Justice to me 2026



Writing and art
by OWL's Class of 2030

Foreword

This publication is an effort to showcase high quality work over the course of the year by OWL's 8th grade students. In English class, students played with point of view by retelling an existing story from a different perspective, wrote memoirs, and dabbled with poetry. They also read and analyzed Angie Thomas's The Hate You Give and participated in book clubs with justice as a central theme. It is my hope that they are now prepared to take on the reading and writing challenges of high school, and that this magazine reflects the voice and talents of this group as they prepare to move on

Students in algebra two spent time this spring crunching numbers to evaluate how well Minnesota's state spending matches up with its values as they prepared for the culminating event in the senate expedition. The only way to gain a true appreciation of what the algebra two class does is to visit the capitol in May, when students gather in the rotunda to make their case to lawmakers. However, we attempted to pay homage to the work of Tom and his students in this publication by providing a snapshot of their work and their reflections on the experience.

Of course, turning all this writing into a publication is no easy task. This year I was blessed with a particularly talented and dedicated team to help make this vision a reality. Anna Funk and Rain Tsuzuki. Both are new to the layout process, but learned very quickly. Meanwhile, Greta Crouser provided crucial copy editing work. The illustrations that accompany the stories were created by the supremely talented Isabel Best, and the collages that precede each section were created by Anna. This team worked extremely hard over interim week, and without their help, this publication would of course not be possible. The printing of this magazine was made possible by contributions from a variety of people who saw my Go Fund Me plea and provided generous donations.

Leo Bickelhaupt
Open World Learning Community

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Acknowlegments

Thank you to:
Thomas Totushek and Leo Bickelhaupt

Artists

Melita Allen - Cover, Isabel Best - Story Art, Anna Funk - Collages

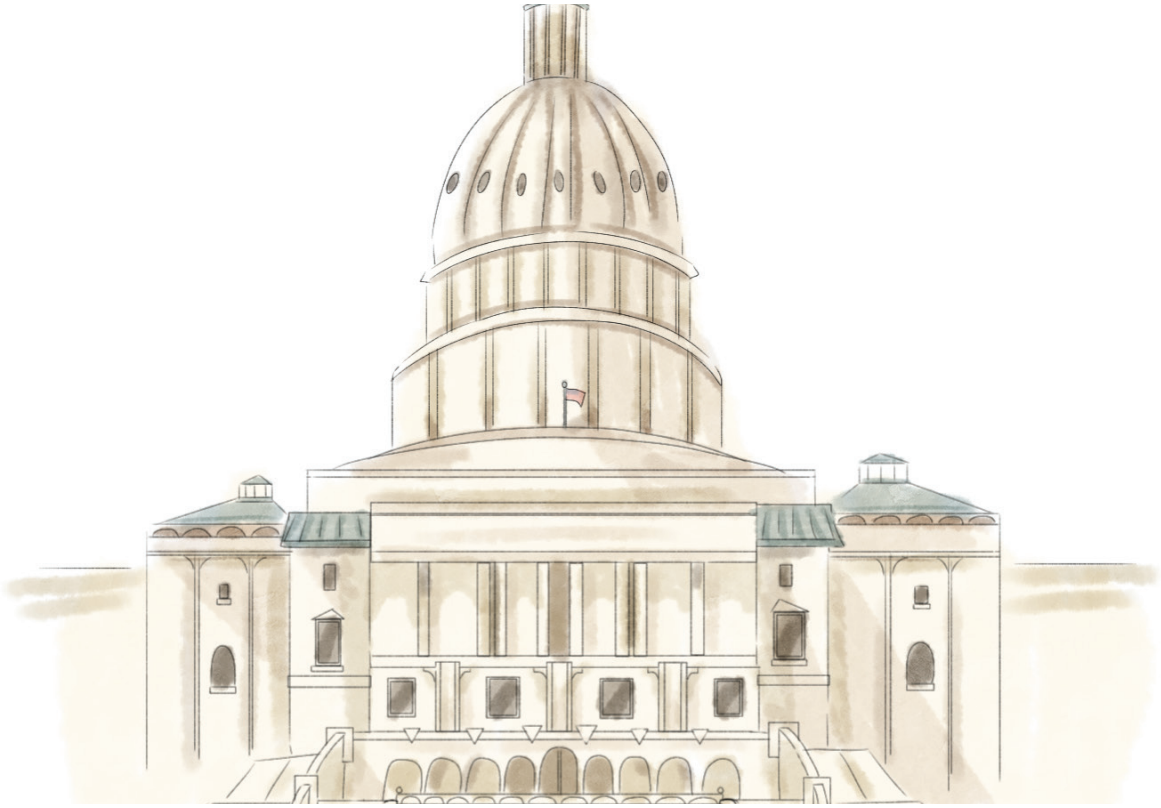
Design Team

Anna Funk, Rain Tsuzuki

Chief Proofreader

Greta Crouser


Senate Expedition



Youth changemaking is encouraged throughout the Senate Expedition

By Beatrice Cosgrove

The Senate Expedition is a months-long project that focuses on student voice and activism. It is an opportunity for students to meet and discuss topics important to them with people who shape policy -- Minnesota lawmakers.. The expedition is led by OWL math teacher Tom Totushek, who provides resources and support throughout the process, while ensuring the project remains student-led.

The topic is introduced early in the school year when students begin to research scatterplots, government spending, and issues in Minnesota they would like to bring attention to. Once students have organized their information, they create a scatterplot graph that uses trendlines to help draw conclusions about policy and spending changes that need to be made.

This project has gained recognition since its introduction, and has made change as well. One group helped to influence the decision to move the legal smoking age to 21. The expedition has also been recognized as one of EL Education's Models of Excellence and Tom has presented the project at the EL Education National Conference.

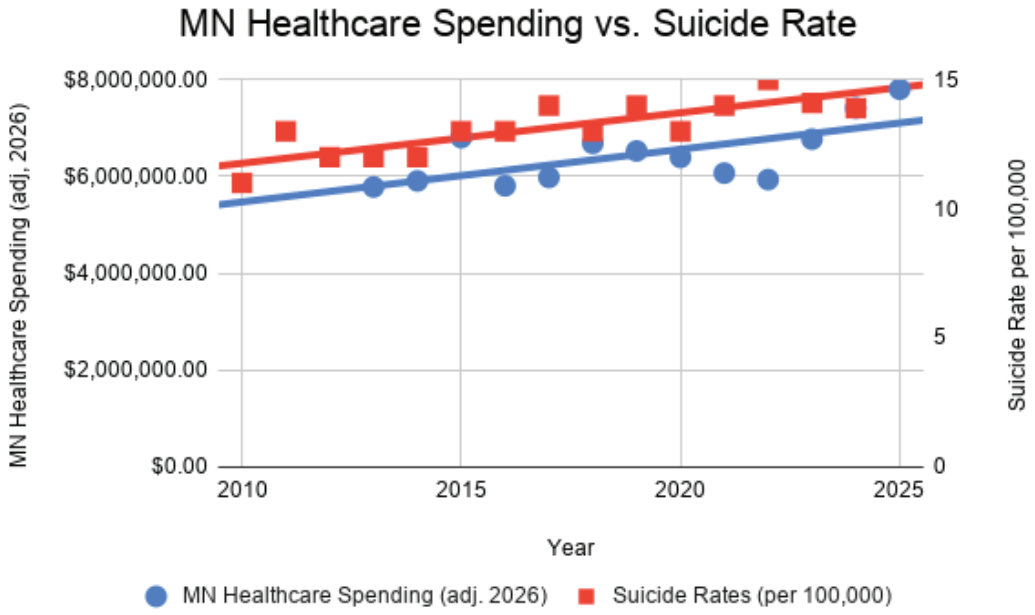
Throughout the Senate Expedition's existence, it has grown and changed. "The first few years we had it at the Senate Building because the Capitol was under construction (hence the name)," Tom said, "Second, we used to rehearse more and film the presentations but I felt like this was too 'scripted' and not authentic enough during the actual presentations." The actual presentations have been changed, also, as Tom found ways to be more efficient. Most of the text was taken away from the posters, allowing the graphs to become larger and challenging students to be more authentic when speaking with representatives by not using the posters as a crutch.

The Expedition isn't simply a school project, it helps students develop writing, graphing, communication and presentation skills. It can seem daunting at first, but Tom says he enjoys watching his students reach the finish line (presenting at the Capitol). "I have two favorite parts. First the look of panic when the students are asked to do something they think is too big for them," Tom said, "...the second is the look of accomplishment after they do the thing they know was meaningful."

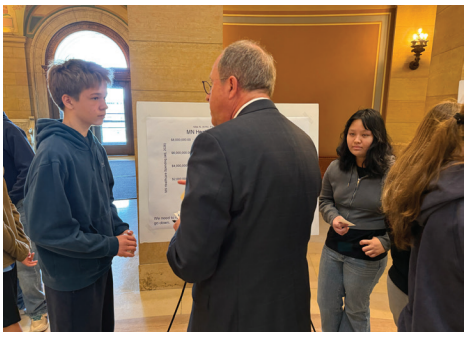
Giving students a way to display their work and shine light on topics that matter to a younger generation of Minnesotans can inspire and encourage students to continue fighting for positive change.

MN Healthcare Spending vs. Suicide Rate

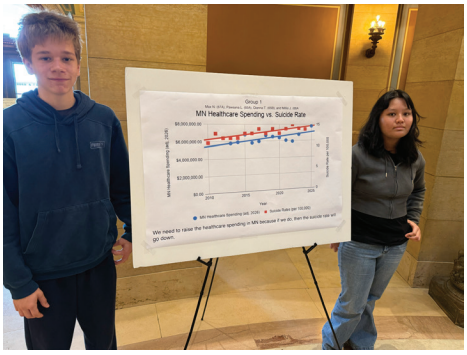
Max N. (67A), Pawsana L. (65A), Qianna T. (65B), and Millie J. (66A)



"We need to raise the healthcare spending in MN because if we do, then the suicide rate will go down."



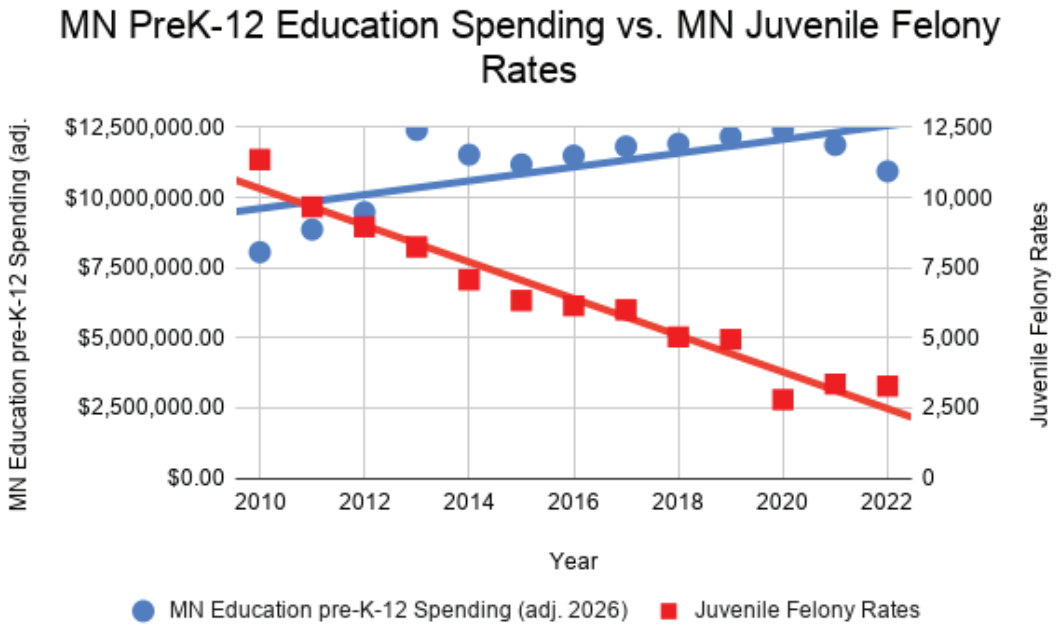
"It wasn't as scary as I thought it would be, presenting to senators."
-Maxwell



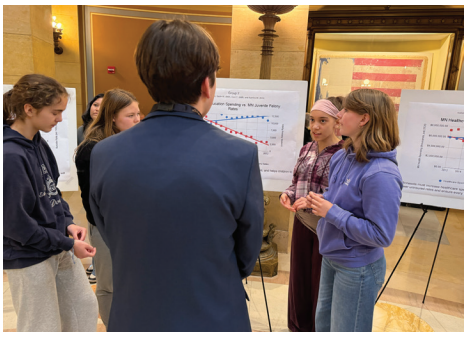
"I got to meet important people."
-Pawsana

MN PreK-12 Education Spending vs. MN Juvenile Felony Rates

Elsa H. (67A0, Sadie W. (66B), Ceci C. (66B), and Audrina W. (67A)



"Regularly spending money on PreK-12 education in Minnesota enables, and helps children to have a chance of life outside of crime."



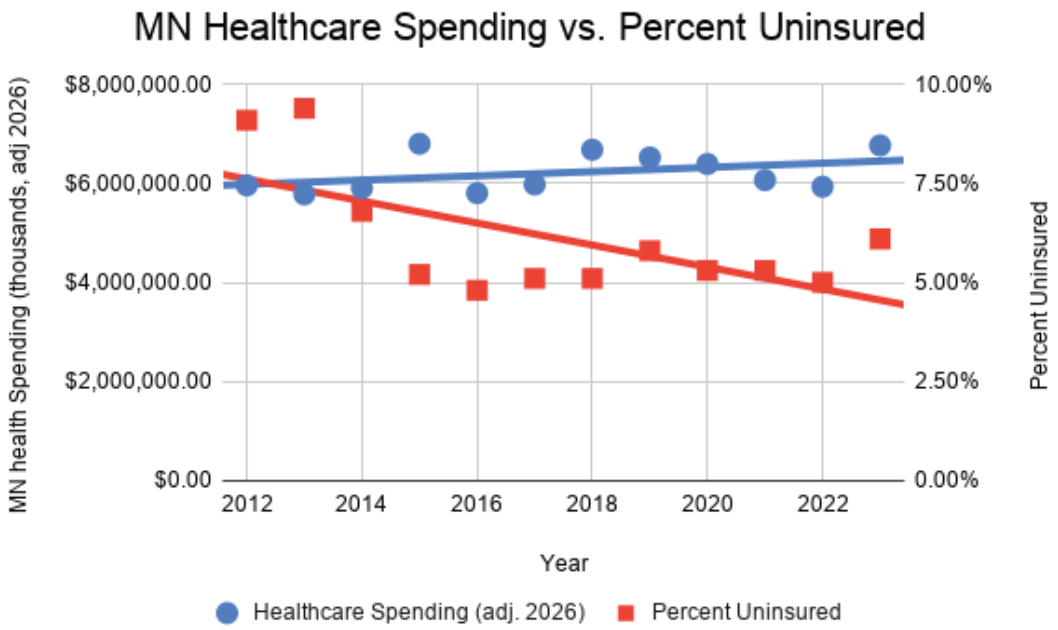
"It was kind of weird talking to someone with high power." -Sadie



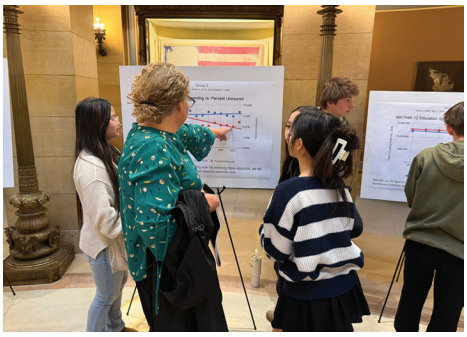
"It was easier than I thought it was gonna be, because the law makers were nicer." -Elsa

MN Healthcare Spending vs. Percent Uninsured

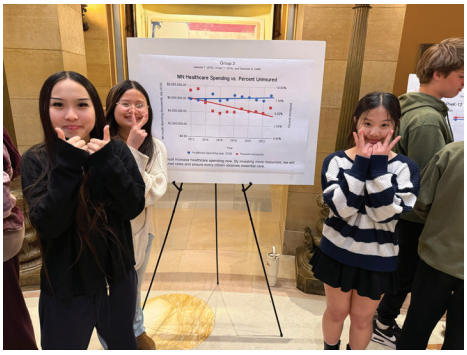
Isabelle T. (67A), Vivien Y. (67A), and Sarisella X. (44B)



"Minnesota must increase healthcare spending now. By investing more resources, we will lower uninsured rates and ensure every citizen receives essential care."



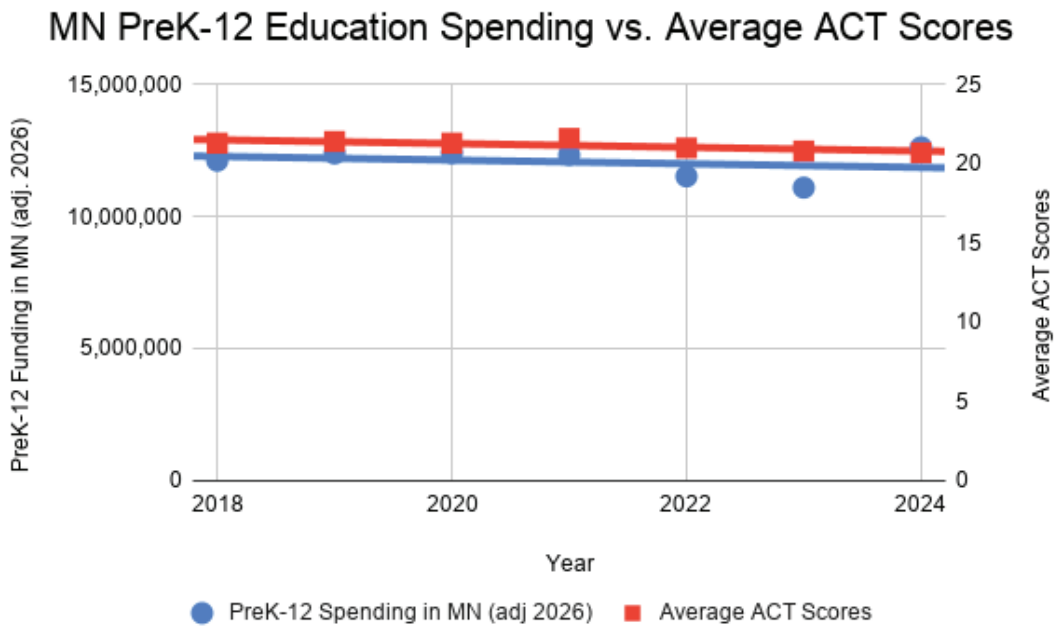
"Presenting in front of my law makers was quite scary and made me nervous, because they are important people in the government." -Vivien



"It was scary and nerve-wracking, but as we got more into it, it started getting better and more steady." -Isabelle

PreK-12 Education Spending vs. ACT Score in MN

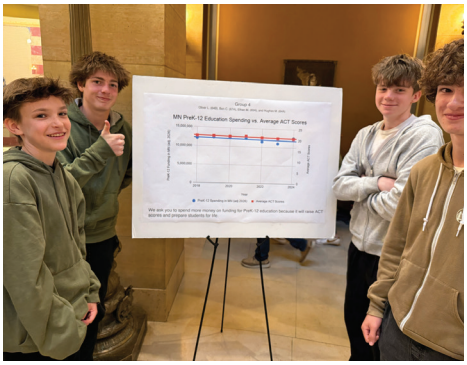
Oliver L. (64B), Ben C. (67A), Ethan M. (65A), and Hughes M. (64A)



"We ask you to spend more money on funding for PreK-12 education because it will raise ACT scores and prepare students for life."



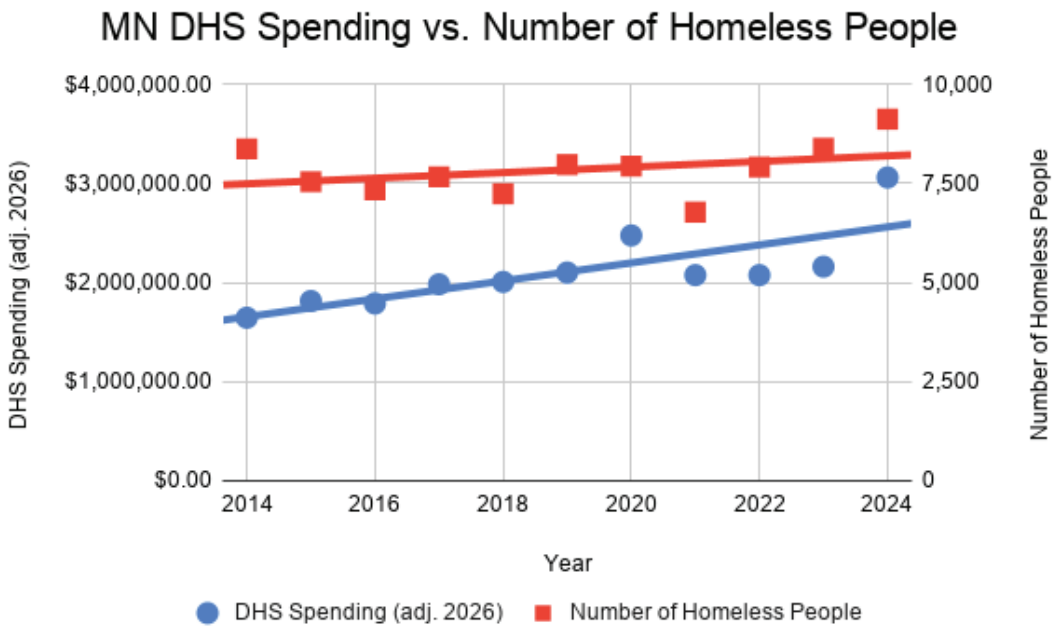
"It was pretty fun. I think our group did really well and the representatives and senators we presented to seemed to think we did a good job." -Oliver



"It was fun and less stressful than I thought it'd be." -Hughes

MN DHS Spending vs. Number of Homeless People

Clara B. (64A), Fuji T. (65A), and Rocio H. (65B)



"Homeless rates in Minnesota are increasing, let's increase our support to give them the help they need to get back on their feet."



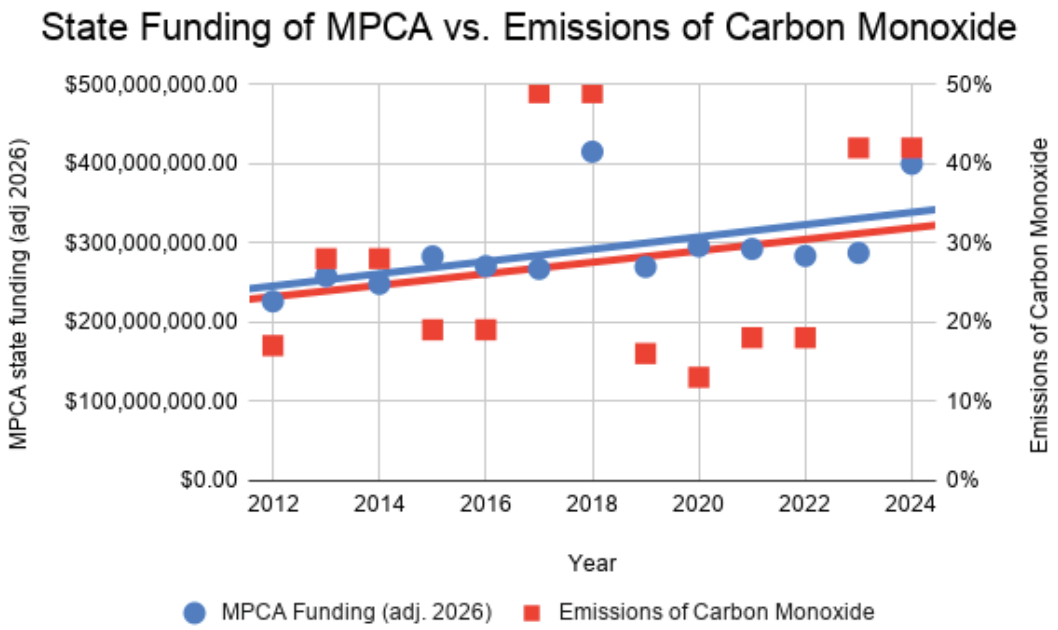
"I thought it was interesting talking to important people about topics that were important to us." -Rocio



"It was less scary than I thought. Everyone was very kind and seemed very invested." -Fuji

State Funding of MPCA vs. Emissions of Carbon Monoxide

Xio S. (64B), Charlotte S. (66B), Anna F. (64B), and Ollie G. (66B)



"Air pollution is a very serious problem and we need to stop it by stopping carbon emissions and finding eco-friendly solutions."



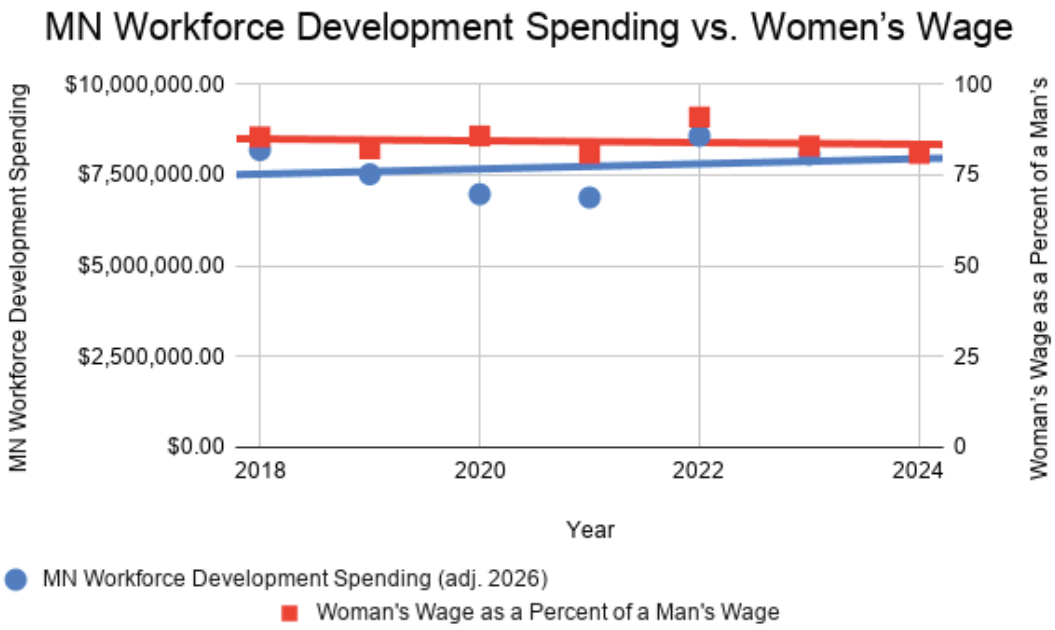
"It felt like history day, but in a different place and talking to really important people rather than, like, a volunteer. I felt like this could actually make an impact." -Charlotte



"Interesting! I liked to be able to explain our graph to different people." -Xio

MN Workforce Development Spending vs. Women's Wage

Sally K. (66B), Finnley F. (64A), and Lydia M. (67B)



"Workforce Development spending needs to increase in order to bridge the unjustified gap between women's wages and men's wages."



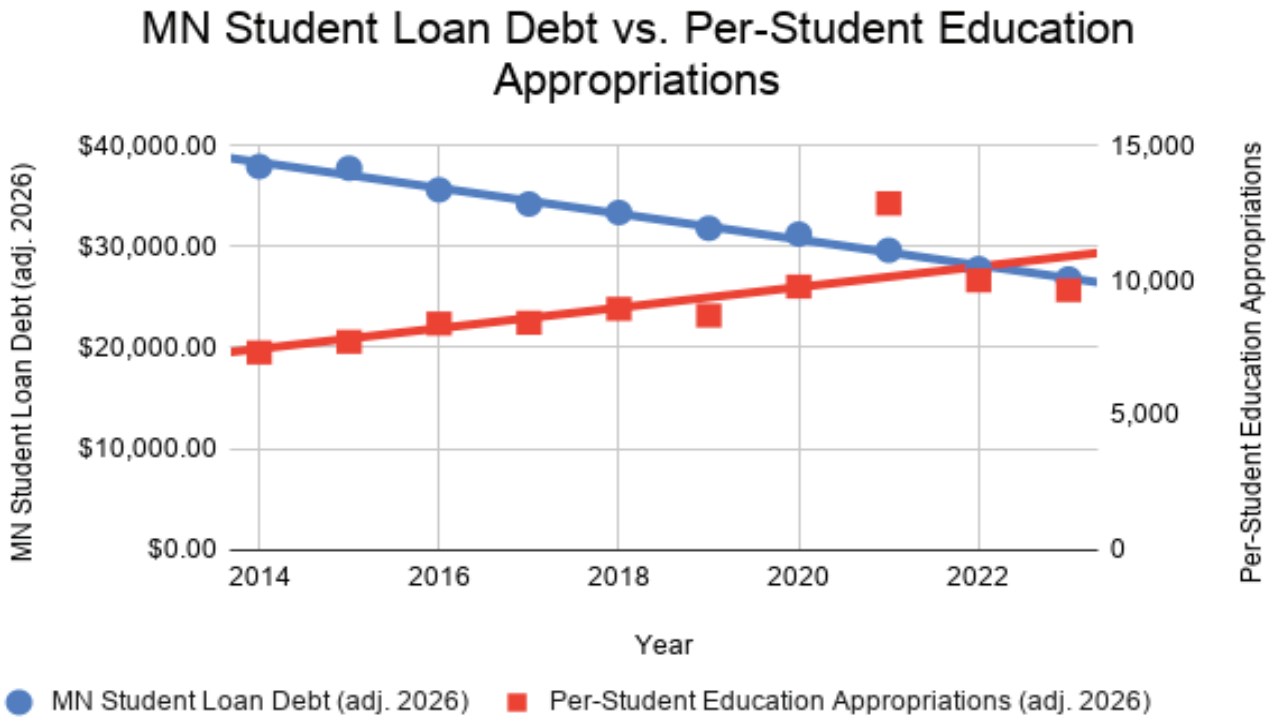
"It was a really good experience and I liked that we got to share things that were we're passionate about." -Lydia



"I think it was really fun and a cool experience to talk to people that represent where we live." -Finnley

MN Student Loan Debt vs. Per-Student Education Appropriations

Melita A. (64A), Isabel B. (64A), Junia G. (64B), and Rain T. (64B)



"Student loan debt is a big problem. The government should keep helping pay off student loan debt to lower debt rates further."



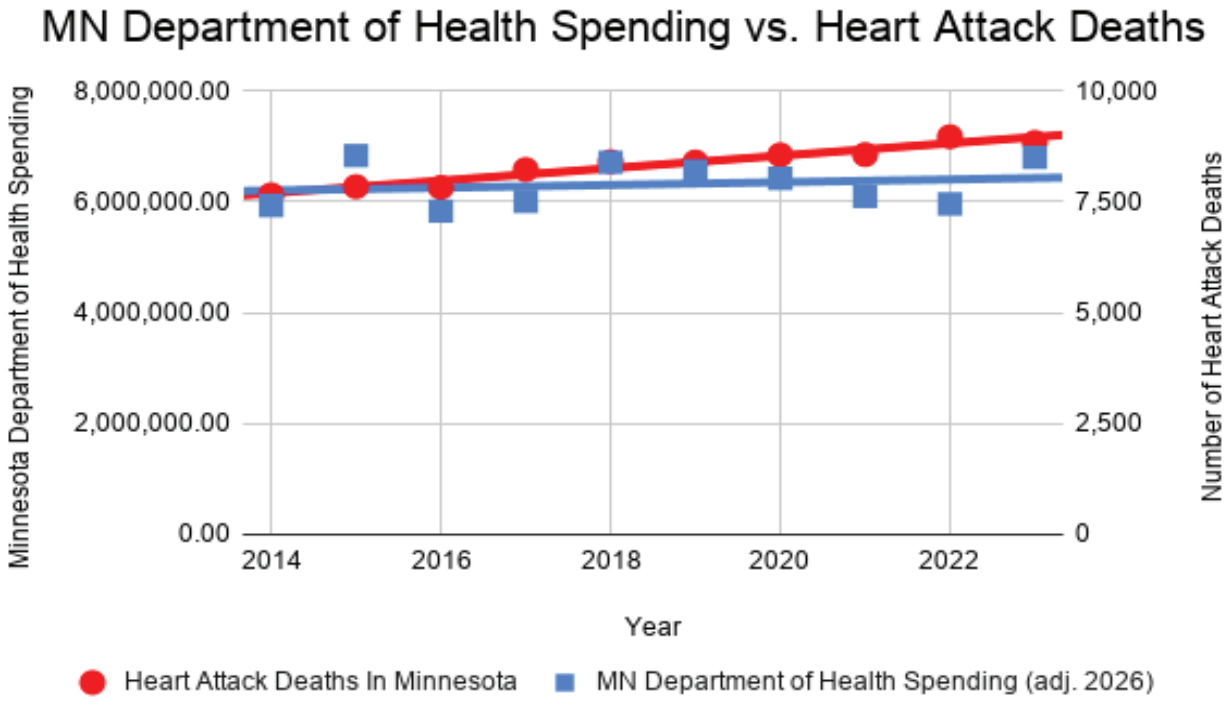
"We made a competition out of saying the least 'um's.' It was very fun and helped me stay focused and work on my presentation." -Isabel



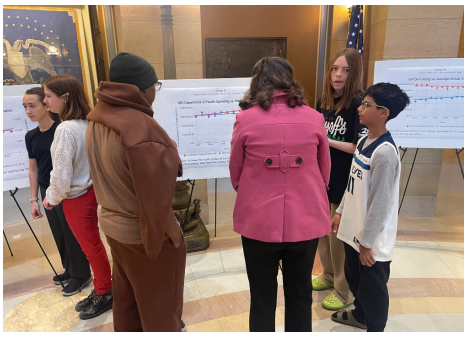
"I felt very good, being able to talk to senators, and feeling like I had a voice, and that I was making a change." -Melita

MN Department of Health Spending vs. Heart Attack Deaths

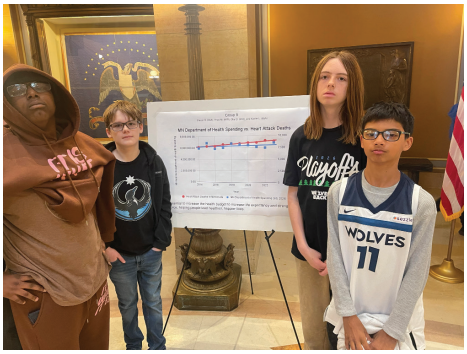
Ciaran S. (66A), Theo M. (66B), Otis O. (64A), and Xavier L. (65A)



"It is essential to increase the health budget to increase life expectancy and strengthen the workforce, helping people lead healthier, happier lives."



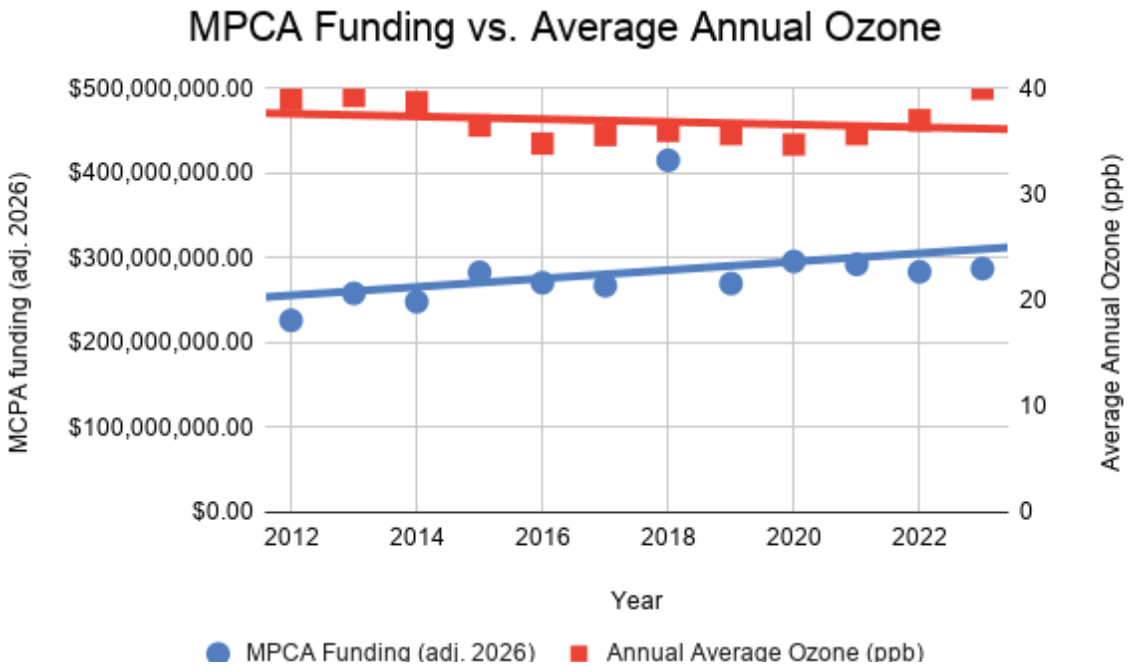
"It was very interesting and informative." -Theo



"It was really cool to present to the senators; I liked talking to them." -Ciaran

MPCA Funding vs. Annual Average Ozone

Gideon P. (67B), Liam T. (66B), and Quinten T. (65B)



"Air pollution has caused asthma, heart attacks, and death for our state. If we don't do something now, it'll only get worse."



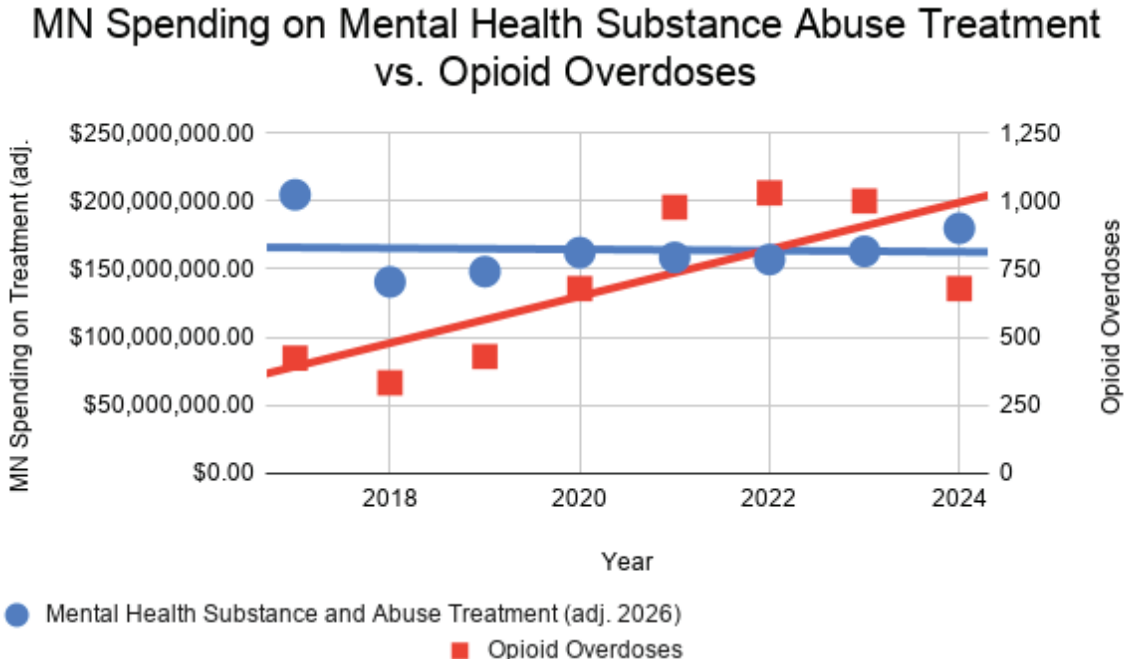
"It was exciting, but also a little nerve racking." -Quinn



"It was really fun. I felt like my opinions and views mattered." -Gideon

MN Spending on Mental Health and Substance Abuse Treatment vs. Opioid Overdoses

Sylas G. (65A), Jacoby O. (64B), Momodu F. (65A), and Thomas S. (67B)



"If the amount of overdoses go down in Minnesota the state will have a better economy and Minnesota will be safer all around."



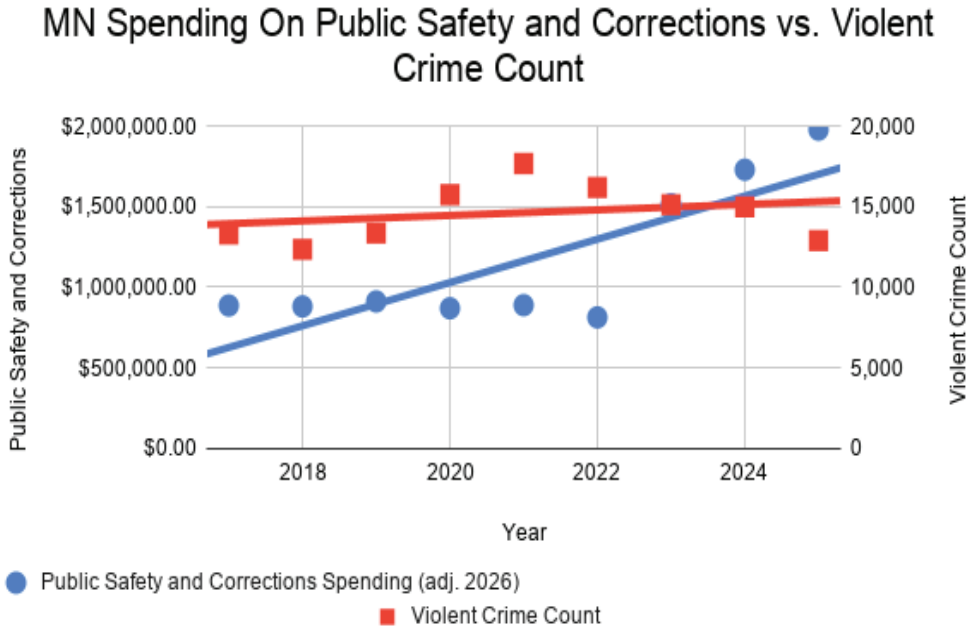
"It was a little scary at the start, but once I started going it was easy." -Thomas



"It was shocking talking to those people. I liked that they cared about my topic." -Sylas

MN Spending on Public Safety and Corrections vs. Violent Crime Count

Bennett M. (66B), Elliot C. (67B), Gavin T. (67B), and Gordon H. (64B)



"We want you to continue increasing the money spent on public safety and corrections because we want less people dying from violent crimes."



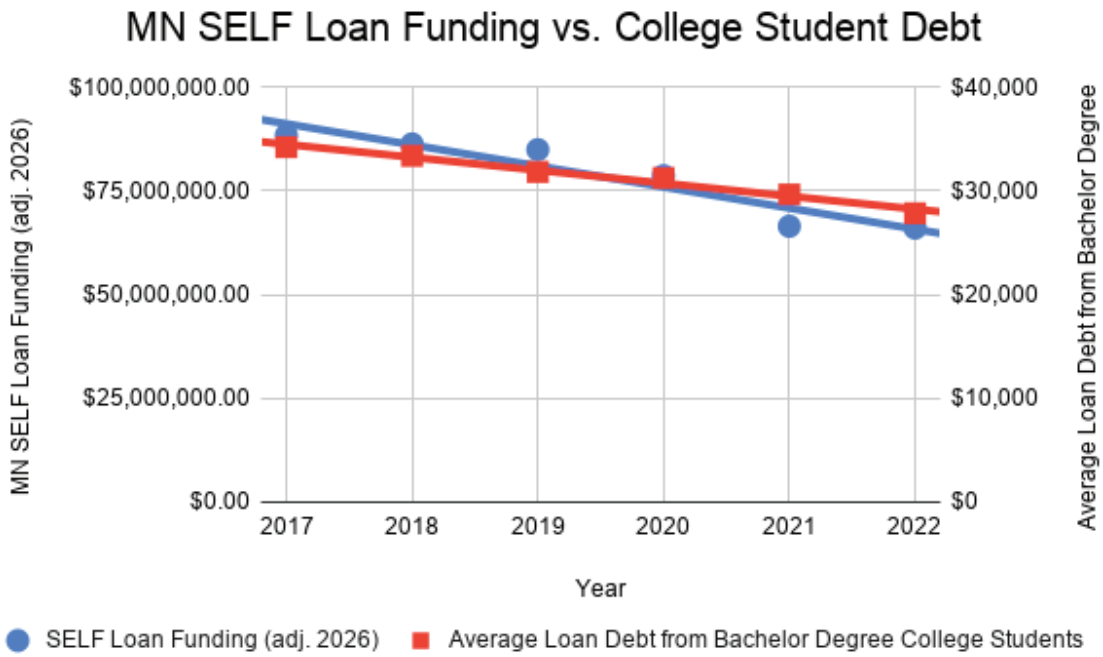
"It was pretty cool to talk to the politicians and people of high power about what we've been researching for months." -Gordon



"It was very nerve racking and I was really worried about it, but after talking to a few law makers I started to get used to it and I felt more confident talking to them."-Bennett

MN SELF Loan Funding v. College Student Debt

Mango N. (64A), Chester T. (44B), Arlo M. (65B), and Niko S. (65B)



"We need your help for this. College is a vital piece of education for many people, and it's hard to go with debt."



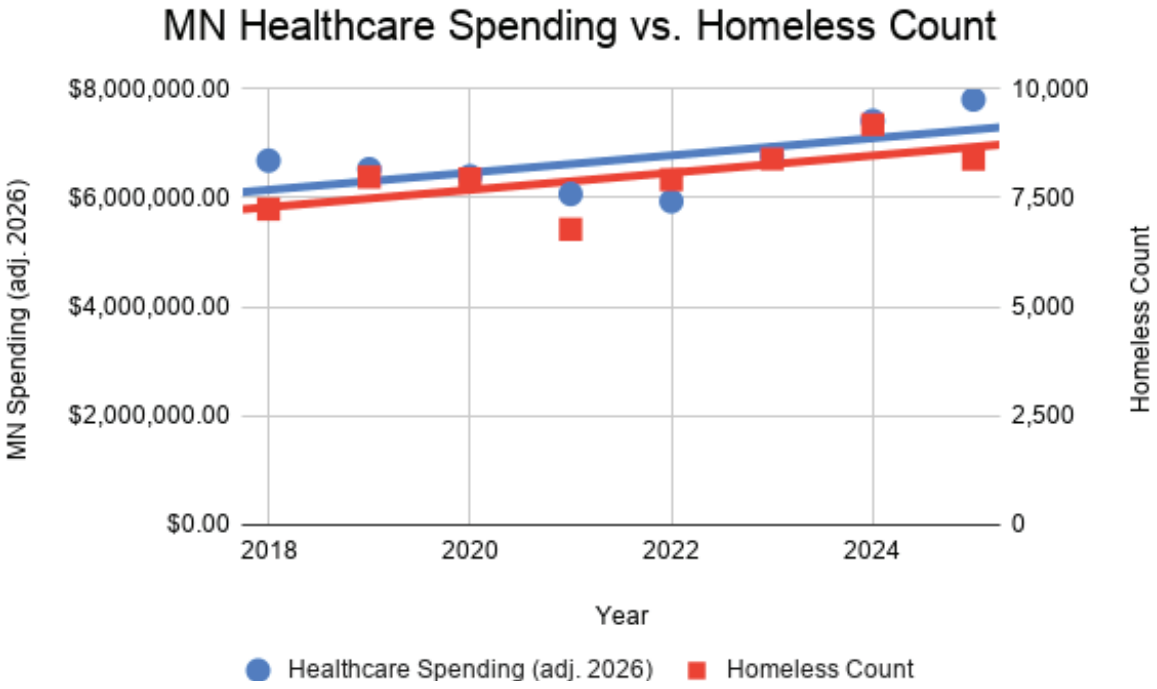


"It was kind of scary at first. Like, you go in, and it's this big, like, shiny building, and then when you start getting into the vibe, it gets easier and easier to talk to the people." -Chester

"The capitol was a valuable experience for me." -Arlo

MN Healthcare Spending vs. Homeless Count

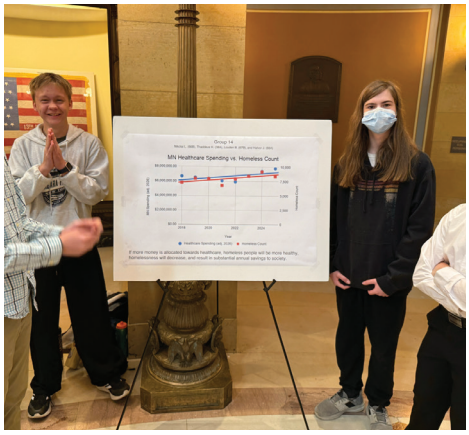
Nikolai L. (66B), Thaddeus H. (38A), Louden B. (67B), and Halvor J. (66A)



"If more money is allocated towards healthcare, homeless people will be more healthy, homelessness will decrease, and result in substantial annual savings to society."



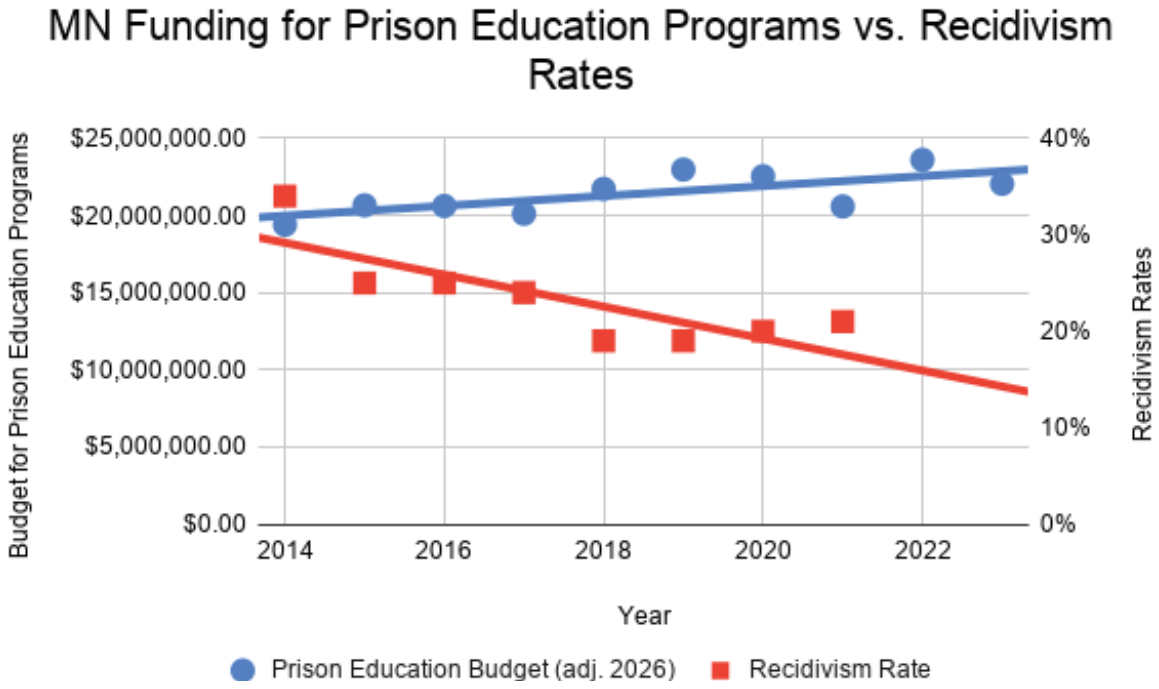
"It was very nice to be able to make a difference in the world by presenting."-Louden



"Top five scariest things I've ever done."-Halvor

MN Funding for Prison Education Programs vs. Recidivism Rates

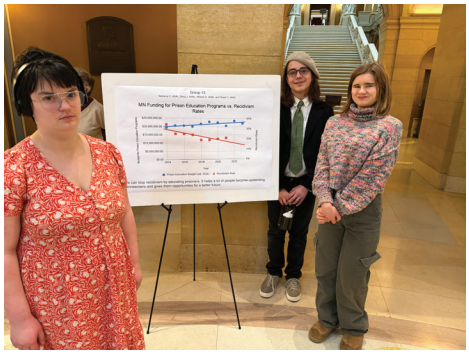
Sebrena C. (65A), Zelda J. (64A), William S. (64B), and Greta C. (64A)



"We can stop recidivism by educating prisoners. It helps a lot of people become upstanding Minnesotans and gives them opportunities for a better future."



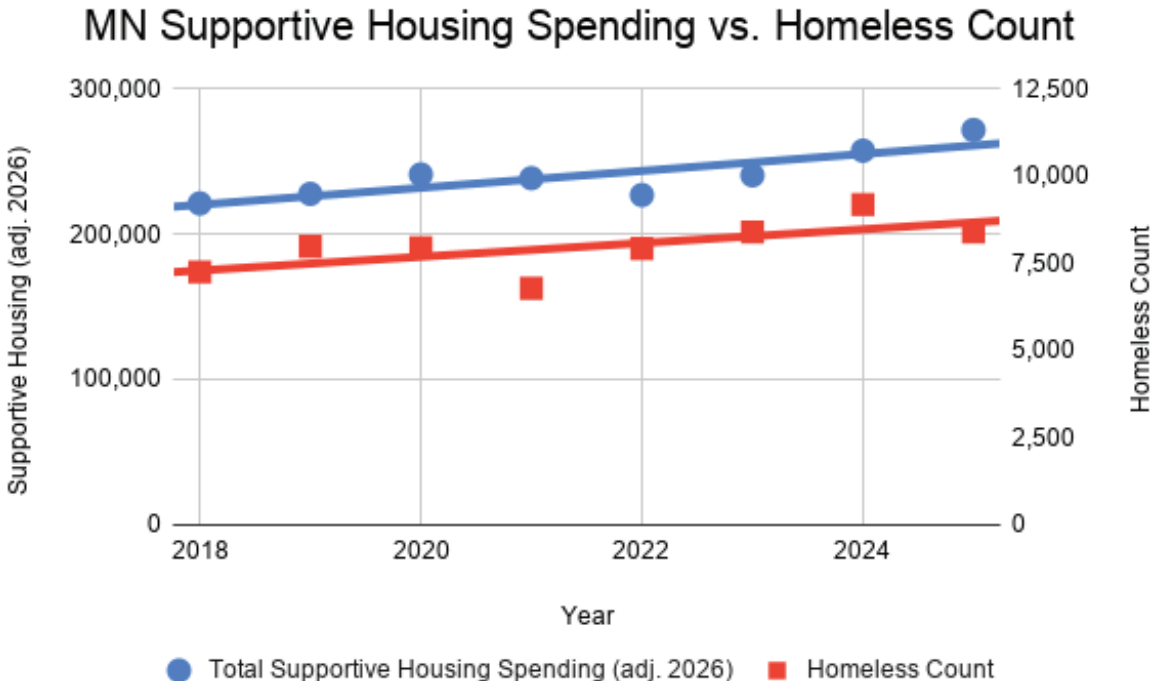
"It was exciting to know that we brought an issue to people who could do things about it."-Zelda



"It was maybe one of the largest, hardest, most rewarding things I have ever done."-Greta

MN Supportive Housing Spending vs. Homeless Count

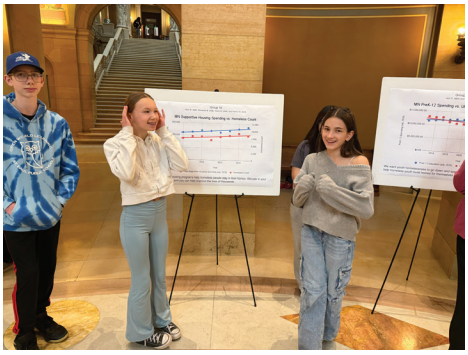
Htoo M. (66B), Elizabeth B. (64B), Rosie W. (64A) and Patrick W. (64A)



"Supportive Housing programs help homeless people stay in their homes. Allocate to your local program and you can help improve the lives of thousands."



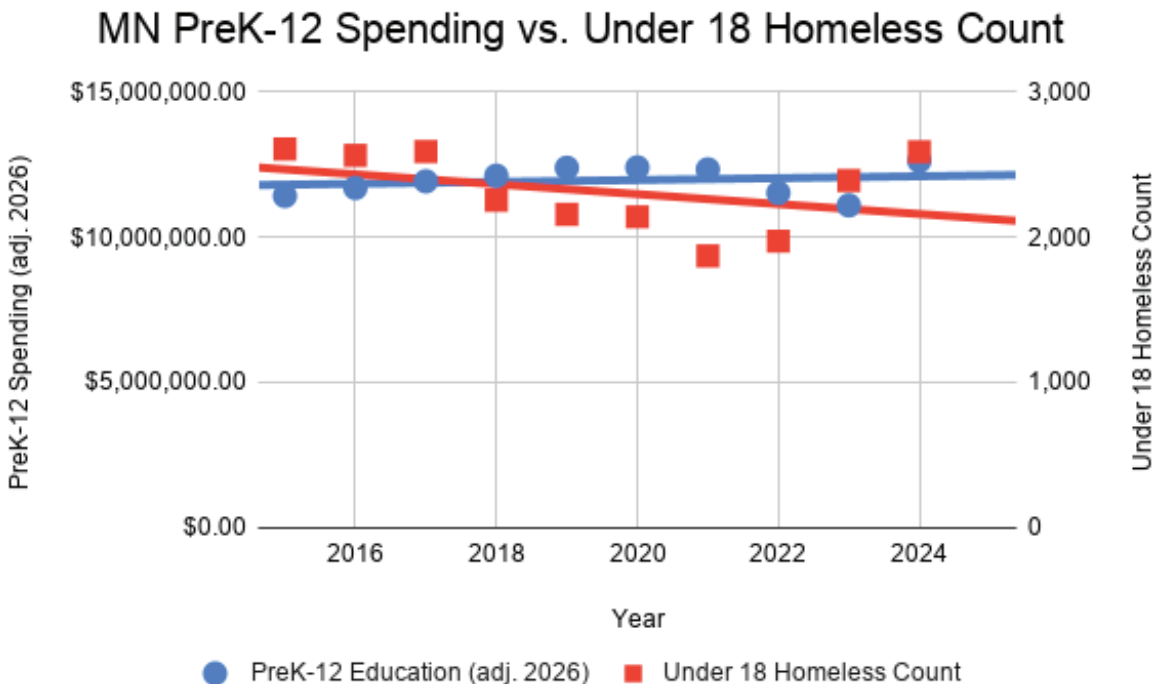
"I was scared, it was really nerve wracking to be presenting to senators." -Htoo



" After all the legislators leave, it's kind of you just staying around, but you can also answer questions. I thought it was fun experience." -Patrick

MN PreK-12 vs. Under 18 Homeless Count

Jack G. (66A) and Felix R. (64A)



"We want youth homelessness to go down and spending money on PreK-12 education will help homeless youth build homes for themselves."



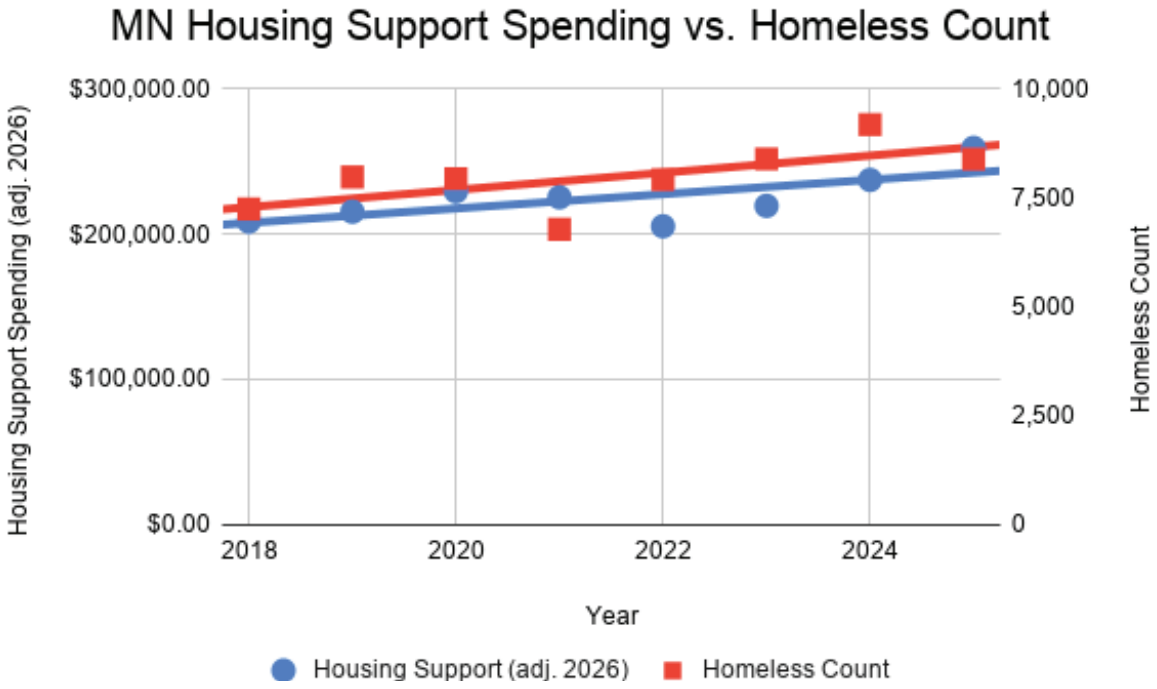
"It was kind of stressful, (being the only one in my group there)." -Jack



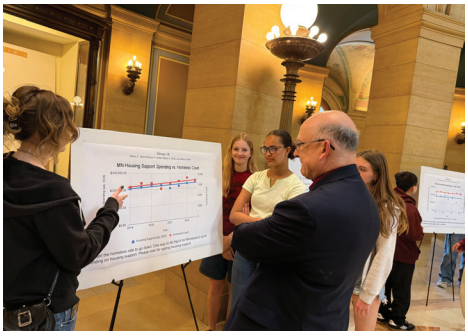
"The senators and people we presented to were nice." -Jack

MN Housing Support Spending vs. Homeless Count

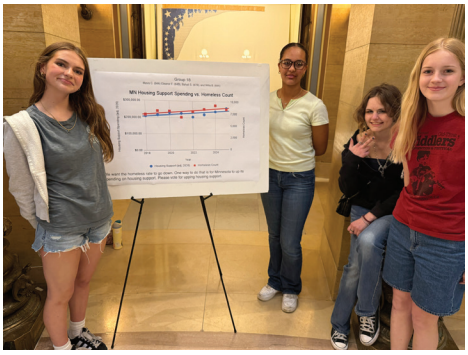
Mavis C. (64A) Eleanor F. (64B), Bahati S. (67B), and Willa B. (64A)



"As of 2024 0.16% of the state of Minnesota is homeless. Housing support is a proven method to decrease homelessness. One way for you to decrease the homeless rate is spending more on housing support."



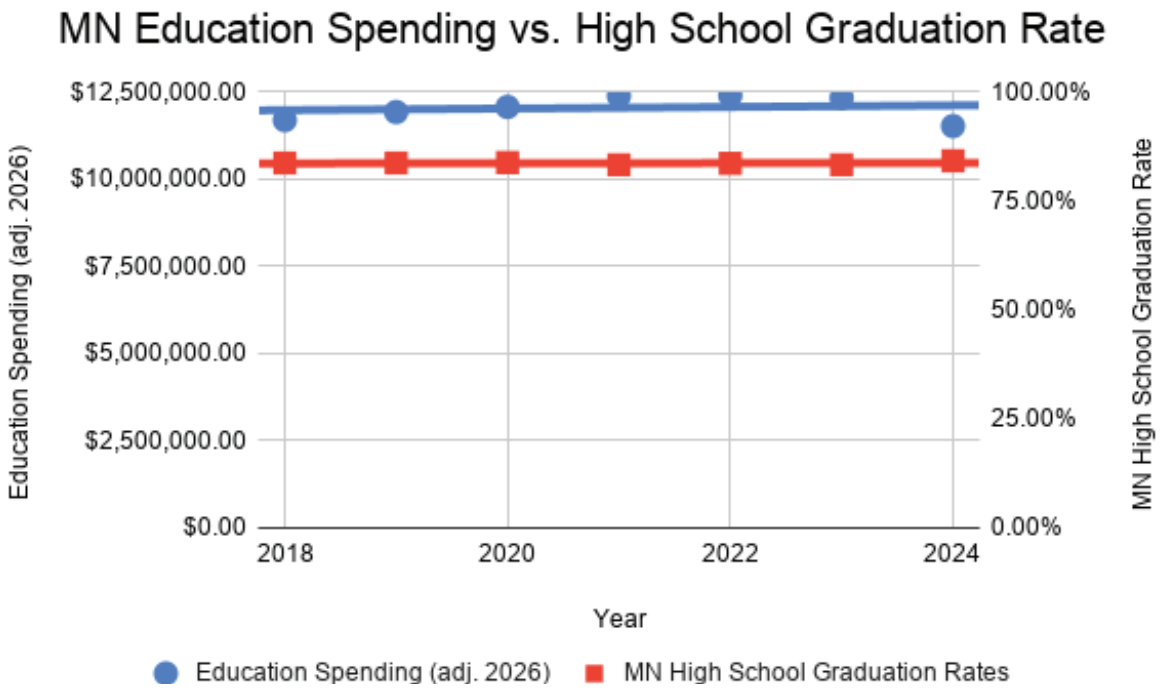
"They were actually friendly! I thought they were gonna be super judgy and cold but it turns out they're just normal people." -Mavis



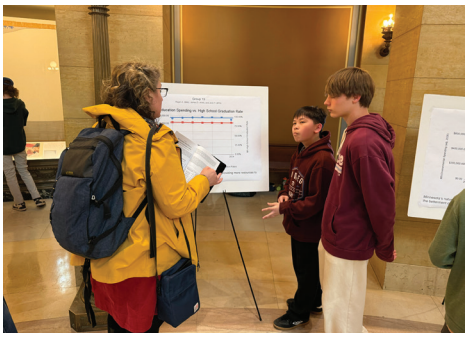
"It was really easy, and we didn't talk to very many people. The people we did talk to though, were very excited to be there." -Bahati

MN Education Spending vs. High School Graduation Rate

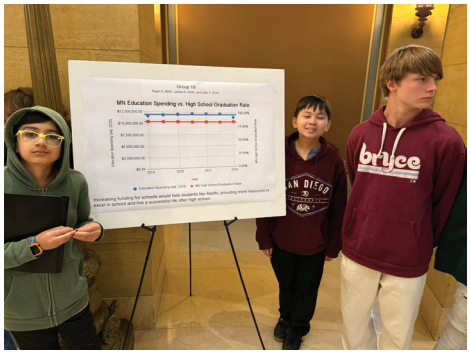
Rajan A. (66A), James D. (44A), and Julio Y. (67A)



"Increasing funding for schools would help students like Adolfo, providing more resources to excel in school and live a successful life after high school."



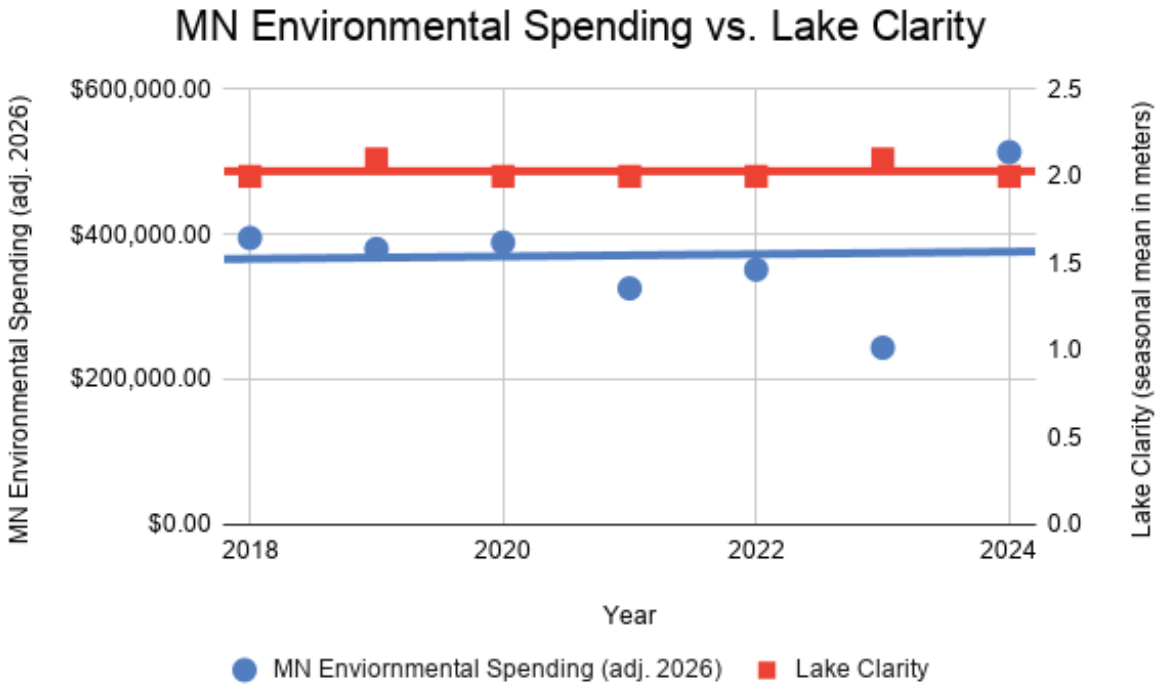
"I liked presenting in the rotunda. It made it feel more special, like not just another day like it would have been if we had presented in school." -James



"I feel like nothing will come out from this, but at least I tried." -Rajan

MN Environmental Spending vs. Lake Clarity

Edmund K. (64A), Declan P. (64B), Soren S. (66B), and Rafael H. (65B)



"Minnesota's natural bodies of water should be more closely and consistently monitored for the betterment of our state's health and wellness."



"I was kind of nervous at the start, but at the end, it was just, like... Cool."
-Rafael



"Informative and interesting."
-Edmund

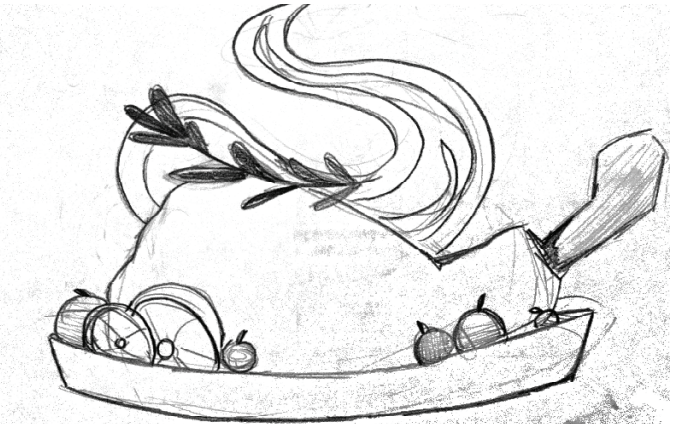





Alternate Narratives
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Alternate Narratives

In Quarter 1, students read short stories, then wrote an "alternate narrative" for a story of choice. These narratives changed a key scene by telling it from a new perspective.



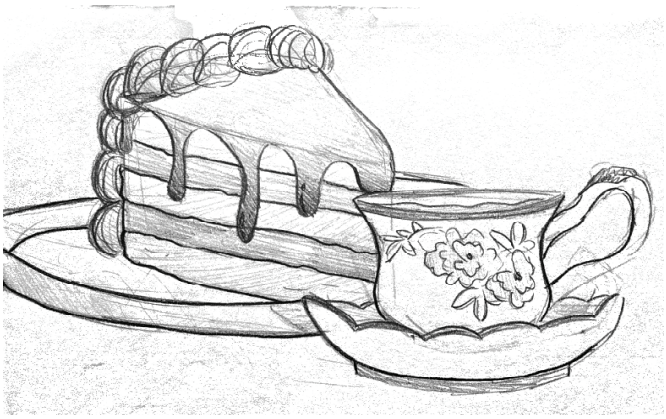


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A retelling of Lamb to the Slaughter

THE TALK DOESN'T GO QUITE AS PLANNED

How will I tell her?

By Finnley Frolek

I have been going over this moment in my head since the beginning of the day. As I climbed into my new teal 1957 Chevy Bel Air to head home, I continued thinking about how I was going to tell Mary. I assume that she will do the same thing she does every Thursday when I get home. She will take my overcoat, ask how my day was, and make me a drink. We usually go to a restaurant for supper, but I have had a long day at the station so I am going to say that I'm too tired. I will sit her down in the living room and tell her right away.

The driveway is coming closer. I pull in and see her sitting in her purple velvet chair through the window. As I walked in she gets up to take my coat. "Hello darling."

"Hello darling," I answered. She went over to the other side of the room to pour me a drink. After she gave it to me, she poured herself a glass with less alcohol and sat back down in her chair, resting her drink on her stomach where her baby bump was getting rather big. We sat in silence for about five minutes until I finished my drink.

"Tired darling?"

I responded with a small "yes, I am." I took a big sip of my drink, finishing it, and stood up to pour myself another one. Out of the corner of my eye I saw Mary get up. "I'll get it!" she said. "No, sit back down," I said in a slightly stern voice. Did that seem too harsh? I went over and poured myself a strong glass of whisky. Sitting back down, I wondered if I was being too rigid on Mary. I was about to tell her something that would probably ruin her life so I shouldn't get too worked up.

"Shall I grab your slippers?" she asked.

"No,"

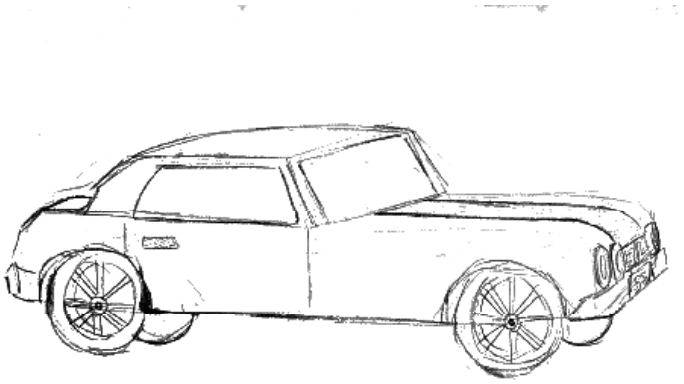
I was getting anxious and I just wanted to sit in silence while I thought about how and when I was going to tell her. Wait did she say something? I didn't hear her so I won't answer. Maybe she will just think I had a bad day and stop talking to me. I glanced over at her. She looked down and continued her sewing. I took another big sip of my drink. I had so many thoughts going through my head that I almost didn't hear her ask me another question. "Would you like me to get you some cheese? I haven't made any supper because it's Thursday."

"No,"

I've tried to stay as calm as I could. She kept talking but I barely heard anything she was saying. "You need to eat, I'll make a cheese and cracker tray." She stood up and started walking towards the kitchen. "Sit down… Just for a minute," I tried saying in a less scary voice. She paused in the middle of the room looking scared now. She walked back to her chair and I saw that she was being careful not to come too close.

"Listen," I said. "I have something to tell you."

She looked worried. I could tell because her upper brow wrinkled a little bit and her smile turned to a slight frown. I looked down at my empty glass and started talking. I couldn't determine what I was saying exactly but I knew that I was talking.



When I was done I looked up at her. Her face was a mixture of anger and confusion. After a few minutes of silence she gained the color back from her pale face. She stood up and whispered "I'll go get dinner" as she walked towards the kitchen. I didn't say anything this time. Taking a deep breath I stood up to grab another drink. That went better than I thought it would.

I walked over to the window. It was a sunny fall day. Red, orange, and brown leaves were covering the ground and crunching under the woman's feet who was walking her golden retriever around the block. A singular greenish-orange leaf started falling from our apple tree out front. I watched it fall to the ground in a graceful manner. I looked at my watch. 5:30. I should find a place to eat, Mary won't want me here, I thought to myself. I heard the clicking noise of Mary's heels coming up the cellar stairs. I knew that she had brought up the lamb leg I got last week for dinner because I could hear the brown paper crumpling in her hands.

"For gods sake, don't make supper for me, I'm going out"

I was still facing the window. She was silent. I saw part of her reflection in the window. She was moving toward me but I didn't know why. Suddenly something that felt like a brick hit the top of my head. I tried moving but I couldn't. I

was paralyzed. I started to sway side to side like I was on a ship in the middle of an ocean. Then, CRASH, I fell on the floor. Colors were flying around everywhere until suddenly everything went black.

Following his Destiny

By Anna Funk

Patrick Maloney was driving down the dimly lit driveway to his home. He looked through the window at the setting sun, and at his yellow house in the distance. He knew his wife was inside, waiting for him. His wife, he thought, not his wife for much longer. He had to follow his destiny, for that was what he thought it was, destiny. He pulled up the crunchy gravel driveway and put the car into park. He got out and walked to the front door, but he didn't go in. His wife, Mary, was kind and sweet and always there for him, and her baby, their baby, didn't deserve this. But Patrick had already made plans, and he had to follow through, this was what he was meant to do. He opened the door and walked inside.

As always, Mary was at the door to greet him with a kiss. She took his coat and hung it up, and made drinks for the both of them. Will I get this in my next life, thought Patrick. But he assured himself that he was better off without Mary.

"Tired darling?" She asked in her soft and sweet voice.

"Yes, I am tired." Patrick replied, and he wasn't lying. He finished his drink in one last gulp, then prepared himself to break the news. Maybe another drink, he thought, what harm could it do?

"I'll get it!" Mary cried as Patrick got up.

"Sit down," Patrick said, in a cold voice that he himself didn't recognize, then he realized he would have to be cold, harsh, if he was really going to do this.

"Darling, shall I get your slippers?" Mary said, sounding worried.

"No." Patrick said.

"Sit down," Patrick said, in a cold voice that he himself didn't recognize

Mary went on about how we could eat out, or not, or yes? He couldn't hear her, he was lost in his own thoughts. After a few minutes of pondering, he told her. It felt good to tell her after all this time, but he couldn't help but notice the shock and sadness on her face. He kept his voice cold and calm, he didn't want to show that this was hard for him too. After every sentence he could see her crack into one more piece. Something was breaking inside her.

He expected her to yell, or cry, or a mix of the two, but she just got up, calmly, and went to the pantry to make dinner. Patrick walked over to the window. He stared out into the woods that lay behind the house, it was dark outside, the sun had set. The crows were circling above the tree line, they were getting closer. Patrick's mother had always said that if you see crows circling, look away, they were an omen of death. But Patrick couldn't look away, the crows seemed to be calling to him, in their never ending song of caws. But then they stopped, and Patrick knew at that moment that something was terribly, terribly wrong. That's when everything went black.

The Dump-and-Ditch Method

By Arlo Moreno

I had just gotten in my car after dropping the patrol vehicle at the station. I had a conversation that needed to be had when I got back home, but maybe I'll have a drink or two first. When I got there, I saw her waiting on the porch, sewing. I parked and got out of the car, walking to the porch.

Mary said "Hullo Darling," and I replied with the same. She gently took off my coat and hung it up. She grabbed drinks and handed me my daily martini as I sat down. She sat down along with me with her own drink; a weaker alcohol. We both sat in silence for a moment until Mary asked, "tired darling?"

"Yes, I'm tired," I responded. I had a lot on my mind at the moment, a lot of stress. So I drank almost all of my martini in one go, trying to numb myself for at least a little bit for when I have to give her the news.

Mary was concerned about me, she jumped up and tried to get me another. I told her to sit back down. I grabbed my own drink, a glass full of whiskey which was an alluring dark amber color. Mary offered politeness again and tried to get me my slippers, but I denied. We chatted for plenty of time, most of it was Mary offering something and me rejecting it. She even got a lamb leg for our dinner. But I knew I had to get to the point.

I got up and told her I had news that would be shocking to her. For around five minutes I admitted my truths, about the affair, about my depleting love for her, and my unreadiness to be a father. She didn't seem to react immediately.

"So there it is, and I know it's kind of a bad time to be telling you," I said calmly to my dear wife. I wonder -- feeling guilty -- how she's taking this, probably not well.

She offered to grab our supper, but I only responded monotonously with, “Don’t make supper for me, I’m going out.” She went to the kitchen anyway.

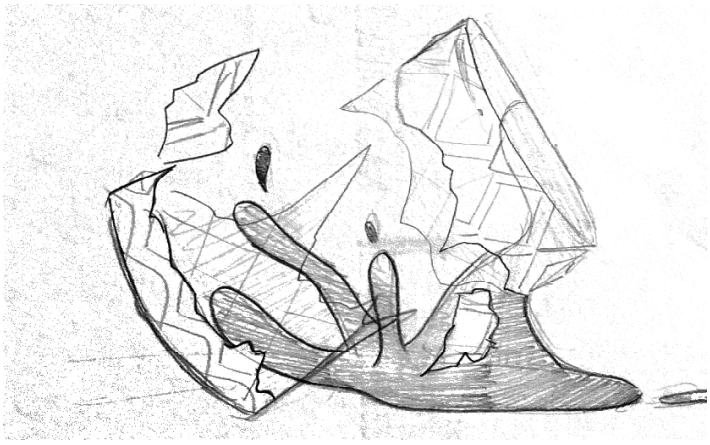
As I stared out the window, contemplating before leaving, I heard her footsteps carefully yet heavily approaching. That was quick, I thought to myself, but I wouldn’t say that aloud. Mary probably didn’t want to talk to me much right now. Then I felt a hard hit on the back of my head. Everything went black.

How to Seal Your Fate in Five

By Ceci Connor

As I wake up this morning, I know I have to tell my wife. I am going to tell her I want a divorce. We are always fighting and disagreeing with each other. I know this is bad timing because she is pregnant, but I will promise to give her money and make sure she’s okay. As I drive away, I see her through the window and I do feel bad for her, but I can’t be with her for the rest of my life.

I go to work, I plan to tell her when I get back. I look at the clock a lot throughout the day. Mostly because even though I am sad that I’m going to leave my wife -- especially because we were having a kid -- But I am also pretty excited to finally get out of that house. The clock finally ticks to 4:30. I should be going home now. So I start my car and start driving home. The whole drive I am pretty nervous about how this would go. How will she react? I park my car and I walk in the door.



She takes my coat and goes to make us drinks. I am nervous to tell her so I drink my drink in one swallow. I get up to make myself a new one but she jumps up and says she will make one for me. Does she think something is off? Because she’s never usually like this, all jumpy and extra helpful like this.

“Sit down.” I tell her.

She asks if I want my slippers. I say no and she tries to make conversation by bringing up how it’s a shame that they keep senior officers on their feet all day. I don’t reply. She then asks if I would like some cheese. I say no. Why is she offering so much stuff to me? She keeps talking about what to do for dinner and how there is meat in the freezer and said she will get me cheese and crackers first.

“I don’t want it” I tell her. I can tell she is getting even more nervous and confused because now she is moving in her chair and looking at me weirdly. But again she said she is going to make some food. “Just for a minute, sit down. Listen, I’ve got something I want to tell you”

I can tell she’s really confused. She keeps fidgeting with random stuff, her fingers and the chair just stuff that was near. And her foot is tapping on the floor. She’s a very fidgety person.

“What is it darling? What’s the matter?” She asks.

“This is going to be a bit of a shock to you, I’m afraid” I tell her, “but I’ve thought about this a good deal and I’ve decided the only thing to do is tell you right away. I hope you won’t blame me too much.” Ok just say it.

I just say it all and it feels like it’s lasting hours even though it’s only been about 5 minutes long. I can’t really remember much about what has happened while I told her, it just all came out. And her face I can’t tell what she’s thinking right now it’s just blank.

The first thing she said after I just told her all that was “I’ll get supper.”

Why is she bringing up dinner again? This is like the 3rd time she’s tried to get food. I just let her make it. I don’t even care anymore. I’m looking out the window now thinking if I made the right choi--

Cross Me Once

By Alan Castro Lozano

I’m sitting in my car. I’m just so shocked, to say the least. Right about now I’m sitting under a street lamp. I’m gonna drive home now.

I’m driving back now. I am passing by the neighborhood I passed every day. This drive feels so much longer now. I’m gonna turn on the radio to try to get my mind off things…

I am pulling into the driveway. I saw my wife in the window. I need to talk to her.

I am now inside the house. I’m sitting on a loveseat, I’m drinking more than usual. I usually don’t. I think she might have noticed… I know she’s been cheating on me… I’m going to tell her that I’ve known, or I just figured it out.

“Sit down, I need to talk to you,” I said to her.

She did.

A couple minutes later after I told her, she’s acting strange, like she didn’t hear me. I think she’s gone into shock. I’ve told her I am going to take care of our child and pay for its

needs even though now I'm not so sure if it's even mine.

She says she's still preparing a meal for me.

I told her I'm going out for a drink.

I'm looking out the window I just heard the fridge open—

Two Birds, Two Stones, One Bird Left

By Declan Proczko

Officer Maloney was on his way home, his mind weighed down. He looked out the window of his car, and thought. He loved his wife. And he didn't want to drop this on her. He hated having to do this.

As he came home he sat not quite hearing his wife's offers or his refusals. He zoned out, I don't want to do this. I have to.

He had to. And so he did, He refused her offer to make dinner one last time. He drained his glass of brandy and moved to get another.

"I'll get it!" She cried.

"Sit down," he told her, exhausted. He once more plunged into thought while answering her questions automatically.

"I've got something to tell you." He told his wife. He could feel himself stiffen and grow still, freezing like water in an icebox. "This is going to be a bit of a shock to you, I'm afraid," he said, fearing how she would react. Would she cry out in anger, would she wail in anguish? "But I've thought about it a good deal and I've decided the only thing

I don't want to do this. I have to.

to do is to tell you right away," he said. He was speaking almost without thinking, as if his mind were in two places at once. He paused, then spoke one more time, "I hope you won't blame me too much". I can't do this, I don't want to do this to her, I can't do this. And still he told her. All of it, and while he spoke, he could see her expression changing from one to the next. From distress to anger and back again, watching him dazedly in horror. "So there it is", he added after finishing his monologue, "And I know it's kind of a bad time to be telling you, but there simply wasn't another way". Mary looked like she was going to cry. "But there really wasn't any other way". He paused, then continued, "But there really needn't be any fuss about it". What have I done? "I hope not anyway. It wouldn't be very good for my job".

He watched her sit, almost as still as a statue in a garden. He wondered what she might be thinking about. Suddenly she spoke, it broke the silence as surely as a pickaxe or a drill pierces the ice of a frozen river,

"I'll get the supper" she said, it was more of a whisper. It was as if that icy river had started to freeze over once again.

He was lost in thought again, staring out the window looking into the street, he was alerted to Mary's arrival behind him by her footsteps on the carpet. I can't eat with this stomach, he thought, protractedly,

"For God's sake," he said, without turning around to look at her, "Don't make supper for me. I'm going out." He heard footsteps and then a marvelous weight with a large amount of force behind it struck him in the back of the head. Time seemed to slow for a moment, he wavered, once twice, I love you, Mary. And then he came crashing down onto the carpet where he would lay for a long time.

Right Under Their Nose

By Isabel Best

Outside was cold and there was a soft breeze as the street lights were flickering in his eyes. Patrick Maloney opened his car door and got in, ready to come home from his job as a detective.

As he was starting the car he started to think on what he would say to her, her as in his pregnant wife, Mary Maloney who was waiting at home for him like always, it was their routine. But would she take it well or will it go badly? She usually took things with a smile but he has no idea how she will react with this. He had already thought it through and decided this was the best decision but still he had this wary and uneasy feeling about saying it but this was a secret not even he could keep in anymore.

Ten minutes to five, and a few moments later his tires drove on the gravel outside and his car door slammed closed, his footsteps passing the window and his keys turning the lock and opening the door.

He set his eyes on his wife, abruptly kissed him before happily saying

"hello,"

as he replied. She took off his coat and hung it up for him, he walked over to his chair waiting for his wife to return and hand him a drink. As he sat there, he shifted uncomfortably as she handed the drink, he sipped slowly as if he changed anything she would notice something was wrong, still pondering about how he should tell her,

Mary asked if he was tired, "Yes," he said, with his mind telling him to just say it. Lifting his glass and draining it in one sip, listening to the ice dropping and clinking against the glass.

His eyes started drooping and head started aching with a slight dizziness as he chugged the rest. His eyes snapped open when his wife had made a small sound, he didn't even hear what she said, just her mouth moving and she stood up abruptly, almost jumping. "Sit back down" he said, as he got up for a stronger drink by himself. He heard her voice more silent than usual as he came back,

asking "darling, shall I get your slippers,"

and he replied with a simple

"no."

He began to sip his drink but could feel her eyes watching. He shook his head, focusing on his drink but he could hear the fuzzy noise of her voice asking him questions, for all he replied some type of no.

Then she started to talk about supper and what he wanted to eat.

"I don't want to go out,"

he said. As the talking continued longer than anticipated, he stopped but it seemed as if everything froze in a stern uneasy voice

"I have something to tell you."

Silence, the light hit his face but it only shone a singular side, silently twitching out of sight, he opened his mouth to speck.

Mary left the house with an empty smile on her face walking to the grocery store.

Groceries were on the floor and the fire in the house bloomed with reds and oranges and the whole room shone with color but there was an unnatural red in the room with a figure crying over a lifeless body on the ground.

"Dead, fairly recently, the victim seems to have taken a strong hit to the head and died on impact,"

The group of police and detectives explored the house looking for more evidence on the murder of Patrick Maloney, their comrade killed in his own house. And his wife who left to get dinner and returned to his corpse.

"We already checked with the store owner and he said she seemed normal the whole time, looked as though she was just buying groceries to prepare dinner for her husband who hadn't wanted to eat out at the time."

"The weapon used for the murder seems to be a metal object like a bat," another said.

"Well they can have gone far, and same goes for the weapon, it has to have been hidden nearby" said a man wearing a uniform of a detective "wouldn't want to walk around with it," he added.

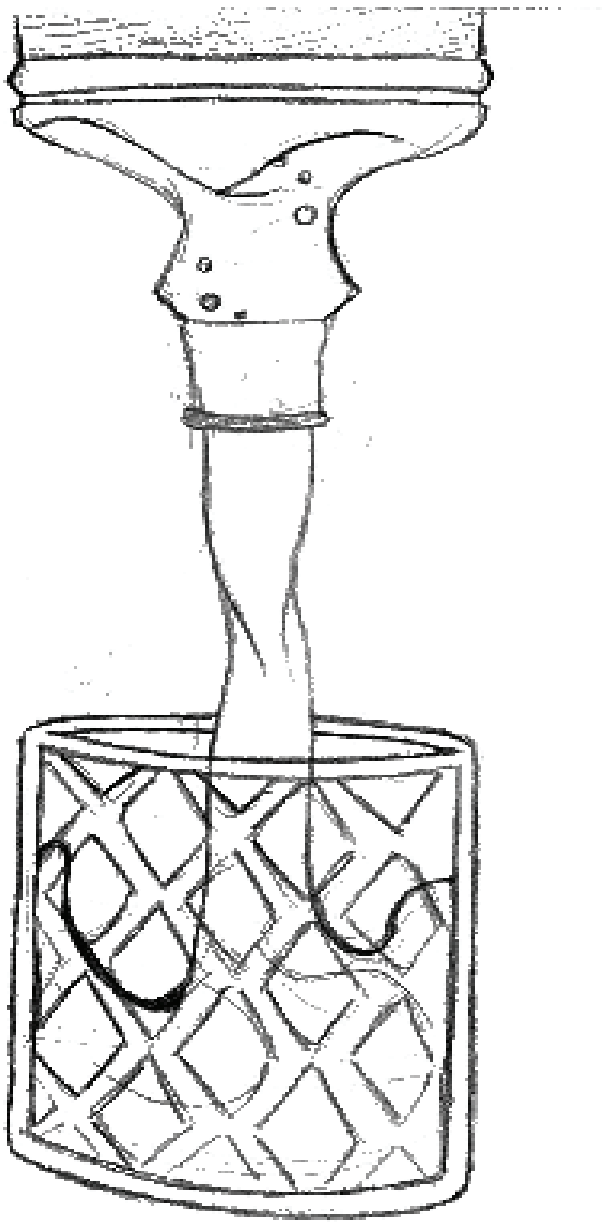
They questioned Mary for some time but the shock of his death seemed to have her only answering in less efficient ways. They searched around multiple times since the answer seemed to be right under their nose

tired a smell got caught in their nose till they heard Mary ask them to eat

"You've been such a great help and this lamb is big and it would be such a slaughter to waste, so please eat," Mary said with a smile that seems forced in a way that she's trying to be strong.

"No we are here for work only and not relaxation with free food," they had said

But with her persistence she seemed to get her way and as they finally agreed to eat she left the room silently, her footsteps like a ghost. With a bright smile creeping up her face a quiet chuckle can be heard covered by sparks of the fire, the ears of the detectives could not hear this laugh. The murderer seems to have gotten away with it after all.



Out of the Fire

By Eleanor Foote

He was at the station thinking of how he would explain his mistake to his wife. This mistake was one he had not thought of when he made it. He did not love his wife and had fallen for another. She met him days after his marriage, it was a slow day at the station and he just wanted to make the check and leave. He had only made it halfway to the car when he was called in with an urgent call: a woman's house had burned down in his neighborhood and the woman needed a place to sleep. That is when he met her.

That was over a year ago now, and he was tired of living in hiding with his lover. It was his 1,032nd day at the station and he decided today was the day he would come home and end his suffering. He left the station and headed to his car.

On the way home he pondered what his parents would think if he went through with the divorce. They were always fond of his wife. They would never imagine what he had done. They would not like his mistress. He was ashamed also.

Though he was done with this marriage and known so for a while, he still had sympathy.

He thought of his wife . . . how would she react?

He pulled into the driveway of his happy home. He slowly opened the driver's door and walked towards the house, slowly to the door. He stood there for a moment staring at the knob. It was fairly cold out that evening, but it didn't matter to him then. He thought again of what his loved ones would think . . . how his wife's face would look when he told her, how she would ask him why and look away. He looked up at the window of the door, and slowly opened it.

His pregnant wife was sitting on the couch, waiting there. He couldn't have told you what happened during the following conversation, all he could think about was what would happen after he told her. He remembered the whisky he poured himself, how it tasted as he shot it down his throat. How it burned. He remembered how his wife insisted on him staying for dinner after he told her. But as he was waiting for her to cook dinner he felt a sharp force in the side of his head. He felt himself hit the floor. Then nothing.

But as he was waiting for her to cook dinner he felt a sharp force in the side of his head. He felt himself hit the floor. Then nothing.

Is this how I will die?

By Niko Leba

I just got off of work at the police station after a long day. Today was terrible. While I was pulling someone over, they sped off the moment I stepped out of my car to get to their vehicle. I have also thought to myself, "I don't want a baby"… My wife is pregnant and I don't know how to tell her. I suppose after putting it off for what seems like forever I outa tell her today. I pull up in the driveway slamming my car door as I walk up to the house with the keys in my hand. I stand at the door for what seems like hours, getting the courage to go in and tell my wife how I really feel. I finally unlock and open the door, to see my pregnant wife.

She's smiling like always, with those big beautiful brown eyes. Does the house feels more chilly than normal, or is it just me? I sit down on the couch and she offers me some whisky and snacks like usual.

"Today, I just want whisky." I tell her.

I swirl it in my cup, the dark liquid making a whirlpool. I drink it in one big gulp and walk over to the cabinet to get myself a refill. I'm so nervous I slam that one also.

"What's wrong?" She asks me.

I tell her I think it's best if I leave her. "I'm not ready to be a father yet."

She looks at me with terror and confusion. She offers to make some dinner, ignoring what I just said.

"I need to go for a walk and clear my head"I tell her, to not to make a big fuss. It will not be too good for my job. She hurries to the kitchen to make dinner anyway, sniffling while she shuffles across the floor.

Instead of heading out the door and running away from my problem, I sit down in my chair and look out the window staring at a pastel yellow car that I hate.

"Why would anyone buy a car that color?" I say to myself.

I snap out of it and I tell her I'll give her money for her and the baby to be taken care of. I stare at a bird sitting motionless on a branch for a while, then I hear her walking towards me. My guess is that she would just start crying. So I start to turn around and I see her swinging a hunk of lamb at me. Time slows down, then all I see is black.

I whisper to myself, "Is this how I will die?"

My mind flashes seeing my life's greatest moments. Scoring my first touchdown in high school football, making my father proud…getting a blue ribbon in the hotdog eating contest at the State Fair…catching a giant walleye in the BWCA. Last of all, I see my wife on our wedding day. She was wearing that beautiful white dress with patterns, looking like she was a goddess. Little did I know…in the blink of an eye, it's all gone.

Cue the Dead-Beat Drop

By Sadie Weeks

I'm driving home from work after a long day. I'm deciding whether to tell my wife about the affair tonight or not. Yes, she is carrying my child, but I cannot drag this on any longer. I pull into the driveway wondering how I'm going to tell her, I get out of my car and walk to the door.

I walk in and she greets me with a kiss. She asks me if I want a drink and of course I do, but I'm going to need a much stronger one this night then others. She pours me a drink, first a fresh ice cube and then warm whiskey over it. We sit in silence as I'm sipping my drink, she asks me if I'm hungry, I refuse because I don't want to worry her after what I'm going to say. We sit in silence after and I sip the whiskey and contemplate whether she will be able to take what I'm going to say or not.

I'm deciding whether to tell my wife about the affair tonight or not. Yes, she is carrying my child, but I cannot drag this on any longer.

Once again she asks if I'm hungry, annoyed I say no, but she insists and says she'll get me crackers. I'm over this, I said I'm not hungry already. This time, I yell at her to sit down. I look at her and then notice my drink is almost gone, I swallow the rest, the ice cube clanking on the bottom of the empty cup. Then got up to pour another one, this time with much more whisky. I looked at her and she had a frightened look on her face. I could tell she was tensing up.

This was my time.

"Honey, I have something to tell you, I've been having an affair with someone from work for a few months now and I got her pregnant. You see this is just too much for me to handle with you too, so I'm leaving. I'll give you some money. And I'm going to eat out tonight." I say looking out the window at the sun setting with a worried look on my face, feeling the regret but also a rush of relief brush over me.

She stands up, looking pale and cold.

"I'll get supper." She says and walks into the kitchen. the floor creaking behind her but everything else is still. Even her footsteps seem cold, getting more chilly with each step. I hear her walk down the basement stairs. I just sit there holding my head sipping my drink in silence wondering what I'm going to have for dinner, if I even decide to eat.

I hear her hobble up the stairs, wondering what she could be doing down there, the floor creaking once again. I open my mouth, about to say I'm leaving but then I feel something cold and hard hit my head.

I fall on the floor and everything goes black.

No Better Time For Lamb

By Sally Keenan

Patrick Maloney leaves the police station with a smile on his face as he says goodbye to his co-workers. In reality he has felt uneasy all day, but chooses to procrastinate the fact of his current situation. The police station is not far from his house, merely 10 minutes away, leaving him no time at all to plan his words.

As he pulls into the driveway of his suburban home, he can see his wife, Mary, through the window. She appears to be content with herself and using her sewing machine. She had worked hard to create a loving home over the past couple of months for the life she thought she'd be living. Patrick exhales deeply and then gets out of the car. As he walks from the driveway to the front door he takes one more deep breath and opens it. Mary stands right in front of him, smiling ear to ear, as she takes off his coat she greets him.

"Hullo darling"

"Hullo darling" Patrick replies with little to no emotion, hoping she'd get the hint. While Mary makes the drinks, he walks towards the living room. As she comes over she sets his drink down and heads back to her sewing machine. Six months pregnant and hopelessly optimistic, Patrick can see her smiling to herself as he starts gulping the whiskey. Finally she looks up, slightly concerned.

"Tired darling?"

"Yes, I'm tired."

Silence fills the room as Patrick gets up for more whiskey. From the corner of his eye, Patrick sees Mary jump up from her chair.

"I'll get it!" She cried.

"Sit down," Patrick says, growing impatient. I have to tell her at some point, he thinks to himself.

"Darling shall I grab your slippers?"

"no."

Patrick starts drinking his whisky as Mary mutters something about policemen. "Darling, Would you like me to get you some cheese? I haven't made any supper because it's Thursday."

"No"

"If you're too tired to eat out, it's still not too late. There's plenty of meat and stuff in the freezer, and you can have it right here and not even move out of the chair." The room

grows silent for a couple seconds. “Anyway, I’ll get you some cheese and crackers first.”

”I don’t want it” Patrick replies with gritting teeth slowly growing angrier. Why does she have to make this so much harder for me? He takes a moment to calm himself before he approaches the topic.

“Sit down, just sit down”

He then begins to explain himself and the secret he has been hiding for months. The room grows stuffy and tense as her eyes begin to widen with realization.

“So there it is, and I know it’s kind of a bad time to be telling you, but there simply wasn’t any other way. Of course I’ll give you money and see you’re looked after. But there needn’t really be any fuss. I hope not anyway. It wouldn’t be very good for my job.”

Mary sits there silent for a few moments. Patrick knows that she was in pain but it almost seems like she is trying to erase the memories just as quickly as they come. She then stands up and walks across the room. A few minutes later she comes back with a lamb leg. Patrick grows confused but angry. I just told her everything and she decided to make LAMB?

“For God’s sake!!” He says turning red, “don’t make supper for me, I’m going out”



He stands up with adrenaline, wanting to get out of this house as soon as possible.

he walks towards the door, the room suddenly feeling cold. He looks out the window at his car thinking, I am about to change my entire life. The wooden floor creaks as he takes one more step forward with a new found hatred for lamb, and immense growing guilt for Mary. This is the way things have to be.

Suddenly he hears footsteps behind him. Knowing Mary was behind him he tries walking towards the door when BAM. An object as hard as rock collides with the back of his head. Pain grows inside him for a decimal of a second before he loses control of his limbs and falls to the floor. For about 10 more excruciating seconds Patrick Maloney is still conscious but too weak to move. He feels an anguish of betrayal, confusion, and hurt, but he also has an epiphany. He feels grateful, because at least her face isn’t the last thing he has to see.

The Bane of His Existence

By Samira Jarvis

Shall I, or shall I not? That is the question Patrick Maloney had as he drove home from work.

“On one hand if I tell her then she will be mad. On the other hand if I don’t tell her and she finds out later, she will be absolutely furious” He said to himself. As he arrived at the house, he decided that he would tell her the horrible news. He slowly walked up the stairs and opened the door.

Once he got inside, his wife, Mary Maloney said “hullo darling.” He responded with the same words. As she took his coat he thought I could really go for a drink right now. Then Mary walked into the kitchen to make him his drink as she always did. Once she placed his drink in front of him, he stared down into the swirling depths of the drink. It was slightly green, and very oily. It slowly swirled clockwise, and he stared at his reflection. Then he picked it up and swallowed most of it in one sip. He started to stand to go get another drink. “I’ll get it!” Mary said. “Sit down!” He said. And she did.

Once he got back from getting his new drink he sat down and said “Listen, I’ve got something to tell you.”

“What is it, darling? What’s the matter?”

“This is going to be a bit of a shock to you, I’m afraid. But I’ve thought about it a good deal and I’ve decided the only thing to do is to tell you right away. I hope you won’t blame me too much. There was a criminal that I caught today. He was a bank robber. We caught him before he could kill anyone or take any money. The reason I’m telling you this is because he shot me. The bullet barely drew any blood. The problem is, it was coated in poison. I only have one day to live. I have decided that I am going to still go out tonight to get dinner with my friends. So there it is, and I know it’s kind of a bad time to be telling you, but there simply wasn’t any other way. Of course I’ll give you money and see you’re looked after. But there really needn’t really be any fuss. I hope not anyway. It wouldn’t be very good for my job”. He looked at her, and she was so stunned by the news that all she could do was say “I’ll get supper”.

Then he turned his chair so he could stare out the window. My final hour approaches, he thought. I wonder what my last words will be, where I will die, and what it will feel like. Will it strike fear deep into my soul? Or will I welcome it in

all its horrific glory. Will I die some other way, before the poison kills me? Or will it be the thing that finally stops my old heart.

Just then, he heard footsteps behind him and said "For gods sake don't make supper for me! I'm going out."

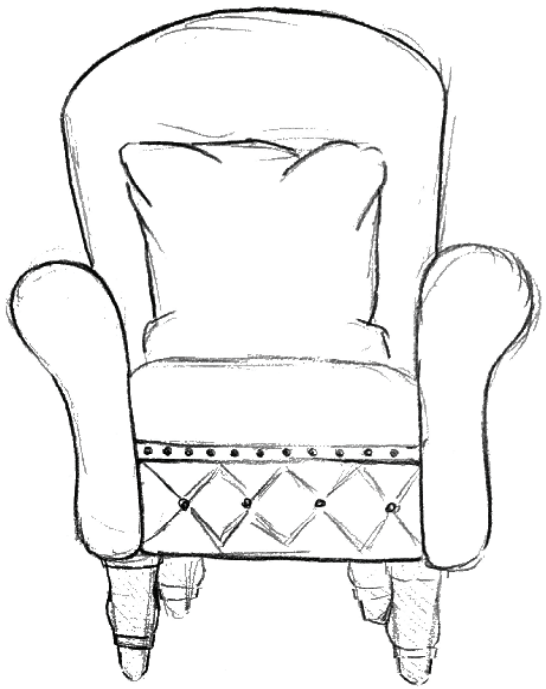
There was a short pause and then he felt a sharp pain on the back of his head and everything went black.

Yes, Long Gone

By Ben Casper

I've been thinking about it for a while. Work is one of the only things that can keep me calm well that and the dark delicious calming whiskey sitting at home. What should I do? I can't seem to decide. My wife is pregnant at home all alone, but what should I do? I couldn't leave her, or could I? Well I'll have to decide what to do when I get back from work. Fine, I know what I'm going to do.

I'm home now and I have to walk into my home that's warmed by a burning furnace. My soon to be ex wife treated me with the normal hello but this time the words felt hollow as if I hadn't even said anything. She's offering me a drink like normal and I accept blankly maybe this will help. But I can't get it off my mind. I sipped for a little then drank it all in one go with the whiskey flowing down my throat. I started to relax and sink deeper into my chair than my father gave to me. It's a shame it went to be passed on again. Well if I'm going to do it I might as well do it now. She's standing up? "Sit down," I say.



I love that feeling of the cool whiskey sliding down my throat. And she began to ask me where I want to eat tonight then I told her "I've got something to tell you."

Well, how do I even break this to her? I know that look of concern on her face is dreadful. I feel terrible, my stomach feels queasy and unsettled.

"You will be looked after."

Is she making food for me? After all that? What can I even do? It's like she doesn't hear me. This is the last time I'll feel my feet hitting the ground here before I pack. I wonder where I'm going to spend the night. Well that's her making food she must not understand. But she will by tomorrow morning be long gone, probably somewhere out of state somewhere really warm.

A soft pattering is all I hear that's her tiny little feet walking across the living room. I've heard that sound a million times before. Like the time where she told me I was going to be a father and the first time we looked at the house. How can I ever forget this place? Wait, I can't. I'm going to stay and raise this child. THUNK. So this is how I die by my loving wife who I was going to raise a child with.

Well not anymore.

A retelling of Shirley Jackson's Charles

THE TRUTH IS REVEALED . . . THROUGH THE TEACHER'S EYES

The Charles Parents

By Greta Crouser

I finish shuffling through the last of the spelling tests and get up from my desk. It was almost time for the moment I both dreaded, and in an odd way, looked forward to.

It was almost time for the PTA meeting.

Now, I don't normally like them anyways; parents demanding their kid deserves special treatment, complaining that everything was all my fault, starting petty squabbles with other parents, I've seen it all.

But that's not why I'm nervous about this meeting; this one in particular. It was finally time to meet Laurie's mother.

Ever since the first day of school, Laurie had been the bane of my entire teaching career. Which is quite impressive, honestly, with ten years on my resume. He hit me, shouted offensive words, even embarrassed me in front of my friend. But now it was time I met the root of the problem; his mother.

Not that Laurie wasn't responsible for his own actions, or that his mother was, but in my experience, that sort of behavior doesn't just come out of nowhere; it's either taught, observed, or enabled. Or even (and this is an option I wouldn't like to have to consider), a cry for help. She had missed the meet-the-teacher night because her other child was ill, so I was spared from having to deal with her there, but she is almost surely going to be there tonight.

I know Laurie, I know what to expect from him every morning. But I have no clue what his mother is like. I pictured either a demanding raging character who thinks their child can do no wrong or a completely neglectful type. The obvious third came to mind, but I don't like picturing it unnecessarily. Besides, if you assume the worst, the worst is all you'll see. But it seems to me doubtful that an attentive parent would let this behavior pass by.

I sit in the stiff meeting room chair, cake and kettle set out on a side table for afterwards. Like I said, I have no idea what to expect, meaning no idea how to approach her. It all depends on her character really, that's the method I use to approach all parents. The Stricts? You butter them up about how special their kid is and how well they're doing. The Laid-Backs? You can act normal and give a good report. But what about the parents of the bullies? The naughty children? They're the ones I am truly afraid of. Depending on the type, I'm either in for a casual dismissal, a tantrum, or I could even put the kid in danger. I probably produced a million different timelines in five minutes. I look at the clock in the meeting room: 5 pm. The adults will start trickling in soon.

When the meeting began, I immediately eliminated the mothers who attended the Meet-the-Teacher night, leaving only three women. But all of them looked warm and loving, if a bit uncomfortable. None of them had any hints of coldness, disinterest, or even guilt. This could be tricky. Was it too much to hope that she would just stand up and admit it?

The whole meeting went by without one mention of Laurie. After the meeting, the adults got their tea and cakes and began to socialize. I stood at the front, trying to catch the eye of one of the unfamiliar women. My anxiety came like huge waves before the tsunami. Oh god, is this really happen-

"I've been so anxious to meet you." The woman had come out of nowhere, "I'm Laurie's mother."

That sort of behavior doesn't just come out of nowhere; it's either taught, observed, or enabled. Or even a cry for help.

Huh… of all the timelines I conjured up, in none of them was it she who approached me. How did the waves subside now that she was actually here?

"We're all so interested in Laurie." I replied. Innocent enough, not indicative of anything bad. Not the better descriptive, "concerned," or the more mistruthful "pleased." "Interested," was an almost perfect middle ground.

"Well, he certainly likes kindergarten." She said, she seems to have a pleasant enough character. Not the sort of mother who would turn out a little terror like Laurie. "He talks about it all the time."

"We had some difficulty adjusting in the first week or so." Also innocuous enough, maybe sugar coated enough to give you more cavities than ten Halloweens, but "Your son is the worst behaved, rudest, most disrespectful child I've seen in my entire career." is a little too harsh. "But now he's a fine little helper, with occasional lapses, of course."

"Laurie usually adjusts very quickly." So, a hint of do no wrong I smell, "I suppose this time it's Charles's influence."

"Charles?" What in the actual world was she talking about?

"Yes," She laughed, "you must have your hands full

in the kindergarten with Charles."

"Charles?" I said again, "We don't have a Charles in kindergarten."

You know in movies when someone's face falls immediately with shock? They go from chipper and smiling to dumbstruck in a matter of milliseconds? That's a myth. Real shock sprouts and grows into realization. Take Laurie's mother for instance.

Her smile slowly faded, the light drained out of her eyes, her eyebrows went up, eventually her mouth was hanging agape like a fish. She just stood there trying to absorb the reality of the whole ordeal. I could see her denying it, see how angry she was at Laurie, see her trying to rationalize it again, see how angry she was at herself for being so blindsided, and then I saw her finally accept the reality. The whole process took a total of maybe fifteen seconds. It's a beautiful thing, watching someone grieve within the blink of an eye.

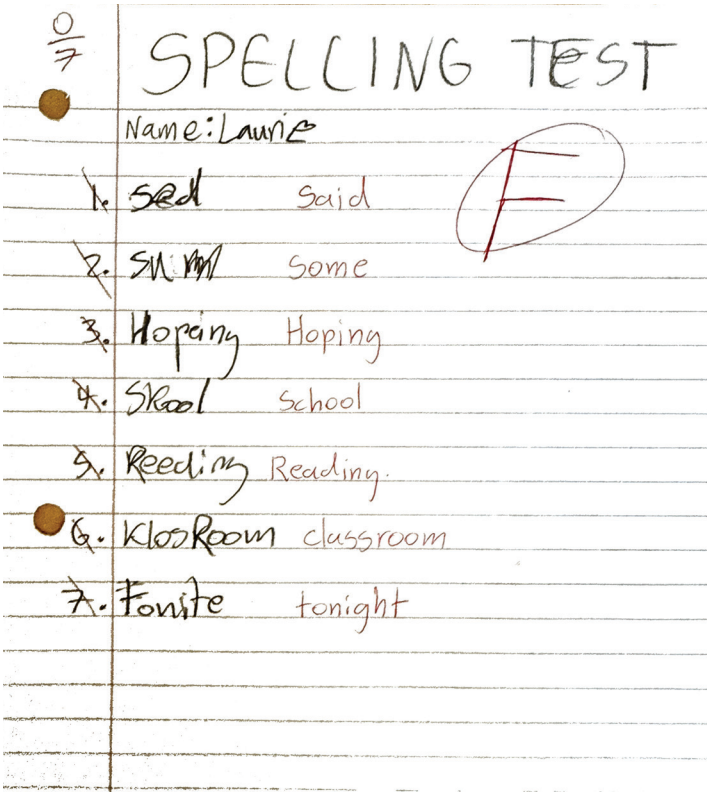
"Oh." Was the only noise she could make for a good moment. "I have to go now." She said and practically limped out the door.

She left, and I was left alone

"Oh." I said aloud.

It was that day I added a new type of parent to my roster; The Airheads. The kind that if you were to put a trumpet in one ear and blow into the other, you could play reveille. Or the Charles Parents, if you want to be poetic.

Was it too much to hope that she would just stand up and admit it?



The Mother Mask

By James Duininck

Oh man. I think, walking into my PTO meeting, what will I say if Laurie's mom is here? I enter the room with all the parents inside, a normal person would see a bunch of old friends talking about their beloved children, all I see is a monster behind a mask. I see all of the parents standing conversing, except for one.

Laurie's mom is sitting down, scanning the room, looking for something, or someone. I do not understand how such a calm, well-put-together lady could create such a chaotic child. I quickly duck behind another student's parents and converse with them instead, I was nowhere near ready to talk with Laurie's mom. Later, as I am trying to walk around and talk with more parents, Laurie's mom flags me down, oh no. Well, there's no better time than the present, I think.

"Hi," Laurie's mom says. How are you so calm? Do you not know what your child has been doing in my classroom?

"Hi," I say back, somehow still holding up my smile. "Laurie has been quite the student." I say, not knowing how else to speak about Laurie. "I must say he has had a little bit of a rough time adapting to the classroom though." Welp, time to have the talk about Laurie.

"Well I'm sure it is nothing compared to the craziness of Charles?" Now you're making things up to make your child not look as bad? After all of the misbehaviors in my class? "Speaking of Charles, I was wondering if his

mother was here, I was hoping I could talk with her tonight."

I pause for a second, "Umm, I apologize," I said, choosing my words very carefully. "There is no Charles in our class."

The expression on this woman's face as I finish my sentence— If someone fell over dead, she would have a calmer expression.

"N-n-no Ch-charles?," she's about to faint. I think. "I see. I need a few moments please." She said, paler than a vampire, and she walks out of the classroom, her face still holding that bewildered expression.

It's Not Always the Quiet Ones

By Crosby Andrianakos

I was just leaving the house to go to the PTO meeting — as I was the local kindergarten teacher — and I was discussing the issue of one of my students, Laurie, with my husband. Laurie used to be a horrible kid. He would cause lots of trouble in my class.

"He really has changed his ways" I said to my husband.

"I mean, from what you've told over the past few days, he has." He said.

"Well then, I must be leaving," I said, "it's almost time for the meeting."

In the car, I couldn't help but think that Laurie's mother better show up and speak of her child's behavior in some way or another. She must…

"Hello parents, thank you all for coming." I said as we started the meeting.

I scanned the room for any new faces and wondered which one was Laurie's mother. We were all on the little-kid-chairs and discussing the year so far. It was quite warm in the room. I was anxious for Laurie's mom to stand up and apologize for her son's behavior, but it never happened.

Once it was through and done one of the mothers walked towards me. Here she is, the infamous mother of Laurie. Here we go, I thought.

"Hello," she said.

"Hello," I said.

"You must be Laurie's mother." I said.

"Yes I am." She responded.

"We had a little trouble adjusting, the first week or so," I said, "but now he's a fine little helper. With occasional lapses, of course."

"I suppose this time it's Charles's influence." She said

"Charles?" I asked

"Yes," she said laughing, "you must have your hands full in that kindergarten, with Charles."

"Charles?" I said. What on earth was she talking about? Who the heck is Charles? "We don't have any Charles in kindergarten."

As if She'd Seen a Ghost

By Thomas Sutton

I put on my best outfit for this meeting — my black skirt and cardigan — and walk to my bathroom. I grab my purple toothbrush and put the crest toothpaste on my toothbrush and brush my teeth. After I finish brushing my teeth, I head to my kitchen and grab the box of fruit loops off the top of the fridge. Then I grab a bowl from the cabinet, place the bowl down, pour the fruit loops in, then I open my fridge and grab the 2% milk and pour the milk into the bowl. I take one bite, it's like heaven in my mouth. I finish the bowl of fruit loops. I think to myself "that was delicious." I check my watch and head out my front door.

I can't wait to meet all the parents. I walk out my front door to my shiny silver BMW I just bought. I open the car door and sit down in the driver's seat with my nice brown leather seats. I put my seatbelt on and I crank the AC up. Then I turn on the radio and it's my favorite song playing on the radio. I immediately start bumping my head jamming out. I check the time and notice I'm gonna be late. Ohh shoot, I think to myself. I turn the key, put the car in drive, hit the gas, head to the meeting.

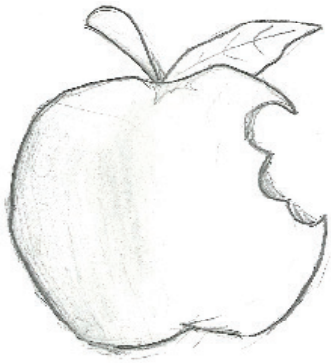
When I arrive, I walk up the steps and open the two big doors. I look around for a moment before I sit down on the cold metal chair. Then I see Laurie's mother walk toward me. She seems nervous.

"I've been anxious to meet you." Laurie's mother says.

"We are very interested in Laurie" I say. "We have had a little hard time adjusting to kindergarten."

"Laurie usually adjusts pretty quickly. I suppose this is Charles influences" Laurie's mother says.

Charles, who's that? I thought to myself. "There is no Charles in kindergarten" I say quickly. Laurie's mother's face goes pale as if she's seen a ghost.



A Loony Called Laurie

By Rafael Hanson

The bell rings and I sigh as I get ready for a day of school. The children rush in, screaming and playing around, pushing each other and hanging out. Except for this one kid, Laurie. He kept talking to himself, talking about some kid named Charles, saying that he is being "fresh." Then he used green crayons instead of red crayons and because of that. So I put him in a corner and he sat there, saying how fresh he was, and then when I told him he could be out of timeout, he started using the red crayons again. So I had to teach him a lesson and spank him.

When I got home for the day, I thought about why this kid Laurie was talking about another kid named Charles, talking about him in third person. And why he was saying he was fresh, while he was messing with the other kids who were doing their job and minding their own business.

The next day, as everyone was settling in, Laurie, or as he calls himself, Charles, was actually not doing anything! But unfortunately after lunch when we were out for recess, he was playing on the see saw, which was innocent enough, but then I looked and saw that he was on the see saw, but the other person was under the see saw and Laurie was bouncing the plank on a girl's head! So then I put him in a corner, and that seemed to work. Until we were having story time, and he stomped his feet. The next day was no better. I was thinking it would finally be a good day and I had my morning coffee, and I feel like I could tackle the world! But, as soon as I got in the class room, (I was running late) Laurie was back at it, and this time he was throwing chalk at everyone. But I was relieved that it was finally Friday and I could take a break from all of this tomorrow.

Two weeks later, on Monday, it was a cold day. Snow was falling, like, late November snow. The snow flakes, falling on my hands, and I can see the little arms or handles or whatever on my black gloves. Today, today feels different. The birds are singing, and as I walk in, the atmosphere feels different. I walk into my room, everything is quiet. No yelling, no hitting each other, just sitting quietly. As I go on with my day, Laurie actually signed up to be a helper! But I did not think this would last, he was only plotting. On Friday, my theories were proven. The day was going well, until lunch. At lunch, he told a little girl to say a very bad word and then the next day he said that word himself and I had to wash his mouth out two times to stop him from saying it again.

Today is Friday, the parent teacher conference. And today, Laurie went right back to doing nice things like the other times before, so I did believe it. But he actually lasted all day without doing anything naughty! As I go through the day I think that can't be true. He was just saying bad words and throwing chalk at the other children a few days ago! Why would he start being nice now? As the day finishes and the teachers get ready for the conference, I take a good look at the room. No crayons everywhere, no chalk, not even a spill of apple juice! The parents file in each parent feeling more bored, but listening as the night goes on until Laurie's mom comes in.

"I've been wanting to meet you," she said "I'm Laurie's mom.

"Oh yes," I said, "we're all so interested in Laurie."

"He certainly likes kindergarten," she responded, "he talks about it all the time."

"He's had some trouble recently but I do think he will do fine," I said.

"Laurie usually fits in quickly," she said. "I suppose his trouble might be from Charles' influence."

"Charles?" I said.

"Yes," she said, laughing. "You must have your hands full with Charles."

"Charles?" I said. "We don't have any Charles in kindergarten."

She sat there, stunned and motionless. until she finally spoke. "Wait, what do you mean there is no Charles? Laurie kept coming to me and talking about this Charles that was wreaking havoc, but then suddenly became nice?"

Then, it all came together. Laurie was never talking about a different person, he was talking about himself in the third person and describing what he did to his mom every day!



A retelling of Seventh graded by gary soto

How does Theresa take in Victor's antics

The Vocal French-Fry

By Millie Johnson

It was a Monday morning when I was walking in the halls of the school to get to class. I saw this boy and he looked really cool and he was kinda cute. But when I looked harder -- I think his name was Victor, and I think he might like me. He looks at me a lot, and I mean a lot. We might have the same French class. I'm going to look and see if he is in French with me this year.

Then when I got to class I sat kinda in the back but more in the middle of the room, then the teacher walked into the class and introduced himself. And he was talking for a little

what he was saying in French wasn't actually French.

bit and then that's when he asked if any one knew French, and Victor raised his hand and said some random gibberish but it was kinda funny. I think that the teacher didn't want to embarrass him, even though

But I kinda like him. He seems really nice and seems like a kind person. I think I'm gonna ask him to help me with my French at the end of class. I don't think he actually knows it, so I am gonna ask so I can get to know him more instead.


Memoirs

Memoirs

Memoirs were introduced in Quarter 2. Students read and analyzed several pieces of autobiographical writing, then selected key moments or phases in their own lives to write about. This assignment gave students an opportunity to reflect on their own lives and consider which techniques are most effective to help tell a good story.

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Confessions of a Boy-Crazy Teenage Girl

By Jane Doe

As an elementary school kid, I didn't really have crushes. I thought boys at the time were stupid and loud and probably underdeveloped, emotional wise. So as my friends on the playground talked about Tom Holland being cute and such, I just stood there and listened. (For the record, I think Tom Holland looks British in a bad way. I still don't think he's cute.) When 6th grade hit, I felt the same about boys for a while. I just simply really didn't have crushes.

My only romantic experience was a boy I had a crush on in 3rd grade handing me a glue stick. I gushed over that for weeks. Until winter break, I became obsessed with romcoms. I thought they were so sweet and romance like this happens all the time. My favorites were 10 Things I Hate About You and To All the Boys I've Loved Before.

Now, somewhat quickly, I became boy crazy. I had 13 crushes within one year, (not a single success.) In a way I thought my hopeless romantic bit was a cute, quirky trait of mine; that the guys I like being 4 '11 while I'm 5' 3 and them being terrible and such was dramatic, in a good way. Like tragically romantic like Romeo and Juliet or something, (it was just tragic.) I liked the feeling of the chase I got from having crushes. I thought that all of them would be exactly like the guys in romcoms and that we would get married and all that gushy stuff.

CONFESSION 1: I would write terrible songs about my crushes because I related to Taylor Swift -- in my own words -- "on a spiritual level." I thought if she could do it, so could I. Now, even though I had no success with all my "romances" I kept on finding new guys to like. I used to think having a partner was like the third and final gem I was missing for a "perfect life." My list being having good friends, being good in school and sports, and having a boyfriend.

Then seventh grade rolls around. Now, I must tell you I honestly can't remember most of Seventh grade, except that I was very anxious, and that I thought everyone hated me and that I was the ugliest person on earth and everything I did was weird and awkward. Now, I didn't have many crushes that year compared to last, but I was still slightly obsessed with some Shakespeare type romance.

The summer going into seventh grade, I met this guy through mutual friends, and we called ONCE. On February second, I went to my friend's house (we'll call her Emma,) and we went to her room. I looked around because I'd never been in there before. I looked at the wall and saw a poorly drawn stick figure titled "mí" by the guy (we'll call him Wyatt.) And I found myself asking Emma a million questions about Wyatt. I never in my life did I think I would like Wyatt. Before, I thought he was strange and short and a little chubby (which he was.) And I remember her raising her eyebrow at me at the thirtieth question.

I covered my face. "God it sounds like I'm in love with him!" I said.

CONFESSION 2: Later on, I would be. (Kind of, I think?) Later that day, I asked Emma for his TikTok. She gives it to me and I follow him. Later he follows me back and I immediately call my cousin for advice. Now at this stage, I didn't really know the guy. I was begging my cousin for what she thinks I should send him. I ended up sending him a funny video and we started talking from there. Now this story continues on for months, but to summarize: I liked him, he liked me, I confessed, he ghosted me, and he moved up a grade and became a jerk. This lasts all of seventh grade. (Except for the part where he moves up a grade)

I had an epiphany over the summer going into 8th grade. basically; "Maybe I'm great on my own and having a boyfriend isn't going to complete my idea of having a 'perfect life.'" Because once I took off my very rose tinted glasses, I realized something… teenage boys suck. Wyatt sucked, all of my 13 crushes from 6th grade sucked, but someone who doesn't suck… is me; and my friends. And something else that doesn't suck is focusing on someone who actually knows how to wash their hair properly, (like myself.) This probably seems prideful and maybe vain, but I'd honestly rather be prideful and vain than insecure and constantly worrying about things that don't matter, like 14 year old boys.

CONFESSION 3: The only person who can make your life "perfect" is yourself.

The Great Christmas Caper

By Greta Crouser

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury! I come to you with a crime allegedly committed by me and my family against my grandparents on December 24, 2024. I, on behalf of my family, wish to give the jury our side of the story.

The story really starts a month earlier, on Thanksgiving day. My grandparents were hosting, and every mem-

ber of my family (except my grandparents, obviously) took one item from their house. It wasn't hard. My grandparents host eighty of my extended family members. It's pretty hard to notice little things like that with that many guests. So in a way maybe this is their fault. Anyways, some of us went small, like mouthwash or deck of cards (mine, sadly.) But others went bigger. Maybe a little too big. And way, way too noticeable.

You know those weird toilet seat covers? The ones you put on the lid and that look like fuzzy anemones? Yeah, my mom took those. No mom, that's not too extreme. I bet they barely go in there. Everyone knows old people are just perpetually constipated raisins.

Others, like my cousin Cade (known lovingly to me as TaterTots, as of my aunt and uncle calling him Cader-Tater as a kid) took a swankier approach, bougie, even. My Nana had this infamous bronze statue of a thin woman in an ugly looking dress and hat to go with it. Her bottom half was strutting like she owned Hollywood while her top half thought she was a Queen waving to her adoring subjects. I think my grandmother found it at a garage sale or something. She dubbed it her "Bougie Lady." Not to be unkind, but that's probably the only kind of lady lil'ol TaterTots has ever picked up.

One of my personal favorites were my Papa's old cigarettes. My mom told me plenty of times that her dad quit smoking when she was four or so. But he, for reasons unbenounced to me, kept one pack in the basement coat closet for forty years. If anything is worse for you than cigarettes, it's expired ones. And on that fateful Thanksgiving day, who would so happen to stumble upon that ancient pack of cigarettes tucked on the top of the doorframe? My cousin, Megan of course! The details of how exactly she managed to stumble upon something on top of the doorframe inside of a closet, I don't know. Maybe she already knew, maybe she was drunk on potatoes and gravy, but whatever the case may be, the cigarettes were hers. For the purposes of this story, she does not smoke.

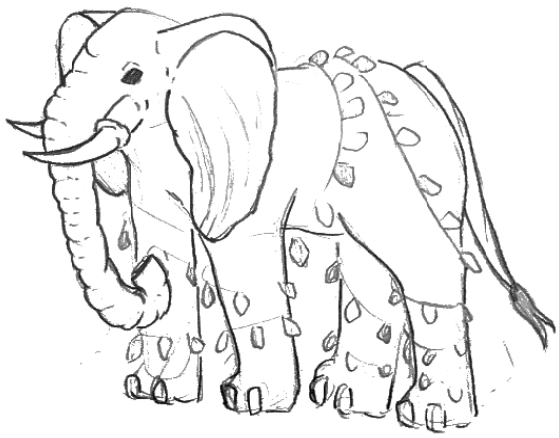
Other honorable mentions include my Nana's popcorn maker, one of those cat tunnels, I think there was a globe, maybe a bottle of alcohol, and a hat from Papa's closet proudly proclaiming, "I forgot to remember."

But ladies and gents, before you rule my family's guilt; fear not, because this story is far from over.

Fast forward to Christmas Day. Everyone is merry and happy and drunk on that good'ol Christmas spirit. Unlike Thanksgiving, our family Christmases are a quiet, intimate affair. Immediate family and some of my cousin's partners only.

If you were wondering, yes, my Nana did notice some of her things were taken. Such as the toilet seat covers, (guess she'd been drinking her prune juice,) and her Bougie Lady. However, she assumed it was multiple isolated misbehaviors of many guests. Everyone knows you can't leave Uncle Jim alone with the gravy after all. Did she assume some of us? Oh, most definitely. But did she suspect we had an agenda? That we were all conspiring together like the plot of an Agatha Christie novel? Absolutely, positively, not.

Towards the end of the night, my family plays White



Elephant. In case anyone in the jury doesn't know the rules, everyone brings a present and puts it in the pile in the center. Then everyone draws a number and the first person picks something from the middle. Then the next people have their turn and they can choose if they want to steal from someone who has a gift or take a new one from the pile. And then the person you stole from gets to steal again or pick again. And you keep going until the pile is empty. Fun, right? Well…

When the game began, we all got comfortable in my grandparent's big living room; some on chairs or sofas, some crisscrossed on the floor, with a sizable pile of colorful boxes in the middle. We drew our numbers and the game began.

I don't exactly remember who or what was opened first, but let's just say this:

My aunt Jess picked a good sized box in the middle, placed it on her lap, and tore the paper away to reveal… a box! And inside that box… was… a popcorn maker.

"Oh!" My Nana said, "We have one just like that!"

Slowly, we took our turns and opened our gifts. Some of us got candles or a sad deck of cards. Until—I think it was one of my cousins— someone opened an old pack of cigarettes.

"Are those Papa's?" My Nana inquired, her face covered in confusion and suspicion.

"Oh, haha, my cigarettes." Papa giggled. I'm not quite sure if he caught on sooner or later, but he could laugh about it.

Everyone in my family kept their mouths zipped. We wouldn't admit it, just gave some sorry excuse. Something like it was Megan and only Megan.

We kept going around, opening up gifts suspiciously similar to my Grandparent's belongings. Until it was finally my Nana's turn. My mom was insistent Nana opened her

gift. My Nana, my poor, sweet Nana, was ever too kind (and/or curious) to refuse. She picked my mom's gift, carefully tore away my mom's boring brown wrapping paper she's been using for years, to find… another box! But when she lifted the lid—

"My toilet seat covers!" She exclaimed.

My poor Nana was left with unwashed toilet seat covers on her lap. No, I did not stutter; unwashed, toilet seat covers. She immediately left to wash her hands and I'm pretty sure she threw them away (good riddance.)

We kept going (all lips still clamped shut) until it was my turn. My Nana asked me a favor; she asked me to pick the gift in the middle that was covered by two gift bags. Me, ever the people pleaser, selected it against my family's pleas. And when I tore the bag away—

"That's my Bougie Lady!" My Nana cried louder than I ever heard her before.

We only told them we were all in it together after all the gifts had been opened.

To put it on the record and for the clarification of any jury members left confused, my mom once found a TikTok where a family stole one thing from their grandparent's house and used it as their gift for white elephant. Then they slowly waited for their grandparents to realize what was happening. Well, I have to hand it to my grandparents, they found out sooner than the other ones.

In the end we all had a good laugh. My grandparents laughed along with us in an "oh, you silly kids" way. My Papa even put on his "I Forgot to Remember" hat and put one of his old cigarettes in his mouth for a photo. And we use it as the icon for your family group chat to this day.

I'll end by saying this, ladies and gents of the jury; Is it a crime to make memories? To pull an innocent, lighthearted prank to make a night worth looking back on? To pull the wool over two people's eyes if they end up having just as much fun? Thank you. I rest my case.

California COVID'n

By Willa Brandvick

We were flying out of Palm Springs. It was seven-thirty pm in March 2020, I was eight, and the plane just took off. I was traveling with my sisters. No one else. We just waved goodbye to our dad at the security gate. It was kind of weird though, there was pretty much no one else at the airport and everyone had these weird things on their faces. The only thing I knew was that we didn't have school for a week. I had no idea what they were or why they were wearing them. Me and my sisters were at the back of the plane and Freya was in the aisle seat. She had to sit there because of her knee brace. She ran into a tree while skiing a few months ago.

I was NOT looking forward to going back to Minnesota. It was cold and stinky and the town that we lived in was small and there was nothing to do. EVER. My only friend was Isidore Heckman, and he was kinda annoying.

The flight took off and after a super long flight of ***complaining and arguing and trying to sleep which just turned into all of us pushing each other till the flight attendant yelled at us.***

We landed at MSP airport. We got our suitcases and met our mom at baggage claim. Once we got in the car all we did was sleep. two hours later, we got home. I was still asleep so my mom left my suitcase in the car and carried me into my bed. I don't know how long I slept, but it felt like decades.

I went downstairs, poured myself a bowl of cereal, and had a few pieces of saltwater taffy we got from a shop on the coast. My sisters were watching tv so I jumped onto the couch, kicking my sister's fractured knee in the process. We fought for a few minutes, but eventually calmed down. I had no idea why we were watching the news, I would much rather have been watching something that was actually fun, like America's Funniest Home Videos, which me and my sisters loved.

"Boo, this is boring. Can we watch something better?" I asked.

"Shut up, Willa. This is important." Freya said back.

"You're watching TikTok on your phone. It can't be that important." I told her. "And how come you're watching a big germ?" Esme said.

"That's this big virus that's going around. That's why there's no school for a few weeks. The whole world is kind of shut down right now."

"What about dad? Does that mean he's stuck in California?" I asked.

"Yeah. But I'd rather be stuck in California than the worst town in the world. At least he can go to the beach and stuff."

"Shut up Esme, Winona's not THAT bad."

"Yeah it is." I agreed.

"Okay, well you're eight so what do you know?"

"More than you and you're in high school."

Freya got up and watched cringey 2020 TikToks in her room. Me and Esme went upstairs, got dressed, and went for a bike ride to Kwik Trip. We got sweet tart ropes and a Milky Way.

My sisters totally overhyped Covid. Most of the time we just hung out at the house and did nothing. We usually went

for a bike ride or ran down to the lakes and hung out there or watched TV in the basement. We put up a swing in the yard and would spend hours out there, reading, napping, or -- when it got dark -- played ghost in the graveyard. Freya and Esme hated spending time with me so I was super happy when our dad moved here, and I found out that there was someone my age in the neighborhood. That whole summer we did nothing but eat popsicles and sit on the front porch.

I was super happy when I got to go back to school in the fall. When we did go back though, it was different, and not just because I switched schools. We had to go into the side door and there was always a teacher standing there with a thermometer. If our temperature was too high we had to leave and we couldn't go back for two weeks. We also ate lunch in the classroom instead of the cafeteria. We were completely isolated from all the other classes. I don't think that I said a word to any kid from another class my entire third grade year.

Then, in fourth grade, Winona Area Catholic Schools decided that masks didn't do anything and we didn't have to wear them anymore. It's not like people in my school ever wore them anyway. There was one kid in my grade who had a mask made out of net. After that, things slowly went back to normal and it wasn't long before I almost forgot about COVID.

Snow Brawl

By Thaddeus Horn

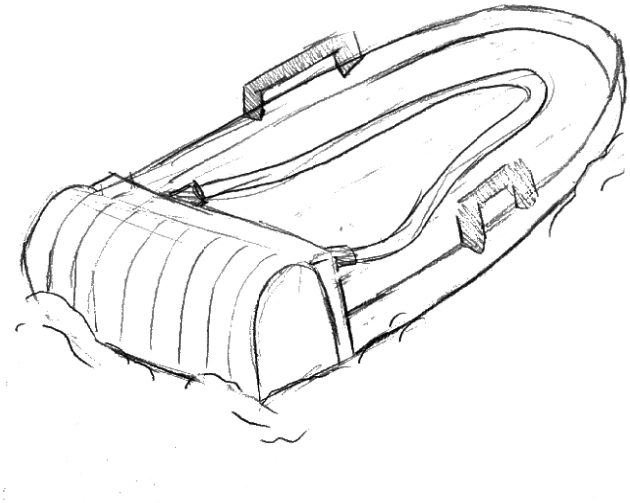
It was winter, snow blowing in my young face. I was only six at the time. This story took place at a friend's house; in his back yard to be specific. We were throwing snowballs at his fence to practice our aim. Well, after a little while we got bored and started brainstorming ideas on what to do.

Then we had it. It involved sleds, snowballs, and great aim. The game went like this: you have one of two roles that you would alternate between. Either you were on a sled flying down a hill or you were trying to throw snowballs at the sledder. Different areas were worth different points. For example, the head was three points, chest was two points, limbs were one point.

This game was going well for about 10 minutes, with my friend in the lead with three more points and I was down to my last throw. And knowing so, I grabbed my most sturdy and powerful snowball. But little did I know that was a bad decision, as that wasn't a snowball, it was ice.

I threw the ice. It whistled through the wind and snow, then a cracking sound pierced through the air. I was happy because I saw that it would hit him in the head and tie the game up. Just before it hit his head I realized it was the best throw yet and I started to celebrate. But then I realized what I had just done. I was thinking to myself, hoping that he wasn't hurt, and he thankfully was not. In fact, he didn't even feel it, which was even more concerning. But since he didn't feel pain we just kept playing.

Well, eventually we got cold and went to play inside. When we started taking off our snow gear, we saw it. He took off his beanie and blood started dripping down his face. I looked down at his hat, now resting in his hand with a red stain on it. I looked up again and he had a giant red lump and blood dripping from his hair and scalp. My stomach dropped. How I could not notice, I thought. I had blamed myself for it. We met eyes and we started screaming. His mom rushed to the room and saw what was going on. I went home as they were going to the hospital and my mom kept me updated. This was not the first time one of us nearly died together, but that's another story for another time.



This Is Our Street of Halloween

By Arlo Moreno

I woke up on October 31st, 2025. Halloween was big on my street. We worked hard to make it a special day, and now it had arrived. I had spent multiple weeks with friends and family setting the event up. The hardest part was likely the yard work. Each day leading up to the last month was spent raking leaves, hanging lights, pitching up tents, piecing together animatronics and practicing for the big musical performance with the Halloween Street band. "Today is the day, I doubt I have room to mess it up," I said to myself in the old cranium.

I got out of bed, got dressed, ate a pop tart, then immediately headed outside. All that was left was the finishing

touches. I hopped from tent to tent, house to house, making sure each decoration was perfect. The food truck had cancelled, its generator stopped working, so we ordered an emergency one. The food had arrived, the tents were up, everything was ready. I got into my costume and waited for my friends to arrive. Oddly enough, our engineer who had helped work on the event arrived later than some of my friends who were coming for the first time.

We hung out in my room for a bit until the rest arrived, soon enough the street was filled and the band was playing. I went trick or treating with them, stopped at the food truck, and it was a great time. Eventually it came time for me to play in the Halloween Street band. I gathered my music, my saxophone, and then headed out. My friends accompanied me the whole way there.

I had to wait for them to finish the song they were in the middle of, which was nice, it gave me time to warm myself up. I don't know if I'm ready, but it's too late to go away now, I thought to myself. I was shaking, pretty intensely, even though I had played with the same people every Halloween since our street started the event. Most of the band members were even my own teachers, and there were plenty of my friends watching to support me, yet

Once I got on stage everything worked out. My body calmed down as it always does when it's crucial and I played just fine. I got off the stage after my performance and went back to hanging out with my friends.

That was the main event for me, what most of my work had amounted to. I wasn't quite satisfied with some of my playing, but it was presentable, maybe an A minus. Although that was the whole point of Halloween for me, I think I enjoyed my friends' company more than the performance, as the performance only gave me a great deal of anxiety. I know it's going to happen again, I know I will play in the band again, and despite the fear, I still look forward to it. We might end the event by my senior year, which hopefully is enough time to build up my skills enough to the point where I can give my best performance for the last one. But who knows, the event could stop any year depending on how many people come. Luckily, it seems we are staying steady. Our biggest year had 1200 people, this year we had 1100, but with much worse weather. I hope it can continue for a long time, even past my involvement.

Daisy

By Bennett Mikesh

Last year around my birthday in August we got a kitten named Daisy. Daisy is a beautiful calico cat with an orange circle on her face. I remember that day getting home and seeing my mom carrying her in a carrier. I immediately thought to myself "yay!" I was jumping with joy, I ran outside through the black metal back door, off the wooden porch, and in front of the carrier. My mom told me to give her some space, so I did. We got her from my aunt's mom's farm. And her brother and sister actually belong to my aunts.

Daisy is a goof ball. She has a lot of these green plastic spring toys about 3 inches tall. She really loves to chase them around all the time every day. Sometimes my other cat, Georgia, will play with those spring toys or with Daisy. Occasionally, I will chase Daisy around and play with her and sometimes Daisy will chase me around the house. But when she's done playing she will lay on her cat hammock or in my brother's bed. She would sleep all day if she didn't know what dinner was. Once it's dinner time, she will annoy me and my family until we give her food. Her favorite time of day is breakfast. The second I wake up she wants food and she will lick, meow, and playfully bite me until I get out of bed. But the moment she's done with breakfast, she will disappear. She will wait until I have to leave for school to come out and meow at me for some reason.

Sadly, she has been confused because my other cat, Charlie, died a couple of weeks ago and now we only have two cats. She doesn't understand why Charlie is not there, she sometimes looks for her in the basement. This shows how wonderful and annoying Daisy is or can be, but we love her very much. She is a pretty important cat to me and my family.



Lake Hubris

By Edmund Karre

Oh no. I was flung from the tube, my head splashing into the water, next my legs, then and I felt my life jacket pulled up to my ears.

Context: I had a very bad idea. Over the summer break, at my grandparents cabin in Northern Michigan, 13 year old me had gotten pretty good at tubing, or so I thought. So I did something stupid. I challenged my grandmother to a contest. I could last 3 minutes with her doing everything to throw me from my tube. This was a farcical idea, and everyone knew it except me. She had had more minutes in that boat then I had on this earth

So at about 10 am I got on my life jacket; a pink, black, and purple one because those are awesome colors and because it was the only lifejacket that fit me. It was only now that I was having second thoughts. But I brushed them aside.

Oh no. I was flung from the tube, my head splashing into the water,

I hopped in, lying in my signature Superman position. But as the boat was being pushed out I started turning, a lot. This is the most terrifying thing as a tuber. But before I could even correct my position, I heard the engine rev, and the boat shot off heading west, snapping me forward, flinging me out to the port side. This was a bad idea I thought.

"#$@%!" I screamed, but there was no turning back now. And at that moment, my grandma turned sharp to port. "#$@% #$@%!" I yelled like my life depended on it. And again I was flung out again, holding on for dear, dear life. The spray was whipping in my face, and my then long hair was pulled all the way back by the wind. Now there is some strategy to tubing. The key thing is to stay on the inside of the wake; outside the wake, and you're screwed. But the faster you're going the harder it is to get back inside the wake.

At this point, I was stuck on the outside of the wake. And then came the eye of the storm. The boat slowed and my heart slowed, but then it started to turn and I said two words, "JESUS CHRIST!" and the boat flew forward. I was swung out to starboard, practically ahead of the boat and then I saw it, the wake. I got a solid three feet of air with the wind knocked out of me. And while all this was happening, I was screaming every profanity I knew in my head. I couldn't catch a break. I was thrown over the wake left and right and left and right, Port to starboard. To me it felt like an hour, when in reality I lasted 53 seconds.

My head broke the surface of the still chopping water. I could hear my grandma laughing from twenty feet away. I swam to the ladder and climbed on as my sibling pulled in the tube. "Less than a minute," said my dad, who'd been recording.

"I am going again." I said, before I could think. Everyone looked at me, dumbstruck.

My grandma smirked, "all right."

I jumped into the tube, catching myself on the side and pushed off from the boat. Again, I got that same feeling of deep regret. But this time, the boat started slow. I could tell she was playing with me. So I gave the universal sign for speeding up in tubing, a thumbs up. And immediately I was thrown over the wake.

"#$@%!" And then the boat banked to starboard. "For the love of god," I said and I went flying twelve feet from the wake. Then the boat banked hard to port going east along the shore.The houses were now replaced by green trees and the metal docks replaced by a rocky shoreline. Now, if you remember, I was laying in a Superman position. This is undeniably the most fun way to tube. It is not the best. The thing is that nothing is actually holding you in the tube. Since it's just your hands and as your weight is distributed across the tube, it's pretty easy to get flipped over. But what it does give you is control. As I was going over these facts in my head, I was actually lasting a long time. I had learned that if I clutched the side with my elbows, it was hard to tip me over the side.

At that moment the boat started sputtering – little jets of water came popping out of the boat in a sharpening of the gasoline smell from the engine. The next things I knew, the engine revved. "#$@% &!?*" I screamed, as the Century exploded off the line like a cat that's seen a mouse. The bow was at a near 45° incline and I knew I was done. My hands felt like they're gonna fall off, and every muscle in my body was on fire. I made the the universal signal to turn around, pointing towards the sky and swinging my finger in a circle. I felt relieved as my grandma turned the boat towards the dock so I didn't see the wake until I was already screwed.

Six months later

the clacking of a key board rings out. As text shows up on screen "I was very cocky and I think that it was important I got taken down a notch. And in the end karma came for me; two days later I got a really bad ear infection which meant I couldn't tube or submerge my head for the rest of the week." The writer stops, reflecting on days long gone. It was less than a year ago, but everything has changed. The person next to him is busy taping his keyboard and being annoying, but this just reminds him of who they used to be. "It was a different time then," says the screen as the cursor blinks, "if it taught me anything, it's that winning is not the key. The key is having fun."

Having a Snow-Ball

By Elliot Carlson

I woke up one day, not knowing that it would be one of the most impactful days of my kindergarten career. It had just snowed about a foot and my class had just been released for recess. I had the ingenious idea to make a gigantic snowball. It took all the strength I had and I needed to call upon some of my friends but eventually we finished it. It was a beast of a snowball; it was about two feet tall, and it had rolled up so much snow that sometimes it would expose the ground and get leaves stuck to it. But in my eyes, it was perfect.

At this point, we didn't really know what to do with it other than stand on it. So we tried various different games that involved the snowball. One of them was so fun that we all liked it and tried competing to see who was the best. That game was called who-can-move-the-ball-the-fastest. It was quite simple; just push the ball with all your might and see how fast you can move it. Everyone was decent at it, but me and Thomas decided we were gonna team up and move it at light speed. We started rolling it and I thought, "we're flying!"

Eventually we got to the hill by the playground. At that point the ball was rolling so fast that it left our hands and for what felt like an eternity the ball slammed into the fence. Then me and Thomas had a brilliant idea. Our school was right on a busy road where lots of cars came by going slowly. Since that snowball was so tall, when we stood on it, we became about two feet taller and were able to easily reach over the fence. So naturally we made a bunch of snowballs and started to throw them at the passing cars. We were only five, so accuracy was difficult and we missed probably thirty

When we were about to give up, I threw a perfect shot right at the windshield of a passing car.

shots.

As soon as the snowball hit, I saw the car pull over and I thought to myself, "Uh oh I'm gonna get expelled and be homeless for the rest of my life."

Before we knew it Mr. Luke was walking up to us in an angry manner. He said four words that I will never forget for the rest of my life, "Who threw that snowball!"

Instantly, all of the bystanders turned on us and snitched us out. I was prepared to face the worst. But instead of putting us on one of those medieval stretching machines, he made us sit out for the rest of recess. I thought that this was the best punishment I could have possibly gotten. There was only five minutes of recess left so we just sat on the bench thinking about what we had done. I myself could not have cared less about this punishment, so it made me feel even better about my decision. To this day I still reflect on this moment as the best day of kindergarten.

I Couldn't Have Hated the Whole Thing More

By Gordan Hutchinson

I am almost sure that for most people, 2020 was the absolute worst year so far in the 21st century. I was born in 2011 and my brother was born in 2015, so I was in second grade and my brother was in preschool. The pandemic hit the USA about March of 2020, and that's when my parents got more strict about basically everything in life. Probably because me and my brother were the stupid second grader and preschooler that we were at the time. If the pandemic happened now, I'm sure I would be a lot more responsible about it than I would have 5 or 6 years ago.

Lockdown started when I was still in second grade. When it started, school was not happening for weeks. And when distance learning started, I didn't do it for a while. Until one day, I did my first zoom meeting. For the rest of the school year, I did zoom meetings for second grade. Although before the pandemic, second grade might have been my favorite year of school. I was also obsessed with Pokémon back then, especially the Sun and Moon anime, but I won't talk about that right now.

Zoom meetings weren't that bad, though. There were some fun little things you could do on zoom. You could change your zoom name to something funny, you could chat in the zoom chat, you could even change your background. I remember putting, like, all my photos into the non-green screen background changer (It changes your background like a green screen but you don't need a green screen) and just playing around with it. Although sometimes the teachers would block some settings like zoom chat. Another thing me and my brother would do was we would make up Pokémon. What we would do is just put random stuff together like glue sticks or cardboard to make Pokémon. One time I hot glued five glue sticks together to make a body shape and added a bouncy ball for a head. I thought it was cool at the time, but looking back, it's kind of weird. I'm not quite sure why I did that. As you can see,

However, one of my fondest COVID memories happened in the summer of 2020.

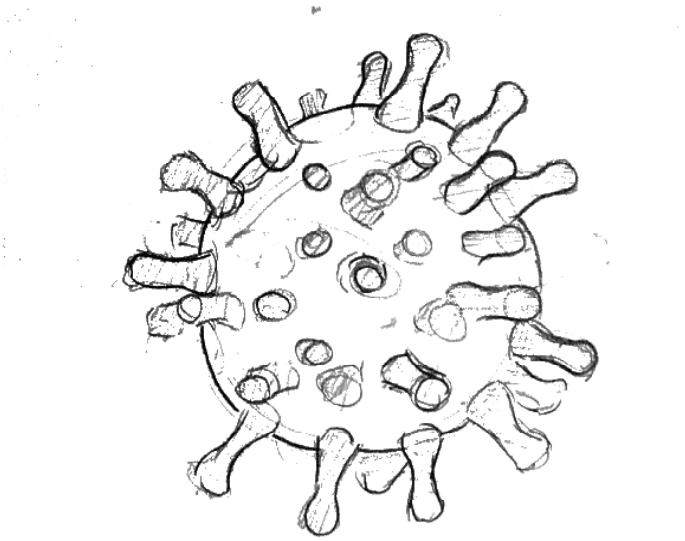
During the summer of 2020, though, after I finished second grade, things were bad. During the summer of 2020, everyone was freaking out. There were no COVID vaccines at the time, and my mom made a rule that we absolutely couldn't touch anything human-made we found outside that wasn't ours.

But one day, (I can't remember exactly so some things may be inaccurate) me, my mom, and my brother were at Harriet Island in downtown St. Paul near a river. When COVID was at its worst, we would have to stay 6 feet away from each other, and not get close to anyone. We were near the river, and my brother found some sort of substance or liquid, (I didn't particularly see this happen.) And he touched it and was even writing stuff on it. Once my mom saw my brother touching it, she freaked out. She figured it was spit. No matter what, it was COVID, so we had to assume it was something that came out of somebody else's mouth. My mom absolutely lost her temper, so we went straight back to the car, then grabbed some hand sanitizer as quickly as possible. I didn't touch the spit, but I was still forced to put on hand sanitizer. My mom also put on hand sanitizer. After that, she called my grandparents to see if we could still go.

I was waiting patiently for an answer, and when I got my answer to whether we were going to my grandparents' house or not, the answer was no. Then we drove home. When we got home, I went inside, went down to my basement, hid under a blanket, and started crying. My parents came down later to talk to me about what happened, and that we could try social distancing from my dad again later, and we did just that later in the summer.

We tried social distancing from my dad again in August, and luckily, we were able to go to my grandparents' house on our second try. During the social distancing, my brother didn't touch any suspicious liquids, and the beginning of the summer of 2020 is really memorable for me (in a not good way) because I remember how sad I was when I found out we couldn't go to my grandparents' house, and how angry my mom got when she saw my brother touching the (what she assumed and could probably tell that it was) spit. I don't think I will ever forget this moment in my life, because it's one of my core memories from COVID, and because it was at the start of the worst summer of not just my life, but a lot of other people's lives too. It was overall a really bad and frustrating time. The worst part, I was in second grade and my brother was in preschool, so we were both little when lockdown was happening, which absolutely sucked. COVID really changed my life, (not really for the better) and the entire world. I wonder what my life would have been like if Covid didn't happen. Hopefully nothing like this happens again in my life. We really do not need another pandemic.

If another pandemic like COVID happens, I will cry.



Ski You Later

By Ethan Mitchell

I really like winter. Especially when it's ski weather. Ski weather to me is when the snow is mostly packed down and isn't icy. When the snow isn't packed, it is very light and fluffy and harder to pass through. But when the snow is icy, it is very easy to fall or slip.

There are two main types of skiing: cross country and downhill skiing. Cross country skiing is where you ski relatively straight, and is great exercise. Downhill skiing is when you ski down hills that have many different heights. If you ask me, I like downhill a lot better. A fun thing I like to do while skiing is called trailblazing, where you go off trail and essentially "blaze your own trail." The fun part about it is when you do it downhill and all the fluffy snow flies past your skis.

One thing that is super fun about skiing is when you go with family. Like, when I went to Lutsen skiing resort with my dad and sister last winter and it was super fun. When you're skiing, there are symbols of the levels of hills in ski parks. The easiest is green, blue, black diamond and double black diamond. There were so many different and challenging hills like black diamonds and really long blue hills. We started off with the greens, then blues for a while, then we did a couple black diamonds. After we finished skiing the first side of the mountains, we went back to the lodge to eat the lunch we packed because food was expensive there. I packed a sandwich, and my dad brought chips and these cool oranges that were purple on the inside. I think I prefer them over normal ones.

Once we were done eating, we got back in our gear and took the chairlift all the way over to the other side of the mountains (the view was great). The mountain ski paths or runs for short looked a lot different than the other side. There

were steeper downhills and sharper turns. Then, we went back near the lodge to where the trick park was with jumps, rails and other obstacles. My dad let me try them out and I was getting really high! One of the times when I told him to video me I had a big wipeout on camera from the biggest jump. When I finally got the good footage of me in the trick park we gave our skiis back and back to our warm home with my mom greeting me at the door.

COVID Cabin-Fever

By Ciaran Sherman Conroy

During the COVID pandemic, it was really, really boring. I don't remember much about it. All I know is that I think I was at home, and then my mom got a call from the school saying that we would be moving to online learning and would not be returning to school for the rest of the year. I remember feeling both excited, and sad because I wouldn't be able to see my friends as much as I did at school.

All I know is that I think I was at home, and then my mom got a call from the school saying that we would be moving to online learning and would not be returning to school for the rest of the year.

For the meetings, I would log in for attendance, and after that was over, I would play video games in the background and not really do much. We had a lunch break at some point for 30 minutes to an hour, and I would play Roblox or Animal Crossing with my friends during that time. It was also nice at the same time because when I wanted to go outside and see friends, I could, since my old house had a playground in the middle of it. My friends and I would go outside and play together; playing games like hide and seek, capture the flag, and wiffleball.

My other friend and I both had babysitters, and they were sort of friends with each other. Both of them would take us to places like mini golfing and swimming at a lake. I remember when the Mall of America re-opened, our baby sitters took us there. And we went on all of the rides except for the SpongeBob ride and most of the rides that were made for kids younger than we were at the time. My favorite ride was either the log ride or the Pepsi coaster. After we did rides, we went to the food court and got burgers and root beer floats from A&W, which tasted pretty good for fast food.

Another time that was fun was on my birthday. I had got jellybeans that were called Bean Boozled. You would press down on the cap, and a jellybean came out, and it could either be a good flavor or a bad one. For one of them, I think it was mint for the good flavor and dirty laundry for the bad flavor. We ended up going to the park that was in the middle of our street. When we started, I ended up having to go first, and on my first turn, I got the good flavor. If you got the bad one, you had to say "Bean Boozled" and swallow it without using any type of drink until you swallowed it fully. Then you could have a drink of water.

Now that I reflect on what happened that year, I think that it was fun and also really boring at the same time. It was fun because I could be with my friends all the time, but it was really boring because I wasn't able to travel and go into my friends' houses at all.

Diary of a COVID Kid

By Lydia Manfred

I'm 13 years old. I live in Minnesota and I'm a pretty weird kid, but I was much weirder in my younger years. Probably like halfway through second grade I had a field trip planned. This field trip was going to be a blast! I mean so exciting! I was in Mrs. Sturm's second grade class and we were going to go so soon. We were carrying on with our life, just finished our second grade play and were just in an empty period of the year, that's why the field trip was so exciting. We were going to go to the Bell Museum. I had never been to the Bell Museum before, and turns out, I wouldn't for a while.

I remember hearing on the news about this weird disease in China and how people had to wear masks. I heard this in the car on my way to school, and I imagined a smoky dark street and people walking around with gas masks on. It terrified me. When I went to school that day, I told my friends all about it. They thought that was so weird, and wondered if they had the flu.

Mrs Sturm told us the news two days before the field trip. She said there was going to be a teachers strike, and that the field trip would be cancelled. I had never been to the Bell Museum before, and was so excited. My dreams were crushed. She later said we could probably reschedule our visit. She didn't know.

The strike happened, and I got a math packet to work on

during the small period of time the strike was going to be. We, of course, left our iPads at school like we usually did. Then, the disease, the Coronavirus or COVID 19 came. I remember going to pick up my iPad and we would all go one at a time in a time slot during the day, I didn't really get to say bye to my friends. It was kind of a blur.

My parents tried to hide this disease from me, but it just left me with more questions. All I knew was I would not really get to finish 2nd grade in school. I was a little kid. We had to pick up our iPads and we got an app named Seesaw (we would get Schoology when we entered third grade), and we also got this new google meet app. This was so confusing. Then when I sat at the dinner table, my parents told me about COVID and all the stuff going on, and I didn't really stress out or anything, still not fully understanding what was going on.

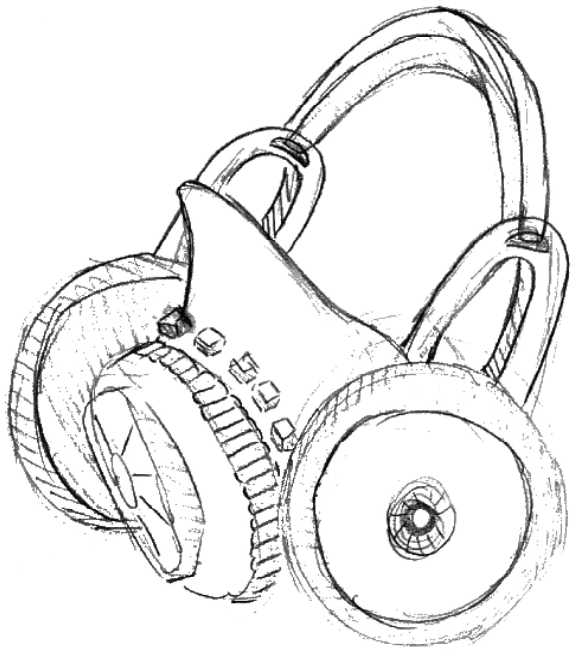
Math was . . . interesting. Of course, I still had to learn, but I didn't understand anything. At some point, I just locked in and it worked.

There were also the files. School iPads are not really like computers, especially the elementary school ones, so there were many times where me and my mom would hover over my iPad with a file that I needed to get to. I didn't have notability because no one told me about it. So to this day I have like, 7 of the same uploaded file in my Google Drive that I've never found.

I remember the distance learning PE class was so easy and it was probably not even necessary. My PE teacher would tell us to grab like stuffed animals or like pillows and jump over them, or like send a video of you doing 10 jumping jacks. I remember one time we had to record ourselves playing hopscotch.

I also got a pandemic pet. We drove all the way to another state to pick him up. I remember it started snowing and it was blizzardy on the way there. When we got him I fell in love. He was a little puppy who had such long little legs that he would hobble around like a fawn. He is adorable. His name is Fred. We named him that because our last name is Manfred, and we thought it would be funny if we made up this saying, "one small step for Fred, one giant leap for Manfred".

Soon after the strike, we got the google meet app and my parents got emails about when meetings would be and what the codes were. Soon google meets started happening and honestly, they were so much better than sitting for a long lecture. You were at home, cozy,comfortable, and really could do anything you wanted. The only person who really had their screen on was the teacher's pet and the teacher. Everyone else was mute, and had their screen off. I would join, mute myself, turn my screen off, split screen my iPad and then I would look up on YouTube "try not to laugh" videos and I would just be laughing and sometimes I forgot to mute myself and my classmates (and teacher) would hear me giggling and (sometimes) laughing out loud. Funny times, but mostly embarrassing.



COVID kind of put a split right through my friendships. When I returned to school in like third grade, I kind of just made new friends and me and my old friends just started being less and less close. COVID was like 6-7 years ago, but back then it was still kinda new to me. Those years were kind of a blur, mostly hanging out with Fred, and summer just mixed together with it all. Not really that excited for summer break when you've already been cooped up at home, you know? A lot of people didn't come back to school when we got back. They continued school virtually.

Going back to school afterwards was like it had never happened. COVID felt like a dream, just a Summer break. Lunch was so weird, like we had these divider things that were like white cardboard and plastic in the front so you could see the person across from you, but you couldn't see to the side of you. We had to wear masks, but we would take our masks off to eat in the divider. I remember people would stick hot sauce and ketchup packets in the cardboard and see how long it would take for the teachers to notice. One packet each day.

There was also the meatball count. There was an old meatball someone in our grade threw against the wall and we would count how many days it was on the wall. We made it to thirty-two, I remember. Then the janitor (his name was Gary. When he retired we took selfies with him, he was like our best friend. He cried when he retired,) took it down because of the commotion. It was high up so he had to get on a chair and knock it down with a broom. It was molding.

I think that the covid 19 pandemic was a large part of my life, taking up so many years, and that's why it's so important to remember the stories, because it's a part of my life, even if it was confusing and stuff, those were my younger life years that I will cherish and write down so I can always remember this. COVID. No one knew it would take that long.

The Great Sandwich Escapade

By Rain Tsuzuki

It was a cold day and I think my last at my Grandma's house for thanksgiving. I had just finished a game of hide and seek with my cousins. I was already stuffed from a heaping plate of French toast for breakfast and some animal crackers I had eaten sprinkled through the morning.

My Grandma always made way too much food for all of us. Us, being my brother, my step cousin; Carter, and his step brother; Brecken.

Somehow they always finished their food without complaining, but not me. I took forever to finish my food. It's not that I'm picky or anything, it's just that I don't really have a huge appetite.

Today's challenge was what seemed like a pb&j for a giant, with piles of peanut butter seeping out the edges. Everyone else was done eating and getting ready to go play in the snow banks, while I was stuck, stranded, and alone, at the counter with a burden of food in front of me. I managed to cram down two more bites, but every one was in agony. The only thing I could think about was the dry gloppyness of peanut butter in my mouth.

Then my Grandma brought out the leftover frosting from the cake she had just baked. I forgot my obligation to not waste food and how I felt so full a moment ago in an instant, as I rushed over to the KitchenAid mixing bowl to collect my share of chocolatey gooey goodness.

My grandma took one look at my plate and said, "finish your food." Without a second thought she sent me back to the counter in shame. I watched as my cousins and my brother happily stuffed their faces with the cake frosting that was supposed to be mine. They started an idiotic conversation about how great it was. It went something like, "blah blah blah, yum yum yum," "this is so good!" or, "oooh I llllooooooove this frosting."

I glared at them. It was outrageous. I leaned back in my chair and thought that if I let the food in my stomach settle I could eat the rest of my sandwich, but that was less than satisfactory. I didn't want to eat another bite. This plan would take too long, the frosting would all be gone by then! I had to think fast.

Then I had this very intelligent train of thought. If I could trick my family into thinking that I finished my sandwich, I could maybe get the leftovers of the rush of frosting eating. I racked my brain, what could possibly work? It had to be fast too.

Then, I got it. I could act like I was going to the bathroom, and throw away the two inches of sandwich I had left. Funny that it didn't occur to me that I only had one bit left and I could have avoided using my plan really easily, but nevertheless. I developed it further, I would go into the bathroom with my food in hand. It's definitely not weird to eat in the bathroom… I would act like I actually went to the bathroom, flush the toilet to make it seem more believable, go to (air quotes) wash my hands, and in the tiny trashcan next to the sink I would hide my sandwich under some trash. It was brilliant!

At least that's what I thought, but that was my childish brain that didn't really think things through. There were so many things in my plan that could go wrong: Someone could go to the bathroom after me and see I hadn't wet the soap dispenser, someone could think it was suspicious of me going into the bathroom with a sandwich and coming out without one, they could hear the crinkling of trash from my hiding of the sandwich. But I had a vision and no one could stop me. Mostly because no one knew of my plan. I was also actively ignoring the good part of my brain that was telling me not to lie to my Grandma because she trusted me. However, in the end, my sweet tooth got the better of me.

Fast forward to after I carried out my very elaborate plan.

Sadly when I finally got to the bowl of frosting all that was left were small globs that were stuck to the spatulas. But I was still totally thrilled!

Then I proceeded to forget all about my charade and play outside for the rest of the day until we left. But don't worry I remembered on the two hour drive home, and I thought about it nonstop for the next week. But my memory never fails me. By the next family gathering it had slipped my mind entirely.

It was now Christmas. I think we had just arrived back at my grandma's place. I sat down at the counter, the same one that had imprisoned me a few months before. I had missed my relatives very much. I was filled with the jolly holiday spirit as my Grandma hugged me. A moment later, she whispered in my ear, "I found your sandwich in the trash." My heart stopped. As I pulled out of the hug with wide eyes filled with terror, she smiled at me in that warm grandma-ish way, and said, "Don't worry, you're not in trouble. Just tell me next time that you're full, I won't get mad at you, and definitely don't throw your food away in the bathroom trash."

I was filled with the jolly holiday spirit as my Grandma hugged me. A moment later, she whispered in my ear, "I found your sandwich in the trash."

My heart started beating again, and under my breath I let out a long, "phewww…"

I learned from that experience that trust is an extremely important thing that you should really value, and that some things, well most things, matter more than that little bit of frosting.

Thanksgiving Karma

By Isabel Best

Thanksgiving, a holiday where you eat dinner thoughtfully made. with everyone eating and thankful for this day to be with each other.

But I, on the other hand, dislike Thanksgiving. The traditional thanksgiving meal, yep no thanks, getting together with family and friends, yeah I'd rather be alone at home, and the main part of thanksgiving, yep I don't need a day to be thankful. But every year I have to participate. In the past I never enjoyed thanksgiving but I never acknowledged the fact that I hate it. Now I can easily and truly state I dislike Thanksgiving and wish I didn't have to contribute to it.

On a fateful day of thanksgiving in 2018(i think, because I really don't know) we had driven up to a family gathering in the morning and later in the day we would head back home and celebrate again with closer family, that was the plan.

So I'm at their house and helping out with the cooking, specifically handling raw beef. My job was to roll it up into bite size portions then hand it off to the next person to have it cooked. My sister was also helping out with the same job I had but she had left and I was now on my own. So here I was standing rolling raw beef with more than enough still left. I am now pissed at Chloe and ready to stop but since I was around family I had to keep up my helpful niece/cousin/granddaughter image.

When I was done I rushed through washing my hands and went down to their basement where all the other kids are.

Leaving their house was amazing cause I will say I'm one of the older kids and I also dislike the rest of them so once we got in the car I was so happy. I slept in the car till we arrived at home. With a few hours to myself till closer family arrives for dinner I went to my room, closed the door and hopped in bed.

I woke to the smell of food. Arriving downstairs I greeted my family and watched as the food cooked. I looked over the stove as the steam rose into my face. We had a small cozy kitchen with a lot of the counters with food covering them. Over by the oven we had a turkey being baked and an extra smaller duck for me since I dislike turkey (it's not the actual turkey I hate but the stuffing).

Later in the evening, we set up for dinner. I set the table, which means I got the placements, the plates, forks, spoons, and napkins. I even filled up cups with water.

And also actually cups for other beverages. Once we sat down and started eating, I was looking around, seeing my family enjoying the food.

We passed around dishes with food. I mostly only ate the duck and the mashed potatoes,

Soon after dinner was over. And dessert came. It was really good. (I don't actually remember what we ate, I just remembered it tasted good.)

And after that, I kind of just got tired. I used all my energy and had none left.

I went over our couch and layed down, and just sat looking around at everything. The rest of the family was still spitting at the table. When we had to say our goodbyes and they left. I lied that my stomach hurt, so I'd be able to skip the clean up process (Which surprisingly takes really long) . So, my mom took me upstairs, because she wanted to confirm where it hurts. I would lie to her about my stomach and she believed it. After that she had told me to get ready for bed and lay down.

I woke up groggily after sleeping (for like, maybe 30 minutes.)

After a little bit, my stomach started to actually hurt, for an unknown reason it was an on and off reaction with the



pain. But it did feel better after putting pressure on my stomach the same way as if you cut yourself putting pressure on the wound subsides the pain. So I flipped over and had my face on my pillow. I lay like that for long enough that I was just about to sleep but then the stomach pain came back worse and soon I had thrown up on my pillow, mattress, and a few unfortunate stuffies (that are no longer with us).

Having just thrown up I walked over to my parents room to tell them, and by then it was kind of late into the night, everyone was getting ready to go to bed. or in bed. So when I went to tell them everything was dark and I could tell they were ready to sleep(it was also easy to tell because they were laying in bed). When we had walked back to my room, I was sitting on a chair watching my parents to see what they would do. It was too late to clean my sheets and everything.

So they just flipped my bed over. And had me sleep on that side(I did not like that idea because I still knew there was throw up on my bed). After that I was told to go to the bathroom and clean up. (since I had some throw up on me, and the taste of throw up was still in my mouth). Once I rinsed my mouth and washed my body I came back. They bought me a box just in case I needed to throw up again and told me to carry that and try to go to the bathroom to throw up, but if I didn't have enough time to just throw up in the bin.

I threw up 4 times that night, each in a different place! Bathroom(toilet), bathroom(floor), bedroom(right side of bed), bedroom(right side of flipped over bed). In the morning, I had missed school because I was sick. That day I was just bedridden(practically more like couchridden since I was hanging out on a couch). I was hanging out in my parents room since they have a bathroom in it so if I have to throw up again I will have less distance to travel. So all I did that day was lay down on their couch and watch episodes of Carmen Santiago. The reason I stayed home was to rest but I only really just skipped (because I hadn't thrown up at all that day).

when my dad came in and he put on the most boring thing in existence (I think it was like a news recap but boring with an old man talking with no entertainment at all.) I fell asleep in minutes and once I woke up I confronted him. All he said was that I needed sleep and he knew that the news recap would make me fall asleep. I just accepted it and finished the day in my own room.

Later my mom told me that she suspected I threw up because of food poisoning since I was handling raw beef and if I didn't wash my hands well enough it would make sense to the reason I threw and why I'm now sick.

I now remember that day as the Thanksgiving night where I faked having to throw up, and I actually threw up.

I do find it quite hilarious about that, though. Now, I do enjoy Thanksgiving a little bit more, but I still dislike it way more than all the other holidays. (I kept that mattress with dried throw up on it till 2018-2019, closer to 2020, very sad)

Sylas Greene and the Terrible, No-Good, Very Bad Lockdown

By Sylas Greene

When I first found out about covid I was 8, almost nine, and I was kinda sad at first, knowing I wouldn't be there with my friends. But I got over it pretty quick once I learned that I could just be on my Xbox after I finished my "work," which was never really work. My parents couldn't tell if I was actually doing it, so half of the time I didn't do any of it.

The first couple days were hard; remembering all of the codes and what time I had to get onto the meets and all that. But it was easy work when I actually did it and when I had nothing to do afterwards. When that was the case, I would do my meet and get straight onto my Xbox for 7-8 hours straight just because I felt like it. Probably was not good for me, at the time but whatever. But then once the first month went by, it got pretty bad because I wasn't really talking to anybody. I couldn't go places with friends, everything was closed, and I had nothing to do except play on my Xbox; which was starting to get boring because of how much I had done it for the past 30 days. It started to become more and more boring by the day. But the thing that got me back into my groove was Christmas.

Everything was so much better around the house. We had

I had nothing to do except play on my Xbox; which was starting to get boring because of how much I had done it for the past 30 days.

a bunch of snacks and drinks and hot chocolate and all that. Once I got into the feeling of every day, it was pretty easy. It was a routine at that point. But I started to get boring after, like, a month or two because it was just the same thing over and over.

Then my birthday came around and that was really bad. It

really sucked because I couldn't see my friends and couldn't go anywhere. That really sucked, but that meant I got a lot of stuff from my parents. I got a switch and an oculus I think, which changed the game for me and my family because the switch came with Mario kart 8; the newest one at the time. And the oculus we could download games and screen share to the tv, which helped us until the end of the year and the start of the new school year. When my mom got an email saying that all students who wanted to come back to school could. As soon as she got that, she made sure I was going.

Playground Politics of Pokémon

By Hal Johnson

I woke up on Monday getting ready for school when I remembered. Today me and all my friends were gonna be trading Pokémon cards at school! So I rushed to get ready and even ate my breakfast super quick because I was just that excited. And as I was waiting for the bus to arrive I remembered that since I had rushed so quickly, I had forgotten to even get my Pokémon cards. I quickly got them, and hopped into the car so my mom could drive me to school.

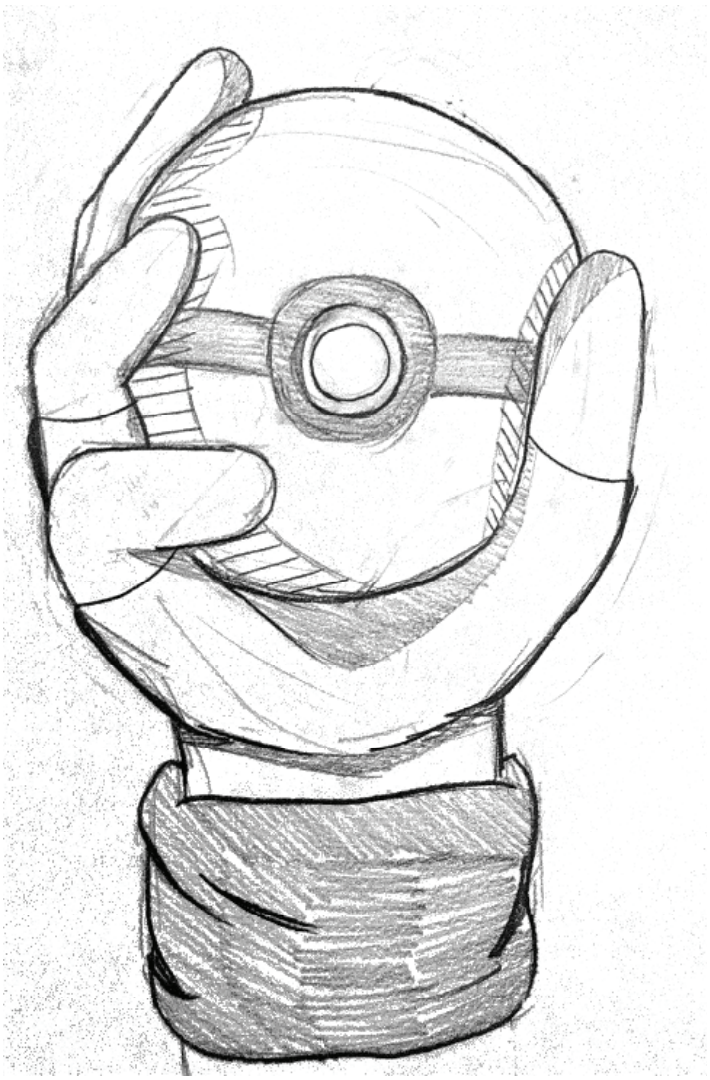
I got into Pokémon when I was probably around 5 or 6 and I quickly got obsessed with the cards and the game, just because it was so simple yet so complicated at the same time. And how the artwork was amazing on every single card and how the game had so many mechanics. I was so obsessed that I had a Pokémon everything; a Pokémon backpack, a Pokémon lunch box, even a Pokémon birthday cake. Another reason why I was super into Pokémon was because my friends were. That meant I could play with them and everyone else who played with them, and I could trade with them! When I was younger, it was super important to me to have pokemon as my everything because it helped me connect with my friends and make new friends from just a shared interest.

So when I got to school on Monday, we immediately started seeding if anyone had gotten any good cards over the weekend. Maybe if we could trade for some to see if we could get a really awesome looking card. And on that Monday I actually did.

I had just pulled out my small binder that could fit in my backpack and pulled out some cards I thought were cool when one of my better friends back then, Trevelen, showed me his newest card. It was an alternate art Glaceon laying on a snowy bench and at the time it was probably worth about 40 dollars. But it was the coolest thing I had ever seen by far, so I had to try my very best to get it into my collection.

So I started bartering with him to see if I could maybe trade some of my own cards for his single awesome Eeveelution card. My first offer was a Blaziken Vmax, but he didn't really like Blaziken as a pokemon, so he turned down the offer. I figured out his favorite pokemon was Mew, but I didn't have any Mews. I had to resort to my coolest looking card; an alternate art Corvi Knight Vmax. It was worth much less than 40 dollars, but I thought it looked just as cool and hoped that he would take it as a fair trade. And luckily, he did.

And just like that I had (In my opinion) the coolest pokemon card that I had ever laid my eyes on in first grade. So when my mom picked me up, I immediately showed her the cool card that I had traded for earlier in the day. And even she thought that the art was awesome. But we couldn't sit there and look at all the details all day so we had to drive home and I swiftly put the card into my binder.



Leech, Line, and Sinker

By Audrina Wilson

I have never fished before, but I have always wanted to. The only time that I have ever come close to actually going fishing was last summer at my friend Elsa's cabin. Her family has this cabin in northern Minnesota, and they go a lot on weekends. This time I had the honor of being invited as well.

On Saturday night, me and her were going to go fishing off of the dock because I have never fished before. About 6 hours before this tragic event, when we were swimming, we started to feel the slightest gust of wind that made the water ice cold so we got out. We went down the steep hill to get to the dock wielding a single fishing pole for us two to share, and a cup of leeches to use as bait.

The wind was now blowing very hard towards the west and the dock was swaying along with it. Elsa was trying to hook a leech onto the hook and they kept slipping out of her hands. The wind kept on blowing and the leeches kept on slipping. Then, when we weren't paying attention, the biggest gust of wind carried the little sea suckers back into the waters from which they came and the cup fell in too. I grabbed the net and fished around for the cup and eventually I found it. We knew that we couldn't do this alone and we went to call for backup.

Then we went back up to the log cabin and grabbed more leeches out of the fridge to use as bait again. But this time we grabbed her sister Agnes, and her friend Kacie, who were both nine because Kacie is really good at hooking the bait. Kacie brought her blanket down — which she had since she was born — because she was in bed when we got them.

We all went down and the wind was still blowing harshly west. Kacie was sitting down while attempting to hook the Bloodsuckers and she asked me to hold her blanket for her and I did. I was getting a bit tired of standing so I got a folding chair to sit on. Our mini entourage asked me to hold the rod while Kacie hooked a tiny devil of the lake and I stood up.

Then, I heard the biggest gust of wind of the night. It was like slow motion; I looked over to my seat and heard a whoosh followed by a plop. My chair was now swimming with the disgusting lake leeches.

We all started panicking and then Elsa and Agnes called their mom down. Their mom was just confused when we told her all of the events leading up to this.

"Who has a swimsuit on?" She asked.

Elsa looked at me because I already told her that I didn't take off my swimsuit after we went swimming earlier. I really didn't want to grab the chair but I was basically nominated to. So I took off my sweater and my sweatpants and jumped into the freezing cold water.

I had my Crocs on, so I could feel around for the chair on the barnacle covered lake floor. The water was at about my

the biggest gust of wind of the night. It was like slow motion; I looked over to my seat and heard a whoosh followed by a plop.

elbow so I wasn't drowning but it sure did feel like it with the literal breath takingly cold water.

When I finally got a grip on the chair I reeled it in as if it were a fishing pole with a leech on the other end. I pulled it up and struggled to put it on the dock but I did get it on as they helped me climb up. Kacie gave me a towel and I dried off pretty quick because of the west wind.

"I will always use this in 2 truths 1 lie!" I laughed.

When we finally got back up to their cabin, Elsa's dad asked us how fishing went and we told him that we didn't catch anything. To this day, I STILL have never caught a fish. But now I think that I was never meant to, and this event was the universe forecasting me to not cast out.

Card-Crazy

By Otis Olson

One thing that I'm obsessed with is sports cards (specifically soccer and basketball.) I got into soccer during the 2022 World Cup. I loved watching the World Cup; and that was when I realized that Mbappe is the best current player and that Messi is the GOAT (greatest of all time.)

One more thing that I learned is that Ronaldo is way too overhyped, (at least compared to Messi.) He scored only one goal in that World Cup and it was from the penalty spot. Messi, on the other hand, scored seven. The reason that I thought that Mbappe is the best soccer player is because he was able to give France a ride on his back in the tournament. One goal to remember from the 2022 World Cup is Mbappe's scissor kick. He passed the ball to a teammate, who crossed it right above his head and he basically did a backflip-karate kick mid air. He was able to score 3 goals. That was probably one of the most dominant performances from just one soccer player in one game, let alone tournament.

And to this day, Mbappe is still doing it. Last week he scored a super hat trick (4 goals!!!) in the champions league. So for Christmas I asked my mom and dad for a big box



of 2022 World Cup soccer cards. Once it got to Christmas in my stocking the first thing that i saw was a box of 2022 World Cup soccer cards. And like any normal human, I opened it right away. One of the first cards that was packed was a special edition Messi champions card. It was a very rare and expensive card.

After that I always enjoyed getting soccer cards and all of that. In recent years, because I've become a basketball fan (Timberwolves,) whenever I go to the games I buy a box with 50 cards and I always get lucky. Some of the best cards that I have pulled consist of a limited edition Messi worth $150, a blackout Pedri soccer card worth $200, an Anthony Edwards rookie blackout basketball card worth $140. My most recent crazy card pull Kon Knuppel rookie basketball card with a patch numbered to 50 (that means that there is only 50 in the world), worth $400.

The reason that I am still into (and/or "obsessed") with sports cards is because the 2026 World Cup is coming up and there are new versions and variations of cards for the event and there will probably be some very good cards that some people will pack and that will lead me to be very excited about the 2026 World Cup soccer cards. The World Cup 2026 will probably make me go broke because I'm buying too many boxes of cards. Or maybe because I'm buying too many player jerseys, but it'll be fun either way.

Mississippi

By Qianna Terry

One day I got home from school and I saw my mom packing the car up,

"Mom, are we going on a road trip?" I said

"Yeah, hurry and go pack two bags. We're going to be gone for 2-3 weeks." She said.

I ran into the house, went to the laundry, and grabbed my stuff from the dryer. As I got to my room I saw my dog, Lucky. She is so cute, but she couldn't come with me. I was really sad, but it would be okay because we wouldn't be gone for that long. I rushed packing. I threw my socks in the bag and they were not matching.

We were going to see my uncle. We loaded up the truck and I was in the way back. My little sisters were in the middle and my grandma was in the passenger seat and my mom was driving. Once we got there, I was so excited to finally see my uncle. He was so happy to see us. I was very happy too.

Me; my cousin, Mathew; and my sister Ani were playing on the trampoline. Ani needed water because I tripped her. Me and Mathew were jumping on the trampoline. When she came back she had this worried look on her face so we asked her what's wrong.

"Mom and everyone is crying" She said.

"Why?" I asked.

"I heard them say something about Katie"

Katie is our aunt who was pregnant and couldn't come. She also had three kids, two were twins that were six and a little one who was three. Ani was starting to worry and cry so we all ran in the house. My grandma told me to come to her, so I did. Ani went to our mom while Mathew went to his mom. She whispered something in his ear and he started to bawl his eyes out. I asked her what's wrong with one look into her eyes. A horrible thought crossed my mind. My uncle ran to me and squeezed me tight. Then I knew she was gone.

She whispered something in his ear and he started to bawl his eyes out.

"Grandma, is it true?" I asked her. Tears started to fall from both our faces.

Well-Suited

By Htoo Moo

My winter memory happened when I was little. I was probably 8 or 7. It was winter break. Me, my mom, my two sisters, and my brother went to a clothing store for snow pants or a snowsuit for each of us. My mom helped pick out my snow suit while my sisters and brother went to go look on their own. My mom and I found one that I liked, it was a pink and black snowsuit. When my siblings finished picking out their suits or pants, we went to go and pay.

One of my sisters picked a snowsuit just like me but in a different color; her color of her snowsuit was a dark grey blue color. My other sister picked out snow pants, the color of her snow pants were a type of light purple color, kinda like the color lavender. And lastly, my brother also picked out a pair of snow pants. His was a dark red with black in the inside of the pants.

After paying, we went out and ate at this Thai restaurant not so far away from the store we just went to. It gets really cold in the winter when you live in Minnesota, so going to a restaurant and eating hot warm food made me excited. When we entered the restaurant, I saw that it was very beautiful. It wasn't my first time coming to this restaurant, but when it's close to Christmas it looks especially pretty with all its Christmas decorations. I liked how they decorated their walls with raindeers, gingerbread, snowmen, and snow flakes.



Epicdemic

By Theo McLaughlin

When I was in second grade there was a global emergency lockdown. That was, of course, the COVID pandemic. During that time I would have to do school at home which is probably the best and worst part of my life.

On a typical day of distance learning, l would have my parents waking me up in the morning and I would go downstairs and eat my breakfast. My Dad would then tell me when my first Zoom meeting of the day was.

This was before I had transferred into the district so I did not have an IPad, instead I would use my family's chrome for Seesaw and Zoom meetings. When I would go join my first Zoom meeting my teacher would tell everyone what we would be doing today and when the next meeting would be. At this point the timeline would diverge into three possibilities.

The first and worst possibility was that we would have a paper worksheet to do and I absolutely hated this one. I think that this is the reason why I prefer digital worksheets over paper ones.

The second possibility is that we would get a digital "thing" for lack of a better word. This was the one that I always finished at light speed, or I got stuck and had a meltdown so my Mom would have to help me.

The third and most rare possibility is that we would get a YouTube video to watch about something that was meant to be entertaining. I think what really happened is that the teacher ran out of things to give us so she would give us that to pass the time.

After everything for the morning was over my parents would have their lunch break and we would usually watch an episode of the Amazing Race. Then my Dad would tell me when my next meeting was.

On some days we would have a teacher for another subject who would host a meeting. This again was before I transferred into SPPS so we had a Spanish teacher and a music teacher.

I absolutely hated Spanish class because we would always have a paper worksheet to do, and I would still be an absolute numbskull and take my time on it even though I still hated it.

Music wasn't as bad because the teacher would either have us watch a video in a meeting, or put videos on Seesaw for us to watch. After the video we would have a worksheet that would either be digital or paper.

Occasionally we would also have gym class which would consist of getting a video to watch then something to do for it. During the holiday season we were sent on a scavenger hunt around our neighborhood.

Once we were done with all of the work for the day I

would go play video games for a while downstairs in the basement. When our parents were off of work we would go eat dinner then watch some more Amazing Race.

After that, we would go to bed, wake up the next morning, and start the cycle over again.

What I can take away from pandemic life is that I think that that is the reason that I absolutely hate doing physical worksheets. I also think that this is the reason that I'm an introvert. I think that the pandemic had a large impact on everything, it's the reason we bring water bottles to school, it's the reason people work from home. Heck, it's even the reason that movies go on streaming earlier.

What I can take away from pandemic life is that I think that that is the reason that I absolutely hate doing physical worksheets.

I think that overall the pandemic was both the best and worst time ever. If you ever feel bored just remember that you had to stay at home for almost a year in 2020.

Cat Outa the Bag

By Jack Grahek

Ever since the 3rd grade, we wanted a new cat since our old cat died. My sister knew that my parents wouldn't budge, so she took matters into her own hands. On a crisp September Friday this year, I was hungry and I wanted some food so my sister and I went to McDonald's. As we were pulling up to McDonald's, my sister decided now would be the right time to tell me what she had been planning.

"Wanna know something cool?" She said,

"Ok?" I replied.

"We are getting a cat… but mom and dad don't know."

I was in shock. She then proceeded to tell me everything. Apparently her friend has a cat who just gave birth to a litter of kittens and my sister's ex-boyfriend wanted to give my sister one of them so they could get back together. His plan did work. She even got food, a litter box, and toys! His name was Clover.

"You can't tell anybody, Ok?" She said.

"Ok."

The next two days were the longest two days of my life. I wanted to tell my parents so bad. A day before we got the cat, me and my dad were just coming home from a marathon a family friend was in.

"Dad, would you be mad if Mia snuck in a cat?"

"Yeah," he scoffed.

"Could we keep it?"

"Definitely not."

It wasn't looking too good.

Fast forward to the following Monday, me and a friend were playing uno when my sister walked in the back door looking very suspicious with a bundled up sweatshirt. She gave me a wide eyed look and I knew the cat was in there. She rushed upstairs and put him in her room and left with my parents to go to her volleyball game. It was my job to take care of him as my sister was gone.

Once they left, me and my friend played one more game of uno to see who would get to see the cat first. I won, of course. I went upstairs to see a little ball of cuteness bundled up in a sweatshirt. He was so small. He looked so confused and scared. It felt so wrong to have him. He was at first scared but warmed up to me quickly. I played with him for a bit, awaiting my sister's instructions. A bit later, she gave me instructions on how to set up his litter. Once I did, I fed him… maybe a bit too much. He was so energetic and appalled by his new home. He gave me a couple scratches along the way. After a bit more playing, I started to set up a little box for him to stay in as I stayed downstairs and waited for my family to come home. I thought that I did a good enough job of making sure he doesn't make himself known to my parents. And went downstairs. When my mom came home, it was just me and her. I was just on my phone when I heard my mom ask me something.

"What is that noise? It sounds like a dying cat."

Clover got out.

"I'll go check it out." I said nervously.

I bolted upstairs to see Clover in the laundry room. I took him back to my sister's room and stuffed a towel underneath the door so he couldn't squeeze back under there. When my mom asked me what it was, I said it was the washing machine.

When my dad and sister came back, me and Mia knew we had to tell them. We grabbed dad out of his office and showed him Clover. He was very surprised. He felt so bad for us because we had to give him back to his owner. My parents were less than happy. We were told we had to give him away soon. That day has never come. In fact, the day after we got him, I saw Clover sleeping beside my dad while dad was petting him. We have had him for over two months now and he has definitely warmed up to us. He has gotten a lot bigger and louder, but he will always have a special place in my heart.

Trick-Or-Treat Trip-up

By Ollie Gonzalez

I love Halloween. Getting to dress up in costume and get free candy from strangers is

my second favorite thing to do. My first favorite thing is listening to Puzzle Park. As much as I love Halloween though, there was one that wasn't my favorite memory.

2024, sometime in September, I was preparing my costume early, because of how excited I was. I was going as a character called TIO. He was from a game I was in love with at the time. He was a tall man that wore a bag on his head that had a hole for his eye, a red bow tie, a purple suit and a matching top hat. My plan was to go trick or treating with my cousin, his friend, and that friend's little sibling. I was a little worried since he and his friend were going in matching costumes so I was going to look a bit out of place. but I continued with it because I really wanted him to see how the costume came out.

Finally, Halloween night. But there was a tiny problem. My costume wasn't finished. Despite starting it early, I had stopped working on it for a while and kept telling myself that it would be fine because of how early it was started. Now, here I was, rushing to finish it on the very last day. Since I needed to go to school, I had asked my mom if she could finish it for me. She agreed and left to go to my second least favorite place, wait, no, first. When the day ended, I returned home and my mother showed me the somewhat completed costume. I say somewhat completed costume because there was one part that she didn't have time to work on. His hat. Looking at time, I began to panic. I had to meet up with my cousin and his friend in 30 minutes. So I begged my mom to make the rest of his hat while I got ready. With the hat done and me in the costume I was now forced to run.

I threw myself in my dads car and away we went. Now, being an idiot, I had forgotten to bring my phone. This was a problem. Now I was left with no way to contact my cousin. So I was forced to rely on my mother. The only way to communicate with my cousin was by my dad texts my mom, my mom text my aunt, my aunt text my cousin. My cousin was getting ready at his friend's house since his friend was the one that needed to do his makeup. The problem with this was, instead of meeting them at their house, according to my cousin, his friend was scared to ask their dad about giving their address. Because they thought their dad would be upset with the question. Now instead of telling me that his friend was scared to ask, he said their dad didn't want to give strangers their address. This was not the case. So my cousin gave us somewhere else we could meet up. But again, there was a problem. He wasn't clear with the location. Just said we could meet them at a church. What church, Max? Because "the church in the neighborhood with the good candy" isn't good enough!

At some point me and my dad found the place they told us to go. Though it took forever. We waited in our car a bit because of how cold it was, but at some point it was taking too long. We asked my mom to reach out to my aunt. But this time, my aunt texted the dad of my cousin's friend. And he said that he was told nothing about meeting up with anyone. And on top of that, he said that he would have been perfectly fine with giving us his address. So that cold night, when I could barely see because of my mask, I heard my dad read out my moms text as she said that my cousin had lied and that the three of them had gone trick or treating without me. Before my dad told me this, I was already starting to cry because I knew exactly what he was going to say. My mom was also crying because of how bad she felt.

After that night I refused to talk with my cousin. He tried to apologize to me and my mom, but we could both tell he was only doing that because his mom told him too. And while I wouldn't talk to him, I also didn't have anyone else I could talk with. And it just so happened that soon after, one of the funniest things happened; something I had to share.

One day, I walked into my living room and saw my grandpa on the couch, closely paying attention to Teletubbies. I



found this so funny that I needed to tell someone immediately, and I only had one person to text. So after refusing to talk with my cousin for weeks, I finally texted him. Just to say that our grandfather is watching Telatubies. And, out of everything, we started talking with each other because of Telatubies. So the only reason me and my cousin are still friends is because of a children's show I saw my grandpa watching.

Sundae Soccer

By Elsa Humphrey

The bell rang and me and the other soccer girls started walking over to Humboldt to change. We got into the locker room and there was a line for the bathroom, as always. I set my stuff down near the door and grabbed my jersey to change into and get into line, which surprisingly moved pretty quick. Soon I'm in the stall and getting dressed. I walked out of the stall and put my clothes in the same pocket my jersey was in. The ice room was open that day, so I went in and grabbed some ice for my water bottle. I might have added too much, but I didn't care at the time.

I went outside. It was too cold out there so Sadie and Frances went back in. It was sprinkling out, so I understand the concern. We waited under the roof where it was dry and we were copying the cheerleaders' moves. I remember we each claimed one and I was the one with the red hair. I felt bad for them having to practice while it was cold out. Me, Ceci, and Audrina got impatient so we started walking to the Icy cup by ourselves, leaving Lydia, Frances, and Sadie behind.

While walking there, I told Ceci that we should play some pump-up music. She pulled out her phone and went on Spotify and got a pump-up playlist. We didn't really like that one, so we picked a new one. We picked a girl power playlist or something like that as a joke. When a part of a song we knew came on, me and Ceci would sing it loudly. It embarrassed Audrina so she always walked a bit ahead of us.

Finally we got there and I only had 5 dollars and Ceci and Audrina didn't have any money either. I got a sundae for myself, but I decided to share it with Ceci and Audrina. Audrina didn't want to share, so I told her to stay behind and see if Lydia, Sadie, or Frances had any extra money. We passed the group of "slow-pokes" as me and Ceci walked back to Humboldt. I ate most of the ice cream, but gave Ceci a bite every once in a while. Once it got to the end, I gave Ceci more of it because all the caramel syrup fell to the bottom of the dish and it tasted nasty near the end. We threw away our trash.

We tried to get inside but no one was there to let us in. We started worrying that we'd be late. We didn't wanna be late to our first game. Then we saw Sadie and she let us in. We were extremely relieved. Me and Ceci quickly grabbed our stuff so we wouldn't be late for the deadline of 5:30. We were early by like, 10 minutes. Which is good because we had time to get our stuff on.

Jeff was late. While waiting for him, we kicked around my little foam ball to practice. After a bit, Jeff came, and we started to warm up. We started by going around the cones, doing high knees or other stretches. Then we played monkey in the middle. I tried really hard to not end up in the middle, but still did. Then we did our corner shooting warm-up and got our pep talk. After that, I don't really remember what happened in the game. I could make assumptions; like we lost, or I played defense, but you can say that about most of the games we played.

We tried to get inside but no one was there to let us in. We started worrying that we'd be late.

I will always think about the time before though. Whenever we saw the cheerleaders after that, we would always point out which ones we were or tried to remember what moves we did. After that, we always walked to Icy Cup together for home games. I always got the small sundae that me and Ceci would share. The whole time I was thinking about the game that's about to happen. I didn't realize that I would remember our walk there or back. It shows that fun isn't always in the large things, but it can be at times you expect the least.

First Day

By Anna Funk

It was the first day of middle school, and I was stressed. I walked through the front doors of my new school to find that I was surrounded by 8 ft tall highschoolers who looked like they wanted to punch something, specifically the new sixth graders. I was fresh meat, and I knew it.

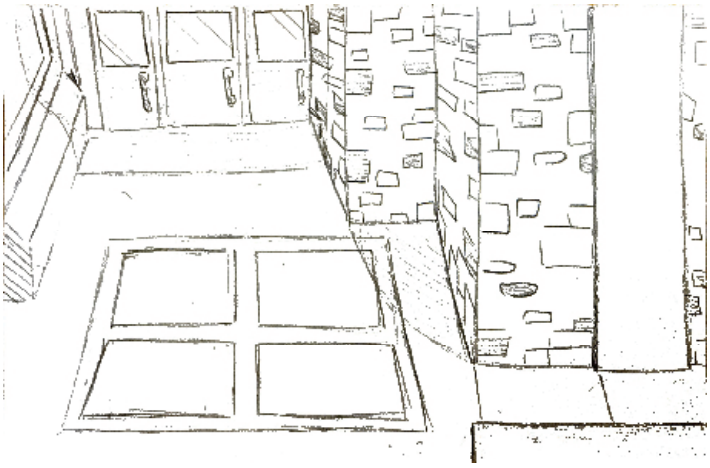
I was used to being the oldest one in the school, the one who knew best, the one who could boss the younger kids around, and the one who knew what to do in every situation. But now I felt like I was a kindergartener again, scared and confused in a sea of older kids. Thankfully I knew where my crew was, because I had had a meeting there before school started. From there a high schooler brought me down to my first class. I sat in my seat quietly, waiting for class to start. I wanted to make the best first impression ever.

After lots of introduction and a bit of talk about the rules, we were given our first assignment, to write a note about ourselves to the teacher. It was a simple assignment, one you could probably get done in a minute or two, but for me, it was different. I put in so much effort into that one little note that only needed to be a paragraph long, you would have thought I was a college student writing an essay that counted for half my grade!

After an hour and 17minof pure stress, it was time for math. I followed the group of six graders out to the cafeteria, where we met the class that had math for the first hour. They showed us where to go and we showed them. After more

unnecessary introduction, it was decided that we go outside for a much needed break. After a few minutes of frolicking in the grass with my friends, I went inside to go to the bathroom. That was when everything went wrong.

I got back to the big glass doors, and noticed that no one was playing four square, that was the first sign to turn back, but I didn't. I walked outside and breathed in the air, it was fresh and clean. Everything was in place, the trees, the bench, the houses, everything except the people. The first thing I thought was that everyone was just around the corner, probably sitting in a circle while they went around saying names, or maybe they were playing duck, duck, grey duck. But when I turned the corner, no one was there. I didn't panic at first, though worry was creeping up inside of me, as I realized that everyone was back in class. I turned around to open the door and go inside. That's when I learned something that sent me flying off worry cliff and into panic ocean. The door was locked.



I tried again and again, but every time I turned the door handle I was met with a little click that let me know it was a lost cause. I tried to think of another way to get inside, but I couldn't think of a solution, I could only worry about what might happen if I couldn't. What would my teachers think of me? What would my peers think? If I was locked out here all day, what would I miss in my classes? How would I explain this to my parents? What could I do?

I tried to calm myself by taking deep breaths, which didn't work, so I ended up just pacing back and forth for a few minutes. That was when my savior came. I saw someone, I don't really remember their face, but I think they were around my age. I ran up to the door to try to get the attention of who I can only assume was my guardian angel. When I got to the door I realized that they were already coming out the door.

"Hey, can you hold the door for me? I left my water bottle outside," they said.

"Y-yeah," was all I could think to say. I held the door, and felt the panic wash away, knowing that my worst fears would not come true, and thanking this random stranger for saving me from humiliation and possibly the worst first day of school ever.

After that I went back to math class, where my classmates were working on some worksheet or something, and I sat back down like nothing happened. What else was there to do, sue the door for locking me out of school? Honestly, when I looked back and remembered this, the first thing I did was laugh. I remember thinking that being locked out was the end of the world, and I didn't even know why. In reality, the worst that could happen was that I had to walk to the front of the school to be let in, sure it might cause me some embarrassment, but it was certainly not the end of the world. I know that every story can be used to learn and grow, so if I had to give this story a moral, I would say that you should always remember, it's not the end of the world, it's just a really good story.


Justice
Poems

Justice to Me Poems

Once students were able to recognize terms in prose, poetry terms were introduced. Students researched justice topics that were important to them and wrote poetry that connected with their chosen theme. Poetry provided them with a medium for students to express their passions and experiment with word play.

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For the Lost Voices

By Dhuoa Vou

Injustice for me is
Sexual violence stealing voices away
Leaving survivors with nothing to say.

because speaking feels dangerous
heavy and cold when the world
often doubts the brave truths being told.

– Amanda Culpepper
Warriors are not born, they are made.

Many carry the pain like shadows for years
hiding behind, smiles that swallow
their tears and fears.

afraid that they'll be blamed, ignored or denied
so for many choice is to bury the pain
deep down inside.

When sexual violence happens
It has the power to steal someone's
comfort laughter, happiness and ease

Turning confidence into anxiety and disease
Justice to me means understanding
the cost and safety of the trust and peace
that was lost

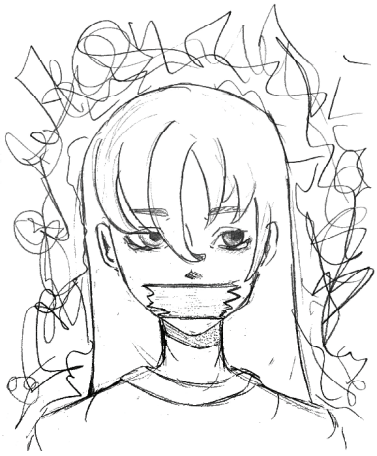
Sexual assaults does not end in one night
The pain can keep growing long after the fright.
Many ask the questions why don't they fight
or speak up for that terrible injustice
that happened that night

–Jess Michaels
I froze when I was raped by Jeffrey Epstein
in 1991 at 22 years old. It took 30 years for
me to learn that to freeze is not to consent.
Thirty years to learn it was never my fault.

We can help by not blaming or shaming
We can help by listening with care
To show them that we are there.
Justice to me means a world
where every brave voice that rises
today pushing the darkness a little away
and every survivor who speaks out their pain
helps build a world where Hope can

remain.

That is what justice means to me.



Take a Better Look

By Rajan Argawal

Justice to me means
Don't ban books
Don't keep things withheld
And if you do
Think harder about
What you're banning
Like
Brown bear
Brown bear
What do you see?
I see a "banned" sticker
Slapped on me
Bill Martin Jr.
Not Bill Martin
Think harder now
Stop your brain fartin'
I say maybe you
Should stop banning books
Do away entirely
Take a better look
Justice to me means
Banned book clubs
Aren't illegal
Not preventing free speech

The 1st amendment's legal
Justice to me means
Drop that graph to zero
Censorship to nonexist
More authors our heroes
This is justice to me.

The Water's Cry

By Isabelle Thapaw

The water is filled with toxins
Whether its plastic in the sea
or chemicals in the lakes
where it kills all the animals
or pollutes their water
They'll never care
As the shores clutter with bottles
The animals find themselves confused
The river used to sparkle bright
and clear enough to see the sand
but now it's just a messy sight
because of what we've done to the land
we throw our trash right in the stream
like plastic bags and soda cans
Once serene now it's just a waking dream
Destroyed by all our selfish plans
The ocean and rivers aren't just a sink
to wash away our grime and dirt
its actually the water that we drink
and when we poison it, were hurt

Being Trans

By Arlo Moreno

Being transgender.
Being trans isn't fraud.
Being trans faces opposition.
Being trans isn't new.
Being trans isn't an issue.
Being trans means a lot.
Being trans means being comfortable.

They are the ones who disapprove.
They are the ones who pass the bills.
They are the ones 'uncomfortable.'
They are the ones who can't accept.
They are the ones filled with hate.
They are the ones who alienate.
They are the ones named, Texas, Florida, etc…
Can't we stop them?
Can't we prevent this?
Can't we end the hate?
Can't we prove ourselves?
Can't we explain?
Can't we live our way?
Can't we all understand and agree for peace?

It would be a safe place.
It would not be so bad for them.
It would be an easier country to inhabit.
It would fit the title of 'freedom.'
It would surely stop much hate.
It would be very cool for us all.
It SHOULD be an amazing world,
but they can't accept being trans.

"It's Not an Emergency"

By Charlotte Scheffing

Justice to me means
The right to choose.
Don't look at the

Kids,

On Mother's Day
Without mothers,
Because you said
"It's not an emergency."

People told Tierra Walker
"It's not an emergency."
Because of fears
For their jobs
Putting the doctor before the

Patient.

The patient,
Who's life is in your hands
But you say
"It's not an emergency."

Josseli Barnica,
Yeniifer Alvarez-Estrada Glick,
Amber Nicole Therman,
Candi Miller,

Porsha Ngumezi,
Taysha Wikinson Sobieski,
Nevah Crain,
And Ciji Grahm
Are all people
Who are no longer with us
Because someone said,

“It’s not an emergency”

What about teens
Who are forced
To give birth to a child
As a

Child.

Justice to me means
My body
My choice.
Isn’t a
Question,
It’s a statement.

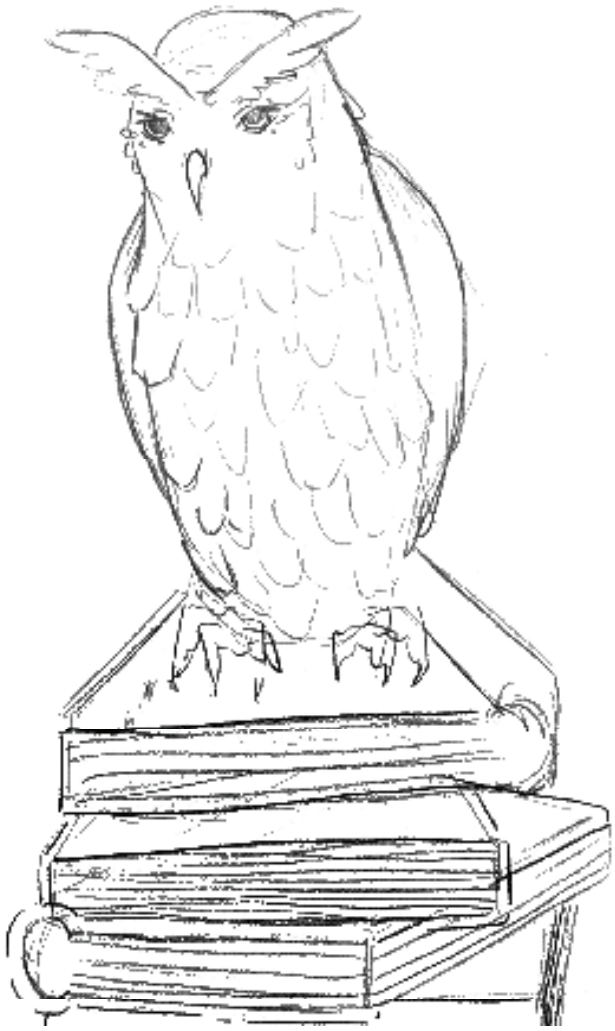
Our Class

By Chester Treziok

I peer through the window of this
godforsaken classroom
at the kids playing outside
their skin white the walls of their schoolhouse
then I look back to the class I am in
at our skin
at our clothes
at our walls

At this room full of envy like
that of Brutus to Cesar
I want to say that I don’t care
that it doesn’t hurt to see those happy kids
learning more than I ever could
to hear them complain about a privilege
that I wish I could have

All I can do is look
and hope one day that I can have it too
they have knowledge
But knowledge is nothing without wisdom
without wisdom knowledge is argent
its rude
its holding its self just out of reach
from anyone it doesn’t deem worthy of it
wisdom keeps it in check
wisdom is the hand that holds you tight
on the nights that knowledge refuses to come near
and wisdom finds a way
to trick knowledge into finding its way
so for know they will have their knowledge
and our wisdom will always find a way



to bring us the justice
the justice that we’ve spent years praying for
the justice that we continue to fight for
and will for generations to come
because knowledge is nothing but a bratty child
that’s convinced itself its better
just because it can read and write
but it would be worth nothing without wisdom

wisdom is the mother
with calloused hands rough with age
wisdom is the story
that follows you to the grave
wisdom is the love of a grandmother
and the hand of your father that holds yours
with such gentleness

despite its shakiness and old age

wisdom comes and goes

it's the air you breathe
the mistakes you make
that shape who you are
and will always be

It's what makes up the kindest people you meet
it's what makes up the warm hug from your grandma
its the embrace of someone you will love
even after they pass
its the words of kindness shared by a stranger
that let you cry on their shoulder

Knowledge is spoiled child of a mother who's trying
wisdom is the mother of a bratty child
that she can't help but worry about

knowledge is thinking you're always right
wisdom is accepting when your wrong

knowledge is having the words
wisdom is knowing when and how to use them

Ash on the Burned Ground

By Louden Buetow

Justice to me is
climate change
helping the world that helped us
Help the ground that we stand on
help each other

When we use fossil fuels
and burn the trees
the smoke that covers the blue
we won't be able to breathe
We wouldn't have helped each other

smoke rising above the trees that used to be
as the fire consumes the forests
the ash on the ground and
the grey and fiery wood
laying on the grass that is now burned

make the world better
Plant the trees that let us breath
Save the water we drink
help the land and animals we eat
help each other

When the world is better
kids won't have to be worried they might
struggle to breathe when outside
They can see the blue sky
they helped each other

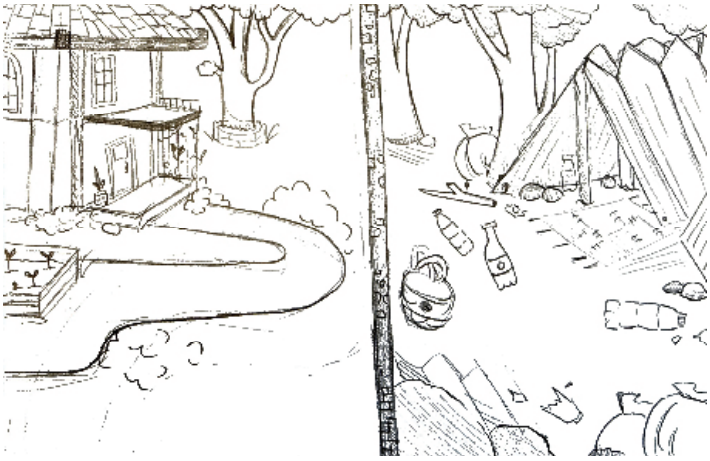


The Big Gap

By Vivian Yang

The Big Gap Some people have a lot of things
While others don't quite have enough
One house is large with a big gate
The other has a broken plate
One kid gets toys that are brand new
While the other has to make them
One kid gets a giant steak
While the other gets a tiny cake
The man sits in a spinning chair
With expensive shoes and perfectly styled hair
He counts his money on a screen
The biggest pile you'd ever seen
But down the long street,
a mom works late
With 3 big jobs on her plate
She tires her feet and hurts her back
But there's still things her children lack
One hospital has a sky view of the city

With doctors that always have time for you
But on the other side of town
There's a hospital that's breaking down
Where the lights flicker and the wait is long
And it feels like everything is going wrong
The gap is like a giant wall
That makes people feel quite small
It doesn't seem fair and it doesn't seem quite right
To have one side dark and the other side bright
We should try to bridge the space
And make the world a better place



"Different Now"

By Xio Schicker

Justice to me
Means being able to live
Completely as yourself
To be safe

Matthew Shpard
Killed in October 1988
21 years old

"1988 was a long time ago-"
It was not
"Things are different now-"
They're not

Pauly Likens
Killed June 2024
14 years old

Justice to me means
Being able to be a part of
The LGBTQ+ community
Without being targeted
Without being murdered

Justice to me means
To live,
To love,
As yourself

I Don't Want to be Shot

By Zelda James

For freedom they said
for justice they said
for self defense they said
but I don't want to die
I don't want to be shot

1,262 children
children dead by accident
But that is no accident
nothing ever is

they cant go back
they cant have a home cooked meal
they cant grow old
they can't play on the beaches
they can't live
I don't want to die
I don't want to be shot

What did elementary schools do to you
what did the children dead do to you
what did children do to you
what did those families do to you
I don't want to die
I don't want to be shot

stop it all
stop the violence
restrictions
bans
I don't care what you do
just do it
something
anything
I don't want to die
I don't want to be shot

How many have to die
to make you understand
maybe one day
maybe one day there will be justice
maybe one day I don't have to be scared

maybe one day I am not scared
But I am today

for freedom they said
but we are not free from it
And justice is not today

Our Views 2

By Melita Alan

Justice to me means
being able to read
whatever I want to

Without a ban
Or a complaint
or second glance

Even if
it has
bad words

gasp!

You've banned and burned
Books for as long
as they have existed

And used it
as a form
of, like, oppression

But the
world isn't
just butterflies

Books
know
that

Don't ban books because
They're written about views
that don't match yours

unban those books,
because its not
just your views,

And it's
our world
2



I am a Woman

By Frances Healy

I am a woman
not worth less than you, man
I am a capable woman

I am a woman
I deserve respect simply
Without having to earn it
because I am human

I am a woman
My body, my choice I chant
Still everywhere I go
That's not the case

I am a woman
My body is not my choice
And yet it's everyone's opinion
That i must hear voiced

I am a woman
I take up the space
your hate creates

I am a woman
I constantly think of what I should wear
so I wont be
"asking for it"

I am a woman

Manipulated since birth by society
to believe I am useful for
only my body

I am a woman
Filled with rage
I will not settle down
or stay quiet

I am a woman
my body is mine
Every unique feature
I own

I am a woman
a masterpiece who
will not apologize
For breaking the chain

I am a woman
I know I am heard today
and have a right to be

I am a woman

Money Ain't Cheap

By Gideon Parker

Money ain't cheap
some of us get it
some of us dont
some of us use it
To buy a new boat
but when the day ends
we're all just the same
no matter the money
no matter the fame
we're all playing pieces
in life's strange, strange game
we need to learn how
to share and to care
to love one another
not tug on their hair
to work all as one
so we get things done
'cause life's quite expensive
and money ain't cheap

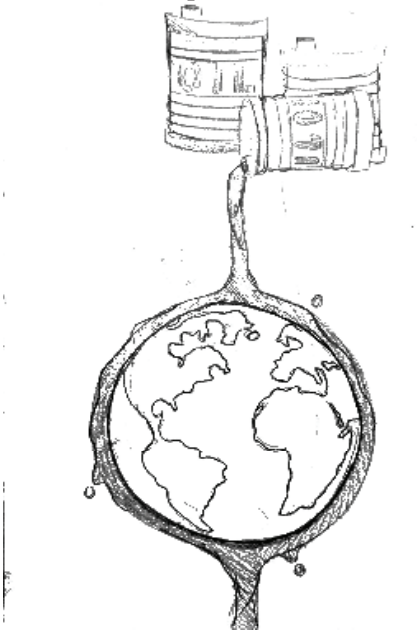
A (Not So) Perfect World

By Hughes Maloney-Vinz

Justice to me means
No more climate change,
we need more people helping,
getting nothing in exchange.

People everyday,
mindless,
not throwing things away.

it needs to stop,
it needs to change,
Before the world we call home,
is one we have to rearrange.
People protested in the streets,
wanting things to change,
Martin Luther King Jr. spoke up for climate,
when things felt unusual and strange.
Oil covered the ocean,
during deepwater horizon oil spill back then,
animals were getting hurt,
because people only cared about money again.
Now kids are speaking out,
like Greta Thunberg on TV,
trying to save the planet,
before there's nothing left to see.
Now picture a world with no litter.
Picture a world with clean air.
All of it's possible to stop the pollution.
We just all need to help.



My Body My Choice

By Rocio Hernandez

Justice to me
Is making your own decisions

Abortion, for example

I believe in my body, my choice
Because when it comes down to it
The decisions a woman makes
About her own body
Should not affect you
Because it is not your body

Those choices should be made by her
And her alone
Not you
Not a lawmaker
Not anyone else

And what about a teenage girl
Who was forced through something terrible?
Why should she have to go through pregnancy, too
While carrying all that pain?

Why should she have to worry about raising a child
Or putting it up for adoption
When none of it was her decision from the start?

I want to live in a world where women
Can make the decisions they want
About their bodies

Where they can walk into a clinic
And receive the care they need
Without people judging their choices
Or filling their hearts with greed

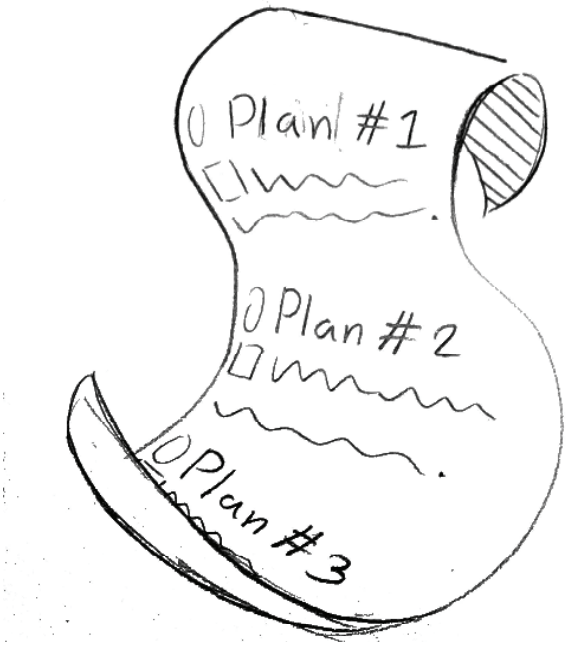
Without whispers, stares, or hatred
Trying to make them bleed

Where they can leave the house
Wearing what makes them feel good

Not having to worry about fulfilling
People's expectations of what's "acceptable."

Where they can go places by themselves
And still feel safe
Being able to walk home alone at night
Without their keys clutched in between their fingers
Just waiting for something to happen

That
Is what justice means to me.



Equal Pay

By Finnley Frolek

Justice to me means
Equal pay for all
The right to earn money
Without having to squall

Women for instance
Don't get the same as men
We have to work harder
While they don't even pick up a pen

Worse for women of color
Hispanic, Latina, African, Asian
They work and they work
But there is no persuasion

Working mothers with children
Get paid even less
They have to take breaks
And it causes them stress

Find ways to help
Help the women and mothers
Fight for equal pay

So they can help all the others

Donate to causes
For women in need
Help them find jobs
So they can succeed

Imagine a world
Where women get the same as men
Equality for all people
Let's be different from back then

It may be possible
If we all unite
If we all work together
If we all fight for what's right

Justice to me means
Income equality
Doing as much as you can
Help to fight for our society

[CENSORED]

By Ollie Gonzales

Justice to me means
Seeing what is hidden
just because it's too dangerous
Hidden behind a black bar
and an excuse
So take a page out of a book you banned
and burn it
Use the television to tell a vision
where you are right
by our side in perfect unity
and leave the truth outside
With the your own people

the truth is simple
the truth is complex
Layers like the pages of a book
Buried under layers of dirt
and lies that mimic the truth you want to hear

we are not dying
That has been banned
You are not the one to kill us
because we can not say that you did
but you did
after you silenced our words
no one can believe what we say
if no one can hear what we say

And don't think saying the truth
with sugar coated words
And newspeak
is true honesty
it's a cover up
hidden behind soft and sweet terms
a kind truth is not an honest truth

The ashes of a forbidden fruit
Blur our vision with smoke
until all we see is your vision
and suffocate our lungs
until we can no longer speak out
the ashes of the books you burnt

you will use everything to tell a vision
Where you are on the right side you created
and leave your living people out side
and hide them behind every excuse you have
and a black censor bar
this was never about the danger
only hiding what you don't want to see
I want a world that isn't blurred, blocked, burnt or banned
that is what justice means to me



Animals Over Women

By Elsa Humphrey

The horse can
get a job.

The chicken can
leave its coop freely.

The dog can
go to the doctor
when ill.

The rabbit can
wear what they want
in public.

The sheep can
get justice
when beaten
no matter the severity.

The doe can
testify in court
and not have their testament
be half as much as the buck's.

The cow's maternal mortality rate
is not estimated to rise
by 50%.

The pig can
live without almost 100 edicts
restricting them.

The duckling can
get an education past
primary.

The geese can
be free.

The women in Afghanistan cannot.

Why is it that women are treated
less than animals?

When we are so much more.

Women should be equal
not only to animals
but men also
no matter where they are
no matter who they are.

That is my idea of the future.

That is my idea of justice.



Underestimated

By Fuji Thao

Justice to me means
Women's rights.
For all to be equal
For women to be in the light.

To have the same power as men
But then again
They are still the ones with full rights
Just like back then.

Females get underestimated
Thinking women can't be as
"Strong"
Still, women are labeled
"Wrong."

Women always get told
That they won't do good.
Just like males
They definitely could.

Like in 1847

Women fought for 73 years
To have the right to vote
Though they still had fears.

Even with their fears they
Still decided to fight
Using their voice
And put the idea in their ears.

This can all be changed
If people would see the good
That women provide
For womanhood.

In the future,
I hope that men
Can see the potential within
All of us in the end.

Climate of Fear

By Rafael Hanson

Justice to me means
no climate change
free from fear,
free from the worry
of our scenes,
having the chance
to make these things
disappear.

If we keep this on any longer,
we could see that our world
may be no stronger.

as the grass wilts
the world tilts.
When the world is beyond repair,
we can do nothing
but despair.

As the floods pour,
Cities will be no more.
as the temperatures rise,
the water dries.

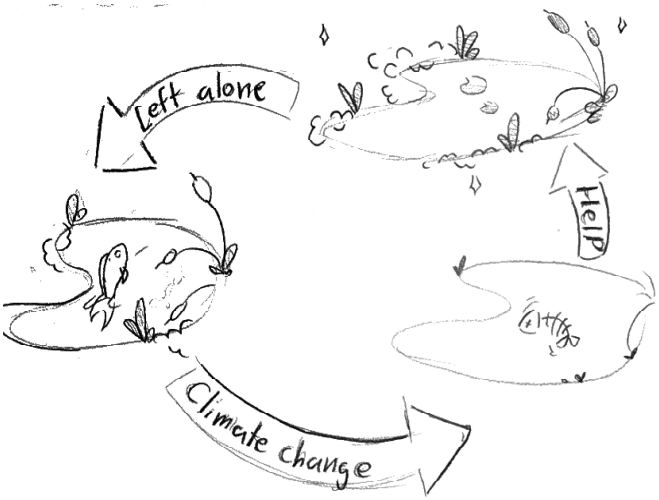
To solve this
we must find a way,
To rid these gases,
everyday.

By limiting carbon dioxide
we can let the earth heal,
and it will strengthen like steel.

If we reduce waste
there will be much less haste
to ruin the earth.
if we recycle,
we can take trash,
and turn it to something
likeable

Imagine a lake
clear as a summer day
not being worried
about where our kids play.

justice to me means
A safe world
free to all
not being paranoid
if it will fall.



What a Good Work Place Looks Like

By Gavin Trott

Justice to me
Means
Is that people
can work in

A safe Workplace
That means
Safe machines
safety equipment

That means
Minimum wage
Overtime pay
Record keeping

EEOC
That means
No Discrimination
Equal pay
Harassment protection

So when you
See something
That makes
The work environment
Unsafe
Protest to make
It right

This is should
What a good
Workplace
look like

Misinformation

By Kayoon Riehl

Justice to me means
speaking the truth,
using facts not just opinions
but always treating people equally
and fairly.

Misinformation
is the information
that only leads to confusion
like when people were misguided
and stormed the capitol,
breaking the glass, breaking in.
Misinformation is
like a recipe
that is missing ingredients.
It's the cake without sugar,
the pie without the crust,
the ice cream without the milk.
Spit it out.

Research where your information
comes from. Look in trusted websites
with no advertisements
and optional cookies.
Stay away from TikTok, YouTube shorts,
and people who talk fast
with no evidence or proof.

Justice to me means
trust and no judgement.
Caution signs
on unreliable websites.
Stop signs on 5-minute
life hacks, Instagram,
and Reddit.



The Quiet and Small

By Oliver Larson

Voting rights is freedom to me,
like birds that fly fast and free.
it's having a voice, being able to know,
My thoughts can't ever be told no.

Voting rights is standing proud,
and knowing it's okay to shout loud.
every single vote, quiet and small,

can help the world change after all.

Voting rights is stories I hear,
of people who fought in pain and fear.
Marching in crowds, shouting with purpose,
because this system is a big circus.

And voting rights is the biggest key,
unlocking these rights is important to me.
A chance for every voice to be heard,
not just the loudest spoken word.

Scroll...

By Pawsana Lay

I wanna know the truth
Without any doubt
But misinformation keeps
spreading around.

By spreading fake info
and propaganda!
it reduces trust in real news..

I can't tell between these tweets!

scroll..

Met gala cancelled!

scroll..

Does Manon from katseye
have.. cancer?

scroll..

Hantavirus spreading!

Woah wait is this really true?
Let me check the sources
And find better coverage
Accuracy 100% false..

This sounds really bad,
Manipulating public opinion.
Can hurt reputations..

scroll..

Leo has 67000+ aura!

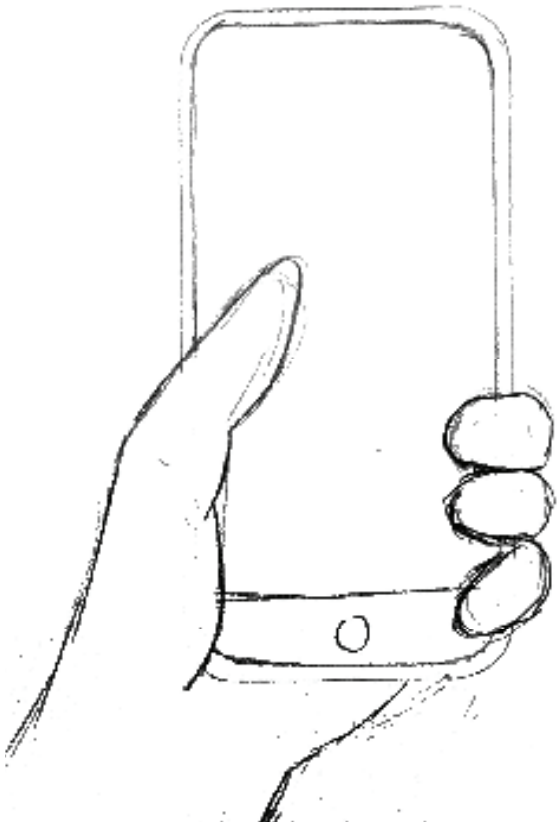
scroll..

Pawsana is tuff

scroll..

Reo Mikage is the best player in blue lock

This sounds way more believable
Oh and, it's from a reliable journalist!
If people supported people like this
Justice for the truth would spread



Don't Love Like You

By Ian Compton

Justice to me
Is the rights of LGBT
No matter who you love
Or how you feel
Rights should be yours
so you can be
Yourself.

Why is it you deny their rights?

Because they use a different name?
Because they don't love how you do?
They don't feel the same as you do?
Just because they don't love like you.
Is it just cause they want to be
Themself.

Or is it
Because what they're doing is wrong?
Why is it their actions are wrong?
because you were told that it's wrong?
society didn't welcome it?
The only reason that its "wrong"
Is because it's new.

All I wish
Is for equal treatment for everyone
Equal rights
No matter who you love, how you love or
what you feel
I just wish that you can just be your very,
Own, true, self.

I wish
the one reason
someone looks at you weird
whenever you shout your gender
is not because of what that gender is
but only just for the one reason that you are
shouting.

Justice to me
Is the rights of LGBTQ+
and the right,
to be
Yourself.

Why the Sky isn't Blue

By Quinten Ticknor

Justice to me looks like: clean air
Instead of grey skies filled with smoke
or orange skies filled with soot
we should have blue skies
and the only time the sky is orange
is during a sunset
Or sunrise
But why does this all happen?

It's because of the
Machines chug chug chugging, smoke in the air
companies not not not, giving a care
While the air we breathe is being polluted
the people
who are causing it
those people
who can stop it
are just sitting around not caring
while we breathe in
smoke
smog
and all the other things polluting the air,
they are just sitting around
going on about their business
without changing anything
and just not caring about
the air.

even though
they have the
money
power
and capability to help
they lack the responsibility
to do anything about it!
they could change their factories
to be more eco friendly
Or give some money to the people
who actually care

if they actually helped
the future would be more hopeful
And we wouldn't have to struggle
to save the LITERAL PLANET
from becoming a dystopia.
If we don't do anything
the air that we breathe
won't be clean
and healthy
and more and more people will suffer



The War

By Sarisella Xiong

Justice
is the fight for colored people
To be treated equally by the whites
Racism
Is the hate that's given
Based from the color of your skin
But it's not just by the whites
it's every race
Colored, black and white
discrimination against one another
for what reason
Why?

There has been
separation segregation from
bathrooms, schools, and lines
famous cases of racism
like George Floyd or Little Rock Nine
The "only white people" school
What difference is there to see?
Does the color of their skin really offend thee?
I only see
young children that come to school
for their purpose of their education
I only see
children who want to learn
without having to deal with discrimination

Where being black
people assume your a thug
they think your apart of
the "hood"
so many have died
due to police brutality and
murders, this world is not
black and white
there's all of this judgment
there's all of this hate
that people give each other
based on their race just based on their race?
just the color of their skin?
its part of their identity
That's just what makes them
who they are
that people hate
You cannot choose nor change
that about themselves
So why do people give all this hate?

Hopefully one day this war will end
Where the battles between
colored people and white people
can put to rest
where people
won't judge others and can receive justice
where racism will terminate
where people can join together
To heal and realize that
we are equal
we are people
we all deserve to be treated the same
no matter what race and color of your skin

No One Believes Me

By Nikolai Stricklan



She moved slowly.
Before it happened.
Keen and eager.
Before it happened.

It wasn't nice.
I didn't want to.
I was better
Before it happened.

No one believes me.
Because of what I am.
No one thinks she could.
It was better before.

I got hit, and attacked.
After I shared
What happened.
No one cares.

"No she couldn't."
"But you wanted it."
But I am a "liar"
Because I am a man.

The Red Pill

By Rain Tsuzuki

The truth
could be
What justice
is to me

exposing kids
to what's real
And if it hurts them
it'll make them stronger

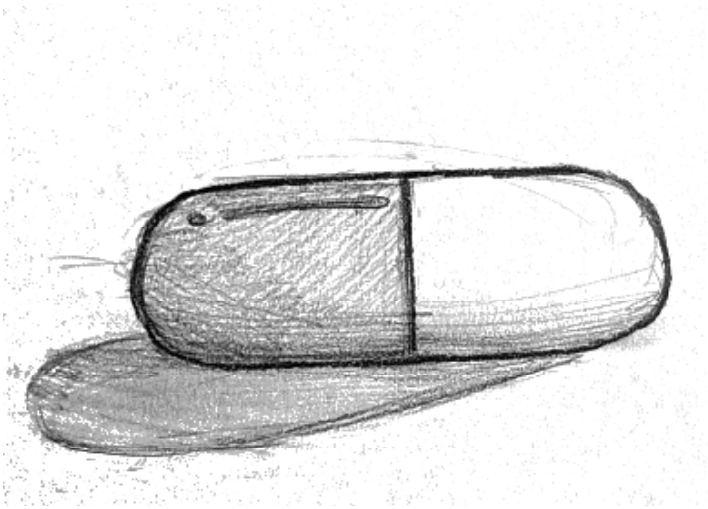
Without education
we would be sheep
following the shepherd
to our demise

We've gotta fight back
Have the courage
to take the red pill
and face reality

See their intentions
see their hidden plan
know that if we can't think
then we'll have to listen to them

they'll cut away our knowledge
hack away at our culture
trample on our freedom
And plant their lies

then they'll get what they want
an army of pawns
A golden throne
and a long sought crown



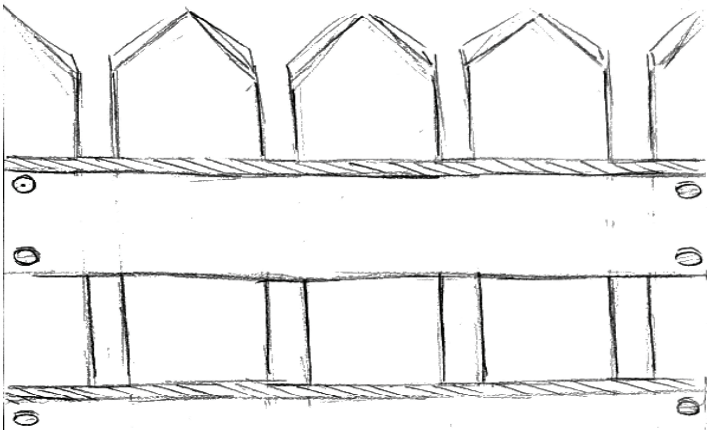
The Fence

By Sally Keenan

"Killer"
A person who takes
with malicious
intent
NOT a person who
never
gave
consent
NOT a person who
could
die
With no
"offense"
But you
Don't.
Care.
you build The Fence.

"Control"
the act of forced
regulation
is your
oppression
my
compensation?
Blood spills from her
lifeless body
A child
Will pay
the expense
but you
Don't.
Care.
you build The Fence.

"Equality"
The idea of
fairness
rights, for all
But I don't see it,
not through
these walls
I see billboards
with hollow eyed men
who make choices about
MY body
where and when
The struggles we face



should be
past tense
but you
Don't.
Care.
you build The Fence.

The fence is built.
Are you proud?
as the life drains from our eyes
Will you look around?
will you stop when there are laws
in all 50 states?
Because there is no redo.
there is no blank slate.
our scars,
our wombs,
our souls,
We fight for our breath,
we claw,
we scratch,
we tear,
Brick. by. Brick.
Death. by. Death.

Justice
the concept of moral
rightness
to which all people are
due
but not all
receive
That is the truth.

Justice is "killer"
Justice is "control"
Justice is "equal"
Justice is abortion.
Justice is a world, with. No. Fence.



The editing team



Greta Crouser



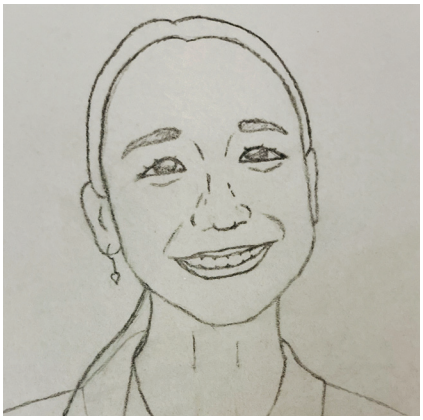
Isabel Best



Anna Funk



Melita Allen



Rain Tsuzuki


Alternate Narratives
hA
hA
HA
college ruled
composition
Senate Expedition
Memoirs
Justice
Poems