

# Nantucket Book Festival Young Writer Award 2023

## WINNER

### Life, in three parts: 11th grade

Anna Popnikolova

#### I. Life, in weeks

The average human lifespan is 73 years, which means  
the average human lifespan is around 4,000 weeks.

This week, I sit in bed and wait. Soon, I can sleep  
with my eyes closed, I seal away another seven days  
and slice open the cardboard to reveal a shiny new, bubble-wrapped week,  
mine to have.

This week, I've spent the entire time knitting a blanket  
or turning pages in a quiet room  
or making something beautiful.

The average human doesn't have so many weeks to spare:  
next week has a coffee date, a dress-fitting, a dinner with friends, a work holiday  
this week has meetings and days upon days upon days—

The weeks end while I wait for another to start.

The calendar is a mouth on the wall,  
swallowing every square that passes, hungry for more.

These seven days end with a satisfying click of midnight.

A new week crowns over the horizon with open arms.

I wake to the dawn of new time, blooming while I marvel.

#### II. Life, in days

If the average human lifespan is 73 years, that means  
the average human lifespan is just around 3,800 weeks, which means  
the average human life (only) lasts about 27,000 days.

One week is seven days, but I play leapfrog from one day to the next,  
eating weeks, bite-by-bite or jumping over them completely.

Today, I spent an entire hour thinking about a song ,  
rolling each lyric over and over in my mouth until it dissolved,  
hard shell first. The music was sweet, something like raw agave or clove—  
The hour was out before I even knew it had begun.

Today, I spent another hour sitting in water.

I thought things over. I cupped the fizzing suds in my hands, watched the droplets run down my wrists  
and arms, dripping back into the ocean that was  
my bathtub. The light came through the window and against the shower glass.

The light fell on the wall. The wall.

Today, I spent an hour with the wall.

I did what one does knows how to do with a wall—

One knows how to dance with the wall, press it with cold palms, try to move it an inch over to the side,  
so forth. I put my back to it and laid on the floor with my feet up against it, I whispered secrets against  
the plaster, tried to get it to open up to me.

The wall did not turn to a door! But I loved it anyway.

I spent an hour telling myself a thing or two about water and walls and wasting time.

I discussed with myself over a bowl of strawberries, and became enchanted with their redness, their  
roundness, the way they opened like kisses and shone like rubies—  
but, wasting time!

I sleep for an entire day and spend the next one completely awake, mouthing the words to every song and  
remembering to never leave my body behind—

all of my days pinken before me, mine to feel and hold.

## **Life, in minutes**

If the average human lifespan is only 73 years, that means  
we don't have nearly enough time to worry!

I spent a minute looking in the mirror so intently that I get dizzy,  
as if I've been spinning around and around and around and  
around noontime, I spent a minute eating a cereal bar and pulling off the screen of my own home  
because I forgot my keys.

I spent a minute deciding whether I could eat the leaves of a strawberry, rolling them between my fingers and  
finding disappointment when I finally chewed them.

I spent a minute holding water in my mouth.

I spent the minute before that holding water in my hands.

Before that, a minute of tap water.

I spend a minute thinking about kindness.

I spend a minute thinking and spinning around and around and—

I spend another minute watching the steam rise from my tea.

I don't spend a minute waiting for the tea to cool, and then—

I spend an entire minute thinking about wasting time.

I spend another one realizing the irony,

I say, forget minutes!

And I look at the sky. I take a leaf off of a tree and see intricacy in those green veins, the curved stem, the life coursing through everything, the everloving heartbeat of the world.

I look at the mouths of all my friends, blooming with love.

I find myself in my parents car in the nighttime and everytime I look over my shoulder,  
the moon is following us.

When a glass bowl shatters on the floor, I don't wish I had been more careful. I admire the way it glitters and hurry to find the dustpan.

I cry in a quiet room and tell my mother that I love her, and then fill the dishwasher with day-old dishes.

I sharpen pencils and listen to songs and songs and pluck minutes out of the air with my fingertips.

I spend minutes now in love with the world. I see all of this life just outside of the windowpane. I see all of this life in the mirror before me, spinning with every glorious moment, around and around and—

Life is ripe and mine for the picking.

## **Nantucket Book Festival Young Writer Award 2023**

### **RUNNERS UP**

#### **Prototaxites: 12th Grade**

#### **Kipper Buccino**

Life in the early Silurian Period felt like warm waters teeming with change. Much of the planet however, was still left untrodden: land above sea only being home to small fungi, lichen, and arthropods like millipedes and early arachnids. One species however literally stood above the rest. At 26 feet tall and more than 3 feet wide, prototaxites, an ancient fungi, were a beacon of hope for the first land organisms. Fungi hold a great responsibility to cycle nutrients and information throughout systems, but these gentle giants also were responsible for sheltering early terrestrial life.

All things exist to fill their ecological niche. I firmly believe that humans are included in that. Every living thing on this planet has influence on others, whether they know it or not. While prototaxites weren't sentient in the way we normally think of the word, there were still active relationships between them and everything they touched. Recognizing these relationships has shown me how I can exist. Growing up neurodivergent with tremendous anxiety was difficult. Much time was spent trying to fit in where I couldn't, like a circle in a square hole. There were many times that I felt out of place in my life, reaching for a common form of communication. In recent years I have found more satisfaction in filling my niche as it occurs naturally, rather than overextending myself, sopping up peripheral nutrients without bringing anything back into the ecosystem. I know that I need a lot of support and external structure, but I recognize there are other people who I can work with to fill in my gaps, and I can reciprocate with my strengths. Working in groups where I feel supported and can support others is something I crave.

And my ideal interactions aren't always transactional in nature either. Many fungi like prototaxites have extensive myceliar systems that can connect across miles of land to subterraneously communicate. I appreciate this idea of a subtle but significant interconnectedness that doesn't function through audible clicks and whistles. It can be really difficult for me to put my emotional struggles into words. This is really frustrating both for me and for people I love who just want to help but don't know how to. I doubt that prototaxites were able to communicate emotions at all, but their towering presence acted as a sign of safety just by existing. Sometimes all that can be done during a panic attack or a high point of anxiety is just sit. The comforting companionship of someone next to me, even in silence, releases the build up in my brain. It's a subconscious communication for help and support. Knowing I have people who aren't ashamed of me and won't judge me for those moments

feels like that interconnected system of mycelia, providing support and information across what can feel like great distances.

What if we just decided to all be connected and speak through direct chemical lingo? Humans don't always communicate as efficiently as they could, but I think it's beautiful how I can feel comfortable sitting in silent understanding among a group of people. Using this feeling as protection for myself and others is something I have desired since I was very young. I always saw my future life defined by a community that functioned not as mechanical, engineered clockwork, but like the natural ebb and flow of ecosystems. Something that functions like clockwork might be broken up by one loose cog, but ecosystems always find a way to balance out any stone thrown at them.

At every point in my life I have felt like various creatures. Whether I was the millipedes searching for shelter, the protective prototaxites, or creatures just pioneering out of the ocean and onto land. I think that at every stage in life people should know that there are others there who are willing and ready to fill an untended niche.

### **Since You've Been Gone / Rabbit Hole: 11th Grade**

**Goshi Gonzalez**

Since you've been gone,  
I've fallen down a rabbit hole.  
Like Salvador Dali, the clocks melt and distort until I'm well past done.  
A Wonderland of endless information,  
Or the mysterious allure of your home office,  
Where model and toy cars laid, an enticing promise,  
Like my old Christmas sock back in Maine, never full of coal.  
Perhaps it is nothing more than a distraction,  
A rabbit hole to keep me from realising you're gone,  
But I'd like to tell you about it.

Since you've been gone,  
I've fallen down a rabbit hole,  
Looking into the times you lived through, burrowing through the internet like a mole.  
I wonder how you felt,

Living through all that you did, and how you dealt,  
Wars and culture changes, behemoths with pain paramount,  
I wonder how your mind could account,  
All those stories with not a single flinch,  
Oh, can't I get a pinch?  
And wake up from this dream?  
The answer is no, as it seems,  
You're truly gone.  
But, that's not the only rabbit hole I've dared to venture on.

Since you've been gone,  
I've fallen down a rabbit hole,  
Surrounded by red, blue, and green pixels as I look on,  
And it feels like I've found purpose within my soul.  
That purpose others tend to find scary,  
But it's an interest within the science of the mortuary.  
Tending to the cadaver,  
For many, an uncomfortable palaver,  
Actually--it's *you* I have to dedicate this interest for.  
When I approached you at the funeral, your final bed of open door,  
And I saw your face, but it didn't seem to be *yours*, unrecognisable,  
Perhaps my fascination with mortuary science is inadvisable,  
But the closure I felt when I saw you one last time,  
Will last me a lifetime.  
"I know you can't hear me, but I love you forever,"  
And maybe we'll meet again when time takes his final cruel fell,  
At the pearly gates of a lovely hell.

Since you've been gone,  
I've fallen down a rabbit hole,  
Within a rabbit hole.  
Both of history,  
And the science of mortuary--what a mystery,  
And, Da?  
You were, and always will be, the best grandpa

That a little imp like me could ask for.  
And every letter you wrote, I have kept  
Maybe somewhere, somehow, your soul just now;  
Like in those silly performances that my cousins and I would put on in the garage,  
*Lept.*

Thank you, Da.

**Believe: 12th grade**  
**Joseph Costanzo**

Note: Please listen to my recording as you read for a better understanding and experience: ["Believe" Read Out Loud](#)

At just six a young kid is when I started to love this  
Ripped jeans big dreams this passion grabbed my compass

First started writing bars in my notebook, was no good  
topics were awful and comical

Songs about the teachers I didn't like  
Cuz the grades that they gave were never too high  
Or talked about how we all were living are life  
Play in the rain skating and bike

Started recording and that was all I would do  
Through the night recite what I would write  
Till the song sounded just right  
Still I wanted more to represent my vision In mind

Wanted it huge and big  
smooth and slick almost like movie clips they call it a music vid

So every shot you saw

I thought and had a meaning to the theme that we'd locked

I would go places looking for the locations

With cloth and glue i made the costumes

Then when the plan was set id meet up with my friends

record every scene I'd dream to the best

I edited directed it all alone learned every bit

Then the day came when it was ready for press

The truth is I didn't think at all

What kids would think in the halls

I was shocked

It would have never been the same from this time on

When you have hopes to own your goals go around the globe

Then they shout no

When you're trying to be that word backwards

And they can't stand it like there back hurts

See I was in the middle of love like OV then it got so lonely

Ugly don't wanna love a life that ain't lovely

Judging throw you under the bus like luggage

They'd chat crap backstab leave me beaten battered broken battling biggest bombings of confidence

But I'm proud how I've overcome

When I was down so afraid

Didn't doubt and go away

Found out to hone my hate



Turn it from hopeless pain  
To the loads of strength  
That I'm needing to be achieving  
My chosen fate

And it's so much more than me  
I do this for the ones that feel poor and weak like there core is beat  
Not enough because of the kids that been talking stuff

I say crush these cowards  
With your tons of power  
Don't be quitting for a minute keep inflecting  
With your differences don't be fitting in  
And let the love devour

Because I've strategized sacrificed craft my time every second that be passing by  
just imagine the fight

You're seeking for greatness  
Grieving with pain and weakened with aching  
Fighting through the fire  
Demons be raging  
Screaming parading  
And even though your knees keep shaking  
You continue reaching and craving

So the steepest you're facing  
And your feet be flaming  
Not leaving ya staying  
And as you climb over the highest peak you be saying  
It's only make believe if you don't believe you can make it

So yes when I lay in that death bed I hope I can get rest  
With the knowledge I put my all in and recked threats  
Because when you're gone what will get left  
Motivation for others to grow amazing or a couple benz and checks

## **Butch: Grade 12**

**Sarah Swenson**

The etymology of the word butch is unclear, but it is best believed to have been derived from butcher, or butcher's knife. For aspiring thief and cowboy Robert LeRoy Parker, the moniker held appeal as both a badge and a warning, and from it, he derived his pseudonym: Butch Cassidy. Gaining fame on the wings of Wanted posters, by the turn of the 20th century the word most closely meant "tough kid".

"Butch" is a phonetic punch. It can be off-putting, and it certainly was to me, thirteen, with a mouth that still felt dirty saying "lesbian", when I heard "butch" for the first time as a passing insult in a TV show.

In contrast to "lesbian", I had no idea what "butch" meant, beyond a vague notion that it meant tomboy. I don't do well not knowing what words mean. I have spent many class periods tracing etymological histories, only to realize I had made another in-class assignment into homework.

It is not entirely clear to historians when "butch" entered the queer lexicon, but by the 1930s it was being used by gay men to refer to masculine gays, and by the '40s it had been adopted by lesbians. Before this term became widely used, others existed, some of which are now considered offensive—such is the nature of linguistics, especially surrounding marginalized groups—such as bulldagger, or partner terms 'momma and pop', mainly coined by Black urban lesbians. It is worth noting that such communities still predominantly use alternative labels for masc lesbians, such as "ag" (short for "aggressive") or "stud".

"Butch" was popularized by working-class lesbians, as many queer labels are. It has been in vogue, and it has been anti-feminist. It has been for macho bandit-cowboys and for gays and lesbians—and, especially, for those society could not place, the self-dubbed "he-shes", who refused to be cornered into a binary, heteronormative system.

Unsurprisingly, "butch" has often overlapped with the trans identity. In Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues*, a cornerstone of understanding the butch identity, protagonist Jess Goldstein explores taking testosterone and passing for male before realizing that passing is not her goal and that she prefers to live in the muddy in-between. She gets top surgery, but stops taking testosterone. She chooses to embrace the "he-she" of her identity, the contrasts of her gender.

"Butch" means choosing to exist in a visibly queer way. It means transformation without the goal of passing. Butch is not a shy mimicry of manhood; it is as separate from man-ness as it is from woman-ness, a fact that makes its overlap with the nonbinary identity understandable.

Demystifying "butch" opened something inside of me, more like cracking a watermelon than unlocking a door. I'm not sure yet what the hours of reading and listening to accounts and etymological histories—and even studies on the queerness of cowboys—has meant for me, but for now, I can say "butch". I'm a tough kid.

In the darkness, I slide my palm up and rest it on my chest bone, angled so I cup nothing but flat skin. I wear jeans under the sheets, even sleeping, dreaming. I am dreaming about cowboys. There is a cowboy in my bed tonight, strapped in denim and a big-buckled belt, with a straw vaquero-style slouch hat on his tummy, one hand cupping his head and the other resting on his breast. He has straight hips and a flat chest, and tomorrow he will mount a horse and ride off across the fields, and the world will care more about what he can do than who he is.

I want to be a cowboy. Tonight, I pretend the flatness into existence. It is fittingly easier to become him in my bedroom. There's only one person here to convince—me—and I have been involved in a lot of pretending. So I screw my eyes tight and dream of horses and boots.

## **Nantucket Book Festival Young Writer Award 2023**

### **ENTRIES**

#### **Lacrosse addict: 9th grade**

**Nick Yates**

“Slide” I hear as I'm meant to be on the player that is wide open and about to rip the ball at the net. I feel my gloves gripping my stick as I hit someone with the ball. I Taste the cold crisp quenching water after every quarter. And smell the freshly mowed grass. My stick is like a boxer ready to fight.

Lacrosse is like sleeping time goes by in a heartbeat.

“You should play, ” my friend was telling me to and he showed me in his backyard some of the rules. That was when I was 12. The more he shows me and the more I do, the more I'm hooked. So I bought my gear and signed up. The first year was just learning the basics but now I'm 14 and its the second year and I realize its something special. The more I practice the more I want to get better and better so I try harder and harder. I taste the salty taste of my sweat as we run sprints but I think to myself its all worth it. The practices seem shorter and shorter the more I like it as the time flies as my addiction for the sport grows. My love for the sport is like an addiction. The more I play, the more and more I want . Every Time i mess up I ask the person who started it all, what can I do to stop people and ways to do better and he teaches me new moves and I perfect it by teaching my stick like a child. All I need and want is to get better.

This story connects to me as a person because It has shaped me as a person for the last 2 years and I

don't know what I would do without it. It feels like just yesterday my friend told me about it when it meant nothing to me and now it means the world to me.

It has taught me that time flies when you're having fun and hard work pays off in the long run.

## **The Way Words Work: 9th Grade**

**Danielle Lewis**

'T'was this teeny tot, tall for her time but small all the same, enveloped in her mind without knowing what fate had spun. Something big was amiss, but she would still have the silliest smile on her face when all was said or done.' Opening lines that catapult a reader into a story are true favorites of mine. I came to realize that books are a way of life for me. I'm serious. Reading (for fun, mind you) will figuratively shove me into an abyss. 'Transportation' is the official word for the act of losing yourself while reading a book, and I ride on the train that is the plotline, traveling across the tracks of the action that occur between the words on those pages.

I get it. For some, reading can be as boring as looking at bouts of little black letters for hours on end. But, for me, opening one of my favorite books will make words beatbox and bounce around the rooms, sometimes simultaneously offending and befriending the limits of my imagination. The familiar, yet not repetitive symbols that spell out "c h a p t e r o n e" can be as effective in raising my serotonin levels as the first jazzy notes of your signature disco dance's opening or the clangorous claps of the audience at the start of that big game. The rush of excitement- that's the entirety of the reason why reading can be just as addicting as anything else; it stems from that feeling of needing to know what happens next.

I hear it. All the time. The excuses that pop up whenever you mention that reading can be beneficial, the absolute appall at the mere thought of wasting precious daylight hours for something 'as nerdy as' reading. Everyone's allowed their own opinions, but it's really easy to block out all the noise of the outside world once my head is in my book. To start being one of the characters, to really resonate with the decisions that they are making, and to think about what you would do in their situation is something that in its purest form is a reading-only experience. It's hard for me to picture myself in the shoes of a movie actor or a sports star. You see what they look like. You might physically hear them all the time, even though it could be only online. But they can't be *me*, not like the way a book character can.

I live it. Reading visualization is the action of creating mental imagery about the things we read, as we are reading them. The cool part is, visualization can be different for everyone. There are always people to interact with who have read the same book as you but finished the last page with a different thought in their minds. Someone could be imagining a completely different voice in their head for my favorite character. I don't know until you talk about it! Socializing about the books I've read can transport me to different time periods and give a slight taste of different cultures, and it all depends on the person I am talking to. We step into the shoes of other people once you hear what their outlook on the story is, and reading with a community may generate a common happiness that you didn't even know was possible.

I know that the following is true: No author is the same, but that's ok. No life is the same, and that's okay too. But when you print two copies of the same book and give them to two different versions of a standard human, then life can become a tiny bit more fulfilling. The feelings of finished novels will start up again, and again each time you live it with another human being. Every book might not share a chapter one, some books don't even have chapters, but the ending is a universally shared experience between all books. The last line signifies the point when the book stops being just reading material. It could be my friend reading the same manga as me, or it could be the fun fact I bore the adults I look up too with. As long as there's someone to talk with, I'll keep reading. *I mean it.* When you think about it, who knows when the world will whip up a wagonload of ways to make me use the words *we've* read?

### **My love for dogs: 9th grade**

**Katie Klatt**

It was a nice sunny morning sun smiling down at me. I felt the warmth and it made me so happy, the green grass grasped underneath my feet. As I stood at JFK Airport checking out the pet relief area as I stood there I heard planes taking off and landing. I was filled with excitement. We made our way to the gate where she would be arriving. As the arrival time grew near my eyes filled with tears of not knowing what to expect. There were several flight volunteers that came through the gates with dog crates. Each passing by made me more anxious. The smell of jet fuel was like a thousand needles piercing my nose. I could taste the sigh of relief from seeing her coming down the ramp.

The minute I knew I was getting a dog is when I knew my life was gonna change. It was August 7th and my mom and dad were at the table on their laptops trying to get a puppy from Korea. My parents explained to us that the adoption process was just as strenuous as adopting a child. We finally got the A-OK. It was a dream I never wanted to wake from. That night after we got the ok I couldn't sleep at all. I kept thinking about Tuesday

and how she was going to be the best dog. When I first saw her it was at my grandparent's little old house because she could not go see the other dog until she got checked by the vet. As I was getting out of the car I ran through those doors. My heart was racing a million beats per minute. I fell to the floor with emotions and hugged her. When I pet Tuesday for the first time it felt like I was petting a cloud. She was anxious yet wanted to investigate me. She was this little black dog. She is a border collie mixed with a golden retriever puppy. We picked the name Tuesday because we got her on a Tuesday. Now we are on our way back to our home, as we are on our way I could feel the tension between Tuesday and the other dogs because she was timid. As we were walking in the house my dad sat on the couch with Tuesday in his arms and we let the other dogs investigate her. The moment she walked into her house she knew this was her forever home. Brodie and Tuesday bonded the most because they were similar in age but moose man was this old man who didn't really want anything to do with her. I started to cry and when she came home she fell in love with the other dogs.

She settled in at the beginning nicely with our family. She was with us for almost a year when she started to really come out of her shell. She had to literally learn how to be a dog. She had come from the streets and had never had a family or lived in a home before. She didn't even know what stairs were or what a comfy bed felt like. She was learning everything from my family and our other dogs. We did a lot of training with her. It was a constant positive reinforcement of the things she did that we liked and redirection of the things she needed help with. Now after having her with us for a couple of years, she has gone from a caterpillar to a beautiful butterfly. She has taught my entire family about patience and understanding others' needs and wants.

### **My life and Football: 9th grade**

**Ashley Klatt**

Run... Run... Catch... Score...

I entered the Whaler Fieldhouse. The smell of the salty sweat made me wanna gag. We all sit together, feeling defeated, but only down by one. The room quickly filled. Heads hung as we filed in and sat on the cold, metal benches. After listening to the pep talk Coach had said, that made us feel better. Smiles grew like the buildings in New York City. The energy was as high as the fireworks being fired on the 4th of July. We headed out like a bunch of army troops heading out for battle, this was our battle. Standing on the sideline, feeling tense and then the nerves hit me like a punch in the face as Coach told me to go in.

I was just 10 years old. Sitting on the couch with my dad watching the Dallas Cowboys take on their rival, the Washington Redskins (Before they became the Washington Commanders). We were only down by one touchdown. I watched the quarterback to the Redskins through a pass to a wide open player but the Dallas

Cowboys safety intercepted the ball. There's only 10 seconds on the clock, he runs up the middle of the field and to the endzone, "TOUCHDOWN!!!" the commentator yells as the Cowboys football players and coaches run onto the field to join the celebration.

Watching football and liking it was different, girls in my class would rather be playing with barbie dolls than watching or even playing football. But, I had a connection to football, it was my happy place and playing in the backyard with my dad made me happy as a clam at high tide.

In eighth grade, I was at a baseball game, A BASEBALL GAME! I saw some boy's in my class who I was friendly with throwing a football on the side by the playground, I joined in and started having fun, then one of the boys' uncles (who was a coach at the school) asked me if I wanted to play actual Nantucket football, and I was thinking, "Girls can play football too? I have never seen a girl play football. I should try, why not?" I then immediately say, "Sure". The boys' uncle replied with, "We'll start your training Monday!" Everyday, I would practice plays, running, lifting, etc. But nobody knew I was going to play in the upcoming year, but when people got word, it spread like wildfire. I got mixed messages, some people were questioning me, making fun of me, some were definitely stunned, etc. But I knew no matter what anybody said I was gonna play.

It was the upcoming summer to high school, August 8th, kept floating around in my brain, the day I was going to walk out onto that field for conditioning and never look back again, I was nervous alright, so nervous five minutes before I was shaking like a leaf in the wind but I sucked it up and went out there. People I had no idea of who they were, were actually nice. I thought I was going to get backlash because I was a girl, but as the days and weeks went on and my bond with those boys got stronger, I felt a part of something I never thought I would ever get the opportunity to do and those boys were total brothers to me. I was so happy, this is where I was meant to be, I was a girl football player.

Football was an eyeopener. Football teaches me to be supportive even when we lose. To be humble when we win. It pushes me when I'm scared and nervous. To be happy even when I get pushed down. I am mentally and physically stronger than people think, smarter than you know, this is who I am. I am dedicated to football, it doesn't matter if I'm sick, mad, upset, etc. I put a happy face on and walk out onto that field for practice or for a game. It doesn't matter. I always give 110% effort if not more. Playing football makes me feel great being a part of something I've never done and been able to do before.

### **How Far Football Has brought Me: 9th grade**

**Travon James**

Touch...Touch...Touch...Touchdown!

I took a step and my blood stopped moving. Bleachers shouting like people at a sports game. Drums

booming and people screaming. Salty sweat ran down my face. Blood's flowing and I'm ready to go. Quarterback shouts "SET GO! SET GO!", I'm pushing to get open like I am in the halls of Nantucket High School trying to get to the class. I fell in love with the sport on a sunny day at the basketball courts, my friend Fervon Phillips suggested that I should play football. He said that I had the speed and that I should try it out. His nephew James Phillips was talking a lot of smack so Fervon told me to run a route against him, I didn't know what that was so he showed me. I ran the route against James beat passed him, I looked up and saw the ball in the air I tracked it all the way into my hands. And after that moment I fell in love with the sport. The game of football has taught me how to have a stronger mentality and it teaches me how to be more responsible. Such as time management and more.

### **Dancing in the Mind: 9th grade**

**Charlotte Hollman**

Pointe, pirouette, perfect.

My first ballet class, I am only 3 years old. I stride into the studio, wearing a ballet pink tutu with matching leather shoes. Hairspray thickened up the air around me. Ballet was like a game at this age; no expectations, no disappointment. As I grew older, my brain constantly criticized my legs, arms, stomach, hips, and turnout. Every single inch of my body is on display. Mirrors surround me, no way to escape my own mind.

I work six days a week for months for one day every season. What feels like endless training and constant criticism all for an hour or two. But, the performance days are the best days. The nerves are unmatched by any other feeling in the world. Right before the music starts and I am standing in the wings awaiting flight. Going over and over my routine in my head, feeling like I'm going to forget the whole thing the second I step on stage. The rituals my dance family and I do every time. We might look ridiculous to the naked eye, but we don't care. Lights come on, a silent hush falls over the audience. The music is starting.

Am I ready to fly?

Ever since I was a toddler, while I was still figuring out how to stretch my legs, I was also learning how to move them in the most perfect way. How I can tilt my head without knocking myself off my tiptoes.

Dance is like a game for the mind. But, this game doesn't have a winner or a loser, it's just me.



Although sometimes I don't want to dance, and sometimes I feel hopeless in my technique, there are times when all the years of training pay off, when the whole world surrounds those 5 minutes under the stage lights. When I dance in front of an audience, I don't have a chance to remember they are there. For a split second, nothing else in the world matters. There are no thoughts clogging up my brain, except for the next move I have to make. I am so lost in time, it's like I'm floating just above the clouds. This is my favorite part about what I do, and why I love it. I am so lost in my expression and when it's over and I'm taking a bow, I can't even hear the applause. The whole world just goes silent. Sometimes I second-guess if they did. This, I think, is the best feeling in the world.

As I grow older, I become aware of how I dance- Comparing myself to every other girl. Noticing how they point their toes, how much more they can lift their leg than me, and the way they move their arms so delicately it looks unreal. Dance is constant criticism, but it shapes your mind into perfectness. So, you are always seeking to be better than the day before. A competition on your conscience.

In a way, ballet teaches me how powerful and how beautiful my body can be and how just by dancing, I can affect someone's life; make them feel some sort of emotion. Dance also teaches me how to push myself just far enough and how to love my body for what it does. The way it can heal a dislocated knee or a sprained ankle in less than a month, or how the tip of my toes can support the pressure of my whole body's weight.

I think the most important thing to remember is how I can create something so beautiful using just me.

### **A short story about a short story: 9th grade**

**Alex Hilmer**

A hero locks eyes with his opponent. His anger was as visible as a burning building in the dead of night. He draws his weapon. His rival does the same. They both begin to charge at each other. A sword is raised and blood is shed. I put my phone back in my bag as the clock hits 7:49 and I rush to class.

I could be walking down the beaten path of the forest listening to the soft crunch of dry leaves beneath my feet, in a fantasy setting; or I could be beaten badly by a bandit batch listening to the soft crunch of my fingers under their feet (also in a fantasy setting).

My phone is my siren, luring me into it's worlds with the song of the satisfaction of a good short story. When I'm bored I submit to it's call and drowns me in it's fictional worlds, whether it be at home or in a class (that isn't English class). At home I am free to accept it's call when I like, but in class I have to be careful when I accept it's call. For example, I usually read in world history class due to that being the class with the least amount of work. With that being said If I am on the edge of my seat while my protagonist is on the edge of a pit I may not know who the heck Raphael, Michelangelo, and the other two ninja turtles from the renaissance are. So by the end of the story I will worry less about the hero's fate and more about my grade's fate from time to time.

Thankfully I haven't had many slip ups of missing work since then after I deleted my beloved short story app from my phone. Although reading short stories do have their downsides, such as the one I have highlighted above; they also still have their upsides. Short stories have fueled my imagination greatly, and have built up other good traits as well such as empathy. But if there is anything I've learned from my troubles with my joy, it's that before getting anxiety about my fictional worlds, I need to have anxiety about my real world.

### **I am the Roller Coaster: 9th grade**

**Keonna Edwards**

As the line gets shorter and I get closer to the front of the line my pounding heart gets faster and louder. It felt like someone sticking their hand in my chest and then pulling it in and out as if it is a slingshot. The sound of everyone screaming and cheering in the distance as they leave makes me even more scared. The whiff of must, sweat, and funk of all the people is making my nose hairs wanna burn off. I even feel myself starting to sweat because it's so hot. Once I reach a certain point in the line I have to put everything that's in my pockets in these lockers. I go through the metal detector, thank god I made it through. At last, I'm inside and the cool breeze of the fan hits me and fills me with relaxation. It's pretty cool in here, all of the details put into it fascinate me, and the animation playing on the TVs distracts me from the danger I'm about to face.

I finally make it to the front of the line. The pounding in my heart is so bad that I feel like I'm having a stroke. But I don't know what a stroke feels like, so I'm just guessing. Oh God, I'm in the back row. You may be thinking why is the back row such a bad thing? Oh, you just wait and see or read. I get seated on the very end and my stepdad sits next to me. "Please pull your restraint down." The robot says over the intercom. I pull my restraint down "tick-ticK-tiCK-tiCK-TICK-TING" God that sound scared me. The guy goes by to check if everyone's restraint is completely secured. Then I suddenly see him do this finger movement to the girl in the window and we start moving. My legs start to shake like I'm freezing but I'm not. My body kind of jolts back as we move and take off. The sound of everyone cheering is making me anxious but yet I can't stop smiling. I

close my eyes but for some reason, it makes me even more scared because I don't know what I am about to overcome. But then I hear yelling out of nowhere so I open my eyes to see no one is there.

“SWOOSH” What seems to be 400 feet in the air I just drop down out of nowhere. As I feel my butt rise off of the seat I feel like I'm gonna fall out. My butt doesn't go back onto the seat for what feels like 20 seconds later. The intense wind hitting my face as I scream as loud as I can is making my eyes water. I suddenly don't feel or hear my heartbeat anymore. I try to close my eyes again but then I start to have a panic attack because I feel like I'm falling from the sky. “WHOOOOO HOOOOOO” I hear my stepdad yell and it makes me laugh for some reason and lighten up. But then we come to a stop. It's dark and foggy like we are at some graveyard. The fog smells like a bonfire. It gets dead silent. About 10 seconds go by and everyone is confused and starts to whisper to each other...“BOOM” Instead of my body jolting back it jolts forward. “OH MY GOD WE ARE GOING BACK WARDSSS!!” I scream. I think feel a little pee come out. As we go in loops my mouth starts to water and when my mouth starts to water that can only mean one thing, PUKE. And then we start twisting as if we are some figure skater doing twists in the air. Then thank god we get to a complete stop and start moving slowly and all I hear is cheering in the distance. “ARE WE FINISHED? ARE WE DONE?” I worryingly ask as I'm hurling. My stepdad laughs and says “Yes” As we get to the tunnel I start shaking and I look like I have seen a ghost. A group of boys see me and start laughing. Ugh, how embarrassing. As my stepdad and I get out and get our things I yell out of nowhere “BEST ROLLER COASTER EVERRRR” “SMACK” As we high-five each other I hear him say under his breath “Gosh you're so bipolar,”and then we go and find my mom and little sister. But you just gotta love an adrenalin rush, because... it's like my drug.

Roller coasters are levitating for me. It teaches me that I like to feel scared like i'm about to die, I find that feeling relaxing.

## **Volleyball and Decisions: 9th grade**

**Ulises Gilberto Abreu Arias**

There you are in the big and cold gym, where the white light hurts your eyes. You hear the balls heating the wooden floor over and over again a sound that your ears get used to easily. The moment that you walk in the fresh air hits your face and you feel the warmth in this big and cold gym. Then your friend gives you a ball, a yellow ball the color of anxiousness, and once it's in your hands you turn it around to feel it. You fill in what the hard parts of the ball are and what the soft parts of it are. Then the game begins, it starts calmly like when you wake up on a Sunday with nothing to do and no one to talk to. When your hand hits the ball it hurts as if you were hitting the floor instead. Your hands start to feel like they are in a fire that you can't turn off until the game is over. A sour taste is starting to appear in your mouth because you know that you could do better but there is nothing you can do. Then all of a sudden the game becomes a war zone of fast thinking and cold

thinking. And that is how a normal volleyball game goes for me.

The first time that I remember playing volleyball was at school when I was around 9 years old with a few friends. At first, I was not good but I started playing with my friends at school and home. The first time that I remember watching a volleyball game I would pay tons of attention to the ways that professionals put their arms together; it was like they only had one arm because their elbows were touching. Any time that I would watch a volleyball game my cousin would bring me because she had the same interest in the game as me. We would buy a big bag of chips, mostly Doritos and we would finish it halfway through the game and we would have to go buy more because we could not watch the game without it. And the smell of hot pavement that was heated by the afternoon's sun with not even one cloud on the sky was where my favorite childhood volleyball team played. Now I have gotten better but I could steal to be better and I do try my best to be better. Any time that I want to practice or just have a little fun I go to my friend. He is a little better than me but you will never hear me admit it in front of him. He has been a really big help to my volleyball abilities and encourages me to keep playing harder and harder every day.

Something that volleyball has changed in me is how fast I can make decisions. But only that it has also taught me that I can always count on someone to help me. And that sometimes things can hurt but if I get over the pain it could become something that I could like. Another thing that volleyball has taught me is that if I want to get good at something I have to practice it over and over again so I can become the best that I can be and get better. Volleyball is like the eye of the storm in my life, something that I know that will never go away. And it has taught me that life is all about taking decisions and about how fast or slow I take them.

## **The First Chapter: 9th grade**

**Annie Ard**

They first meet on the fast ferry. The first ferry is frightening for someone from a faraway land. Seeing the gorgeous beautiful ocean contrasted to a drug-filled trailer park. The air of the salty sea burns her nose. The ocean seemed asleep as we crossed. No waves, like a child napping. Then, I'm waiting to find out what happens next. Feeling the next page on my fingertips. The next chapter is just words away. I'm in the comfort of my own bed, the silence ringing in my ears with my reading light on drinking my lemon honey tea.

I don't remember how old I was, but I remember the book. *I Will Always Write Back*. waiting in the airport with my mom to go to Maine, being bored out of my mind. She leaves me to go shopping at some tacky airport cart and when she comes back, there's a gift for me. It's a book, but I never had an interest in reading. When she handed me the book, I felt the heaviness of the pages. They had a different texture from a piece of

paper from a spiral notebook's page, harder, more durable, and less processed. It had that new book smell like it had never been opened, fresh out of the manufacturer. I read a sentence, then told my mom I was bored. So I sat in silence while my mom read her book. I could feel the time going by and the only thing I could hear was her pages turning. When we landed in Maine, I didn't touch the book. But, I was going to a camp for a month where no electronics were allowed so I had to bring it with me. Turned out, I was homesick. I missed my mom and the only thing I had was the book she bought me. My stubbornness was not allowing me to even try with this book. I started it once and I didn't like it so why try again? But there was something about it, this book was calling out to me, screaming my name. So I read. I read in the morning. I read in the night. It was like a door had been opened. I no longer cared what was going on around me. There was swimming, games, horseback riding and all I did was read. There was sadness, drama, and friendship and what made it better was it was a true story. I had gotten so interested in this book that I would always forget about lights out. I always had to be told to go to bed. I felt connected to my mom and to these two strangers who I felt like I knew my whole life. I felt like an artist so inspired they painted a gallery. I was the artist. And when the month ended I turned to my mom and told her I wanted my next book. She sat me down and asked what genre I liked. Realistic Fiction or a true story. Then, we went to find my next book.

I think what really made me want to finish this book was that I was letting go of my problem, missing home, and going to a new reality where my problem didn't exist. I read books that consumed me whole like the ocean. I only came up for air when I had to. I could try new things and go around the world without even leaving my room. The books I was reading were teaching me more than I thought school ever would. These fictional books taught me about life. I became an independent person because of a few words on a few pages.

### **When I Dance: 11th grade**

**Zulma Osegueda**

If you know me, you understand that I'm always listening to music. I listen to music all the time: when I wake up, at school, in the car, and before sleeping. I don't know where it comes from, but this feeling for music has always been there. I love music. It can transport me in and out of multiple places in my head. Good and bad. It's so painfully beautiful that there aren't enough words in my bilingual brain to express this feeling. When I listen to music, everything goes quiet. My anxiety, stress, and every doubt I ever had all go away.

It's 2 am. I know I should be sleeping, but my mind won't slow down. I remember being little and carrying this feeling of my body tensing; my socks felt excessively close to my skin, my hair suddenly had too many bumps, the outside became overly loud, and everything just felt like too much. I didn't comprehend how

to communicate those feelings that were too big for my tiny body. I had to be around 4 or 5. Knowing I loved to move to music, my mom put me in dance lessons. I was the youngest there. I always gravitated toward anything music-related; it was fun, and everything felt right. That tense feeling evaporated into nothing but a blissful feeling that little me felt magical.

I am now 17. I continue to find peace in music. I don't dance anymore, and I'm not much of a singer. I suppose you can say life got in the way of things. When I first moved to Nantucket from El Salvador, I realized there wasn't a competitive dance team, so I settled for my only option, a dance program through the Community School. It was still great, and even if we didn't compete, I still enjoyed the atmosphere of working on the bar and feeling the sense of movement to music. I loved doing piqué turns and pirouettes around the room.

As I sit in my creative writing class now, searching my brain for what to write, I feel sad, almost empty, at the thought of this significant loss in my life, the loss of dancing freely, and losing myself in that moment. I tend to overthink, and I want to change that. When I danced, it was my perfect way to let go; I focused on every beat, and I knew the counts without worry. I just felt the music, and I instantly knew the movements that came next. It was second nature. I loved dancing in groups. It made the entire experience so much more enjoyable to be with a set of people who also shared the same passion as me; dancing to different styles helped me explore different sides of myself. Whether it was slow or energetic, I enjoyed being able to express many emotions, each one being so unique. I was also able to learn different techniques and push myself to learn more and grow as a dancer. But most importantly, I enjoyed making people smile. I find no matter where I go, dance can always bring people together.

The passion I once had, this dream of wanting to be the best, flexible, lean yet firm, and the drive I had to push myself to be excellent, feels far away. I wonder what the younger me would think. I wonder if I let her down, or maybe she would understand that sometimes we manage to get wrapped up in other things. I still have this longing passion for dance, and when I listen to music, the same overwhelming euphoria flows through me. Today, music -- whether it's R&B, folk, bachata, classic rock, reggaeton, or pop -- helps me express myself the way dance once did. Maybe there's a chance I can continue to dance after all these years. If not, I know there is still a part of me that gets that same joy from watching others perform, or simply being transported to a blissful place through music.

## **WHAT MAKES ME ROLL THE TRACK OF TIME: 11th grade**

**Jaime Saravia Abarca**

I have always been an imperative kid. I can not sit still. I need to be moving or having my mind occupied. There are activities that help me with this, and one of them is running. Since I have memories I love to run and it is hard to remember the times I was tired or my friends were not tired. They always get tired after hours of playing and I would still want to play more.

Running was the activity that I did the most that helped me drain all my energy, until I found what it would be my passion. Biking. The first time I ever rode a bike was when I was about eleven years old and it took me about the whole afternoon of the day I did it. It was at my ex-best friend's house. In my country El Salvador, houses over there are big and have a lot of nature, so my friend had a huge front and back yard and I would go around all day during vacation and during the afternoons in the weekends when the vacation ended. Time used to go by fast, so fast.

I would spend days and days riding my friend's bike in her house until one of the best days of my life came. My mom bought me my own bike. It was a BMK, medium size, gray color with hydraulic brakes. It was perfect, perfect for my size, perfect for the zone I live in and perfect for those vacations. And also those were the fastest vacations ever. It was the first time I ever snuck out. I did not do anything bad, I only went on a ride in the route, where big buses and cars drive and could have killed me, but nothing happened and I told my mom eventually when I got older. I had to leave the country when I was 14 and I stopped biking for 2 years.

I have been biking for as long as 5 years, and when I came back to biking it was awesome. I tried an electric bike. The speed. The utility and the place that I live in right now, nantucket is a small place where utilities are close to each other and a regular bike is super useful, an electric bike is illegal, literally. They became popular during 2021, and a lot of young people got in trouble with them, until the point that they almost banned them. They did not but electric bikes have to be regulated and not go over 20 miles. Of course I love speed, I would not listen and modify my bike and go as fast as 80 miles per hour. The fastest I have ever ridden an electric bike. With a 1500w motor and 52v battery for those who like them as well as me. (THIS IS FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES). But of course you have to check the voltage of the controller kit according to the motor and battery's voltage. And also remember to include physique brakes and never just trust the electric brake.

This makes me realize the amount of information I have learned through the years. Those little details, like never buy a stock model, or leave your battery overcharging even though they have safety systems. I truly enjoy everything about bikes, and electric ones. Every kind. Every type. I love them all.

## **The Six-Stringed Beast: 11th grade**

**Colin Christie**

It felt natural in my hands.

The first time I picked it up it felt like it was an extension of me. A way to express myself in a way any other human could understand regardless of native tongue. The first notes I played were those of Beethoven and not my own but it still felt spectacular, something that I, and many others, could pick up and show themselves in a way almost beyond comprehension. The subdivision of the six strings and those frets would become my passion.

Over the next two years I would dedicate myself to the craft of learning this instrument and the structures behind it. Scales such as minor, pentatonic, and major. Songs within those scales such as “Smells like Teen Spirit” by Nirvana to “Slow Dancing in a Burning Room” by John Mayer. Ideas propagated through my head of where to take this new found passion. I was playing it but with no general direction.

So I started listening. I looked for the type of musical resonance that I appreciated. I found the overall process interesting and informational. I sought through many bands of many genres. From the founding metal works of Black Sabbath and the roots of the instrument itself with Jimi Hendrix all the way to the punk rioting sounds of Greenday and the modern very new and very technical sounds of math rock and midwest emo bands such as Polyphia and Covet. I emerged from this still ongoing process with a new outlook on the instrument as a whole.

I did not just want to use this instrument for enjoyment anymore. I want to have this instrument be the driving force of my life. I wanted my career to involve the tedious but ever-rewarding process of changing strings. I wanted to continue to talk with other phenomenal musicians about their equipment and creating process. I wanted this now permanently rooted part of me to bring others joy. I now had the ability to play this way, in a way that others and I took delight in.

The question now was how?



What could I do to make this happen? Who could I talk to? Who could hone me further? The man who originally put me on this path. I continued to study under him, taking everything he said in depth. Rooting his advice within me, right next to everything I had learned myself. I now just needed a place for it all to culminate. A climactic event. A musician's pride: a concert.

It was a night in early May, and I was running late. I had just had dinner when I noticed the time and rushed over. When I arrived everyone was already prepared however, I was yet to prepare myself for what was about to happen. I was about to go on stage in front of friends, family, and many more people, to do something I had never done before. I was going to go on a stage to play a six stringed electric machination of the arts for all the aforementioned. Though I was nervous, though I was incredibly unprepared, I did great. I played passionately and everything went well.

Looking back at it all though I have no idea how it all happened so fast. This extreme new opportunity that had been presented to me consumed my life. Even though it ate away at my time, as it continues to do, it taught me a valuable lesson. That I was meant for music, not just music however, I was meant for this instrument. This six-stringed, electric beast, the guitar.

### **Beginner's Luck: 11th Grade**

**Siena Monto**

February 5, 2022. I had just finished studying some of the best dystopian fiction ever written, including Ray Bradbury's insanely brilliant, *Fahrenheit 451*, and I was given the assignment to write my own future shocker. My mind raced as I considered the myriad of possibilities. Would my vision be dark, optimistic, or simply just strange? I never expected that this task would inspire me to combine all my fantasies and art into a single complex and expansive alternative world that would nearly consume me.

I quickly lost myself as I imagined the fate of the characters I had written about and illustrated in my short story, *Farmer The Robot*. What would their world be like? What challenges would they face? Would they be happy? I approached the project through a series of proposed stories and timelines that gradually entwined. My first proposal led me to consider their personal journeys. How would a scientist's dream of creating a peaceful, utopian society lead to exactly the opposite? Her anxiety and sadness upset me as she gradually became a real person, not just a flat fictional character.

Strange new visions came to me as I moved to my second proposal. This time my silent alien spiders from the planet Chronos came to life and began to express themselves to their human oppressors. I could feel their fear as I imagined them scavenging for water on a parched desert planet. Would they be able to survive on a planet with dwindling resources by cooperating with their ancient enemies?

I formulated a disturbing third concept story where my humanoid spider friends had evolved and created a genetically modified supersoldier to overrun the human colonists. I shared their triumph, but my journey was not complete. I identified with my marginalized creations, but would they turn out to be just as bad as their masters? My world had taken on a life of its own and the story was not complete.

By the fourth proposal, I dreamed that the spider aliens had gotten their revenge by launching an invasion on Earth in retaliation to mankind, destroying the ecosystem and all life in the process. But it felt so hollow and empty for my characters. I felt that I had abandoned them. Surely my human heroes, General Lance, Private Akira, and Professor Will would be able to stop the madness. My robot alter-ego, Farmer, would never be part of such a catastrophe. Even the malicious Earth Industries must have limits. I began work on a fifth and final proposal as the cold winter wore on.

Then I had a brilliant idea. I went back in time to stop the disaster from ever happening. I changed the past I had created to save the future I wanted for my characters. If Earth Industries didn't kill Farmer's creator, Professor Will, then my robot would never travel to Chronos to start the war. I had created my butterfly effect. One world might have been saved, but another was now at risk. I was exhausted. When I finally handed my project in, I thought for sure weeks had passed, but it was only February 7. I wondered what Bradbury would think of my world.

Either way, imagining and creating fictional, alternative, realities can be challenging. Having to create the settings, devising key aspects of the plot and the worldbuilding, formulating each and every character. All a burden I, the author, chose to carry initially when writing the short story and one I continue to cling onto.

## **Web Horror: 12th Grade**

**James Cronin**

A lot of kids my age grew up on the internet. It's not uncommon for kids to have unrestricted internet access and as far back as I can remember I was messing around with whatever I could find on my family laptop, so, as any 10 to 13-year-old kid growing up around 2014, I devoured everything I could find surrounding the, at

the time, current children's craze: Five Nights at Freddy's.

I'm not going to discuss it for too long because I'd be here for 50 pages, still if you're anything like me you spent the summer of 2015 with your friends, talking about the missing children or the bite of '87 or the purple guy or whatever mystery MatPat was trying to decode within these games.

{Also thinking back, did we ever discuss his first video on the series he made? Why did he connect this random chuck-e-cheese style indie game to a real-life murder case, early game theory was wild.}

Anyways, that's not the point. The fact is the popularity of Five Nights at Freddy's among children was the introduction for most of my generation to the horror genre as a whole. Maybe someone had been into horror movies like "Halloween" or "Saw" or something but not a lot of 10-year-olds were hyped about "Texas chainsaw massacre".

But Freddy's? Perfect, colorful mascots? Missing kids? Purple murder men? Perfect children's game.

After Freddy's, there was a wave of people getting interested in indie horror, and later on I ended up dabbling in things like Petscop, Tattletale, and Yume Nikki.

It's hard to consider Yume Nikki a horror game, it's mostly just a trippy experience but from what I can remember it's pretty freaky. Yume Nikki, or Dream Diary in English, is about a girl named Madotsuki, a young girl who appears to be a shut-in based on the fact that she just shakes her head when you try to go outside. The point of the game is to experience Madotsuki's dreams by exploring. There are a lot of these but they're not really important aside from a few that let you explore further into the dream worlds.

Some of these are pretty innocuous like Block world, Snow world, and Candle world. All filled with their respective objects. But the further you go the creepier the worlds get, Standouts being Traincar, Guillotine World, Hell (and mini hell), and my least favorite White Desert. White Desert's art is the worst, it's unnerving and completely monochrome and there's fun things like the Bloody touching monster which is just the friendliest fellow.

I can't talk about Yume Nikki without its most notorious event, Poniko's House. This is how I found out about Yume Nikki, I found it during summer break in middle school and really wanted to find it myself. Poniko's House is the home of the Uboa light switch, once you flip the light switch there is a 1 in 64 chance of Uboa appearing and taking you to White Dessert, which as I just mentioned, is the worst. I remember hearing Uboa's sound for the first time late at night on my iPad and freaking out. I mentioned it to a friend but we never ended up playing the game.

Something I did end up experiencing with a friend was Petscop. I'd known about Petscop since its release in 2017 but never watched it. I'd heard about it because of its unfortunate parallels to the tragic case of Candace Newmaker, which I won't discuss but will preface by saying that the creator has stated that he regrets making these connections.

At time of writing, I have finished Petscop but I haven't had much time to interpret much of it since I finished it at 2 am this morning. For context, Petscop is a series of Youtube videos in which the protagonist Paul

is given a disc containing a fake Playstation 1 game and a note giving him a code to explore the secrets of the game and his family.

Petscop is a really uncomfortable watch, in the best way possible. Me and my friend were freaking out basically the whole time waiting for a cheap Jumpscare or a loud sound, what you'd normally expect from a creepypasta video but there's none of that.

The single freakiest moment is the episode where Paul is talking to Belle over the phone. According to my friend's theory, Belle is a victim of some kind of child experiment relating to the game and she's also a close family friend of Paul's. Paul is talking to Belle on the phone and as their conversation continues they seem to be getting closer and closer to getting some answers, it's such a cool moment me and my friend were theorizing right along with them but in a split second Belle's phone line goes quiet and the in-game Tiara character walks onto the screen.

I'm going, to be honest, I lost my shit at this. Belle is Tiara which I was pretty sure was the case but the fact that Belle might be part of the game? Or maybe she can go in and out of the game? There is no explicit answer but this moment was genuinely some of the scariest shit I'd seen in a hot minute.

There's also another scene later on where Paul is made to select a room layout from a selection of 4 or 5. The character named Martian is implied to be either a murderer or a child kidnapper, he's also related to Paul. Paul selects the room that looks like his own and Martian says "Here I come" and Paul's character stops moving. It's kind of chilling because we're not sure what's going on, I believe Paul is trying to hide from the real-life Martian.

I think experiencing this kind of media holds a certain kind of nostalgia for me. That kind of Scooby Doo feeling of finding some spooky shit with your friends on a weekend at 12 am is awesome. I don't really have any kind of poetic ending, I'm just trying to convey this kind of nostalgic feeling I get when talking about this stuff. It's fun and that's all that really matters to me.

## **My Writing: Grade 12**

**Kathryn Hall**

I find literature engaging: the creation of worlds that aren't our own, for others that have trouble finding themselves. I write three books in my spare time, and read dystopians and fiction. The concept of writing for others and changing the stereotypes is one of my favorite parts of writing.

For example, my little sister asked me to write a princess story. Since it was for her, I made her the main character and let her pick things about the other characters. Their names, their color schemes, etc. In this book, I take the mean girl stereotype- the popular and rich girl in pink- and turn it into a poor boy with a major attitude

and superiority complex. I also take the time and put excessive research into things I believe need some time in the spotlight. In the book for my sister, one character has vitiligo, one has schizophrenia. In my first book, the bad boy stereotype becomes a nice boy with a tough facade for his own protection. My latest makes fun of the mafia love stories where the kidnapped girl falls in love and a mafia is all money and very little crime.

I've been working on my first book for six years, since I was twelve. I've changed the beginning three or four times since I've started it, but never once changed the characters or who they are. If I like a book I'm reading, I could be in those pages for hours on end and putting myself by the characters' sides. I've cried with them, cried for them, related to them with almost every situation they're put in. I've found characters that give me hope, that changed my viewpoint on certain things. I've seen people struggle to find a good book in my classes, and my little sister is starting to read. So I want to make a book that gets people invested in reading, and something to link me and my sister and show her how much I love her. Her princess story is the one I'm most focused on writing, as it's important to us both.

For all my stories, I am shedding light on things most people don't think about or want to talk about. Heterochromia, schizophrenia, vitiligo, fear, and more. I want to help people be more open about these things, and more. Writing gives me the chance to get rid of stereotypes, or at least weaken them a bit. And I'm willing to spend hours researching these topics when I have the time. These fictional worlds I and others create. Those are the concepts I can spend hours thinking of and doing. I've seen first hand how much these worlds can help people, how inspiring words on the page can truly be. I want to do that for others that haven't found their place yet.

There are only a few things that stop me from spending hours in literature. Work, school, and writer's block. I genuinely despise writer's block. It's the reason one of my books has taken a third of my life to write, and why I struggle to write Paige's story. As much as writing is a struggle at times, I love it. Writing unites me with my family and piece myself together, as I put parts of myself and those I love into the characters I write. Some are obvious, like one of my main characters having a sibling or Paige being a main character. Others, not as much. For example, one of my many characters loves archery. Another loves guitar and has small ticks that I do, like playing with his necklace. Shedding light on things and immortalizing yourself and those you care about are the reasons I love books. Both writing and reading. The concept of literature is exactly what could make me lose all track of time.

## **The gift I was given: 12th grade**

**Natalie Mack**

It's those first chords of Bohemian Rhapsody. A rush of adrenaline comes over me and I listen closely for the intro to finish. Those familiar chords I know so well, feel as though they radiate through my entire body. I sing the first verse. Now comes the second verse, my favorite. Next, the electric guitar solo. I listen closely to the notes. Aidan plays it perfectly, as he does every time we've played this mashup. I'm hit with another rush of adrenaline as he finishes. I know what's coming. The drum transition and intro to Radio Gaga. I look back at my Dad, our drummer, to see him fighting the urge to smile, just as he does every time, so he doesn't throw off the beat. We all turn to Hunter, our piano player, filled with anticipation. Patiently waiting for him to yell out "ok, three, two, one, go!", just as he does every time. Once he does, Ryan our bassist, Gabe our rhythm guitarist, and Aidan our lead guitarist, immediately jump into the intro to Radio Gaga. Although it may not seem like it, we all share the same feeling of ecstasy as we make our way through the song. I can feel the connection between each person and instrument in the room every single time we play this Queen mashup. Although we play it all the time, each time we do, it's so special. It electrifies me. These feelings I've described are just a glimpse into what I have felt these past 5 years of being in this band. Being a part of this band and finding this passion for singing and performing was certainly not something I had planned. I constantly look back on these past five years and realize how different my life would be if little sixth grade me hadn't taken the chance to be in the middle school talent show. I never knew it would blossom into something this remarkable or better yet, lead me to the most amazing people I have ever met, have some of the best moments of my life, and reveal to myself what my passion is.

Although different activities such as figure skating, field hockey, and swimming have come and gone, singing has remained a constant in my life. No matter where I am or what I'm doing, I always come back to singing. I never get tired of it. Over time I have begun to realize that this is because it is my passion. Whether I'm singing in the shower, singing as a character in a musical, singing in chorus class, singing with my band, or singing in the car; I feel at peace. Regardless if it sounds good or bad, if it's flat or sharp, or if anyone's listening, I feel at home. Something about the notes ringing through my throat and out through my ears makes me feel like in that one moment, nothing else matters. Being able to feel this way is something I will forever cherish and be thankful for. Singing has shaped my identity.

Although being a musician on Nantucket island doesn't present many opportunities to get recognized, I have taken every opportunity that has been presented to me. Classes, private lessons, playing at fundraising events, singing national anthems, festivals, and so much more. I am constantly creating and being curious about music. I find it fascinating that there is so much more I can discover about music itself and how I fit into it. With this in mind, I have made the decision to attend Belmont University, a college with a well-known music program, located in Nashville, Tennessee. Being at a school that will tend to my needs as a student and musician

while also living in a city well-known for music and opportunities will present me with the potential to pursue my passions on a higher level.

## **The Art of Surfing: Grade 12**

**Nathan Morash**

On a sunny day or even a rainy day, if there are waves in the distance from the shoreline, then there is a crowd of people with boards trying to catch the power of the waves. Surfing and other watersports have taken over my life. I will get out of bed at 5:00 am just to catch some gnarly waves. I have even ditched family and friends just to go surf and with no regret. Sometimes I would come home so late that my mom would come questioning me where I had been since I never answered the phone. Two years ago, when I first started, I had an antique 20 plus year old board that my dad gave to me. It was beat up and scratched, but it worked just enough for a kid with a dream.

At the age of 12 I got into kiteboarding since my father has kiteboarded for years. After a few years of kiteboarding I was curious to try surfing, but my father shut that idea down really fast. He told me to focus on kiteboarding since we do it together, but in reality I knew he didn't want me bugging him to drive to another beach. My curiosity, with the help of my stubbornness, held out until I got the holy grail, my driver's license. I was a 16 year old boy with a used car, a board and a dream. I didn't know anyone who could teach me or even who to ask for advice. So, I turned to the internet and researched. For nights I would stay up until 3:00 or 4:00 am just watching surfing videos. After a few nights of staying up and gaining dark new eye bags, I decided to finally paddle out. It was a sunny afternoon with some strong waves and a forgiving current. I paddled out and turned around waiting to see which wave would be my first. I was confident and ready, so when I saw the wave coming, I started paddling and stood up and rode the wave, the first try. I wish I could say that without lying through my teeth. In reality I fell over the falls and the waves washed me up on the beach. I was stubborn and tried and tried until one day, I finally got it and rode my first wave. Catching that first wave was extraordinary and I will never forget the power of the wave coursing through my board then to me. Even though I was 1 and 87 with the waves and my win/loss record, I drove home with the biggest smile on my face.

When asking a surfer what riding a wave is like, they won't really be able to explain. Every surfer has a different answer since it is more of a feeling to experience to get the full effect. Surfing has even followed me to the workshop. The board that gave me my first wave was on the brink of breaking into pieces. Instead of letting the board break, I restored it. I spent hours sanding, researching, fiberglassing, taping, and painting. Now the board looks like a piece of artwork and is stronger than ever. Some surfers say to just let the board break while surfing it one last time, but I believe there's a connection between the surfer and the board. I cherish each of my boards and take care of them since they are the key to surfing.

My passion for surfing and watersports is so radiant in me that I even got my friends addicted to it. Someone once told me that when they asked me about surfing or other watersports that they saw a spark lit up in my eyes. So if anyone asks me “Hey, I wanna learn to surf”, I will never say no, since not only do I live to surf, but I love to teach people to surf. No one has ever come up to me after and said that they had a bad time since they always left with smiles on their faces. I have taught many people how to surf and now I am seeking to progress my skills. While I haven't found anyone to take me to the next level yet, my dream is to go to surf camp. The goal of this summer is to work enough to afford camp and progress my skills so I can go to one of the most famous beaches for surfing, Pipeline in Maui, Hawaii. Surfing might be a hobby to most people but there are people out there, like me, where surfing is a lifestyle.

### **Food: 12th grade**

**Jack Sylvia**

I love food

The food I shove down my mouth

But not all of it's satisfactory

I avoid the stuff they sell down south

Now who wants a chicken and a waffle

On the same plate

That's probably why those Southerners

Have a problem with weight

No

I'm just fooling

Please don't get mad

I'm supposed to be writing about my love for food

But there's so much that's bad.

I should focus on the positives

There's so much good food

Like right now I'm eating chicken with some sauces

In my solitude

But I wish I were eating with another person

That would be grand

But then I would hear them chew

And have thoughts that are a little offhand



So I should eat alone  
Right here in my solitude  
Thinking about all the things I've eaten  
While feeling a bit crude.

Okay, now I'm trying to think  
What are the positives of eating food  
I guess food makes you happier  
Makes you give away your gratitude  
Food makes you lively  
By lifting your spirit  
A nice big meal can make you all smiley  
At least that's when your food's delectable  
And if you are anything like me  
Your food mustn't have one vegetable.

Food is everything in my life  
And at least something in yours  
I think of food constantly  
Right now I'm thinking of a tuna I ate in the Azores  
Yum, was it extravagant  
I could eat it every day  
And yes I'm being adamant  
Because if there's only one thing to love  
It's a fresh bluefin  
Raw of course  
If you cook you do sin.

You know my friend likes tuna burgers  
When he told me that I thought he was jokin'  
He proceeded to be serious  
It turns out a part of his mind is broken  
Because when you cook a slab of tuna  
Its DNA becomes polluted  
And that's no way to eat a tuna

And I don't think it should be disputed.

Let's talk about current events

Tonight I'm eating one of my favorite foods

Chicken Alfredo

Wish I could eat it for every meal

But I don't want to look like play-dough

Now for lunch, I had a peanut butter and jelly sandwich

I spread it proportionately on two slices of wheat-berry bread

Now it wasn't an ideal lunch

I wish I had a tuna sandwich instead

And my breakfast wasn't ideal either

I had scrambled eggs with chopped-up fruit

But not everything is perfect

Sometimes, your meals are reduced

On a higher note

I had great snacks today

But I forgot the dessert

I'm craving a fruit flambé.

I need to go to the store

To get more food

And if I don't go there soon

For breakfast, I'm screwed

So I must make a list

With everything I need

Well I know I need eggs

That's guaranteed

And I'll need some kind of meat

Looks like I'll go to the downtown deli

Shoot, I also need one jar of grape jelly

And I'll get some spicy pickles

As some kind of treat

I also need some bread

I'll make sure it's wheat

And the last thing I need

Is three bundles of bananas  
All I need to do now  
Is change out of my pajamas.

“You can’t always get what you want Jack”  
Is what my dad says  
But right now I want the finest snack  
So I’ll add all my desires to my list  
I’ll add some root beer floats  
A big bowl of yogurt with fruits and oats  
I want a blueberry muffin  
I want a lot, give me a dozen  
I want a slab of tuna, big, and extra bloody  
I want that slab of tuna to be extra chubby  
I want some clam chowder from a really fancy restaurant  
I want some hot chocolate with a chocolate croissant  
I want so much more  
But you can’t always get what you want.

Sources/inspiration:

I was deeply inspired by the movie “Over the Hedge”.

My dinner that I ate on 4/11/23.

My English teacher Robert Norton.

## **Water-Hatching Dinosaur Eggs: 12th Grade**

**Nina Walder**

I’m looking into the eyes of a tiger—taxidermied. His bared teeth are the size of my fingers and he towers above me, looking so real I may as well be witnessing the grand, beautiful creature in the wild. I’m at the Fairbanks Museum & Planetarium in St. Johnsbury, Vermont. Within the brick, Romanesque building is a museum shaped by the Victorian-Era, eclectic collection of Franklin Fairbanks. Undoubtedly, he was a lover of animals; on the first floor, displays of taxidermied animals cover every habitat to exist. There is a precious scene of a mother opossum with four joeys on her back and one of a black bear gazing at a bird. I discover the

pademelon, an Australian marsupial presenting as a rodent-like kangaroo. I also learn that leucism is a partial loss of melanism that creates, as opposed to the complete white coloration of albinism, a gorgeous, splotchy pattern on a taxidermied porcupine. When I reach the second floor, with stunning artifacts from every continent, I know I must be in heaven. There's no place I'd rather be than in a museum.

I'm looking at the impressionist strokes of a painting depicting nine young ballerinas. I read the text beside it and immediately decide that Hilaire-Germain-Edgar Degas is one of my favorite painters. The 1878 painting is fittingly named *The Rehearsal*. And just beside it, I find an 1880s painting of a woman leaning against a table with a bottle of wine. I can feel how tired she is, which is something an artist needs more than just technical skill to convey. I'd love to meet Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, I'd guess he uses art as an outlet too. Harvard's Fogg Museum, with its glass ceiling and white, stone arches, has the greatest collection of art I have ever viewed. And with the layout of rooms transitioning between locations and time periods, it is as if I am stepping around the globe and through time. I marvel at a beautiful Japanese, paper fan from the Edo Period, detailed with ink, a lakeside panorama. In Room 1740, a section of the Early Chinese Art section, I find a Neolithic Age, jade rabbit. It's simple and small, but immeasurably precious to me—just as I find the hundreds of other animal sculptures spanning land and time. I may just have to get the Harvard Museum's membership.

I'm looking at a blue morpho butterfly, and I am amazed by the way it appears to be brown but reveals a shimmering, sapphire color when it opens its wings. I see some on the ground and tell my mother I want to keep some. Unfortunately, I'm not able to when she asks the worker for me. I'm just eight and I am in the butterfly garden at the Boston Museum of Science. I am amazed as we walk through exhibit after exhibit, learning about electricity and robotics and space and the human body. We watch a film in the Mugar Omni Theater, which surrounds viewers with a circular screen so it feels as if I am right there when we witness the migration of monarch butterflies. I learn that you can lay on a nail bed without getting hurt because your body is exerting pressure over a large surface area, putting less pressure on each individual nail. The dinosaur replicas tower above me. I beg my mother for one of the gift shop's water-hatching dinosaur eggs until she gives in. I devour the informational plaques with my eyes. Every. Single. One.

Nina, it's been three hours. We need to go.

Can you just pick me up later?