the young man was heading, so she followed it and soon came across a small cabin.  
To be continued...



## The Treasure Box

Taliyah White

The WELL



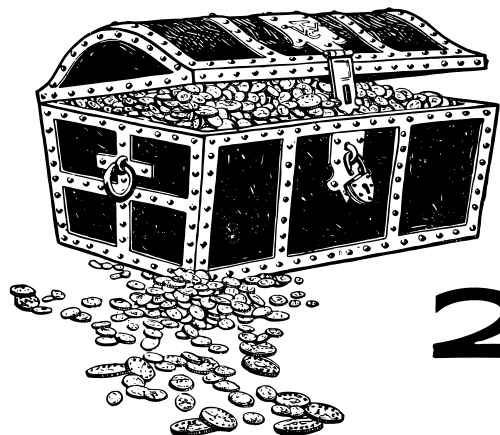
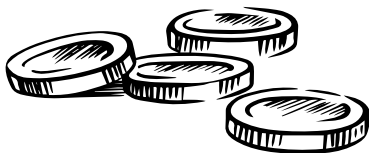
Once upon a time, there was a girl named Trinity. She was on a ***journey*** to find a big box filled with money and ***treasure***. She first learned about the treasure from a ***shadow*** that ***whispered*** to her in the darkness of her room, just before she fell asleep. That night, she dreamed of going on a journey to find the treasure.

It took her two days to find the box. When she finally got to it, she opened it — but there was no money inside, only broken pieces of a ***mirror***. It looked like a ***puzzle***, so she put the pieces back together. Once finished, she realized it was another map to find the REAL treasure. She took a quick nap and rested for her journey ahead.

When Trinity woke up, it was dark, but she wasn't going to wait any longer to find the treasure. She was frustrated about how long this journey took, but she had a feeling she was close.

She pulled out a yellow ***lantern*** and when she turned it on, she saw the real treasure box beside a large black tree.

To be continued...



# A LETTER TO MY FUTURE SELF

## A Letter to Darian

**Darian Williams**

**Henderson Middle School**

Dear Future Me,

For my career, I want to be a pro football player. But first, I want to go to a D1 college in Colorado and major in Physics. My hobbies will be things I enjoy — like drawing and painting. I would mostly hang out with my friends and brother.

A skill I want to get better at in the future is geometry. My big dream is to be an NFL Draft Pick with the Baltimore Ravens. My advice to my future self is to follow your dreams and be you.

I want to buy Mom a house and give her 2 million dollars. After I make it, I want to give back to Richmond by helping the poor — providing money to get them off the streets, just giving out money.

Sincerely,

Past you.

# A LETTER TO MY FUTURE SELF

## A Letter to Jahrei

**Jahrei Thompson**

**Henderson Middle School**

Dear Future Me,

The job I think I'll have is a technician, because I'm really into technology. I think I'll live in a penthouse somewhere in Virginia. My favorite hobby is video games — they're so fun, and I'm always happy when I play them.

I'll probably spend time with my brother and head to KFC. A cool skill I have learned is math, and it's a good skill to have, considering how math is part of your everyday life.

A big dream I've achieved is getting to go to college and passing. I will go to Princeton and finish with a 4.1 GPA. The advice I would give to myself: no matter the cost, always protect your loved ones.

Sincerely,

Past you.



# A LETTER TO MY FUTURE SELF

## A Letter to Kyria

**Kyria Haynes**

**Henderson Middle School**

Dear Future Me,

Yes, you are 23 years old, but I want you to know that my predictions are right. I think your job is a ballet teacher — or maybe a dance teacher. I think you'll live in a two- or three-story house in the Bahamas. Your favorite hobby would probably be drawing or dancing — maybe even singing.

You would be spending time with your friends in New York, looking at the Christmas lights. You'll also be spending time with your family for Thanksgiving. A cool skill you might have is cooking — and maybe you'll even have your own bakery.

A big dream you achieve is doing ballet and finding success in life. Advice I would give: don't trust everyone — some people will try to use you for something or someone else.

Sincerely,

Past you.

# PAUSE & REFLECT

This page is designed for you to reflect on your personal experiences. This is your space to pause and reflect. Answer the three questions below and let your thoughts flow.

1. When was the last time you felt really proud of yourself, and why?
2. What is something you're grateful for today, and why?
3. What is something you wish you understood better about yourself?

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**@PODIUMRVA**

